

Chapter 4

The Bodoland Movement and Its Different Phases

The Bodo movement has been the strongest tribal movement in Assam. This movement seeded during the colonial times and culminated into a radical assertion in the late 1980s. The main source of Bodoland movement was the feeling of discrimination, deprivation and injustice. In the campaign to regain the lost political, economic and cultural suzerainty, the leaders of the Bodo Movement emphasized that the Bodo people are ethnically different from the rest of the people of present day state of Assam and hence entitled to political acknowledgement.

The Bodo Movement is the largest movement by the indigenous tribes of Assam so far. It has been shaped by a long trail of events taking place within the Bodo community and in its surrounding social setup. The movement started as one for self-assertion and regeneration of the Bodo community. The Bodo movement was the result of the growth of ethnonationalism in the Bodo Community. The engima of nationalism admittedly defies any cut and dried approach for unravelling its mystery and charm. Nevertheless no one can dispute the fact that the force of nationalism is most compelling and pervasive. Undoubtedly, membership in a nation provides “a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world through the prism of collective personality and its distinctive culture.” At the same time popular mobilization is ignited and set in motion by the driving force of nationalism. Over the years it has been rather evident that the crystallization of national identity on ethnic lines eventually fosters collective identity often decisively and in a manner inconceivable by either religion or class. The fact, therefore, remains ethnic national identity is relatively more meaningful and promising than other identities more because it fulfills the test of stability.¹

Various scholars attribute the force of ethnic nationalism to the perception of the nation as a community of shared fate. One may not agree with Gellner who has opined that nationalism “invents nations where they do not exist” on the ground that there would be an element of fabrication in the process primarily because the elite in all cases construct social reality in terms of “cultural artifacts” and expressed through imagination which undoubtedly includes ethnic distinctiveness. There is no disputing the fact that the notion of the nation needs to be imagined. It is worth quoting Anderson who made theoretical formulation succinctly clear by stating that "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members — yet in the mind of each lives the images of their community". Ethnic communities are, therefore, not necessarily historically precise and consistent reality. The fact however remains that ethnic nationalism is a 'powerful drive that induces millions across the globe to nurture the vision of better political existence'. In the construction of an ethnic community's image and also in the evolution of the entity several attributes matter such as culture, language and above all national consciousness. Indeed, the common denominator of all ethnic communities is national consciousness, which fosters, by all means, a feeling of belongingness and fraternity. Of the various typologies of national movements, ethnic nationalism stands out to be the most significant because of its volatile nature, although examples of ethnic secession are very few indeed.

The gravitational pull of ethnic nationalism can be traced to certain basic urges. It goes without saying that membership in a nation promotes a sense of identification, which in turn instils a sense of pride in the tradition and institutions. Tradition remains the sheet anchor of ethnic identity and mobilization. Persistence of tradition has been found to be both socially and practically acceptable as a means of strengthening ethnic bond and overcoming anonymity. The result is anything but spectacular so much so that individuals consciously or

unconsciously submerge themselves in the vortex of ethnic pride and prejudice to kindle the hope of governance in tune with some sense of equality. The inroads of modernization loom large in their lifestyle but tradition holds the sway, for it is at once uniting and rewarding. Evidently, ethnic aspirations get directed towards identity formation and consolidation. Over the years several ethnic categories have transformed themselves into ethnic communities.²

Significantly, the crystallization process of ethnic community does not however take place at a rapid pace and at the same time no uniform pattern is discernible either. The properties of ethnic nationalism explain the explosive power rooted in the myth of a common ancestry and homeland. It is well acknowledged that prevalence of a common culture too facilitates the emergence of a collective personality. Above all, y language and religion add to a sense of solidarity and are considered to be the important resources of ethnic community.

Over the past two decades ethnic nationalism has taken deep root in several parts of North-East India projecting the need for collective destiny. Side by side the idea of self-determination ignites and motivates individual members to take recourse to agitational path and often political extremism. The movement is not self-propelled because intelligentsia and political elite play the vital role of educating and mobilizing the masses along the path of ethnic separateness. Over and above, the rationale of the move as interpreted by the elite holds sway in the society. Generally speaking political autonomy and statehood are projected as the ultimate prize of ethnic nationalism. Elsewhere in the world stateless ethnic communities clamour the same sentiments even though the right of self-determination is no more than a political fiction.³

Despite ethnic movements and upsurge, the conventional interpretation of self-determination as de-colonization remains largely intact at the beginning of a new century. However, the advocates of ethno-nationalism harp on the secessionist element of the right of self-determination, which in their view is a fundamental human right. Even the African Union

held that only the ex-colonies could claim statehood. The emergence of Bangladesh was no doubt a triumph of ethnic nationalism but it was largely facilitated by external intervention. Again the emergence of post-Soviet States on ethnic line is considered to be a reiteration of the conventional interpretation of self-determination as new entities emerged after the collapse of an empire. Further, the Eritrean independence from Ethiopia and the recent success of nationalist movement in East Timor too remain within the ambit of this understanding. It is not out of place to mention that the Canadian Supreme Court in 1996 ruled out Quebec's secession stating 'outside the colonial context, there is no recognition to a right to secession whether or not such population has any distinctive cultural identity.'⁴

Against this background the emphasis remains on democratic government, human rights and political autonomy within the existing borders. The legitimacy of state remains undiluted. Nevertheless, politicization of ethnicity and ethnic militancy continue to pose challenge to the power and stability of the state and competing theories may be cited to explain the clamour for political bargaining. Michael Hechter has argued that relatively most backward region of country will exhibit the strongest desire for ethnic autonomy. On the other hand, Immanuel Wallerstein argues that the richest ethnic group living on the geographic periphery will express the strongest desire for sovereignty. In another explanation Rothschild holds that ethnicity can be seen as a highly conscious political and new mode of interest articulation. The fact however remains undisputed that politicization of ethnicity on the plank of socio-economic demands is a legitimate instrument in the pursuit of political power.

Ethnicity refers to a common tradition, a system of shared values and culture by a group of people who identify themselves as a distinct entity different from other cultures. Besides this element of self-conceived identification, the group demanding a place under the sun may have a number of other characteristics that define its distinctiveness and maintain a

social distance from other groups. These attributes may roughly include a distinct language (or dialect), social customs, traditions, dress patterns, food habits, and other modes of life. Close to the heels of ethnicity comes the concept of ethnic minorities who consider themselves distinguished from the larger societies by showing certain traits already mentioned above. Subjected to discrimination and outright repression by the dominant group in their society, they may respond by seeking to blur distinctions between themselves demanding recognition and better tolerance for their group.

Ethnic movements in North-East India involve the assertion of identity around certain social problems, historic-cultural legacies and political exigencies by way of organising themselves into an ethnic body to concretise their identity. Subsequently they raise a demand for a separate administrative unit comprising the areas where a distinct ethno-cultural group forms a majority.

The methods adopted achieve their goals range from peaceful persuasion to militant tactics, extortions, kidnapping, indiscriminate homicide and ethnic-cleansing for creation of a homogeneous land of their dreams.⁵

The Bodo movement in its present form emerged in the 1960 demanding a separate homeland for the Bodo tribal population of Assam. It took a severe turn in the 1980s, after the Assam Accord was signed. This movement is yet another dissent of the tribal community within the state of Assam after Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have been successful in carving exclusive tribal states for themselves from Assam in the 1960s and 1980s. The period from 1960s to 1990s witnessed several ethno-consolidating political movements among the Bodos. They are discussed below -

The Udhayachal Movement

During the independent Movement in India, the tribals co-operated with other non-tribal people in their common struggle to drive out the British from India. But without

amending the salient features of the colonial socio-economic system, the post independence leaders under the grab of “welfare economy” accentuated deprivations and inequalities among the tribals. This system has a result, yielded a lot of contradictions and induced the tribals to “movements” of various types and dimensions. The Bodo movements in Assam are thus a product of the legacy of the contradiction of the colonial socio-economic system.⁶

Independence and adoption of the Constitution in 1950 did not improve matters for the Bodos and other “plains tribes” of Assam. Whereas the tribes in the hill areas of the North-east were given a large measure of administrative autonomy and protected from land alienation under the measures contained in the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, the Bodos and other plains tribes were fobbed off with the so called “Tribal Belts and blocks” where the Assam Land Revenue Rules and Regulations in theory imposed restrictions on possession and transfer of tribal lands. In practice, the restrictions on ownership and transfer of land in the tribal belts and blocks have been observed more in breach resulting in large scale alienation of land owned by Bodos and other plains tribes.⁷

The pan-tribalism among the various tribal communities living in the plains districts of Assam began dawning sometimes in mid-twenties of twentieth century. The plains tribals were always imbued with a strong sense of ethnic separatedness. They resented Hinduisation and refused to be identified with the Assamese adopted a resolution in the Conference of Assam Kachari Yubak Sanmilani held at Titabar, Jorhat, on 12 August 1927 to safeguard their identity.⁸

After Independence, a consciousness grew among the plains tribes of Assam. They compared their position relating to constitutional safeguard with that of the scheduled tribes living in the hill areas of Assam and in order states. They discovered that they enjoy minimum constitutional safeguard among scheduled Tribes in India. The scheduled Tribes in other States enjoy the benefits of the Fifth schedule which meant to protect the interests and

the tribal way of life. They also enjoy the provisions of the sixth schedule, the objective of which is to protect the customs, practices, and identity of the tribal people and afford them the opportunities of growth and progress in accordance with their genius and traditions. The schedule tribes in Assam were deprived of such benefits and provisions. Moreover, agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the plains tribes of Assam. The tribal land was not well protected. A large chunk of tribal land was occupied by a host of immigrants who entered from East Bengal and encroached upon the tribal areas, and settled therein.⁹ Despite the constant reminders to the Government, their grievances were not given due attention. Thus unabated encroachment on tribal belts and blocks, gradual deterioration of general economic conditions of the plains tribals and increase of landless people among the tribals deeply perturbed the minds of the plains tribals. All these factors induced them to think of an organization of the plains tribals.

On 27 February 1967, after the Fourth the General Election, the tribal leaders and workers from all parts of Kokrajhar sub-division met under the presidentship of Shri Modoram Brahma a noted Bodo educationist and senior social worker. All the grievances of the plains tribal were highlighted and discussed. In the meeting, they arrived at the conclusion that full autonomy alone could provide the plains tribals with necessary condition to preserved their language and culture and help them develop according to their own choice and genius.¹⁰ They thus decided to form an All Assam organisation under the name –“Plains Tribals Council of Assam” (PTCA). In order to agitate for full autonomy, an Action Committee was formed. The members of the Action Committee travelled throughout the plains tribals areas of Assam to mobilize Councils of Assam. On 18th, March 1967, the Action committee convened a meeting of the all AD-hoc District councils at Kokrajhari. In this meeting, various members were elected for different portfolios, namely, Sri Biruchan Doley and Sir Samar Brahma Choudhury as its president and vice-president respectively, Prof.

Charan Narzary as its general secretary Sri Ajit Kumar Basumatary as its joint secretary. Kokrajhar Became the headquarter of the Organization.¹¹

The tribal leaders held that the federal plan was the most suitable one which could satisfy the aspirations of the hills people and other minority groups, particularly, the plains tribals. One cause for setting up of the PTCA was the Governments' proposal to give Assam a federal structure,¹²⁽⁸⁾ but the Central Government had abandoned the federal plan for reorganization of Assam.

On 8 April, 1967, the PTCA held a session at Edenbari in the district of Darrang. Here the leaders adopted its constitution and decided to publicize its view in a weekly news magazine entitled "jana Jati." It was brought out for inspiring the plains tribals politically, socially and economically. On 20 May 1967, a memorandum was submitted to the president of India in which they listed their grievances and demand. In 1968, the Government of India delegated a team to study the tribal development programmes in Assam. The plains tribal MLAs and the minister Mr. Rupnath Brahma jointly submitted a memorandum to the team explaining that the Tribal Belts and Blocks of Assam did not benefit much from the Government.¹³⁽⁹⁾

The PTCA gave a call for boycotting the by-elections to the Lok Sabha from Kokrajhar constituency during July 1967 and May 1968. Thousands of volunteers of the PTCS responded to the invitation. The important leaders of the party were arrested and detained for an indefinite time. When released from the Jail, the leaders organized a conference of the PTCA at Tezpur from 12 to 14 January 1969. In the conference, they reiterated their demand for full autonomy to ensure peace and more efficient administration in the northern tracts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, and Lakhimpur upto the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. It was at this juncture (1969) that the Assam Re-organisation Act for the formation of certain autonomous states within Assam was passed.

In October 1972, The PTCA again submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister, Srimati Indra Gandhi stating their grievances. In September, the two members' delegation met to the prime minister and reiterated their demand for the creation of an autonomous region to be called "Udayachal". This resulted due to the failure of the Government of Assam to seek suitable solution to the earlier demands of the plains tribals.

