

**BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT: A STUDY ON
THE ROLE OF ALL BODO STUDENTS' UNION (ABSU)**

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

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2017

I, Sankar Das, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Political Science.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter of the work, the profile of Assam, the profile of Bodoland Territorial Council area, the struggle of the Bodos, review of literature, statement of the problem, scope of the study, significance of the study, objectives of the study, research questions, methodology, chapterization are discussed.

Profile of Assam: Assam, the land of rivers and blue hills, is a landlocked with natural beauty of North-Eastern part of India which holds a total area of 78,438 sq km that covers valleys, rivers and plains. The land of Assam extends between the foothills of eastern Himalayas and the Patkai and Naga Ranges.¹

An analysis of the frontiers of this North Eastern beauty reflects her landlocked feature. The detail descriptions of her frontiers are – the northern side which is surrounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern side surrounded by Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, the southern side surrounded by Mizoram and Tripura and the western side which is surrounded by Bangladesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal.

The two prominent valleys of the land are the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley which are featured with the presence of the Brahmaputra river and the Barak river respectively. The entire region of Assam consists of 33 districts which falls under 5 administrative divisions viz. Barak valley, Central Assam, Lower Assam, North Assam and Upper Assam.

¹Baruah, Santanu Kaushik (Ed.).(2017): “Assam Year Book”,pg.19.

The current demographic scenario of Assam is a reflection of the census report of 2011 which clearly states about its population, literacy rate, density etc. According to the census report of 2011, the population of Assam is 3,12,05,576 where male population is counted as 1,59,39,443 and female population is counted as 1,52,66,133. The literacy rate is 72.19% of which 77.85% are male and 63% are female. Population density of the region as published in the report of 2011 is 398 persons per square kilometer. Among all the districts, Kamrup (Metro) registered the highest population density (1,313 persons per square kilometer) while Dima Hasao registered the lowest population density (44 persons per square kilometer) in the region.²

A study of the religious profile of Assam unveils the fact that the major religion in the state is Hinduism with 61.47% followers. Next to it is Islam with approximately 34.22% followers. Except these two, the positions of other religions are Christianity (3.74%), Buddhism (0.18%), Sikhism (0.07%), Jainism (0.08%), other religion (0.09%) and not stated (0.16%).³

The Constitution of India in its 8th schedule has recognized Assamese, the regional language, as one of the statutory languages of India. In spite of Assamese, other languages that are used in the region are Bodo, Bengali, English, Hindi, Nepali, Mishing, Karbi, Odia and others.

The factor of migration is still a burning issue in Assam which has raised the question of identity especially towards the native of the land. The state of Assam is a home ground of diverse tribal population who are unique in their own way. The devil of migration has posed threat towards their ethnic identity. An attempt has been made by the

² Census of India 2011.

³ Statistical Hand Book Assam 2016 published by Directorate of Economics and Statistics Government of Assam, Guwahati-28.

legal authority of the nation in the form of 6th Schedule of the constitution of India to address the problem of tribal identity in some of the north eastern states which includes the state of Assam. As per the provisions of the Schedule, Assam has 3 Autonomous District Councils viz. Bodoland Territorial Council, Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council.

Profile of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC): The BTC is an autonomous council within the state of Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It has been formed with the aim to fulfill the long pending aspiration of the Bodos in the area. The Memorandum of Settlement (2003) signed by three parties – Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers explores various aspects on the formation of BTC within the state of Assam.

The total villages and areas is divided into 4 districts after reorganization of the existing districts of Assam. The Bodoland Territorial Council comprises the districts of Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang-curved out of eight existing districts-Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur.

BTC has been further subdivided into 10 Civil Subdivisions and 40 Development Blocks, some of which are partly in BTC area and partly outside. The provisional geographical area of BTC is 8795 Sq.Km.

