

Chapter 3

Rise of Social Awakening And the Background of Bodo Movement

Prior to the establishment of British rule in India the existence of the Bodos and other allied societies were on the verge of extinction. Social change was oriented to structural assimilation either to Hinduism or Islam. These people were quite unaware of their social dignity, pride and honour.¹For centuries, tradition of structural assimilation as a process of social change remained as a popular tradition among the Bodos. The new conditions created by the British Government in India totally changed the traditional mindset of the people not only of the Bodos but also all sections of the people of India. Under new liberal intellectual conditions set by the British" rule, the Bodo people developed the sense of self-respect, identity, consciousness of their society and soon they started to reassert their community identity. They started to reassert their community identity by reviewing and restructuring, their lost history, culture, tradition, custom, language etc. The movement for reassertiveness was started with Brahma Dharma movement. The Brahma Dharma movement was followed by a series of movements like, movement for language, movement for education, movement for economic security and lastly the movement for political autonomy. The Bodo movement is not the result of any particular factor but it is the result of multiple factors. Some factors are historical, others are economic; some are religious and cultural, some are political, some factors lie in the environment they live in. All these factors gained forces in the new conditions created by the British government and led the Bodo society into a new direction of social change. The nature, causes and direction of social change in the Bodo society during and post British rule had resulted in the rise of social consciousness among the Bodos. This

chapter aims to unveil the background and immediate circumstances leading to the rise of social consciousness among the Bodos. They are discussed below:

Impact of Colonial Rule

The colonial rule had its impact on the Bodos in the sphere of economy. The only profession of Bodos before the advent of colonial rule was agriculture, whether shifting or settled, with hoe or with plough and their survival completely depended on this. The new land revenue policy introduced by the British had a direct bearing on agriculture. In the district of Goalpara, the permanent settlement was introduced which meant the payment of the assessed land revenue to the authorities by the zaminders on a particular date of the year without fail. This entailed cash payment by the ryot. This was not an easy task for a people just passing through a transitory phase from hoe cultivation to plough cultivation.

A very complex economic situation had developed in the societies of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam with the taking over of power by the British imperialist. The pre-colonial society in Brahmaputra Valley was semi-feudal and semi-tribal in nature hence a mixture of more than one classical mode of production prevailed. The economy was largely self-sustaining in those days. Colonial penetration into Brahmaputra Valley and British administration was linked with the capitalist world economy. This new form of economy unfolded new complexities with serious socio economic and political ramifications into the medieval society of the Valley.²

Thus the 19th century was a time of economic degradation, displacement and land alienation for the Bodos.

The border trade along the foothills of Bhutan used to be the exclusive one of the Bodos since ancient times up to 18th century. The Bodos maintained trade links with the bordering hill tribes on the North Tibetan and Chinese traders through the Kachari-Duars or

passes or routes. The most famous among these trade routes was the Lhasa-Tawang-Udalguri and via this route a considerable volume of barter trade between the Tawang hill tribes and the Bodos of Udalguri were carried on. During the days of moamoria rebellion this route became abundant. The British after taking over of political charge of Assam reopened the route and resumed trade. They started organizing a *Bhootiya Mela* annually at Udalguri. As monetary system replaced the old barter system the Bodo traders could not cope with the requirement of capital in minutest transactions. The requirement was met by a section of hard working people with business acumen traders from Barpeta. By the end of the 19th century the total volume of the border trade in Udalguri area practically were out of the grip of the Bodos. This resulted in the total changes of occupation of the Bodos of Lower Assam. Most of them were compelled to adopt farming as their profession. In Goalpara, a section of the Bodo who became zamindars oppressed their fellow Bodos.

The Bodos were worst sufferers economically due to the British land-revenue policies which made payment in cash mandatory. The Bodo cultivators soon became indebted to Barpetiah and Marwari traders and their land alienation started thereof. In order to avoid taxation many Bodo peasants engaged themselves in wage-earning jobs in the tea plantations of the British.

In the district of Goalpara, the Permanent Settlement was introduced which meant the payment of the assessed land revenue to the authorities by the zamindar on a particular date of the year without fail. This entailed cash payment by the ryot of his share of land rent to the zamindar within the stipulated date. That was not an easy task for a people just passing through a transitory phase from hoe cultivation to plough cultivation. In other districts of the Brahmaputra Valley the Permanent Settlement was not introduced since these areas came under the British only after 1826 when Cornwallis' scheme of land revenue had already been put under cold storage. But the revenue rates to be paid in cash were doubled in 1868 in the

district of Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. The rate was too high not only for the tribal peasants but also for the traditional peasantry of the valley since the cash economy itself was still at a formative state there.

Impact of Modern Civilization

The modern civilization installed by the British government in India like, introduction of modern education based on science and rationality, introduction of new economic system as against the static caste based economy, emergence of multiplicity of employment avenues giving opportunity to the people for economic and social mobility irrespective of caste and religions, development of transport and communication, introduction of new pattern of administrative and political system, introduction of rules of law and new legal system treating all section of Indian people equal before the law, Protection of the rights of the disadvantage sections of society. The effect of the introduction of modern culture and civilizations was far reaching. It instilled the sense of self-respect and Socio-cultural, political, economic consciousness amongst all sections of people in their own stations. It also created identity consciousness based on ethnicity, race, language, religion etc.

Modern education

Introduction of rational and scientific education has weakened the traditional domination of the Brahminical orthodoxy. Principles, ideals, norms of Hindu religion for centuries controlled political, economic, custom, tradition and other aspects of institutional life of the society. Elite section of the society constituted privileged class and rest of people in the society constituted proletariat class. Modern education is rational and scientific and contrary to worldview of religion. It emphasizes democratic values such as liberty, equality,

justice and fraternity. Modern education laid great stress upon the importance of man. Thus the progress of modern education has encouraged the principle of equality among man. The feeling of social inequality and untouchability are being gradually eliminated from the minds of children. Depressed people realized how they were suppressed and exploited for centuries of year in the name of caste and religion. b. Appearance of non-caste based occupations: - Introduction of Western culture and civilization, like introduction of English education, political and administrative system, legal system, revenue system, transport and communication system, development of trade and commerce on non-caste line, growth of urbanization and industrialization etc. created conditions for the emergence various type of non caste based employment avenues, professions and occupations etc. As a result, people adopted occupations, profession, services and employment that appears to him more suitable and profitable. Caste system no longer remained as the only option for choice of occupations. New system introduced by the British government created conditions leading to emergence of new avenues of life. And the way of achieving this economic opportunity was not based on hereditary or birth but was based on

Nature of Bodo economy

The Bodo Movements started primarily for socio-economic under-development of the community. The prime two reasons behind movements were firstly, economic underdevelopment of the community and secondly, rising political aspirations of the Bodo leaders. The policies and developmental activities of the colonial Government could not bring the desired socio-economic development for the Bodo community. This impacted immensely on the Bodo psyche. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in its 92 point charter narrates

how the Bodo and other Plains Tribes have suffered from wants, discrimination, injustices, insecurity, and tortures and why they need a separate state.

Even after independence, most of the Bodo grievances remained unattended to by the Government. As a result problems of land alienation, poverty, indebtedness, severe unemployment, economic exploitation and cultural and political neglect became increasingly acute among them. The schemes of Tribal Sub-Plan, the Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal Development Project, Welfare of schedule Tribes and Backward classes, Tribal Research Institute etc. meant for the development of the tribal measurably failed to protect the interest of tribal of Assam.³ The Bodo middle class got alarmed and tried to draw the Government's attention to their plight on issues of land, language and employment through different memoranda and agendas of the Bodoland movement.