On 7 December 1972, the PTCA launched a movement demanding a separate Union Territory of Udayachal by bifurcating Assam in its second general session held on 25 April at Bognadi in North Lakhimpur. The PTCA delegates and representatives from all parts of the proposed Uayanchal attended. They reiterated their earlier demand, opposed the Agricultural Farming Corporation or the government of Assam and demanded redlimitation of the Panchayat Constituencies. In September 1973, a PTCA delegation met the Prime Minister and submitted a memorandum in which they affirmed their earlier demand for a separate administrative set up of Udayachal.¹⁴ The demand for Udayachal gained support from the mass because of the imposition of Assamese language on the plains tribals.¹⁵

THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

Assam is a land of controversy over language. It is inhabited by different ethnic groups; tribal non-tribal. it is a multi-lingual state too. Among the various groups of Assam the 'Assamese' people of Aryan stock are only one among many. The tribals especially the Bodos resented the Assam Government's stand towards the tribals. Despite the opposition of the tribals the Assam Government in 1960 declared the Assamese as the official language of Assam This declaration had repercussions. It hurt the very sentiments of the tribals. Within ten years the States of Meghalaya for the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos was set up¹⁶ and in 1987 Mizoram attained its statehood and become the 23rd state of the Indian Union. In 1972, the Assam Government made Assamese the sole medium of instruction in the Universities of

Guwahati and Dibrugarh in the place of English. Again, soon after assuming power, the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) Government imposed the Assamese language as compulsory third language on the non-Assamese medium students in secondary schools through a circular issued by the Secondary Education Board of Assam. The tribal students and the Assam Linguistic Minority rights committee (ALMRC) vehemently opposed such policies these hardened the attitude of the tribals of both the plains and the hills.¹⁷

A new consciousness had crept into the minds of the Bodos because of spread of Brahma Religion under the leadership of Sri Kalicharan Brahma in the mid-nineteenth century. He was the first man to plead for safeguards for the tribals before the Simon Commission.¹⁸ Those who were converted social reforms. They took over the leadership of the socio-political life of the people. In the course of time, the Bodos grew conscious of their socio-political status. They wanted to raise their status. To meet the aspirations of their people, to unite them and to bring about their all round development, reviving of the Bodos, more or less emerged out of the movement for linguistic rights.

The Bodos formed the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), a cultural and literary organisation, at Basugaon in Kokrajhar sub-division of Goalpara district during the conference on Nikhil Bodo Language and Literature held on 15 and 16 November 1952.¹⁹ The BSS aimed at untiting the Bodos on the issue of language and encourage the development and research on the Bodo language. It demanded the schools of the Bodo dominated areas. Sri Ranendra Basumatary was the president of the BSS.

The BSS members had submitted a memorandum to the then Chief minister of Assam, Sri Bishnuram Medhi at Dhubri in 1953, demanding the introduction of Bodo language in the primary schools in the Bodo populated areas. In 1956, Government of Assam tried to introduce a text book. The Bodos refused it because it has a large number of Assamese words in it.²⁰ On 16 November 1962, the BSS organized a large procession of about 15,000 Bodos.

In response, the Government of Assam constituted a one-man Enquiry Committee headed by Rupnath Brahma, the Bodo Minister in the Assam government. The Government recognized the use of Bodo language in the Bodo concentrated areas in 1963 for primary schools.²¹ Consequently on 18 May 1963, the then Chief Minister Sri Bimala Prasad Chaliha, inaugurated the introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction upto class III at the Kokrajhar Government High School. The students had to pursue their education through Assamese medium from Class IV onwards. It was not feasible and practical for the Bodo students, who complete the primary education upto Class III in Bodo medium. Therefore, the BSS again demanded the Bodo medium upto class VI. Two delegates, namely, J.K. Basumatary and S.C. Das met the Chief Minister at Guwahati Circuit Home on 5 January 1968. However, the Educational Department of Assam maintained that the Bodo Language could not be introduced at the middle school level because Bodo was not a recognized regional language. On 14 February 1968, the Annual Conference of the BSS which was held at Ramfalbil gave two weeks time to Chief Minister for a final decision, failing which they threatened would launch a mass movement.²²

The agitation, however, started on 28 February 1968 at Kokrajhar with the boycotting of schools and colleges. The Bodo MLAs and the delegates and representatives of the BSS met the Chief Minister on 31st March and on 1st April and a document was signed pertaining to the introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction at the secondary level of education. On 2 April 1968, the Government of Assam formally communicated to the President of the BSS its decision to introduce Bodo as a medium of instruction at the secondary stage of education, and to appoint a committee of experts for this purpose (The Government accordingly appointed a committee).²³ On 23 September 1968, the State Education Minister formally inaugurated the introduction of Bodo medium at secondary level at Kokrajhar higher Secondary School. However, The BSS still felt that the introduction of

Bodo language has not yet been implemented in practical terms and that it has to organize further agitation to achieve the goal.

THE SCRIPT MOVEMENT

The Bodo language has no alphabet of its own. A decision had to be made as to which script would be more suitable for the Bodo language. The Roman script was found more suitable for the Bodo language. In June 1972, an Assam Linguistic Minorities Rights Commission (ALMRC) was set up, with Prof. Charan Narzary, The general secretary of the PTCA, as its vice-president. The PTCA rendered its full supports to the medium of instruction in the universities of Assam. The ABSU (All Bodo Student's Union) also submitted a memorandum to the English as the medium of instruction in Assam (universities) and autonomy for the plains tribals.²⁴ Thus the language movement along with the political movement entered into a new phase.²⁵

On 12 September 1974, when Sarat Chandra Singha was the chief Minister and Hiteswar Saikia, the Home Minister of Assam, the BSS, the cultural and literacy organization of the Bodos launched a movement demanding the approval the Roman Script. It was turned down brutally by the state Government.²⁶ This action of the state Government compelled the Bodos to step up the agitation to fulfil their demand. The entire Bodo population was united during this movement.

The BSS remained firm and mustered impressive argument for their demand. This can be summarized as follows:

1. The Kothari Educational Commission permitted adoption of Roman Script.
2. The neighbouring Garo people of Goalpara used the Roman Script.
3. Famous linguist, such as Dr. S.K. Chatterjee and B. Kakaty, recommended the Roman Script as being the most appropriate for the Bodo language.

4. The Script is widely used in the world.

5. It would not be a new script for the Bodo language and was first used for Bodo literature in 1886. The Assam Government had prepared Bodo text books in Roman Script in 1904 in introduced primary education among Bodos which had been used upto 1936.²⁷

The BSS precipitated the issue in the early part of 1974 by introducing the Bodo English Premier, “Bithorai” in Class I, printed in the Roman Script. Immediately, the Government of Assam stopped grants to the Schools in relation. This resulted in protests, a token strike on 12 September 1974 and mass picketing of schools on 18-21 September. On 24 September 1974, the tribal MLAs and the minister of tribal affairs held a discussion with the Chief Minister along with All Assam Tribal Sangha and Tribal MLAs. The memorandum was rejected by the state Government. Consequently, the Sangha resumed its agitational programme with full support from the PTCA and the Bodo Students’ Union. The movement created anxiety and panic among the non-Bodo people. Finally, when the movement was at the height, the State Government referred the script issue to the Central Government for a decision, thought the State Government could grant the Roman Script itself. The State Government continued inhuman atrocities and tortures on the Bodos to compel them to accept the imposition by the Central Government. The Central Government knowing the sentiment of the State Government suggested alternatives. Compelled under the circumstances, the Sangha accepted the Devanagiri Script in lieu of Roman Script for the Bodos language as considering the broader national perspective. This decision was taken by joint meeting of the executive committee of the BSS, the All Bodo Students’ Association, the Assam Bodo Teachers’ the Association and others on 12 April 1975, at Barama in the present Nalbari district.

Now the Devanagiri Script is being used for Bodo language in the schools, but the Devanagiri Script is found unsuitable even after a long period of trials. Hence, the Bodos

under BSS decided again to adopt the Roman Script. The Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) has adopted the Roman Script for the BAC areas and entrusted the BSS and ABSU with the implementation of the decision. The BSS has submitted a memorandum to the state government to approve the Roman Script for the Bodo language outside the BAC also. It is worth nothing that about 20 years after refusing the Roman Script for Bodo language, the State Government has granted the Roman script for Mishing language.

Movement for official language

The Script movement was followed by the movement for the recognition of Bodo language as an official language of Assam. The BSS stood firm on its demand and submitted several memoranda to the state Government for the recognition of Bodo language. After four year of struggle finally, the state Government has granted the Bodo language the status of associate official language of Assam. This is the only case in the long struggle for the language where no blood shedding was needed.

The Bodoland Movement

Multiple factors sparked off the multifaceted problems of Bodos, which led to a Bodoland Movement. These were:-

- (i) Non-tribal including tea garden labourers poured into the tribal land from other parts of the states and from neighbouring Bangladesh,
- (ii) Non-implementation of the Assam Land Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1947,
- (iii) Non-implementation of the Constitutional provisions under Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India, and
- (iv) Fractional division into different religious fragments among the Bodos.

Thus, the Bodos had to struggle much and there was no alternative left but to take up agitational path and ultimately turned into the movement which continued under different banners of leaderships. At the first instance, creation of separate state in Bodo dominated areas of Assam came to their mind and Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed in 1967. To achieve their rights, the PTCA were firm in their demand for an autonomous region for the plains tribals to be named as 'Udayachal'. This movement continued over two decades and underwent a radical change within it and gave rise to United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) in 1984. Their movement was also launched for creation of Union Territory in tribal dominated areas of Assam.' The Bodos who had joined hands with the All Assam Students Union (AASU) during the six-year long movement (1979-85) have now deadly rivalry over the Bodoland issue.' The 'Assam Accord' of 1985 did not cover the interest of the Bodos. Henceforth in 1988, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) began to support actively the UTNLF for a common issue, i.e. the Bodoland in Assam. To gain momentum of the movement and popularize the issue among the masses, another Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) was formed in the same year. When the movement turned violent, there was series of talks of bipartite and tripartite nature held with the State Government, the Central Government and ABSU-BPAC representatives to solve the demand of the Bodos. Finally, the 'Bodoland Accord' was signed creating 'Bodoland Autonomous Council' (BAC) on February 20, 1993. This accord was reached with the objective of providing maximum autonomy to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement within the framework of Indian Constitution.²⁸

The background of Bodo movement was prepared during colonial period with the systematic immigration that was allowed by the Britishers and which had continued even after independence. In the early part of 20th century, the Britishers in order to undertake development and cultivation of wastelands, officially encouraged immigration of landless

peasants from the densely populated bordering districts of Bengal to the sparsely populated districts of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. The colonial administration also imported a large number of working hands to work in the tea plantation, road construction, oil field and coalmines. This process of immigration scheme opened a new floodgate for immigration of landless peasants from East Bengal (Now Bangladesh) to Assam and at least 90% of the immigrants were Muslims. During the period 1911 to 1931, the Muslim peasants formed a significant portion of the population in all the Brahmaputra valley districts. In the post independence period, the flow of the massive immigrants assumed a menacing land problem particularly to the Bodo population. As per census report of 1991, Assam has witnessed the highest growth of voters which is at 13.38% as against the national average of 2.1%. The main reason for the sharp increase of voters is no doubt due to immigration of Muslim settlers from the neighbouring country Bangladesh. The main point to be noted is that the rate of increase is much more alarming in the Bodo dominated areas. Thus, the huge influx of the migrants had shaken the fabric of tribal economy, culture and society. Growing migrant population appeared to be a serious threat to their survival and development as a tribal entity.

The massive increase of migrant population put tremendous pressure on tribal land because these new section of population continued to settle down in the reserved forest belts and blocks meant for the tribals. The migrants tempted poor tribals by offering much too high prices and compelled them to part with their land. This resulted in considerable eviction of tribals from their own lands and put them under severe strain for livelihood as well as necessary resources. In the post colonial period, tribals were forced to be dependent economically and subservient politically to the Hindus, upper caste landlords ruling class. The tribals were also deprived of the benefit of industrialization and they remained at the level of peasant economy belts and blocks were created in Assam under the provision of the Assam land and Regulation Act, 1947 in order to protect tribal land alienation and encroachment by

the outsiders. But these measures were inadequate. Confronted with such critical situation, the Bodos developed a deep sense of resentment against the caste Hindus Assamese who have ruled the state since independence. The imposition of Assamese language as the official language of the state led to vehement protest from the various non-Assamese speaking linguistic groups. Besides, the Bodos became highly apprehensive about their cultural and political identity. All these factors have made the Bodos feel unsafe and insecurity has threatened their very existence.

