

**INCORPORATION OF THE EASTERN DUARS TO THE
COLONIAL RULE: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL & ETHNIC
TRANSFORMATION OF THE BODOS (1866-1993)**

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March, 2016**

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**INCORPORATION OF THE EASTERN DUARS TO THE COLONIAL RULE: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL & ETHNIC TRANSFORMATION OF THE BODOS (1866-1993)**” has been prepared by me under the guidance of Dr.Ananda Gopal Ghosh,Professor, Department of History, University of North Bengal. No part of this thesis has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.



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CERTIFICATE

I certify that Ms. Banabina Brahma has prepared the thesis entitled “**INCORPORATION OF THE EASTERN DUARS TO THE COLONIAL RULE: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL & ETHNIC TRANSFORMATION OF BODOS (1866-1993)**”, for the award of Ph. D. degree of the University of North Bengal, under my guidance. She has carried out the work at the Department of History, University of North Bengal.

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Banabina Brahma

ABSTRACT

“Eastern Duars” holds an important a place in the history of Assam as well as in Indian History because of its typical geographical position. The entire tract called ‘Eastern Duars’ is the only connecting link between the entire Northeastern regions with the rest of the Indian Republic.

In spite of her importance as the only connecting link between the entire northeast region with the rest of Indian Republic, the “Eastern Duars” has failed to receive adequate justice in the hands of historians both regional and national. There are already several historical works and monographs and articles in learned Journals on Western Duars, but work on Eastern Duars is extremely poor in number. The present work expects to evolve many critical aspects of socio-political and cultural conditions of Bodos of Eastern Duars in a new dimension.

The earliest inhabitants of Eastern Duars are the Bodos, the Koches, the Garos the Rabhas and the Dobashias. Among these communities the Bodos were largest in number and all the Eastern Duars leading to Bhutan were dominated by them. The Bodo dominance in Eastern Duars has been mentioned by W.W.Hunter on his work “A Statistical Account of Assam”, Francis Hamilton in his work “An Account of Assam” and Alexander Macknenjee in his work “North East Frontier of Bengal”.

Prior to the advent of Colonial rule in the Duars area, the entire tract was ruled by some petty chiefs on a regular payment of taxes to the Bhutan king. Most of the times the king of Bhutan used to appoint the tax collectors from the Bodo community as they were majority in the Duars and maintained a cordial relation with the Bhutiyas. P.R.Pemberton and Babu Kisan Kant Bose in their “Report on Bhootan” mentions the name of several Bodo tax collectors directly appointed by the Deb Raja of Bhutan. It was due to the reason that most of the Duars or passes to Bhutan were in Bodo dominated areas. They established socio-economic and cultural relationship amongst themselves in the Bhutiya Mela organized every year.

After the occupation of Duars in 1866, the British inducted huge migration in the Eastern Duars. First, they brought laborers from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to work in their tea plantation. These people were subsequently settled by the colonial rulers in Eastern Duars’.

Secondly, the massive induction of immigrants triggered by the British are the land hungry Muslim peasants from East Bengal. At the early part of 19th century, the British Raj allowed the settling of land hungry peasants from the bordering districts of Bengal to the wastelands of Assam. This colonization scheme initiated by the British Government opened a floodgate for immigration of landless peasants from East Bengal to Assam, and at least 90 percent of these immigrants were Muslims. By the 1942, the Government of India had directed the Government of Assam to launch an intensive “Grow more Food” Campaign by utilizing all available land to provide adequate food to the allied troops stationed in Assam.

Thirdly, the third wave of migrations that took place in Eastern Duars during the colonial period are the Nepalese from Nepal. They came to Assam in two roles — (a) as a part of the colonial army and (b) as graziers. A large number of ex-serviceman and graziers were encouraged to come and occupy the fertile Duars region and engage themselves in cattle keeping’.

The colonial period also saw immigration of Marwari merchants from distant Rajasthan. Though their numbers was small, they played an important role in opening up the Eastern Duars to trade under colonial patronage. They acted as moneylender, bankers and general agents to the managers of the tea Garden and throughout the state sold articles imported from other parts of India and became dealers in rice and grains’.

Thus the colonial period saw a drastic change of the demographic set up in the Eastern Duars. Groups of communities having distinct languages, cultures and ethnic characteristics – hitherto unknown in the area came to the region under the colonial patronage they were settled in the area. This change of demography had created a social tension for the first time in the Duars region. The phenomenon of immigration had shook the very foundation of social set up in the region and lead to the hardening of the boundaries of social formation in Eastern Duars into ‘sons of the soil’ and ‘outsiders’. The ‘sons of the soil’ generally wished to keep the ‘outsiders’ away from territorial resources and destinies.

Now, the Bodos as they were major community of the area, they took the leadership in the protest against the immigration. They never reconciled themselves to their subjugation

by the British. Their micro level freedom struggled and consistently asserted their ethnic identity and insisted on enjoying exclusive control over like land, water, forest, minerals etc. The Bodos under the banner of Plains Tribal League raised the question of land settlement and protection of tribal land under the Line System. From then onwards, the process of ethnic assertion of the Bodos in Eastern Duars begun. Here lies the genesis of transforming the 'Eastern Duars' into present 'Bodoland Territorial Council'

In the meantime, the Bodos were already in the process of new social formation after the "Brahma Movement" which was started by Kalicharan Brahma. The movement led by Kalicharan Brahma gradually assumed a multi-dimensional form. It started as a religious movement but over the years socio-economic agenda of vital importance was added to it. That ensured for Kalicharan a position amongst the Bodos that went far beyond his primary role as a religious preacher. In 1929, when the Simon Commission visited Assam, Kalicharan submitted a memorandum demanding reservation of seats in the legislative assembly for the Bodos. This representation of Kalicharan marked the beginning of the Bodo politics in real sense of the term. Subsequently, in the Act of India'1935, the Government of India made provision for four reserved seats in the assembly for the Plains Tribals of Assam. This was the historical achievement as that point of time no such reservation for any other tribals or caste had been given under the British Government in India.

Until then, the mainstream Assamese society could not recognize the Plains Tribals as potential political force. But, when the Simon Commission made provision for four reserved seats for the Plains Tribals of Assam, the mainstream Assamese intellectuals, who were so far indifferent to the Bodo social development, suddenly became jealous.

At the same time, under the patronage of Kalicharan Bhahma a new organization called the 'Assam Tribal League' was formed. The Tribal League took members from other Plains Tribal groups including the Misings, Chutiyas and Mottoks. The formation of this organization was the first successful attempt to consolidate the Plains Tribals under the Bodo leadership. And it was the first starting point of the mutual jealous is between the Bodos and the mainstream Assamese society.

The emotional attachment of the Bodos with the mainstream Assamese society divided after Independence in 1960. In that year, the Government of Assam introduced the "Assam Official Language Act, 1960" which imposed the Assamese Language as the only official language of Assam. The Bodos who were trying to propagate their own language

since 1952, under the banner of Bodo Sahitya Sabha had termed this Act as ‘Aggressive Nationalism’ of Assamese middleclass and refused to obey the Act. Rather, they demanded the introduction of Bodo language as the medium instruction in Bodo dominated areas. The indifference of the State Government towards the demand had compelled a group of Bodo intellectuals and social activist to think afresh about apolitical course of action that would enable them to some kind of autonomy in dealing with their own affairs.

Therefore, the land problem provided the Bodos with the material basis and the language issue the emotional content to think seriously about a new political set up that would ensure them protection of their land, their way of life, and cultural aspiration according to their own genesis and tradition.

On January 13th, 1967, Mrs Indira Gandhi made a statement that the Central Government was examining a proposal for reorganizing of Assam on federal basis. These pronouncements immediately set forth various responses amongst the concerned peoples and the agitated Bodo leaders interpreted it as a signal for launching a movement demanding autonomy for the Plains Tribals of Assam. Accordingly on 27th February 1967, the “Plains Tribal Council of Assam” was formed at Kokrakjhar to raise the demand for ‘Udayachal’ or the autonomy for the Plains Tribals of Assam.

The year 1985 is a turning point in the Bodo history. Significantly, from that year onwards the demand of ‘Udayachal’ for all Plains Tribal community of Assam became feeble and the demand for autonomy only for the Bodos gained popularity. From now onwards, the political leadership has passed on to PTC to ABSU; since then the ABSU projected themselves as the only political force to represent cause of the Bodos. Their main slogan was ‘Divide Assam Fifty Filthy’. Finally on 29th February 1993, an agreement was signed between the ABSU and the Government of India and accordingly ‘Bodoland Autonomous Council’ was formed. Thereafter, since 2003 it came to be known as ‘Bodoland Territorial Council’ (BTC).

Preface

The Bodos are of mongoloid race of Tibeto-Burman stock now inhabiting an extensive area in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam with their main concentration in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra right up to 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 inhabitant the entire north eastern plains of 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.

In earlier literature Bodos had been referred as the 'Kacharis'. It was B.H. Hodgson 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 bellow were incorporated into that family .These are –Boro Kachari, Sonowal Kachari, Tiwa, Rabha and Dimasa.

This work has explored many critical and micro level 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.

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, the present researcher has shown only those aspect of the 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 .

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 added 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 Supremacy 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 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.

The study reveals that the entire development process the socio - religious movement, upward social mobility, ethnic crisis, Bodoland movement etc. are inter related to each other and their roots were laid in the Brahma dharma movement or the spread of Christianity in the early part of twentieth century.

I have tried to present the facts and chronology as authentic as possible and analyzed them critically and objectively. Many of the facts are established facts, which I have just reproduced and interpreted them from various angles.

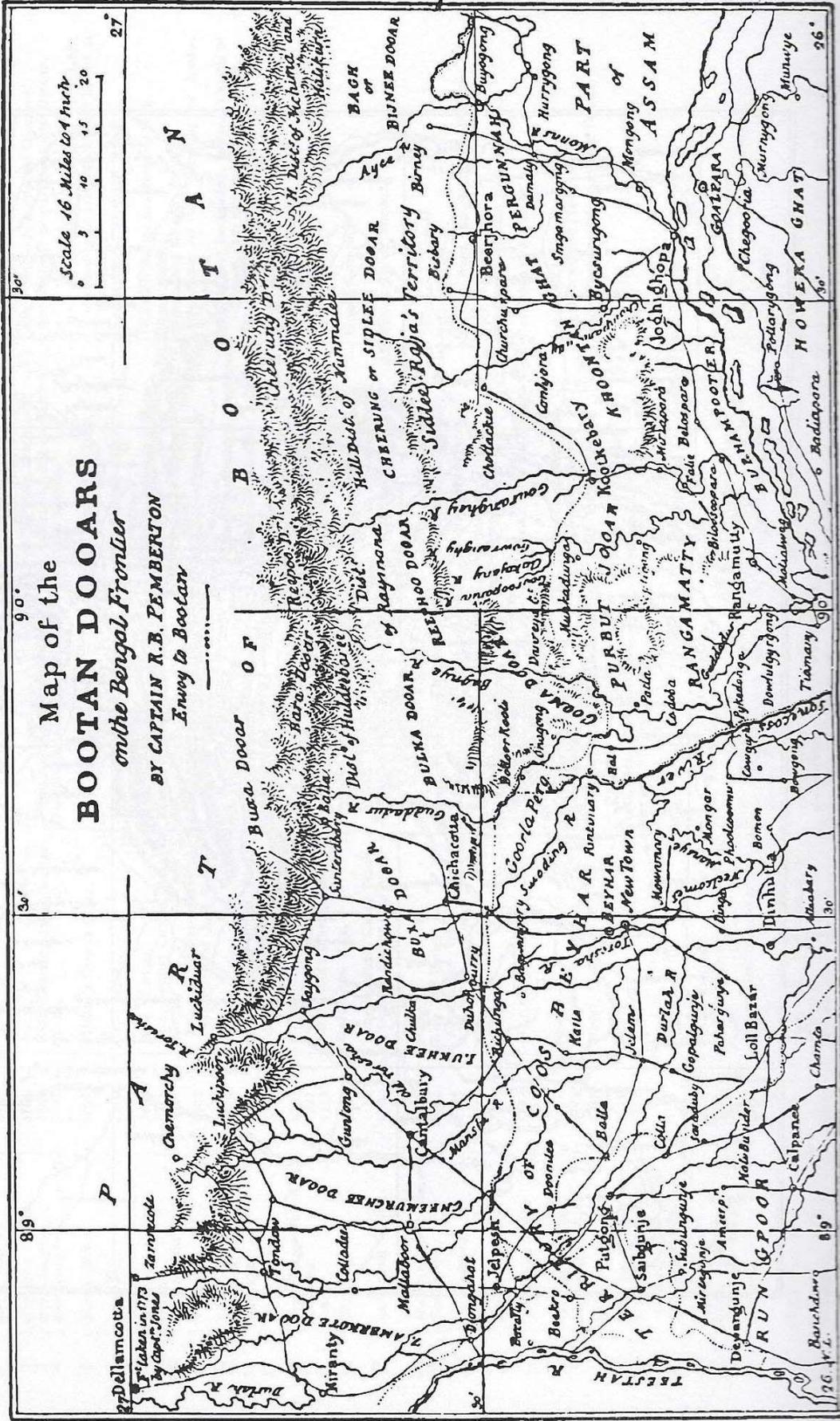
In accommodating facts I had always been careful and tried to present them in brief but comprehensible manner avoiding unnecessary prolongation. Great care has also been taken not to distort the fact in this thesis.

Standard references have been used in preparing the thesis in order to substantiate the various points discussed. The bibliography shows the extent of the study to prepare this thesis.

Abbreviations

AAKRKS	:	All Assam Koch Rajbanshi Kshotriyo Sanmilani
AAMSU	:	All Assam Minorities Students' Union
AASA	:	ALL Adivasi Students' Association
AASU	:	All Assam Student Union
AATWWF	:	All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation
ABSU	:	All Bodo Students' Union
ABSU(R)	:	All Bodo Students' Union (Ramchiary)
ABSU(U)	:	All Bodo Students' Union(Upen)
ABWWF	:	All Bodo Women Welfare Federation
ACKSA	:	All Cachar Karimganj Students' Association
ACMS	:	Assam Chah Mazdur Sangha
ALMRC	:	Assam Linguistic Minority Rights Committee
AJP	:	Asom Gana Parishad
BAC	:	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BEC	:	Bodoland Executive Council
BJP	:	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLT	:	Bodoland Liberation Tigers
BPAC	:	Bodo Peoples Action Committee
BPF	:	Bodoland People Front
BPPF	:	Bodoland People Progressive Front
BSF	:	Boro Security Force
BSS	:	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTAD	:	Bodoland Territorial Area District
BTC	:	Bodoland Territorial Council
CCBM	:	Co-ordination Committee of Bodoland Movement

CCTO	:	Co-ordination Committee of Tribal Organisation of Assam
DC	:	Deputy Commissioner
MLA	:	Member of Legislative Assembly
NDFB	:	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NTUC	:	National Trade Union Congress
PDF	:	People Democratic Front
PTCA	:	Plains Tribal Council of Assam
PTCA(P)	:	Plains Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive)
SDO	:	Sub Divisional Officer
SJSS	:	Sanmilita Janagasthiyo Surakha Samiti
UTNLF	:	United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front
URMCA	:	United Reservation Movement Council of Assam
SEBA	:	Secondary Education Board of Assam
ST	:	Scheduled Tribe
ULFA	:	United Liberation Front of Assam
WPT &BC	:	Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Communities
YBNA	:	Young Bodo Nationalist Association



Chapter 1

Introduction

Eastern Duars

The terms 'Duars' literally means 'Door' in English is used to refer the areas below the Bhutan foothills which always carries the sense of border mart at the foot of mountain pass and the areas in its immediate vicinity. Duars therefore means the passes and valley that led to the hills. It is known to all that social relation and economic interdependence between the hills and the plains on Northeast India have been there since the time immemorial. It is through this Duars that the people of Bhutan have been interacting with the plains people below their foothills since time immemorial.¹ Along Indo Bhutan borderline, there are eighteen such Duars or passes. The Duars on the frontier of Bengal and Cochbehar are together called "Western Duars" and the remaining Duars on the Assam frontier are called the "Eastern Duars".

The "*Eastern Duars*" holds an important a place in the history of Assam as well as in Indian History because of its typical geographical position. The entire tract called 'Eastern Duars' is the only connecting link between the entire Northeastern regions with the rest of the Indian Republic.

The tract called "*Eastern Duars*" forms an integral portion of undivided Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang District of Assam. The Eastern comprises several Duars. In the Duars, covering the narrow strip of the plains, that is, the foot hills providing access to the mountain region compressed within the limits of Assam there are 14 Duars; of these, five Duars, viz., Bijni or Bagh Duar, Chirang, Guma, Ripu and Sidli, collectively known as Eastern Duars, are situated in between the river Manas on the east and the Sankoch on the west. Five other Duars, viz., Baksa, Bijni, Chapaguri, Chapakhamar and Garkhola are situated between the

river Bamadi on the east and the Manas on the west. The remaining three Duars, viz., Buriguma, Killing and Koreapara are situated between the Dhansiri on the east and the Bamadi on the west and Chariduar, situated further east. Koreapara is now situated in the present Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh and Chariduar is included in the present Darrang district of Assam. The Eastern Duars form a flat strip of country lying beneath the Bhutan Mountains. It is bounded on the North by the mountain of Bhutan, on the East by the River Manas, separating it from the district of Kamrup, on South by the main portion of Goalpara district and on the West by the River Gangadhar and Sankash, which separates it from the Western Duars attached to the Jalpaiguri district of North Bengal.²

The term “*Eastern Duars*” to these geographical areas is a colonial term given by the British. Before the penetration of colonial rule into this area, it was under the control of Bhutan. At that time it was divided into small principalities and either administered by the ‘Subbas’ directly appointed by the Dharma Raja of Bhutan or by the local zamindars or revenue collectors like - the Bijni Raja, the Darrang Raja etc. It was only in 1866 after the treaty of Chinchula (when the Bhutias were defeated by the British) these Eastern Duars came directly under the British control. And since then, from 1866 to 1993, the ‘Eastern Duars’ have experienced transformation in different aspects of society, ethnicity, politics and administrative setup. From 1993 onwards ‘Colonial Eastern Duars’ came to be known as the ‘Bodoland Territorial Council’.

Here confusion may arise that the rule of Assam has been passed to British East India Company in 1826, after the treaty of Yandaboo between Burmese and the British. Then how come Eastern Duars came under British Rule in 1864? Again, it is because the Ahom rule was never consolidated in indo-Bhutan borderline. It was under the Koch rulers of Cochbehar and Darrang Raja. In later years, taking advantage of the weak successors of the Koch Kingdom, the Bhutias had consolidated their rule over this area. And thus, in 1864, the British

defeated the Bhutias in Anglo-Bhutan war and according to the treaty of Chincula, the entire Duars region in Assam frontier has been annexed to the British Empire. In 1866, the 'Eastern Duars' or the Duars areas of Assam frontiers has been separated from the Duars of North Bengal and was given name of 'Eastern Duars' with its headquarter at Goalpara.

Eastern Duars region is a very low plain with an altitude of about 200 feet above the sea level at the southern border. At the northern border, its altitude varies between 500 to 2000 feet. The Himalayan mountain ranges raise abruptly, several 1 thousand feet high, just beyond its border in Bhutan. The annual rainfall in this region varied from 150 inches to 300 inches. The climate was wet, the land was damp and for ages, the region had been covered with dense forest. This forest contained valuable timber and medicinal herbs were also found in the forest. In the past, the region had been notorious for life taking diseases like malaria Kalajar, Black water fever and the like.

In the past, human habitation must have been established in many places of the Duars from time to time. Naturally the damp and unhealthy climates of the place did not permit the long existence of those colonies. So they got extinct in course of time. Heavy rainfall, damp climate and frequent changes of the course of its turbulent rivers and the luxuriant growth of vegetation naturally lead to the decay of human habitations. Still there exists some ruins at various places in the jungles of eastern Duars which proves that once this region were ruled by an well organised administrative machinery for example –there exists the ruins of an old fort in the dense forests of Kokrajhar district on the bank of river Samoka, a few miles away of Indo-Bhutan boarder. This ruin is known as 'Chiknajhar', the capital of Chikna Jwhlwao a local Mech chieftain. It has been identified to be one of the frontier fortifications of the region as "Pundravardhan Bhukti". But excavations by a competent Archaeological department might show some more interesting and authentic facts of this brick construction.

Early Inhabitant of the Eastern Duars:

Eastern Duars has been inhabited by different people of different races and cultures of both hills and plains. Waves of people belonging to different ethnic groups poured into this region. The main tribes of Eastern Duars are discussed below:

1. The Meches or the Bodos
2. The Koches
3. The Garos
4. The Rabhas
5. The Dobhasias

This study has been strictly confined only with the socio-political transition of the Bodos of Eastern Duars.

Franchis Hamilton in his book “North East Frontier of Bengal” said that the entire Eastern Duars tract was formally inhabited by the people called Meches or Kacharis, the only classes apparently able to live in this malarial zone in consequences of the atrocities of the Bhutias.³

In, Brahmaputra valley, the Bodos mostly live along the Eastern Duars or Indo-Bhutan borderlines in lower Assam’s undivided Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang Districts. Francis Hamilton in his book ‘An account of Assam’ and Alexander Macknenjee in his book ‘North East Frontier of Bengal’ said that the entire Eastern Duars tract was formally inhabited by the people called Meches and Kacharis (Bodo), the only classes apparently able to live in these malarial prone zone in consequences of the atrocities of the Bhutias. W.W. Hunter in his book ‘A Statistical Account of Assam’ said that Meches are the most numerous class or caste in the Eastern Duars.⁵ They are known as Mech in the western part of the Duars, but in the more eastern parts they are called indiscriminately Mech or Kachari; and again farther east, in Assam, they are called by the name of Kachari alone, losing the name of Mech altogether.

They form the great majority of the population in the Eastern Duars. The Places in the foothills through which these passes opened up to the Indian Plains were and are still known as the Kachari Duars. The boarder districts of Assam along the International boundaries of Bhutan are still dominated by the Bodo-Kachari population. During the Bhutanese rule over the Duars most of the revenue collecting officers were recruited from the Bodos. These statement is supported by the accounts of R.B.Pemberton on his “Report on Bootan” and Baboo Kishen Kant Bose and Dr. William Griffith’s “Mission to Bootan”

Another class of people, the ‘Dobhasias’ lived in the Duars region. These people had originally been The Koches, the kacharies and the Garos and Rabhas. During the Bhutia inroads to the plains, on a occasion, a large number of these people, both men and women were taken away by the Bhutias as captives and they were detained in Bhutan for a number of years. Later on, in another fight, the Koch king Najir Deo Sahib defeated the Bhutias. Accordingly, the treaty that followed, the Bhutias released these captives. But when they came back, they were considered as ‘patit’s’ (outcast) due to their long captivity in Bhutan and were not accepted by their kinsmen. But they were allowed to settle in Duars. These people, during their long stay in Bhutan, had acquired knowledge in Bhutia language and were used as interpreters, in all communications between the Bhutias and the people of the plains. Hence they went by the name Dobhasias or the interpreters.

Colonial Migration

The demographic pattern of Eastern Duars begun to undergo a drastic change since the annexation of the area by the British after the second Anglo-Bhutan war in 1865.

After the occupation of Duars in 1866, the British inducted huge migration in the Eastern Duars. The British occupation of the fertile and rich Duars region had facilitated the British to extend their imperial economy by introducing commercialization of agriculture in the newly occupied land. The verdant area had been rich in valuable timber and in addition to

this the British introduced the cultivation of tea. Now for this new economic activity they needed manpower and mostly people of labour class to carry on their Colonial economic mission. At first the British recruited the Bodos in their tea plantations as labours because of their physical strength and proximity to the tea gardens. But the Bodos as they were independent spirited and could not obey the strict British rules and regulations in the tea gardens and because of the low wages paid by the British; they rebelled and refused to work in the Gardens. Therefore the British had to bring cheap labour from famine stricken Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to work in their tea plantation. These people were subsequently settled by the colonial rulers in Eastern Duars'.⁶

Secondly, the massive induction of immigrants triggered by the British are the land hungry Muslim peasants from East Bengal. At the early part of 19th century, the British Raj allowed the settling of land hungry peasants from the bordering districts of Bengal to the wastelands of Assam. This colonization scheme initiated by the British Government opened a floodgate for immigration of landless peasants from East Bengal to Assam, and at least 90 percent of these immigrants were Muslims. By the 1942, the Government of India had directed the Government of Assam to launch an intensive "Grow more Food" Campaign by utilizing all available land to provide adequate food to the allied troops stationed in Assam. Taking advantage of it massive immigration of Muslim peasants from East Bengal to Assam and settled them mainly in the Bodo inhabited lower Assam Districts. The real motive of the Assam Government (Muslim League) became so obvious that Mr. Wavell, the then Viceroy of India, could not help making the caustic comment that Sir Sadullah's "Grow more food" campaign was really a 'Grow more Muslim' campaign.

Thirdly, the third wave of migrations that took place in Eastern Duars during the colonial period are the Nepalese. They came to Assam with two roles

(a) as a part of the colonial army and

(b) as graziers. A large number of exp-serviceman and graziers were encouraged to come and occupy the fertile Duars region and engage in cattle keeping.⁷

The colonial period also saw immigration of Marwari merchants from distant Rajasthan. Though their numbers was small, they played an important role in opening up the Eastern Duars to trade under colonial patronage. They acted as moneylender; bankers and general agents to the managers of the tea Garden and throughout the state sold articles imported from other parts of India and became dealers in rice and grains'.⁸

Thus the colonial period saw a drastic change of the demographic set up in the Eastern Duars. Groups of communities having distinct languages, cultures and ethnic characteristics – hitherto unknown in the area came to the region under the colonial patronage they were settled in the area. This change of demography had created a social tension for the first time in the Duars region. The phenomenon of immigration had shook the very foundation of social set up in the region and lead to the hardening of the boundaries of social formation in Eastern Duars into 'sons of the soil' and 'outsiders'. The 'sons of the soil' generally wished to keep the 'outsiders' away from territorial resources and destinies.⁹

Now, the Bodos as they were major community of the area, they took the leadership in the protest against the immigration. They never reconciled themselves to their subjugation by the British. Their micro level freedom struggle and effort to consistently assert their ethnic identity insisted on enjoying exclusive control over the resources of the area like land, water, forest, minerals etc. The Bodos under the banner of 'Plains Tribal League' raised the question of land settlement and protection of tribal land under the Line System. From then onwards, the process of ethnic assertion of the Bodos in Eastern Duars begun.

Physical History

The eastern Duars is very fertile. The rainfall is generally plentiful and the soil is naturally moist and fertile. Owing to each sub-mountainous position and good rainfall the

eastern is ideal for almost all kind of agricultural purposes. About one-third of the total land of Duars region is covered by dense forest. This forest contains valuable timber like *sal* (*shorea*), *sisu* (*dalbergion*), *sonaru* (*cassia*), *titachapa* (*michelia campaca*), *ajhar* (*largerstromia flos reginae*), *sam* (*artocarpus chaplasha*), *khair* (*acasis*), *nahar* (*mesela*), *khkan*(*duabanga*), *amri* (*amoora*), *chum*(*mechilus*), *nooni*(*morus*), *era*(*ricinus*), *keseree* (*helerophancy*), *suanlee* (*tetrenthera*), *champa* (*michelia*), *mezenkari* or *adakari* etc. help in the rearing of silkworms, which nourish the silk industry of Assam. Varieties of medicinal herbs are also found. Agar and lac are two important products.

*“Besides, the rich florae, the forest region is also rich in its animals and birds. The animals and birds. The animals like one-horned rhinos, wild buffalo, leopard, tiger, elephant, bear, various kinds of deer, monkeys, black panther, wild boar, the yellow primula (Floribund, found only in this region) and the painted bat with its red wings which is the only coloured bat in the world. Some rare birds are also found in this region like pelican, imperial pigeon, green pigeon, blue coot, and different types of parrot etc.”*¹⁰

The tract called the Eastern Duars forms an integral portion of Goalpara District in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. It lies between 26 degree 19' and 26 degree 54' N and 89 degree 55' and 91 degree E. and is bounded on the north by the mountains of Bhutan; on the east by the Manas river, separating it from the District of Kamrup; on the south by the main portion of Goalpara District; and on the west by the Gangadhar or Sankosh river, which separates it from the Western Duars, attached to Jalpaiguri District, and the Bengal State of Cooch Behar with area of 1570 square miles and population of 72,072 (as per census 1901).⁵

The Eastern Duars form a flat strip of country, lying beneath the Bhutans Mountains. The only elevated tract is Bhumeswar hill, which rises abruptly from the plains to the height of nearly 400 feet, and may be regarded as a detached spur of the Garo Hills on the south of

the Brahmaputra.¹¹The remainder is level plain, intersected by numerous streams and overgrown with wild vegetation. In some parts stretch extensive tracts of Sal forest; but the greater portion is covered with heavy grass and reed jungle, amid which the beautiful cotton – tree (*Bombax malabaricum*) is the only timber to be seen. The Villages are enclosed by a fence of split bamboos to keep out deer. A few bamboo and plantain-trees stand in the enclosure, but there is none of the luxuriant jungle of bamboos, areaca – palms, and plantain-trees in which the Assamese village is usually embedded. At the foot of the mountains, where the river debouches upon the plain, the scenery assumes a grander aspect. The principal rivers are the Manas, Champa, Gaurang, Gangia, Gurupala, and Gangadhar which are navigable by country boats, for a portion at any rate of their course, throughout the year and in addition to that numerous small streams become navigable during the rainy season. By far the most important channel of communication is afforded by the Manas, which might be navigated by streamers of light draught. All the rivers take their rise in the Bhutan hills, and flow in a southern direction into the Brahmaputra. Their beds are filled with boulders in the hills, but they become sandy as they advance into the plain. A peculiar tract of pebbles, gravel, and sand, resembling the Bhabar in the United Provinces, fringes the hills; and the water of all the minor streams sinks here, during the greater part of the year, not again appearing above ground until it reaches the alluvial clay. The Eastern Duars were annexed in 1865 after the military operations which the Bhutan government had provoked by their repeated aggressions on British subjects, and the gross insults to which they subjected the envoy who had been sent to demand redress. They were at first placed in charge of a Deputy Commissioner, with its head quarters at the village of Dotoma, in Khuntaghat pargana of present Goalpara district.

Flora and Fauna

Nature has lavishly bestowed all her beauties on Eastern Duars. The hills and the forests, besides enhancing beauty to the land, contain valuable flora and fauna, some of which

are rare in the world. About one-third of the total area has been considered as forest region in Eastern Duars and in the period 1976-77 area under reserved forests was estimated at 16,514 sq. km. This forest region contains valuable timber like *sal (Shorea)*, *Khoir (Acacia)*, *Sisso (Dalbergia)*, *Gamari (Gmelina)*, *Sonar (Cassia)*, *Cham (Artocarpus)*, *Bonsom (Phoebe)*, *Nahar (Mesus)*, *Amari (Amoora)*, *Khokan (Duabanga)*, *Koroi and Maz (Albizia)*, *Simalu (Bombax)*, *Ajar (Lagerstroemia)*, *Champa (Michelia)*, *Hallang (Dipterocarpus)*, *Hollok (Terminalia)*, *Kadam (Anthocephalus)*, *Bola (Morus)* etc. and various kind of bamboos, canes, grasses and reeds. In addition to providing timber for various construction purposes, certain trees provide good tanning and dyeing materials as well as household fuel. Vegetable plants and essential oil producing plants are not uncommon. Lac and *Agaru* (a much valued perfume) are two important forest products of the State. The abundance of *Chom (Machilus)*, *Nooni (Morus)*, *Era (Ricinus)*, *Keseru (Heteropanax)*, *Suanlu (Tetranthera)*, *Champa (Michelia)*, *Mezankari or Adakuri (Tetranthera)*, etc. helps in the rearing of silk-industry of Eastern Duars. Sealing wax, gum and rubber are also produced. Medicinal herbs and many varieties of beautiful orchids, generally classed as *Kapauphul* and *Bhatauphul*, are exported from Eastern Duars, which are sold at high price in foreign countries. In the financial year 1976-77, Eastern Duars is very rich in different kinds of citrus fruits like orange, lemon, *ou-tenga (Dillenia)* and *thekera (Garchinia)*. Betel-nut and betel vine are so abundantly grown that they not only form the most common items in the daily menu of an Assamese but constitute an integral part of Assamese culture. Among other common fruits, mention may be made of jack-fruit, mango, banana, guava, pineapple, *leteku (Baccaurea)*, *ponial (Flacourtia)*, *jamu (Syzygium)* etc. Eastern Duars exports an average of one thousand quintals of dried fruit annually. She is well-known for her oranges and pineapples.

Besides these rich floras, the forest regions in Eastern Duars abound with many kinds of animals like one-horned rhinoceros, elephant, wild buffalo, tiger, leopard, bison,

Himalayan bear, black panther, sloth bear, various kinds of deers and monkeys, pigmy hog the smallest pig in the world, the yellow primula (*Floribunda*) which is found only in this region and the painted bat with its red wings which is the only coloured bat in the world. The Kaziranga wild life sanctuary is one of the best of its kind and is a point of attraction to tourists from all over the globe for its one-horned rhinoceros. This sanctuary has an area of about 410 sq. km and a population of 250-300 rhinoceroses, 500 wild buffaloes a magnificent species getting rarer in the rest of India and 300 elephants besides other animals and birds. The other game reserves are Manas (about 260 sq. km.), Sonai, Rupai and Pabha. The total area of game sanctuary in Assam at present is about 1188 sq.km. Besides the common species some rare types of birds are found of Eastern Duars, which includes pelican, blue coot green pigeon, different varieties of parrot, partridge, quail, florican, different kinds of pheasants, scarlet, yellow mi, hornbill, maina, egret, etc. and some water birds like whistling teal, snipe, adjutant, cormorants, white and black-billed strokes and a varieties of seasonal migratory ducks. Among the reptiles found in the State mention may be made of crocodile, king cobra, Lizard, monitor lizard and python.

Climate

Annual revolutions of seasons in Eastern Duars are not accompanied by sharp contrast of temperature and rainfall. Due to its constant high humidity, Eastern Duars has a moderate climate. Rise of temperature in Eastern Duars is checked by frequent showers and thunderstorms which bring heavy rainfall during the spring and summer. Eastern Duars is freely open to the moisture-laden winds from the Bay of Bengal. She lies beyond the influence of the dry air-current which flows down the Gangetic plain during the hot weather. The climate is, therefore, very damp. There is wide variation of temperature between summer and winter months, but neither the summer is extremely hot nor the winter extremely cold.

Shihabuddin Talish, the historian of Mir Jumla, who invaded Eastern Duars in the middle of the 17th century, made a correct assessment of the climate of Eastern Duars, when he observed that “it rains for eight months in the year and four months of winter are not free from rains.” In short “perpetual humidity, frequent and heavy rainfall and moderate temperature changes of warm summer and cool winter especially distinguish the valley of Eastern Duars.”

Floods are the most common and regular natural calamities in Eastern Duars. It is generally in early May that the first flood of the year is experienced. But it is of short duration and does little harm to the land or to the early cultivation. By early June, the south-west monsoon reaches the Eastern Duars valley and the continuous heavy rains raise the river levels rapidly and the Brahmaputra remains in space, registering a series of high flood levels until October. The plight of the people during this period beggars description. Villages situated on the river banks are submerged, paddy fields, standing crops and cattle are washed away and thousands of inhabitants living in these areas are rendered homeless. All important lines of communication are snapped, so that Eastern Duars becomes largely cut off from the rest of India. When floods subside, often pestilence creates havoc among men and animals. The flood of 1954 was one of the highest ever recorded.