The population of the BTC area as per 2001 Census report is 29.2 Lakhs out of which the ST population is around 52% and only 3% of the total populations live in urban area. The average density of the population in BTC is 326 Sq.km, compared to 340 per Sq.km. of Assam. Amongst the Tribal population Bodos, Rabhas and less number of Garos are inhabiting in this area Bodo population being 90%. The other communities like

Ransbanhis, Sarania which have been originated from Bodo group also inhabit in large part of BTC. Besides Tea and other Ex-Tea tribes including Santhal, Orao, etc. are also available in two packets. Moreover, other general communities like Bengali, Assamese, Nepali and few number of Hindi speaking people are also found in the Council area.⁴

According to the 2011 census the total population of Assam is found 31169272 where Baksa, Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Chirang districts comes in 18th, 20th, 21st and 26th respectively in the ranking of districts by population. Baksa has total population of 953773, Kokrajhar 886999, Udalguri 832769 and Chirang 481818.⁵

The geographical boundary of BTC lies between 260 7'12" N to 260 47' 50" N Latitude and 890 47' 40" E to 920 18' 30" E Longitude and is in the North Western part of Assam. Kokrajhar town the Administrative Head Quarter lies roughly between 260 25' N Longitude and 990 16' 38" E Latitude.

In the sphere of economic life of BTC area, agriculture still holds a dominant position, but in the recent times occupation like service, trade and commerce, etc are adopted in a small scale. Agriculture has been dominant occupation of the BTC society. It is also the main occupation of the economic life of the BTC area.

The Provision of the Sixth Schedule and other relevant Articles of the Constitution of India are applied to the BTC in terms of the agreement of the Memorandum of Settlement (2003). About 40 (Forty) subjects has been entrusted to the BTC Authority for all round development of the people in this area. A provision is made in para 2(1) of Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 is reserved for Schedule Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for

⁴ www.bodoland.in

⁵ Census of India 2011.

all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities from BTC area of which at least 2 should be women. The nominated members have the same rights and privileges as other members including voting rights. The election from the 40 constituency is based on adult franchise and the term of the elected members is of 5 years.⁶

Struggle of the Bodos: Assam is a homeland of different ethnic groups. People belonging to various cultures, religions, races came to the region in different periods of time and assimilated there. One of the most remarkable among these tribes is Kirata and it also finds a mention in Mahabharata. The Kirata tribe belongs to clan of Mongoloid tribes and Bodo tribe is linked to the Kirata of the Mahabharata period. The Bodo people are categorized as Indo- Mongoloid tribe who migrated to the land in pre – historic period. The Bodo people are known with different names. The ABSU views that the following tribes were known with one single name but at present they have different names to represent their groups. Tribes like Bodo or Boro, Borok, Barman Kachari, Chutiya, Dimasa, Deuri, Dhimal, Hajong, Mech, Modahi, Koch, Rabha, Sonowal, Thengal and Tiwa. They are but cognate tribes of the same ancestry.

With the time passing, the Bodo tribe lost its significance in the region. Different races came to the region and started living in there permanently. Moreover the evils of caste system and other social evils deteriorated the position of the Bodos in the region. It was in the first decade of 20th century that a Bodo person, namely Kalicharan Brahma took an initiative to reform the Bodo society. Later on a group of youth of Bodo society influenced by Kalicharan Brahma came to the front and showed their concern about their

⁶ Memorandum of Settlement (2003)

rights and identity. In order to ensure their identity the movement was started on 1929, when the tribal leaders of Assam articulated their demands before the Simon Commission. From that period onwards the largest ethnic group of Assam, the Bodo, viewed that their demand for equality, identity, development were not fulfilled. The plain tribes of Assam including the Bodos were not covered under any special protective provision during the Colonial administration.

In the initial stage of independent India, the scheduled tribe people by living in northern plain area of Assam have been neither covered by the fifth schedule nor the sixth schedule of Indian constitution. Exclusion of plain tribes of Assam under special provision in post independence period symbolized the continued approach of colonial legacy by Indian state.