The idea for the separate state came to the Bodos out of the womb of socio-economic and political contradictions²⁹ and the negligence of the state administration. To receive their due rights, as mentioned earlier, they launched a movement – PTCA (1967 onwards). They were firm in their demand for an autonomous region for their movement for more than 23 years. But the political scenario among the Bodos underwent a radical change with the split in the PTCA on ideological lines. This gave rise to the PTCA and the PTCA (progressive). The latter was led by Binai Khungur Basumatary. It was later come to be known as the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF).³⁰ The ABSU sought ways and means to unify the two parties. They organised a convention at Harisinga in Darrang district on 19 April 1984, but unfortunately, failed to bring them to a common platform as they widely differed in their political ideologies.³¹

The movement for a tribal homeland in India out of the presents State of Assam with Union Territory status was first started by the UTNLF in 1984, beginning with poster and wall writing campaigns. In 1988, the UTNLF actively supported the programmes launched by the ABSU for a homeland. As a result there were a number of instances of police repressions, arrests and house burnings.³²The action of the police infuriated the UTNLF. In order to internationalise the Bodo issue, Mr. Binai Khungur Bsumatary, the leader of the UTNLF, approached Amnesty International during a visit abroad. He urged Amnesty International to

ascertain if the happenings in the State amounted to the violation of human rights. On the other hand the PTCA's demand for Udhayachal did not result in violent demonstration. Instead, they continued their agitational programmes to prayers and petitions to the Centre.³³

When the PTCA failed to achieve Udhayachal, the ABSU took up the movement for a separate state for the Bodos under the able leadership of late Upendra Nath Brahma, the "Father of Bodo".³⁴

Late Upendra Nath Brahma took up the initiative and responsibility to reunite the divided Bodos and work towards a common goal. Though versatile in his academic performance, he sacrificed his personal interest and devoted himself to the common cause. Under his guidance and leadership the mass movement for the creation of separate state of Bodoland gained popular momentum. His charming personality mobilized the Bodos throughout the state to actively participate in the ABSU movement through public rallies, meetings and seminars etc. In 1988, under his initiative and able guidance the Bodos People's Action Committee (BPCA) was formed. The basic purpose of this organisation was to embrace all the people in the Bodoland movement. Brahma had successfully led the mass rally at Guwahati and the Delhi Demonstration. His last representation was at the tripartite talks in 1990.

A new phase of the movement emerged with the rupture of relationship between the PTCA and the ABSU. Consequently, the movement for autonomy for the plains tribals slipped into the hands of the latter. They brought forth 92 point Charter of Demands, which included the creation of a separate Bodoland with the status of Union Territory, creation of an autonomous district council in compact tribal areas on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, creation of an autonomous regional council for the non-Karbi Tribals in the Autonomous Karbi Anglong district, Central University at Kokrajhar, etc.³⁵ In Basbari, the ABSU convened a student's convention (19-23 December 1988) and scaled down on its original 92-

points demands to three, that is (a) creation Brahmaputra; (b) creation of autonomous districts for the Bodos and tribals on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river, and (c) inclusion of the non-Karbi tribals of the autonomous district of Karbi Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

While the agitation was gaining momentum the Central Government intervened and initiated the tripartite talks among the ABSU-BPAC combine, Assam Government and Government of India the first round of talks took place at New Delhi on 28 August 1989. On the eve of the tripartite talks, a must killing of innocent Bodo people to place at Gohpur village, in Sonitpur district.

Whatever was achieved at the tripartite talks between the representatives of the Centre, the Assam Government and the ABSU in Delhi on 28 August 1989, was nullified by the bloody fortnight. These developments endangered the following round of talks scheduled to be held in Delhi in the last week of September 1989. The Centre's role in resolving the Bodo problem became crucial. For the second tripartite talks in Delhi both the Assam Government and ABSU (U) had a common agreement to create an atmosphere conducive to negation by withdrawing repressive laws and the students' adjuring violence. But the second round of tripartite talks held in Delhi did not bear fruit. The Centre represented by the Welfare Minister, Dr. Rajendra Kumar Bajpai turned down the demand for further division of Assam to create a separate Bodoland comprising areas north of the Brahmaputra.

The Assam Chief Minister, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mhanta assured that his Government was prepared to examine the issues and work out appropriate legal, political and administrative solutions acceptable to all the sections of the people of the state. The AGP Government's stand was that there are nine plains tribal groups in the state – Bodo, Miri, Sonowal, Kachari, Deori, Rabha, Braman, Tiwa, Mech and Hojai. Their population according to them is over 22 lakhs and they form 12 percent of the total population of the state.³¹

On the serious consideration of the Bodo problem, the Government of India, at the end of the extended session of the eighth round of talks (11 September 1989 and 13 September 1990), proposed the areas of the Bodos and other plains tribals to the north of the river Brahmaputra, and to submit its report within forty five days to make recommendation on autonomy. The committee was constituted by the Government of India on 25 February 1991, the Three-Member Expert Committee on Bodo issue consisted of Dr. Bhupendra Singh, IAS (Rtd), Chairman , Dr. K.S. Singh, Director General, Anthropological Survey of India (Member) and Sri A.M. Gokhale, Joint Secretary, Dept. of rural development, Govt. of India, New Delhi (Member Secretary). The Expert Committee began its work in April 1991, but had to suspend its work due to Guwahati High Court's injunction. With the lifting of this court injunction after the Saikia Ministry had assumed power, the Bodo panel resumed its work in Assam. The Three-Member Expert Committee submitted its report in March 1992 with a proposal to grant the Bodos maximum autonomy short of separate state within the Indian Union. The Bodo leaders, however, refused to accept the formulae. They remained adamant to their demand for a separate state-Bodoland.³⁶

A five-member Co-ordination Committee of Tribal Organisation of Assam (CCTOA), the Apex Body of all tribes of the State, met the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. They lodged complaints against the state Government's disinterest in a political solution to the problems of the Plains Tribe of Assam. According to Mr. Giridhar Pator, the Convenor of the CCTOA, "the problems of the Plains Tribals would be solved unless the genuine representatives of all the tribes were involved in the negotiation process". The Organisation strongly suggested that plains tribal areas be given constitutional recognition and adequate machinery be provided to these areas to give them the right of self-determination. "The arrangement will go a long way in protecting the lands and areas of the Plains Tribals to ensure their ethnic identity, and to give them a sense of identity," the organisation affirmed.

Despite a series and bipartite talks held between the Central Government and the State Government with the ABSU-BPAC representatives and Expert Committee, there was utter failure to chalk out a satisfactory solution to the burning problems of the Bodos.³⁷ There were instances of killing and bomb blast taking lives in every nook and corner of the State.

Following the submission of the report by the Bhupinder Singh Committee, a meeting held with the State Chief Minister, Hiteswar Saikia, the Bodo leaders insisted on the inclusion of as many as 4443 villages in the proposed territory of the Bodos. The State Government came forward with a rational proposal that any village which comes within the compact areas of the Bodos, even though it may constitute only 1% of the tribal population, would be included in the map and the villages without any tribal population, would be excluded. This proposal of the State Government was not acceptable to the ABSU-BPAC representative. They held on to their demand for the inclusion of 1035 villages having no tribal population. The State Government had referred the issue to the Centre for its consideration.

Compelled by the circumstance, the State Government and Bodo leaders (ABSU-BPAC) finally arrived at an agreement to end popularly known as the “Bodoland Accord” (Bodo Accord), as signed on 20 February 1993 in the presence of the representative from the Centre, Rajesh Pilot, Creating a “Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)”. The BAC would comprise about 2000 villages and 25 tea estates stretching from Shankosh river to Mazbat Pasnoi in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Bodo Accord was reached with the objective of providing maximum autonomy to the Bodos for social, economic, education, ethic and cultural advancement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Furthermore, the BAC area would also include reserved forests per the guidelines laid by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India.

Certain issues like the 10-km-belt along the Indo-Bhutan border, inclusion Gossaigaon, Bijni, Barpeta and Tangla towns and Tea Garden with the BAC area are yet to be solved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Different Phases of Bodoland Movement

The characteristics of the Bodo movement were that it not only stands for the political protection of the community but also for the social and cultural security of the community. The history of the Bodo movement from its very beginning to the formation of BTAD in 2003 has gone through various ups and down but it never failed in its main objectives for securing a separate state for the Bodos. The nature of the Bodo movement since the colonial period to the formation in 2003 has been discussed in the following:

First Phase: 1929-1947

The first stage of identity assertion movement by the Bodos indicates that the educated middle class played the leading role in the process of transformation and the consolidation of the Bodo national identity. The history of Bodo political activism began with the submission of four memoranda to the Simon Commission in 1928. To establish of distinct ethnic identity was the main motive of the Bodos from beginning of political consciousness. The Plains Tribes, including Bodos, had no representatives in the Legislative Council of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. This caused deep political resentment in the tribal minds. So they decided to co-operate with the Indian Statutory Commission against the powerful call for boycott by the Congress. The text of the four memoranda were more or less same, hence the Commission accepted the one submitted by the Bodo community of Goalpara wherein the backwardness of the Bodo community and their distinct identity was stressed

upon. It says: “Out of one lakhs 50,000 have been treated as Hindus, which is the cause of decrease in the number of Bodo Population. The Bodos have a distinct civilization of their own. There should be a separate category ‘the Bodos’ in the Census Report”. However, the main aim of their memoranda was gain political participation, educational and job opportunities from the colonial Government which was thought necessary for the development of the community. The Bodo elite were definitely aware on the complex play of numbers, political reforms and power which found reflection in their strong demand for a separate electorate and their insistence on being identified themselves as a separate community.

The formation of the Tribal League was the second step in the political journey of the Bodo community. In its resolutions the League demanded that all the backward tribes and communities should be considered as one unified group and at least seven seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly should be allocated to them in proportion of their numerical strength.

The Government of India Act of 1935 was the turning point in political history of the Plains Tribes’. It awarded them separate electorates on the basis of the recommendations of the Simon Commission. Four seats were reserved for them in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Bhimbor Deori became a spokesman of the tribals. With this opened the hitherto closed door of politics and power to the Plain Tribes.

In 1937 the all Assam Tribal League participated in the general election held throughout the country under this new Act and bagged all the four reserved seats and consolidated their position for future mobilization and participation. Bhimbor Deori was elected to the Legislative Council. This remarked the beginning of their total involvement in State politics. As has been observed earlier, the main aim of Tribal League was to serve the

interests of Plains Tribes. In doing so they never hesitated to shift their support from Congress to Muslim League taking full advantage of the prevailing political situation of that period.

Gopinath Bordoloi formed the first Congress Ministry on 20 September, 1938 with the support of Tribal League. The support was earned following by an agreement to protect tribal interests. The Tribal League, which was the only representative organization of Plains Tribes, worked hard to stop the onslaught by the land hungry immigrants and shrewd and crafty money lenders. According to this agreement imaginary lines were drawn dividing the areas occupied by the tribals from other non-tribal areas and the East Bengal immigrants were debarred from settling in tribal areas inside the line¹ and, thus Line System came into being to protect tribal interests. But the Ministry did not last long. In 1939 Gopinath Bordoloi and many Congress leaders were put behind bars following the Nationwide Satyagraha. When the Congress ministry resigned in 1939, the Tribal League shifted its support to the Muslim League who formed the subsequent Government.

It was the far sighted vision of Bhimbor Deori , a prominent Tribal league leader, the Sadullah ministry had to recognise all tribal people, irrespective of religion, must introduce them as tribals in the census of 1941. As a result, the Census Report of 1941 showed 28,24,133 numbers of tribal population against only 12,29,280 in its Report of 1911. The total population of the State was only 70.60 lakhs in 1911. In the 1921 it rose to a total of 80 lakhs and in the 1931 it exceeded 86 lakhs. In 1941 it was 109,30,000 lakhs. The tribal population on the other hand decreased from 1921 figure of 12.57 lakhs to 9.92 lakhs in 1931 Census. However this growth was viewed as threat for the caste Hindu position. The Congress then was consisted mainly of caste Hindu members. Therefore, it adopted very unfair means to obstruct the normal functioning of the Tribal League. They adopted certain means to allure the tribal people to reduce the number of their population. The Congress Party in the

beginning adopted the policy to allow the various tribal communities of the State to identify themselves as tribal. But, when as a consequence the number of tribal population increased largely, the Congress attacked the tribal leaders by calling them anti-Government, etc.

The Tribal League leaders despite their endeavors to maintain separate identity were totally against the regrouping scheme of the British Government. It was the time when most of the Congress leaders were behind the bars, influx from the Mymensing district had formed a sizeable chunk of the immigrant population as the Sadullah Government had always supported their cause. The question of regrouping provided them an advantageous position and they proposed that Assam should be grouped with Bengal. The Tribal League leaders opposed the Muslim League on this issue strongly. The Tribal leaders insisted that the Plains Tribes were more akin to Assam than to Bengal.