Early History of Eastern Duars

Since the early period Eastern Duars had been ruled by different dynasties in different period. In the ancient period, it was under the rule of Kamrupa Kingdom. After the disintegration of the Kamrupa Kingdom, it came under the Koch Kingdom. Again in seventeenth century, the Mughals occupied the eastern part of Koch Kingdom. Finally, the Ahoms defeated the Mughals and the Ahoms established their control over this area. But the Ahom could not consolidate their rule over this area because of the Meches (Kachari) chiefs had resented the Ahom rule and tried to assert independence with help of the Dharma Raja of

Bhutan. In such circumstances, the Ahoms were compelled to enter into a compromise with them and accordingly ceded the Duars region to the Dharma Raja of Bhutan in exchange of some tribute. The Dharma Raja could realize the fact that at any time the Meches could try to overthrow his rule from the Duars plains; he adopted a very diplomatic policy towards the chief of Bijni, Sidli and Darrang. Instead of over lordship towards those Rajas; Bhutan's attitude was that of friendly and equality. These were allowed to collect revenue freely without any influence from the Dharma Raja. The Rajas were assisted in revenue collection with some 'Subbhas' or 'Choudharies' who were mostly the Kacharies and were directly appointed by the Dharma Raja himself. The policy of equality adopted by the Dharma Raja of Bhutan had proved to be fruitful in the long run.

A close and careful examination of all the available datas and sources on Eastern Duars reveals that this vast area bellow the Bhutan foothills were never practically ruled by any power till the independence of India in 1947. There was always a sort of independent rule under its local chiefs on payment of a nominal tribute sometimes to the Koch kingdom, sometimes to Ahoms, to the Bhutias and even to the British. While the British had consolidated and firmly controlled the administration of Western Duars (Bengal part of Duars area), they never extended their firm consolidation on eastern part of Duars. As a result, this region was deprived of all the good effects of the colonial rule whereas on the western Duars all sorts of development activities were undertaken by them for the benefit of the people.

It is for the nonpayment of tribute and the Bhutias atrocity on the plains of Assam, the conflict between the British and Bhutias started taking the advantage of the mountain passes, the Bhutias would come down to the plains and plunder the inhabitants and carry them as captives. In spite of repeated request and protests, the Bhutan Government would not stop it. The deputation of Captain Pamberton did not yield any result. In 1963 another peace mission of British government under Mr. Ashley Eden also failed due to lack of goodwill

from the Bhutan Government. At the same time, the occupation of Duars was gradually becoming important for the British for economic point of view as they realized the potential of tea plantation in fertile Duars region. In 1864, war broke out between Bhutan and the British and ended with the treaty of Chinsula and the Bhutias were compelled to surrender the Duars to the British in 11.11.1865. A year later in 1866, for the advantage of administration Eastern part of Duars were ceded from western part of Duars and amalgamated with the administration of undivided Goalpara district. Shortly after this treaty, the Indo-Bhutan boundary was permanently marked by a joint survey and by fixing permanent boundary pillars along the entire Indo-Bhutan border.

So, Eastern Duars had a misfortune of becoming a colony when most part of globe was experiencing the rise of nation and nationalism. In Khasi and Jaintia Hills under Tirok Singha rebellion took place against British rule and in 1857, Maniram Dewan had tried to spread sepoy mutiny in Assam unsuccessfully and after 9 years of that Eastern Duars came under Colonial Rule.

It is a happy thing that no further troubles, worth noticing, ever arised between the two countries and since then a very cordial relationship has been existing between India and Bhutan.

After the independence of India in 1947, when a fresh treaty was concluded between India and Bhutan, the Bhutan Government claimed the small border area of Dewangiri in the Assam Bhutan border but after a friendly discussion, this claim of Bhutan was conceded to. By the existing treaty, India has responsibility in the defense of Bhutan against foreign aggression and India has been paying its best attention to the all round development of Bhutan.

The demand for a Bodo homeland no doubt is animated by the memory of ancient Boko Kingdoms and of a distant past when the great Bodo culture may have flourished

uncontaminated by other cultures. Bodo is not a homogeneous category in the sense that even within Assam they have had a history of living under different socio-political norms. In the present geo-political context of Assam, the demand for a separate state was made from the Northern Bodos (living the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh) and if one goes back in history one will find that they are the section of Bodo people living outside the influence of Ahom state formation and also of the neo-vaishnavite of Sankardev. Even within this active region two powerful divisions could be seen cantering Kokrajhar and Udalguri. The Bodos of Kokrajhar and those of Udalguri show a kind of difference in terms of awareness, organization, goals and modes of movement. Kokrajhar group had had long history of socio-political activism since the period of Guru Kalicharan Brahma. The Brahmas remained active in formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha and also in PTCA's political mobilization, whereas Udalguri has been more exposed to missionary activities and it also the area where from the radical faction first raised their heads, the birth place of Bodo security force.

The Strategic Importance of the Duars

The strategic importance of the Duars regions is due to its geographical location. The Duars always played an important role in the development both in the hills as well as in the border areas of plains. It was through this Duars business transactions were carried out. Most of the times the businesses were carried on by barter system. It was through tin basis of the hills-plains contracts his Eastern Duars the regular trade was carried out between ancient Assam and Bhutan. As a matter of fact the extensive trade was the main basis of the hill-plains contact in the entire north east India in the pre-colonial period that was accomplished through an organized market system in the adjoining plain and foothills to the mutual benefit of the people of both sides as the surplus generation in an area balanced deficit in the other. The hills society was generally self sufficient in view of the limited ones in their lifestyle and in a situation of inter-ethnic confrontation. The Bhutanese brought down for barter gold

dust, rock salt, musk, cow tails, blankets, knives rubber, elephant task, ponies, Chinese silk, woolen cloth etc. in exchange for rice, dry fish, cotton cloth, glass, breads, salt, utensils, brass metal, eri and endi cloth from the people of Assam.¹²

The winter migration of large section of Bhutanese towards warmer areas of south must have brought them into contact at an early day with the local tribes inhabiting the plains, it is also said that the Khen or Khengpa, the ancient people of Central Bhutan (Khen means wild or orphan), were perverted cattle herders and warriors. For ages they used to bring their cattle and sheep down to the plain for grazing in winter months and also barter yak-tails, blankets and other products they brought down from their country against rice, dried fish, cotton, silk cloth etc.¹³

Thus Bhutanese directly or indirectly obtained almost every article of consumption or luxury from the trade with Duars. A considerable amount of revenue seems to have been collected from the Duars customs houses in Kamrup and Darrang.¹⁴

Another strategic importance of the Duars was that it was through Bhutan that Assam carried on trade with China and Tibet at a place named Geegunsur, about six km distance from Chouna lying on the border of Assam which the Assamese merchants passing through Koriapar Duar used as the most important market. Tibetan trade across Bhutan and Tawang was carried on by the Khampas or the Tibetan traders through two passes Dhansiri and Udalguri. Trade with Tawang showed an increase in almost all articles particularly in ponies which was stimulated in 1880 by the growing demand for these animals for Shillong Tonga service and Transport services in Naga hill. The Tawang people obtained higher price for ponies Rs.50 each as against Rs.40 obtained by their neighbours in Bhutan. There had been increase in trade in blankets, salt, rubber, wax, musk and spices. In Bhutan, export of gold dwindled while in Tawang it nearly doubled. Increase in export of salt from Tawang was a

serious concern of the local authorities; it was untaxed and available at about Rs. five while imported variety was sold in Darang at Rs.5-8.

The British Government first realized the importance of the Duars in terms of its natural resources, economic prospects and strategic importance.¹⁵

In the colonial period the strategic importance of the Duars was felt by the British in view of the position of Bhutan, Sikkim and the Chumbey valley of Tibet just to the north of the Duars. The eleven Bengal Duars were the gate ways to Bhutan as well as to the Chumbey valley, Sikkim and Tibet. From the year 1774, this importance along with its commercial potentiality for trade transactions with the Himalayan countries and Tibet was realized by the British East India Company's Government. After the treaty of Sagarly in 1816 with Nepal and more after the virtual annexation of Darjeeling in 1835, though entrance into Sikkim came more or less within the reach of the British government but the more important alternative route to Tibet from the Duars through *Kalimpong* and Bhutan remained out of grip; and therefore, the annexation of the Assam Duars in 1842 and of the Bengal Duars and *Kalimpong* in 1865 remained to be a matter of vital importance. Viceroy Lord Curzon with the apprehension of the strategic and commercial importance of the Chumbey valley, kept the provision of British Indian predominance over the valley in the Treaty of Lhasa in 1904. The British Indian Government's Tibet policy and attitude towards Bhutan and Sikkim ever since were guided by strategic consideration and that was reflected in the Shimla Agreement. Evidently after 1914, the year of the Shimla Agreement signed by Tibet and British India but not ratified by China, in the sphere of overall strategic view of the Himalayan zone the position of the Duars always played a role of significance.

After the virtual annexation of Tibet by the Chinese Red Army in 1950s, the eyes of the Chinese Government fell on the Duars like that of a flying vulture for landing in search of a feast in terms of imperialistic adventure, for the narrowest stretch of India between

Chumbey valley and the border of Bangladesh is only fifty kilometers. The Duars is the bottle's neck of India connecting the North East including Assam with the rest mainland of India; it is the only narrow strip of communication of India between two unequal halves of the country which the more powerful China may take on by a sudden air and missile strike supported by a land.

After the partition of India in 1947, the significance of the Duars has increased manifold for the chicken's neck of the Duars is the only corridor of communication of India with its seven eastern states. Bounded by the international borders of Bhutan, Tibetan part of China and Bangladesh, the strategic position of the Duars is of paramount importance to the people and the Government of India. With abundant reserved forest, tea gardens and green agrarian fields and inhabited by different stocks of people speaking various languages and practising diverse religions, the Duars of late has become a cockpit of identity-politics and statehood-movements.¹⁶

Social Importance of the Duars

The Duars played an important role in maintaining peace and harmony between the hills and plains since time immemorial. Bhutan is a hilly country and she is not self-sufficient in her food production. Therefore the people of Bhutan had to depend by and large on the plains of Assam for their requirement of foodstuff and other necessities. Every winter through the Duars, the Bhutias came down with their mule-loads of rock-salt, gold dust, Musky, yak tail, Chinese silk etc and carried up different kinds of cloths, raw silk, cocoon, rice etc. The routes through which the Bhutias descended were Bijni, sidli, Ripu, and Guma Duars leading to the districts present day Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Baksa and Chirang districts. The trade was carried on in the three fairs adjacent to Bhutan-Udalguri, Khagrapara and Doimara. Later on Subankhata and Darranga Mela were started. Another market in

Kherkheria was started by Bhutia chief in Killing Duar in 1874. In 1883, another very successful market or mela was started at Dewangiri.

These fairs and markets not only played an important role in economic exchanges it also played as centre for cultural exchanges between the people of Assam and Bhutan. As these Duars were mostly lived by the Bodos, a very cordial relationship grew up between the Bodos and the Bhutias. The Bodos of these Duars region preferred the Bhutia rule over the British rule.¹⁷.

The Bhutias maintained cordial relationship with the Bodos. The historical records further strengthen this view. The Meches (Bodos) preferred the Bhutanese Government over the British Government as it evident from the following testimonies:-

The testimonial of a Meche, Jnan Mandal, 80 years, extracted by Charu Chandra anyal in late 1990 states that,

“At the time of Bhutabese Government the Meches were not tortured unlike others. They were in good terms with the Bhutanese Government. Harnath was made a Mandal... Bhutaese Government took rupees seven per family per year and allowed to cultivate as much as the family could do so”

Another Meche, Phade Saiba, more that eighty years old, living Mechua-Dhura-Balabathan village commented, *“we used to eat rice, vegetables, fish or meat three times a day. But now we can hardly afford two rice meals a day”*.

Kalsing Saiba, sixty years old Meche’s testimony is equally anguished: *“My father had vast plot of land and was well-to-do. Now I have no land. I work as a share cropper or sometimes as an agricultural labourer on cash wage of rupee one a day and three meals”*.

The fate of Gashat Machari, 98 years, is no better. He rues, *“At that time the land was plenty and men were few, so we had mush land to grow crop now I have only five acres of land under cultivation”*.

Dhansing Meche, a centenarian, living in Sisu-Jhorna was bitter about the British administration *“My father’s name is late Khayer Sigh. My father was in Bhutan holding a large lot of agricultural land. The whole of Duars was under Bhutan Government. My father was at Chamrchi near the present Reabari Tea Estate (in the Duars). My father had a large plot of land more than one hundred acres where the present Ambari Tea Estate is situated. Then we shifted to the present site of Bandhapani Tea Estate, then we came to Maraghat and from then there to this place we were cultivators. We grew plenty of rice and we ate rice and vegetables three times a day. As far as, I can remember and so far I heard from my father that the Bhotias were good. The collectors came once a year, collected rupees eight per family and left us to enjoy as much land as we could cultivate. The British came. They spoke sweet words. They gave us protection no doubt but they increased the rents, introduced many laws and we gradually lost our lands and we shifted to this place. Now I have only four acres of land that can hardly maintain my family”*.¹⁸

The above statements of the Meches shows the close relationship between the Meches and the Bhutiyas.

Objective of the studies

In spite of hare importance as the only connecting link between the entire north east region with the rest of Indian republic, Eastern Duars’ has failed to receive adequate justice in the hands of historians, both regional and Indian. The present work expects to evolve many critical aspects of socio-political and cultural condition of the Boros of Eastern Duars in a new dimension.

The period from 1866-1993 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 change, 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 and original sources, Assamese, English, Bodo and Zangkha, a narrative not merely of the successive stages in the establishment of British supremacy in the Duars, but also the period of subsequent reactions in its true perspective leading to the early phase of the so called Freedom movement in the Duars area.

The investigation of my research work mainly based on the process of changes, progress and development of the socio-political transformation of the Bodos of the eastern Duars. The motivation of this research is:

- 1) to ascertain what led the Bodos to assert their linguistic, cultural and political identity in the first quarter of the twentieth century and
- 2) to identify the social forces that were instrumental in the articulation of this identity.

The objectives of the research are:

- (a) to explore the role of the educated middle class in the consolidation of Bodo national identity and
- (b) to examine the factors responsible for the transformation of the Bodo movement from autonomy to secession.
- (c) What were the factors leading to the transformation of Eastern Duars into present BTC?
- (d) Since when and why the socio-political conflict between the Bodos and mainstream Assamese society begun?
- (e) What was the immediate reason of the Bodo slogan "Divide Assam Fifty Fifty"?
- (f) Which section of Bodo society took leading part in the Bodo Movement?
- (g) What was the impact of Bodoland movement on the Bodo society, on mainstream Assamese society and other smaller tribal groups in Assam?

(h) What is the contribution of the Bodo movement in the History and society of Assam in particular and in India in general?

This research is likely to contribute towards an understanding of the politics of social forces such as the middle class. The study may also stimulate future research on the nationality question in India because it highlights the response of the Indian State on this issue as a significant factor responsible for the alienation and marginalization of smaller nationalities like Bodos.

My thesis the “**Incorporation of the Eastern Duars to the Colonial Rule: The Socio-Political Transformation of Bodos of Eastern Duars (1864-1994)**” has been divided in to 6 chapters. Formulation of the chapter scheme has been done in such a way that it would be convenient to deal with the topic methodically.

Area of Study

The investigation of my research work is mainly based on the process of change, growth progress and development of the socio-political and ethnic transition of the Bodos of colonial eastern Duars. It also critically examine the process of transformation of colonial eastern Duars into present BTC.

Methodology

For the entire study the historical method of research has been adopted. Primary and secondary sources have been complemented by field work in the form of interviews.

Discussions

The chapter one deal in details of the physical & historical introduction to the ‘Eastern Duars’. It discusses that the Eastern duars had been ruled by different rulers at different times. It also discusses how this particular tract called Eastern Duars had been incorporated to the British rule when already other parts of India had been fighting against the British rule.

The second chapter discusses in details about the origin, early settlement and distribution of the Bodos in different parts of eastern India. It also discusses about the culture, religion and tradition of the Bodos.

The third chapter discusses about historical process of socio-cultural transition of the Bodos. It also explains historical background of the Bodo movements and the genesis of the transformation of Colonial Eastern Duars into present day BTC.

The fourth chapter deals in detail about the various socio-political movements of the Bodos for the protection their identity and ethnicity. This chapter also discusses about the nature and different phases of Bodoland Movement.

The fifth chapter discusses about the women participation in Bodo mass movement. This chapter also examines the impacts of these movements on the socio-political scenario of Assam from Academic point of view without any bias.

The chapter sixth is the summary of the previous chapters.

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Chapter 2

Introduction of the Bodos

India is a meeting ground of diverse races, cultures, civilizations, religions, languages, ethnic groups and societies. Streams of different human races like Austro-Asiatic, Negritos, Dravidians, Alpines, Indo-Mongoloids, Tibeto-Burman and Aryans penetrated in India at different periods through different routes. They migrated and settled in different parts of India making their own history, culture and civilization. They had contributed to the structuring of the great Indian culture, history and civilization. The Tibeto-Burman people are predominant in whole North-Eastern region. The Bodos are one of the earliest settlers in Assam.

The older generation of scholars used the term 'Bodo' to denote the earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to eastern India who subsequently spread over different regions of Bengal, Assam and Tripura. Grierson identifies the Bodos as a section of the Assam-Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman speakers belonging to the Sino-Tibetan speech family.¹ S.K. Chatterjee subscribes to the same view. According to him these people migrated to eastern India in the second millennium B.C. and a large portion of them was absorbed within societies of plains-man at quite an early state.² Isolation caused fragmentation of the original stock and ultimately the branches assumed independent tribal identities like the Tipra, the Bodo-Kachari, the Rabha, the Dimsasa, the Chutiya etc. Rev. Sydney Endle, in his monograph, *The Kacharis*, used 'The Kachari' in the same wider sense incorporating all these branches. In present day socio-political terminology 'the Bodo' means the plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley known earlier as 'the Bodo-Kachari'. The media at the regional and national level; officials at the Centre and the state political parties of all hues and the people in general have accepted what may be termed as the contraction of the original denotation. In

the light of this situation, in this study also the term 'Bodo' has been used in the new sense, meaning the Bodo-Kacharis of the Brahmaputra Valley. Rev. Endle identifies trans-Himalayan region between Tibet and China as the original home of the Bodos.³ S.K. Chatterjee is more specific when he suggests that 'the north-western China between the headwaters of the Huang Ho and Yang-Tsze Kiang rivers was the early home of the Proto-Bodos who migrated to eastern India in waves between the second millennium B.C. to the first millennium A.D. There are also other theories which we need not go into since the determination of the original home of the Bodos does not have any direct bearing on our study.' However, for our purpose, it is necessary to remember that scholars like Edward Gait, J.D. Anderson and K.L. Barua hold the Bodos as the autochthons of the Brahmaputra Valley. At present, they are concentrated mainly in the districts of Kamrupa, Goalpara, Darrang and Nagaon of the Brahmaputra Valley. According to the Census of 1971 the Bodo population of Assam was 6,10,450 in 1971. Amalendu Guha, on the basis of the Census of 1881 thinks that in the late nineteenth century the Bodos formed one third of the indigenous population of the Brahmaputra Valley.⁴

The Bodo or Boro are the largest indigenous tribe of Assam. The term 'Bodo' was for the first time used by B.H. Hodgson as an ethnological term to refer the Meches, the Bodo speaking people of Darjeeling District in 1846 while writing about them. Since then the word 'Bodo' has been used as a generic term to denote the different branches of the Bodo language group.

The Bodos are spread all over the plains of Brahmaputra valley of Assam along the foothills on northern boundary adjoining Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. The Bodos are the earliest Indo-Mongoloid migrants to eastern India who subsequently spread all over the different regions of Bengal, Assam and Tripura.⁵

G.A. Grierson in his work “Linguistic survey of India” identifies the Bodos as a section of Assam-Burman group of the Tibeto-Burman speaker belonging to the Chino-Tibetan speech family”.

Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee is also of the same opinion. According to him, *“these people migrated to eastern India in the second millennium BC and large portion of them were absorbed within societies of the plains.”*⁶

The Bodo speaking people called themselves as the Bodo or Boro fisa (means son of Bodo). According to G.A. Grierson Tibeto-Chinese stock of language originated in the plain areas of Yung-Tsze-Kiang and Huang-ho river of china. This family is now widespread throughout the western and the southern of the Asia continent including Burma, Assam and North east India. As per the classification given by the Robert Shafer, the Bodo language belongs to the branches of Baric section under the Baric division of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Language survey of India describes the Bodo language under the Bodo subsection under the Assam Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branches of Sino-Tibetan Chinese family. G.A. Grierson had also designated the Bodo as ‘Boro’ or ‘Bodo’. The Bodo groups comprises (as stated in the Linguist survey of India Voll-3, part-ii), the following tribes: Kachari or Bodo, Lalung, Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, Tripuri (Kok-Borok), Koch, Chutiya (Deori) and Moran. The group of tribes known as Bodo or Boro forms the most numerous and important section of non Aryan tribes of the province of Assam. Modhuras Boro says *“the Bodo or Boro speech community is now well spread throughout the north Eastern states of India including Assam, Arunachal, Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and North Eastern parts of West Bengal and adjoining area of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan”*.

Racially the Bodos of Assam belong to the Mongoloid stock. S. K. Chatterjee refers to them as ‘Indo-Mongoloid’ and the terms “defines at once their Indian connection”.⁷Some

other scholars prefer to use the term Indo-Tibetan. The physical features, such as snub nose, wide forehead, round face, scanty body hair, and high cheek bones, slit eyes and yellow skin colour points to their Mongoloid origin. This seems to pointing to Tibet and China as the original home of the race.⁸ S.K. Chatterjee located North-West China as the original homeland of Sino-Tibetan speakers. According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India, the upper courses of the Yang-Tsze-Kiang and the Huang-ho Rivers in the North-West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races.⁹ It can be suggested that the original homeland of the Bodos was in the Bodo country, now known as Tibet. Ajoy Roy believes that the name 'Bodo' was derived from 'Bod' from where they migrated.¹⁰ Most of the scholars have used the term to denote a community speaking the Sino-Tibetan Bodo languages rather than to denote a race. The generic term 'Bodo' was applied first by T.C. Hodgsons to Bodo group of languages and includes Kacharis (Bodos and Dimasas), Koches, Garos, Rabhas, Chutias, Tipperas, Hojais, Lalungs, and other allied tribes of North-East India.

Realistic approach in the study of Bodo History, culture and society was started only with the English writers. The Bodos living in different parts of India have been identified by different names. In addition to the Kacharis proper, S. Endle has classed the following tribes of Boro, Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgurias, Sarniyas, Di masas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, and Hajongs within the fold of the great Bodo race. To this Endle says, "May be one or two smaller communities e.g. the Morans, the Chutias of Upper Assam, whose language not altogether extinct as yet though apparently dying out rapidly, would seem to prove them to be closely akin to the Kochari (Bodo) race. The Bodos or Meches of Bengal called themselves as Bardhanari or Bwrdownari. The term Bardhanari is a suggestive to that section of the Bodo people who might have been the subjects of Harsha Vardhana, the great King of Northern India who was contemporary to Kumar Bhaskar Varmana, the king of

Asura dynasty of ancient Kamrupa. The term Bardhan or Bwrdown may have close connection with the Thardhan Confederation, Bardwan, Bardhaman, Boudha, Bodo etc.

The term Kachari is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mythical ancestry¹¹ and others regarded the Kachari as aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley i.e. the whole of modern Assam, North Bengal and parts of Bangladesh. They ruled the whole of Assam up to the 12th century A.D. and moved to the western part of the Brahmaputra valley, North Cachar hills and the plains of Cachar in the 16th century A.D. to evade the Ahom onslaught. In the course of time they spread over a larger area, and some of their groups became isolated from others. The census of 1881 listed 12 subgroups of them,¹² whereas counted fifteen of them identified nine communities as members of the Bodo speaking group. If we combine all the lists, we get a list of eighteen groups, e.g. Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madani, Mech, Rabha, Saraniya, Hojai, Garo, Rajbanshi or Koch, Chutiya, Moran, Hajong, Tippera, Mahalia, Dhimal, Solaimiya, Phulgariya.

According to Dr. N.N. Acharyya, the Kacharis are the earliest known indigenous habitants of Assam. They are known under different names in different places and ages throughout the North-Eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent. In Goalpara and North Bengal they are called Mech, in the north Cachar Hills, Dimasa. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the Kacharis are called Bodo or Bodo-fisa (son of the Bodo or Man). They were known to the Ahom as Timasa, clearly a corruption of Dimasa and therefore, this name must have been applied to them when they were ruling the Dhansiri Valley. "The idea of Dr. Acharya is based on the contemporary ethno-demographic structure and distributions of the Bodo people lying in North Bengal and Assam, which is very partial. His information about the present distribution of the Bodo population is incomplete and did not cover the areas like, Nepal, Tripura, Meghalay, Bangladesh. His concern is the present and not to the history of the past.

He is far distance from the Pre and archaeological part of Bodo History. It may be because of his preoccupation in approach and attitude towards the construction of Indian history in general due to which history of the Bodos and other aborigines failed to gain actual place in the History of India. Many of the historians failed to show balance in attitude, interest and approach in the study of Bodo History.

Eastern Bodos were known as Kacharis. They established Kingdom at Dimapur and later shifted to Kachar. Chutiyas, Borahi & Moran in upper Assam they also established Kingdoms of their own. In the last part of twentieth century number of archaeological sites have been discovered in different parts of upper and middle Assam. To ascertain the race, culture and civilization of these archaeological sites a systematic study with scientific approach is required.

The Kachari are now represented by the Mech in Western Assam, the Bodo in central Assam, the Dimasa and Hojai in the North Cachar hills and the Sonowal and Thengal in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. In the Cachar plains the Kachari are known as Barmans. As the Thengals are not schedule tribes, they have to be treated separately. The Dhimal, Mahalia, Solanimiya, and Phulgaria groups of the Kachari couldn't be traced during 1991 census.

Migration and Early Settlement of the Bodos

Regarding the migration of the Bodos in India the scholars are of different opinion. As the Bodos racially belonged to the Mongoloid race, it is most probable that they might have migrated from the Central Asia, the mainland of the Mongoloid people. Most of scholars are of the opinion that the people of Bodo origin migrated in India about 5000 B.C. and the Bodos or the Kiratas are the latest migrants before the Aryans.

According to Sydney S. Endle, there are possibilities of two migrations of the Bodos from the North and North-East into the rich valley of Brahmaputra. One group entered North-East Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sonkosh, and founded the powerful kingdom of Kamrup. The other made its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valleys into Eastern Assam and laid the foundation of Chutiya kingdom. Historians like Gait and P.C. Chaudhury have unanimously accepted that the Bodos filtered into the Assam valley cutting across various mountain passes and river courses from the North.

The Bodos migrated in successive waves and settled down at different locations in the Brahmaputra valley. Since they were nomads, they kept moving within the valley. Further, the pressure from new settlers forced them to penetrate deep into the valley. Hence their population is scattered all over Assam and even beyond the state. A faction of the Western migrants settled in the Jalpaiguri and Koch Behar districts of West Bengal, while another faction of the same flow settled in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara districts of Assam. It further spread out in the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur. In course of time these scattered groups acquired variations in language, customs, and culture and even, to some extent, physical features, through inter-marriage and close association with other inhabitants Koches and Sonowals in the Brahmaputra valley, Dimasas in north Cachar Hills, Drumans in Cachar Plains, Tripurians and other allied tribes in Tripura, Garos in Meghalaya, Hajongs in the adjoin foot-hills of Banglaesh, Meches in Lower Assam, North-Bengal and South-Eastern Nepal.

Anderson, in his introduction to Endle's book, 'The Kacharis', observes that no one who has heard the Kacharis, the Garos, the Meches, the Rabhas, and the Tipperas of the Bodo race speaking their own language can ever fail to recognize that they belong to the same linguistic group.¹³ Endle has divided the Great Bodo race under two sections: the Bodo-

Kacharis or the Plains Kacharis and Dimasas or the Hill Kacharis. In his division he has kept the Brahmaputra as the dividing line partly because he was influenced by the tradition he had narrated in his monograph. The tradition describes the prolonged struggle between the Chutiya Kacharis and the Ahoms and its aftermath which was responsible to a large extent for the wide division of the above mentioned two sections. He, however, believed that despite the separation, the two sections are of the same origin racially.

Endle writes that the people known to us as Kacharis and to themselves as Bada (Bara) were in early days the dominant race in Assam. In ancient Sanskrit literature the Indo-Mongoloids or Kacharis or Bodos were known as Kiratas or Mlechchhas, a people outside the Varna fold. It is believed by historians that this tribe must have covered the whole of Brahmaputra valley as is evident from the Bodo syllable 'Di' meaning water in the names of the rivers such as Dikhu, Dibong, and Dibru etc. Undoubtedly the Kachari people were very widely distributed.

The present day Bodos of North-East India were of course not known by the name of the Bodo by the others. During the time of epics and Puranas the present day Bodos were known as Danavas, Asuras, Rakhshasas, Daityas, Mlecchas, Kiratas, etc. The people whose life and culture were structured around the Vedic system gave these names. It appears that the presence of the various Mongoloid groups of Sino-Tibetan speaking people were noted by 10th century B.C., when the Vedas were compiled and the composite Hindu culture and civilization reached the Mongolian people's of North and North-Eastern mountains and plains from about that date. "Dr. S.K. Chatterjee proposed the name Indo-Mongoloid' as an equivalent to what the ancient Hindus was understood by the term Kirata. In the history of Assam the Mlecchas or the Mechas were the most important people as these people had molded and shaped the history of ancient Assam then known as Pragjyotishpur or Kamrupa". S.K. Chatterjee writes, "One may say that, the Bodos who spread over the whole of the

Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East-Bengal, forming a solid block of North-Eastern India, were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in eastern India, and they form one of the main basis of present-day population of these tract. Judging from the wide range of extinction of their language, the Bodos appear first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley, and extended west into North Bengal (in Koch Bihar, Rongpur and Dinaspur district). They may have pushed towards north Bihar also, and the Indo-Mongoloids who penetrated in the north Bihar might equally have been Bodos or Himalayan tribes allied to the Newars. Dr. T.C. Sarma stating the distribution of the Bodo people says, *“from the records in the Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (dated c.1000-800 B.C) it is known that the north eastern frontiers kingdom of India, a Mleccha territory ruled by the Bodo kings, referred to as Danavas and Asuras by Aryans of the Ganga Valley, was known as Pragjyotishpura (the eastern land of astrology) and later as Kamrupa with its Central shrine of mother Goddess Kamakhya on Nilachal hill overlooking the mighty Brahmaputra within the present metropolitan complex of Gauhati”*. He also goes on to say that, North Bengal and parts of east Bengal were ethnically and politically an extension of the Bodo Kingdom in ancient Assam.

Racial and cultural identities of Kiratas appear to have changed from age to age and from region to region. The evidences furnished in ancient Indian, Greek, and Roman classical literature may be taken as the source of information to ascertain their migration and settlement and which can further be supported and confirmed by philology, archaeology, history, ethnography and also processes of social, economic and political change; religious institutions and organizations of that time.

The descriptions provided in Rigveda, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Puranas, Brahmana and other classical Indian literature indicate that the Kirata settlements in different parts of ancient Indian sub-continent were as old as the civilization of the Vedas and epics, even

earlier. Ancient Indian classical literature depicts the socio-cultural interaction between the Kiratas and Non-Kiratas, i.e., Aryan, Dravidian, Austric etc. Vedic literature indicates the Kiratas as the people of low status, and living outside the Aryan fold during the Vedic age. “The Pulindas, Sabaras and Mutibas and other cognate sub-groups of Kiratas who lived together in the extensive forest tracts of the Vindhya region much later with each other are said to be the off springs of the cursed elder son of Viswamitra. They were outside the Brahmin community and were called Dasyus. During the Sutra period there were massive interaction between Aryans and Non-Aryans. The Kiratas living beyond the Aryandoms in western, northern and eastern sides were represented by other countries” and refers one section of Kiratas of the eastern region were gold complexioned and of extra-ordinary strength, nomadic, cannibals, and fair looking with sharp pointed hair knots or conical heads, whereas, the another section were island dwellers, raw fish eaters and fierce by nature. From this picture depicted in the text, it appears that they were none but the ancestors of Kiratas of North-Eastern India and the eastern land, which, according to R.D. Banerjee” and Buddhayana, this area referred to Anga, Vanga, Kalinga, Magadha. In ancient time there was no clear cut geographical boundaries between Bengal and Assam on political, linguistic and socio-cultural bases. They might have shared common socio-cultural zone with similar racial, and socio-cultural features, which were different from the Aryans.

According to Hodgson “*the basin of the Sapta Kusika or the country of the seven Kosis was the original homeland of the Kiratas of Nepal, who were once very powerful and the dominant race. This clearly indicates that, the people of Kirata origin inhabited the Sapta kosika regions. Some Orientalists historians say that Aryans drove out these people to Nepal. The process of extension of Aryan culture and civilization indicates that the Aryan culture and civilizations extended to all directions of India from Aryabatta. War and invasion were not essential part of the extension of Aryan culture and civilization. The Non-Aryan people*

accepted it because the social institution of the Aryans as the ways of life and instrument of social order proved to be far better in comparison to that of their own. Rajatantra, the system of absolute monarchy, as an instrument of governance, which was developed by the Aryan civilization, allured the non-Aryan kings and rulers and they accepted the system primarily because of the political, economic, administrative, religious and socio-cultural advantage of the ruling class through conversion to Hinduism. And like other Hindu kings, myth was created connecting his genealogy with one Hindu God and assumed the status of Kshatriya. These new Kshatriyas were not given equal status along with other Hindu Kshatriyas. As their Kshatriya origin is not racially based on Aryan race, for that reason Manu referred them as debased Kshatriyas”.

The views of Hodgson was also supported by S.K. Chatterjee and he says, *“The Aryan speech with the Vedic tire-cult does not appear to have been established over northern India beyond north Bihar-Bidegha or Mithila before 700 B.C. prior to that, in the area of North-Bengal and Assam, a powerful non-Aryan, possibly Tibeto-Burman, state may have arisen, with a mixed population of Austrics, Dravidians, and Tibeto-Burmans, the last, representing a group who were aggressive invaders from the east, perhaps being the dominant ruling class, as has happened many centuries later when the Ahoms came to Assam. This non-Aryan state, possibly ruled over by Indo-Mongoloids, was susceptible to upper Gangetic Brahmanical influence from the beginning. Traditionally, a ruler of this early Indo-Mongoloid state, Bhagadatta, took part in the Kurukshetra battle”.*

The Kiratas are to be found in northern and southern slopes of Himalaya, i.e. in Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. They inhabited much of the areas to the eastern side of Aryabatta. Uttarkhanda, extending from Kali on the east and to the Tong River on the west comprising Garwal and Kumaon region are inhabited by the people of Kirata origin. Since time immemorial, they lived in these regions. In the epic age, Uttarakhanda formed a part of

Kosala. Some scholars including S.K Chatterjee says that, Kassas, Kunidas, Nagos, Sakas, Gurjaras and allied tribes living in between the Satluj and the Beas in the Punjab hills; the tribes living in East-Punjab and North-West United Province Hills, all belongs to Western groups of complex pronominalised Himalayan Tibeto-Burman dialect. They were Hinduised long before and had completely given up their ancestral dialect in favour of the Aryan language.