Among the ethnic groups of the region, the Bodos are the largest in number. Almost 12% of the total population is covered by Bodo ethnic group. They have been experiencing the socio economic exploitation and discrimination as they were deprived of the protective and promotive provisions of the two schedules of Indian constitution. The Bordoloi Committee of the Advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights, Minority and Tribal and Excluded areas, in their report argued that the plain tribes of the region should be treated as a minority not as scheduled tribes for all practical purposes. It showed the negligence of mainstream nationalist leaders on issue of recognition to culture and identity of plain tribal peoples of Assam.

The Bordoloi ministry in Assam amended The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 to address the demands of plain tribes with regard to preservation of

their land in 1947. The continued encroachment in tribal land and growing concern for identity among plain tribes paved the way for the demand 'Udayanchal'. The demand of Udayanchal was the first attempt of plain tribes to establish a separate homeland for plain tribes of Assam. The demand of Udayanchal was not conceded but it made an impact on the nature of plain tribes' struggle relating to their identity, culture, tradition, language, and self determination in the region.

In 1987, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) led the movement for separate statehood. The term 'Bodoland' was given to the proposed statehood by the ABSU. The separate Bodoland movement, which was launched by ABSU, had gone through different phases. The centre as well as state governments initiated different measures in different phases of the movement to deal with the issues of Bodos. The Bodo Autonomous Council (1993) and the Bodo Territorial Council (2003) were the major administrative initiatives that were taken by Government in response to the Bodos' demands and issues.

Presently, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), a powerful student organization argued that those initiatives were not enough. The ABSU opined that only the separate Bodoland state can resolve their demands. Regarding the nature of Bodoland there are different views among the representing groups of Bodo people. The ABSU demands for a separate state under the provision of Articles 2 & 3 of the Constitution of India.

The Bodos view that the areas which are the ancestral land of Bodo people where their fore fathers had been living for generations since the time immemorial should be included in the proposed Bodoland boundary. The concerned government failures to

ensure identity issues along with prevention of encroachment of tribal land by non tribes provide the popular support among Bodo people on their demands of separate statehood. All Bodo Students' Union under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma initiated the movement for separate statehood within Indian Union for the first time in 1987. From then onwards the movement had witnessed different phases but still the demand for separate homeland remains to be the prime objective of the student union.

The peace and development paradigms of the area were worst affected by violent activities of different Bodo groups regarding the separate Bodoland. The violent and non violent protests of these groups caused serious damage to human development of the region. Polarization on ethnic lines also causes a potential threat to the peace and harmony in the region.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Udayan Mishra (2014), in his book "India's North East Identity, Movements, State and Civil society" published by oxford university press, Delhi deals with socio-political scenario of the North East. He examines the nature of identity movement by linking up with historical roots and their attitude towards the Indian federal structure. The book also makes a point of state response on the issue of these movements in two different ways, for example repression and negotiation. Chapter 3 of the book, identity Movement and Insurgent Politics in its B part exclusively deals with the Bodo Movement. The work helps the study to identify and examine the historical roots of the ethnic problem in the region. The discussion on government response and the issue of

autonomy in the region helps the study to critically examine the ethnic demography of the region.

Sanjib Baruah (2005) in his book 'Durable Disorder, Understanding the Politics of North East India' published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi analyses the causes and seeks to comprehend the political meaning and significance of persisting political violence. He also makes a point of existing political economy of the North East India and its linkage with an idea of ethnic homeland and makes ethnic violence and internal displacement quite predictable. In addition to this, Baruah argues for new policies that can uniquely deal with the complex phenomena of North East India. Moreover, he links up such policies to give new outlook of India on foreign relations regarding South East Asia. The book helps to understand the nature of federalism, the ethnic dimension of the region as well as the meaning of democracy in the context of this region.