Following the Quit India Movement the Muslim League and on 25 August, 1942 came to power on 25th August 1942 in Assam. The Tribal leaders like Rupnath Brahma, Rabichandra Kachari and Karkachandra Doley actively supported the Sadullah Ministry..³⁸ In December 1944 the Sadullah ministry organized an All Party Conference with the idea of solving the problem pertaining to land. Rabichandra Kachari represented the Tribal League. The outcome of the Conference had gone in favour of the immigrants rather than the tribal people of Assam and the obvious consequence was the net loss of confidence of the Tribal League leaders with the Sadullah ministry. The Tribal leaders felt cheated by the Sadullah Government and distanced themselves from the Government.

In the meantime ,the congress under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi took advantage of this breach of faith by the Muslim League towards the Plains Tribes. In 1946 Congress leaders were released from jail and they started political regeneration on their part to win the faith of people. Tribal League leaders, however, were suspicious of Congress

activities owing to the caste Hindu factor. But the endeavors of Congress bore fruit, the Tribal League came closer to Congress and with letter's acceptance of Joint Electorates with reservation of seats, Bhimbor Deori was inducted into the Cabinet.³⁹

The Tribal league and congress came closer in 1946 when Cabinet Mission declared it's Grouping Plan for India and Assam was put under Group C along with Bengal which created stir in Assam. The Congress protested against this decision and refused to be a part of Bengal. The Tribal League leaving aside all its Caste Hindu prejudices joined the Congress in the greater interests of Assam and its people.

The Tribal League, which was an elite organization of all the Plains Tribes of Assam was the only common platform for the Bodos to articulate their political aspirations at the initial phase of the Bodo movement. The League's activities remained mostly within Constitutional limits, it took part in electoral politics, through which tried to protect the interests of the Plains Tribes. At the same time it refrained from any type of agitational politics. It also stayed away from the nationalist movement of the time. But many Bodos individually participated in the struggle against imperialism. They had entered into agreements with both the Muslim League and Congress at different juncture of time to abide by Line System but their efforts could hardly bring any desired results. In December 1947 the Tribal League succeeded in its endeavours when Bordoloi ministry created tribal belts and blocks based on 'Line System' by amending the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 so that tribal land alienation could be prevented.⁴⁰ During the year from 1947 to 1951 as many as 31 Belts and Blocks were constituted. Subsequently more were added though some few old ones were denotified and thus ceased to be such protected area. As on 31.10.1990 there were 17 belts and 30 blocks in 14 districts of Assam comprising of 3980 villages. Of these 3980 villages as many as 3204 villages were predominantly Bodo inhabited areas.

But unfortunately even this specific legal safe-guard could not improve the matter much as there appeared a very big gap between that the Government intended to do and what actually was done on the ground. Rampant malpractice and manipulation ensured large scale illegal transfer of land from Tribal to non-Tribals took place due to the false reporting of the lower ranking revenue officials on whose report all action at higher levels had to be taken. The post-independence successive Governments, however, could not fulfill the expectations of Plains Tribe peoples. The perpetuation of the inherited colonial state system without the benefit of industrialization could not change the structure of inequality, deprivation and underdevelopment. The problems became more acute in contemporary period. Tribals were forced to be dependent economically and subservient politically to the Hindu Upper caste landlords and ruling class in the post-colonial period. Their leaders too were seen competing among themselves for power. These years were the worst years in political history of Plains Tribes of Assam.

Second Phase: 1967-1986

The second phase of Bodo movement was more assertive in nature. The second phase of Bodo movement lasted from 1967 to 1986. The problem of influx from newly formed Country of Bangladesh to Bodo dominated areas and the imposition of Assamese language as official language on the tribal population of Assam mainly dominated the second phase of Bodo movement.

The second phase of the Bodoland movement saw growing demands for autonomy though it was yet to resemble a struggle backed by groups capable of employing violence as an alternate means to achieve their aims. The socio-economic conditions of Plains Tribes of Assam remained unchanged after the independence. The partition of India and eventual

creation of Bangladesh led to an incessant influx of migrants in Assam which created serious socio-political problem for the tribals particularly to their land interests. The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1947 which was enacted to protect tribal land alienation and encroachment by the outsiders proved to be inadequate. Moreover, the Plains Tribes of Assam could not avail themselves of constitutional safeguards the hills tribes enjoy under the provision 5th and 6th Schedules of the Constitution of India. This happened because while the hill tribals were acknowledged to entirely different peoples in the plains, the Plains Tribes were seen historically as part of the Assamese society. This is the reason why in 1946 the Assam Congress sent Dharanidhar Basumatary, a Congress worker as one of the ten members to the Constituent Assembly despite sending a selected delegate of the Tribal League. The inability of this tribal member Congress to voice the interests of Plains Tribes had a long lasting effect. Later the Tribal League leaders were criticized for lack of political vision and also for the good will they showed towards the Congress on the issue.

During 1960s language dominated political scene in Assam. With Linguistic reorganization of States the political mainstream of the region tried to implement the Official Language Bill and made Assamese the sole official language of the state. The different linguistic groups strongly opposed this and demanded due recognition to their languages by introducing as medium of instruction in schools in tribal areas. The Assam Government's position on this issue finally led to the separation of the hill areas from Assam by 1972 and aroused linguistic passions among the Bodos too.

Till 1967 Bodo politics remained more or less dormant. The Assam Tribal League had also been transformed into a socio-cultural organization known as All Assam Tribal Sangha

in 1954. It was against this backdrop that the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed in 1967.

The demand for political autonomy for the Plains Tribes of Assam was first voiced in 1967 by the ABSU. ABSU is a non-political organization. It was formed on 15 February, 1967 following the announcement of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 13 January, 1967 to reorganize Assam on a federal structure. The Plains Tribes pressure group aiming at securing autonomy for all the Plains Tribes of Assam was formed on 27 February, 1967 by the ABSU leaders. The main aim of the PTCA was to demand a political unit for the Plains Tribes of Assam in the form of Union Territory to be called Udayachal. Issues and concerns over the Line System and Immigration formed major items in their political agendas.

On the other hand the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, gaining full support from ABSU, launched a vigorous movement demanding introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction up to the secondary stage of education in most of the Bodo dominated areas from 28 February, 1968. This peaceful movement continued till 11 March of that year and on 23 September, 1968 Bodo was introduced as medium of instruction. This proved to be one step forward in the direction of Bodo linguistic identity and BSS's successful move. Prior to this the Bodo Sahitya Sabha had fought hard for and their efforts had borne fruit when Bodo was introduced at the primary stage of education in 1963. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha also showed serious concern when the Assam Language Bill was passed. The Sabha passed a resolution expressing their view points on the issue stating that Hindi rather than Assamese should be the only official language, thereby placing every linguistic community on equal footing which would prove beneficial to national unity. The resolution further stated that the Bodo cultural heritage, so far maintained, must not be forgotten under the shadow of the assimilation policy of the State Government.

At such a juncture, a new political party was formed to safeguard the interests of the tribal people of Assam. The formation of PTCA gave a new direction to the Bodo movement. Just after its formation the PTCA submitted a memorandum to the President of India, Zakir Husseini, on 20 May 1967. Full autonomy was demanded in the Plains Tribal areas from the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts so that the tribals could protect their land and themselves from the economic exploitation of the non-tribals, bringing to an end the political domination over the tribal by the non-tribal, to have the opportunity to grow according to their genius and to conserve their traditional culture and language.⁴¹

In the 1968 parliamentary bye-election was boycotted by the PTCA. More than 80 per cent of the tribal people refrained from casting their votes on the call to boycott the election by the PTCA. In another major step, the PTCA was turned into a political party. The party first contested elections in the 1971 mid-term poll followed by general elections in 1972. In 1972 the PTCA defeated a Cabinet Minister Ranendra Narayan Basumatary and returned its General Secretary Charan Narzary from Kokrajhar West (ST) Assembly Constituency.⁴²

The problem of official language of Assam again took a different shape when the Assam Government declared in 1972 that the sole medium of instruction in the two universities in Assam would be Assamese. Immediately after this declaration the Assam Linguistic Minorities' Rights Commission (LMRC) was set-up. Charan Narzary, the G.S. of PTCA, became its Vice President. The LMRC with full support from PTCA fought in favour of retention of English as the medium of instruction in the universities of Assam. At the same time PTCA launched their movement in demand of Union Territory with which began a new phase of the movement.

The passing of the North-Eastern Areas Reorganization Act of 1971, in the Parliament and the division of Assam into five states and two Union Territories encouraged the PTCA to

further its demand from Autonomous Region to its next level. They had come out of their former tactic of submitting memoranda too. In December 1973, PTCA demanded a Union Territory by the name of 'Udyachal' comprising of all the Plains Tribal areas in the entire northern tract of Assam. But PTCA was not successful in initiating a programmed toward this end since it coincided with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha's movement demanding Roman script for Bodo language. Therefore, the Udayachal movement had to be postponed for the time being.

The ABSU support to the BSS's demand for Roman script for the Bodo language had strengthened the movement. The ABSU had organized the general masses and further articulated the linguistic passions among the students. Many lost their lives, 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 after the intervention of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.⁴³

In 1977 when the Emergency was lifted, the PTCA entered into an alliance with Janata Party to contest the forth coming elections. The PTCA won only one seat and that too the reserved ST seat from Kokrajhar. However, the recognition of the PTCA as a political Party by the Election commission inaugurated a new era in the political history of Bodos.. According to the electoral agreement with the Janata Party, stipulated on setting up of an autonomous administrative apparatus for the tribal areas on the north bank of Brahmaputra and enforcement of the provision of Chapter X of Assam Land Revenue Regulation act for the south bank tribal people. PTCA contested the 1978 Assembly elections and joined the coalition ministry headed by Golap Borbora, Samar Brahma Chaudhury was inducted in the Cabinet Ministry.

The Janata Government, however, was short lived. It was dissolved before PTCA could press their demand for autonomous region for the tribals of assam. The dissolution of

the Janata Government created an unstable political situation in the State. At that time PTCA thought it unwise to launch a movement to pressurize the Centre to fulfill their demand to create Udayachal. The Party therefore confined itself to submitting memoranda from time to time. Again the Party participated in the 1983 elections and won three seats and became a part of the Keshab Gogoi headed Congress-I ministry. Samar Brahma Chaudhury was again inducted in the cabinet ministry as Forest Minister. The PTCA made virtually no effort for the creation of Udayachal. Charan Narzary, Member of the Parliament even, openly denounced the demand for Udayachal in Parliament.

The Tribal people of Assam became suspicious on the double standards played by the PTCA. Dismay grew within the party for its alliances with the Janata and Congress-I Governments between 1978 and 1982 overlooking the genuine political aspirations of the Plain Tribes. This eventually led to a split in the party. The rebels headed by Binoy Khungur Basumatary formed the PTCA (Progressive), which later demanded a Union Territory called 'Mishing-Bodoland'.

The creation of Udayachal issue was the main election agenda for the PTCA in 1985 election which brought victory to the PTCA candidate in one Parliamentary Constituency and three Assembly constituencies. But after the election both Charan Narzary and Samar Brahma Chaudhury again forwarded the earlier demand of Autonomous Region instead of a separate Union Territory. The ABSU and Bodo Sahitya sabhawichhad vehemently opposed this move of the PTCA. Most of the tribal leaders too was dissatisfied with the PTCA. Hence they withdrew their support for the movement.⁴⁴

Thus when Udayachal demand lost its ground, the issue of a separate state once again cropped up when the PTCA (P), met the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh, on 8th and 9th July, 1980. They were assured of talks on 'separate state issue'. As a result all tribal organizations were invited to join the discussion that was

held on 20 August, 1980 at Raj Bhawan, Shillong. Seventeen representatives from PTCA, PTCA (P), All Assam Tribal Sangha, All Assam Tribal Students Union, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students Union were present in the meeting that discussed the issues relation to a separate state for the tribals and the problems of foreign nationals.

The period between 1980 and 1983 was a period of memorandums in Assam politics. A number of memoranda were submitted to the Centre in support of a separate tribal state by different organizations of Assam. It was the time when foreign national issue engulfed the political discourse in Assam; the Bodos also got alarmed at the presence of huge number of illegal immigrants in the state. On 10th July 1982, ABSU delegation met the Home Minister, S.B Chavan urging for a separate state and solution to the foreign national issue.

Meanwhile a ABSU delegation, led by its President, Upendra Nath Brahma met and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, on 22nd January 1987 in New Delhi. This memorandum dealt in details the demand for a separate state with the Union Territory Status for all the Plains Tribal people of Assam in the northern tract of Brahmaputra valley. The delegation also submitted a memorandum on the same issue to the Union Home Minister Buta Singh on 24th January, 1987 and to President of India, Giani Zail Singh on 30th January, 1987. The ABSU also submitted to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Bhishma Narain Singh, a 92 Point Memorandum on 10th January, 1987 in Guwahati and also to the Assam Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

Though so many memoranda were submitted and many reminders were sent, nothing evolved to solve the Bodoland issue. Under such circumstance the ABSU and BPAC resolved to initiate a vigorous movement with effect from 2nd March 1987, with a determination to create separate homeland for the Bodos and all the Plains Tribes of Assam under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the then ABSU President. The target set to achieve through this movement was the creation of a separate state by 1990.