The original home of the Sino-Tibetan speaking tribes or the people of Mongolian race were the North-western China. They spread from the upper reaches of the Yang-tsze-Kiang and the Hoang-Ho or Yellow river in different directions. They infiltrated into India partly from Tibet down the valley of Brahmaputra and partly from China through Burma by the Mekong, the Chindwin, Salween, and Irrawadi. Gradually they spread into different parts of Assam, Bengal, and sub-Himalayan tract of Nepal and down to the Ganges valley. Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetans speaking tribes dispersed in some groups to the west and north of Tibet (the present day Chinese province of Si-Kiang) from where they begin to spread east and south. Some of these early Tibeto-Burmans had penetrated within the frontiers of India either along the southern slopes of the Himalayas through Assam or by way of Tibet and further crossing the Himalayan barriers they established themselves into Nepal and Garwal-Kumaon. According to some historians, all categories of Mongoloid people cannot be brought under the category of Kirata, because the very term Kirata was meant only for those who settled in India extending from pre Vedic age down to the tenth century AD. This argument is not tenable, because the concept of the Kirata or Indo-Mongoloid is based on race not on time.

Greek and Roman classical literature mentioned about the Kirados' or Kirhodoeis (Kirhadai) located on the northern side of Ganga and Brahmaputra delta. Greek classical literature mentioned about the Nonos, who are identified as Kiratas settling near Arriana or

Aryabarta to the north-western side. The Kiratas, on the whole, as described in the classical literature, can be identified with those tribes of north-western and north-eastern India, including Assam, Bengal, Tripura, Orissa, and Sikkim and of Nepal, Tibet and Burma who had settled in the plains, valleys and hills between the epic age and the fifth century A.D. But classical literatures show that there were also Kiratas settled in other parts of India such as in Vindhya ranges, deltas, Ganga basin etc, with different names and biological features or physiognomy. Beyond the features of racial theory, classical Indian literature mentioned about the dark and very dark Kiratas. The dark Kiratas, might have been due to their dark skin did not figure in the study of 19th century anthropologists, social scientists and historians. Just because their complexions were dark, we cannot exclude these people from the category of Kiratas. We should examine the hypothesis from the point of bio-dynamics and influence of geographical conditions and natural environment. From the known zoological record it is said that, Africa is the original homeland of human beings. Zoological evidence of human settlement before 60000 years has been discovered in Africa. With what skin and physical traits did they migrate to the other parts of the world? Obviously it was with dark skin, similar types of physical features that of a Negroid built. Variation of men in physical traits in skin colour, body built etc. were the subsequent development in different geographical and socio-cultural circumstances.

According to the lexicographer, Amar Sinha, Kiratas, Sabaras and Pulindas are the three different branches of the Mlecchas. According to him there is no basic difference among these three groups. Kautilya also refers to the Sabaras, Pulindas, Candalas, and other wild tribes together. The Kiratas and the Sabaras have been mentioned by Dandin again and again as the same people. The identification of Kiratas with hills, the aboriginal tribes of Vindhya hills and Rajputana also corroborated by the accounts of Kalhana. It is generally held that the name Kirata was applied to the numerous fair complexioned or yellow coloured hills tribes of

Mongolian race who lived in all parts of the Himalayas. But on the basis of the description of their physical features available in the epics and Puranas, we find that they were of both yellowish and darkish complexion.

Grierson observed that the dialects of so called Kiranti group are closely related to dialect spoken by tribes, who have never claimed to be Kiranti. The historians and philologists have never paid any attention in this regard. Comparative studies of the languages spoken by different groups may be helpful to find out the truth. Hodgson with classical 'Cirrhadai' or Kirata has correctly identified the Kiratas living between the Sapta Kausaki and Sapta Gandagki. The Kiratas of Nepal, a very powerful people in the neighbourhood of the tribes on the northern frontier of the Himalayas are said to have held dominion down to the delta of the Ganges¹⁴.

In Bengali the term Karat or Kiret is applied disparagingly to moneylenders, extorting from poor debtors, to an exceedingly miserly person and to those, who were noted for their cruelty. 'Kirad', a common caste name in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Berar in Mahrastra is used in the sense of a (Hindu) merchant. In Buddha's time people of non-Aryan origin conducted trade in the areas of sixteen Janapadas including Mithila, Kusola and Magadha. These merchants were identified as Kiratas. These Kirata traders, later on, might have developed in to a homogenous group forming a common caste category. In western Punjab, the Hindus who were in majority were scornfully scalded by their Mohammedan neighbours as Kirat. This fact indicates that, a large group of Hindu people living in western Punjab once might have been Kiratas and at some point of time they became Hindus.

The Kiratas of south are mainly identified with Bedars or Boyas inhabiting mostly in the Hilly regions, forest tracts and outside areas in Mysore and Andhra Pradesh. They are found in Bellary and Karnool districts. They are believed to be the descendent of the old

Kirata class as forest tribe, hunters, mercenaries or fighters. The census of 1891 and 1901 showed that there was a district named Kirataka which is a clear indication that this land was once inhabited by Kiratas. (The Boya Tilari, on subversion of Vijayanagara dynasty seized various other districts. Karris, another Kirata group were found in existence in the Madras Census Report, 1891 and 1901, in northern Taluka of North Arcot and in the adjoining district of Cuddapa. The Bedars also figure in the early epigraphic records of Mysore. In ancient time they were regarded as Mlecchas and in course of time, they came under the great impact of Sanskritisation and consequently attained a higher grade of culture. As a result of their gradual cultural transformation, most of them joined the fold of Hindus and assumed the Hindu names. That is why, at present they mostly represent the Hindu caste.

Bodo concentration in the North-East

The Bodos are found in almost all the areas of Assam in various configurations though they came from Tibet and settled in the lower parts of Bhutan, later got scattered to the different parts of North- East India diachronically. They moved west and reached Cooch Behar, Rangpur, and Dinajpur districts of North Bengal and even North Bihar. Some sections of the Bodos moved southwards and settled in the Garo hills, Tripura, and Sylhet and Mymensing districts of the present Bangladesh. A section of the Bodos also migrated towards the east and crossed the river Brahmaputra, got settled in the North Cachar Hills district. Gradually, with the passage of time many changes crept in their language and culture and they acquired a new identity called the Dimasas. Some of them moved farther and in course of time got crystallized into distinct communities such as Morans, Borahis, Chutias, Thengal Kacharis, Sonowal Kacharis, etc.inhabiting the eastern part of Assam. The main concentration of the Bodos is in Assam. Their main habitat is now on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra, starting from Dhuburi and Kokrajhar district, Goalpara district in the west,

Dhemaji sub-division of Lakhimpur district to the east. The northern tract of Assam covers the following areas:

- a. North and Eastern parts of Dhuburi district, the whole of the Kokrajhar district and the northern most part of Goalpara district,
- b. Northern parts of Barpeta and Nalbari and northernmost part of Guwahati sub-division in the district of Kamrup.
- c. Northern part of Mongoldoi
- d. and Tezpur Sub-division in the district of Darrang ,
- e. Northern parts of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji sub-division in the district of Lakhimpur.

The southern bank of the river Brahmaputra and these are as follows:

- a. Dudhnoi and Dhupdhara areas in the southern part of Goalpara district.
- b. Dhupdhara – Boko- Chaygaon areas, Chaygaon Rani areas, South Gauhati-Sonapur-Khetri areas in the Southern part of Kamrup district.
- c. Jagiroad-Morigaon areas and Rupohi – Dhing area of Nowgaon district.
- d. Southernmost part of Sibsagar district c) Northeastern part of Dibrugarh district
- e. Howraghat – Langhin areas of Karbi – Anglong district.

In the neighbouring states

- a. Tikrilla area of Garo hills in the Meghalaya state.
- b. Dimapur area in the Nagaland.
- c. Northern part of the Jalpaiguri district in the state of West Bengal. Among the areas of the northern tract of Assam; Kokrajhar is the highest Bodo concentrated district in the state of Assam.

Bodo population in Assam state

The physical area of BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) will comprise of four new districts-Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang. On the north bank of Brahmaputra, the present BTC area is being carved out of eight districts Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. The area of these eight districts is more than 27,100 sq. kilometers and about 35% of the total area of Assam. The following two tables show the total population pattern of undivided eight districts of Assam and the total population of BTC as per the census report of 2001.

Table No. 1.

Districts	Population
Dhubri	6,3965
Kokrajhar	9,304,04
Bongaigaon	9,06,315
Barpeta	7,74,229
Nalbari	11,84,564
Kamrup	1,12,796 (1991)
Darrang	7,59,712
Sonitpur	1,02,369 (1991)

Census report: 2001

Table No. 2.

Total Population of BTC-26,31,289

Kokrajhar	8,98,991
Chirang	3,43,626
Baksa	7,17,642
Udalguri	6,71,030

Census report 2001.

The Bodo people are one, if not the largest, of the eight plains tribal people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.¹⁵

Comprehensive History of the Bodos

The Bodo people do not have written history of their own. Classical Indian literatures provide -us a lot of information regarding prehistoric civilization of the Kirata-Bodo people. We cannot accept all these information as it is. The historicity of the classical Indian literatures is to be tested and supported by archaeology, religion, and language, political system, economic system, culture, tradition, geography etc. of the people living in this vast region since prehistoric time. We cannot say with certainty about the history of the society, culture, civilization of the Bodos and their allied groups. Information based on interdisciplinary approaches provides us some genuine premises on the basis of which we can understand about the migration, settlement, and extension of culture and civilization of the Bodo people since prehistoric time. Nobody has taken appropriate initiative for the discovery of history of Kirata-Bodos living in India since prehistoric time. The information collected so far from classical Indian literature and the archaeological evidences are not interpreted properly and failed to expose the actual history of the autochthonous people and their contribution to Indian culture, history and civilization. Though it is impossible to reconstruct the Bodo culture and society in its original forms and characters with the areas they established civilization in the past with glories and pride; but at least we can make an honest endeavour to reconstruct their history as it was and help understanding their relation with other groups. In the First Chapter, "Historical Perspectives" ethnographic descriptions of the Bodos are made in brief. Extensive discussion is made on migration, transmigration, and areas of settlement in which they established kingdoms and domination of the Bodos and other Kirata-Mongoloid groups in different parts of India since prehistoric time.

Great writers on ethnography, history, language, anthropology, religion, society etc. identify Bodo people as distinct from the rest of the Indian people socio-culturally, racially and linguistically. Recent studies conducted on the origin, growth, development and change in

Indian societies, extension of Aryan culture, language, religion, and traditions, turned this proposition as a fallacy. Rather it is clearly exposed that the complete segregation of the Kirata-Bodo people from Aryan, Austric and Dravidian speaking people or Vis a Vis, linguistically, racially, socio-culturally and demographically is historically and scientifically quite unrealistic. Complete segregating of these people from Aryans and other neighbouring people is quite unscientific. Variation in Physical feature of man is not only determined by mutation or gene but also determined, by other factors. Without interbreeding also there can be physical variation in human organism due to influence of certain physical and socio-cultural circumstances.¹⁶

Geographical and Topographical studies made by geographers, geologists and ethnographers discovered a number of toponamical evidences, i.e. the names of places, rivers etc. in Bodo language. This also indicates that the people of Bodo origin once inhabited these areas. Since prehistoric time, great waves of socio-cultural changes swept over the Bodo society. From Bodo Socio-cultural existential point of view we can divide these changes into two major phases as, phase of Deconstruction and phase of Reconstruction. Again the phase of Deconstruction may be divided into two broad categories. First one, starting from prehistoric time till the advent of the Islamic culture and civilization. This phase of Deconstruction encompasses the socio-cultural interactions between the Kirata-Bodos and Aryan speaking people since the time of Vedas and subsequently extension of Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism amongst them in the form of Tantricism, Saktoism, Saivism and Vaisnavism consecutively. These series of Changes alienating the structural and functional system of the Bodo Society may be explained with reference to the concept of Sanskritisation. The process of Sanskritisation covers imitation of Hindu ideals and conversion to Hinduism. The imitation often brought partial change in different aspects of social structure; on the other hand conversion commonly replaces the total structural and functional system of the society.

The total changes brought in the structural and functional system of a society through the acceptance of Hinduism is defined as the 'Process of Absorption of Tribes and non-Hindus into the fold of Hindu'. These two processes brought thousands of Bodo people into mainstream Bengali and Assamese society or even more to other societies with Hindu Social structure. The second phase of the Deconstruction started with the advent of Islam and it was the last and greatest wave of Deconstruction that ever came and swept Over the Bodo society. Since the advent, growth and development of Aryan culture, language and civilization in India continued constantly for thousands of years, the Bodos and other Indo-Mongoloid people had been in the constant process of socio-cultural absorption under Aryanisation of language, religion and culture. The great variety of social changes that have ever taken place in structural and functional system of the Bodo Society within the jurisdiction of the concept of Sanskritisation/Aryanisation and Hinduisation is discussed in Chapter-IV. It covers basically the process of Hinduisation in different forms, Sanskritisation, Hinduisation, Vaisnav movement etc. The phase of reconstruction started only with the advent of British and their establishment of imperialism in India.

The earliest mentioned king of kamrupa or pragjyotisha, as it was known in more ancient times was a non Aryan named Mahiranga danava. His name was evidently Mairong for a hill on the seven mile of the Gauhati-Shillong road is still known as 'Mairong parbat'. The name Mairong was sanskritised into Mahiranga. It is clearly a Bodo name and the people of this race who then inhabited the country were called Kiratas and Mlechhas as they were Mongolian immigrants. Mahiranga is said to have been succeeded in direct descent by Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur. Mahiranga is called a danava but his descendants were called asuras. This shows that epithets like danava and asura were applied indiscriminately to all non-Aryans. After the Kings came Ghatakasur who is described as the ruler of the Kiratas perhaps he belonged to the same dynasty to which Hatakasur, Sambarasur and Ratnasur

belong. He was overthrown by Naraka who founded a new dynasty. Naraka was also known as Narakasura in some of the epics and he claims himself to be the descendant of Bhauma dynasty (Born of earth). Again the word Bhauma is a Bodo word meaning the earth. That is why it is probable that Naraka also was a Bodo King.

Therefore the oldest legendary figures in history of Assam, Mahiranga Danava, Ghatakasura and Naraka were all Kiratas. Mention about them in Puranic records, Ramayana etc proves their contact with the Aryans. In Mahabharata, references have been made about Bhagadatta, the ruler of Pragjyotishpur, who might have had some sort of tributary relation with the powerful Kaurava kings till 650 A.D.¹⁷ It is said that Bhagadatta took part in the battle of Kurukshetra with a large number of Chinese and Kirata soldiers.

There is no definite record available about the Kings of Assam. The first epigraphical record of any royal kingdom in Assam is found in Allahabad Rock Inscription of the powerful North-Indian King Samudragupta (335-376 A.D.), wherein Kamrupa is mentioned as a frontier kingdom paying tribute to Samudragupta. Pushya Varman, who claimed his lineage from Bhagadatta, was a Bodo King who laid the foundation of Kamrupa kingdom and the Varman dynasty in the North-East of Brahmaputra. It was the time when the power of Pragjyotishpur was declining. To protect himself from the wrath of the powerful North Indian king, whose territory was extended up to Bengal, the Kamrup King might have entered into the above mentioned tributary relation. It is probable that by that time a process of Hinduization and Sanskritization had started among the Bodo royalty. As Bhagadatta claimed himself as the descendant of Naraka-Bhauma dynasty, therefore it is no doubt that the Varman dynasty was of Bodo origin.

From the middle of the seventh century A.D. source materials in the form of epigraphs are available for the reconstruction of the history of Assam. E.A. Gait states that there are properly speaking no historical data available till Heien Tsang wrote his travelogue. He

further remarks that form the store narrated by Tsang, all that one can gather with certainly is that the Brahmaputa Valley was known to the Aryan invaders of India at a very early period and that the process of converting the aboriginal tribes into Hinduism is much older than existing records on the subject.¹⁸

It was during the reign of Bhaskar Varman that Hieun Tsang visited Kamrup on the former's request. Bhaskar Varman was a great ruler of Assam and he maintained friendly relations with the greatest contemporary ruler of North India, Harshavardhana. His dominion had spread over a considerable part of North Bengal. Thus a Hinduised Indo-Mongoloid empire was built by the middle of the seventh century A.D.¹⁹

After the end of Varman dynasty, the Salstambha and the Pala dynasties who both claimed themselves to be descendants of Naraka-Bhauma dynasty ruled Assam till 100 A.D. Salastambhas have been mentioned as Mlechchha in the Borgaon Copper Plate Inscription of the eleventh century and it is a fact that they were Bodos. So far as the Palas are concerned historians differ in opinion. S K Chatterjee puts them as separate entity from the Bodos while B K Baruah does not consider them as being separate from the Salstambhas.

After the death of Tyagashimha, the last ruler of Salstambha dynasty, Pala dynasty rose into power. According to another inscription of Ratnapala, the first king of Pala dynasty was the relative of Tyagashimha of Salstambha.

The close observation of the historical dynasties of Kamrupa and Pragjyotishpur it is seen that right from Naraka to the Palas all claimed themselves to be the descendants of Bhauma dynasty. That is why there is no doubt that all of them belonged to the great Bodo group of people.

Minhaj-Ud-din, in his work, *Tabagot-i-Nasiri* stated that, the country (Kamrupa) between Gaud and Tibet was inhabited by three Races, i.e. Koch, Mech and Tiharu. Khara Vana, a Mech Chief founded a kingdom in Sylhet and he was also completely Hinduised and

his dynasty traced their descent from Bhima-Hiddimba". The Mech Kings of Sylhet were given "the same pedigree as the ruling house of Kachar, as they had the same speech Bhima-Hiddimba's son Ghatat Kacha was made their ancestor." The southern Maches or Bodo, who ruled over the old kingdom of Patti Kera (Comilla) were entirely Aryanized in speech. The Maches known as Tipra in Tripura were under the title of Manikya who also had been Hinduised at an early period.

During 1416-1418 a King named Donuja Mardana ruled over Bengal. He was Koch chief of North Bengal, that is, he was racially Bodo or Mech tribe. Another Branch of Bodo belonging to Kamboja tribe came from north-western Punjab to Bengal and founded a new ruling house. The Kamboja or Koch-Bodo domination did not last long. The Pala King, Mahi Pala I, (c-992-1042) drove them out from their ancestral sovereignty.

In 1205, the Turks under Muhammad Bin Bakhtyar Khilji invaded Kamrup with an intention to conquer Tibet. According to the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, of Minhaj-us-Siraj, at that time the inhabitants of Kamrup belonged to the Koch, the Mech and the Tharu communities. The Turks were defeated but in the beginning of the thirteenth century the Turks again attacked Kamrup and occupied the kingdom for some time until the Kamrup King fought back and defeated them.

In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachari kingdom extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu to the Kallang, or beyond, and included also the Valley of Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar Sub-division.²⁰ It was the time when the Ahoms appeared in the political scene of Assam and laid the foundation of Ahom rule of long six hundred years. They found the Kacharis as the most important and prominent of their western neighbors. Historical records of the eastern branch of the Bodos show that under the name of chutiya they had established a powerful kingdom in the eastern corner of the province, at or near Sadiya. They were engaged in prolonged wars with the

Ahoms. The Ahoms subsequently subdued the Morans, Borahis and other Kacharis tribes living in the northern slope of these hills. With the establishment of Ahom rule, the political history of the Bodos became clear. The first collision between the Ahoms and the Kacharis occurred in A D 1490, when the Ahom king Sudan-pha was defeated and driven across the Dikho.²¹ This defeat made them cautious and later they handled their turbulent neighbours with greater wisdom and care. In 1536 the Kacharis were defeated by the Ahoms and their capital Dimapur was annexed. They removed their capital first to Maibong in North-Kachar Hills and then to Khaspur on the southern Barail. From that time onwards the Kachari princes were regarded as “feudatory chiefs”²² of Ahom King. But the Kachari Kings resented this very much and tried to regain their independent status whenever the Ahom government was involved in some sort of trouble.²³ The tributary capacity of the Kachari kings helped them retain their hold over some selected tracts like Kapili valley within the fringes of Ahom territory even till the beginnings of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha, the Kacharis and Moamorias attacked the Ahoms near Raha in the Kapili valley which was described as Kachari territory.²⁴ So despite Ahom subjugation, the Kacharis had been able to retain certain territories under their control.

The Koches were the only branch of the widely spread Bodo race with authentic history . In 1515 A.D. Bishwa Singh laid the foundation of a powerful Koch kingdom that extended from river Korotoya in the west up to the river Barnadi in the east comprising a greater part of North Bengal and Western Assam. Bishwa Singh was the descendant of Chickna Jwhwlao, a Bodo chieftain of western Assam with his capital at sicknajahar, some 18 kilometers away from Kokrajhar town, on the bank of river Samoka in Bhutan foothills. The sixteenth century Assam was dominated by Ahom-Koch relations. The reign of Koch king Narnarayana (1533-1540) represents the zenith of the Koch power and his armies which were led by his brother Sukladhwaj or Silarai, met with almost unvarying success. Nara Narayana

entered the Ahom capital Gargaon (modern Nazira) and did not leave till he had received the submission of the Ahom King. The Kachari Raja and the Raja of Manipur were reduced to the position of feudatory chief. After his death, the Koch Empire was divided into two states- Koch-Hajo in Goalpara and Koch-Bihar in North-Bengal. This division eventually weakened the Koch power.

Ahom-Kachari clashes continued with intermittent breaks only during the Muhammadan invasions. Even then the Kacharis were regarded as subjugatory or thapita sanchita in their dealings with the former. Rudra Singha (A.D. 1696-1747) brought the Kacharis under his jurisdiction. He then compelled the Kachari kings to cede further plains territories in the southern part of the present Nowgong district. The Ahom subsequently occupied the whole tract from Sibsagar to Nowgong. They allowed the Kacharis to retain a small portion of the southern part of Nowgong and the hilly tracts on condition of payment of an annual tribute to the Ahom kings.

Various circumstances compelled the once powerful Kacharis to recognize the supremacy of the Ahoms and abandon their plains territories to them, but still they do not give up their hostile attitude towards the Ahoms till the end of Ahom rule in Assam. As the Ahom kingdom started to decline, the Kacharis too were losing their strength. Towards the later part of the eighteenth century the Bodos had fallen so swiftly on the slide of history that for more than a century the Bodo-Kacharis were left in complete oblivion.

The Bodo had exercised sovereignty in Assam under different names at different times. The western section of the old Bodo (Kacharis) occupied the thrones of Koch-Bihar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. An eastern branch in the name of Chutiya also established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Sadiya and then a section of eastern Bodos maintained their kingdom with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur in the face of continuous invasions of the Ahoms and neighboring powers till the advent of British rule in Assam. This

section of Bodos is known to us as Dimasas or Dimasa kachari (hill Kacharis).²⁵ The last migration of Bodo King from Maibong (N C Hills) to Khaspur (North-Cachar) made Cachar Valley the ultimate seat of Bodo royal power. Eventually, the kingdom disintegrated beyond repair under the regime of Govinda Chandra Narayan into two parts: one under Govinda Chandra and the other comprising Northern and Central portion of the kingdom was taken over by Tularam Senapati with the help of British intervention Govinda Chandra was murdered on 24 April, 1830. Following which his kingdom was temporarily placed under Lieutenant Fisher, who was entrusted with the power of a Magistrate and a Collector. Finally on 14 August 1832, the Governor General of India annexed the plains of the Bodo kingdom of Cachar to the British dominion. Tularam Senapati who had been allowed to retain his dominion was pensioned off in 1854 and his dominion annexed to the paramount power.

S. K. Bhuyan states that the kingdom of Cachar was only one of the numerous states set up by the political genius of the Kachari people.²⁶ The Kacharis living outside the fringes of Cachar remained loyal to the Kachari monarch and the bonds of union among the Kacharis, whether within Cachar or outside, were very strong. There is no record of any attempt to fuse the scattered Kacharis into one political unit. The Kacharis living in Assam could never dream of transferring their allegiance from the Ahom monarch to the Kachari King at Dimapur or Khaspur, though the latter belonged to their own tribe.

Conflict and assimilation are part of any living society. No society can remain static. The Bodos went through both conflict and assimilation throughout their existence in the Brahmaputra Valley. Their socialization with various other communities has greatly metamorphosed the language and culture they brought with them from their original habitat. But despite interaction and assimilation they have retained some aspects of their cultural identity intact over the ages, i.e. language, religion, way of living etc.

Aryan influence over the Bodos remained confined mostly to the Bodo royalty. Although the process of Hindization continued till the advent of British in Assam, the masses remained untouched. No attempt was made before the ek saran dharma of Sri Sankardev to draw the masses into the pale of Hinduism.²⁷

The early Bodo settlers of Assam had spoken their own dialect. In course of time, the interaction, assimilation and integration of various cultures, religions, races and civilizations produced a distinctive synthesis of the Valley's culture, economy and polity,. As a result, Assamese language developed as a link language along multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-caste, multi-cultural and multi-lingual along with other tribal languages contributed greatly to the development of Assamese language.²⁸

The traditional religion of the Bodos in Bathou which is worshipped once in a year by the entire village community which is known as *Kherai*. The Aryan influence has definitely caused some changes in their social as well as religious life. They practice patriarchal system of descent and inheritance.

Traditional Bodo economy is agro-based. Before practicing settled cultivation the Bodos used to be Jhum cultivators. Rice is their main food. Rice beer or zou is their traditional beverage. Apart from consuming regularly this zou is used in almost every religious and social ceremony. They are very fond of chewing betel nuts. Weaving is ingrained in the blood of a Bodo woman.²⁹

Dress and Ornaments

Dresses and ornaments of the Bodos are the symbol of their traditional art and culture. Most of the tribes belonging to the Mongolian races in the North Eastern Region of India deserve the same character of dresses and ornaments. Their arts of such dresses and

ornaments are the intrinsic reflections of the nature within which they are shaped and moulded. However, at present the dresses and ornaments of the modern Bodos do not differ from their Aryan neighbours. Since ancient time, the indigenous people like Bodos were accustomed with the production of clothes from the tread of Eri and Muga. The Eri cloth is of dub colour and is durable. It is light but warm, in ordinary cold season, wrap of the Assamese (Referring to the people of ancient Assam including all tribes) is generally made of this cloth. Bodo women are expert in rearing the “EndiEmphou”(Eri worm) and Muga latha (Muga worm) and find out treads from them.They weave different kinds of clothes like “Dokhna” (Women’s dress for covering the whole body), zwmgra (Chadar or oruna or scarf of woman), Gamosa (Cloth for covering the lower part of the body by man and sometimes used in bath), Phali or Rumal (Handkerchief), Sima (Big and wide cloth used as rugs during the winter season) etc. out of the treads of Eri and Muga. Traditionally Bodo men folk used to wear a garment called Gamsa to cover the body from waist down to the knee. Previously Bodo old men used to wear wooden footwear known as Khwrwm (Karam in Assamese). There was no use of shirt in the past. They only used a type of cloth known as zwmgra made of Eri and a small cloth on the shoulder during the winter and summer season respectively. But now-a-days they put on modern dresses available in the market. The dresses of Bodo women are a distinguishable feature of Bodo culture. A man can identify Bodo womenfolk seeing the dresses of her. Bodo woman wears her Dokhna “covering the body from the chest down to the ankle. Its length and breadth is made in such a way that it can be tied one round at a time in the waist. Dokhna or Dokhona is made of varied colors and Agor. The Dokhna without Agor is called Salamatha or Matha. Dokhona Thaosi is generally meant for use of bride, “Bwirathi” (Woman receptionist of bride and bridegroom in Bodo marriage) and “Doudini” (A dancing woman in Kherai puza) or during the festivals or other ceremonies. Now-a-days Bodo woman wears blouse in her body and covers it with zwmgra (Scarf).

The zwmgra covers the upper portion of the body. Bodo women wears various colours of scarf with full of Agor to beautify themselves. Seeing this beautiful art of the Bodo women Lady Hydery (Wife of the first Governor of Assam) made this comment, “I have travelled throughout the world with my husband but I have not seen that a mother has spun and woven the cloth for herself and for her children.” A species of various types of Agor which bloom in the art of Bodo Women are given below:

- a. Phareo Megon (Pigeon eye).
- b. Daorai Muukhreb (Winkle of peacock).
- c. Phul Mwbla(Varieties of bloomed flowers).
- d. Daosa Mwkhref (Winkle of chicken).
- e. Maozi Agan (Footprint of cat).
- f. Dinkhia Mohor (A design representing fern of Dhekia).
- g. Gangu Godo (An Agor representing the shape of a kind insect called Gangu).
- h. Sinri Bibar (A design representing the Singri flower).
- i. Bwigri Bibar (A design representing the flowers of plum).
- j. Gonjar thaisip (A design representing the fruit of Nui tree).
- k. Thaigir Bibar (A design representing the flower of Thaigir plant and it also feeling of failed love).
- l. Gandola agor (A design representing an insect Gandoula).
- m. Khulshi Dentha (A design representing the spoon).
- n. Muphur Apha (A design representing the footprint of bear).
- o. Laoson Agor (A design invented by a Bodo girl called Laosong).
- p. Mokhordoma Agor (A design representing a litigation or zig zag).
- q. Banduram Agor (A design first crafted by Bandhuram kachari).
- r. Agor Gidit (A design representing a Diamond shape).

- s. Gorkha Gonbruui Agor (design representing twill).
- t. Daokhi Agor (A design representing stool of a hen).
- u. Mwitha bibar (A design representing a kind of vegetable's flower)

The favourite colours of the Bodos are generally Gwmw (Yellow), Gwthan (Green), and Bathogan (Colour of parrot's feathers). So Bodos most popularly used words "Gwmw-Gwthan-Bathogan" represents it.

Ornaments:

It is a well known fact that the Indo-Mongoloid Bodos used a lot of gold ornaments available in those days. Gradually silver, bronze etc. became popular among them. There were about ten streams which produced gold more or less abundant in the district of Darrang. British people extracted gold from those rivers when they ruled India. Bodo used varied types of ornaments in the nose, ears, neck and hands. They wore or still wear phulkhuri, dul, boula (For upper ear), phuti (A design of flower attached to earlobe) in ear. The ornaments of the nose are Nakhaphul (A hole is made on the skin of upper side of the nose for holding the), Nolot (Holding from the middle of two nostrils), buluki (Nose pendent) etc. Bodo woman wears ornaments in the neck also. The popular ornaments are-

- a. Chandra Har (A heavy necklace).
- b. Bisa Har (A necklace).
- c. Thanka Siri (Around neck ornament).
- d. Zibou Zinziri (A snake like chain).

The popular ornaments of the hands are asan or bangle both big and small. Small bangle is called asan Suri and big bangle is called asan. The dresses and ornaments of the

Bodo men and women have changed radically except Dokhna and Phasra/Zwmgra of women. All Bodo women still put on Dokhna and Phasra/Zwmgra to symbolize their culture. Their ornaments of ear, nose, neck, hair style are now modified according to the modern design of present time. Now-a-days they do not want to stick to old styles and fashions. They have used various types of treads or yarns for Dokhna suited for their use. Sometimes Bodo women are also found wearing other Indian dresses like sarees, churidars etc. especially in town.

Social Groups

There are beliefs associated with the creation of the social groups, five regulations of the Bodos known as the Baad system, beliefs and practices associated with various birds and animals, with agriculture and the penance method.

The main social groups are: Swargiari, Basumatari, Narzari, Musahari, Gayari, Owari, Khakhlari, Daimari, Lahari, Hajoari, Kherkatari, Sibingari, Sabairiari, Bibairiari, Bingiari, Mahilari, Ramsiari, Sangphramari, Phadangari, Islari, Ganjlerari, Bargawari, Thalirari etc.³⁰

These groups seem to signify some kind of kinship. According to the belief these were mainly created on the basis of certain specific duties entrusted to a group or a clan to perform certain functions by the Monsing-Sing-Borai (supposed to be the first human being on the earth). This resulted in a disciplined society with a healthy atmosphere.

1. Swargiari: Swarga (heaven) + ari (group). Endle describes as a heavenly folk. The priesthood dauris and ojas are selected from this class and the society entrusts the duty of worshipping the gods from among the Swargiaris.

2. Basumatary: Bwiswmata (mother earth) +ari (group). They are known as the landlord class of people. This group is entrusted with the responsibility of solving the land problem, distribution of land, settlement of any disputes relating to land holding.
3. Narzary: Narzi (dry leaf of jute plant) + ari (group). It is believed that the person of Narzari group were entrusted with the duty to collect and supply narzi gwan (dry leaves of the jute plant during the sraddha ceremony. After cremation takes place, people chew narzi leaves to sever relations with the dead person. In the present Bodo (mech) society of West Bengal the people of this group use the surname Narzinari.
4. Mwshahary: Mwsha (tiger) + ari (group). The duty of the clan is basically to ensure the safety of the domestic animals from the danger of the attack by tigers. Some people also believed that people with magical powers could transform themselves into tigers and kill the domestic animals. Some people use the surname Baglari, instead ofMushahari.
5. Goyary: Goi (areca) + ari (group). This group of people were traditionally associated with the planting of areca trees.
6. Owary: Owa (bamboo) + ari (group). They are believed to have planted bamboo trees for the first time. Large quantities of bamboo were collected by this group for the elaborate festivals like Kherai and Garja.
7. Khakhrary: Khankhala (a plant) + ari (group). A long grass like plant which is used during the Kherai festival. The belief is that people of this group were engaged to collect Khangkhala plant for the Kherai festival.
8. Daimary: Daima (big river) + ari (group). It is understood that some people who lived by the banks of the river got their livelihood by fishing. People also used to float down logs in the river to the towns or market centre where wood was sold. These people got their name Daimari also because they were suppliers of books.

9. Lahary: Lai (leaves) + ari (group). These were the people who collected leaves in large quantities for the festival.
10. Hajoary: hajo (hill) + ari (group). It is probable that the name of the clan was derived from the habitat. People who lived in the hills or the foothills might have been called Hajoary.
11. Kher Katary: kherkata (cutting of thatch) + ari (group). The people of this group are very few in number. The people of this clan are generally found in the districts of Kamrup in Assam.
12. Sibingary: Sibing (sesame) + ari (group). This commodity is essential in Assam. The people who were engaged in collecting or supplying sesame were called Sibingary.
13. Bingiary: Bingi (string instrument) + ari (group). Bingiary clan is supposed to have made this traditional instrument to play during the religious festivals.

At present people of this community is rarely found. These clans and many more have been accounted in the works of Bodo scholars. Many are no more found anywhere. The reason being that most of the duties and functions of the community barring a few are defunct. The status of the groups or the clans is of equal status. The Bodos of Assam and West Bengal have been maintaining their connection with the groups through their surnames only. Though it is observed that this clan's or group's social, cultural and economic significance has been lost today.³¹

Festival

Festivals constitute a significant part of the culture of the Bodo people. The Bodos have a rich tradition of festivals. They have many festivals where the Bodo people both men and women wear colourful traditional dresses and they dance and sing. These Bodo people

are known best for their colourful folk dances.

Festivals of the Bodos can be divided into: Seasonal or agricultural

- a. religious
- b. ritualistic and
- c. ceremonial

Further the seasonal or agricultural festivals can be divided into:

- i. Bwisagu, in the month of Bwisagu or Bohag (in the mid April): One of the most cherished festivals of this tribal group is Bwisagu. It is basically a springtime festival and is celebrated during mid April. Bwisagu is the most cherished festival of the Bodo Kacharis of Assam and is celebrated by the Bodo. The Bodos celebrate it as a springtime festival at the advent of the New Year, which is during mid April. Bwisagu begins with worship of the goat. The next day, which synchronizes with the first day of the month of bohag of the Assamese calendar, the actual merriment begins. The supreme deity Bathou or Lord Shiva is worshipped during the festival by offering chicken and rice beer.

The beautiful Bagurumba dance is an integral part of Bwisagu. This is mainly a formation dance with slow steps and outstretched hands. About a score of girls dressed in most colourful attire perform this dance accompanied by Bodo traditional musical instruments. The traditional musical instruments that are used in this dance festival are khum (drum), jotha (manjari), Khawan (taal), gogona (mouth-organ) and siphung (flute) zabkhring etc. It is also customary to use the same at the time of closure of the Bwisagu.