The greatest economic issue for the Bodos has been the question of giving adequate protection to their land and the maintenance of their economic stability. Ever since the introduction of capitalism the Bodos have had to struggle hard for maintaining their economic stability. Till the coming of the British they had practiced communal mode of production and enjoyed land under their tribal rulers. They even had trade relations with Tibet and China. The new administration under colonial regime brought with it money-economy, private ownership of property, taxes, exposure to the world market and commercialization of agriculture. These changes affected not only the Bodos but all the indigenous communities of Assam alike. The new tax system payable in cash and immigration of large number of people from East Bengal led to large scale rural indebtedness and land alienation. In the circumstances, the Bodos became economically and socially backward. The community was also slow in taking to modern avenues of employment opened by modernization. They have been easy targets for many glaring exploitations and injustices for decades due to their illiteracy and simplicity. It is observed that 90 percent of the Bodos live below the poverty line even today, while a small

group of educated elite amongst them have cornered the crumbs of Assam's miniscule economic cake 98 percent of the Bodos live in isolated villages that are largely inaccessible from the main townships due to poor communication network : an indicator of the long neglect they have suffered .The Bodos are mainly agriculturists , who have not branched out into professions other than petty government jobs .A study of villages in tribal areas shows that their market economy centers round a meager sale of vegetables, mustard seeds and jute .Most of the paddy grown is used domestically within themselves the Bodos continue to practice the barter system.⁴

In such a situation, land continues to be an important factor for the stability of the Bodo economy. Their cropping technique has remained traditional. Low productivity of land has added to their economic hardship by making them indebted to rural moneylenders.

Indebtedness in turn has resulted in landlessness. The Bodo peasants borrow money in times of flood, death of cattle and illness. In Goalpara district alone 53.2 per cent Plains Tribes were indebted to Kabuli alas who provide them more than 70 percent of the loans at the interest rates ranging up to 100 per cent. Failure to refund loans eventually resulted in losing their land. Thus the curve of landless peasants and unemployed youth among the Plains Tribes grew in numbers.⁵

The Government efforts to redress their grievances under the Five Year Plans and financial assistance have yielded little results in safeguarding tribal interest because of the slow-implementation and, in some cases, non-implementation of policies.

The question of loss of land is very serious for tribes since in the absence of diversification of their economy, loss of land practically means loss of the only means livelihood. Rural indebtedness, illegal occupation of tribal lands by immigrants, urbanization, industrialization and Government declaration of reserve forest as wildlife sanctuary have caused large scale and loss among the tribes of Assam.

It has further been stated that an area of 2,81,007 Bighas has been de-scheduled and denotified from tribal belts and blocks. It is the Government's responsibility to preserve tribal majority in tribal belts and blocks. In reality this is not so.⁶ Land alienation in tribal belts and blocks is much higher than in tribal villages outside these protected areas. The economic conditions of the tribal families living within tribal blocks and outside them were also found to be different. The former were better off than the latter.⁷ Tribal land alienation, however, is not the result of improper Government protection alone, lack of awareness on protective laws among tribals and their bad economic condition is also responsible for it.

There is a very close relationship between immigration of Muslim from East Bengal and tribal land alienation. The creation of tribal belts and blocks owes its origin to the influx of people from outside, particularly from East-Bengal. The Census report to 1911 first mentions influx of immigrants. Mostly Muslims, in the riverine area of the Goalpara. In the decade 1911-1921 there was an increase of more than 1.5 lakhs of population, constituting 20 per cent of the total population of the district. It was also mentioned that 5/7th of the increased population in Darrang and Nagaon district was due to immigration from East-Bengal. According to the 1931 census the number of the East-Bengali immigrants was half a million. According to this report this was an event "which seems likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than did the Burmese invaders of 1820 the whole structure of Assam's culture and civilization." This premonition later proved to be true.

Immigrants in fact were encouraged to come and settle in Assam by the British Government itself. The colonial administrators saw Assam as sparsely populated and its resources ineffectively used. They thus introduced the tea-plantation and reserve forests in order to utilize the timber and other forest resources and encouraged settled cultivation through the large-scale immigration of peasants from East Bengal. All these events led to the decline of tribal landownership and land rights were rarely taken into consideration unless

there was fierce resistance from local population. By the thirties, the problem of land alienation of Assam's tribes increased to such an extent that the British Government had to introduce the Line system as the first protective measure. Even then their pressure was affection tribal villages. In 1936 the Line System Review Committee reported tribal villages being worst victims of unregulated encroachment of vacant land by the immigrants and disappearance of many tribal villages. The tribal inhabitants then moved further into sub-mountain zones.⁸

To protect tribal land interest's one new chapter was added to the Assam Land Revenue Regulation 1886 entailing the creation of the Tribal Belts and Blocks in 1947. The Act of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) of 1947 clearly stated that no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement to settlement any land in any area or areas constituted in Tribal Belts and Block.⁹ But the reality was quite the reverse. There were numerous cases of tribal land encroachments both according to Government documents and public testimony. In its "*Why Separate State?*" Document, ABSU alleged that the so-called protective measure of tribal belts and blocks. In Assam there are as many as forty five (45) tribal belts and blocks now covering an area of total 1,25,28,320 B-1k-10Ls of land but nowhere have they been preserved by the enforcement of law.

There is also resentment about the immigrants' occupation of patta lands (Government waste land), unclassified forests and even reserved forests of the entire northern bank of the Brahmaputra. Attempts to evict these immigrants have so failed because of their strong financial standing and the long litigation process. The Bodo leaders even suspected political foul play behind this issue and in this context the ABSU had pointed out how the State Government had rejected of U.N. Dhebar's suggestion to cancel the illegal alienated land pattas and restoration of those to the original land-owners in case of tribal belts and blocks with effect from 26 January 1950.¹⁰

Apart from encroachments, urbanization and industrialization have also posed as problems to the economic stability of the Plains Tribes of Assam. The peace loving tribes have a closer affinity with nature. It was seen that when their habitat is urbanized the tribes left their own lands. Uprooted by urbanization and industrialization, they move from place to place, jungle to jungle in search of new settlements. These landless tribes encroach upon the reserve forests and all other Governments' Khas lands. For example, during expansion of Guwahati city the South Kamrup tribal belts, which were constituted by the Government notification no. R.D. 74\46\172 dated 27\02\50, covering 7,72,464 bighas of land have been shattered. It has been alleged that in order to obliterate the predominance of the Plains Tribes, the Assam Government abolished this tribal belt on the pretext of extension and industrialization of the Guwahati city and as result most of the tribes were completely uprooted and became landless. For development of North Lakhimpur town some areas of sub-montage North Lakhimpur protected belt had to be denotified in 1969. Against this backdrop, PTCA complained that the Plains Tribes had been uprooted in a systematic and a planned way from their own soil and that the step-motherly treatment of the administration, dominated by the Assamese-speaking people, has reduced them to the status of the second class citizens of the state.¹¹

Planning for industrial set-up also displaced thousands of tribal peasants from their land. Most of them were forced to live nomadic life without rehabilitation in other alternative settlements. For example, the Bongaigaon Petro-chemical complex encroached and alienated thousands of acres of tribal land.¹² Certain section of Bodos continued their nomadic lifestyle until recently although the recorded land proprietary system had been introduced long time back. These people along with those uprooted from their lands, settled mainly in reserved forest areas. The AGP Government evicted a large number of unauthorized encroachers from forests and other Government land all over Assam. According to ABSU, about 70 per cent of

tribal families have become practically landless. Illiteracy, lack of social awareness, excessive use of traditional country liquor, economic backwardness all combined made them easy prey to the systematic exploitation of the more advanced, shrewd and privileged section.

