

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

The Bodos were the earliest settlers of Brahmaputra Valley of Assam. The Bodos are of mongoloid race of Tibeto-Burman stock now inhabiting over vast area in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam with their main concentration in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra right upto the foot hills along the northern boundary of Assam adjoining Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. They are now recognized as Plains Scheduled Tribe in Assam. Once this great race inhabited the entire north eastern plains of India extending from southeast Nepal through North Bengal and Assam-Meghalaya right up to Tripura as well as the adjoining foothill regions of Bangladesh, where their descendants are still living under various tribal and linguistic identities. They have their own distinct culture, language and ethnic identity. In earlier literature Bodos had been referred as the “Kachari’s”. It was Grierson who used the word Bodo for the first time to refer to a linguistic group under Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and all the communities mentioned below were incorporated into that family. These are- Boro Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Tiwa, Rabha, Dimasa and Garo. The root of Bodo political assertion it was begun in the colonial period. The British rule created a new situation in Assam and its impact was also failed within the Bodo society as well. Though the assertion of the Bodos is a recent development, their existence as a distinct ethnic group has a history of more than two thousand years. It is almost impossible to trace and reconstruct the history of a people who do not have written record and whose participation in the mainstream history is only marginal. In this study, it has been shown only those aspects of Bodo history which can be based on the basis of evidences, direct or indirect and at the same time which is capable of throwing some light on the complex process of formation of the nationality. Though the Bodos were slow to pick up the new opportunities opened up by the administrative

innovations of colonial rule by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a substantial section of the Bodos became aware of the changing scenario and wanted to uplift the material status of the society. Khalicharan Brahma and his Brahma movement was the pioneer in this field. Under his leadership the Bodos for the first time united for an assertive political identity.

The period from 1866 to 1993 is a formative epoch in the history of Assam in general and to the Bodos in particular. It marked not only the beginning of British rule having radical changes, but it also ushered in a new element in the area-the social tension, ultimately leading to political consciousness among the people of the area. The object of this work is to provide in the light of available original sources - Assamese, English, Bodo and Zongkha, a narrative not merely of the successive stages in the establishment of British Paramountcy in the Duars, but also the period of subsequent reactions in its true perspective leading to the early phase of the Freedom Movement in the Duars area.

My endeavour to study the gradual transition of the Bodos of Eastern Duars during the period under review had to reckon with many limitations. In spite of the difficulties of processing the source materials on the Duars region, an all out effort was made to secure all relevant information through interviews of some senior personalities in Assam. All sources of information and interviews are enlisted in the bibliography of and reference to them is cited in my thesis. I do not claim this work to be the final one, but firmly believe that this work is a pioneering and lay basis for further investigation in the never-ending field of academic research. This work has explored many critical and micro level undiscussed aspects of the socio-economic and ethnic transition of the Bodos of Duars region, particularly the land related issues since the coming of the Colonial rule.

The Bodo politics of identity forms an important part of the post-independence political development in Assam. Apart from its significant on social-politics history of Assam, the Bodo movement is instrumental to a very large extent in bringing similar identity

aspiration among other communities in Assam. Therefore, a complete study of the movement, its historical background and its impact could help to grasp ethnic imperatives under a democratic political set-up.

A critical look into the different stages of identity assertion of the Bodos reveals some interesting trends. The middle class which has been instrumental in articulating demands of the Bodos in these various phases seem to have played an important role in transforming the Bodo identity. Since the issues of language and script were integral to identity assertion of the Bodos in the initial phase, the middle class was apparently articulating the Bodo ethno-linguistic identity as distinct from the larger Assamese linguistic identity. The subsequent phases which focused more on territorial autonomy signaled towards the emergence of a distinct Bodo regional identity. The demand for a territorial unit of all plains tribes of Assam was supposed to be an inclusive political arrangement, but the Bodos, being numerically larger and its middle class leadership being more organized than its counterparts among other tribal groups, were likely to assume a predominant role within such an arrangement. This was followed by a more aggressive assertion of Bodo exclusivity which centered on the demand for a separate Bodoland, thereby indicating the transformation of Bodo ethnic, linguistic and regional identity into a distinct national identity. The advocacy by militant outfits of a sovereign independent Bodoland as a homeland for safeguarding the political, cultural and economic interests of the Bodos is nothing but an endorsement and reassertion of the Bodo national identity. In reality, however, the middle class is likely to pursue its own class interests in the proposed homeland of its own.