- ii. Domasi or Magw or Bhogali, in the month of Magh (in the mid January)
- iii. Katrigacha or Kati Bihu, in the month of Kati (in the month of October - November)

Religious festivals of the Bodos include Kherai, Garza and Marai.

Kherai Puza

Kherai, the greatest national festival traditionally celebrated by the Bodos has been more religious rather than social in its nature and content involving sacrifices but wears a look of great social and its performance with great pomp and grandeur in the mood and its performance.²⁵ In Kherai puza, the altar is placed in the rice field. This is the only festival where the entire atmosphere of the traditional society becomes fully surged. In the Kherai festival, Bathou is worshipped along with 18 (eighteen) Gods and Goddess in the various contexts. Bathou represent the five basic elements of life-processes i.e. the Panchabhuta. These are: earth, air, water, weather and fire. These basic elements are the root of everything. Kherai puja begins with various religious and traditional dances and songs and playing of musical instruments. These are performed in their honour and glory. The dances are essential and inevitable part of the Kherai worship and they are exhibited in items serially and chromatically. The items carry different and distinct significances of various Gods and Goddess. The dance represents the activities and behaviors of Gods and Goddess. The dances are initiated, guided and controlled by the deodhani or dwudini, who is the focal figure of the dances. The duudini or deodhani is supposed to be the perfect embodiment or representative of the supreme power. Dwudini or deodhani is the female Shaman or women oracle. The Kherai dance is strictly restricted to the womenfolk. Men are allowed only to play on various musical instruments, yet they have to maintain the honorable distance with the precinct.

Kherai festival is celebrated in the month of Kati (October - November), before harvesting and just after completion of all plantation work. It is believe that this festival has some sort of relationship with the fertility cult. Virtually Garza and marai do not fall within the range of festival.

Garza and marai festivals are associated with Bathou worship of the Bodo people. From the time immemorial they worship the Lord Shiva. These religious rites of the Bodo

people commonly worshipped and performed by all the villagers at a particular worshipping place; but the marai is a religious rite worshipped and performed privately by the individual families to satisfy the Goddess marai. Mara puja is not largely prevalent as Garza among the Bodo people. Other important festivals of the Bodos include aapsa hatarnai, wnkham gwrlwi zanai.

Religion

The traditional religion of the Bodos is called Bathou which has been practiced since time immemorial in South East Asia. This religion is invariably linked up with and centred round the worship of Bathoubwrai or Sibwrai i.e. the supreme god of the Bodos. Hence it is known as Bathou religion. In the Bodolanguage, *Ba* means five and thoumeans deep philosophical thought. These five elements are- Bar (Air), San (Sun), Ha (Earth), Or (Fire) and Okhrang (Sky). Hence, Bathou means five principles, significances which are mysterious: not easy to understand and feel without meditation. Amongst the follower of Bathou religion, God is known as the Bathou Bwrai. In Bodo language, the word Bwrai signifies the oldest or most elderly man in power and knowledge or the supreme in all respects. Therefore, he exclusively represents supreme soul, poromatma, who is omnipotent, omniscientand omnipresent. Fire can't burn him, water can't moisten, air can't dryhim and spear can't pierce him. He is the illuminator of all earthly objects; He is the source of all knowledge and lights. He bestows us everything we need in this world.

The creator of these five elements is called ***Bathou Bwrai*** or the God. After creating physical form of a man with the composite elements, he confers his spirit to inanimate body which displays as the totality of living beings body. So, Bathou is religion and philosophy that embodies the spirituality of the creator or the God. The followers of Bathou religion is

spirituality through the prayers, offerings and sacrifices offered to the deities.

Many scholars observe regarding the religion of the Bodos. According to Sindney Endle, the religion of the Kachari race is distinctly of the type commonly known as animistic and its underlying principle is characteristically one of fear or dead.³² He again says in the same monograph-*“in the typical Kachari Village as a rule neither idol nor place of worship is to be found; but to the Kachari mind and imagination earth, air and sky are alike people with a vast number of invisible spiritual beings. Known usually as Mwdai all possessing powers and faculties far greater than those of man. Mwdai is a Bodo word which means deity (God or Goddess) and should be mistaken for invisible spirits.”* Dr P. Bhattacharjee strongly objects “the religion of the Bodos is not animistic”. They are worshippers of Bathou, the supreme God. They have other Gods and goddesses. They believe in Ghosts and Spirits also. But the concept of the Supreme God is predominantly. The Bodo scholars and writers are of the opinion that their religion cannot be regarded as animistic. They worship Bathou. He is the illuminator of all earthly objects; he is the source of all knowledges and lights. He bestows us everything we need in this world. Frankly speaking the Bodo peoples are fundamentally nature worshippers. They are believers in the hidden power of the nature which can strongly dominate the social life. It is thought that the nature is the cause of peace and sorrow.

The religion of the Bodos cannot be said to be purely animistic. Some scholars of Assam like Dr. P.C. Bhattacharya also do not agree with the opinions of these foreign writers who described the Bodo religion as animistic.³³

Fair and Festival of Bodos

Fair & festival reflect true picture of a particular society. These traditional fair & festival have bases deeply rooted in socio- economic and religious believe of a community. The traditional Bodo culture is no exception of that and the socio- economic and religious

believe have great impact on the fair & festival of the Bodo. There are basically three kinds of fairs & festival in Bodo society:-

Firstly, there are festival predominantly social by nature and strictly performed according to religious believe.

Secondly, there are festival which are religious in nature and purpose but these are entire free from social elements in it including laws and customs.

Thirdly, the most of the fair & festival have economic roots. The Bodo society is predominantly an agricultural society so the festival celebrated by them are naturally connected with their occupation. Such festivals are celebrated in larger scale thanking god & goddesses seeking their blessing for good harvest. Some of the fair and festival of the Bodos which have great impact on Bodos are mentioned below-

Bwisagu festival

It is the prime religious pre-monsoon festival of the traditional Bodos. It is a kind of worship as well as festival performed for good agriculture product. This festival is performed by the Bodos in first week of Assamese Month i.e Bohag or Baisakh (the Aryan word). It is almost similar to the Assamese Rongali Bihu, which celebrated in the month of Baisakh (mid April). The term Baisagu is derived from Bodo word Bwswrni agu, which means beginning of the New Year. Celebrating the Bwisagu Bodos welcome the New Year and bid farewell to the old Year. This festival starts celebrating from the day of Sankranti of Chaitra and Baisakh (14th April) and continues for seven days. The normal domestic activities become a stand still during these days and spend festivals through merriment of singing, dancing and feasting etc. This is, in one sense merry making festival where young and old, men and women, boys and girls take part in songs and dance to pay respects to Bathou.

According to traditional customs of Bodos, they clean houses by throwing old earthen cooking utensils on the first day of the New Year, and replace them with new ones. They offer prayer to the family deity Bura-Bathou maharaja and Ai Bishahory at the altar. Next to them they offer food and drinks to their ancestors. This ceremony is performed after the house is made clean and members take bath. All family members, men, women, young boys and girls exchange their mutual respects. They forgive each other's misdeeds and exchange Gamosas.

The first day of Baisagu is called Makhou or Mahau. . This meant for 'cattle', as cows and bullocks that provide them most of their livelihood. On that day in the morning cattle are decorated with garlands made of slices of raw gourd, brinjal and turmeric and are led to the nearest stream, river or pond for their ritual bath. While asking them for bath, the cowherds throw some of the pieces of gourd and turmeric at the cattle beckoning them to eat and recite the following rhyme:

Lao za phanthao za
Bswr bswr re hanza hanza
Bimani khither phiphani khither
Noncor zagon halua geder.
Bima gayda baidi daza
Phipha bolr baili za
Bari khonayao don embu bongla
Bibaidi za geder zogla.

The English gist of the above verse may be explained as follows- (Eating gourd, brinjal, let there be increase in your herd in abundance year after, year in revenge of your father, in revenge of your mother who stunted and sort statured, grow into long and tall like a big frog in the corner of homestead).³⁴

Social structures of the Bodos

Like the other tribal societies of India, the Bodos of Assam have hierarchical structure. Dumont has criticised contemporary anthropologists for their cultural bias towards equality which, in his view, has made them incapable of understanding the nature of hierarchy.' The term 'hierarchy' is culture-specific.

Anthropologists usually present the order of castes in their village in a vertically ranked series. Among the Bodos, the image of the hierarchy is not a ladder-like construction but a chyle with some sects in the centre and others in the surrounding rings. The implication of this model is that of moral universe with a sacred centre.

The social structure of the Bodos are Patriarchal in character. In patriarchal system father is the sole authority of the family. On the other hand in a matriarchal system the authority lies with the mother. In the Bodo society father is the sole authority of the household. After his death the sons inherit the property. In Bodo society the daughters do not have the right to property when there are sons.

The Bodo families in early days were composed from defence point of view. These were termed as compact families. Families of Bodos are, nowadays, reduced to a small size from economic point of view. The large or extended family, on the other hand, can be identified on an occasion like Kherai puza as people have to take meal together on that particular festival. There is a popular Bodo saying Boro-Buri zob zob, meaning husband and wife.³⁵ It means that only husband and wife can live together to spend conjugal life. Descent of a Bodo family is the important factor to be discussed. There is no doubt that the Bodos of Brahmaputra Valley remain patriarchal. Father is the sole authority of the family. The head of the family is called Nophang.' The property of the family is accordingly divested in the son.

Father, being the head of the family, represents his family in the village council or any other social function at the community level. Significantly, eldest son occupies an important place in the family. There are some matriarchal characteristics seen in the patriarchal Bodo society. The widow marriage system is practiced in certain cases among the Bodos. This system is called Dholca. In this case a man comes to live with the widow in her first husband's establishment.³⁶Hence, the widow wife becomes sole authority of the family and accordingly property descends to the children.

Marriage is an important institution from the social point of view. It creates new social relationships and reciprocal rights between the spouses and their families. It is called Haba by the Bodos, Ha means soil or earth and bei means to bear something on the back. Habil, therefore, signifies 'to bear the soil or the responsibility of the earth on the back'. It is interesting to observe that the Sanskrit word for marriage *bivciha* also has the same etymological meaning. Traditionally the Bodos have six types of marriages. They are given below:

1. **'Swngnanwi lainai haba'** or arranged marriage is the most common socially accepted marriage custom of the Bodos. The bride is selected by the parents of the bridegroom and then the marriage is settled after negotiation. Till today this form of marriage is solemnly celebrated. However the bride price is no longer compulsory.
2. **'Gwrjia Lakhinai Haba'** is very rare in the present times. Earlier in the families where there were no sons or male members, member of the community or a person who works in the family is asked to be the bridegroom with his consent. He becomes a member of the family. It may be called a marriage by service.

3. **'Kharsonnnai Haba'** is a mutual agreement between the young boy and the girl. The consent of the parents is not considered important. The society frowns upon such marriages but tolerates it.
4. **'Bwnanwi Lainai Haba'** was always considered by the Bodos as an evil. This system was prevalent in earlier days. The girl was forcefully taken by the bridegroom and then the marriage is solemnized.
5. **'Donkharlangnai Haba'** is not socially approved, but is still in practice in some communities. This is the marriage by elopement of both bride and the bridegroom. This is the irregular system of marriage.
6. **'Donkha Habnai Haba'** is marriage between a widow and a man from the community who stay together as husband and wife. But, their marriage has to be regularized according to the social customs. Although widow re-marriage is allowed in the society, certain restrictions are there. A widow can only marry the younger brother of the husband and similarly a widower can marry the younger sister of the wife.
7. **'Hathasuni Khurnai'** Traditional form of marriage known as *HathasuniKhurnai* was a simple affair which bears testimony where the bride offers meals to the bridegroom in a simple function. The meal consists of a special chicken curry with broken rice without applying any spices or colouring agents. This is called *Ondlakhari* in Bodo. After consuming a portion of the rice the couple prays to Bathou Bwrai for peaceful conjugal life. Before offering the meal to the bridegroom the bride offers a portion of the meal to the goddesses and god of the main house (Nomano). Introducing the bride to the god the Deuri chants mantras and the advices are given to the bridegroom by the elders of the community. The meal thus prepared is served to the villagers. The marriage festival which used to run for seven days was restricted to three days later.

There was abundance of food and merry-making at various levels. Preparation of rice beer was given much importance and two persons (jau sirgra and jau rangra) were involved in distribution and making of the rice beer. The event was certainly a marked celebration for the individual and the villagers.

A few post-marriage customs are also prevalent in the Bodo communities today.

1. ‘**Kholar Gothainai**’ The act of returning the bride and the bride price (malsa) is known as kholar gothainai. This is done when the husband expires suddenly after marriage. The bride returns to her parents and the malsa is given back to the deceased husband’s by the parents of the bride.
2. ‘**Mamai Mara**’ The uncle of the deceased niece has to receive the bride –price of her female child in case it has not been paid during her marriage.
3. ‘**Athmangal**’ is performed on the eight day of the girl’s marriage. Only a few selected relatives are invited for a feast on the occasion. The couple leaves for the bridegroom’s place after receiving gifts by the bride’s relatives.
4. **Divorce** takes place in a Bodo society by tearing a betel-leaf into two pieces. This is known as *fathwibisinai leng* .The betel leaf is kept in the presence of the village elders in the house of the Gaon bura. However, if the reasons for divorce are not very serious from husband’s side, he has to pay for her livelihood. If the woman is been divorced for her unfaithfulness, the entire money spent on her by her husband’s side is to be returned. Once the amount is paid she is free to live with her new husband.

At present the Bodo society has undergone many changes. There are only a few marriages that are performed in the traditional manner. Due to the various factors that led to mass movements in this part of the state. People have mixed reactions to deliver when it come to asserting their own stand on the issue of orientation, involvement and apathy to the situation prevailing around. Most of the people who have been converted to some other religious faith

at the core of their hearts do still follow the traditional religious philosophy. The Bodo - Christians wear the same traditional Dokhonabut put a veil on their heads as a part of European culture. The customs followed in the pre-marriage rituals are strictly traditional. In some places it is the standard Assamese way of celebrating marriage except for a few interludes in the marriage that are strictly Bodo in nature.³⁷

Bodos do not have any specific generic term to denote the kin group, which is ordinarily described as kin from wife's side. But a common term, Kurma is used for the relatives from wife's side. Likewise the term Bhagi has been used for relatives from the father's side, Bodos have words for uncles, brothers and sisters. This type of family relationship comprises individual social group, called khell. The individual khell is so strong among the Bodos that they are bound by social customs and laws.

As family is the lowermost stratum of the society, one should know the structure of the household or family, how they live customarily in the society. A typical Boro-Kachari household generally consists of four houses, on four sides of a Sitla or inner yard and Langwna, or front yard in front of the southern house. According to the rank of occupants they have big house on the north, which is called no ma no. The senior most couple of the family resides here. This house comprises three rooms. The eastern room is called Ising, or kitchen. There are strict restrictions for the outsider. Here they have a seat for the goddess of prosperity. Therefore, they never allow other persons to enter the kitchen. The oven where they cook is by the side of the eastern wall of the Ising while near the northern wall are two molehill type foundations. On the tip of each an egg, alternatively a pebble, is kept. This is called Mainao Bindw or the house goddess of prosperity. Near the western well the cooking utensils are kept and washing is done inside.³⁸

The Bodo tribe was originally casteless. In process of time, a segment of Bodo tribe was converted into Hindus to adopt Brahma religion under the influence of Kalicharan (Mech) Brahma, the preacher of the Brahma movement. A segment of their tribes was influenced by Christian missionary, another section of the Bodo tribes remains unchanged and far from influence of either religion. This section of traditional Bodo Kacharis is the actual representative of their tribes. A traditional Bodo-Kachari is a smiling beauty, which attracts any outsider. He has pleasing manners. He lives a simple life and envies none. This kind of traditional society, therefore, can be guided properly to uplift their social status, so that they can cope with the modern civilised society.

Status of Women in Bodo Society

The status of the Bodo women reflected in the traditional Bodo society is quite different from that of the post independent society. Before talking about the status of Bodo women we need to understand the meaning of the 'status' as a concept of social science. Commonly, we use the terms, like 'status' of women, status of Brahmin, status of Sudras, etc. in order to define the position of a particular segment of society. As indicated by the term itself, 'status' implies the position of member or group of members in a given society in relation to others. Society is a Web of relationship. Hence 'social status' is a position of a member or a segment of members, in the network of social relationship in a society.

According to Ralf Linton "status are the polar positions... in patterns of reciprocal behaviour". A polar position comprises 'a collection of rights and duties'.⁶ Thus he conceived of status as a position based on socially approved rights and duties. Members of a society conform these rights and duties by performing certain roles. When a person is acting these rights and duties, he is said to be performing roles of a status of a member of a society as defined by the society. Social status corresponds to social roles, ascribed or achieved. In order

to I understand the status of a member or a segment of a society we must know the roles performed by that particular member or segment of society in relation to others.

Anthropologists or social scientists have identified three important criteria for understanding the 'social statuses in simple society, i.e. sex, age and kinship. The Bodo women are a segment of the total population of the Bodo society and can be explained the status and role of the Bodo women in terms of age and kinship. The kinship system refers to a set of persons recognized as relatives, either by virtue of blood or by virtue of marriage relationships that is through what is called affinity. Kins are bound by virtue of blood relationship and marriage. As a 'member of a Kins group, a person occupies a specific position in the society and his or her roles accordingly. We may explain the status and role of women within the network of kinship relations. Age is another criterion on the basis of which roles is divided. Certain roles are specifically assigned to minor age group and important roles are assigned on adult. For the convenience of our understanding we may stratify the entire Bodo women population into three categories, like, (a) minor aged group (b) adult and (e) old aged group. Aidan Southal on the other hand identifies four 'Role Domain' for explaining the status of a member or a segment of a society, i.e., Kinship domain, economic domain, political domain and religious domain.' Aidan's frame works of 'roles domain' provide a wider scope for understanding the status of a member or a segment of a society in general and the women in particular as well. Efforts will be made of explain the status of Bodo women under the Aidan's frame work of role domains as it provides wider scope for the purpose.³⁹

The structure of the Bodo society is patriarchal in nature. Though man is the sole authority of the family, the families not having male issues transfer their property into their daughter's name. Though it is quoted by some Bodo scholars that women occupy a high position in the society it was observed that it was only partially true. The Bodo women are not the members of any traditional institution. It was found that the birth of a daughter is not

favoured as much as that of a son. Marital separation does not allow a woman to have a share of her husband's property. It is needless to say that the Bodo women are hardworking and industrious. They are expert weavers and have earned recognition worldwide in contemporary times. The Bodo women in the Darrang district have mainly depended on settled agriculture. Since most of the villages have been created by clearing of the forests, the Bodos had to stop relying on the forests and depend on settled agriculture as an alternative. The women too had to share some of the characteristics from the settled agricultural societies. They had to resort to some other means of sustenance. The women took up weaving and bamboo-craft as their past-time activities which later helped them in generating resources. It was felt that educated women are more in number than men. But the jobs would go to men only, which made the women frustrated and thus the families stopped supporting their daughters for education. The women in the village have gained control over the domestic and the social fronts by their potential to control or participate in the production process. In the socio-cultural sphere also women have been in the forefront as organizers, and at times as official representatives of the community. Women no more go to collect firewood as the forests reserves have been cleared off. Since women are generally not allowed to assist in ploughing. In the same group women do other works such as planting, weeding, spraying fertilizers, hoeing etc. Bodo women generally are not seen selling produce in the market. They do not have the access to the information on their production activities. Hence, they are unable to deal with the market.

The roles of the Bodo women under Kinship domain may be explained in two levels, i.e. pre-marital level and post marital level. Before the marriage, a woman is a member of a particular family of orientation. She acquires her membership either by birth or adoption. The family is the basic unit of social structure of every society. It is true both for simple and modern society with complex social structure. Statuses in the society are determined by the internal organization of family, its degree of autonomy, sanctions of taboo by which it is

protected and perpetuated. The specific pattern of family life in any given social structure is the product of mores and varies with time. Children, either male or female are taught largely by their families to conform to socially approved pattern of behaviour. Family prepares the children for participation in the larger level and acquaint with larger culture.-Individual social identity is initially fixed by family membership by being born to a given status and characteristic. The children take on the socio-economic class standing on the parents socio-economic positions in which they born including its behavioural pattern and definition of reality. In addition to internalizing family attitudes and beliefs children are treated and defined by others extension of social identity of their parents.

Before the marriage, a woman is a daughter of a "family of orientation." Father and mother, brothers and sisters are her immediate kinsmen. Daughter is regarded as the transient or non-permanent members of the family. Her relations to parents and other elder members are of love, mutual affection, respect and of obedience. Every member of a family has to play 'some ideally set roles' or normally expected roles, which are defined by social mores and values. She has to play different types of ideally set roles with different members of the family in different ways such as a daughter, sister, granddaughter, as niece, aunt, etc. Her role in the family is defined by her Kinship position. Her relationship to younger member of the family is of love and affectionate. Her role differentiations are extended to lineage and clan level. Whatever roles (Services, duty and works) she plays with her kins in the parents' family are all a sacrifice to the family.

The actual position of a member of society is determined by the actual roles that one plays.' Actual roles played by women may be different from ideally set roles or expected roles. We have general perception only on the 'ideally set roles. But in the real scenario of the women's roles and statuses are totally different. If a woman performs her roles above the level of expected or ideally set roles she may be considered as a good woman and commands a

good position in the society. But when a woman performs her roles below the normally expected roles or contrary to the ideally set roles she may occupy low position in the family or society.

The role of daughters as Kin members in the family is determined by the structure and economic condition of the family. In a poor family the role of a daughter is cooperative, contributory and substantive in terms of economy. In her early time of childhood she is to perform the role of baby seer at home. A female child also performs as baby seer in other family. She leads responsible and difficult life. Even now, in spite of government's policy of compulsory education for all children, the children from poor family in the rural areas hardly could avail this chance for education. They are to drop out from schools due to poor economic condition of her family. The situation in a family with subsistence economy or below subsistence level is different from that of the wealthy family. Young girls, from wealthy families comparatively lead an easy life. In such families both boys and girls are oriented towards modern education. Parents are not interested to make their children a good man or woman skilled in traditional business conforming the 'ideally set roles' prescribed by traditional mores and values. Instead they desire their children to be highly educated and employed in government or non-government offices, which is non-manual in nature.

Religion plays a great role in upholding the status of Bodo women in the society. The impact of conversion in general and on the women is different in the process. Christianity has brought radical changes through the inputs of education, health and social reforms. The Bodos converted to Hinduism were comfortable to relate themselves with the mainstream society without relinquishing their identity, practices and customs. But, it is difficult to say that whether these reformations laid a positive impact on the women's status.

The culture of the Bodo society emphasizes the marriage of daughters. Earlier, the life was simple and the necessity of life was limited. Marriage of girls was not a problem. Now situation has changed.

The basic conditions of economic life have totally changed, the necessities of life have increased and society becomes complex. For economic uncertainty both boys and girls are not interested in getting marriage. Marriage of a daughter constitutes a difficult problem for every parent these days, and constitutes a major women issue' in the Bodo Society. Unmarried girls beyond age limit are neither desirable by parents nor individual girls concerned. For a father it is a burden and a state of dishonour and anxiety and for a girl it is a curse and a state of sorrow and humiliation. Normally society doesn't like a girl to remain unmarried beyond age limit. Psychologically, they are aware of their positions. And, in order to get relief from anxiety they move to towns and cities and engaged themselves as household workers, and workers in small scale industries and started independent lives. The number of this category of woman is quite considerable now.

The attitudes of the parents towards girls are not fair when it is compared to boys. Boys are more preferred than the girls and options for higher and costlier education are more opened for boys than the girls. It is attributed by the fact that girls are to be disposed to another family after marriage. Daughters don't enjoy the rights of property inheritance. This is the most important factor that attributed to economic uncertainty for unmarried girls.

After marriage a woman is incorporated into her husband family with different family structure and economic conditions and psychological background. The family structure and economic condition of the husband family determined the roles of the newly married bride. Her living in the new home is in a way conditional, depending on proper behaviour, efficiency in the household work, amicable relationship, service to the elder, pleasure to husband and gifts she brings at marriage. At the marriage rites, the couple promise to

associate one another in all circumstances in pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity till to death. Her relation to husband is of love, friendly, mutual respect and affection and cooperative. Endle has stated that, the position of Bodo Woman was sub-Ordinate to her husband, but the direct observation of fact convinced Endle that, the Bodo husband treated his wife with distinct respect and regards her as an equal and a companion to an extent which can hardly be said to be the rule among many of the Indian people. In comparison to caste Hindu society Bodo women enjoy greater freedom in the society.

Stating the freedom enjoyed by the woman in Assam. W. Robinson stated that, the women of Assam were beautiful to look at and they go about in public without any artificial modesty unlike the woman of other parts of India. Definitely Robinson indicated to the women folk beyond the caste-structured society of Assam. Her role to the father and mother in laws is of love, respect, obedience and servitude. She is subordinated to mother in-law in the management of household affairs. In the absence of mother in-law she manages the affairs. She maintains avoidance relationship with the elder brother of her husband. Her relations to younger member of the family are of love, affection, master and guide. Women in the family; are regarded as “Noni Mainao” or “Lakshmi”. These are the 'ideally-set of roles, normally expected to be performed by women after marriage in husband's family.

There are lots of differences between the actual roles performed by a woman and ideally set roles of the women. Desai and Thakkar observed that, women themselves sometimes become oppressed and oppressor." There are instances of Bodo women of becoming oppressed particularly by husband in drunken state. Barren woman: without child become a subject to dishonour in the Society. Woman without child is a great disqualification for her. A woman may be ill treated or-oppressed due to her miss-conduct and character.

Sometimes, it is seen that, woman herself usually become oppressor instead of being oppressed. Daughter-in-laws with better economic background and modern outlook-from

wealthy families married to a son working in government service created tensions in the family. She for one reason or the other Used to come into conflict with other members of the family. In these conflicts ultimately the son takes side of his wife. When the husband is the only earner, she gradually begins to control the family affairs and tension in the family grows. And slowly the bride herself turns to an oppressor and she becomes the factor of anxiety for other members of the family.

Employed women on the other hand put rational domination on the family. Due to her education and economic position she enjoys comfortable position in the family as well as in the society. A few women with irresponsible, mischievous, quarrelsome, jealous, envious cruel in nature create tensions not only in the family but also outside the family. Such type of women is referred as Rankhini, Khungkhini, Mwnsari, Jansari etc. Generally, people avoid such type of women. Due value is given to quality but not on beauty which is reflected by the Bodo proverb, 'Mohora mwjang akhola angjang, the meaning is beautiful in form but ugly in characters.

Though the work pattern of Bodo women is traditional in nature, it is the relative autonomy that these women enjoy in particular. Earnings of unmarried young women are not appropriated by the other family members. They save it for their own expenses or invest it in pigs, goats or yarn for weaving. The women here are seen working better in groups. Since one cannot force an external system on them as they will find it difficult to adapt in such a system. They rather try to build it on the lines of their own tradition and keep relating it to the contemporary trends. The transition from the traditional collectives to Mahila Samities is also a positive factor in this regard. It was seen that rural women worked through these groups to meet their socio-economic demands, women problems, and also thought in terms of welfare activities in village.

The roles of the Bodo women perform in the economic domain are in no way less than male counterparts. The Bodo society is a patriarchal society and so the contributions of the women are not duly recognized. Men are bread winners, so, they, not the women are head of the house hold." This statement is not appropriate in case of the Bodo Society. In poor family and in the families in simple society, women take very important roles in the economic domain of society...Earlier, it was stated that from her minor age Bodo women play vital, effective and contributory' roles to the family economy's In her studies on the economic life of the Karbi Women Upala Baruah made a beautiful remark as, "Daughters begin as soon as their strength permits to help their mother in all her works". "The poorer the household, the greater the dependency on women's work for survival". Similar is the picture of the Bodo women in poor families in rural areas. Newly settled poor families in reserved forest areas in Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bagra; Dhekiajuli, Orang, Belsiri, Rangapara, Sonitpur, Mingmang, and Dhemaji etc. The women play similar roles in survival and continuity of the families. In traditional Bodo society agriculture was the primary and common occupation to all the families. There were instances of specialized occupations i.e., carpentry, bamboo craft, pottery, weaving etc. But these specializations were not based on hereditary or birth like that of the caste Hindu society. The poor families of the newly settled forest areas in Sonitpur, Darrang, Bagra, Chirang and Kokrajhar districts women play equal roles to male counterpart to the family economy. When a girl attains-five or six year of age, she begins to play her roles as a baby seer in the family. It is exception to only the families with wealth and property. She helps the families by moving light household articles from here and there as desired by the elder members of the families. With the increase of her ability and strength she begins to help her mother in all kinds of household works. Washing of pots and utensils, fetching of water from stream and well, booming of floor and courtyard of the house, are her regular works. Her orientation is towards becoming a 'good household worker'. Mother and other members

of the family help her in the construction of ideas and experience through socialization and training.

Traditional Bodo society was characterized by isolation, self-sufficiency, self content economic life and distinctiveness and homogeneity; all the essential features of the 'little community', as conceptualized by, Robert Redfield's. The introduction of new social structures or systems since the time of British rule in India has brought radical changes in structural and functional, systems of all traditional Indian societies. Changes have been crept into the Worldviews, modes of life, avenues of life, attitude of life, necessities of life, organization and structure of society, material culture, and value system etc. of the society. Society is directed to new dimensions of social change i.e. development, welfare, progress, unity peace etc. Indian society has achieved a lot in general but the national policies for development has failed to marginalize the gap between rich and poor, advance communities and backward communities, instead has created a new situation attributing to socio-economic backwardness of the scheduled communities of India. On the other hand new modes of life enhance the level of consumption at the individual and family life. Under the above circumstances, the lives of the tribal people turn misery. Growth of population put tremendous pressure on land. Alienation of land by non tribal community, encroachment, illiteracy and many other social, economic and political factors make these people displaced from their homeland and compelled to settle in a new reserved forest areas. Their social-economic conditions become worst.

The deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the families degenerate the roles and statuses of the Bodo people in general and the Bodo women in particular, all these areas. Poor families in rural and forest reserve areas lead a very difficult life. Adult women support their family economy in different ways such as - animal husbandry, especially by poultry farming, Piggery, silk rearing, weaving. Many women now adopt weaving as a profession. They take

important roles in agriculture. Paddy plantations are entirely done by woman folk. They also take care of vegetable garden in the family. They also sell the domestic products in the market and they do shopping and marketing for daily consumption. The women of poor families, in order to meet the growing needs of the families of the time undertake the customary production of rice beer for trade. The women from the families above the substantial level of economy comparatively lead an easy life. They get their household works done by the maidservant. They take important role in the management of household works and the socialization of their children. The post independent India provided to the people new domains of economic roles in the forms of jobs in the public sector under different department, in the private sector in different industries, entrepreneurs, trade and business establishment etc. Educated Bodo women also accepted these chances and get employed as a government servant under different departments, public or private sectors. The percentage of serving under government departments is less in comparison to the Bodo male counterparts. The statuses of employed Bodo women are better economically and socially than those who are engaged in agriculture. Employment is the symbol of economic status in itself and sign of being educated.

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Chapter 3

Rise of Social Awakening And the Background of Bodo Movement

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

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

Impact of Colonial Rule

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Impact of Modern Civilization

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

Modern education

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

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

Nature of Bodo economy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Role of Christian Missionaries’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Kalicharan Brahma and his socio-religious movement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Simon Commission and the Bodos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Role of Tribal League

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Language Policy of Assam Government

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

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

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

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

Impact of Assam Movement on Bodos

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Role of Bodo Sahitya Sabha

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

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

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

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

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

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

Role of ABSU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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 became 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 on 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 sabhawhichhad 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 Upendra 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 th BSS held at Mainao Nwgwr, 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 gain momentum with the decision not to held 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 BWWF 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 boarder. 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 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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Chapter 5

Women Participation in Bodo Movement

Participation of women in movement is nothing new. Women continue to be a part of the resistance movement throughout the world. What is new is rediscovering their contribution to those movements. The foundation of political participation of women in India was laid during the Freedom movement. The selfless participation of large number of women had strengthened the movement. But gender equality was nowhere the agenda of Indian National movement. It was not the main thrust of the national movement. Either directly or indirectly large number of women participated in the freedom struggle. The contribution of women in getting freedom is noteworthy. They proved that women are capable of strengthening the political movement. The participation of women in freedom struggle had its impact on the society and family and on women themselves. Contemporary scholars are rewriting history of the past and searching for women's contribution to civilization. In the middle of 1960s, a few women of the United States drew attention of their friends and colleagues to the question of women's subordination. This opened a new space for women. At that time students of American universities were busy with many progressive movements: civil rights movements, protests against Vietnam War, agitation for equal opportunities for women and minorities, and against education policies. Many women participated in those movements and assisted their leaders/ husbands or colleagues and friends by collecting theoretical materials for their lectures and even drafting their lectures. This subordinate role of theirs made them radical in their ideology. In 1963 Betty Friedan published a book titled *The Feminine Mystique* which set in motion the second wave of feminism in the United States.

The American women's movement of 1960s was indebted to another writing on women, that is, Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949 and "considered to be the feminist canon".¹

This brought about two major contributions to academics:

- (i) it has emerged as a challenge to most established notions of the society, and
- (ii) it has drawn attention of many scholars to the need for relooking into the role of women in various historical events. From then onwards the scholars around the world felt the need for "women's studies" because it would help increase the knowledge on women.²

Existing literature on women suggest that women's conditions in the world are not similar. Studies on social movements show active participation of women right from 1789 when the French women demanded equal rights for women for the first time. During the period they hoped to bring about their own 'revolution' within the greater revolution by joining the struggle in the streets in Paris as well as in other places. This movement of the French women is described by Pollock as the first wave of feminism.

Women's participation in social movements in Asian and African countries is not embedded in Western feminism; it is instead linked with nationalist or socialist movements of those countries. Moreover, gender discrimination is neither the sole nor perhaps the primary focus of the oppression of the Third World women. The women activists of the Third World are more concerned with the problems of local people, racism, and economic exploitation. They are even critical of the term 'feminist' and use the word 'womanist'. Asian feminism, in particular, is an awareness about women's oppression and exploitation in family, at work and in society and conscious action by women (and men) to change the existing situation.³

Emancipation of Indian women begun with the Renaissance of Bengal. Indian women have also made substantial contribution to the freedom struggle of India. But in the list of women freedom fighters, tribal women of northeast India are rarely known. On the contrary, many tribal women were arrested during the Quit India Movement from the villages of Assam. The Tebhaga and Naxalite movements in Bengal, Sharecroppers' Movement in Assam, and various movements in other parts, of the region involved women but there are hardly any records of their participation. The few records that have begun to be known are found in Barthakur and Goswami, Devi, and Zehol.⁴ But it was due to the selfless participation of these invisible population these movements were successful.

Every human society is invariably characterized by social differentiations. Amongst such differentiations, gender based differentiation is one. This has been relatively more specific in earlier societies. Accordingly men and women were treated differently. They were assigned different roles and status. Men had the role of bread earning and protection of women and children. Women had the role of reproduction of heirs and home making. Historical records show that the position of Indian women varied through the ages. A historical understanding of status of women in early Indian society shows a declining trend in the position of women. The historical analysis of the position of the position of women in ancient India shows that women did not share equal position with men. Women were recognized only as wives and mothers. Their position was as subordinate to men. The later movements like Buddhism, Jainism, Vaishnavism and Sikhism made certain efforts to improve the status of women. The Bhakti movement allowed women to undertake spiritual activities independently. It is the 18th century that is considered to be the darkest period in the status of women in India.