Issues of education and employment are related since degrees are the key to employment whether in the Government or private sector, the condition of education was quite poor among Bodos till the early 70s. The Bodos themselves were to blame partly for this state of affairs. The major section of the Bodo society never exhibited much enthusiasm for formal education even though Bodo populated areas had school. But the condition of the school was very pitiable and little effort was put in by qualified teachers.¹³ This factor also was responsible to a certain extent for the low literacy rate among them. The Bodo literacy rate as per the Census Report of 1971 was Male-19.7 and female-11.06, less than half of the literacy percentage of the Assamese population.¹⁴

But by early 80s spread of education to the interiors led to an increase in the number of educated persons and skilled labor among the Bodos, Science and technology and the role of electronic media also had far reaching consequences in bringing about change in their socio-cultural life and outlook. No longer contented to be farmers they looked to the Government for job. But the paucity of government jobs led to an increase in the number of educated unemployed.

The 10 percent reserved seats for Plains Tribes in Assam has not been fully utilized ever, The Statistics available in the communications of Personnel Department of Assam Government show that as on 6.6.86 the backlog of plains Tribal employment even in Grade IV of the Assam Secretariat Staff was as high as 66.20 per cent in consideration of the 10 per cent reservation quota for the Plains Tribal community. In, of the total 1975, of the total 100,660 employees of the Assam Government only 5,488 were Plains Tribal people which were almost half of the required 10 per cent quota.¹⁵ The Plains Tribes have been already

unhappy with this. In addition, the requirement of a knowledge of Assamese language for many jobs and stiff competition with the educationally advanced non-tribal Assamese have left many educated tribals unemployed and embittered. A growing feeling among the educated tribal youth is that they have been left out in cold with the Assamese having cornered the lucrative administrative post.¹⁶ Out of this frustration perhaps ABSU, in its 92 Point Demands, includes a whole range of demands centering round language, such as implementation of Bodo as an associate official language in Bodo areas, introduction of the roman script for Bodo, the teaching of Bodo, in schools and universities, Government support for cultural projects such as Bodo, filmmaking, the establishment of a museum and television stations focusing on Bodo, programming, expansion of Bodo programmes on existing state-owned radio and television networks and the abolition of the language requirement of Assamese for state government employment. They also alleged that the Assamese people are chauvinistic in their attitude and that the Assam Government is for the Assamese alone and not a Government of the people of Assam.¹⁷

The Plains Tribes felt that it was due to their inability to get protection under 5th and 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Schedule Tribes living in the states other than Assam enjoy the benefit of the 5th Schedule which safeguards the interests of the land of the tribal population, gives them protection against exploitation by money-lenders and protects the tribal way of life. The hill tribes of Assam enjoy protection of their customs, practices and identities and the opportunity of growth and progress under the provision of the sixth Schedule. But the Plains Tribes of Assam do not enjoy the protection under either of these clauses.

This discrimination towards the tribal population of the Plains of Assam was made because initially they were regarded as being part and parcel of the Assamese population Gopinath Bordoloi stated during debates on the subject of tribal protection that “the plains

tribal people are being gradually assimilated to the population of the Plains and should for all practical purposes be treated as minority.”¹⁸ This explains why the Plains tribals were omitted from protection of Constitutional provision.

On various occasions demands for protection has been made by various Plains Tribes organization since 1947. The Tribal League submitted a memorandum in this regard before Constituent Assembly and Minority Advisory Committee on 20 March, 1947. In 1960, the Assam Tribal Sangh also submitted another memorandum before the Dhebar Commission. PTCA in its memorandum to the President of India reiterated that the Plains Tribals of Assam enjoy the minimum constitutional safeguard among all the Scheduled Tribes in India. The petitions yielded no result.

The long standing socio-economic grievances of the Bodo community coupled with a rise in political consciousness amongst the educated Bodos provided an ideal setting for the Bodoland movement in the mid-eighties.

Role of Christian Missionaries’

The Christian missionaries played a great role in the growth of self social consciousness among the Bodos. In an effort to adjust to the new politico-economic changes generated by British regime, the leading members of Bodo community realized the need for education and development of the Bodo language with British assistance. A letter written by Rev. Miles Bronson on September 1st, 1844 to the Corresponding Secretary of the Baptist Bhutan frontier had expressed their wish to have schools established among in their area.¹⁹ This realization perhaps was an outcome of their endeavor to cope with the changing politico-economic situation. The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to evangelize the Bodo; soon they were followed by other missions.

The need of Bodos for education had been seized as an opportunity to further the missionary agenda. But it cannot be denied that these missionaries were largely responsible for awakening the Bodos and for the pioneering studies on the amalgamated Bodo people and their languages.

The missionary efforts to convert the Bodos came in stages. The American Baptist Mission established its centre at Guwahati in 1843 with Rev. Barker as its head. His centre run a school boarding house and some Bodo boys were accommodated there. The first Bodo convert was a boy of 15 named Aphints, an inmate of this boarding house.

However, this conversion took place at Guwahati as the American Baptist Mission was yet to establish a base in the Bodo-inhabited areas.

It was the Anglican Church that made the first move to preach the gospel in the interiors of the Darrang district where the Bodos formed a sizeable segment of the population. Rev. C.H. Hasselmeyer, who came there as a tea-garden chaplain, started working amongst the neighbouring Bodos as we in early 1860s. It was on his advice that Rev. Sydney Endle was sent there in 1864 to assist him. In 1896 when Rev. Hesselmeier died, Rev. Endle became the chief of the Anglican Church in the Darrang region. Through his efforts a Bodo church was established at Bengbari, the first of its kind in the region. Rev. Endle learnt Bodo language and investigated into the Bodo culture thoroughly. He wrote a handbook of the Bodo language and translated some passages of the New Testament in the Bodo language. This monograph on the Bodo culture, way of life and society, entitled 'The Kacharis', published in 1911, is still regarded as a standard book on the subject.

In the district of Goalpara, the conversion work was taken over by the Santhal Mission of Northern Churches (Lutheran). Initially the prime objective of the Mission was to look after the Santhal Christians who emigrated from Bihar to Goalpara to take advantage of a land settlement plan of the government, and also the Santhal tea garden labourers. Soon the

Mission extended its work amongst the Bodos as well. The Bodo to be baptized by them in 1886 was Teklo Basumatari and soon some others followed suit. This Mission had the credit of ordaining the first Bodo Pastor, Ratio Basumatary, which took place in 1914. But the Mission gradually discovered that it was difficult to work amongst both the Santhals and the Bodo and hence some independent arrangement for the Bodos became necessary. So the Mission Home Board sent a Danish couple to work exclusively amongst the Bodos. In 1927 they established a mission station at Gaurang near Kokrajhar. Gradually the Mission extended its activities in Kamrup and Darrang districts and two other Mission stations were established at Bangaigaon and Parkijuli in 1938 and 1951 respectively. American Baptist Mission that had been working in the Garo hills also started working amongst the Bodos of the neighbouring Goalpara district. In the areas around Sidli, it succeeded in converting a number of Bodo families. The American Baptist Mission is no longer operating in this region and its followers are now administered by a local body known as the Goalpara Baptist Church Union.

The Roman Catholic Church made a late entry amongst the Bodos. Since the Bodo areas were primarily served by different Protestant Missions, the Roman Catholic Mission did not want to enter into any competition and confrontation. However, an internal feud amongst the Lutherans gave it a chance to work among the Bodos. Some rebel Lutherans approached the Roman Catholic Mission at Guwahati to come to their village and Father Seudori immediately came and converted four Lutheran families to Catholic faith. During mid-thirties the Catholics swelled in number in Goalpara district through the efforts of a local convert at the cost of both Lutherans and Baptists. Father Merengo, the Catholic rector of Guwahati, took much pain to learn the Bodo language and ultimately became an expert. He composed the first prayer book in the Bodo language. Subsequently it was revised and edited by another catholic priest, Father Zenon. The Roman Catholic Church, though it came late, made quite a

headway amongst the Bodos and at present two Mission Stations, one at Tangla and the other at Udalguri, are functioning as busy centres of its activities.