Bodo aspiration throughout was taken for a ride by the Indian National Congress which never hesitated to unilaterally withdraw for their own promises made towards Bodo people.”⁴⁵ The Bodos accepted Devanagiri Script with assurance from Indira Gandhi to reorganize Assam on federal lines but nothing of that sort had been done. They entrusted PTCA to take up their cause seriously but too much political flexibility of PTCA and rigidity of Assamese leadership disappointed them and ultimately the gap between the bodos and the assamese people widened. The Bodos had started distancing themselves emotionally from assamese people and identified them as their enemy.

Third Phase: 1987-1992

The State Government’s repressive measures to deal with the Bodo movement launched by joint leadership of the ABSU–BPAC had created a clash of interests between the Bodo middle class and Assamese middle class hegemony. The Bodos sought to carve out its own political space by transforming and consolidating Bodo ethnic and regional identity into a distinct national identity by raising the demand for a separate homeland for protection of its class interests. A feeling was created among the masses that social mobilization was necessary to realize the ethnic and political demands of the community. This realization handed the responsibility of leadership to ABSU to mobilize the masses behind its ideology of a separate state. The PTCA had been sidelined by the ABSU from now onwards. The ABSU came to the limelight in 1986 with the election of Upendera nath Brahma as the President of the organization. It began to acquire new dimensions with exercise of civil hegemony over large section of Bodo masses.

The third phase of the Bodoland movement was characterized by open and persistent demands for autonomy, with ABSU taking over from the PTCA and spearheading the movement. Thus by 1986, ethnic mobilization of the Bodos came under the leadership of

ABSU. With the coming of Upendra Nath Brahma as the 8th President of ABSU in 1986, a drastic change came in the nature and technique of the Bodo movement. It became a turning point in the struggle of the Bodos.

The ABSU adopted the most popular tool and tricks to mobilize the masses to attract their attention towards their programmes. It began its mass mobilization programmed through circulation of pamphlets against Ammamese Chauvinism. The Assamese people were blamed for alienation of the tribals of Assam. They submitted a 92 point charter of demands to Shri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta ,the then chief minister of Assam stating genuine aspirations and grievances of all the Plains Tribes of Assam, especially the Bodos. Memorendum was also submitted to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 22nd January,1987 at New Delhi on their demand for separate state of Bodoland with Union Territory status for the plains tribals of Assam in the Northern part of Brahmaputra valley.

The charter of demands covers multifarious issues.It covers the concerns about the Socio-cultural identity of the Bodos,their economic backwardness and political marginalization. The resentment over the continuous flow of illegal migrants from Bangladesh and demand for their detention and deportation constituted an important aspect of the charter. Amongst the 92 demands articulated in the charter, three were of principal importance. The rest 89 demands were related to the Socio-Economic ,Educational,Cultural and other problems of Bodos.The three main demands were –

- 1)Creation of Regional council for non-karbi tribes in Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council.
- 2)Creation of Autonomous Council for the tribals living on the southern part of Brahmaputra Valley.
- 3)Creation of separate state with the status of Union Territory on the northern bank of Brahmaputra River for the plains tribes of Assam.

They also made clear their plan to launch a democratic mass movement following Gandhiji's path of non-violence from 2nd March 1987 unless their demands were fulfilled.⁴⁶

Subsequently, several programmes of mass rally, hunger strike, religious prayer, cultural demonstration, black out, mass crying were organized under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma. The ABSU initiated the Bodoland movement to fulfill their long standing political demands. A series of non-violent course of action was organized by ABSU at the initial stage as has been declared on the eve of their mass agitation. On 12th June 1987, ABSU organized a huge rally at Judge's field in Guwahati. This was the first mass rally organized by ABSU in demand of a separate state. The Bodos from almost every corner of Assam participated in the rally to make it a success. Slogans like "Divide Assam-fifty-fifty" and "no state, no rest" rent the air.

On returning from the peaceful rally at Guwahati a Section of participants at rally were attacked by a group of Assamese youths, near Tihu chawk. The victims sought help from the nearest Police Station but instead of assisting them, Fifty-eight passengers of a bus were arrested by the men of Patacharkushi Police Station, of whom fifteen were girls. In this clash many were injured and Sujit Narzary, a class X student of Kokrajhar Government Higher Secondary School died of head injury. The next day ABSU delegation met the Chief Minister at his residence seeking justice and accordingly all the arrested youths, were released.⁴⁷ Sujit Narzary was declared by the ABSU as the first Bodo Martyr, who died for the cause of Bodoland.⁴⁸

This incident, at the initial stage of mass movement, definitely shaped the further course of action of ABSU. As time passed, both integrationist as well as secessionist tendencies grew with the ABSU movement. But ABSU reiterated time and time that theirs was a democratic and peaceful movement. The police atrocities provoked Bodo youths to take

to arms. They also alleged that it was the AASU and AGP volunteers who were inciting violence against ABSU activists in particular and Bodos in general.⁴⁹

The ABSU further requested all the Bodos to participate in a public protest in front of Dispur Assembly on 2nd July 1987 between 10 am to 3 pm. Stressing on the non-violent nature of their movement the ABSU reiterated that every Indian citizen Irrespective of caste, creed or religion, had the right to liberty under the Indian constitution.⁵⁰

In fulfillment of their 92 point demands, the ABSU organized a mass religious prayer and oath-taking session on 21st July 1987. A mass hunger strike was also organized on 10th August 1987 from 6 am to 4.30 pm in front of the DC's and SDO's office on the same day. Many ABSU volunteers were arrested in connection with this mass hunger strike and on 27th August 1987, a 12 hour Tribal Area Bandh and 24 hour National Highway Blockade at Lailangpara near Rowta Chariali in Darrang district was called.

Meanwhile, the ABSU submitted another memorandum to the President, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of India on 10th November 1987, reiterating their 92-point demands.

The AGP Government adopted policies to cripple the Bodo movement, along with which the AASU too campaigned to resist this movement. This only resulted in "the alienation and the separatist tendencies during the 16 month long rule of Asom Gana Parishad Government".

During the bandh called by the ABSU, on 9th September 1987, at Gahpur the ABSU volunteers were attacked by the AASU and AGP supporters. The ABSU volunteers reportedly did not receive any help from the police. The Bandh on the same day at Bongaigaon was also obstructed by these two opposition groups.

On 24th and 25th September 1987, the ABSU organized a 36 hour Tribal area bandh. ABSU volunteers were guarding to make the bandh total success and were fired upon and

lathi-charged by the police. In the incident one person died and many were seriously injured. Many volunteers were also taken into custody. In protest against the police firing and brutal killing of their volunteer, the ABSU organized a rally at the Anchalik Committee level. Immediately prohibitory orders under section 144 Cr.P.C. were imposed by the district administrations but that failed totally to suppress the public sentiment. At the village level meetings were organized to gain mass support for a separate homeland on 12th October 1987. On 20th October 1987 processions were taken out at important places throughout the State in which traditional musical instruments were exhibited. A mass demonstration was also organized at the Boat Club, New Delhi on 10th and 11th November, 1987.⁵¹

Despite State repression, the ABSU activists did not slow down their activities. 1987 witness programmers in 15 phases but no attempt was made to meet the genuine demands of the Plains Tribals. This attitude hardened the tribal mind time and against the political mainstream of Assam. Hence the year 1988 commenced with more programmers to accelerate the course of the movement.

The year 1988 started with the protest against transfer of L.N. Tamuli as Additional District Commissioner –cum-Additional District Magistrate to Kokrajhar from Karbi Anglong. Tamuli had earlier exhibited anti-tribal feelings. Apprehending the imminent danger for tribals, the ABSU called for a 12 hours bandh on 11 January from 5am, demanding transfer of Tamuli to any non-tribal area.⁵²

By this time All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) became active. They submitted a memorandum to the Home Minister of India on 3rd February 1988 praying for initiating necessary action to protect the Bodo women from inhuman torture including gang rape by the state police.

The United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) another leading organization of the Plains Tribes submitted a memorandum on 3th May, 1988 to Prime Minister Rajiv

Gandhi, They Criticized not only the AGP Government's policies but also condemned the PTCA leaders' acts of treachery. They urged the Prime Minister to meet their demands through the creation of a Union Territory as a homeland for the Schedule Tribes (Plains) formerly christened as 'Tribal Land', immediately to avoid further deterioration of the situation.⁵³

The ABSU gave a call for a 72 hours Assam bandh from 5 am of 27th April, 1988. The bandh turned out to be a violent one. ABSU accused the State Government and the Assam police of letting loose a 'reign of terror' by arresting hundreds of innocent ABSU supporters and inhuman and public torturing them. Further, it was alleged that in Kokrajhar jail, the arrested persons were not provided proper meals for many day.⁵⁴

Therefore, ABSU resolved to observe 9th May, 1988 as a 'Black Day' in protest against the police atrocities and demanding unconditional release of the arrested volunteers. On 9th May the State Police raided the Sonai Serfang village in Udalguri sub-division. In doing so the police fired indiscriminately and one Purna Daimary (16) was killed and many other sustained injury. The ABSU thereafter pleaded judicial inquiry and demanded punishment to the culprits.

The AATWWF also condemned the police atrocities. A group of four MLAs visited the affected village on 16th May to assess the situation and reported to the Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta that they found no reason for the village to be raided. They requested the Government to take necessary action to restore normalcy.

The United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) organized two padayatras or marches on 16th May, one from Sadiya towards Guwahati and another from Dhubri, both to converge at Judge's Field Guwahati on 27th May. Their attempts were obstructed by the Government by arresting the padyatris. It should be mentioned here that

UMRCA was demanding reservation for all the tribal groups and reorganization of Assam on federal structure by granting autonomy to all the tribal groups.

The ABSU movement from 1987 especially showed that the entire movement was directed against Assamese hegemonies and anti-tribal attitude of the AGP Government. ABSU held AGP responsible for any adverse situation that arose during their phase of movement from time and time. Allegations and counter allegations between the State Government and ABSU became regular routine.

In protest against the policies of the AGP Government, the ABSU called for a bandh on 1st July, a 100 hour Rail cum Rasta Roko from 5am on 14th June, 1988 was a success. The ABSU decided to further intensify the movement for a separate state and called a 100 hours Assam bandh as the twenty-fifth phase of their programme. The programme set for the twenty-fourth phase was Dharmayagna (religious prayer) and oath-taking at Anchalik levels to achieve the target. The ABSU circulated a handbill to the people the subject of which was to stop police-raj, restoration of democracy with a slogan Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty. The ABSU strongly condemned indiscriminate police firing at Saraibil on 12th May, 1988 Morning and demanded immediate stoppage of police atrocities, raiding villages and killings of innocent Bodos.

Meanwhile, different newspapers published news accusing ABSU of issuing non-Bodo people with Quit Notices. A joint meeting of ABSU and All Assam Koch-Rajbanshi Kshotriyo Sanmilani (AAKRKS) on 21st May, 1988 at Guwahati denied this news as 'baseless'. They believed that spreading this kind of rumours through press was nothing but the handiwork of some clever agents of the ruling class to create communal tension and mistrust between different communities. They said their movement is a democratic one and urged all the people to maintain communal harmony.

The ABSU received an invitation for discussion on the Bodo issue with the State Chief Minister that was to be held on 27th June, 1988. On 6 June they submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister forwarding a set of ten demands. The State Government refused to accept the demands made by ABSU. The organization along with other democratic organizations of tribals termed the Assam Government a Liar Government.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha had so far remained behind the scenes of the ABSU led movement. On 30th August, 1988, they submitted a reminder memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam in connection with Bodo language stating that the “BSS-a literary organization and its role in shaping the Bodo psyche cannot be undermined. The present political aspiration in a sense emerged out of language movement launched by BSS”. Other ethnic organization like All Cachar-Karimganj Students’ Association (ACKSA) and All Assam Minorities student’s Union (AAMSU) extended their moral support to the ABSU led movement from time to time. However major opposition to the movement at this stage came from the AGP Government in particular and the Assamese in general.

The ABSU, ACKSA and AAMSU resolved to launch a joint movement by organizing a 50 hours Rail Roko Programmed in Assam from 5 am on 26th September, 1988. Before this joint move could materialize on 1st September, Pramila Rani Brahma, the President of AATWWF was held under Narcotic Drugs and Psychopathic Suspense Act, 1985 following a raid conducted by Surajit Saikia (SI), Kokrajhar Police Station. This report was strongly refuted by the alleged person in a press release. The written statement of one eye-witness, Rajat Kumar Roy, confirmed that no objectionable article was recovered from the alleged person’s residence.