Educated women in America were largely successful in articulating the issue of inequality between men and women. This proliferated in later years and incorporated the

various experiences of women around the world. The struggle of feminists to bring changes in the position of women and their efforts to stop women's subordination and gender discrimination brought about significant changes. They, if anything, began reviewing and rewriting their contribution to historical events.

It was in Europe where Women's emancipation movements and women participation in class struggles started. It was due to that the concept of Liberation started in Europe. When the European women were enjoying the result of Liberal situation, their counterpart in Asia and Africa were still struggling to consolidate their position within the family itself. Maria Mies, writing on the activities of socialist women who participated in the French Revolution in 1789 and 1848, refers to the liberal feminists who wanted to bring change in women's position in the previous century. Mies has tried to understand the position of women after 200 years of their struggle for emancipation or liberation. It was believed that there was greater harmony of interests between proletarian men and proletarian women than between bourgeois women and proletarian women. This situation of socialist women is called 'conscious sacrifice', which created a point of ambiguity for the socialist women. Further the new left of 1960s, returned to the old questions which were asked by the socialist women one century back. The difference between the above two groups of activists is that the latter discovered that their individual problems had social causes and were shared by many other women. It was a new and liberating experience for them and they realized that they could have women as friends, whereas formerly, women were seen as potential competitors. The feminist movements in America, Holland, France, Belgium, and Germany brought about female solidarity, which was unknown to them before.

Namibian women too participated in the liberation struggle of Namibia since 1964. In the beginning it was very difficult for them to come out from home and maintain connection with other women. They were supposed to look after their children and domestic animals

besides cooking food. Many of them never visited the villages before the formation of South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) and its women's council. This organization brought significant changes in women's life. As a result, Namibian women were in diplomatic, military and political fronts. This movement made them conscious of their position in the society. They realized that they were oppressed both as 'Black' and as 'women'. Thus, they believed that the western women did not belong to the same status as they did and gave less stress on the 'agenda of equality of women with men', 'peace programmes' and 'women's development programme', of the feminists of Britain, West Germany and America. They offered such programmes in the International Congress of Women held at Copenhagen in 1980, not knowing the agenda of people's liberation struggle of third world countries.

The issues of women's emancipation in India under British colonial rule was, according to Jayawardena, closely linked with two important types of movements: one, the political movements to resist British rule, and the other, social reform movements. The people of all political ideologies participated in the freedom struggle of India. The women's wing of communists supplied food during the Bengal Famine and worked in different parts of Assam, present Bangladesh, Bihar and other places.

Mass participation of women in social movements in India was first noticed in 1905, when people of Bengal and other areas of India raised their voice against the division of Bengal. From that time onwards Indian women participated in several protest rallies, meetings and processions.⁵

From the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century a number of women's organizations were formed in India. Men established some of these organizations but they were a few in numbers. Most of the women's organizations like Bengal stree Mahamandal, National Council of Women in India, All India Women's Conference, etc. were dominated by rich and upper class women. These organizations took up issues of child

marriage, education for women, and Purdah. Some of the members of those organizations actively participated in the freedom movement. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani of Bharat Stree Mahamandal had regular connections with underground activists of Bengal and Bhikhaiji Rustom Cama was the first woman revolutionary to have regular connection with the revolutionaries of Paris. Bengal was the epicentre of armed struggles during independence movement in India. There were a number of organizations formed in the districts of undivided Bengal, which were run by women. Interviews, biographical notes and letters of many women show that many of them were followers of Gandhi and had participated in 'Satyagraha', and civil disobedience movements. Such women mostly came from the middle class background. Many female students of college and universities were attracted to armed revolution. Mandal has further observed that housewives from middle to old age also participated in Gandhi's non-violent movements. The underground women revolutionaries not only carried messages, arms and ammunitions from one place to another, provided money, food, shelter to the male revolutionaries, hid and smuggled weapons but also took part in direct action and for that some of them received trials/life term imprisonment. The in-depth study by Mandal shows that the status of armed women revolutionaries was lower than that of the women who participated in Gandhi's civil disobedience movements.

The Independence movement of India gave birth to many women leaders who participated in social reforms. According to Biswas most of them hailed from rich and famous families of India. Aruna Asaf Ali, Sucheta Kripalani, Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Padmaja Naidu participated in the national politics in later years. Some European women also participated in the struggle for Indian Independence. They were Annie Besant, Mira Ben, Neli Sengupta, Sister Nivedita, etc.

The social reform movements of the nineteenth and the nationalist movement of the twentieth century emancipated women to some extent though the women of upper caste were

mostly benefited. The lower caste women who were marginalized due to caste bondage and gender specificities were less benefited from those movements.

Women of northeast India, specially tribal women of Manipur and Assam, have participated in the freedom struggle as well as in other movements.

A number of women's organizations were formed in Assam in post-independent India. These were: Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, Mahila Sangha, Nari Mukti Sanstha, Sadau Asom Nari Sanstha, etc. These were associated either with leftist political parties or with other political parties. A large scale women's participation was noticed in the movement against illegal migrants in the state led by All Assam Student's Union in 1979. Women of all age groups and occupations went to the streets to protest against illegal migrants. But the women participants were later disillusioned as the leaders of this movement failed to solve their problems.

About women's movement in northeast India, a special mention must be made of the women of Manipur who organized themselves to protest against the consumption of country liquors and drugs. The role of women in social movements in Manipur can be traced back to the British period when Manipur was under monarchical system. Women's movements of Manipur are known as nupilan. It began in 1904. The second nupilan was held in 1939. The latter one was related to the scarcity of rice. The women revolted against the monarch and traders and petty women traders provided leadership. This movement was successful as the women activists compelled the monarch to change the policy of rice trading. In 1980s a woman's organization called *Meira Paibis* was formed in Manipur. The activities of this organization were different from the activities of the previous organization. Since 1970, some underground movements are also going on in Manipur. Many innocent youths suffered and got killed too. As a result the women of Manipur started to guard their sons and husbands from the harassment by the police and paramilitary forces. Side by side this organization

started handling the problems of liquor consumption and drug trafficking. In these movements the leadership came from urban women and from women traders but at present the women leadership is not necessarily confined to the women traders.

Assam is a land where women took part in every aspect of society - be it administration, cultural aspects since the ancient time. In the mediaeval period we seen woman like Phusehwarly Devi who took active part in Ahom politics and administration, princes Mulagbhoru, who fought with the Mughals for sovereignty of her country. In the same manner, the participation of woman in social and political movement is nothing new. Woman continues to be part of resistance movement throughout the world.

The participation of woman in socio political movements were restricted only some privileged section of society in early years. The social condition was not congenial for woman in general to take part in the political affairs of the society. Till the formation of 'All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation' (AATWWF), there was no organised platform for Bodo Woman participation in the socio political life. Before the formation of AATWWF, the Bodo woman had to participate under the banner of the Bodo Sahitya Shabha and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU).

But womens participation is not very easy to document for it is more often in disguised form. Be it in the field of economic activities or ethnic movements their participation is difficult to evaluate because the categories of evaluation are often male centric. In spite of all these limitations, I have travelled extensively in the Bodo dominated areas and interviewed a cross section of women participants. I, myself being a Bodo women, had the better access to the Bodo language and women who had participated in the movements could interpret their cause in better way than any other could have been done.

The AATWWF was formed in 1986 under the initiative of Sri Upendra Nath Brahma, the then president of ABSU. The main aims and objective of AATWWF was to form a

federation of the woman folk of all tribal group of entire Assam to unite in common platform through mutual understanding and common ideology. They aimed to stand and to ensure for rights and justice of tribal woman in spheres of socio-economic, political, educational, and cultural promotion and preservation for indigenous self identity. Thus, their participation in the in the Bodo Movement is not something unprecedented or unexpected. What is not known much before are the details of the nature and magnitude of their participation what follows is an attempt to fill up this gap.

Women's Participation

The Bodoland movement marked the beginning of a political awakening among the Bodo women. With the establishment of AATWWF, membership was open to all section of women. Large number of women from villages to towns had joined this organization as members. Pramila Rani Brahma was elected as the first president of AATWWF.

Prior to 1994 women's participation in the ABSU movement was negligible. It was more intense only after the movement for implementation of the Roman script launched in 1994. Alo (pseudo name), one of the prominent AATWWF members, was a close associate of Upendranath Brahma and took active part in mobilizing people on the foreigners' issue. At that time the latter was a university student and the former a student of Kokrajhar College. During the AASU movement and latter had a regular interaction with the student's union of the college. The students of this college were his close associates who later became active participants of the ABSU movement.

The ABSU movement exhibited two contradictory trends very clearly: non-violent protests through organizing mass rallies, processions, protest rallies, hunger strike, road blockade, etc. and the other trend was violent in nature. The ABSU established a military wing (ABSU VF) to conduct armed struggle. Dr. Phukan Chandra Bodo and, later Preme Singh

Bramha, were in-charge of this wing and were designated as 'chairman'. They were both former executive members of the ABSU. The Bodo Volunteer Force actively participated in the movement from the beginning. It worked as an underground wing of the ABSU. Its protests were violent in nature which included bomb blast at public places, dacoity to collect money and arms, firing on security personnel, etc. Its volunteers worked as soldiers for the Bodos during movement. In 1989, the ABSU and the VF leaders expressed the desire to train the women in arms. The women too wanted to join arms training and they did it. So, from 1989 onwards, women joined the Volunteer Force but they were not involved in 'direct action'. They were taught to use the rifle for their own safety. They were trained to carry messages and other necessary articles. Many girls from different areas received nursing training in the rural primary health centres. The idea of women joining the VF was not received well by some AATWWF members. This decision was criticized on the ground that they were doubtful about the marital future of such girls. Yet the ABSU and VF continued with their armed training to the women as well.⁶

The following organizations were formed in 1986 and 1988. The All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was a women's organization while the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) was the people's wing of the ABSU.

It was Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma who drew large number of women into the freedom struggle. In response to Upendra Nath Brahma's call large number of women joined in the movement. The AATWWF was formed under the direct initiative of the leaders like Upendranath Brahma, Sansuma Khungur Bwismithiary, Subhas Basumatary, and Deora Dekhereb Basumatary, of the ABSU. It is mentioned in the AATWWF's constitution: "It is considered expedient to form a federation of the women folk belonging to all tribal groups of entire Assam to unite themselves in a common platform through mutual understandings being imbibed in a common ideology with a view to fighting for ensuring rights and justice of the

tribal women in the spheres of socio-economic, political, educational, cultural and for their emancipation from their socio-domestic drudgery and thereby to enable themselves in rendering services to the promotion welfare and preservation of the indigenous self identity of all tribal groups living in Assam". The aims and objectives of the AATWWF were formulated. Accordingly, social ethnic and women issues of northeast Indian tribes were highlighted. But for the first six years it did not have its own programmes, instead it worked for the ABSU. One of the AATWWF members said: "We couldn't concentrate in the programmes of AATVVVVF only because we were busy solving more urgent problems of our country. The duty that was performed by us was more urgent".

The AATWWF changed its name to All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABVVVVF) in 1993. The new name was more acceptable to them as all its members belonged to the Bodo community. But this also meant it was not received very well by the women of other tribal communities in Assam.

The Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) was formed on the 8th November 1988 in Suryakhata, district Kokrajhar. In this Karendra Basumatary and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary two former ABSU presidents were selected as Chairman and Chief Convener of the Committee. It was described as the people's wing of the ABSU (Moshahary 1993:9). The BPAC had village and village council level committee like the ABSU and AATWWF had. Those local committees played a significant role in inter-community affairs. Like the AATWWF the BPAC Central Committee worked hand in hand with the ABSU. Most of the BPAC central committee members were erstwhile executive members of the ABSU. The BPAC was finally dissolved after the formation of Bodo Autonomous Council.⁷

Women and Mobilization

Mobilization groups were formed on different levels, members of which were drawn also from the AATWWF. The ABSU did not have access to all areas. For mobilization in some such areas it was dependent on the members of AATWWF. The Mushalpur area of Nalbari was one such area. Upendranath Bramha considered foot march as the best way to mobilise people and in the beginning of the movement mobilization was done through this medium. Upendranath Bramha himself had covered a vast area of Kokrajhar on foot. In all such programmes the AATWWF members had played a significant role.

Women and Leadership

Not much is written on the leadership of the Bodo movement. Anil Boro writes that it is the movement of the middle class. It is observed that most of the leaders and activists of the BSS, ABSU, PTCA, PTCA(P), and the UTNLF belong to educated families.

They are teachers in schools and colleges, employees of government and semi-government organizations, banks, and private companies. Lawyers, artists, doctors, and naval officers were also found among the leaders.

Prior to the formation of the AATWWF there were hardly any women in leadership. The AATWWF was the first organization in which a large number of women participated. Among them were educated women in teaching profession.

The Bodo leaders came from different age groups. The leaders of organization like the PTCA, PTCA (P), BSS and the UTNLF were of middle or old age. Before 1987, very few women leaders were there in these organizations. Upendranath Bramha and Sansuma Khungur Bwismurthiary were among those leaders who felt the importance of women's participation. Bramha believed that a society cannot progress without the progress of women.

During 1970s Kanakeswar Narzary travelled the northeastern states extensively and met many tribal leaders. From the letters written by Upendranath Bramha to Kanakeswar Narzary it appears that the former had close relations with Kanakeswar Narzary and his wife Hirabai Narzary. Upendranath Bramha was the main source of inspiration for Hirabai Narzary to join the movement. Pramila Rani Bramha, the first Bodo woman leader, was also greatly influenced by Upendranath Bramha and had close relation with him. Most of the early executive members of AATVVVVF were either related or known to the ABSU, BPAC, and the BVF leaders.

Activities

Upendra Nath Brahma through his experiments with Satyagraha or the peaceful strike realized that women could equally participate together with men. His overpowering voice and his views on women influenced their position. His brand of politics mostly dharna and gherao allowed women to participate the women freely. For Upendra Nath Brahma statehood movement was not merely a political movement, it was also an economic and social reform movement. He said men and women are equal but not identical.

The most intense period of the Bodoland movement was for six years, from 3rd March 1987 to 20th February 1993. During this period of ABSU carried out numerous activities. It published books, leaflets, etc. and submitted memoranda. Its underground wing (BVF) also carried out innumerable violent activities. The movement was most intense in Kokrajhar. Many top leaders of the movement were from this district. The movement also had a strong base in Darrang. The intensity of the movement is believed to be more or less same in these two districts.

Women of different age groups participated in the ABSU movement on village council, district and state levels in the form of processions, dharnas, gheraos, rasta roko and

rail roko programmes. There also was organizational level participation of women. In this regard, Pramila Rani Bramha, the first woman leader of the Bodos, deserves a special mention. She started her political career as a close associate of Upendranath Bramha. She founded the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) just before the launching of the ABSU movement. Regarding the formation of AATWWF she said:

“I have seen many protest movements since childhood such as the Udyachal and script movements. I never participated in those movements. I have seen how people were exploited and betrayed by the PTCA leaders. But I did not know how to get rid of such a situation. During 1980 my husband and I rented a house in Kokrajhar town. Upendranath Bramha was my next door neighbour. I was disappointed with our leaders as the PTCA leaders compromised with the leaders of the ruling parties to fulfil their self-interest. Upendranath Bramha and I discussed the situation regularly. I felt the need to join those who were against their leaders. When the ABSU decided to launch a fresh movement in 1986, I was not sure what I should do. At that time I was requested to establish a women's welfare organization by Upendranath and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary. Accordingly, on 14th July 1986, a meeting was convened at Deborgaon High School of Kokrajhar and the All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation was established”.

In Bodoland movement, the women took part in processions, holding meetings, demonstrations and organizes strikes. The convener and founder secretary of AATWWF, Malati Rani Narzary, had joined various protest rallies, picketing, etc. since her teenage. She had also participated in the Udyachal movement. As an executive member of the ABSU she had also participated in the Roman Script Movement. According to her, growing atrocities on the Bodo women provoked her to establish a women's organization. Her brother, an executive member of the ABSU central committee from the beginning, told me that the Bodo women were not involved in any organizational activities earlier. Those who were

involved during college day, mostly discontinued afterwards. Malati Rani Narzary, who was a neighbour of Sansuma, was a different kind of person. She was a very courageous lady. She had participated in different activities of the PTCA, ABSU, PTCA (P) and the UTNLF and the BSS. She was also the founder secretary of the Plains Tribal Women's Welfare Association. She was requested by Sansuma to establish an active organization for women.⁸

The first meeting of the AATWWF was held on 14th July 1986. It was attended by women like Kamali Rani Basumatary of Darrang district, Latika Hajoary and Meera Basumatary of Goalpara district, Umarani Basumatary, Hira Rani Bramha, Supriya Rani Bramha, Malati Rani Narzary and many others from Kokrajhar district. They were all related to the ABSU leaders in one way or the other.

An executive member of the AATWWF Central Committee Malati Rani Narzary once said: *“All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was established in 1986. The initiative was taken by Upendranath Bramha and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary. The women of Kokrajhar, Darrang and Goalpara districts were present in the meeting of 14th July 1986 where the AATWWF was formed. The aim of this Federation was to organize the tribal women for the welfare of the tribal people. Pramila Rani Bramha has made remarkable contribution towards this. She was the founder president of AATWWF. Malati Rani Narzary was Convener of that meeting. Ansula Gowda Bodoso, an active leader of the ABSU, took me to that meeting. He was from my district and knew me”.*⁹

To quote her further: *“I was assigned to form the Goalpara district committee of the AATWWF. So I called a meeting and invite the women of all tribal communities of the district. Mahat Chandra Hajoary, a retired head master of that school, helped me a lot. He inspired me to do this job. About two hundred women belonging to Garo, Boro, and Rabha communities attended the meeting. Anandibala Rabha, former MLA, was also invited to that*

meeting. In this meeting I was selected its president and Bishnupriya Khakhalary, its secretary”.

Kamali RaniBasumatary , one of the founder members of AATWWF and a resident of Darrang, adds: *"Before the establishment of AATWWF Darrang District Committee (AATWWF, DDC) a meeting was held in Khairabari School of Darrang on 20th August 1986 which continued till the next day. Prior to this meeting, Maheswar Basumatary, the then secretary of the ABSU, Darrang District Committee, had met me at home and requested me to attend this meeting. The necessity of a women's organization in the Bodo society was discussed then. Next morning the ABSU leader announced that they were launching a fresh movement for separate state and solicited women's participation. We, the educated ones, were especially requested to take charge of the rural women during the movement".*

Abola Brahma of Khairabari, recalled: *"On the 20th August 1986, a meeting was held in Khairabari. Some of the women present there were: Pratima Kochary, Malati Doimary, Rita Basumatary, Junu Daimary, and Sunali Doimary. Late Tankeswar Boro, the brother of Baliram Boro, the MLA, and Nowa Narzary invited me to attend this meeting. The meeting started at 2 p.m. Maheswar Basumatary, Khagen Basumatary and Debnot Basumatary were the speakers. They highlighted the necessity of a women's organization. In their own words "Generally the Bodo women are backward. So, it is difficult to approach and organize them. This task has to be done by educated women. The leaders said that the ABSU movement would not be successful without the participation of women. They highlighted the importance of women in family and in society. I started thinking that I was also a responsible member of community. Being a woman I could not ignore the responsibilities of my society."*

Formation of the AATWWF was not smooth everywhere in the Bodo dominated areas. In Nalbari district, it took two years to be formed. It was established on 20th June 1988. On behalf of the ABSU Kamala Kanta Lahiri, Manoranjan Swargiary, and Girin Bramha of

Mushalpur are took initiative to inform the women of the area. The first meeting was held in Kumarikata village under Tamulpur. Sonaram Bagalary, an executive member of the ABSU Central Committee, attended that meeting. The following girls participated in this meeting, viz., Giribala Bramha, Guneswari Bramha, Joymoti Basumatary, Ila Basumatary, Anupama Gayary., Padma Basumatary, Manju Bramha, and Dulu Bramha. Giri Bramha of Pub Bangnabari was selected as its president and Gunewsari Bramha of Dihira village, Nikashi subdivision, as its secretary. Nikashi subdivision was a strong base of the ABSU since the beginning of the movement.¹⁰

Women's Organizational Role

Upendra Nath Brahma succeeded in galvinising the traditional housebound women as a powerful instrument of political action. Women's traditional capacity to sacrifice was especially emphasizes by Brahma in an effort to mobilize women. He argued that women's capacity to sacrifice her own personal interest for the family also held to extend the community and nation and this motivated the women to join the Bodoland movement. The AATWWF members had remarkable contribution to organizing the people during the movement. In the beginning the following issues were discussed: (i) health and hygiene, (ii) family planning, (iii) necessity of cleanliness, (iv) mother's role to keep babies clean and tidy, (v) mother's responsibility to educate children, (vi) problem of alcoholism in family and society, (vii) bad effects of polygamy, etc.

According to the AATWWF members there were some evil practices in their society which impeded to women's progress. One such practice was addiction of male to country liquor. Such addiction resulted in many unwanted incidents in villages. Wife beating was a regular phenomenon. Polygamy was also in practice. Before the ABSU movement second marriages by the men were not a social offence. Durga (pseudo name), an active founder

member of the AATWWF and a resident of Beltala, Guwahati, says that her father had five wives. His youngest wife belonged to the age group of his children. It was a normal practice of the rich men in those days.

The activities of educated women received wide appreciation of the rural people. They helped the rural women in many ways. A few experiences of the women participants are presented here which reflect the internal dynamics of the movement. Rupasi (pseudo name) and Sumita (pseudo name), two founder members of AATWWF, Kokrajhar District Committee, told me that in many villages and village councils the AATWWF members conducted meetings and formed committees.

According to Mili (pseudo name), "When the ABSU initiated the movement for a separate state, the PTCA supporters did not like it. So, Kokrajhar, Nalbari and Barpeta where PTCA supporters were numerous frequent clashes took place. The members of the AATWWF played mother's role at that time. According the Banani (pseudo name) and Mani (pseudo name) of Kokrajhar, the members of the AATWWF maintained peace during the clashes between the ABSU and the PTCA supporters. To quote her again: "We, the AATWWF members, wanted to stand as a guardian organization of the Bodo people. We wanted to stand united for the cause of our people. There were factions but we told our people that all activists were like our children. They were all demanding a state for our community. So, they are not committing any crime. They are sacrificing their life for us. So we have to help them".

During the movement the policemen and the army personnel entered villages in search of the ABSU activists, but they often targeted the women. According to the women activists, most policemen had the habit of stealing valuable things like watch, radio, torch light, etc. To stop such activities and to protect women from various atrocities, the AATWWF members took some measures. The village women were advised to stay in-groups during any police or army operations. They were told to follow the search parties boldly at each step and see that

nobody stole anything from the houses. They were trained to handle the cases of molestation or rape. They were told to bring victims to the nearest and reliable doctors for medical examination so that filing of the FIR would be easy. They were instructed not to put any medicine on any physical injury caused by the police or army personnel. At the same time they were asked not to hide such incidents of torture.

In the beginning of the ABSU movement Nalbari was in tumultuous situation. Incidents of arson and clashes between the PTCA and ABSU supporters were frequent in 1987-88. The Nalbari District Committee of AATWWF devoted much of their time to resolve the misunderstanding between two groups. Until then the ABSU supporters had no access to some of the places in this district where the AATWWF members came to the rescue of the ABSU.

During the movement, the AATWWF members were also assigned the job of supplying or cooking food for the ABSU members. The ABSU Volunteer Force members always moved in groups and never stayed in one place. It was the duty of the subdivision level members of the AATWWF to keep constant contact with them wherever they stayed for the night. However, staying in those camps during night was prohibited for the women. According to Binita, the ABSU members depended a lot on AATWWF members for organizing people and keeping communication between common people and the ABSU members.

The AATWWF members of all the three districts were aged around twenty years. Most of them were pre- university or college students and unmarried. Many of them were either sisters or relatives of the ABSU activists. They laid the foundation of mass participation of the women in the ABSU movement.

There was some difference in the age group of the district/subdivision level committee members and the central committee members. The formers were of early age group (18-25

years) and most of them were unmarried. Most of the central committee members were married and mothers of at least two to three children. Majority of them were teachers, too.

Complexity of Women's Participation

While some women delivered speeches in public meetings others were engaged in refreshment and reception committees arranging food, water, etc. Cooking food for the guests was one of their regular duties during the movement. Most of the women of Balagaon and Rangalikhata villages of Deborgaon did not get time to listen to their leaders due to such engagements. They had to perform such duties at the back side of the stage. Before any meeting at Deborgaon the ABSU instructed the Deborgaon village council Committee members of AATWWF to take care of everything. Their works ranged from collecting paddy, pulses and vegetables from each house, cleaning them. Cooking for participants as well as guests at home, who could be participating in such meetings, cooking for leaders like Premsing Bramha and Upendranath Bramha.

Every AATWWF member made a monthly contribution of Rs. 5. Each village council committee collected Rs. 2000 every year and submitted it to its district committee. The AATWWF members also collected clothes and distributed them to the riot victims who took shelter in different camps. In the executive meeting of the DDC AATWWF, held on 20th July 1989, a decision was taken to distribute aronai to each member of the Bodo Volunteer Force. Accordingly, all village council committees of the AATWWF of Darrang district were directed to weave aronai for the male activists. This was according to an old custom of the Bodos, which desires that the Bodo men going to the war should wear aronai to protect themselves from all evils and to win the battle. The aronai which the Bodo soldiers wore in the battlefield were woven by a close relative such as sisters or wife. Furthermore, those aronais were woven on the night before they left for the battlefield. Preparation of threads,

patterns, and all other works related to weaving had to be done within a single night and the same was to be presented in a sacred function.

This custom was revived during the Bodo movement with slight modification. Instead of kin members village council committee members of the AATWWF wove the same. The women who wove it had to take bath first. According to the custom they did not even talk while weaving. It was presented to the ABSU activists (VF) at the Bathou Thansali (the altar of Bathou) of respective village councils.

The ritual was directed by the priest of respective Bathousali. All the activists took bath before going to Thansali and wore clean clothes. After that the women tugged the aronai around the waist of the male activists. This was how the AATWWF members also boosted up the morale of the ABSU VF members. The women members also did confidential errands, carried money and other things from one place to other. In case of sudden police/ army raids in any village they rushed to protect the innocent villagers. In case an innocent person was arrested they forced them to release him/ her. They were instrumental in minimising atrocities on women by armed forces. The Bhumka rape case of Kokrajhar was successfully handled by them and the culprits were punished. On 25th and 27th January 1988, the women of Bhumka area of Kokrajhar were raped repeatedly by the police force personnel. The AATWWF members came to know of that incident on 28th January and brought the victims to Kokrajhar district court where they registered their appeal and everybody in the court saw the condition of the victims. Their clothes were full of blood. Some of them had received bullet injuries. Moreover, the then government tried to suppress these news. They did not take action against the police. After learning about it, the then Chief Justice of the Guwahati High Court, G.M. Lodha invited the petitioners to submit an affidavit on the Bhumka rape case. On behalf of the victims the AATWWF took the initiative and submitted an affidavit to the High Court. Many other women organizations like YWCA, Nari Mukti Sangathana, and Pradesh Mahila

Congress Samiti supported the AATWWF in organizing a protest rally at Guwahati judge field. On the basis of their appeal Mr. Justice G.M. Lodha and Mr. Justice J. Sangma jointly gave a 22 page judgment on 14.3.1988. AATWWF members handled such cases successfully in other districts as well.

Gherao/Dharna

The AATWWF members of Mushalpur, Nalbari district, organized a procession against the arrest of innocent people in the month of May 1989. Several gheraos were organized by them during 1989-91 (see Table 4.4). In all such cases they compelled the authorities to release those who were arrested from the villages during police raids. The women of Pub Bangnabari village went to the police station for the first time in May 1989 when Bagadhar Narzary was arrested. He was an ex-military personnel and a resident of Guwahati. He had gone to Pub Banglabari village to see his mother. On that particular day he gone to the local bank where he was arrested. The police department alleged that he was imparting military training to the members of the ABSU Volunteer Force. Hearing it some villager went to the police station but the policemen detained them too. At last the women of this village went there and gheraoed it. The police officer-in-charge was compelled to release him and other villagers. In August, 1989 they went to the police station once again to get one Charan Narzary of the same village released. He was a cultivator and resident of this village. These incidents took place before the formation of the AATWWF. Babli (pseudo name), an active member of Nalbari District Committee AATWWF, recalls that in June 1989 some Villagers of Shantipur, Mushalpur subdivision, were arrested following the bandh called by the ABSU. After this incident one part of this village was set ablaze and a camera was snatched from a journalist when he went to the village to cover the same. In June 1990 almost 1000 women gheraoed the Mushalpur and Borbori police stations for the release of eight

innocent villagers of pub Bangnabari. These women came from the villages like Kathailgaon, Choibari, Berlabari, Lamidara, Bathoupuri, Bwerimukh, Thakuchup, and Khwrabari of Mushalpur subdivision. At first they went to Mushalpur outpost where they compelled the policemen to release three villagers. After that they proceeded to Borbori police station which was eight kilometers away from Mushalpur. According to some women informants the Bodo men were targets of the armed forces. Under such situation, they acted as custodians of the villagers and their properties.¹¹

In 1989, one Vijan Narzary of Navingaon village, Kokrajhar district was standing in front of his house when some policemen went and arrested him. His family members and other villagers of this village gheraoed the police station and compelled the policemen there to release him.

According to Usha, the granddaughter of Gurudev Kalicharan Bramha, a few fishermen were arrested on May 12, 1988 from Jomduar village beside Sankosh river of Kokrajhar. That was a market day and the fishermen were taken to Saraibill police station. The news of their arrest quickly reached the Saraibill bazar. The people rushed to the police station to see whether the arrested persons were their family members or not. But the policemen opened fire and two women died on the spot. Some others were injured. Most of the victims were women. After this incident Usha organized the women and Anganwadi workers of nearby villages. They met the District Magistrate of Kokrajhar, submitted a memorandum to him and demand compensation of Rs. 1 lakh for deceased family and Rs. 50,000 for the injured persons.

Women in Bodo Volunteer Force

The Bodo Volunteer force was the military wing of the ABSU. This Force required messengers to carry secret messages. Many AATWWF members of different village councils and district committees were involved in this job. They were trained to perform this job. In

1989, one of the AATWWF members was sent by the ABSU President, Upendranath Bramha, to the ABSU VF chairman Premsing Bramha. She travelled all the way from Kokrajhar town by train and bus and reached a village situated in the border of West Bengal and Assam. She went back with a message from the ABSU-VF resident. Chairman and passed that to the ABSU president.¹²

Carrying money for ABSU was also a part of their job. A few girls of Nalbari district twice carried one lakh of rupees with them and handed the same to the ABSU members at a guest house located in Guwahati.

Sometimes they also had to accompany the ABSU leaders. Once Asha , Poli , and Nila of Baganbari village of then Barpeta District accompanied Urkhao Basumatory, a leader of the ABSU, from Pub Bangnabari to Salbari village of Barpeta. One member of that team was Chilagang Basumatory. It was a marriage season and they introduced themselves as members of a marriage party and Urkhao as the bridegroom to the policemen at the checkpoints.

Nursing Training

Some Bodo girls were given nursing training by doctors in different primary health centres. During 1989-90, not less than 30 to 40 girls from each village council received nursing training. Out of 170 informants, there were around twenty women who said that they received nursing training. The informants of Darrang district who received nursing training stayed at Kapurpura village of Darrang for three months in 1989. The training was based on courses, which are actually given to the nurses. The course was as follows:

- (i) First aid: learning to bandage on different parts of the body, stop bleeding, take out bullets from any parts of body, operation in case of bullet injuries.
- (ii) (ii) Pharmaceutical training was also provided. They were taught to identify the causes of disease, nature of treatment and the names of medicines used

for diseases like gastroenteritis, diarrhoea, fever, viral infection, acute allergy, bedsore, malaria, general weakness and jaundice.

- (iii) Training was given to handle the burn cases.
- (iv) Training was provided to manage the patients suffering from psychological disorders such as insomnia.
- (v) Advance first aid training was given on different types of bullet injuries and proper treatment of wounds in case of profuse bleeding, removal of bullets and treatment. The whole management of operation, treatment of old bullet injuries, fractures, sprain bleeding, unconsciousness, vomiting, acute pain, burning, muscular pain, glandularia, etc. was taught. Use and function of different surgical instruments, techniques of pushing saline water, etc. were also taught.
- (vi) Basic knowledge on human anatomy was also taught to them.

They held practical classes and they had to nurse a patient of acute burn and other patients during their stay at Kapurpura. The girls attended the classes regularly. The classes were held on topics like 'Women's Role in the Bodo National Movement', 'Aims and Objective of Bodo Movement', and 'Women Role in Different Phases of Movement'. They were taught to explain the ABSU's role to the children as well.

The aim of such training was to help the ABSU and ABSU VF activists in time of need. The trained girls were instructed that wherever and whenever they would come to know about injured persons and activists, they must nurse them. These girls proved very helpful during the movement. One of the AATWWF leaders, who was the head of a nursing team in Kokrajhar, told that during peak years of the movement (1989-1991) most doctors left their jobs and the primary health centres of Bodo dominated areas were deserted. Even medicine was not available. At that time the trained girls were helpful to the villagers. Apart from

nursing the activists they performed duties of doctors. In the village these girls were doctors cum pharmacists. Some of them showed considerable efficiency in nursing activities including operations.

From 1989 onwards girls began to receive training in the use of firearms. Such training was given in the remote villages of Bodo dominated areas. The aim of such training was to provide some measures for their safety. There was no plan to bring them to armed action. But they were told that if situation so demanded they would be called in.

Most of the times the ABSU VF members were on the move. Usually they moved in small groups. It was the duty of the AATWWF members to arrange food for them. Sometimes the AATWWF members went to hideouts to prepare food for them. The VF members entered villages during night. They spread themselves to various houses at the time of food for the advantage of logistics as well as to avoid being all arrested together.

Role of AATWWF in Dispute Resolution

The village political organization became defunct during the movement. The people consulted the ABSU and AATWWF members to solve any conflict in their villages. Most disputes were related to extra-marital affairs. One such case was between Daokha and Panilam of Deborgaon, Kokrajhar. Panilam married Daokha's wife's sister. His wife appeared to the AATWWF for justice. In the meeting held by the AATWWF to resolve this dispute the ABSU members were also present. The ABSU activists criticized Daokha and labelled her as a woman of 'corrupted moral character'. Rupasi (pseudo name), the president of AATWWF's Deborgaon Committee, criticized the comments of the ABSU activists and argued that Daokha might have been morally corrupt woman but by marrying her sister even Panilam showed a corrupt behaviour. Her argument disappointed the ABSU activists and Panilam was forced to give money to his wife. One other case was Sukur Sing Basumatary versus

Somaisree Mosahary of Kashikotra village, Kokrajhar. Somaisree was the fiancée of Sukursing. They were known to each other for many years. But when Sukur Singh married Kalyani Bramha, Somaisree sought to help of the AATWWF for justice. After a long discussion with the three persons involved and the neighbours, the AATVVVVF instructed Sukursing to give Rs. 20,000 as compensation or penalty to Somaisree.

According to Rapasi polygyny was not an offence in the Bodo society until recently. The AATWWF members vehemently opposed that practice and tried to eradicate it. For this the Bodo women are grateful to the AATWWF members.

Seminars

The AATWWF organized many seminars during the movement. They were mostly one-day seminars and the common theme was 'women'. A rough list of seminars organized by it is given in Table 4.5. Apart from the local educationists the executive members of AATWWF were regular speakers in such seminars, the programme of the seminar and the theme were planned by the central committee members. The lecturers were delivered in the Bodo language. The intensity of women's participation is understandable from the theme of seminars and speeches. None of the previous movements demanded women's participation so clearly and deliberately.