The study shows that the middle class has indeed played an important role in the consolidation of Bodo national identity as distinct from Assamese identity. However, it appears that the Bodo middle class will actually seek to protect its own interests in the proposed homeland instead of safeguarding the rights and interests of the masses. The bitter

struggle for power among different sections of the middle class within the existing autonomous arrangements will bear testimony to this phenomenon. The deviation of the Bodo movement from autonomy to secession necessitates a critical relook into the role of the Indian State. Indeed, the response of the state is a major determinant that has shaped and transformed the nature of the Bodo struggle for self-determination.

For a deeper understanding of the Bodo identity assertion, it is necessary to relate this assertion with the nationality question in India. The Indian State has always viewed this issue as a problem of all-India national integration and has considered nationality aspirations as anti-national. This has further alienated smaller nationalities like the Bodos of Assam. Ironically, the Assam movement against foreign nationals had initially drawn the Bodos and other plains tribes under its banner, but it failed to accommodate the aspirations of these nationalities. Moreover, the Assamese middle class hegemony generated a sense of insecurity among the Bodo middle class and pushed it towards a path of self-determination for consolidation of the Bodo national identity. It may be argued in this context that unless the Indian state appreciates nationality aspirations within a framework of mutual understanding and trust and respect for other groups residing in the same region, there will be a sense of discontent among smaller nationalities, inciting some aggressive sections to reject the existing arrangements and explore new political frontiers

This thesis has been prepared keeping in mind all probable aspects related to the problem while analyzing the relevant Government official documents, documents of different Bodo organizations, views of different news papers and interpretations of different people of the Bodo community many whom were directly involved with the movement. And the conclusions have been arrived at:

- 1) The Bodo movement was the result of growth of ethno-nationalism germinated during the Colonial period. The provisions granted to the plains tribal people of Assam in the Act of 1935 as recommended by the Simon Commission has made them conscious about their political rights.
- 2) Prior to the incorporation into British Colonial Empire the Bodos of Eastern Duars were ruled by petty chiefs who had to pay annual tax to the Deb Raja of Bhutan. The Bodos had maintained a very cordial relationship with the Bhutias and most of the tax collectors directly appointed by the Bhutias were from the Bodo community.
- 3) The issue of Language played a very crucial role in shaping the Bodo ethno-nationalism. It was on the imposition of Assamese language on the multilingual tribal people of Assam the conflict between the mainstream Assamese people of Assam and Bodos had started.
- 4) The problem of illegal immigration, especially from Bangladesh and their settlement in the tribal blocks and belt area was the root of the Bodoland Movement.
- 5) The attitude of the AGP Government towards solving the foreigners issue and their failure to protect the tribals land from the encroachment of suspected foreigner's had made the Bodos suspicious about the real intention of the AGP Government . The Bodos felt that their socio-cultural identity as well as ethnic identity is no longer safe in Assam .Therefore they raised the slogan "Divide Assam Fifty Fifty "
- 6) The Bodoland Movement was an example of mass mobilisation carried out along ethnic lines leading to a sharpening of pre-existing ethnic cleavages and a heightened sense of group awareness amongst the people bounded within these cleavages. The contextual background helps to understand the spontaneous and intense response of the Bodos to ABSU's call for a mass movement, as also to understand the response of the state and the non-Bodo people towards the Movement. The Movement occurred at

a crucial movement in Assam's history when political aspirations of different ethnic groups in the state were rising rapidly after the conclusion of the six-year long Assam Movement and the settlement of the foreigners issue with the signing of the Assam Accord. The coming to power in the state of the newly-formed AGP party in the 1985 elections strengthened this tendency.