British officials and missionaries saw better opportunity of evangelical work among the Bodos of North Kamrup and Darrang as revealed by William Robertson, Inspector of Government Schools, when he wrote in 1855 that the Cachari (Bodo) population inhabiting the Chatgiri division, situated between Desh Durrang and Bhutan Hills present and interesting field for missionary labour (obviously meaning Uldaguri belt).²⁰ This section of Bodos was left outside the ongoing ethnic process in Ahom Assam. The missionaries hence found in the non-Hinduised Bodos a better opportunity to spread the gospel. Apart from this Bronson could see more opportunities for British exploitation in Doar areas of Darrang. He could visualize the possibility of an inroad via Tibet to reach even China with the opening of the Bhutiya Mela at Udalguri.

The discovery of tea plant by Robert Bruce in 1823 in Upper Assam led to developments that had significant implications on the Bodo, people, including, planters employed local Bodo workers to reduce tea producing cost. But the free willed Bodo workers were not willing to work under terms of the planters. They had even rebelled against their garden owners on several occasions. And the planters had been cautioned by the then Commissioner of Assam. The tussle between the British tea planters' labour policy and the uncompromising fighting spirits of the Bodos helped in increasing of the latter's social bond.

In 1855 the Baptist Missionaries took a decision to work for the development of certain tribes of colonial Assam and thus they also started working for development of Bodo, language. The missionaries and the East India Company had no real enthusiasm for the creation of a written Bodo language and literature. Whatever move the missionaries had taken in this regard was solely based on the need for spreading the gospel and the consideration of trading benefits. Endle's 'An Outline of Kachari Grammar' with Special Reference to

Durrang in 1884 was supplied by the desire to have a manual to understand the psychology and social behavior of the Bodo workers engaged in British tea plantations.²¹ Nevertheless the missionaries helped in spreading education and the Anglican Church did commendable work towards the development of Bodo language and literature. Many important books were written and published by other missionaries i.e. Short Grammar of Mech Bodo language by RLO Scraf Crude, Dimacha Vocabulary in 1895 by J d Anderson, A Christian's Grammar and Dictionary of Kachari Language in 1904, Dimasa Grammar in 1906 by Behold among others.

The Missionary activities in almost all parts of the country from the very beginning were accompanied by some other complementary services that left behind lasting impact on important domains of secular pursuits. In the Bodo region also the impact was not different. The missionaries always showed utmost concern for the development of the indigenous language of the people amongst whom they worked. Also they laboured hard for spread of spread of literacy amongst them. In the Bodo areas the missionaries took up both the tasks in right earnest. Emphasising their role in the field of education, Mushahary writes:

The schools had been instrumental in the work of evangelisation of the Bodos. In early days, primary schools were set up where education was imparted not only to the children of the converts, but also to those of the non-converts in their down mother tongue. The textbooks were written for the beginners in the Bodo language written in modified Roman scripts. Education was, therefore, a great force in the method of evangelisation of the Bodos and every Mission Station was invariably marked by the presence of a school of primary level at least to start with.

So, the Christian missionaries played an important role in introducing a system of formal education amongst the Bodos.

The Bodos, in the nineteenth century, were a preliterate people; and their speech did not have a script. They had a fairly developed oral tradition that was considered sufficient for

meeting the needs of their simple way of life. So, they did not feel it necessary to borrow any of the scripts used in the neighbouring areas for rendering their thoughts into a written form. When Rev. Endle brought out his Bodo handbook, it became the first book where the Bodo language was rendered in a written form. And his translation of the pieces of the New Testament gave birth to the Bodo literature. The prayer book written by Father Merengo was also a significant addition to this literature. And the Bodo primers used in the missionary schools laid the foundation for the use of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction. In all these exercises, the missionaries used the Roman script modified suitably to accommodate the Bodo phoneme system. So, in all fairness, it can be said that the Bodo language, as a medium of literary expression, was born in the hands of the missionaries. It is not altogether unusual that a major section of the Bodos feel an emotional attachment with the Roman script since it was associated with the birth of the Bodo literature. This colonial works contributed greatly to the development of Bodo languages and growth of ethnic and racial consciousness among the Bodos.²²

Kalicharan Brahma and his socio-religious movement

Kalicharan and his Brahma Dharma represent the cumulative effect of the British rule on a backward tribe that had been pushed to the sidelines of history for centuries. By any standard, Kalicharan was a remarkable personality. True, he was no Rammohan, but neither was the Bodo society the Bengal society of the nineteenth century. Rather if we take into account the adverse social realities that confronted Kalicharan, we can identify some basic similarities between the two. The Bodo reformer, too, ushered in a renaissance in the Bodo society—a renaissance of a modest scale conditioned by the limitations of the surroundings. His multipronged activities tried to encompass all shades of the Bodo life and his priorities and programmes had a striking similarity with that of Rammohan which of course may not be

accidental since Kalicharan always retained a close contact with Calcutta. His zeal for women's education, development of the vernacular language, reforms aimed at social upliftment and the rejuvenation of the economic life of his people all point to his liberal and enlightened frame of mind.

The effect of education and modernization introduced by the colonial rulers was remarkable during the first half of the twentieth century, equipped with colonial modern education, a very small section of Bodo elite grew out from the hitherto medieval Bodo society. They initiated some positive changes to transform the Bodo society from within to save it from complete peril and extinction. Socio-religious reform movements of Kalicharan Brahma may be regarded as the pioneering move in this direction.

Kalicharan Brahma was born in April, 1860 at Kazigaon in Parbatjowar sub-division of Kokrajhar district. He had primary level of education. His father was associated with revenue collection of the wealthy Parbatjowar estate as dafadar. His father's association with the zamindari administration gave Kalicharan a prominent position amongst the Bodos. As he was financially well off, Kalicharan used to visit Calcutta frequently. At the Calcutta residence of the zamindar of Parbatjowar, Kalicharan came in contact with Srimat Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami. Sometime in 1907, Kalicharan became disciple of Paramhansa Sibnarayan Swami and propagated the religious message of Sibnarayan Swami amongst the Bodos and this religion came to be known as Brahma Dharma. On his return from Calcutta, he began to preach Brahmaism.²³ Soon he shifted his attention to the welfare of the Bodo community.

It was a time when the Bodo community was on the verge of complete decay. A large part of the community was living on outside the sphere of Hindu religion and social structure. Considerable numbers were getting converted into Christianity for Christianity was considered as a better alternative for social up gradation. In short, the Bodo community was

on transition, partly relinquishing their traditional customs and culture. Their extinction seemed evitable.

At such a critical point, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma came forward as a savior of the community. But it was not an easy task to propagate the new religion amongst the Bodos who were already confused because of the ongoing tussle between Christianity, Sarania Vaisnavism and the indigenous Bathau religion. It was he who directed his attention to reform the Bodo society out of its evil practices for which they had been looked down upon by their neighbors. He did not confine himself to preaching only but as a corollary initiated a social movement encompassing different spheres of Bodo life. Prime importance was given to the cause of education. The Brahmas opened schools, boarding houses and even a school for girls where vocational training was also imparted. Kalicharan himself met the Chief Commissioner of Assam to demand more schools for the Bodo areas, in which education could be imparted in English. He stressed on education as a means to enlighten the community. He not only opened schools but also tried hard to make education compulsory by pressuring the reluctant guardians to send their children to school. A. J. Larine, the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, helped him tremendously in the setting up of schools for the Bodos. He also founded a boarding place called "Brahma Boarding" for the convenience of Bodo Students studying at Dhubri Government High School. This school produced some Bodo intellectuals with progressive outlook who brought new hope for the Bodo community. The importance of Brahma lies not as a religious preacher but as a social reformer. He initiated many social reforms and a literary movement. Infact the Bodo language took shape of a standard language, mainly modeled on the Bodo language as spoken in Kokrajhar area. Assamese script was adopted by him and his followers to enrich Bodo language.