Literary Activities of Bodo Women during the Movement

Songdan, the first magazine of Bodo women by Bodo women and for Bodo women, was published in 1991 by the AATWWF. The magazine called Raikhrnuthi was published in the same year. These magazines were published once in a year and women related issues were of primary concern to them though they also published other writings of women. The editorial

board members were women though the writers were not necessarily women. Many renowned Bodo intellectuals, poets, ABSU activists, etc. wrote on women related issues in those magazines. Those articles discussed the contribution of women to upliftment of the Bodos, involvement of the Bodo women in politics, women's contribution to the development of Bodo society, etc. The second issue of Songdan published articles on Aung San Suu Kyi, the winner of the Nobel peace prize in 1991, and also on women's role in the French revolution.

Almost all the executive members of the AATWWF central committee wrote on various aspects during the movement. Special mention may here be made of Bina Bala Gayary of Subankhata village, who published a book of poems. Others are Romela Islary, the first editor of Raikhmuthi, Latika Hajoary, Mira Rani Basumatory, and so on. They all wrote in the Bodo language. There were some other women who wrote in Assamese or English. Anupama Basumatory is one such writer and her poetry collection Rupali Nadir Glzat (The ghat of silver river) received a lot of appreciation. A translation of one of her poems written during the movement is reproduced here:

"Oh my beloved friend;
you who share my sorrows
The companion of my search for beauty
And Worshipper of an afflicted heart;
Had you also stood
Like that pine tree
In the plains, of life-
Ignoring the chill of the snow
Transgressing the fury of the storm.
Bearing the agony of my injury
Remaining firm, tall, majestic and unruffled!"

(From the poem titled 'like a Pine tree' 1998-113)

Conventions and Conferences

The AATWWF organized some conferences and conventions periodically. The conferences were held in a gap of two years when new committee were formed. And conventions were held in alternate years. Reception committee was formed before holding conferences and conventions. Such committees were usually formed with the local members though some central committee members were also incorporated. The member of delegates and observers was decided by the members of both the reception committee and AATWWF members. There were two types of sessions in conferences and conventions. One was open session and the other was delegates' session. The open session was open to all Bodos and non-Bodos whereas delegate sessions were closed door sessions and restricted to the delegates only.

The delegates selected the executive members of central committee in such sessions. The general secretaries of various sessions submitted annual reports in delegate sessions. Important resolutions adopted in the delegate sessions were read out in the open sessions. Usually conferences continued for 3 days. Scholars in different fields were invited to open sessions for delivering lectures. Cultural programmes were part of everyday programme. These conferences and conventions were mainly organised and participated by women.¹³

The AATWWF was renamed as All Bodo Women's Welfare federation (ABWWF) at the Tamulpur conference held in 1993. The delegates proposed the organisation's new name and it was accepted. Excerpts from the Interview with Pramila Rani Brahma:

“Which language will I speak in O.K., I will speak in Assamese. Apart from the Bodo language which is my mother tongue I can express myself comfortably in Assamese”.

“I was born in a village called Balagaon. I don't know the exact date of birth nor do my parents know. But they often tell a story about an earthquake from which I guess that I was born in 1950. Further, I guess that the month was March. My mother, Thageswari Barhma, was born in an adjacent village of Deborgaon. My grandfather Dilip Narayan Brahma, was an illiterate peasant. He thought that going to school was a wastage of time. My father never followed his father's ideas. He was a favourite student of one of his school teachers. I cannot remember that teachers' name at this moment. He took all responsibilities of my father's school education and as a result my father was able to study upto class X. when he was in class X, his mother fell seriously ill and she died after a few days. This incident stopped my father's study and he was asked to plough the fields. My father never liked ploughing. So he joined the police service which too was not the right choice for him. That was a period of freedom struggle. The freedom fighters were treated as enemies by the British and were badly beaten up by policemen. My father could not bear such brutal treatment by the policemen and soon he left the job”.

“I was a small child when he left his job. Our economic condition was better after he started timber business. Hence I did not have any experience of financial crisis during my school and college days though my elder brother and sisters faced it during their childhood. Among seven children, I am the fourth. My eldest brother is the headmaster in a lower primary school. The second, a sister, is a school teacher in a lower primary school. The brother, who is just elder to me, is an officer in the Education Department. Another brother, next to me, is a doctor. Next is a sister who is also a teacher of a high school and the youngest is a brother who is a businessman”.

“I received my primary education in Deborgaon Primary School. I studied there upto class VIII. Among his seven children I was the most favourite of my father. I started assisting my mother in household work at an early age. I used to work in our agricultural field too. I

did all kinds of works like sowing, harvesting, husking the paddy in dhenki (husking machine), cleaning and any other works related to jute cultivation. My father did not like my doing all this. So he took me to Kokrajhar and admitted me to a school there. I passed the school final in 2nd division. I wanted to join a college in Guwahati. But he did not approve it. He thought that I might be a bad girl if I live alone in Guwahati. At that time I was very young so he was over protective about me. I did my graduation with honours in Political Science from Kokrajhar College in 1972 and took admission to post-graduate class at Gauhati University. During my school and college days I was addicted to reading novels and historical writings. A novel was enough to engage me for a day I forgot every other work once I sat to read a novel. I read many Bengali novels as well. I had the habit of writing short stories. I also participated in the college sports regularly but my father never allowed me to participate in sports and games beyond the college campus. In college, I used to mix up with everybody. Among the friends there were more boys than girls. I got married just after my graduation. My husband was one year senior to me in college. Both of us liked reading novels. He also encouraged me to write short stories. I joined the post-graduate classes after my marriage. I attended classed for three months”.

“Unfortunately, I had to return home after three months because we were told to vacate hostels when the Assamese language movement started in 1972. I joined my parents-in-law after coming back. I felt that my in-laws were not interested in my higher studies. In 1973 I joined Symborgaon High School as an assistant teacher. This school was 12 kilometers from Kokrajhar town and I was there for one year only. Then I joined Kokrajhar High School”.

“I was involved in the works of AATWWF and ABSU when I was resident of Kokrajhar town and mother of three children. My husband always co-operated me. Earlier he was in service but at present he stays at home and looks after our children. He is also a

writer. My daily routine has thoroughly changed after 1986. For that I have full cooperation of my family members. My father was a supporter of the PTCA. He picked up a quarrel with me once when he came to know that I was working for AATWWF and ABSU. My mother supported me because I used to tell her many things. But I never discussed anything with my father, as he was a strong supporter of PTCA. I tried to convince him about the ABSU movement but he was unwilling to listen to me. Meanwhile he met Upendranath Brahma at my home. It was a conversation of half an hour after which he was thoroughly convinced”.

“In 1991, I contested for the post of Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) as an independent candidate. I was elected from Kokrajhar town constituency and in next assembly election I was re-elected from the same constituency. The decision of joining politics was not my personal decision. I never thought of it before, not even in my dreams. In 1993, the Bodo Autonomous Council was established. But the Council could not give any satisfaction to the people, leave alone the women. I joined with the idea that I would be able to do something for all of them.”¹⁴

The above account of Pramila Rani Brahma, one of the most notable Bodo women leader that the Bodo movement has produced, leaves certain lessons. One, the humble background of her family was no obstacle to her in the field of politics. Two, the patriarchy was quite intimidating for her but that could neither take her away from educational pursuits nor distract her from supporting an organization that was disliked by her father. Third, and perhaps most important, it shows the limitation as well as opportunities that a women normally encounters in her life, both before and after marriage.

The women participation in the Bodo movement should be appreciated keeping in mind cases such as the one discussed here. What the men expect of them or what they expect of themselves is rarely fulfilled because the society is not yet ready to concede them a corner of its public domain. Politics, governance, movement, etc. are men's domain in the worldview

of the Bodos as it is so with very many other communities in India. If the men need the women to participate in a movement it is still within the extended domestic domain which includes cooking food for the male activists, weaving aronani and offering it to the males, nursing them if they are injured, and the like.

Impact of the Bodo Movement

All social movement aims to bring a change in the prevailing system. For that every social movement organizes itself as collective action under an organizational structure, with an ideology and set goals. While trying to achieve its specific goals, social movements leave powerful effects both within its organizational and support structure and on the larger society of which it is a part. The most glaring impact of the Bodo movement has been the redefining of the Assamese Identity. During; the Movement themselves as distinct ethno-linguistic community and tried to reverse Assamese formation. According to them Bodo speaking people cannot be Assamese¹⁵. This indeed was the first time when the Bodos clearly asserted their distinct ethnic identity to realize their political demand.

Although socio-economic and political processes in Assam in postIndependence years prepared the background of the Bodo hegemonic project, the immediate circumstances were provided mainly by two factors – a. the signing of Assam Accord and b. AGP politics and policies. During the initial stage of the Assam movement the Bodos had supported the Assamese cause. The issue of Bodo identity started taking serious turn only with the signing of Assam Accord. The question therefore arises as to why the Bodos suddenly started feeling insecure about losing their ethnic identity. It was due to the inclusion two controversial Clauses in Assam Accord Clause no 6 and 10 and the confusing intention behind the implementation of these clauses created a fear pshyche among the Bodos.. They feared that this Clause might give legitimacy to the imposition of Assamese language and culture on

them. Hence doubts surfaced and leading sections of the Bodo community conceded that without a separate state their language and identity would soon become extinct. Out of this apprehension the Bodos led by ABSU started a mass movement for the creation of a separate Bodo state during the first tenure of AGP, who came to power as result of the Assam Accord. And it became clear by then that the state's major tribal population (Bodos) was not willing to be identified as Assamese. Until then it had probably not crossed any of the signatory's mind that the term "Assamese people" would have meant anything other than the composite Assamese community.

This chapter will explore how the growth of Bodo politics of identity led to ethnicization of Assamese as well as the redefinition of the Assamese identity. Before that a brief insight into the historical process of formation of the Assamese identity is necessary.

The Assamese Community and Identity Formation Process

The formation of Assamese community and identity is related to the process of Aryanization as well as rise and consolidation of Ahom rule in "Brahmaputra Valley.

Since time immemorial people from Indian sub-continent as well as from the Far-East used to migrate to Assam. Various groups belonging to Mongoloid origin entered the Valley from different directions- China, Tibet and Burma. They were followed by Aryans from the Indian mainland. Around 1000 B. C. the Mongoloid ruling figures in Assam had come to the fold of Brahminical Hinduism with which the process of Aryanization commenced in the Brahmaputra valley.¹⁶ Although it was not as rigid as in some parts of India the caste system gradually took root with gradual growth of Hinduism. But the process of Hinduization in the valley was not complete since the tribes retained most of the aspects of their religion and culture in practice. It remained incomplete during the colonial period and post-colonial period as well. Even then the interaction, assimilation and integration of various cultures, religions,

racess and civilizations had produced distinctive syntheses among the people of Brahmaputra Valley and gave birth to a distinct community semi-tribal and semi-feudal in nature. This unique community later came to be known as the Assamese.

This social process got further momentum with the advent of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century. Under Ahom system of centralized administration the various indigenous ethnic groups like Kacharis, Moran, Muttaks, Karbis, Chutias, Tiwas, Rabhas, Bodos, Mishings, Deuris and Koches all assimilated themselves into a single cultural community. The rise of Vaisnavism in the fifteenth century provided further impetus to this social process of assimilation in Brahmaputra Valley.

It is to be noted that the Assamese identity did not emerge before or during the Ahom rule nor did Assamese language and literature develop in its present form during that period. But it is a fact that the Assamese language developed locally, and expanded more through the cultural assimilation of myriad tongued peoples during the 600 year Ahom rule. They even gave up their Tai-Ahom language and adopted Assamese as the state language. In natural course events the language also spread to the areas of their influence. Further, the Assamese language, literature, dance and drama developed very significantly due to the endeavours of Vaishnava preachers or gurus.

Assam was even able successfully resist Mughal invasion mainly due to the unity and stability brought about by Ahom rule. This can be regarded as a sign of pre-national collectivity of the people of pre-colonial Brahmaputra valley. Ideally, this collectivity should have found expression in a single Assamese national identity, but this did not happen. The prevailing chaotic political situation in 17th century Assam led to British intervention and in 1826 Assam (Ahom territory) became part of the British Indian Empire. With it, the entire ongoing social processes in Brahmaputra Valley came to a halt, leaving fissures for future Assamese identity.

Assertion of Assamese Identity during British Period

As a social process identity formation involves close interaction between the individual, the society and history. Individual identity becomes collective or group identity when solidarities become organized for collective action and decision. This is how categories of persons transform to collective actors through organization and articulation of identity. The determination of such a collective action involves legitimating of its boundary in terms of psychic, social, cultural and sometimes in territorial domains. Therefore, identity formation should be seen as a process that takes place in time context and its coherence and intensity depends on the culmination of overlapping symbols of assimilation and inclusion essential in the formation of group consciousness.¹⁷

As early as 1837, the Colonial rulers had replaced Assamese with Bengali in the schools and courts of Assam. This decision came out of their concrete belief that Assamese was a dialect of Bengali language. This however, was not a sudden decision. Many British officials like John Peter Wade, Francis Hamilton who had the opportunity to come to Assam even prior to 1826 expressed that common people were familiar with Bengal. In fact Wade in the preface of his report commented upon the originality of the Assamese language that the original history of Assam exists in two distinct languages i.e. the Baloongh or Ahom (the language of the race of Swargadeo) and Bakha (Bassa) being a dialect of the Bengalee.¹⁸ Later David Scott also opined on the same line with Hamilton. Moreover, the Assamese language at that time was not in good shape nor was there any educational institution that was imparting education in Assamese in Assam. In comparison the Bengali language and literature had been far advanced than the Assamese language and already was widely accepted as an elite language in different parts of India.¹⁹

At the initial stage of British rule, the educated Assamese showed a strong desire to learn Bengali language. They were not concerned much about the status of their mother-

tongue. Bengali was introduced as court language in Assam following the Act XXIX of 1837 passed by the President of the Council of India on the 20th November 1837, which directed the vernacular language of a district to be used in the courts.²⁰ Immediately decision was taken to introduce Bengali since Assam was a part of the Presidency of Bengal. In fact for more than ten years after the annexation of Assam, Assamese was the court language in Assam and if the above Act was to implement fully Assamese should remained as the court language. Presumably that Act was not implemented in all parts of India alike. With introduction of Bengali in courts and school in Assam the influence of both, the language and its speakers increased.

It is to be noted here that for the British colonizers Assam was merely an extension of Bengal and they showed no intention to establish schools and educated the Assamese people. Their main aim was to earn maximum profits by exploiting the resource of Assam. Therefore, the already surplus educated unemployed Bengalis were brought from Bengal to work as subordinates in Assam's administration.²¹ Under such circumstances, the Bengalis monopolized nearly all Government jobs in Assam. The Assamese people became a subordinate class socially with which the former fascination for Bengali language began to decrease. The educated Assamese elite like Aandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Baruah and Hem Chandra Baruah endeavoured for development and reintroduction of Assamese language with the help of American Baptist Missionaries. Although the language developed to an extent, they failed to convince the British Government to change their decision.

By the last quarter of 19th century the forces of modern education led to the emergence of an Assamese intelligentsia with which the cry for Assamese identity also became intensified. They articulated the fear of the crisis of the Assamese identity and started pressing the British Government for restoration of Assamese language to its former position. This issue of restoration necessitated the establishment of the independent status of Assamese language.

This was followed by establishment of literary societies like the Asomiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha in 1888 and by publishing journals like the Jonaki the intelligentsia carried on the fight for Assamese identity. Other middle class organization like the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, Assam Association and the Asom Sahitya Sabha continued to express and articulate the sentiments of Assamese identity. The efforts of this class bore fruit and, finally in 1873 Assamese was reintroduced in courts and schools in Assam.

As is usually the case, in Assam also the educated elite was the most articulated section of the Assamese society. They stressed on issues like the preservation and promotion of the Assamese language, jobs for the sons of the soil and the overall development of society. But, most of the issues that they raised were related basically to their own class interests. From the very beginning they had to face intense competition from the advance Bengali middle class, therefore all their rages were expressed against the Bengali speakers. They played a collaborative role with the Colonial government for a long time only to serve their own interest and for that same purpose the issue of Assamese identity found dominant place in their agenda and politics. Their endeavours for restoration of Assamese language definitely created a 'we' feeling among its speakers and under their hegemony, the Assamese language became the most important and sensitive symbol of Assamese identity.

It was only by 1920's, that the Assamese middle class was able to consolidate its position in Assam. Meanwhile, the growth of independence movement and popularity of Congress reshaped their agenda. They turned their attention to the ongoing Muslim immigration from East Bengal seriously. Conditions of land abundance, low population density, and Government revenue considerations led the British to encourage immigrants from East Bengal to settle in the wastelands of Assam. This offended the peasantry, both tribal and non-tribal, and their cause was articulated by the Assamese middle class.

The Congress leadership in Assam which was virtually dominated by the Assamese high Caste Hindus did not share the idea of a broader Assamese identity consisting of the different communities of the hills and plains. And they never tried to give Assamese identity a territorial limit. They rather adhered to the common perception of the time that Assamese identity was synonymous with the people living in Brahmaputra valley only, where natural assimilation had taken place for centuries. This is revealed in the election appeal of the Congress Party of 1946 that stated, "Unless the province be organized on the basis of the Assamese language and Assamese culture, the survival of Assamese nationality (identity) will be impossible." The influx of immigrants from East Bengal and the prospect of grouping Assam with Bengali Muslim dominated areas of Bengal forced the party to take up the issue of Assamese identity more seriously, The Assamese identity remained fluid. It had undergone many changes along with territorial and demographic changes initiated by the colonial regime. New elements were added to the Assamese identity in the form of new immigrant populations like Muslim Bengalis, Marwaris, Nepalese and tea industry labourers who accepted Assamese as the lingua franca and became part of the Assamese culture thereby making it more diverse. Even if no conscious attempt was made by the Assamese middle class to bring the hill tribes within the fold of Assamese identity, Assamese language continued to be the link language among them. In fact, the policy of segregation of the hills was to a large extent responsible for this. The hill tribes became politically conscious quite early and within a few years after independence got separated from Assam to form their own states.

It is evident from the above discussion that the Assamese identity had undergone a historical evolution and had reached a particular stage of its development with the emergence of educated elite and subsequently a middle class. This middle class in the process of achieving its own interests became aware of its identity and propagated this idea of Assamese identity partly in order to attain its own interests and partly in its sincere belief that such an

identity was necessary for the survival of any community. This idea of identity gradually began to permeate the whole Assamese society. Till the second and third decades of the twentieth century Assamese identity remained almost unchallenged because of the fact that other groups of the composite Assamese community had not reached that stage of maturity where an identity could emerge.

However, from the 1930s onwards the situation gradually began to change as other ethno-linguistic communities too began to develop elite class. Among those in the Assam Plains, the Bodos were the first to develop a small educated elite group. There were no apparent conflicts between the Assamese middle class and Bodo middle class in those days because their class interests hardly clashed with each other. It is a fact that during the colonial period the Bodos became aware about their distinct identity. But this identity was mostly taken up with the task of bringing social reforms in their own society rather than articulating identifiable identity issues like language, religion, culture etc. They considered themselves part of composite Assamese community which is evident from their following words that the Bodos can by no means call themselves other than Assamese²² and refused to be a part of Bengal due to cultural differences.

Rupnath Brahma in his Presidential Address of the History Session of Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1956, talked about the contribution of the Bodo-Kacharis to the Assamese language among many other things. In fact, till a particular point of time after independence the issue of differentiation from Assamese identity was not at all emotional outpourings about tribal and non-tribal unity within the Assamese society, vanished with an almost continuous quest of the Assamese middle class to establish their hegemony over Assamese society.

Imposition of Assamese Identity And Assertion of Bodo Identity

During the post-independence period the projection of Assamese identity acquired a new dimension. The linguistic reorganization of States within the framework of the Indian nation-state necessitated this new projection of Assamese identity as the regional identity. Usually a group attaining or wishing to attain a hegemonic position uses identity as an organizing principle by which it tried to assimilate and alienate rival competitive groups. The quest for an Assamese identity in post-independence period is suggestive of this hegemonic project. It is interesting to note that Assamese speakers actually were a minority in colonial Assam, the second largest group after the Bengali speakers. Independence made the Assamese leaders tried to consolidate their position in the apex of socio-economic as well as political sphere of Assam by implementing some vigorous policies like language policy.

The first big step in that direction was made by passing the State Official Language Bill, 1960 in Assam Legislative Assembly which made Assamese the sole official language in Assam. They considered it necessary to bring a psychological unity among different people living in the Plains and Hills alike. It however, brought a major wedge between the Assamese speakers and other linguistic groups of the State. In 1972 Assamese language was made the medium in Universities of Assam. Various linguistic communities protested against it by stating it as a means to enhance Assamese dominance in Assam. And among the Plains Tribes the Bodo protest was the loudest.

During that period Assamese identity also developed as part of both its global and local concerns. As India pursued a voracious quest for global economic power, Assam's natural resources were exploited in a quasi-colonial manner but the Assamese got little benefit. Being situated at the periphery of modern state it had to reassert its identity in relation to the Powerful Central Indian State and other competing regional groups to get a legitimate share in allocation of resources and developmental benefits.

The language issue is the most sentimental issue of all community. It was on the issue of language that the tension between the tribals of Assam and the mainstream Assamese began. During the Assam Movement on foreign national issue both non-tribal and tribal segments of Assamese society stood together across class and caste lines. This unity did not last long. Soon the Bodos withdrew their support from the Movement. Their dismay grew along with the signing Assam Accord. The Assam movement reinforced Assamese middle class's desire for policies that would protect Assamese cultural identity. The AGP Government ushered in a new wave of enforcement of the domination of Assamese language in schools, universities, administrative offices and communication systems to demonstrate that the Assamese were the effective masters in their own house.²³ In doing so they paid little attention to the sentiments and fears of other linguistic groups. Different tribal communities of Brahmaputra valley and perhaps even a few hill tribes like the Karbis and Dimasas, in the natural course of events, would have probably integrated themselves with the Assamese identity but, the forceful imposition of the Assamese language created a sense of identity crisis among them and the process of construction as well as assertion of distinct identities gained momentum among them. According to U Mishra²⁴ the Assamese overzealousness in protecting their language has alienated the tribal communities of the Brahmaputra valley. For the same reason the Bodos started disowning themselves from the Assamese identity.

The growth of Bodo regionalism was the immediate after effect of the confusion generated by Clause 6 of that Accord. They were equally concerned about another Clause 10 of the Accord which promised evictions from reserved Government lands. While bringing it into action foreigners and indigenous people all were treated alike by the Government without considering the fact that a section of Bodo community still stuck to the traditional migratory habits. The issue of eviction of some Bodos provided the spark to the Bodo Movement that was launched during the first tenure of AGP Government. According to Sanjib Baruah the

failure on part of Assam Movement leaders to select sufficiently inclusionary historical and cultural symbols and in being insufficiently insensitive to “foreigners” and “indigenous” peoples alike led to ethnicization of Assamese.²⁵ On top of everything else this new Assamese leadership, politically secure, also tried to convert this security into economic security of their own community. And to a certain extent they neglected the interests of tribal population.

The indifference attitude shown by Assamese political leadership while crafting Assamese community, had distanced the tribal communities to be a part of the greater Assamese community. They never attempted to bring together the exclusive ethnic formations within one single political project by generating equal socio-economic developments among them. Rather they took it for granted that all sections would accept to be part of Assamese identity and culture since they had adopted Assamese as one of their own languages. Hence, the endeavour of Assamese leaders to equate the territorial identity of multi-ethnic Assam with the ethno-linguistic identity of Assamese speaking people of Brahmaputra valley led to assertion of a distinct Bodo identity.

We have observed earlier how Bodo politics over the years has evolved from tribal ethnicity to regionalism. The main theme of the Bodo state demand movement was the ethnic differentiation from the Assamese. The Bodo speaking people cannot be Assamese. For reasons of legitimacy of a distinct Bodo identity and political power the reversal of Assamization was but necessary. In this context history and language has played important roles.

Revival of Ancient Glory

As a result of creating a Pan-Bodo identity, the Bodos became eager to know their root and ancient glory. It has led them to reconstruct their ancient History on the basis of authentic source materials. A credible capacity to recall a community's early historical accomplishments

can offer valuable political capital for its political leaders. The Bodos have few comparisons here. They have presented a continuous history of amalgamated Bodo race as masters of the Brahmaputra valley under different names in different stages of history till 1854 when the last Bodo kingdom was captured by the imperial power.

They have made a study of their origin and history regarding Assam and based on historical authenticity claim that they were the original inhabitants of the land. They use the category 'artificial Assamese' to describe the present generation of Assamese ethno-nationals who represents the relatively upper formations of the Hindu caste structure. The latter's ancestry, according to Bodo leaders, can be traced to migrants from northern India.

The attitude of some of mainstream Assamese people towards the Bodo movement had widened the gulf between the two communities. Two major communities of Assam who were co-existing peacefully so far became hostile to each other. Politics of identities very rarely accepts homogenization. Recognition of differences in terms of ethnicity, language, religion is what strengthens identity politics. Since the relationship of power and subordination play central part in identity formation, identity tends to form boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Again all social relations can become the focus of antagonism in so far as they are constructed as relations of subordination. Many different forms of subordination can become the focus of antagonism in so far as they are constructed as relations of subordination. Many different forms of subordination can become the origin of conflict and struggle. There exists therefore in society a multiplicity of potential antagonisms and class antagonism is only one among many.²⁶ The ethnic rage in Bodo case was directed mainly towards Assamese assimilation and subordination. And the Bodos do not call themselves 'Assamese' as user of the language. Assamese belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages. Most of the tribal languages historically associated with Assam belong to the Tibeto-Burman cluster, which includes the Bodo group²⁷ Assamese language and literary

history bear close affinity to their counterparts in Bengal and further west the eastern Hindi area to lend credence to their indigenous pretensions. Given such a perception of the part of the Bodos, it is understandably why they want a division of Assam and a homeland free from Assamese political domination and exploitation connected with 'land, education, culture and job opportunities.

The Bodos had completely denounced the basic notion of Assamese community identity formed by great Vaishnava Preacher Sankardeva. The young genre of Bodo leaders started raising questions regarding Assamese identity and community even questioned, "What is the definition of Assamese?". According to them (ABSU) there is no clear cut accepted definition of Assamese. In practice one whose mother tongue is originally Assamese and not converted from non-Assamese speaking community is known as Assamese. As such Bodos are not Assamese. They showed total disregard for the ethnic process that had taken place historically in Assam which led to emergence of the Assamese community.

It is interesting that the process of Sanskritization that led to the birth first of Assamese community and later Assamese nationality was in fact geared up at the initiative of Bodo rulers. However it was not imposed on them without their will. Compared to the formation of Assamese community the formation of Assamese regional identity was of recent origin.

Any nation is "imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each other lives the image of their communion."²⁸ Therefore endurance of a nation is basically an emotional process. However, in post-independence years, the Assamese identity became more exclusive.

The Movement also popularized the learning to their pristine culture which could be noticed in their religious practices, death rituals, food habits, preference for Bodo names over

Assamese, use of Dokhona etc. It seems that for the Bodos of today, establishing a Bodo identity is more important than anything else. Bodos have attained something short of separate state in the form of BTAD and Bodo language is a schedule eight language at par with Assamese. Therefore it is natural that any reference today to the Bodos automatically invites attention to their position in the state vis-a-vis the Assamese. The Bodos seemed to have no objection to be called Assamese as long as the term means all indigenous people and Indian citizens living within geographic boundary of Assam. But they objected to be called Assamese in the sense of the speaker of the language. This indeed is a new development which the Assamese today have to digest with a grain of salt. However, the inadequate public recognition given to the Bodo language in Assam is both the result of the relative newness of the Bodo project of differentiation and the inevitable consequence of the very logic of language based sub-nationalisms and cultural grammar of the national-province of India.

The Bodoland movement brought about a new height of identity consciousness among the Bodos and also gave a new definition to the Assamese identity. Assamese identity could no longer be regarded as a monolithic identity. The linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class severely affected the natural process of assimilation of different ethnic groups into emerging Assamese nationality. In fact the Bodos clearly rejected being part of it. Other tribes also want their respective identities to be preserved. In fact the Assamese nationality formation came to a halt.²⁹

The common Bodo people refused to identify themselves as a part of greater Assamese community of Assam. The movement had brought such a confidence among Bodo speakers that now there would be Bodo youths within the BTAD who do not prefer to speak or cannot speak Assamese. For example the students of 20 No. Boragari J B School situated in Kokrajhar revealed that they do not know Assamese. Bodo writer Bidya Sagar Narzary was selected for the Sahitya Academy Award for his work *Birgwsrini Thungru* in 2008. In

2005, Mangalsing Hazowary got the award for '*Jiuni Mwgthang Bisombi Arw Aroj*' a collection of Poetry and in 2007 Janil Kumar Brahma also got the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. Central Institute of Indian Languages, a Central Government organ, has also made provision to make interested people proficient in Bodo language through its ten month long training programme. Today, Bodo speakers proudly identify themselves as Bodo with their distinctive language, culture, rituals and history. Earlier knowledge of Assamese was important to avail of economic opportunities. Now, after the formation of the BTAD and political autonomy, this is no longer necessary.

The idea of Assamese identity is no longer relevant today. Lack of inclusionary historical elements to bind different social communities and the chauvinistic attitude of Assamese political mainstream to make Assam an Assamese speaking province proved detrimental to the unity and integrity of people living in Assam. In 2003 when the Bodos finally got the BTC, reluctant Assamese mainstream ultimately accepted the fact that Assam is a multi ethnic and multi-lingual state. To maintain the territorial oneness of Assam it has to be accepted anyway. The Assamese mainstream has accepted the multi-cultural nature of its identity which was reflected in representation of State's culture at the inaugural function of National Games held in Assam in 2006. Earlier, a Bodo cultural party which had won the first prize in a national competition held at Hyderabad and was selected for Festival of India in Moscow was dropped by the Assam Government and replaced by an Assamese Bihu Cultural Party. Bodo cultural programmes have been exhibited as Assamese Bodo dance in the Apna Utsav held in Delhi. The first Bodo documentary film *Daina* was also awarded as being an Assamese Bodo language film. Many other such instances are there.

The rising ethnic and linguistic aspirations of the very communities who were contributory to the formation of Assamese community have brought about a transformation to it.

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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 19th 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 20th 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, 10th 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.

Appendix-1

Memorandum Submitted before the by Bodo Community of Simon Commission Goalpara District on 4th January, 1929

We the undersigned on behalf of the Bodo-Community of the district of Goalpara of Assam beg to submit the following memorandum. Some of the important points touching the enquiry with a special reference to the District of Goalpara and to the Bodo Community of the said district.

1) That the Bodo Community forms a considerable portion of the population of the district of Goalpara and its numbers about 1 lakh 50 thousands. In the whole province of Assam its numbers are almost eight lakhs. A large number of Bodos live in the district of Jalpaiguri and Cochbihar in the province of Bengal. Out of one Lakh and fifty thousands, some thousands have been treated as Hindus which is the cause of decrease in number of the Bodo population in the district of Goalpara. The Bodos have a district civilization of their own. There should be a separate category as 'the Bodos' in the Census Report. The history shows very clearly what part of this community has been playing in the history of Assam since the time of Bhagadutta, who ruled over Assam during the time of the great Epic, the Mahabharata. Many kings who rules over Assam belonged to this race. Bhisma raja, Bali raja, Ban raja and ViswaSingha all belonged to this race and history will prove how influential once they were.

2) The people of this race are born warriors and even now many people have listed their names in the military under the British Government. The original proprietor of the Bijni Estate and Cochbehar Estate were people of this race. But in the course of time, they

styled themselves as Hindus, their Estates are still existing but are totally ignored. We belong back-wards, failed together to place the opinion of our community before. So we could not submit the memorandum in time and we hope that you will be pleased to accept it and to consider it favourably for your decisions as regards Indian constitution, will make a distinctly new stage in our political life.

3) **Electorate:** In our opinion, there should not be mixed electorate. Each section of the people should have the liberty of sending their representatives in the local councils. The peculiar position in which we are placed offers as practically no chance of sending our representatives in which, though there is a large number of voters in our community. Out of the total population of the whole district of Goalpara which numbers about Six lakhs eighty five thousand eight hundred and eighty two, three lakhs sixty nine thousand three hundred ninety seven fall under the heads of non-Mohammadians. Non-mohammadians mean Hindus, Christians, Jains, Sikhs and the like. A liberal view of the thing shows that we cannot enjoy the advantages of the reform as the other community does. In spite of our being in such a large number all advantages of the reform are being enjoyed either by the Brahmins or by the Khatriyas or by the Sudras. So in order to safeguard the interest of our community we should have a separate representative in the council.

4) In our opinion, there should not be a second chamber in the local council.

5) At present there are certain restrictions which debar many to exercise their right of franchise. This should be removed and more liberty be given for that purpose. There should be four seats in the central legislature one for Mhammadians and three for non-Mhammadians; and one of the three non-Mhammadian seats should be reserved for Bodos of Assam.

6) **Territorial pre-distribution:**Some interested persons of our district are agitating for the transfer of the district of Goalpara over to Bengal. As far as we are concerned, we opposed it. Goalpara is a part and parcel of Assam and history will prove what part she has been playing since the time immemorial. The habits and customs of the people of this district are more akin to Assamese than to Bengalis. We the Bodos can by no means call ourselves other than Assamese. The transfer of this district to Bengal will be prejudicial to the interest not only of this community, but all the other communities, and this transfer will seriously hamper our progress in all directions.

7) We also desire to put it before you that there be a sub-division either at Kokrajhar or at Haltugaon within the sub-division of Dhubri. This community should be benefited as "listed community" and more opportunity of employment be given.

8) **Education and appointment:**We the undersigned beg to lay before you that this community should receive special treatment at the hands of the Government in matters of education and appointment. Our community is most backward in point of education. Such being the case, our people are always misled. They cannot understand the value of reform. They cannot save themselves from the hands of the foreign money lenders. To remove this drawback there should be compulsory pre-primary education and special scholarship for going facility for higher education to Bodo students be provided for. As stated before, a large number of our people are serving the Military and thereby rendering loyal service to the British Government. We claim certain provincial and executive posts for some of our people who are getting higher education.

9) A large number of Bodo Sepoys are included in the Gurkha-regiment and are generally known as Gurkha. To our opinion, there should be a separate regiment as the 'Bodo-Regiment' for the Bodo people of Assam.

10) **Local Boards:** The Chairman of the Boards during the term of their office — big land holders should not be allowed to stand for election from general constituency. There is no objection if they are given special seats in the Boards.

11) In matters of Board election under the Dhubri Local Board, our community should have separate electorate just like the Mhammadians — under the thanas of Bilasipara, Kokrajhar, Bijni and Dhubri. The Bodo people who are in the majority in those areas should have separate seats at the Dhubri Local Board. As stated before, our peoples are illiterate and ignorant. So they are easily misled by others at the time of elections and consequently, the people of other communities are elected. In view of the illiteracy, ignorance and influence of other communities we earnestly pray so that we get separate seats in Dhubri Local Board, Such is also the condition of Goalpara Local Board. There too we want separate seats.

12) In conclusion, we beg to lay before you that, if required, any one of us is willing to appear before you and to give evidence.

Signatory

Kalicharan Brahma and others.

Appendix-2

Agreement between the Assam Plains Tribals League and the Assam Congress on 10th September, 1939 in Shillong

1. That the Assam Tribal Party will remain an independent Party and its members will not be bound to put their signatures pertaining to the creed of the Congress.
2. The present system of the separate electorate will continue till the Congress Party agree to accept the system of keeping separate seats in the joint electorate for the tribal communities in proportion to their populations.
3. The tribal communities will be allowed to send their members to the Local Boards according to the electoral system to be determined by the Tribal League in its next session.
4. The people of the tribal communities who have embraced Hinduism or Christianity will be included in the Schedule of the tribal people provided they identify themselves as the tribals.
5. The plains tribals will be treated as a separate class for Government services and in the matter of appointment. Preference will be given to them till the quota provided for them in proportion to their number is filled up. In case any candidate from among the tribal people does not possess the requisite qualification for any service, no candidate belonging to other community and possessing additional qualification will be appointed in place of such tribal candidate,

6. For the spread of education among these communities provisions must be made and maximum amount of financial grants be allocated every year out of the budget for their education.