- 7) 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. To strengthen the Bodo politics activities of the movement had use the term Bodo in a broad scene to mean all the who speak or used to speak one of the Bodo groups of languages. Historical memory and hero warship like Zaolia Dewan, Jwhwlao Daimalu and Sickna Jwhwlao were revived to evoked the masses with a sense of pride of their glorious past. These activities bound all the Bodos together with nationalistic feelings.
- 8) Starting during the British period the Bodos had a long history of identity assertion in Assam, the initial stage of which was marked by a desire of reforming, regenerating and raising awareness within the community. The Bodo leaders joined the Tribal League and actively participated in the Constitutional politics only to serve the interests of their community and to address major issues concerning the society like tribal identity, land alienation etc. 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. The Bodoland movement had gone through several ups and downs. A bloody clash took place between different groups of Bodo organizations. Finally BAC accord was sign in 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1993. But the people were not satisfied with the arrangement of BAC accord therefore, they entered into a

new phase of movement under BLT and finally, 10<sup>th</sup> February, 2003 another Bodo accord was signed and BTAD was created.

- 9) The essence of this ethnonationalism of the Bodos can only be understood in the context of the struggle for domination between agricultural capital and the Indian industrial capital.
- 10) The violence associated with this political agitation has its origins in the manner of handling the movement by the respective Government in Assam and the general attitudes of the main stream Assamese society.
- 11) The Assam Movement, led by students along supposedly Gandhian lines, disowning all incidents of violence and affirming their faith in the Indian Constitution but refraining from participation in elections, became the model for other ethnic movements that cropped up throughout Assam in the post-1985 period. Of these the most significant and enduring was the Bodoland Movement, which indeed finds many parallels with the Assam Movement in its strategies of collective mobilisation and political bargaining.
- 12) As to the level of structural change that the Movement aimed at bringing about, we may note that the Bodo Movement was neither a reform movement nor a revolution but rather in between these two, i.e., a transformative movement aiming at bringing about middle level structural changes in this distribution of power and in the system of differential allocation of resources. The element of conflict in this movement acquires a sharper focus than in there reform movements, of which the Brahma Movement among the Bodos is a good example. Again the Bodoland Movement is not a revolutionary one as the conflict is not based on the ideology of class struggle but is

more between ethnic groups with some elements of class struggle being built into its ideology.

- 13) The study concludes that the rise of various ethnonationalist movements on the sub-continent and internationally suggest that there is a need for a comparative analysis of the political economy of these movements. Such a comparative analysis will enhance our understanding of the unique and universal features of the phenomenon of ethnonationalism.

Studies on ethnonationalism have ignored the context in which various identities take shape and the culture is influenced. The focus of various studies on cultural variables isolated from their material economic base gives rise to a phenomenon of several partial realities. Thus for Anderson print capitalism becomes the sole force of building national identities and for Brass, it is the art work of an almighty economic and political elite that is able to construct and deconstruct identities at will. The lack of understanding of the material context of the phenomenon of ethnic identities and its dialectical relationship with the larger social reality thus produces as many conclusions as there are variables under study. The political economy approach, on the other hand, contends that parts of social reality cannot be studied in isolation from each other as they are interlinked in a dialectical manner. By linking the political and cultural constructs with their economic roots, the political economy approach seeks to find what is the source of power and conflict in the society. It contends that the conflicts over political power are actually conflicts over access to material resources. Thus, in its attempts to understand the dialectical relation between politics and economics, the political economy approach locates the context in which various identities take shape.

The rise of Bodo ethnonationalism in the 1990s, however, is qualitatively different from the previous attempts of Bodo movements. It is associated with the land related issues



since the coming of the colonial rule. The study has shown that the development of capitalism in the Punjab agriculture gave rise to a powerful class of capitalist farmers. A number of factors specific to the region aided the speedy transition of the Bodos.

Finally, the study concludes that there is a scope to understand the phenomenon of ethnonationalism through a comparative analysis of the political aspirations of various ethnonationalist movements. India has witnessed the rise of Kashmiri, Sikh, Naga, Mizo and other north-eastern sub-nationalisms. The Tamils of Sri Lanka and Muhajirs of Pakistan have also produced challenges to their respective central authorities in the region. The common feature of these movements have been their demands for 'special status' or separation on the basis of ethnicity, be it religious, linguistic or tribal identity. Some ethnonationalist movements from other continents, like Eritrea in Africa and former republics of Yugoslavia in Europe, have attained separation and formed independent States. A comparative analysis of these will be helpful in understanding what makes certain ethnonationalist movements more likely to succeed than others. It will also enhance our understanding of how and why ethnonationalist movements emerge.