The 20th Annual Conference of ABSU was held in between 19th-20th December, 1988 at Bashbari in Dhubri District. In the history of ABSU movement for separate state, the Bashbari Conference is important. This ABSU conference was attended by delegates from

ACKSA, Tripura Upajati Yuba Samiti (TUJS), Tripura Tribal Students Federating (TSF), Tripura Sundari Nari Bahini (TSNB), All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU) etc.

In this conference the separate state demanded by ABSU was given the nomenclature of "Bodoland". The ABSU formally declared its suspension of the 89 non-political demands retaining only the three political demands and upgrading "the demand for Union Territory to full-fledged Statehood for more autonomy and political power. By this time it became clear that the Bodos wanted to acquire regional hegemony in the proposed state of Bodoland. The UBRLF extended its support for a separate state which they believed was the only means to preserve Bodo identity. The BPAC also welcomed the decision. They confirmed their decision to remain with ABSU to make the Bodoland movement a successful one. BPAC further requested the Centre to begin talks with the ABSU for the solution of the Bodo issue.

Meanwhile, all the prominent tribal organizations of Assam held a series of discussions on 16-17th January, 1989, on various problems of the Plains Tribes of Assam. The meeting which was presided over by Samar Brahma Chaudhury discussed the matter of unity and solidarity of the Plains. The ABSU and UBRLF did not join the meeting.

The UBRLF submitted another memorandum to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Bhishma Narayan Singh, on 29th January, 1989, demanding separate Bodoland. They also urged through this memorandum that discussion and negotiation with the ABSU and UBRLF leaders should be immediately initiated by the Central Government.

The ABSU-BPAC decided to resume movement. Under the joint initiative of the ABSU and BPAC a number of programmes were organized. As a part of mobilizing techniques, christening of a child in meaningful Bodo word, use of traditional dress so on were made compulsory and also revolutionary patriotic songs were distributed in the form of audio-cassettes in every Bodo household. These steps of the ABSU-BPAC generated emotional support and attached the masses to the movement far more keenly. Earlier on

30th October, 1988 the duo had decided to suspend their movement for creating a congenial atmosphere for dialogue with State Government. The Government held an informal talk with ABSU on 11 January, 1989. No. satisfactory solution could be achieved. ABSU accused the Stated Government of lack of moral courage to invite them for a formal dialogue. As a further programme of the movement they called for 120 hours Assam bandh from 5 am on 16th February and next 175 hour Assam bandh from 5 am on 2nd March to realize their demand.

Large number of Bodo government employees resigned from their services to join the movement. With the participation of the large section of the community the movement gained momentum. It reached its climax during 1988-89. However, the movement went on without much response from any concerned quarter. Both the centre and the state government were indifferent to the developments taking place. It was only on 28th August the ABSU received an invitation for Tripartit talk from the state government. The ABSU and PTCA looked upon each other as arch enemies and hence the presence of the PTCA in negotiation would have undoubtedly polluted the atmosphere and jeopardized the prospect of any understanding rather than creation congenial atmosphere during the session.⁵⁵

However, the talk failed after seven rounds of talks. On 25th February, 1991, the Central Government constituted the Three-Member Expert Committee headed by Bhupinder Singh to demarcate the area of Bodos and other plains Tribes to the north of river Brahmaputra and to make recommendation as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial powers to be given to the Bodos. This committee paid visits to places like Gauhati, Barama, Karbi-Anglong, North Cachar Hill districts, Mangaldoi, Kalaigaon, Tangla, Paneri, Udalguri etc. This committee submitted their report to the union home ministry on 1992, 30th March. However this time too the ABSU-BPAC rejected the recommendations of the committee and ABSU restarted their movement. ABSU suspended their movement for the time being S.K.

Bwismuthiary stated, “At present we have suspended our operation in the hope that the Expert Committee report would be able to give us justice”, He further stated that in case the verdict of the panel went against the demand for carving out a separate state, there would be no other option but to revive agitation.⁵⁶

At this stage ABSU-BPAC organized a special central level meeting of all frontal Bodo organizations and Bodo intellectuals at Debargaon in Kokrajhar on October 9 to discuss the Bodo issue. The meeting expressed concern over the delaying tactics and adamant attitude of the Central and State Governments regarding the political solution of the Bodo issue. Further course of action was also discussed in the meet. The meeting decided to stage hunger strike in all districts and sub-divisional headquarters from 16th October.⁵⁷ ABSU-BPAC also warned the Government that if the mass movement for Bodoland took an unwanted turn owing to the lack of right political approach of the government, they were not to be blamed.

The question of the areas to be included in the proposed Bodoland remained contentious in solution of the Bodo tangle. The ABSU demanded 4443 villages (out of which 109 were tea gardens and 1035 non-scheduled tribal villages) in the proposed BAC for the Bodos. The Chief Minister regarded it as impracticable. He also said, “*I am not a king. I cannot part with any territory of the State without consulting the people as required in a democracy.*”⁵⁸ The demography of 4443 villages on the north bank of Brahmaputra had to be studied to solve the Bodo tangle. For this purpose an All Party meeting was organized under the President ship of Chief Minister at Janata Bhavan and CPI(M), Congress(S), Janata Dal, NAGP, AGP, JSK, RCPI, Congress(I), CPI, UMF, PLP, AJYCP, National Council and Tribal Sangh took part in the meeting. ABSU-BPAC and the SUCI abstained the participation.⁵⁹ with this all party meet, the solution to the Bodo issue seemed to brighten. The Government proposal to form Bodo Autonomous council (BAC) was welcomed by all except BJP. BJP

opposed the BAC since out of 4443 villages only 1193 villages had a Bodo population of more than 50 per cent.⁶⁰

But the ABSU-BPAC leadership rejected the recommendations of the all party meetings. They reiterated their demand for a separate state. They alleged that the decision was an attempt to dilute and reject the genuine and legitimate hopes and aspirations of the aboriginal Bodos. The meeting held between the State Government and ABSU-BPAC also could not reach any consensus on the territory of the proposed BAC. The ABSU renewed its agitation. Outbreak of violence became imminent with fresh agitational programmes started by ABSU-BPAC on one hand and extremist activities of the underground Bodoland Security Force (BSF) on the other. The ABSBPAC leadership also demanded demarcation of the “Bodoland Territory” taking the assembly constituency as the unit starting from Gossaigaon in the west to Bihpuria Assembly constituency in the east. They also demanded inclusion of 109 tea Gardens within the territory but the state Government did not agree.

A group of 150 ABSU-BPAC supporters were arrested while they were trying to stage hunger strike in front of Kamrup District commissioner’s office. Later they were kept in temporary jail in Nehru Park. About 2000 volunteers of the ABSU-BPAC and other organizations demonstrated in front of Gossaigaon Civil SDO’s office. Local MLA’s belonging to Bodoland legislative party and former MP, A.L. Basumatary, also joined the agitators.⁶¹ ABSU-BPAC charged the Government with unleashing a ‘reign of terror’ and detrimental policy to crush the renewed struggle of the tribals for a separate state.⁶²

ABSU-BPAC organized a mass march to Dispur on 28 October but their progress was foiled. Police prevented supporters from coming to Guwahati; buses were checked at Amingaon, pressmen were prevented from taking photos of Bodo supporters at Nehru Stadium in presence of Police superintendent of Police Ashim Roy. Cameras were taken away which however were later returned to the pressmen. Rallies were also at Kokrajhar, Barpeta

and Bongaigaon 2000 volunteers participated in a massive rally organized at NH 31(c) from Sonkosh River to Manas River under the auspice of ABSU Kokrajhar district banner.⁶³

ABSU-BPAC declared its action plan of 1001 hour bandh with the intention of pressuring the Central Government to grant a separate Bodo state in the north bank of Brahmaputra and autonomous districts for the Bodos dwelling in it's the south bank. On the verbal assurance from the Union Home Minister, the ABSU President, S K Bwismuthiary and BPAC decided to withdrew the proposed 1001hours bandh.⁶⁴

In the meantime violent activities had increased throughout the state. In the wake of the death of Upendra Nath Brahma, the Br.S. F.the militant group of Bodos had tried to capture the leadership of the Bodo movement seeing the potents ahead of the Central Government notification dated 22nd November 1992. Incidences of Bodo Security Force (BSF) extremism escalated around this time and news of violence kept coming. Two CRPF men lost their lives when suspected Bodo outfits attacked them with sharp weapons in Kasikotra market under Sidli P.S. of Barpeta district on October 9, On the very same day two women were killed in Nilachalmari Village of Darraong also. In another incidence of violence BSF massacred eight persons and injured several others in Gulandihbi village under Uldalguri P.S.⁶⁵ A group of 16 outfits wearing camouflage and armed with sophisticated weapons cordoned off a dhaba about 4 km from Sonitpur. BSF had been active in Dhekiajuli, especially, in the tea gardens area.⁶⁶

Circumstance compelled the Center to deploy army against BSF. Earlier, the Chief Minister urged the Centre to ban the BSF, which was creating havoc with their militant activities. The Publicity Secretary of BSF, B. Olongbar, however said that the BSF was not responsible for the killing of five Railway Protection Force personnel on October 4, 2 CRPF men at Kasikotra on October 9, bomb explosion in a train on October 13, attack on Borobandha forest camp on October 12, attacks on Samajora forest camp and Kokilabari from

October 8 and killing of two women in Nisilamari near Tangla on October 9. The release clarified that they had no hand in these human tragedies. They termed H. Saikia as the enemy of the Bodo people and alleged that without verifying facts, the Chief Minister blamed the BSF. He also warned the media not to publish rumours.⁶⁷

The Central Government finally declared to ban the outfit on 23rd November, 1992, with immediate effect. A notification issued by the Union Home Ministry said that in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-Section (I) of the Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, the Central Government declared BSF to be an unlawful association.⁶⁸

So far several rounds of talks held between the Government and the bodo leaders remained fruitless. The Bodo leaders remained adamant on the number of villages to be included in the proposed BAC. Now the ABSU made an additional demand for 209 villages, along with 1035 other villages which, according to the government had no tribal population.⁶⁹ The State Government proposed that whichever village came within the compact area of the Bodos, would be included in the map even if it constituted only one percent tribal population. The proposal was rejected by ABSU-BPAC. Their demand for inclusion of non-tribal villages led to the point where State Government was compelled to seek Central Government's help. Intervention of Central Government brought a silver lining to the bodo problem. Rajesh Pilot came to Guwahati to sort out the differences and also to get the State Government's approval.⁷⁰

On February 20, 1993 the Bodo Accord was signed by the leaders of ABSU-BPAC and the representatives of Government of Assam and India in presence of Rajesh Pilot in the Kokrajhar Circuit House. This historic accord came to be known as the "Bodo Accord" under which the Bodoland Autonomous Council was (BAC) created for all round development of the region. The boundary demarcation of BAC was left to be decided later on mutual

understanding of the signing parties. The accord conceded limited executive, legislative and financial powers to the Bodos on 38 subjects. As per the conditions of the accord, there would exit a general council of 40 members of whom 35 would be elected on the basis of adult franchise. The rest five were to be nominated by the Governor from among the unrepresented communities. Mr. Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, the then President of ABSU became the first chief Executive member of the council. But the Bodo accord of 1993 could not satisfy the leaders of the Bodo movement and its supporters. The primary cause behind the failure was due to the half hearted attitude of the state and central government towards the implementation of the provisions of the Accord. The demarcation of the boundary was also not done by the state Government. Besides the police cases pending against the activists of the movement were not withdrawn and no relief and rehabilitation was offered to the families of martyres. In protest to such negligence and betrayal the Chief Executive member Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary tendered his resignation and ABSU resolved to start a fresh movement for separate Bodoland state in its Lnglin Session in Karbi Anglong in 1996. This was how the ground for another phase of Bodo movement appeared.

Fourth Phase: 1993 to 2003

The fourth phase of Bodoland movement entered a new phase with the signing of Bodo Accord after six long years of agitation for a separate state under the leadership of ABSU in 1993. Many Organizations, both political and non-political welcomed the Accord in the hope that it would bring peace to the troubled areas. The real test of the Accord started soon with the question of settlement of boundary of the BAC.

By 1996, dissatisfaction and frustration over the provisions of the Bodo Accord and its non-implementation reached its highest peak and as a result an extremist group known as Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) appeared on the scene. The Government of Assam

issued a Notification on 10 December, 1993, demarcating the boundary of the BAC area. The list of the villages constituency-wise to be included in the BAC was published vide Notification No.TAD/BAC/26/93/18. A total of 2570 villages situated in a vast and contiguous areas extending from the Western boarder of Kokrajhar up to the Eastern boarder of Majbat constituency of Darrang district were included in the Council. Apart from the villages with 50 per cent tribal populations, villages with less than 50 per cent tribal population also were included to maintain the contiguity of BAC. 25 tea gardens and reserved forests, the BAC, The demarcation did not fully satisfy the ABSU leaders. Many of them demanded some five hundred and odd more villages to be included in the BAC. The Government did not readily concede to the demand but agreed to look into the demand for further consideration. Many were dissatisfied with non-inclusion of Sonitpur, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur district within the BAC.