Kalicharan wished to initiate a social movement based on mass participation. He, at regular intervals, started convening mass meetings known as the Bodo Mahasammelan. The

process resulted in the formation of a regular organization with an executive committee. To supplement the efforts of this main body, students and women were organized through Chatra Sammilan and Mahila Sammilan. Through these organizations, Kalicharan and his disciples tried to create public opinion for abolition of brewing and drinking rice-beer, reduction of the bride price and restriction of rituals that entailed wasteful expenditure. These programmes were addressed not only to the Brahmas but to the Bodo community as a whole. Kalicharan had an economic vision as well. He sponsored the co-operative movement, and encouraged his fellowmen to participate actively in trade and commerce. In another meeting with the Chief Commissioner, he pleaded for raising a Bodo Regiment so that the sturdy youths of the community could get employment. He wanted the Bodos to adapt modern techniques of agriculture. The Bodo-Mahasammilan, in its session at Bhaoraguri, decided to institute a periodical to popularize the ideas of reforms.

So, the movement led by Kalicharan gradually assumed a multi dimension form—it started as a religious movement, but over the years socio-economic agenda of vital importance was added to it. That ensured for Kalicharan a position amongst the Bodos that went far beyond his primary role as a religious preacher.

Though in the field of religious propagation the Brahma religion was not very successful, yet his role in uniting and generating a new confidence and consciousness among Bodos, especially the Brahma, cannot be overlooked. He prepared them to take the leadership of this community.

Unifying and reforming Bodo society had been Brahma's primary aim. Along with other learners and prominent personalities of the community who thought on similar lines, he convened the first Bodo Maha Sanmilani. The Bodo living in different corners of Assam assembled for the first time to discuss their various problems under the banner of this Sanmilani. In 1921 the first conference of the Bodo Maha sanmilani was organized at

Goalpara district. Jadav Chandra Khakhlari, its first President, articulated for the first time the unity of Bodo society and regretted the community's deplorable situation. Resolutions were adopted to stop malpractices prevalent among Bodos and to raise its position.

They visualized the role of socio-literary organizations in the development of their community. Many youth organizations like Kachari Chattra Sanmilani (1919), Kachari Yuva Sanmilani, Boro Charta Sanmilan, Boro Maha Sanmilani etc. were founded in the second decade of the 20th century. And in course of time these organizations played very important role in awakening the Bodo community with their socio-literary movements.

Imbued with the idea of an amalgamated Bodo race, the Bodo elite of the period tried to customize social rules with a motive to unite geographically as well as socio-religiously the scattered Bodos of Assam. The first Bodo book printed by the community on its own effort was 'Badoni Phisa O Aiyen' in 1915 from south Goalpara. This book was on the customs and traditional rules of the Bodo people. Again in 1924 the Assam Bodo Chattra sanmilani published the Bodo journal, 'Bibar'. This quarterly journal edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary was published till 1926. Many Bodo poems, songs, prose and stories were written and produced by this journal, which saw the flowering of Bodo language and literature. Some writers of this period tried to remind the Bodos about their glorious past as the master rulers under the leadership of Pramod Chandra Brahma. In 1938, a monthly Bodo magazine, 'Alongbar', was published and the contributors of these journals created a new dimension in the development of the Bodo language and literature. Many romantic poets emerged during this period. In the artistic hands of these romantic poets Bodo language and literature got a new life and spirit.

The Bodo elite did not confine themselves to socio-educational and literary activities alone. They also encouraged the Bodo people to pursue trade and business for economic betterment of the community. Kalicharan Brahma even established a school of handicraft that

received government patronage. The purpose was to make the Bodos economically independent and not too much dependent on agriculture. This effort to shape the Bodo economy on capitalist line did not prove very successful.

Kalicharan Brahma's objective in propagating the Brahma religion was to carve out a terrain for the Bodos that would provide them an upward social mobility keeping their self-respect intact and without being subjected to torturous exactions that had been practiced by the Guru of the Saranias. In this effort his success was remarkable. In fact, since then in the craze to become a Sarania showed a marked decline and, 'most of the educated Bodo-Kacharis availed the earliest opportunity to come over to the new religious order. The Bodo elite class was born out of the movement led by Kalicharan and for the next few decades whoever amongst the Bodos came into limelight for any kind of attainment or achievement was almost invariably a Brahma. To use the emergence of this elite class is significant because it is this class that gave the broken Bodo identity an articulated and viable form that gradually culminated into the Bodo assertion of the present day.

So far the incorporation into the Assamese society as a Sarania was essentially linked with the social recognition of a Bodo individual, The Brahma religion created an autonomous space for the Bodo for earning and enjoying such recognition. The early decades of the British rule had marginal impact on the Bodo economy and almost no impact on the Bodo political life. But the new regime acted as a catalytic agent in creation of new religious option for the people. The Bodo response to the situation, in spite of initial vacillation, ultimately turned out to be fraught with far-reaching consequences. It is through the religion that the Bodos learnt the mechanism of raising socio-economic issues and took up programmes for social regeneration. The Bodo identity and the Bodo consciousness also had their embryonic development in the womb of religious movements.

Simon Commission and the Bodos

In the wake of the socio-religious movement launched by Kalicharan Brahma, the Bodos tested the benefits of modern age for the first time. Already the Assamese students had engaged in various organized activities under the banner of 'Assam Chatra Sanmiloni'. The new light of western education and the social awakening brought by the Brahma Movement encouraged the Bodo students to form 'All Assam Bodo Students Association' in 1919 at Dhubri. It was the first step towards political aspirations of the Bodos. Their true aspiration was revealed when they stressed on separate electorates while submitting their memoranda to the Simon commission.

The encounter with the Simon Commission helped formulating two basic tenets centring which the Bodo politics went on evolving since then. The first one is the concept of reservation. Not only for assembly seats, the idea of reservation became the key word for demanding other benefits like job and land settlement. In other words the idea of reservation became the perpetual issue that stood as a stumbling block in any subsequent attempt of reconciliation between the mainstream Assamese society and the Bodos. The second aspect that developed in the wake of Simon Commission's visit was the mechanism of projecting the Bodo demands as the demands of all plain tribals of Assam. As the most advanced group amongst the plain tribal communities of Assam, the Bodos sought to and are still seeking to establish a kind of hegemony over the other less developed plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley. The claim went almost unchallenged for more than half a century and only recently this hegemony has been challenged.

By 1930s Bodo identity had already taken a definite shape. In the conference of Assam Kachari Yuvak Sanmilani held at Titabar, Jorhat on 12 August, 1927, the representatives drawn from all parts of Assam and all Tribal communities of Bodo family adopted a resolution to recognize themselves as independent from the Hindu community in all

respect, political, social and religious.²⁴ This was indeed a clear indication of the growth of Bodo consciousness. Side by side with their growing self-consciousness they were clear on their will to stay as a part of Assam rather than as a part of Bengal. They wrote (we, the Bodos, can by no means call ourselves other than Assamese,²⁵ With Assam they felt more akin culturally. In fact they stated that the question of separate political identity was rooted in the question of livelihood not culture.

When the Simon commission visited India the aspirations of the Bodo leaders were reflected in the four memoranda presented by different sections of Bodo, community from all over Assam. They were Memorandum by the Bodo, community of Goalpara district, Memorandum of Assam Kachari Yuvak Sanmilani, Memoranda of Bodos and Rabhas of Goalpara district and Dhubri Boro Sanmilani. They appealed to the commission to preserve their distinct identity and independence as a community. Other demands included reservation of seats in the local legislature, representation in the government services according to its numerical strength and due share in administration, facilities for spread of education amongst them and scholarships and facilities for going abroad for higher studies in agriculture, engineering, commerce and science and creation of a Bodo regiment. A strong resentment against the proposal to transfer the then Goalpara district to Bengal was also expressed.

In the late twenties and early thirties this claim of consciousness was more valid since the Bodos were more advanced in all spheres at this period than any other plains tribal community of Assam. At the same time, the Bodo leaders cultivated good relationship with other plains tribal groups, particularly with the Chutiyas and the success added credit to their claim for leading the cause of plains tribals of the province.