7. Sufficient number of scholarships and stipends must be given to their students for general and professional education.

8. Sufficient number of scholarships and exemption of tuition fees must be granted in the High Schools and the M E Schools too.

9. One of their members must be included as a Minister in the Ministry.

10. The Government must make provisions for given settlement of lands to the landless tribals, particularly to the Miri people.

These conditions are considered as demands in addition to the demands laid down in the resolution of the League.

Appendix-3

Agreement between the Assam Tribal League And the Assam Muslim League on 16th March, 1940 which is accepted by Sir Md.Sadullah as the Prime Minister of Assam United Party

1. The Assam Plains Tribal party will remain as an independent party and stay as a co-partner with the United Party as long as the Assam United Party will remain in the minister. It has been expressly said that in absence of the ministry of the United Party, it will not be obligatory on the part of the Plains Tribal Party to remain a party to the United Party.

2. Regarding the Line System, policy embodied in the resolution of November 4, 1939, was accepted as the original policy and demand was available in the resolution. Accepting that condition, Sir Md.Sadullah held the Line System Conference and steps were taken to ensure the protection of the tribal interests.

3. Land settlement will be given to the landless tribal after taking into account of landless tribals.

4. The Assam United Party and their Ministry have recognised the tribals as a main minority group of Assam. They have admitted that the tribal groups like other tribal groups or communities deserve separate seats in the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils in proportion to their populations. The United Party and their Ministry will place this demand of the tribal group before the Central Government at the time of amending the India Reforms Act of 1935.

5. In case of Local Boards, there shall be a separate electorate for the plain tribal constituencies and they will get seats in proportion to their populations. The Government shall

place the Amendment Bill before the Legislative Council in order to implement this policy as early as possible.

6. Some conditions were also placed, seeking the opportunity for the educational development of the tribal communities. The Government accepted these conditions and held the Tribal Education Conference and decided to give the opportunities sought for in the conditions.

7. Those people of the tribal communities, who have embraced Hindusim of Christianity, will be included in the Schedule of the tribals provided they identify themselves as tribals. The Government will, by all legislative means, render its help so that their number is not reduced in the next census.

8. The plains tribals will be treated as a separate class for Government services and in the matter of appointment. Preference will be given to them till the quota provided for them in proportion to their number is filled up. In case any tribal candidate from among the tribal people does not possess the requisite qualification for any service, no candidate belonging to other community and possessing additional qualification will be appointed in place of such tribal candidate.

9. Special privileges and encouragement will be given to the plains tribal people in the matter of Government contract, Mahals, etc.

10. One Minister, and if it is expedient to appoint parliamentary Secretary, one Parliamentary Secretary will be appointed from the Tribal Party.

Besides, assurance was sought for to complete the works initiated during the period of the Assam United Party Ministry for exemption of taxes, total prevention of opium, removal of illiteracy and spread of Primary education for the general improvement of the public and the tribal people. We owe our gratitude to the present United Party Ministry as it has decided to continue and has been continuing those works.

Appendix-4

Resolution of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha Expressing its Viewpoints on the Issue of Assam's State Language Bill

"Whereas the repercussion of the Official Language issue in Assam has threatened the very unity of the Nation, in particular the unity of the State of Assam, the Bodo people of Assam view the development with grave concern. It has given its anxious thoughts over the issue and came to the conclusion that 'Hindi', the official language of India should be the only Official Language of Assam for the following reasons

1. The unity of India has to be maintained in order to preserve the newly won independence. The issue of the official language issue in Assam has threatened the unity giving rise to fissiparous tendency which is harmful for Assam and for India as a whole. To put an end to this tendency the best course is, in the opinion of the Bodo people, to accept 'Hindi' as the official language of the Assam placing thereby every linguistic group in the state on the same footing; that way putting the people of the State of Assam one step forward towards learning 'Hindi'. Further, the Bodo people of Assam consider that the panacea for the linguistic trouble not only of Assam but the whole of India is to adopt Hindi as the common official language of every State of India and treat any other language as vernacular.

2. It cannot be denied that Assam is multilingual State. Every linguistic group desires to keep alive their literature and get education in their own mother-tongue. The biggest linguistic group in the State is that of Assamese which can claim only 54 percent. According to the opinion, of the S.R.C. a language should be spoken by seventy per cent or more to be recognised as an Official Language of a State. Looked at from this point of

view the declaration of Assamese as official language of Assam, will mean imposition on the people of other linguistic groups. The people of Hill districts and of Cachar are almost one and all ignorant of this language. Even in the Brahmaputra Valley Districts, mainly the northern parts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang and some parts of Nowgoen and North Lakhimpur Districts the uneducated rural tribal people, mostly the Bodo people, are totally ignorant of this language. The purpose for the adoption of the official language of a State is to better and smoothen the administration. In this adoption of Assamese as an official language will totally fail.

3. In Assam, the Bodo speaking people are the largest tribal group. They have preserved their language and culture all these years under adverse circumstances. They desire very legitimately to preserve them in future also. They consider that to maintain their separate identity and to develop themselves most speedily. Their children must be given education in their mother tongue. This will not be possible if Assamese is recognised as the official language of Assam: for, in that case Assamese will be an extra language that the Bodo students will have to learn putting thereby an extra burden upon them and placing them at a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis the Assamese speaking students."

Appendix-5

Memorandum Submitted to the President of India Dr. Zakir Hissain by Plains Tribal Council of Assam on 20th May, 1967 DEMANDS

1. Full autonomy in the predominantly plains tribal areas of the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar Districts including all the Tribal Belts and Block of those areas. so that the tribals can —

- a. adequately protect their land,
- b. give effective check to economic exploitation of tribals by non-tribals,
- c. conserve their language, culture, customs and what is best in themselves,
- d. prevent political domination by non tribals over tribals and imposition of anything which would disrupt their traditions and customs and
- e. grow according to their own genius and traditions.

The plains Tribals' Council of Assam considers that the proposed federal plan Tribals provided enough to fulfil this aspiration of the Plains Tribals, provided a federating unit is carved out for the plains tribals of Assam. Hence, the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam decides to welcome the reorganisation of Assam on federal plan with the condition that a federating unit be carved out for the plains tribals also with the areas suggested above.

2. In determining areas where the plains tribals are predominant, the population that exist in the year 1947 should be the basis.

3. The plains tribal areas, which will not be continuous to the proposed federating unit for the plains tribals and consequently will remain outside that unit should be declared as Scheduled Areas and the Provisions of the Sixth Schedule should be applicable to those areas.

4. The recommendation made by the Dhebar Commission to prevent alienation of tribal land to non-tribals in the para 45 of chapter 11 which reads: we further recommend that the Deputy Commissioner or Collector should have powers suomoto or at the instance of the aggrieved tribal land holder within a period of 12 years to institute enquiries and restore possession of the land with or without payment of any compensation to the transferee. This provision should be made applicable to all transfers of land by tribals to non-tribals with retrospective effect from the 26th January, 1950, adequate machinery should be created to implement this law or regulations', should immediately be given effect to, by making suitable laws.

Appendix-6

Demands of All Bodo Students' Union Which were included in the memorandum Submitted to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on 22nd January, 1987

Demand No. 1— Creation of Separate State with the Status of Union Territory for the Plains Tribals of Assam

The all Bodo Students' Union has been demanding a Separate State with the Status of Union Territory under the Provision of Articles 2 & 3 of Indian Constitution for the Plains Tribals of Assam in the Northern Valley of the Brahmaputra along the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh for all round security and development.

Demand No. 2 — Extension of the Provision of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution in the Tribal Compact Areas of the Southern Valley of the Brahmaputra of Assam

The Provision of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution should be extended to the Tribal compact areas in the Southern Valley of the Brahmaputra River of Assam and create Autonomous District for those tribals who will be residing in Assam after the creation of Separate state in the Northern Valley of the Brahmaputra River for the plains tribals people of Assam.

Demand No. 3— Creation of Regional Council for Non-Karbi Tribes in Karbi Anglong Autonomous District

All Bodo Students' Union urges to create Regional Council for the Non-Karbi Tribes such as Bodos, Rengmas, etc. within the Karbi-Anglong Autonomous District council as per the provision of paragraph (2) of sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution.

Demand No. 4 — Preservation of Tribal Belts and Blocks and Creation of new ones

All Bodo Students' Union demands the Government of Assam as well as India to

(a) Evict all un-authorised non-Tribal encroachers from Tribal Belts and Blocks giving them alternative rehabilitation somewhere outside Tribal Belts & Blocks and other predominantly Tribal areas provided they are Indian citizens.

(b) Detect and deport all foreign nationals from Assam and India.

(c) Check further infiltration of un-authorised non-Tribal people into Tribal Belts & Blocks and other predominantly Tribal areas.

(d) Turn null and void the Land registration of non-Tribal encroachers into Belts and Blocks and restore all alienated Lands and properties to original Tribal proprietors or to their nearest kith and kins.

(e) Create new Tribal Belts and Blocks within Assam comprising all contiguous and pocket Tribal areas with retrospective effect from the 26th January, 1950. (t) operate all encroachment cases with retrospective effect from 26th January, 1950 as per the U N Dhebar Commission's Report.

Demand No. 5 — Central University at Kokrajhar

The Central Government is urged upon to sanction and install a Central University at Kokrajhar.

Demand No. 6 — Indian Institute of Technology at Kokrajhar

Your Honour is urged to direct the state Government of Assam to install the proposed IIT at Kokrajhar.

Demand No. 7 — Retention of English as the Medium of Instruction in the Colleges of Gauhati and Dibrugarh University

The Central Government is urged to direct the Universities of Gauhati and Dibrugarh to retain English as a medium of instruction along with Assamese in their colleges for an indefinite period.

Demand No. 8 — Central Museum at Kokrajhar

A Central Museum should be installed at Kokrajhar to preserve the historical and cultural monuments, sculptures, stones, symbols etc. of Bodos and other indigenous people of North East along with the Indian historical and cultural monuments, sculptures, etc. The Central Government is urged to take keen initiative to install the same at Kokrajhar with immediate effect.

Demand No. 9 — Installation of Air Station at Kokrajhar

- a. Install a new AIR station at Kokrajhar to cover all kinds of colourful Bodo programmes,
- b. To grant Bodo programmes of 60 (sixty) minutes in Dibrugarh and Siliguri stations of All India Radio.
- c. Allot 60 (sixty) minutes Bodo programme in the morning to broadcast Bodo views and news through AIR Gauhati.
- d. Increase time period of evening Bodo programme from existing 45 (fourty five) minutes upto 60 (sixty) minutes in AIR Gauhati.

Demand No. 10 — DoordarshanKendras at Udalguri and Kokrajhar

The All Bodo Students' Union has been demanding DoordarshanKendras at Udalguri and Kokrajhar to give wide coverage of Bodo programmes. Besides Bodo programmes, news should be telecast from the GauhatiDoordarshan Kendra. The central Government and the Doordarshan authorities are urged to give effect to this demand without delay.

Demand No. 11- Revival of Balajan Airport at Kokrajhar

The deserted Balajan Airport near Kokrajhar should be revived to link Kokrajhar with Air route and remove its bottleneck transportation. Kokrajhar should have direct Air link with new Delhi as well.

Demand No. 12 — Increment of Scheduled Tribes Reserve Quota in Government Services and Fulfillment of its Backlog

The Government of Assam as well as India are urged to —

- (i) Increase the Scheduled Tribes Reservation Quota in Services upto 41 % in the state.
- (ii) Fill up the Backlog posts by Schedule Tribe Candidates in no delay.
- (iii) Provide 75% job reservation in respect of new District and Sub divisions in Tribal areas like Kokrajhar, Gossaigaon and Udalguri, etc.
- (iv) Provide Rs. 100 p.m. Pension for all educated unemployed Tribal youths.

Demand No. 13 —Recognition and Implementation of Bodo as one of the Regional Language Subjects in UPSC and other Civil Services Examination

The Government of India is urged upon for immediately recognising Bodo as one of the Regional language papers in the UPSC and other Civil Service Examinations for the greater interests of the Bodo nationality.

Demand No. 14 —Inclusion of Bodo in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students' Union have been demanding the Government of India for the inclusion of Bodo into the 8th Schedule of Indian Constitution since long. But it has not been conceded uptill now. As such, the All Bodo Students' Union reiterates the same demand and requests you to take necessary steps for including Bodo Language into the 8th Schedule of Indian Constitution.

Demand No. 15 — Extension of Special Provision for Tribals in Indian Constitution from 1990 to Indefinite Period

It is needless to reiterate that the Tribal people are lagging far behind in respect of education, economy, jobs, social customs and traditions, etc.

That is why the Central Government is urged to extend the special provision for Tribals in Indian Constitution from 1990 to an indefinite period until and unless the Tribals are fully developed.

Demand No. 16 — Eradication of Poverty

It is needless to state that the plains Tribal people of Assam, particularly the Bodos are wretched, poverty stricken people. Moreover in state as well as National level over-all people are badly inflicted by severe poverty. Therefore, the Government of India is urged to follow and implement constructive policies for the eradication of poverty.

Demand No. 17 — Free and Compulsory Education for Children upto Fourteen Years of Age

The Indian Constitution provides free and compulsory education for children upto fourteen years of age in its Article 45 which had not yet been implemented with due stress. Therefore, the Government of India is urged to implement the Constitutional Provision and impart education to children upto fourteen years of age compulsory and free of cost.

Demand No. 18 — Opposition to Clause No. 6 of Assam Accord.

The Clause No. 6 of Assam Accord is being misused against the interest of Tribals in general and Bodo in particular. On the basis of this Clause, the Assamese language has been imposed upon the non-Assamese indigenous people of Assam such as Bodos which is quite undemocratic and unconstitutional. This Clause No. 6 of Assam Accord is nothing but only meant for Assamisation and assimilation. Therefore, the centre which was also a partner in signing that Accord is urged to scrap the Clause No. 6 of that Assam Accord.

Demand No. 19 — Opposition to Clause No. 10 of Assam Accord and Eviction Operation from the Forest of Assam

The All Bodo Students' Union strongly opposes the AGP Government's policy of eviction operation of tens of thousands of poor landless Tribal families from the Forest and khas lands of Assam. The Government of Assam has already issued eviction notice and started eviction operation. The ABSU also vehemently opposes the clause No. 10 of Assam Accord and the Assam Forest Protection Force Act, 1986 which are meant for the same purpose of eviction. There are enough reasons to apprehend that the Assam Forest Protection Force which has already trained up would be misused to evict, harass and massacre the Tribal people living in the Forests of Assam. The Accord which was originally arrived at for detection and deportation of real foreigners had been diverted with an ulterior motive against Tribals of Assam. On the other hand, the non-Tribal encroachers of Tribal Belts and Blocks have not been evicted at all under the Clause No. 10 of Assam Accord itself. Therefore, the Central Government is urged to direct the state Government of Assam to stop the policy of evicting Tribal families from the Forest and khas lands of Assam but to give permanent settlement where they are living in. The ABSU also demands to scrap the Clause No. 10 of Assam Accord and the Assam Forest Protection Force to bring peace in the jungles of Assam.

Demand No. 20 - Opposition to Four Language Formula

It is reportedly learnt that, although the SEBA Circular of 28th February, 1986 has been suspended, the Government of Assam is still planning to introduce Four Language Formula in Secondary School of Assam imposing Assamese as Compulsory Subject upon the non-Assamese Medium Students from the Academic Session of 1987 which is in contravention with the National Three-Language Formula of 1968. Moreover, this is an undemocratic and unconstitutional move of the State Government. Nowhere in any other State of India Four Language Formula has been implemented. Say, in Bihar and UP only

Two Language Formula is used in secondary stage. The ABSU states that the Bodo Medium Student will read their mother tongue Bodo. International Language English and National Language Hindi only in Secondary stage. Bodo students cannot take the extra burden of fourth language. Therefore, ABSU opposes the Four Language Formula and urges the Central Government to pressurise the State Government of Assam not to introduce Four Language Formula.

Demand No. 21 — Revocation of Assamese from the Pre-Condition in State Service

It has been noticed that in various advertisements and circulars for the recruitments in state services the Government of Assam has laid a pre-condition of the knowledge of Assamese Language which is discriminatory against the non-Assamese speaking candidates as a result of which the Bodo Medium Students are deprived of getting state jobs. This pre-condition is against the provisions of Articles 14, 15 & 16 of Indian Constitution and a flagrant violation of Clause No. 7 of Assam Official Language Act, 1960. Under such circumstances, ABSU demands the Government of India to set aside the pre-condition of Assamese language in the recruitments for state services. Furthermore, Assamese must not be the sole official language of Assam. English should not be totally removed from the offices of Assam.

Demand No. 22 — Extension of Bodo as Associate Official Language in other Districts of Assam

The erstwhile Assam Government confined the jurisdiction of recognition of Bodo as Associate official language only in Kokrajhar District and Udalguri Sub-Division depriving the large section of Bodo speaking people as well as Bodo medium Students of other districts of their legitimate rights. Therefore, the Central Government is urged to direct the state Government to recognise Bodo as Associate Official Language in other districts too under the Provision of Art. 347 of Indian Constitution to give equal status to Bodo language as well as

to give facilities to all Bodo speaking people and Bodo medium students of all districts of Assam. As such, the ABSU demands that Bodo should be extended as Associate official language in the Districts of Dhubri, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Sonitpur, Lahimpur, Goalpara, Nagaon and Karbi-Anglong with immediate effect.

Demand No. 23 — Opposition to AASU's Demand for Constitutional Amendments

The All Bodo Student's Union vehemently opposes the All Assam Student's Union's (AASU) demand for Constitutional Amendments so as not to apply the provisions of Articles 330 and 347 of Indian Constitution in the case of Assam which a great threat to the interest of the plains Tribals of Assam particularly the Bodos. It is reportedly learnt that the AsomGanaParishad Party is also taking such a move. The demand is an undemocratic and unconstitutional one and chauvinist in its nature. As such, the all Bodo Students' Union urges upon the Government of India not to succumb to such chauvinist pressure and not to amend the Indian Constitution in such a crooked way.

Demand No. 24 — Stoppage of Political Assassination and Extremism in Assam

It is seen that an ugly head of extremism and political assassination is mounting up and a number of political assassinations have already taken place and many other political leaders and activists are getting threatening letters to their lives. This is an omen in a democratic country like India. On the other hand, the State Government and the administration completely failed to protect the lives of people and maintain law and order situation in the state rather including Assamese extremists. ABSU is opposed to the principle of violence.

Demand No. 25 — Stoppage of Brutal Police Atrocities upon the Bodo Students

The Assam Government and administration has let loose the police atrocities and reign of terror upon the Bodo students for demanding separate State and struggling to preserve their identity and culture. Police Forces are deadly hostile and repressive upon the Bodos

particularly in Kokrajhar District and Udlguri Sub-Division. Police forces are out to crush down the Bodos. So, your Honour is urged to take all necessary steps to stop police atrocities upon the Bodos and the Bodo Students and youths in particular.

Appendix-7

The Bodo Accord (BAC Accord, 20 February, 1993)

1. Preamble

- (i) Both the Government of India and Assam have been making earnest efforts to bring about an amicable solution to the problems of the Bodos and other Plains Tribals living in the north bank of river Brahmaputra within Assam.
- (ii) Towards this end, the Government of India held a series of meetings with the State Government as well as with leaders of All Bodo leaders. As a result, it has been considered necessary to set up an administrative authority within the state of Assam under a scheme, the details of which are outlined in the succeeding paragraphs:

2. Objective

The objective of this scheme is to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement.

3.

- a. **Name:** Bodoland Autonomous council (BAC): There shall be formed, by an Act of Assam Legislative Assembly, a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) within the State of Assam comprising contiguous geographical areas between river Sankosh and Majbat river Pansnoi. The land records authority of the State will scrutinize the list of villages furnished by ABSU/BPAC having 50 per cent and more of tribal population which shall be included. BAC will also include Reserve Forest as per guidelines laid

by Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Environment and forests, Government of India, not otherwise required by the Government for manning the international border and tea gardens located completely within the BAC contiguous areas.

- b. **Powers:** The BAC WILL COMPRISE OF A General Council comprising 40 members, 35 elected on the basis of adult suffrage and having a life of five years. The Government will have powers to nominate 5 members to the Council, particularly from groups which could not otherwise be represented. This Council will have powers to make by-laws, rules and orders for application within the BAC area on the subjects enumerated in Schedule 'A'.
- c. The Executive Authority of the BAC would be exercised in its Executive Body to be known as Bodoland Executive Council (BEC). The BEC will be responsible for implementation within the areas of the laws in Schedule 'A'.
- d. The General council and the BEC will hold office during the pleasure of the Governor of Assam. Consultation with the State Law Department of Government of Assam would be necessary if the Governor proposed to dissolve either the General Council or the BEC before the expiry of its term in accordance with the provisions of law. The Executive authority of the BEC will be exercised by the party enjoying a simple majority in the General Council. On completion of elections, the Governor would invite the leaders of the majority party to constitute the BEC.

4.

- 1) a. The finances for the BAC will be earmarked under a separate sub-head within the State budget in keeping with the guidelines laid down by the Government of India from time to time. The Governor of Assam would have no powers to divert this earmarked allocation to other heads areas except in exigencies when there is unavoidable overall Budget cut.

b. The provisions made in 4 (i) (a) regarding allocation of funds should be in line with the spirit of the Constitution (seventy second) and (seventy third) amendment.

2). The BAC would also receive grant –in aid from time to time within the principles and policies enunciated by the Government of India.

3). The General Council will have powers to raise finances from levies/fees/taxes etc on subjects mentioned in Schedule ‘A’ subject to Constitutional amendment mentioned above.

4). The finances for the BAC will be managed exclusively by the General Council and the statement of its annual of its annual accounts will be laid on the table of the State Assembly.

5. Powers of Appointments

The Bodoland Executive Committee would have powers to appoint Class III and Class IV staff within its Jurisdiction for implementation of scheme connected with the subjects enumerated in Schedule ‘A’.

6. Reservation of Seats

The Election Commission of India will be requested by the BAC to consider seat reservation and delimitation of Constituencies, both Lok Sabha and the State Assembly, within the BAC area to the extent permitted by the Constitution and the law. Thereafter, only candidates belonging to the Schedule Tribes (Plains) will remain entitled to contest these reserved seats.

7. Special Provisions for the BAC Area

The General Council shall be consulted and its views shall be given due regard before any law made on the following subjects, is implemented in the BAC area.

- (i) The religious or social practices of the Bodos:
- (ii) The Bodo customary laws and procedures; and

(iii) The ownership and transfer of land within the BAC area.

8. Special Status of the Bodoland Autonomous Council

The BAC shall, within the laws of the land, take steps to protect the demographic complexion of the areas falling within its jurisdiction.

9. Special Courts

Action will be taken in consultation with the Gauhati High court to set up within BAC area Special Courts as specified below to try suits and cases between parties all of whom belong to Scheduled Tribes or Tribes in accordance with the tribal customary law and procedure, if any.

(a) Village Courts

(b) Subordinate District Customary Law Courts within a civil Sub-Divisional Territory, and

(c) District Customary Law Court

11. Appointment in Central Bodies

The claims of the Bodos shall be considered for appointment to the North-Eastern Council.

12. Official Language

The general council can lay down policy with regard to use of Bodo language as medium of official correspondence with the BAC area. However, while corresponding with office outside the BAC area, correspondence will have to be in bilingual form in accordance with the article 345 the Constitution and the provision of law in this behalf.

12. Changes in Geographical

The geographical area of the Bodoland Autonomous Council as agreed upon can be changed with the mutual consent of the BAC and the Government of Assam.

13. Revision of List of Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes

The scheduling and rescheduling of Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes residing within the Bodo areas will be done as per the Commission appointed by the Government of India under the Constitution.

14. Trade and Commerce

The General Council will have powers to regulate trade and commerce within its jurisdiction within the existing law. For this purpose, it can issue permits and licenses to individuals within the BAC area. The Government while considering allotment of permits to people residing within the BAC area will give preference to the Bodos.

15. Employment Opportunities

The BAC will have powers to restore jobs for Scheduled Tribes within its jurisdiction. However, exercise of such powers shall be in accordance with the existing Constitutional and legal provision.

16. Civil and Police Services

- (i) The Government of Assam may from time to time post officers of the rank of Class II and above to posts within the BAC in accordance with the exigencies. While making these posting due regard will be given to, views of BAC about officers being so posted.
- (ii) The officers posted to the BAC area will be accountable to the BAC for their performance and the assessment of their work recorded by the BEC authorities will be incorporated to their ACRs by the State Government.
- (iii) The Central Government, while making recruitment from the State of Assam to the army, paramilitary forces and police units, will hold special recruitment drives within the BAC area.

17. Appointment of Interim Bodoland Executive Council

The Government of Assam will take steps for the formation of an Interim Bodoland Executive Council for the BAC from amongst the leaders of the present Bodoland movement who are signatories to this settlement, during the transition period, i.e. prior to the holding of election of election. Such Interim Council would be formed before a prescribed date mutually agreed between the Central and State Government.

18. Relief and Rehabilitation

- (i) ABSU-BPAC leaders will take immediate steps to bring over ground and deposit with the District authorities all arms, ammunition and explosives in the possession of their own supporters and will cooperate with the administration in bringing over ground all Bodo militants along with their arms and ammunition etc. Within one month of the formation of the Interim BEC. In order to ensure the smooth return to civil life to the cadre and to assist in the quick restoration of peace and normalcy, such surrenders made voluntarily will not attract prosecution.
- (ii) The Government of Assam will consider sympathetically the withdrawal of all cases against persons connected with the Bodoland Movement excluding those relating to heinous crimes.
- (iii) The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the employees of Government of India and subordinate offices as well as in respect of Central undertakings. Similar action would be taken by the Government of Assam.
- (iv) The Government of Assam will initiate immediate steps for suitable rehabilitation of the Bodo militants coming over ground as a result of this

settlement, similarly, the Government will organize ex-gratia payments as, per rules to next of kins killed during the Bodo agitation.

19. Share in Collection of Excise Duty on Tea

The Government of Assam will deposit in the BAC fund revenue collected from the tea gardens falling within the BAC area.

20. Protection of Rights of Non-Tribals

The Government of Assam and the BAC fund revenue collected from the tea gardens falling within the BAC area.

21. Ad-hoc Central Grant for Launching the BAC

After the signing of this settlement, an ad-hoc Budget on reasonable basis will be prepared by Interim BEC and discussed with the State and Central Government by necessary financial support.

Sd/-
(S.K. Bwismutiary)
President, ABSU.
Government of Assam

Sd/-
(K.S. Rao)
Addl. Chief Secretary

Sd/-
(Rabi Ram Brahma)
General Secretary, ABSU

Sd/-
(SubhashBasumatari)
Chairman, BPAC.

Sd/-
(Rajesh Pilot)
Minister of State (Internal Security)
Ministry of Home Affairs,

Sd/-
(HiteshwarSaikia)
Chief Minister of Assam
State Government of Assam

Demands

(A) On Government of India

1. Education

The Government of India will give sympathetic consideration to the requests of the Bodo leaders:

- (i) For the setting up of a Central University, Agricultural University, Medical College, Ayurvedic College, Forest Training School, Sainik School, Textile Institute and a Central School within BAC area; and
- (ii) Introduction of Bodo language as medium of instruction in Post-graduate course in the Universities within the North-Eastern hills University, Shillong, by opening of a separate Bodo Department therein.

2. Cultural Development

The Government of India shall refer to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting the request of the Bodo leaders for;

- (i) Creation of facilities for programme production and opening of a TV station at Kokrajhar;
- (ii) Providing facility and capacity for production of Bodo and other tribal programmes including the broadcast of regional news from Kokrajhar Radio Station;
- (iii) Opening of one Radio Station each at Udalguri and Jonai;
- (iv) Reservation within the rules in matters of employment for the local Bodos in above mentioned new TV/Radio Stations; and
- (v) The Government of India would consider establishing a Museum at Kokrajhar for preserving and display of Bodo and other indigenous art and culture.
- (vi) All historical relics, monuments, archeological sites and remains and important historical place like Dimapur, Maibong etc. will be protected/ preserved.

3. Economic Development of Bodo Areas

The Government of India will sympathetically consider depending upon vitality, the setting up of the following in Bodo Areas:

- (i) Some forest based industries
- (ii) Some hydro-electric projects
- (iii) Some multi-purpose irrigation projects
- (iv) One fertilizer plant
- (v) One cement factory
- (vi) One paper mill
- (vii) One textile mill

4. Scholarship

The BAC will be helped by the Government of India in making arrangements for the payments for the payment of scholarships to Schedule Tribe students from primary school onward up to University level at enhanced rate and on monthly basis.

5. Bodo Hostels

The Government of India will be requested to help in establishing hostels for Bodos at New Delhi, Calcutta, Guwahati, Shillong, Madras and Bombay.

6. General

The Government of India for national security point of view shall consider construction of a National Highway starting from Raimana in the district of Kokrajhar up to Itanagar, the Capital of Arunachal Pradesh touching the Indo-Bhutan border through Bodoland and Arunachal Pradesh.

(B) On Government of Assam

1. Language and Literature

- (i) Establishment of a separate directorate of Plains Tribal Education in the BAC area with separate budget allocation.
- (ii) Establishment of a separate Education Ministry along with a separate Secretariat for Tribal Education in Assam.

- (iii) Recognition of Bodo language as one of the language subject in the Assam Public Service Commission.

2. Reservation

Increasing the reservation quota to 40 percent for the Scheduled Tribes for admission to educational institutions within Assam.

List of Subjects and Departments over which BAC will have control within the BAC area

1. Cottage Industries
2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary
3. Forests
4. Agriculture
5. PWD
6. Sericulture
7. Education
 - (a) Adult Education
 - (b) Primary Education
 - (c) Up to Higher Secondary including Vocational Training
8. Cultural Affairs
9. Soil Conservation
10. Co-operation
11. Fisheries
12. Panchayat and Rural Development
13. Handloom and Textiles
14. Health and Family Welfare
15. Public Health Engineering

16. Irrigation
17. Social Welfare
18. Flood Control scheme for protection of villages (not of highly technical nature)
19. Sports and Youth Welfare
20. Weight and measures
21. Library Services
22. Museums and Archeology
23. Urban Development – Town and country Planning
24. Tribal Research Institute
25. College Education (General)
26. Land and Revenue
27. Public/Public Relation
28. Printing and Stationary
29. Transport
30. Any other matter connected with development
31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trusts, District Boards and other local authorities
32. Tribal Welfare
33. Markets and Fairs
34. Lotteries, Theaters, Dramatic Performances and Cinemas
35. Vital Statistics including registration of births and deaths
36. Food and Civil Supply
37. Intoxicating Liquors, opium and derivatives etc.

Appendix-8

Memorandum of Settlement On Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), 2003

The Government of India and the Government of Assam have been making concerted efforts to fulfill the aspirations of the Bodo people relating to their cultural identity, language, education and economic development. Towards this end, a series of talks were held between Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) since March, 2000. As a result, it is agreed to create a self-governing body for the Bodo areas in the state of Assam as follows:

2. Objectives

The objectives of the agreement are: to create an Autonomous self governing body known as the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam and to provide Constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule to the said Autonomous Body; to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area.

3. Area

3.1 The area of proposed BTC will comprise all the 3082 villages and the areas shall be divided into 4 contiguous districts after reorganization of the existing districts of Assam within a period of months of the signing of the agreement on the lines of the proposal given by BLT subject to clearance of the Delimitation Commission.

3.2 A committee comprising one representative each from Governments of India and Assam and BLT will be decided by consensus on the inclusion of additional villages and areas in the BTC from out of 95 villages and areas on the basis of the criteria of tribal population being less than 50 per cent, contiguity and any other agreed relevant criteria within a period of three months of signing its MoS.

4. Status of Bodoland Territorial Council

The Provision of the Sixth Schedule and other Relevant Articles of the Constitution of India will apply to BTC, Mutatis Mutandis in terms of this agreement. The safeguards/modifications for the non-tribals in BTC area, inter-alia, will include the following:

Provision of Para 1 (2) of Sixth Schedule regarding Autonomous Region will not be applicable to BTC.

A provision will be made in Para 2 (1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 will be reserved for Schedule Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities from BTC area of which at least two should be women. Nominated member will have the same right and privileges as other members, including voting rights. Election from the 40 constituencies of BTC shall be on the basis of adult franchise. The term of the elected members of BTC shall be for five years.

Safeguards for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance for property etc. of non-tribal will be suitably incorporated in Para 3 of the Sixth Schedule. Any such law as may be made by the BTC in this regard will not, in particular:

- a) Extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by any citizen of India in respect of their land at the commencement of BTC, and

- b) Bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bonafide acquisition of land within the BTC area.

Provision will be added in Para 6 of the Sixth Schedule that in BTC area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without the approval or the State Government.

Provisions of Para 8 of Sixth Schedule regarding power to asses and collect land revenue and impose taxes shall be applicable to BTC.

Para 10 of the Sixth Schedule will not be applicable to BTC area.

Provision of Article 332 (6) of the Constitution will be so modified that the existing status of representation of BTC area in the State Assembly is kept intact. After the creation of BTC, the Parliamentary Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the Delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

In the event, Panchayati Raj system ceases to be in force in the council area, the power of the Panchayati Raj institutions in such manner that not-tribals are not disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected.

5. Powers and Functions

The Council shall have legislative powers in respect to subjects transferred to it as enumerated below. All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and until assented to by him, shall have no effect. The BTC shall have executive, administrative and financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it.

Subject to be enumerated to BTC by Assam Government:

1. Small, cottage and rural industry,
2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary,
3. Forests,
4. Agriculture,
5. PWD,
6. Sericulture,
7. Education (Primary Education),

Higher Secondary including Vocational Training, Adult Education, College Education (General) 8. Cultural Affairs, 9. Soil Conservation, 10. Co-operation, 11. Fisheries, 12. Panchayat and rural Development, 13. Handloom and Textile, 14. Health and Family welfare, 15. Public Health Engineering. 16. Irrigation, 17. Social Welfare, 18. Flood Control, 19. Sports and youth Welfare, 20. Weights and Measures, 21. Library Services, 22. Museum and Archeology, 23. Urban Development-Town and country Planning, 24. Tribal Research Institute, 25. Land and Revenue, 26. Publicity /Public Relations, 27. Printing and Stationery, 28. Tourism, 29. Transport, 30. Planning and Development, 31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trust, District Boards and other local authorities 32. Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward classes, 33. Markets and fairs, 34. Lotteries, Theaters and Dramatic performances and cinemas, 35. Statistics, 36. Food and Civil Supply. 37. Intoxication liquors, opium and derivatives etc., 38. Labour and employment, 39. Relief and Rehabilitation, 40. Registration of Births and Deaths.

5.2 There shall be an Executive council comprising of not more than 12 Executive members, one of whom shall be the Chief and nether one the Deputy Chief of the said Executive council. There shall be adequate representation for the non-tribal members in the Executive council. The Chief and the Deputy Chief of the council shall have the status equivalent to the Cabinet Minister and the other Executive Members equivalent to the Minister of State of Assam for protocol purpose in BTC area.

5.3 The BTC shall have the full control over the officials and staff connected with the delegates subjects working on the BTC area and shall be competent to transfer officers and staff within the BTC area. ACRs of these officers shall also be written by the appropriate BTC authority.