AGP, CPI (M), National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Assam Chah Mazdur Sangha (ACMS) and All Assam Koch-Rajvanshi Kshatriya Sanmilani remained critical over the issue of inclusion of villages with little or no tribal population in BAC. The INTUC (Assam branch) and the ACMS directed their criticism ant the inclusion of 25 tea gardens within the BAC territory, where there was no Bodo population at all. Two other organizations representing the tea garden workers, the Adivasi council of Assam and the Asom Chah Mazdur Shramik Parishad also echoed these sentiments and demanded that the Advasis (Jharkhand) people should be in the Scheduled Tribes list as they were in large numbers working in the Assam tea gardens.⁷¹

The All Assam Koch-Rajbanshi Khatriyo Sanmilani opposing the inclusion of non-Bodo villages in the BAC area feared that the non-Bodo population would be deprived of equal political status. The President of the Sanmilani, Phani Medhi said that that the BAC area would include a population of 18 lakh people of whom 12 lakh belonged to the Koch

Rajvanshi community. He alleged that their fate has been placed at the mercy of the Bodo People. The Koch-Rajvanshi people had been demanding scheduled Tribe status since long back, which was also supported by the ABSU-BPAC leaders by signing an agreement on October 3, 1992. But when they found that the Bodoland Accord showed no concern for the Koch-Rajbanshis, they felt betrayed by the ABSU-BPAC leadership. Though the power of re-scheduling the tribe is with the government of India in other area, the Bodo Accord vests this power in case of the BAC area to the Council authority. This made the Koch-Rajbanshis apprehensive about their future.⁷²

The major opponent to the Accord happened to be the Bodos themselves. Militant activities especially of two outfits i.e. BLT and NDFB reached new heights after 1993.

The enthusiasm of BAC did not take much time to vapor. The BAC was included neither in the 5th nor in the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution. The Bodos soon realized the futility of the kind of autonomy they had been endowed with the non-implementation of Bodo Accord let loose ethnic violence on a great scale in BAC.

Serious dispute over the territorial jurisdiction of the BAC cropped up between the signatories of the Accord. The chief of Bodoland Executive council (BEC), S.K. Bwismuthiary resigned from his post protesting against the non-inclusion of additional 500 villages in BAC area. Prem Singh Brahma became the new Chief of BAC. He was the erstwhile chief of the ABSU Volunteer Force, which was disbanded following the formation of BAC. Thus, the ABSU got divided into two sections the Sansuma group and the group led by Prem Singh Brahma.

The experience of North-Eastern States suggests that signing of Accords with some groups to the exclusion of others could hardly be the best way to bring about peace. In dining solution to the Bodo issue the government never tried to bring the radical factions to the

negotiating table. The result could be seen when the BSF militants denounced the Accord straight away. They were opposed to anything short of a sovereign Bodo state.

BDSF or BRSF or BSF, this militant organization gained an upper hand in the later stages of the movement. The BSF was constituted on October 3, 1986 at Odalkhasibari village in the Darrang district. It was the brain child of Ranjan Daimary, who had earlier formed the young Bodo Nationalist Association (YBNA) in 1983 that became defunct a couple of years later.⁷³

BSF militants aiming for separate Bodoland were up in arms with a renewed vigour. It started imparting arms training to recruits near Daifam and in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh Jungles.⁷⁴ More than 3000 youths were groomed in guerilla warfare. Sophisticated weapons like carbines and stingers in large numbers, about 1000 AK47 rifles, a number of LGMs, 2-3 inch mortars and huge quantity of bottle bombs, etc were being piled up by the BSF members. At the Tangla session of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, they appealed for the adoption of Roman Script for the Bodo language. The main aim of the militant organization was to liberate the Bodoland with armed struggle for distinct identity of the Bodos. Following the footsteps of ULFA it believed in violence. The Bodo Security Force started violence from where the ABSU had left it but in a more calculated and ruthless manner.⁷⁵

The extremist activities of BSF continued unabated and several incidences of raid, kidnapping, extraction of ransom and wanton killing took place in BAC.

By 1996, a series of killings had been engineered by BSF. During this time BSF extended their activities to Kokrajhar also. These killings in fact were the result of NDFB's (political wing of BSF) decision to punish the 'Chuthur' or 'jati-hatru' who had opposed their movement for sovereign Bodo state.⁷⁶ Pro-Government Bodo leaders became their targets. Bodoland Autonomous Council's Executive Committee's member, Jogeswar Basumatary, ABSU President, Swambla Basumatary, Jamuna Daimary, the Vice President, Bodo women

welfare Forum's kamrup district branch, were killed during 1996. In most cases the hand of NDFB had been suspected.

NDFB's violent activities keep rocking Kokrajhar. 21 persons were massacred by NDFB ultras at Gossaigaon in a single day.⁷⁷ People's Democratic Front (PDF) meanwhile urges United nations to come forward to help the Bodos.⁷⁸ On November 25, 1998, the ban on NDFB was extended. 237 killings had been attributed to them since 1996.⁷⁹

The Internal clash in ABSU started to grow. BPPF tried hard to bring different Bodo groups to terms. ABSU also joined hands with them. ABSU expressed that the activities of BSF on one hand and the clash between Prem Singh Brahma and Sansuma faction of BPPF became a matter of grave concern and was affecting the socio-economic development of Bodos. In the meeting held on 9 October, 1995 at Rangia Doulkuchi I P School, a fifteen member co-ordination committee was formed under leadership of Kamrup district ABSU President as an endeavour to calm the situation.⁸⁰

Meanwhile, the non-implementation of BAC added spice to the factional squabbles in Bodo dominated areas. The ABSU set 31 October as last day for implementation.

In the 28th Annual conference of ABSU held at Longhing, Karbi Anglong, it accused State Governments of unwillingness to implements the Bodo Accord.⁸¹

ABSU also abstained from the tripartite talks held in New Delhi on 16 March, 1996. They decided to have no talks with the government on the boundary demarcation issue and on 15 March, 1996, submitted a memorandum for a separate state to the Prime Minister. Towards the end of 1997, the ABSU declared its intention of resuming their movement for a separate state.

Already the two factions of ABSU had come together by the time of General election in the summer of 1996 and decided to renew their demand for a separated state. Bodoland

People's Movement council, a joint forum of Preamsingh Brahma and Sansuam faction, was floated for contesting the 27 Assembly and 2 Lok Sabha seats. ABSU welcomed their joint move. The PDF, whose main hold was Udalguri, was also ready to contest election.

However, the political scene in Bodo dominated area in particular and Assam in general changed after the Assembly elections of 1996. The PDF legislators backed by the NDFB, a banned militant outfit successfully won the contested seats. They became an ally of the AGP Government. But PDF disappointed the aspirations of Bodo people. It has become apparent to the Bodo outfits that the Governments would do nothing to fulfill the tribal aspirations. Extremist activities escalated thereafter in the State. Both, NDFB and BLT, remained powerful and created serious law and order problems in the state. NDFB is said to be the strongest with sophisticated weapons and cadres trained even outside India. A significant development, however, occurred in Bodo movement during June, 1999. In a joint statement dated June 9, the Bodo leaders said that leaders of the two organizations met on May 30 and decided to "bury the past and stop all internecine clashes." Now they decided to work together.⁸²

But this violent movement did not last long. The Bodo general masses and the middle class Bodos were very much offended and grew tired of the violent situation within the Bodo dominated areas. So they urged the militant organizations to come to the table of negotiation and establish peace in the area. So pressed by the civic society the militant organizations decided to come to the table of negotiation with the government. It has been suspected that the outfit's decision to talk with Government of India is nothing but an effort to overcome its isolation. Bhutan Government's ultimatum to the Bodo groups to leave the country or face eviction also have influenced such a move. The editorial titled "Talking to Militants" in Hindustan Times dated 9th September, 1999, suggested that the Government should make efforts to bring larger groups to the negotiation table.

Towards the end of December 1999, the State Government concerned on learning that the BLT has prepared a blueprint to carry out a series of operations by the end of December if their demand for a separate Bodoland was not met by December 31. BLT was formed in 18th June, 1996, separate state within constitutional limit as its goal.

At such a critical period the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* played a very positive role. The *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* offered to negotiate between Government and the Bodo outfits. The 37th session of BSS was held at Bang Para, Barama. President, Bineswar Brahma called for truce between Government and militants. He urged the militants to declare ceasefire to create a congenial atmosphere for negotiation for the settlement of the Bodo problems. He felt that since the Bodo problems are political and its solution must be sought through political dialogue; he also demanded inclusion of Bodo language in the 8th Schedule of Constitution of India.

The Prime Minister ruled out the creation of a Bodo state. While replying to the debate on the Presidential Address in the Lok Sabha Atal Bihari Bajpayee declared that the Centre had no intention of setting another State reorganization Commission. This declaration was a blow to the Bodo separatist movement.

ABSU threatened to resume their stir. No autonomy, except granting of Sixth Schedule status could now clam the Bodos. With immediate effect, they withdrew support to the BJP Government. In tune with the ABSU demand, BLT Publicity Secretary, Mainao said, "Separate state is must." A high level delegation led by Garla Batha Basumatary of ABSU met Union Home Minister L.K Advani in New Delhi on 27th October, 1998. The delegation requested him to initiate steps to hold tripartite talks at the political level for the creation of a separate Bodoland. The Home Minister assured them of prompt action and the Bodo organizations called off proposed state wide bandh scheduled for November 1.

A seventy one member delegation of PDF took out a protest rally at New Delhi on 26 October against the Government's failure to find solution to the Bodo problem and handed over a memorandum to the President of India. Two new demands were made:

*Nilachal Autonomous District Council on South bank of Brahmaputra

*Inclusion of Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong in Schedule tribe (H) list.

The Ministry of Home Affairs team led by Additional Secretary, P.D. Shenoy stated that the separate state demand would be considered if the concerned State Legislature passed a resolution to that effect. But the Assam Government was against any division. Sansuma urged Assam MLA's to pass resolution and sent it to the Central Government. But the Assam Government straight way ruled out such a possibility. Hence, all the prime Bodo organizations decided to boycott the forthcoming tripartite talks. ABSU, however, declared that talks should be held only with the Central Government. ABSU later consented for tripartite talks on condition of exclusion of BAC leaders.

The Third tripartite talks were held only with PDF and the Government of Assam represented by Additional Chief Secretary, H.S. Panghtal. The talks remained inconclusive even as the Assam Government announced its decision to include ten kilometers of international boundary along Bhutan border in the BAC area along with 2,935 villages.

According to State Government out of 2,935 villages being sought to be given away to BAC 1,199 have tribal population, 801 villages have no tribal population, 299 have tribal population up to 10 per cent and 201 villages 11 welfare schemes and a medical college at Kokrajhar. The PDF insisted on a separate state.⁸³

Involvement of non-Bodos in talks for separate state irked BPAC. Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary said, *"How can the Government involve the non-Bodo groups when we are*

demanding a separate state and not them ?". According to him, all non-Bodoland Coordination Committee of Bodoland Movement (CCBM) also criticized the participation of non-Bodos in tripartite talks. The organization urged all sections of the proposed Bodoland to raise the slogan of separate state.

ABSU-BPAC made it clear that there would be no discussion on the boundary demarcation of BAC. ABSU-BPAC and PDF declared the launching of joint movement and suggested talks at a political level involving Union Home Ministry.

Urkhao Gwra Brahma, President of ABSU, told that 75 per cent of demanded areas were inhabited by tribal people and the majority of tribal belts and blocks of the state came within it. He denied that the ABSU had any link with Congress. He said, "We started the movement when the Congress was in power. The question in our mind is now to protect our identity and not to get support of any political party."

PDF's 243 decision in this regard assumes significance as it earlier remained confined support had made the movement led by ABSU more powerful. "We must achieve the goal as several persons have lost their lives in the name of Bodoland", said ABSU President.

General public opinion was reflected in a section of the Press. The Editorial of Assam Tribune (April), 2003 read:

"The Bodo leadership would be well advised to demand greater autonomy within the parameter of Assam. It would be wise for them to abandon its demand for a separate state. Admittedly the Bodos had been neglected in the past by the state remove the leeway in the development of the Bodo people who deserve a separate University and a few technical institutions."⁸⁴

A new development took place at the 39th session of the BSS held at Mainao Nwgr, Kokrajhar. The BSS President Bineswar Brahma strongly supported the use of Devanagiri Script despite strong resentment of the NDFB and some sections of the Bodo community. On August 19, he was shot dead by suspected NDFB militants.