That the Simon Commission would respond favourably to the demand of reservation for plains tribals in the Assembly was a foregone conclusion. Hence the Bodo leaders took up

initiatives to consolidate the Bodos that might be utilized politically if need arose. The Kachari Jubak Sammilani, that represented before the Simon Commission in 1928 was simply an organization floated for that particular purpose; now the need was felt to promote organizations of more permanent nature. So, in the early thirties, two new organizations came into being. The college-going Bodos formed a Bodo Chhatra Sammelan with Shobharam Brahma Chaudhury as president and Satish Chandra Basumatari as secretary. Later Rupnath Brahma also became a president of the organization. Names of these student leaders are important in the sense that almost all of them and their family members played important roles in subsequent years in the state and regional politics. It needs to be mentioned that all of them were Brahmas. Another organization with a broader base was instituted. That was Assam Tribal League. Kalicharan Brahma sponsored the move for formation of the Tribal League that also took members from other plains tribal groups including the Chutiyas and Mattocks who were included in the scheduled list during that period. The formation of this organization was the first successful attempt to consolidate the plains tribals under the Bodo leadership and the scheme worked till independence.

As expected, the Simon Commission made provisions for four reserved seats for the plains tribals of Assam. In the Government of India Act of 1935, these provisions were incorporated. First general election of the provincial legislature on the basis of this Act was held in Assam in early 1937. The Tribal League did not contest the election officially, but the four tribal legislators who were elected formed a block in the assembly that came to be known as Tribal League block (at times the term Tribal Party was also used). In the Assembly that was constituted in 1937 no party had a clear majority. With 33 members, Congress had an edge over others as the single majority party. But initially the Congress high command was reluctant to allow their provincial legislature parties to go in for coalition governments. Later, of course, it modified this rigid stand under pressure. Anyway, the parliamentary politics and

ministry making in such a fluid situation assumed the form of gambles in uncertainties where opportunism, pragmatism, and horse-trading had a field day. The Assembly, during its tenure of eight years (April 1937 to October 1945) had to deal with six ministries including a short spell of Governor's rule. It is somewhat unfortunate that the Bodo and other plains tribal leaders had their maiden encounter with parliamentary politics in such a perverse situation. It soon opened up for the Tribal League an opportunity to taste power and since then during the entire tenure of the Assembly, the Tribal League, or at least its leader Rupnath Brahma made it a point to stay within the power nexus, whatever its colour or composition might be. For the next generations of the Bodo politicians, this example left behind a dubious legacy.

On the basis of recommendation of the Statutory Commission, the Government of India Act of 1935, awarded separate electorate to the Plains Tribes in the entire Assam. This opened the hitherto closed door to the corridor of political establishment and power to the Bodos along with other plains tribal communities. This political space under colonial rule brought total involvement of all the Plains Tribes in the state politics and contributed towards their solidarity.

Role of Tribal League

The visit of Simon commission concretized the desire for political participation among the Plains Tribes of Assam. Driven by the urge for self-assertion, the leaders organized a convention of all the Plains Tribals at Raha on 17 April, 1933. This convention, presided over by Jadav Chandra Khakhlary, gave birth to the All Assam Tribal League, a common political organization of all the Plains Tribes of Assam. Rupnath Brahma, Bhimbor Deori and a few other young educated Bodos took lead in the political activities of Tribal League. Its main thrust was to maintain the tribal identity, continuation of separate electorate, assurance of

tribal representation in the Local Board as determined by the League inclusion of all tribes. Irrespective of religion or faith, in the schedule of tribal people, treating of tribals as separate class for Government services and preferential treatment in the matters of appointment, liberal financial grants to the tribals and allocation of maximum amount in the budget of every year for the spread of education among tribal communities, settlement of land to landless tribals, induction of one of them in the ministry.

The Tribal League infect was formed when the hope of getting a separate electorate for all the tribal population of Assam plains became clear after the visit of the Simon commission. The League was successful in its movements for separate electorate status for the Bodos and other Plains Tribes of Assam. The Bodos cast their votes on the basis of separate electorate in the first general election held under the Government of India Act, 1935.

During the Bodo leaders' first political experience, the immigration problem attracted their immediate attention. The Bodo leadership, however, could not do much for the development of the community despite their initial reformative tendency. The period from 1937 to 1946 was the period of political activism for the Tribal League. No political autonomy as such was demanded since the political climate of the time was not favorable to make such demand. Their aim was to safeguard tribal interests. In doing so they never hesitated to shift their support from Congress to Muslim League taking full advantage of the prevailing political situation of the time.

On the eve of independence however the Tribal League leaders decided to join the congress, giving up their separate political identity. The euphoria of a free sovereign nation engulfed the minds of the Plains Tribe leaders too. Influenced deeply by this new hope, they converted the Tribal League into socio-cultural organization. The Tribal Sangh they surrendered all political endeavors to the congress leadership. But by giving up their separate political identity and merging into the political mainstream of Assam, they did not give up

their separate Bodo lingo-cultural identity. Hence they formed the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 as the custodian of Bodo language and culture. It was the Sabha that took the issue of development of Bodo language seriously and its activities made the young Bodo generation confident and aware about their ethnic identity.

Apart from the activities of Bodo Sahitya Sabha the political atmosphere of free India led to a resurgent assertion of Bodo identity to the extent of demanding a separate state out of Assam within two decades of independence. Other socio-economic factors affecting the Bodo community also played a crucial part. The demand for a separate state emerged out of the community's frustration at not getting political and economic justice from the policy makers. The young leadership realized that without political power development was a distant cry. This indeed was a new direction of assertion of Bodo identity. Never ever before had the Bodos living in the Plains of Assam voiced their identity to the point of demanding separate political formation.

It is a well known fact that societies continually change their structure in changing environments. It may be regarded as a survival technique. These changes occur due to the change in the political, economic and other factors. The Bodo community in the years following independence changed in some major aspects along with the advent of democratic polity in India. Some of the changes actually started taking place during the British period. Independence only accelerated the process.

Democracy and Spread of the Idea of Self-determination Modernization, Urbanization, Globalization

Politics played an important role in the assertion of Bodo identity for statehood. In India the advent of democratic polity popularized the idea of self-determination among ethno-

linguistic communities living in a definable territory. Since democracy endows an ethnic community the right to negotiate with the state about the kind of relationship it wishes to have. They developed the idea to handle their socio-economic affairs on their own and also to participate in the decision making bodies and processes for their true development. In the Bodo case too, the right of self-determination had emerged as a sacrosanct principle behind their movement. According to Brass ethno-nationalists movements usually derive legitimacy from this principle.²⁶

The Bodo movement was inspired by the idea of self-determination and a wish also to protect their distinct lingo-cultural identity. They already had the examples of the hill tribes like the Nagas, the Mizos and the Khasis and Jaintias of Assam who were able to successfully carve out separate territories for themselves by applying the right to self-determination during 60s and 70s. The Central Government's policy of reorganizing state boundaries in north-east also played significant role in shaping the demand for a Bodoland.

Modernization and globalization have brought about an evolution of Bodo identity. Modernization unleashed an intense competition over access to a range of resources, both educational and material, among ethnic groups. During the 1980s, India was trying to be a part of the global economic power and Assam's material resources such as gas, plywood and oil were increasingly exploited by the national essentialization of Assamese identity in resistance to an overpowering Central Indian State. Further this identity was utilized to maintain social dominance of the Assamese over material resources and people of Assam. No doubt globalization, urbanization and democratization have created a social space in which the discourse of Assamese sub-nationalism has been able to develop and evolve, but at the same time Assamese regional hegemonic identity has had to face challenges from other internal groups like the Bodos.