5.4 BTC shall also be competent to make appointments for all posts under its control in accordance with the rules of appointment followed by the Government of Assam. However, the posts where recruitment is made on the recommendation of APSC shall not be covered under this provision. The Council may constitute a Selection Board for appointment and to ensure adequate representation for all communities living in the Council area.

5.5 No posts shall be created by BTC without concurrence of the Government of Assam and it shall also abide by the decision of the government of Assam in respect of abolition of temporarily keeping any vacant posts.

5.6 Development functions and bodies with the Competence of BTC shall be transferred to BTC. In respect of DRDA, concurrence of Government of India will be obtained.

5.7 The offices of the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police will be outside the superintendence and control of BTC.

5.8 The State Government would provide an amount, to be decided every year on population ratio basis, grants in aid in two equal installments to the BTC for executing development works. The proportionate share for the BTC shall be calculated on the Basis of the plan funds available after setting aside the funds required for earmarked sectors and salary. This amount may be reduced proportionately if the state plan allocated is reduced or there is plan cut due to resource problem. In addition, the Council will be office expenses and the salaries of the staff working under their control. The BTC shall disburse the salaries of the staff under their control and would ensure strict economy in the matter.

5.9 BTC authority shall prepare a plan with the amounts likely to be available for development works, both under State share and Central share, covering any, or all the

activities of the Departments under their control. The council shall have full discretion in selection the activities and choosing the amount for investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in a fair and equitable manner. This plan will be a sub set of the State plan and would be treated as its integral part. Once the plan of the State, including the BTC plan, gets the approval of the planning Commission the BTC authority will start execution of their plan in the BTC area. Modifications, if any, made by the Planning Commission in the BTC proposal, shall be binding on the BTC authority. The State Government shall not divert the funds allocated to the BTC to other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning Commission through the Government of Assam.

5.10 The executive functions of the BTC shall be exercised through its Principal Secretary who shall be an officer of the rank not below of commissioner/Secretary to Government of Assam. The sanctioning power of Government of Assam shall be vested with the Principal Secretary of BTC and sanctioning powers of head(s) of the Department (s) including the technical section shall be conferred on the senior most officer of that Department, preferably not below the rank of Additional Director, who may be designated as Director of BTC for that Department. The Principal Secretary and other officers shall exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of BTC.

6. Law and Order

To strengthen the Police Administration, Government of Assam shall appoint an IGP for 4 districts of BTC and the jurisdiction of the DIG Kokrajhar shall also be modified to cover these 4 districts.

7. Revision of List of ST

Consequent to the inclusion of BTC area into the sixth Schedule, the list of ST for the State of Assam shall be modified so as to ensure that the tribal status of Bodos and other tribals living outside the BTC area does not get affected adversely.

8. Grands of ST Status of Bodo-Kacharies of KarbiAnglong and N.C. Hills district

The Government of India agrees to consider sympathetically the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharies living in KarbiAnglong and N C Hills Autonomous Council area in the ST (Hill) List of State of Assam.

9. Development of Bodo Language

9.1 The Government of India agrees to consider favorably the inclusion of Bodo language in Devanagiri Script in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution.

9.2 Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purpose.

10. Additional Development Package for BTC

10.1 The State Government, within the limitation of financial and other constraints, may offer or allow the council to offer, possible and sustainable additional incentives for 'attracting' private investment in the Council area and would also support projects for external funding.

10.2 In order to accelerate the development of the region and to meet the aspirations of the people, the Government of India will provide financial assistance of Rs. 100 Crores per annum for five years for projects to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in BTC area over and above Normal plan assistance to the State of Assam. The size of the Corpus will be reviewed after a period of five years. Suitable mechanism will be built in the system to ensure that the funds are transferred to BTC

in time and at regular intervals. An illustrative list of projects which may be considered to be taken up in BTC given below:

List of Projects: 1. to establish a centre for development and research of Bodo language. 2. Up gradation of existing educational infrastructure by way of renovation/addition of buildings, providing modern facilities for teaching such as computers, science laboratories etc. from primary level to college in BTC area. 3. A cultural complex to be established at Kokrajhar to promote and develop Bodo tradition and cultural heritage. 4. To establish a super specialty hospital with all modern facilities at Kokrajhar. Government hospitals shall be established in all district, sub-divisional and block headquarters. 5. To establish spors complexes in all district headquarters. 6. Food processing plants and cold storage facilities at Kokrajhar, Kalaigaon, Udalguri and Tamulpur. & Construction of a bridge over river Aai o connect Koilamoila, Amguri etc. with the rest of the district. 8. To build a Bodoland Bhawan in Delhi, 9. To set up intergrated agro-processing park and textile-cum-apparel park. 10. Revitatzation of KokilabariAgrucultural Farm. 11. To develop adequate infrastructure to develop Manas sanctuary as an internal tourist spot. 12. To complete Campa, Suklai and Dhansiriri irrigation projects. 13. To construct a highway on the Indi-Bhutan border from Jamduar to Bhairabbkunda to connect remote place located adjacent to the border. 14. To set up model diary, fishery, horticulture and poultry farms/training centers at different places in all the 4 districts to encourage youth for self-employment. 15. To enhance the existing facilities in veterinary hospitals in BTC areas.

10.3 Government of India will provide necessary one time financial assistance required for development of administrative infrastructure in the newly created district

headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters and block headquarters, besides the BTC Secretariat Complex at Kokrajhar.

11. Centrally Funded University

11.1 A centrally funded Central Institute of Technology (CIT) will be set up to impart education in various technological/vocational disciplines such as Information Technology, Bio-technology, Food Processing, Rural Industries, and Business Management etc.

11.2 The CIT will be subsequently upgraded to a centrally funded State University with technical and non-technical disciplines to be run by the BTC.

12. Relief and Rehabilitation

12.1 The BLT would join the national mainstream and shun the path of violence in the interest of peace and development. After the formation of the interim council of BTC, BLT will dissolve itself as an organization and will surrender with arms within a week of swearing in of the interim council. The State Government would provide full support to relief and rehabilitation of the members of BLT who would surrender with arms in this process in accordance with the existing polity of the State, Financial support in such cases, however, shall be limited to the provisions of the scheme prepared and funded by the Government of India. Withdrawal of cases against such persons and those related to over ground Bodo Movement since 1987 shall be considered according to the existing policy of the State of Assam.

12.2 The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the Bodo employees of Government of India and subordinate offices as well as in respect of Central Government Undertakings. Similar action will be taken by the Government of Assam.

12.3 Bodo youth will be considered for recruitment in Police, Army and paramilitary forces to increase their representation in these forces.

13. Special Rehabilitation Programme for the People Affected by Ethnic Disturbances

The Special Rehabilitation Programme (SRP) for the people affected by ethnic disturbances in Assam, who are at present living at relief camps in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon etc. shall be completed by the Government of Assam with active support of BTC. Necessary funds for their rehabilitation shall be provided by the government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation shall be made available by the BTC.

14. Interim Council

Immediately after the signing of the agreement, Interim Executive Council for BTC shall be formed by the Governor of Assam from amongst the leaders of the present Bodo movement, including the signatories to this settlement, and shall include adequate representation to the non-tribal communities in BTC area. The Interim Council shall continue for a period beyond 6 months during which period election to the Council shall be held. Government of Assam shall dissolve the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and repeal the BAC Act.

15. Government of Assam will consider inclusion of all tribals including Bodos in RHAC/MAC/LAC in consultation with the leaders of these Councils.

16. The implementation of the provision of the Memorandum of Settlement shall be periodically reviewed by a Committee comprising representatives of Government of India, Government of Assam and BTC.

Signed on 10 February, 2003 at New Delhi in the presence of Shri L.K. Advani, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of India and Shri TarunGogoi, Chief Minister of Assam.

Sd/-
(Hagrama Basumatary)
Chairman
Bodo Liberation Tigers

Sd/-
(P.K. Dutta)
Chief Secretary,
Govt. of Assam

(R.C.A. Jain)
Secretary (B M)
Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India

Appendix-9

(Copy of the Amendment Act of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in Pursuance of the Memorandum of Settlement Signed on 10th February 2003)

The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2003 No. 44 of 2003

An Act further to amend the Constitution of India in its application to the State of Assam BE it enacted by Parliament in the Fifty-fourth year of the Republic of India as follows:-

1. This Act may be called the Sixth Scheduled to the Constitution (Amendment) Act 2003.
2. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution shall, in its application to the State of Assam, have effect subject to the following modifications, namely:-
 - (1) In paragraph 1, after sub-paragraph (2), the following proviso shall be inserted, namely: - “Provide that nothing this sub-paragraph shall apply to the Bodoland Territorial Areas Districts”.
 - (2) In paragraph 2, after sub-paragraph (1) the following proviso shall be inserted, namely:- “Provided that the Bodoland Territorial Council shall consists of not more than forty-six members of whom forty shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage, of whom thirty shall be five open for all communities and the remaining six shall be nominated by the Governor having same rights and privileges as other
 - (3) In paragraph 2, in sub-paragraph (3), after the proviso, the following proviso shall be inserted, namely:-

“Provided further that the District Council constituted for the Bodoland Territorial Council;”

- (4) In paragraph 3, for sub-paragraph (3), the following sub-paragraph shall be substituted, namely:-

“(3) save as otherwise provided in sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 3A or sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 3B, all laws made under this paragraph or sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 3A or sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 3B shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and, until assented to by him, shall have no effect;”

- (5) After paragraph 3A, the following paragraph shall be inserted, namely:-

“3B. Additional powers of the Bodoland Territorial Council to make laws:-

1. Without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 3, the Bodoland Territorial Council within its areas shall have power to make laws with respect to:-
 - i. Agriculture, including agricultural education and research, protection against pests and prevention of plant diseases;
 - ii. Animal husbandry and veterinary, that is to say preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice, cattle pounds;
 - iii. Co-operation;
 - iv. Cultural Affairs;
 - v. Education, this is to say, primary education, higher secondary education including vocational training, adult education, and college education (general);
 - vi. fisheries;
 - vii. Flood control for protection of village, paddy fields, markets and towns (not technical nature);
 - viii. Food and civil supply;
 - ix. Forests (other than reserve forests);
 - x. Handloom and textile;
 - xi. Health and family welfare;
 - xii. Intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives, subject to the provisions of entry 84 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule;
 - xiii. Irrigation;
 - xiv. Labour and employment;
 - xv. Land and Revenue;
 - xvi. Library services (finance and controlled by the state Government);
 - xvii. Lotteries (subject to the provisions of entry 40 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule), theatres,

dramatic performances and cinemas (subject to the provisions of entry 60 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule); xviii. Markets and fairs; xix. Municipal Corporation, improvement trust, district boards and other local authorities; xx. Museum and archaeology institutions controlled or finance by the state, ancient and historical monuments and records other than those declared by or under any law made by Parliament to be of national importance; xxi. Panchayat and rural development; xxii. Planning and development; xxiii. Printing and stationery; xxiv. Public health engineering; xxv. Public works department; xxvi. Publicity and public relations; xxvii. Registration of birth and deaths; xxviii. Relief and rehabilitation; xxix. Sericulture; xxx. Small, cottage and rural industry subject to the provisions of entries 7 and 52 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule; xxxi. Social welfare; xxxii. Soil conservation; xxxiv. Statistics; xxxv. Tourism; xxxvi. Transport (roads, bridges, ferries and other means of communication not specific not specified in List I and List III of the Seventh Schedule with regard to such waterways, vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles); xxxvii. Tribal research institute controlled and financed by the state Government; xxxviii. Urban development- town and country planning; xxxix. Weights and measures subject to the provisions of entry 50 of List 1 of the Seventh Schedule; and xi. Welfare of plains tribes and backward classes:

Provided that nothing in such laws shall-

- (a) Extinguish or modify the existing rights and privileges of any citizen in respect of his land at the date of commencement of this Act; and
- (b) Disallow any citizens from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by any other way of transfer if such citizen is otherwise eligible for such acquisition of land within the Bodoland Territorial Council Areas District.

(2) All laws made under paragraph 3 or under this paragraph shall in so far as they relate to matters specified in List III of the Seventh Schedule, be submitted forthwith to the Governor who shall reverse the same for the consideration of the President.

(3) When a law is reserved for the consideration of the President shall declare either that he assents to the said law or that he withholds assent there from:

Provided that the President may direct the Governor to return the law to the Bodoland Territorial Council, together with the message requesting that the said Council will reconsider the law or any specified provisions thereof and, in particular, will consider the desirability of introducing any such amendments as he may recommend in his message and, when the law is so returned, the said Council shall consider the law according within a period of six months from the date of receipt of such message and, if the law is again passed by the said Council with or without amendment it shall be presented again to the President for his consideration”.

(6) In paragraph 4, after sub-paragraph (5), the following sub-paragraph shall be inserted, namely:-

“(6) Nothing in this paragraph shall apply to the Bodoland Territorial Council constituted under the proviso to sub-paragraph (3) of paragraph 2 of this Schedule”

(7) In paragraph 10, after sub-paragraph (3), the following sub- paragraph shall be inserted, namely:-

“(4) Nothing in this paragraph shall apply to the Bodoland Territorial Council constituted under the proviso to sub-paragraph (3) of paragraph 2 of this Schedule”

(8) In paragraph 12, in sub-paragraph (10, in clause (a), for words, figure and letter” matters specified in paragraph 3 or paragraph 3A or paragraph 3B of this Schedule” shall be submitted;

(9) In paragraph 17, the following proviso shall be inserted namely:-

“Provided that nothing in this paragraph shall apply to the Bodoland Territorial Areas District.”

- (10) In paragraph 19, after sub-paragraph (3), the following sub-paragraph shall inserted, namely: -

“(4) As soon as possible after the commencement of this Act, an Interim Executive Council for Bodoland Territorial Areas District in Assam shall be formed by the Governor from amongst leaders of the Bodo Movement, including the signatories of the Memorandum of Settlement, and shall provide adequate representation to the non-tribal communities in this area;

Provided that the Interim Council shall be for a period of six months during which endeavours to hold the election to the Council shall be made.

Explanation: - For the purpose of this sub-paragraph, the expression “Memorandum of Settlement” means the Memorandum signed on the 10th day of February, 2003 between Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers”.

- (11) In paragraph 20, in part I of the table, after entry 2, the following entry shall be inserted, namely:-

“3, the Bodoland Territorial Area District”;

Subash C. Jain

Secretary to the Govt. of India

GLOSSARY

Bodo	English
<i>Agor Gidit</i>	- A design representing a Diamond shape.
<i>Banduram Agor</i>	- A design first crafted by Bandhuram kachari.
<i>Bisa Har</i>	- A necklace.
<i>Bwigri Bibar</i>	- A design representing the flowers of plum
<i>Bwisagu</i>	- Bodo new year feasible celebrated during the month of April.
<i>Bwirathi</i>	- Woman receptionist of bride and bridegroom in Bodo marriage.
<i>Chandra Har</i>	- A heavy necklace.
<i>Duars</i>	- Door.
<i>Dokhna</i>	- Tradition dress of Bodo woman
<i>Daokhi Agor</i>	- A design representing stool of a hen.
<i>Doudini</i>	- A dancing woman in Kherai puza.
<i>Daorai Mukhreb</i>	- Winkle of peacock.
<i>Daosa Mwkhrreb</i>	-Winkle of chicken.
<i>Dinkhia Mohor</i>	-A design representing fern of Dhekia
<i>Endi</i>	- Eri Silk
<i>Garja</i>	- Traditional way of worshiping 18 tribal Deities/ Gods by Bodos
<i>Goṅarthaisip</i>	- A design representing the fruit of Nui tree).
<i>Gangu Godo</i>	- An Agor representing the shape of a kind insect called Gangu).
<i>Gandola agor</i>	- A design representing an insect Gandoula.
<i>Gorkha Goṅbrui Agor</i>	- design representing twill.
<i>Haba</i>	– Marriage
<i>Kherai</i>	- Traditional way of worshiping lord Shiva by Bodos.
<i>Khulshi Dentha</i>	- A design representing the spoon.
<i>Laoson Agor</i>	- A design invented by a Bodo girl called Laosong
<i>Mokhordoma Ago r</i>	-A design representing a litigation or zig zag.
<i>Muphur Apha</i>	-A design representing the footprint of bear.
<i>Mwitha bibar</i>	- A design representing a kind of vegetable's flower
<i>Noni Mainao</i>	- Goddess Laxmi
<i>PhareoMegon</i>	- Pigeon eye.

- Phul Mubla* - Varieties of bloomed flowers.
- Sinri Bibar* - A design representing the Singri flower
- Thaigir Bibar* - design representing the flower of Thaigir plant .
- Thanka Siri* - Around neck ornament.
- Zibou Zinziri* - A snake like chain.

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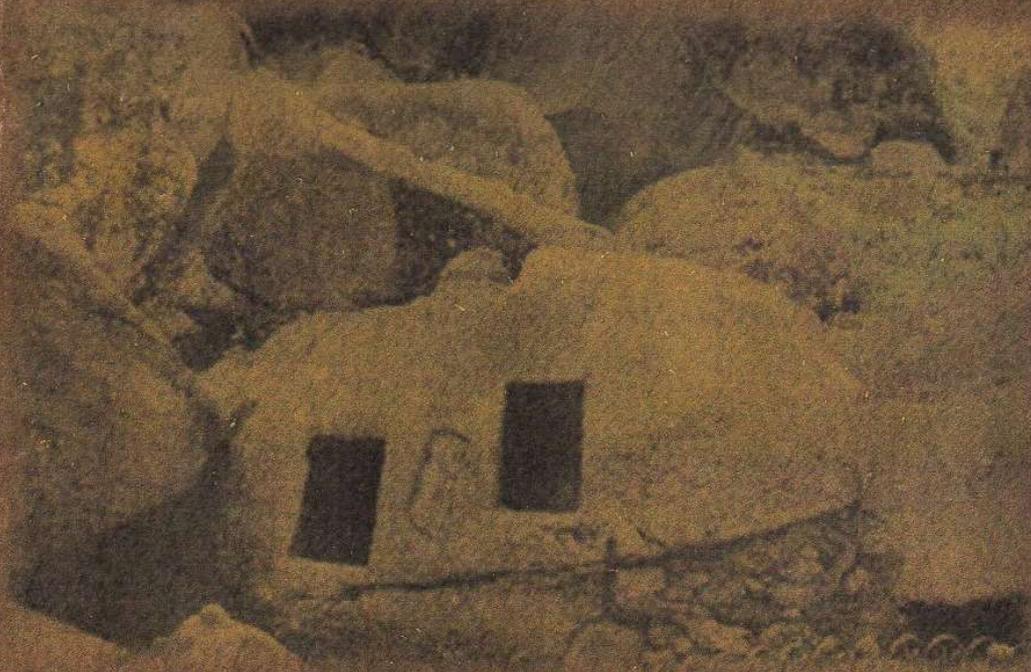
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সংহতি

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সাহিত্য, সংস্কৃতি আৰু সমাজ-বিজ্ঞান বিষয়ক তিনিমহীয়া গবেষণা পত্রিকা
A Quarterly Research Journal on Literature, Cultural and Social Science



সম্পাদক
ড° হৰ কুমাৰ নাথ

TRANSFORMATION OF COLONIAL EASTERN DUARS INTO BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL: HISTORICAL GENESIS.

Bababina Brahma

Abstract—

Eastern Duars only connecting link between the entire north eastern region and mainland India. Meches or the Bodos one of the major tribes living in Eastern Duar. Penetration of Colonial rule in Eastern Duars after the battle of Chinchula in 1866. Migration of cheap labours to meet British Planter Raj .Social tension starts and people resists against Colonial rule. Social and political awakening of the Bodos and gradual transformation of Eastern Duars into Bodoland Territorial Council.

Introduction :

Geographical conditions character of the terrain and nature of production have always been shaping the human history in different parts of world. The Northeastern India with its varied topographical features have helped the development of different political & social units in the region¹. In the same manner, the "Eastern Duars" holds an

important a place in the history of Assam as well as in Indian History because of its typical geographical position. The entire tract called 'Eastern Duars' is the only connecting link between the entire Northeastern regions with the rest of the Indian Republic.

The terms 'Duars' literally means 'door' in English is used to refer the arrears below the foothills which always carries the sense

of border mart at the foot of mountain pass and the areas in its immediate vicinity. Duars therefore means the passes and valley that led to the hills. It is known to all, that social relation and economic interdependence between the hills and the plains on Northeast India have been there since the time immemorial. It is through this Duars that the people of Bhutan have been interacting with the plains people below their foothills since time immemorial. Along with the Bhutan borderline, there are eighteen such Duars or passes on the frontier of Bengal and Cochbehar. Together they are called the 'Western Duars' and the remaining and seven on the Assam are called the 'Eastern Duars'.

The track called the Eastern Duars are an integral portion of undivided Goalpara , Kamrup and Darang Districts of Assam. The Eastern Duars is bounded on the North by Bhutan hills, on the East by the River Manas, separating it from the district of Kamrup, on South by the main portion of Darrang District and on the West by the River Gangadhar and Sankosh, which separates it from the Western Duars attached to Jalpaiguri District of North Bengal.

Population :

By now it has been established fact that the Bodo-Kacharis are the earliest inhabitants of ancient Assam or Kamrupa. In, Brahmaputra valley, the Bodos mostly live along the *Eastern Duars* or Indo-Bhutan borderlines in lower Assam's undivided Goalpara, kamrup and Darrang Districts. Francis Hamilton in his book '*An account of Assam*' and Alexander Macknenjee in his

book '*North East Frontier of Bengal*' said that the entire Eastern Duars tract was formally inhabited by the people called Meches and Kacharis (Bodo), the only classes apparently able to live in these malarial prone zone in consequences of the atrocities of the Bhutias. W.W. Hunter in his book '*A Statistical Account of Assam*' said that Meches are the most numerous class or caste in the Eastern Duars. They are known as Mech in the western part of the Duars, but in the more eastern parts they are called indiscriminately Mech or Cachari; and again farther east, in Assam, they are called by the name of Cachari alone, losing the name of Mech altogether. They form the great majority of the population in the Eastern Duars. The Places in the foothills through which these passes opened up to the Indian Plains were and are still known districts of Assam that are still dominated by the Bodo-Kachari population.

The term 'Eastern Duars' to these geographical areas is a colonial term given by the British. Before the penetration of colonial rule into this area, it was under the control of Bhutan. At that time it was divided into small principalities and either administered by the '*Subbas*' directly appointed by the Dharma Raja of Bhutan by the local *zamindars* or revenue collectors like - the Bijni Raja, and the Darrang Raja. It was only in 1866 after the treaty of Chincula (when the Bhutias were defeated by the British) these are came directly under the British control. And since then, from 1866 to 1993, the 'Eastern Duars' have experienced transformation in different aspects of

society, ethnicity, politics and administrative setup. During this period, the Bodos have established themselves as most dominant ethnic community in these area and finally from 1993 onwards 'Colonial Eastern Duars' came to be known as the 'Bodoland Territorial Council'. The objective of this paper has been to trace and examine the genesis of the wonderful transformation of the 'Colonial Eastern Duars' into the present 'Bodoland Territorial Council'.

Here confusion may arise in the mind of those friends who are not from historical background that the rule of Assam has been passed to British East India Company in 1826, after the treaty of Yandaboo between Burmese and the British. Then how come Eastern Duars came under British Rule in 1864 ? Again, it is because the Ahom rule was never consolidated in indo-Bhutan borderline. It was under the Koch rulers of Cochbehar and Darrang Raja. In later years, taking advantage of the weak successors of the Koch Kingdom, the Bhutias had consolidated their rule over this area. And thus, in 1864, the British defeated the Bhutias in Anglo-Bhutan war and according to the treaty of Chincula, the entire Duars region in Assam frontier has been annexed to the British empire. In 1866, the 'Eastern Duars' or the Duars areas of Assam frontiers has been separated from the Duars of North Bengal and was given name of 'Eastern Duars' with its headquarter at Goalpara.

Now the point is how the colonial Eastern Duars has been transformed in to BTC – what was its genesis? To understand that we have to go back to the history of the area.

Political History:-

The political History of Eastern Duars is very peculiar. It had been ruled by different dynasties in different period. In the ancient period, it was under the rule of Kamrupa Kingdom. After the disintegration of the Kamrupa Kingdom, it came under the Kock Kingdom. Again in seventeen century, the Mughals occupied the eastern part of Koch Kingdom. Finally, the Ahoms defeated the Mughals and the Ahoms established their control over this area. But the Ahom could not consolidate their rule over this area because of the Meches (Bodos under the banner of the Raja of Bijni, the Raja of Sidli and the Raja of Darrang) had resented the Ahom rule and tired to assert independence with help of the Dharma Raja of Bhutan. In such circumstances, the Ahoms were compelled to enter into a compromise with them and accordingly ceded the Duars region to the Dharma Raja of Bhutan in exchange of some tribute³. With that the hope of independence of the Meches over alien rule has died, so far it was the first collective effort of the Mech (Bodo) Chiefs of the Duars region to ascertain independence over alien rule. Now they have put under the Dharma Raja of Bhutan. The Dharma Raja could realize the fact that at any time the Meches could try to overthrow his rule from the Duars plains, he adopted a very diplomatic policy towards the chief of Bijni, Sidli and Darrang. Instead of over lordship towards those Rajas; Bhutan's attitude was that of friendly and equality⁴. These were allowed to collect revenue freely without any influence from the Dharma Raja. The Rajas

were assisted in revenue collection with some 'Subbhas' or 'Choudharies' who were mostly the Kacharies and were directly appointed by the Dharma Raja himself. The policy of equality adopted by the Dharma Raja of Bhutan and proved to be fruitful in the long run.

It is for the nonpayment of tribute and the Bhutias atrocity on the plains of Assam, the conflict between the British and Bhutias. At the same time, the occupation of Duars was gradually becoming important for the British for economic point of view as they realized the potential of tea plantation in fertile Duars region. In 1864, war broke out between Bhutan and the British and ended with the treaty of Chincula. The Bhutias were compelled to surrender the Eastern Duars to the British in 1866.

So, Eastern Duars had a misfortune of becoming a colony when most part of globe was experiencing the rise of nation and nationalism. In Khasi and Jaintia-Hills under Tiro Singh a rebellion took place against British rule and in 1857, Maniram Dewan had tried to bring sepoy mutiny in Assam unsuccessfully and after 9 years of that Eastern Duars came under Colonial Rule. By 1866, the inhabitants mostly Bodos were politically conscious. Once again they tried to overthrow the British rule with the help of Bhutias but failed.

The Bhutias maintained cordial relationship with the Bodos. The historical records further strengthen this view. The Meches (Bodos) preferred the Bhutanese Government over the British Government as it evident from the following testimonies:-

The testimonial of a Meche, Jnan Mandal, 80 years, extracted by Charu Chandra anyal in late 1990 states that,—

... at the time of Bhutabese Government the Meches were not tortured unlike others. They were in good terms with the Bhutanese Government. Harnath was made a Mandal... Bhutaese Government took rupees seven per family per year and allowed to cultivate as much as the family could do so....

Another Meche, Phade Saiba, more than eighty years old, living Mechua-Dhura-Balabathan village commented, " we used to eat rice, vegetables, fish or meat three times a day. But now we can hardly afford two rice meals a day.

Kalsing Saiba, a sixty years old Meche's testimony is equally anguished: " My father had vast plot)so of land and was well-to-do. Now I have no land. I work as a share cropper or sometimes as an agricultural labourer on cash wage of rupee one a day and three meals,

The fate of Gashat Machari, 98 years, is no better. He rues, " At that time the land was plenty and men were few, so we had much land to grow crop.— Now I have only five acres of land under cultivation.

Dhansing Meche, a centenarian, living in Sisu-Jhorna was bitter about the British administration:- " My fathers name is late Khayer Sigh. My father was in Bhutan holding a large lot of agricultural land. The whole of Duars was under Bhutan Government. My father was at Chamrchi near the present Reabari Tea Eastate (in the Duars). My father had a large plot of land more than one hundred acres where the present Ambari Tea

Estate is situated. Then we shifted to the present site of Bandhapani Tea Estate, then we came to Maraghat and from then there to this place..... we were cultivators. We grew plenty of rice and we ate rice and vegetables three times a day..... As far as I can remember and so far I heard from my father that the Bhotias were good. The collectors came once a year, collected rupees eight per family and left us to enjoy as much land as we could cultivate. The British came. They spoke sweet words. They gave us protection no doubt but they increased the rents, introduced many laws and we gradually lost our lands and we shifted to this place. Now I have only four acres of land that can hardly maintain my family.”¹⁰.

After the occupation of Duars in 1866, the British inducted huge migration in the Eastern Duars. First, they brought laborers from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to work in their tea plantation. Tease people were subsequently settled by the colonial rulers in Eastern Duars’⁶.

Secondly, the massive induction of immigrants triggered by the British are the land hungry Muslim peasants from East Bengal. At the early part of 19th century, the British Raj allowed the settling of land hungry peasants from the bordering districts of Bengal to the wastelands of Assam. This colonization scheme initiated by the British Government opened a floodgate for immigration of landless peasants from East Bengal to Assam, and at least 90 percent of these immigrants were Muslims. By the 1942, the Government of India had directed the

Government of Assam to launch an intensive “*Grow more Food*” Campaign by utilizing all available land to provide adequate food to the allied troops stationed in Assam. Taking advantage of its massive immigration of Muslim peasants from East Bengal to Assam and settled them mainly in the Bodo inhabited lower Assam Districts. The real motive of the Assam Government (Muslim League) became so obvious that Mr. Wavell, the then Viceroy of India, could not help making the caustic comment that Sir Sadullah’s “*Grow more food Campaign was really a grow more Muslim Campaign*”.

Thirdly, the third wave of migrations that took place in Eastern Duars during the colonial period are the Nepalese. They came to Assam in two roles — (a) as a part of the colonial army and (b) as graziers. A large number of exp-servicemen and graziers were encouraged to come and occupy the fertile Duars region and engage themselves in cattle keeping’⁸.

The colonial period also saw immigration of Marwari merchants from distant Rajasthan. Though their numbers were small, they played an important role in opening up the Eastern Duars to trade under colonial patronage. They acted as moneylender, bankers and general agents to the managers of the tea Garden and throughout the state sold articles imported from other parts of India and became dealers in rice and grains’⁹.

Thus the colonial period saw a drastic change of the demographic set up in the Eastern Duars. Groups of communities having

distinct languages, cultures and ethnic characteristics – hitherto unknown in the area came to the region under the colonial patronage they were settled in the area. This change of demography had created a social tension for the first time in the Duars region. The phenomenon of immigration had shook the very foundation of social set up in the region and lead to the hardening of the boundaries of social formation in Eastern Duars into 'sons of the soil' and 'outsiders'. The 'sons of the soil' generally wished to keep the 'outsiders' away from territorial resources and destinies.

Now, the Bodos as they were major community of the area, they took the leadership in the protest against the immigration. They never reconciled themselves to their subjugation by the British. Their micro level freedom struggled and consistently asserted their ethnic identity and insisted on enjoying exclusive control over like land, water, forest, minerals etc. The Bodos under the banner of Plains Tribal League raised the question of land settlement and protection of tribal land under the Line System. From then onwards, the process of ethnic assertion of the Bodos in Esatrn Dauars begun. Here lies the genesis of transforming the 'Eastern Duars' into present 'Bodoland Territorial Council'

In the mean time, the Bodos were already in the process of new social formation after the "*Brahma Movement*" which was started by Kalicharan Brahma. The movement led by Kalicharan Brahma gradually assumed a multi-dimensional

form. It started as a religious movement but over the years socio-economic agenda of vital importance was added to it. That ensured for Kalicharan a position amongst the Bodos that went far beyond his primary role as a religious preacher. And, in the twenties of this century when, as a sequel to the non-cooperation movement and its fall outs, political awareness of the diverse varieties in conformity to needs and aspirations of the different segments of the nation, tended to reach the bottom level of the masses, Kalicharan did not feel shy of adding one or two political items to his socio-economic agenda. In 1929, when the Simon Commission visited Assam, Kalicharan submitted a memorandum demanding reservation of seats in the legislative assembly for the Bodos. This representation of Kalicharan marked the beginning of the Bodo politics in real sense of the term. Subsequently, in the Act of India'1935, the Government of India made provision for four reserved seats in the assembly for the Plains Tribals of Assam. This was the historical achievement as that point of time no such reservation for any other tribals or caste had been given under the British Government in India.

Until then, the mainstream Assamese society could not recognize the Plains Tribals as potential political force. But, when the Simon Commission made provision for four reserved seats for the Plains Tribals of Assam, the mainstream Assamese intellectuals, who were so far indifferent to the Bodo social development, suddenly became jealous.

At the same time, under the patronage of Kalicharan Bhahma a new organization called the 'Assam Tribal League' was formed. The Tribal League took members from other Plains Tribal groups including the Misings, Chutiyas and Mottoks. The formation of this organization was the first successful attempt to consolidate the Plains Tribals under the Bodo leadership. And it was the first starting point of the mutual jealous is between the Bodos and the mainstream Assamese society.

The emotional attachment of the Bodos with the mainstream Assamese society divided after Independence in 1960. In that year, the Government of Assam introduced the "Assam Official Language Act, 1960" which imposed the Assamese Language as the only official language of Assam. The Bodos who were trying to propagate their own language since 1952, under the banner of Bodo Sahitya Sabha had termed this Act as 'Aggressive Nationalism' of Assamese middleclass and refused to obey the Act. Rather, they demanded the introduction of Bodo language as the medium instruction in Bodo dominated areas. The indifference of the State Government towards the demand had compelled a group of Bodo intellectuals and social activist to think afresh about apolitical course of action that would enable them to some kind of autonomy in dealing with their own affairs.

Therefore, the land problem provided the Bodos with the material basis and the language issue the emotional content to think seriously about a new political set up

that would ensure them protection of their land, their way of life, and cultural aspiration according to their own genesis and tradition.

On January 13th, 1967, Mrs Indira Gandhi made a statement that the Central Government was examining a proposal for reorganizing of Assam on federal basis. These pronouncements immediately set forth various responses amongst the concerned peoples and the agitated Bodo leaders interpreted it as a signal for launching a movement demanding 'autonomy' for the Plains Tribals of Assam. Accordingly on 27th February 1967, the "Plains Tribal Council of Assam" was formed at Kokrajhar to raise the demand for 'Udayachal' or the autonomy for the Plains Tribals of Assam.

The year 1985 is a turning point in the Bodo history. Significantly, from that year onwards the demand of 'Udayachal' for all Plains Tribal community of Assam became feeble and the demand for autonomy only for the Bodos gained popularity. From now onwards, the political leadership has passed on to PTC to ABSU; since then the ABSU projected themselves as the only political force to represent cause of the Bodos. Their main slogan was 'Divide Assam Fifty Filthy'. Finally on 29th February 1993, an agreement was signed between the ABSU and the Government of India and accordingly 'Bodoland Autonomous Council' was formed. Thereafter, in 2003 it come to be known as 'Bodoland Territorial Council' (BTC).

This kind of awareness marks the culmination of the long quest of the Bodos for carving out their rightful place in the

history and society of multi-ethnic Assam, and this assertion is brought with new possibilities that are destined to dominate

the socio-political scenario of the region in coming years.

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নাথ যোগী উন্নয়ন পরিষদে হাতত লোৰা উল্লেখযোগ্য আঁচনি সমূহ



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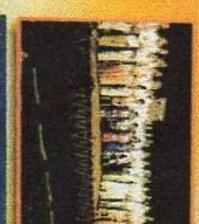
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সীমিত পুঁজি আৰু বৃহৎ জনসংখ্যাৰ নিমিত্তে অৰ্থেৰ মাজতো জনগোষ্ঠীটোৰ উন্নয়নৰ দিশত এক সুদৃঢ় পৰিকল্পনা।