The movement for a separate state gained momentum with the decision not to hold elections in BAC despite the High Court's order to hold the elections. All the major Bodo political parties and organizations grouped together to form the Bodoland Parliamentary Party- a united front to press for the demand of a separate Bodo state. A three member committee was also formed comprising the ABSU General Secretary, Nathuram Bodo, PDF General Secretary, Gangadhar Ramchiary and the BPAC Convener, Reva Narzary to organize a political convention to be held at Rangia on April 29, 2000. BSS and BWFF extended their support to them.

At this stage the Central Government decided to involve the Bodo ultras in negotiations in an effort to solve the Bodo Tangle. ABSU and BLT hailed Center's positive move and observed that this would pave the way for a peaceful solution of the Bodo problem. NDFB, however, remained adamant. It started fresh efforts to regain strength around March 2000. The Unified Command operations had severely affected the banned outfit and its eastern Command had been cracked down by army along the Arunachal-Assam border. It now started activating its district units and estimated that around Rs. 20, 000,000 was collected from sections of people in Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Barpeta districts. The sum thus collected was spent on the procurement of arms and ammunitions and training."

The reason for the BLT's pro-talk attitude can be understood in the context of their decreasing popularity among their own people. Earlier they were seen as fighting for a noble

cause but the perception had changed due to senseless violence and acts of extortion by the groups. As the initial step the Centre suspended anti-insurgency operations against BLT.

In its Editorial of 28 March, 2000, The Statesman (Calcutta edition), commented that while the Government's initiative was commendable, it doubted the expediency of negotiating with only one faction. It is observed that Delhi was likely to repeat the same mistake that it had done in Nagaland by involving only the Issac-Muivah faction of National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Attempts to marginalize agitation leaders would only complicate matters.

On January 10, 2000, the Central Government lifted the ban on the BLT and announced suspension of operations.

In a Press Release of 29th March, 2000, BLT Vice Chairman, Kamal Mosahary and Publicity Secretary, Mainao Daimary stated that mere suspension of operations was not adequate for an amicable and peaceful solution of the Bodo problem. It reiterated three demands: a separate Bodo state on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, a District council on the south bank and Sixth Schedule inclusion of Bodo –Kachari people and release of 50 of its arrested or detained cadres. The Press Release further stated that the 5000 year old history, culture, polity and economic would at stake without a separate state. In support of their argument they observed that many indigenous people of North-East India had lost their identity but the Mizos have been able to safeguard their interests for timely creation of Mizoram. The BLT leaders further stated that the NDFB should realize the ground realities and design their approaches accordingly, adding that the demand for a sovereign Bodoland was against the wishes of the Bodo people. Meanwhile, the Central government extended the lease of ceasefire with BLT for one more year.

Differences among the Bodo leaders were partly responsible for delay in the solution of the problem. But the major hurdle was the NDFB. They had rejected the Government's offer of a joint working group. Even as the peace talks were in progress, clash occurred between BLT and NDFB in which eleven BLT men in Barpeta.⁸⁵ and four at Hatibari Chuba under Tamulpur Police Station, in Nalbari were killed by NDFB that obstructed the peace process. The NDFB also declared that BLT, ABSU and BSS leaders would be targeted by them for selective killing. The spectre of fratricidal clashes loomed over the Bodo dominated areas of the state with banned outfit NDFB's decision to shoot at sight rival Bodo leaders. NDFB stated that it was compelled to take such a decision to neutralize joint efforts of certain organizations to crush the revolution launched by its way back in 1986 with the aim of liberating the Bodo people. It blamed BLT – ABSU volunteer force responsible for setting off fratricidal clashes by killing the first ever self-styled action commander of NDFB Bangbar Gwra Basumatary on September 14th, 1988.

The BLT made it clear that they would not be provoked by the NDFB's statement. ABSU, however, stated that NDFB's threat was ridiculous and that it was reflecting immaturity of its leadership.

The prospect of a Bodoland generated opposition among non-Bodo and non-tribal sections. Organizations like All Adivasi Students Association, Adivasi Council of Assam opposed proposed Bodoland (BTC). They went to the extent of suggesting that the creation of BTC would be a wrong set up as the Bodos were not in a majority in many areas. Koch – Rajvanshi Sanmilani, Asom Ana Bodo Adhikar Suraksha Sangram Samiti, and Religious Minority Council joined in opposition, Bwismuthiary, however, stated that the alienation between Bodos and Assamese was complete therefore to force his community to co-exist within Assam would be a futile exercise.

In an effort to prevent clashes between different communities in Assam the Government decided to hold a meeting involving both tribal and non-tribal organizations of Assam on 6 and 7 December, 2001, in order to prevent clashes they were against holding of talks with URMCA, Lower Assam Minority Council, and Ana Bodo Adhikar Suraksha Samiti who were opposing the rights of the Bodos from beginning. The Coordination Committee for Boboland Movement (CCBM) also warned State Government against holding talks with non – Bodo organizations and MLA’s outside BAC. The Bodo Council demanded extension of the Sixth Schedule for the amicable solution of the Bodo problem.

On Dec 30, 2001, the State Government declared its decision to extend Schedule Six to the BAC with protection to non- tribal groups by January, 2002. With this declaration the prospect of a Bodo settlement brightened. However, the inclusion of 93 additional villages and reservation of ten seats to the non-Bodos in the Council remained a major hurdle in the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The stalemate over the creation of BTC continued as the State Government failed to convince the All Party Meet to include the additional 93 villages in BTC, along with the 3070 villages that had already been agreed to.

BLT Vice Chairman, Kamal Mosahary said, further criticized the role of Government and said that while the Congress Government was not taking any positive stand the AGP adopted a completely different stand after losing power. The last All Party Meet held on 10 January, 2003, failed to arrive at a consensus. According to him the 93 villages had been included in BAC in 1933 but later had been excluded. He demanded that the thirty out of forty seats should be reserved for tribals and ten open. He further proposed forty-five instead of forty seats for BTC and stressed on the importance of the forthcoming Meet in view of the expiry of the ceasefire with BLT on 21 January, 2003.

The next round of tripartite talk between Centre, State and BLT was held on 20 January in New Delhi. The truce with BLT was extended for another one month and Government decided to cede twelve more villages out of ninety-three to the proposed Council. The question of allocation of seats among tribals and non-tribals in the proposed BTC remained another issue in delaying the solution of the Bodo problem. The Government decided to keep some seats reserved for the non –Bodos and non-tribals in BTC areas which was opposed by the Bodo leadership. U. G. Brahma, a Rajya Sabha Member and a senior leader of the Bodo movement opined in this regard that the Bodos were sympathetic toward the Government’s concern for security and safety of non-Bodos but at the same time the Bodo must be allowed to exercise their democratic rights and ask for new formula –a few seats unreserved. BLT also demanded 25 seats reserved for Bodos, 5 seats for non-tribals and 15 seats open. The Government, however, made clear of its stand to no-revision of its former decision on allocation of seats and offered two options to the BLT:

- 1.Thirty seats for tribals and ten for non-tribals or
- 2.Thirty seats for tribals, five seats for non-tribals, five for general communities and six members nominated by State Government

However, the second option was accepted by BLT and State Cabinet after mutual discussion. This acceptance finally opened the way for further action in the formation of the Bodo Council.

The State Government made its first move in this direction when the Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi and Chairman of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on BTC issue, and State Health Minister, Bhumidhar Barman called upon All India Congress Committee(AICC) President, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi to brief her about the likely resolution of the problem. The State Government’s major achievement was the new Bodo Accord. At last the three year long talks

between the Government and the BLT culminated in the signing of an agreement on February 10, 2003.

The tripartite Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Special Secretary (North-East) R C Jain on behalf of Ministry of Home Affairs, State Chief Secretary P K Datta and Chairman of BLT Hagrama Basumatary. Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, State Health Minister Bhumidhar Barman and State Government officials besides the top leaders of ABSU, BPAC, BSS and ABWWF were present on the occasion of signing the Accord.

The Union Home Minister directed the State Government to re-appeal BAC to pave the way for the creation of BTC under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. The Commissioner of Welfare of Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Communities (WPT and BC) was entrusted with the responsibility of administering the areas till the BTC is formed.

A financial package of rupees five hundred crores for the socio-economic and infrastructure development, a centrally funded technical institution, recognition of the Bodo language under the Eight Schedule of the Constitution besides reviewing of Cases pending against the BLT was to be set up dissolving the defunct BAC. The Bodo language Bill was tabulated in the Parliament in August, 2003. The ST Amendment Bill was passed by Lok Sabha was sent to the President for approval. As Gogoi announces amnesty to BLT 2641 militants joined mainstream. An interim Council was sworn in on 6 December, 2003.

The BLT leaders revealed that they would form a regional party by involving various Bodo organizations. In the decision to create the BTC the Government did not involve non-Bodo organizations. Hence, Sanmilita Janagosthiyo Surakha Samiti (SJSS) leader, Brojen Mahanta, Phani Medhi, Tridip Pati Singha and others vowed to oppose imposition of BTC on

Non-Bodos in the so called Bodoland areas. In a public rally at Telipara under Gossaingaon Police Station, in Kokrajhar district the leaders of SJSS announced the launching of an intensive and all out agitation against the BTC.

BLT Publicity Secretary, Mainao Daimary, assured equal treatment and equal care to all sections of people. Commenting on SJSS stand he said, he saw no reason for the non-Bodos to be apprehensive. The Accord would solve the socio-economic problems of the Bodo dominated areas of state and there was no reason for NDFB to keep on fighting. He appealed them to come to negotiations in the interests of restoration of peace in the region. The BLT thanked ASSU and all other political parties and intellectuals of the state for playing positive role in solving the Bodo problem. As BLT leaders were being felicitated by people in different Bodo areas of the state, SJSS called for 36 hour bandh as a protest against the creation of BTC. They called it a destructive measure and predicted that the situation could become worse if non- Bodos were not taken into confidence.

ABSU gave up demand for separate state. It also decided to convince NDFB to come for negotiations. The 35th annual conference of ABSU expressed the hope that the BTC would fulfill the hopes and aspirations of both the Bodos and non-tribals. The victory of the Bodos was celebrated in Bodo dominated areas. BLT was disbanded and its cadres were to be rehabilitated through government jobs and self-employment schemes.

The BTC Bill has tabled in Lok Sabha on August, 2003. Opening the debate on Sixth Schedule to the constitution (A) Bill 2003, Senior Congress MP, Madhav cent Bodo population could rule over 72 per cent non-tribals. Bwiswmuthiary of Congress answered that reservation does not exist in other Autonomous Councils.²⁶⁶ so the non –Bodos should feel safe in BTC. With the passing of BTC Bill the road of autonomy was opened for the Bodos.

The SJSS gave a call for mass protests against the BTC Bill. A statement signed by SJSS's Deputy Convener, Brajen Mahanta, its Coverner and All Assam Adivasi Student's Association President, Justin Lakra and President of Koch-Rajvanshi Yuva Chatra Sanmilan, Tridip Pati Singha, UMCRA President, Hiteswar Barman, Bengali Yuva Chatra Federation President, Saddam Hussain warned of a popular upheaval against the Central Government on BTC Bill. 267 SJSS described BTC AS 'Fascist Imposition' while All Assam Adivasi Students' Association (AASA) called 24 hour bandh, 12 hour rail rook on August 8, 2003.

It was hoped that with the creation of BTC the decade long violence would eventually come to an end. But the new Accord left various opposing elements outside its fold. The NDFB could not be brought to terms while various communities like the Adivasis, Koch-Rajbansis resented the new arrangement. However, under such state of affairs future violence cannot be under mind. The success of BTC thus will lie on its ability to create mutual goodwill among the different communities living in the BTAD and to work towards the overall development of the area.

Thus, the changing nature of the struggle was one of the important characteristics of the Bodo movement. The movement before the year 1967 was a peaceful and non-political. The main focus of the movement during that time was on socio-economic, cultural and spiritual issues. In 1960s some changes came in the nature of the movement under the leadership of the PTCA, the movement has assumed political character and to a certain extent succeeded in drawing the support of the other tribals of the states. However, the Bodo movement reached its climax only in 1980s. Under the leadership of ABSU, the movement for a separate state of Bodoland was launched on 2nd March, 1987 which was supported by a large section of the Bodo society including the other tribals of the states. It was the result of

this movement, the Bodo accord of 1993 was signed and Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was created.

The Bodo movement passed through a number of phases. It was mobilized both through peaceful and violent tactics. Socio-cultural organization like Boro Chatra Sonmiloni, All Bodo Students Union and Plains Tribal Council of Assam used peaceful method of ethnic mobilization while the underground organization like BLTF and NDFB chose a part of aggression. The combined effect of the two is mixed. It resolved the identity question of the Bodos to a certain extent but not without suffering to the lives of common man. It is believed that the use of force in the movement has been effective in achieving certain degree of success, it is also fact that the costs of it was very high amounting to the lost of human life, under development, social disharmony and a persistent law and order problem in Bodoland.

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