Modernization and capitalist penetration helped in essentialization of Bodo identity. Since the state machinery exploited them in a quasi-colonial manner, they tended to resist the interference of state power. Decreasing economic opportunity coupled with increased immigration, expanded education and intense competition with advanced Assamese neighbors instigated the Bodos to secure a distinct identity and thereby to secure a social space for themselves. The problem was aggravated by the nation-building endeavors of the mainstream of Assamese.

The state of Assam that emerged in 1947 was multi-lingual, multi-ethnic state. With independence all the linguistic groups desired to keep alive their respective ethno-linguistic identities. Their desire naturally clashed with Assamese sub-national narrative created under the shadow of nation-province framework. Further linguistic reorganization of states in 1954, provided the Assamese with the opportunity to ensure their socio-political domination by implementing Assamese as the official language as part of Assamese hegemonic project.

In the past Assamese identity had always been fluid in the sense that demographic and geographical changes of the colonial period have necessitated reworking of this identity. At no time was there any finality in regard to settling of the national question in Assam.

Hence the nation-building endeavors of Assamese political mainstream in post-independence period alienated Bodos to a great extent. The Bodos asserted that the Assamese people were in fact outsiders who have unleashed an anti-tribal policy to arbitrarily cleanse Assam of its genuinely original and authentic inhabitants. They accused the Assamese Government of conducting a deliberate policy of assimilation through and imposition of “Assamese language and culture upon the tribals undemocratically (and) violation the constitution of India.”²⁷

Language Policy of Assam Government

Assam is a multi-lingual state. The tribals of Assam speak their own language as well as the Assamese language without any problem. But this multi-lingual culture of the Tribal people of Assam faced a serious blow in 1961 by the passing of the Assam official Language Act making Assamese the only Official Language in Assam. After linguistic reorganization the Assamese intelligential and mainly the Asom Sahitya Sabha had made efforts to give recognition to Assamese language as the regional language domination both the education and administrative machinery. Pressed by their demand, the Assam Government passed the Assam. This immediately led to vehement protests from the various non-Assamese linguistic groups in Assam as sufficient knowledge in Assamese language would be now a compulsory requirement for entry into any Government job.

The language issue is a sensitive issue. It proved to be the most sensitive and critical issue in Assam in the sixties. Historically, the Assamese language had been used as link language by its different ethno-linguistic groups. But this single factor engendered serious dissatisfaction among the tribal population of Assam. The hill tribes in particular separated from Assam due to this reason.

The attitudes of some of the mainstream Assamese intellectuals also played a negative role. In 1972 the Universities of Guwahati and Dibrugarh made Assamese the medium of instruction in place of English in their colleges on demand and movement of All Assam Students' Union (AASU). The AGP Government just after assuming power imposed Assamese language as the compulsory third language in secondary schools, through a circular given by the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA) on 28 February 1986. These Government policies were viewed with suspicion by antagonistic groups.

Whenever Assamese leaders quoted the territorial identity of multi-ethnic Assam with the ethno-linguistic identity of Assamese speakers of the Brahmaputra Valley, they pushed the other ethnic groups to seek security through own autonomous structures.²⁸

Impact of Assam Movement on Bodos

The Assam movement had inspired the Bodo movement.. Some circumstances had compelled the Bodo students to detach themselves from the Assam Movement and search for other way to assert their identity. The objective of the movement was to oust the foreign immigrants with which the question of safeguarding Assam's identity was involved. In the initial years of the movement the Bodo political leaders, All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and other Plains Tribal organizations extended full support to the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) leaders. The obvious reason for this cooperation was the common interest in driving the immigrants out, who were creating economic hazards for the Bodos more than any other sections out of Assam. But in later years when it became clear that the real intention of the leaders and supporters of the movement was to establish Assamese regional hegemony, the tribal organization, particularly the ABSU, started disassociating themselves from the AASU movement. However, the final divide was created when the Assam Accord was signed. The Bodos found no specific provision to safeguard their interests; rather clauses 6 and 10 of the Accord were viewed with disregard by the ABSU. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord promised legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. Clause 10 made provision for strict enforcement of all relevant laws to ensure prevention of encroachment on all Government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks.

The Bodo leaders feared that these provisions would legalize the assimilations measures of ruling Governments in Assam. The general perception was that the protected forests lands were occupied by foreigner immigrants. But in reality many Bodo families had settled in reserved forests areas after having lost their traditional entitlements. If the first part of the clause 10 of the above Accord was implemented, those Bodo families also would face eviction. At the same time the ABSU leaders were suspicious as to whether the second part of the clause would be implemented because its true implementation would hurt the Assamese interest i.e. the interests of the traders of Barpeta and at the same time would benefit the Bodos.

When the AASU leaders signed the Assam Accord, by Assamese people they meant all the indigenous people living in Assam'. In absence of any clear cut definition, the (Assam Accord) document itself made the Bodo leaders suspect about possible Assamese cultural domination and loss of Bodo identity. As was suspected, a new wave of enforcement of the dominance of Assamese language in schools, universities administrative offices and communication systems was pursued to demonstrate that the Assamese people were effective masters in their own house by the AGP Government that came to power immediately after the Assam Movement.

Thus the confusion, distrust and tensed situation instigated the emergence of Bodo student leaders who took a new course of action. Under their leadership the ABSU took a hard line and by 1987, they started sponsoring popular movements for the attainment of a separate Bodoland.

The cultural, economic and political policies initiated during AGP's tenure benefited only one section. In its Election Manifesto of 1985, the party promised to make sure that the implementation of the Official Language Act became effective at all levels.²⁹ After coming to power the AGP Government tried to establish the preeminence of Assamese language over

other languages. The Government has made the Assamese language the compulsory third language of the non-Assamese medium students in Secondary Schools through a circular given by the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA) on 28 February, 1986. Hence in addition to the mother tongue, English and Hindi, a non-Assamese-speaking student has to study Assamese as a fourth language. The main intension of this was to acquaint the non-Assamese speaking students with the language. The policies taken for the development of minority languages were merely tools of appeasement. In reality no practical measures were provide for higher education in these languages. Knowledge of Assamese was made an important requirement to enable one to get Government jobs.

The policies of this Government were meant to bring an explicit construction of a Greater Assamese Society and on that very attempt they alienated the Bodos. The student leaders of the Assam Movement, who became the leaders of the AGP Government, got caught in their own rhetoric and failed to recognize that Assameseness itself is a contested formation. In failing to select sufficiently inclusionary historical and cultural symbols, and in being insufficiently sensitive to the human impact of their policy demands-as applied to foreigners and indigenious people all alike-the leaders of the Assam movement contributed to the process of ethnicization of the Assamese.³⁰ Hence, AGP had to face a major crisis for survival in October, 1987 in the wake of a rise in Bodo insurgent activities all over Assam.

Role of Bodo Sahitya Sabha

The assertion and Ethno-consolidation of the Bodos found their expression with the foundation of The Bodo Sahitya Sabha on 16th November 1952 at Basugaon town following the footsteps of Asom Sahitya Sabha. The fundamental aim of BSS has been to unite the languages of Dimasa, Tipperah (Block) and other allied languages and dialects of different

regions-both plains and hills and thereby to develop and expand a standard Bodo language and to promote Bodo culture. The Sabha has been instrumental in arousing consciousness amongst the Bodos regarding their linguistic and ethnic identity. Since its formation, it has been holding annual sessions at various Bodo majority areas and has been organizing meetings and seminars to encourage Bodo writers and scholars. It also arranges publication of Bodo literary works. Under Sabha's guardianship, the Bodo language has developed considerably.

The Pan-Bodosentiment has been infused and taken a concrete shape under the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The Sabha played very crucial role in legitimizing Bodo identity among its masses. The phase of constitutional politics carried on by the Tribal League during the 1930s and 1940s was followed by the cultural activism of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha from the 1950s onwards. After the formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha the search for identity assumed a concrete shape. The Sabha took remarkable steps for the development of the Bodo language and preservation of the Bodo culture. The Sabha opposed the implementation of Assamese as the Official State Language of the province and advocated Hindi as the official Language not only in Assam but for everywhere in India. The Sabha also expressed the sentiment that since the Bodos has their language and culture their children must be given education in their mother-tongue³¹ so that their distinct identity can be maintained. Realizing the need of imparting education in the mother tongue the Bodo Sahitya Sabha stated its movement for the implementation of Bodo language as the medium of instruction in schools in the early sixties. Accordingly in 1963 Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction in primary stage and in 1968 at the secondary stage.

In 1974 the Bodo Sahitya Sabha launched a Movement for the adoption of the Roman Script. Bodo was not a written language in the past and till that demand, the Bodo language had been written in the Assamese script. The Assamese Government instead of conceding the

demand of the Sabha took repressive measures to suppress the movement. In their memorandum to the three Member Expert Committee ABSU stated, “The Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students’ Union jointly launched a vigorous movement tried to crush down that peaceful mass movement in which 18 Bodo people lost their valuable lives in police firing. Many Bodo villages were raided, Bodo houses were burnt, properties either damaged or looted; not less than 50 thousand Bodo people were arrested and put into jails. Ultimately, Devanagiri script in lieu of Roman script was accepted by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha at the intervention of the then Prime Minister of India. Indira Gandhi, Script³² thereby establishing a link with pan-Indian languages. The attitude of the Government alienated the Bodos from the Assamese political mainstream and made them restless. Consciousness of Bodo identity became stronger among masses.

Since its inception, the Sabha has been working for the development of a pan-Bodo sentiment and for the creation of a common Bodo language which would unite all the people of Bodo origin scattered all over North-East India. This embryonic idea could be seen tuning into action when Joybhadra Hagzar, a Dimasa Kachari from North Cachar district, was elected as the first President of Sabha.

Role of ABSU

Student participation in politics is not a recent phenomenon, but a fact of history. A fundamental similarity between youth revolts all over the world is that they are marked by a growing disillusionment of youth and older generation. In fact, it is often in search of autonomy and identity that youths become the instruments of change. Even in the developed countries like France, England, USA and Germany, students had participated in anti-authoritarian movements at various levels and this participation had taken various forms

ranging from simple anti-authoritarianism to more complex forms of radicalism. In similar manner, the Bodo youths were inspired and encouraged to fight for their own community. In the initial period, their reaction was primarily associated with social causes, but eventually they were compelled to be political.

The All Assam Bodo Students Union (ABSU), one of the largest students organization of Assam came into existence on 15th february 1967. The origin of this organization can be traced the socio-political condition prevailing at the time in the region. The first session of All Bodo Students Union welcomed the proposal of then Prime Minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhis proposal for re-organization of states. Gradually, the importance of political awareness of the students together with the prevailing condition of the Bodo community in that time resulted in the student community taking an active part in politics. In fact it was the student community of the Bodos that began the Bodoland movement in Assam.

"Student" can be defined as a part of the community, which has two important qualities, namely: youth and intellectualism. Being young, the student is energetic, active, dynamic, curious and impatient. On the other hand, students are also intellectuals, or at least in the process to become intellectuals. They go to the universities so that they have the opportunity to develop their analytical ability, logic and ratio. As intellectuals they will become more critical, more innovative and more sensitive than the rest of the youth.

Given the two qualities, many social scientists assume that the student is one of the most important agents of change of a nation. Many social changes or even political changes in many countries throughout the world are triggered by student movements. Although it is impossible to list all student movements which have social or political implications. The Zengakuren student movement in Japan is one example. Other examples are: the student movement in Turkey during the period of Menderes' government (1960), the Berkeley student revolt, the French student revolt, the Thai student movement in 1973, and the Indonesian

student movement in 1966. However, the students can be one of the most important agent of change.

In developing countries the Student movements can be motivated by one of the following: -

- 1) Nationalism
- 2) Ideology
- 3) Frustration and aggression
- 4) Social conditions.

Nationalism usually takes place before the independence of a nation. The urge to be free from colonialism and the need to have a self-government push a nation to fight for independence. History has noted that in most revolutions for independence, it is the intellectuals and the students who initiate and lead the revolutions.

After independence when a nation is in the process of seeking its identity, some ideologies grow within the nation. The ideologies vary from communism to liberalism, from socialism to capitalism. The spreading of these ideologies usually is done also by the intellectuals and the students. In this stage of the development of a nation, student movements usually are motivated by the urge to win in the competition among different ideologies.

In the next stage of a nation's development, student movements can be motivated also by frustrations. Frustration or relative deprivation might be society, political or economical. In frustration, there is a relatively big discrepancy between the expectation of values or conditions of the people and the real values or conditions perceived by the people in a given period. The bigger the discrepancy, the greater the possibility of aggressive behaviour to take place. The student, being part of the intellectuals, has the bigger tendency to have a greater sense of deprivation than non-student youth or the rest of the community because the student has higher value expectations. That is why the student tends to take the role as the pioneer of most social or political movements in a country.

As a social movement, student movement is caused also by particular conditions. N.

Smelser mentioned six social condition required by a social mass action i.e.: structural strain, structural conduciveness, generalized belief, mobilization for action, lack of social control, and a triggering factor. Again, the students are a group in almost every country, which has all the conditions required to make it more sensitive and action prone.

Bodo political aspirations reached a new height during the eighties of the nineteenth century. The phenomenal growth of ethnic consciousness after the Roman Script Movement of Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the changing political orientation of new Bodo leadership i.e. ABSU leaders, particularly at the end of Assam Movement led to a radical outbreak for a separate Bodoland. The ABSU was motivated to join the Bodo movement by the prevailing social conditions of the societies and with the feeling of newly acquired nationalism.

In the 18th conference of ABSU held at Rowta in May 1986, U.N. Brahma was elected as President. With his election ABSU activities took a new turn. ABSU decided to include political issues as part of their agenda and started the successful mobilization of a large number of Bodos in support of their demand for a separate state. The older generation of the Bodo politicians went back stage with ABSU taking the center stage of Bodo Movement. Since most of the Bodo leaders happened to witness AASU activates from close quarters it became easier for them to emulate their movement tactics. Like the AASU leaders, the Bodo leaders also used cultural and historical symbols to inspire nationalistic feelings among the Bodos. They were confident that Bodo demands for greater public recognition of Bodo language and culture and for economic and educational opportunities could be best met with the creation of a separate state only. Hence they articulated a radical agenda and focused on exclusive Bodo identity. They realized that the earlier leaders had failed due to lack of mass support. To reach the masses, the ABSU opened branches at the Anchalik levels to organize volunteers prior to the formal commencement of the movement on 2 March 1987.

This very fact proved to be a major yardstick for the success of ABSU campaign. And when the movement started, the Bodo masses overwhelmingly supported their leaders.

Their radical agenda and mass mobilization sidelined them completely from the PTCA leaders who had proved to be weak and individualistic. The political activities of the PTCA remained limited to a barrage of memoranda. Moreover they failed to connect themselves to the pulses of the common tribal population. Like their predecessors, the Tribal League leaders, they also kept changing their loyalty in favor of the party in power. They disappointed the Bodo people most by joining the Janata Government after the declaration of emergency in 1975-76 and finally on 4 April, 1977 when they treacherously gave up Udayachal demand. Considering the ineffectiveness of the PTCA leaders, the Bodo masses came in full support of ABSU. The efforts of Bodo Sahitya Sabha had already resulted in the desire to preserve Bodo language and culture and work together for the community rights among the Bodo people. ABSU leadership by utilized that sentiment in favour of the Bodoland Movement.

Students can be pioneers of change, but in history, it has not always been the case. Their role as agents of change depends very much on the internal conditions of the students themselves (motivation, ideology, competition among them) and the external social and political conditions as well (pressures from the outside competition with other pressure groups, availability of political channels, etc.).

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