Monirul Hussain (1993) in his work "The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity" published by Manak Publication in association with Haranand Publication, New Delhi studied the 1979-85 movement that was held in Assam from sociological perspective. The author makes one understand the Assam Movement from a deep historical perspective. It also emphasizes on the societal and historical context in which the movement is embedded. The author has used the powerful conceptual categories of "class", "Ideology" and "Identity". The historically evolving contradictions in the social structure of society in Assam has been described very well, like the decline of Ahom aristocracy, the colonial policy encouraging immigration on a mass scale, the uneven competition between the Asamiya Middle Class and the changes in Assam's

demographic composition due to incorporation of densely populated areas in its territory. It also analyses the changes that took place in the social structure of Assam following independence and partition of the country, emergence of an articulate and conscious Asamiya middle class, its relationship with the national ruling elites and finally its disenchantment. The work helps to understand the society of the region. The description about the history of the region with its class existence helps the study to look into the issues of ethnicity from a new and different perspective.

Jaikhleng Basumotary (2014), in his article 'Quest for Peace in Assam: A Study of the Bodoland Movement' deals with various dimensions of the Bodoland Movement. He started with the introduction of North-East India. He gives a brief overview of the Bodo tribe. He views that the ethnicity and identity had been the key issues of mobilization in all of the North-East India. He defines that the movement was started due to negligence of aspiration of Bodo people. He also views the movement as economic, socio-cultural aspiration of Bodo people. He also outlines the different phases of movement like, 1933 to 1966 (1st phase), 1967 to 1986(2nd phase), 1987 to 1992(3rd phase), 1993 to 2003(4th phase) and the 2003 to onwards (5th phase). Basumotary also highlighted the role of different organizations with regard to the movement. For example, Tribal league, ABSU, PTCA. Basumotary also emphasizes the violent phases of the movement. Moreover, the issue of non- Bodos and the impact of movement upon them is also raised in his article. The article helps to articulate the work to highlight the change in demands and activity under different phases of time.

Apurba Kumar Baruah (2005), in his article 'Communities and Democracy: a North East Indian Perspective' published in North East India Studies, Vol-1, June, deals

with the issues of violent characteristics adopted by the ethnic groups of Assam to ensure their own identity. He also tries to evaluate the lack of proper policy of authority that cause serious damage to human development and democratic structure of the region. Baruah also focuses on the process of nation-building and its impact on ethnically diverged state like Assam. In addition to these, Baruah critically examine the issue of peace in the atmosphere of Bargaining Insurgency. The work is helpful to understand the unique position of the region in context of ethnic phenomena. The process of policy making, nation building and its impact on states like Assam can be evaluated through this article.

Chandan Kumar Sharma (2005), in his article 'The Indian State and Ethnic Activism in North East India' published in North East India Studies, Vol-1, June, focuses the concept of self rule on ethnic dimension and its increasing assertion in North East India context. He also views that the theory of 'one nation and one state' is not welcome phenomena in ethnic dominant region. Sharma points out the uniqueness of the ethnic phenomena in the North-East India and argues that it is far away from Indian Nationalism. He also raises issues like majoritarian politics, cultural homogenization to define the ethnic phenomena in the region. In conclusion, Sharma discusses the centralist policy and their impact on North-East region of India. These issues help the work to formulate the bridge between the background of the region and the ground reality of the region. The analysis of ethnic phenomena in North Eastern region describes the differences of ethnicity between Indian state and the North East India. The article helps the study to articulate and conceptualize the uniqueness of ethnicity in North East India.

Sharma's description on majoritarian politics helps to explain the issue of community-based majoritarian politics and its role in ethnically diverged North East region of India,

Samir kr Das (2005), in his article 'Globalisation, Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution in North East India: Proposals for a Paradigm Shift' published in North East India Studies, Vol-1, June, raises the issues of strategies of conflict resolution followed by Indian state in the North east in the wake of globalization. He argues that although non ethnic conflicts exist in the region, such conflicts are subsumed under ethnic conflicts due to pivotal role of ethnicity in the region. He also shows concern on the process of globalization which plays significant role in defining not only economic status but also the cultural and political life of people of the region. In addition to these, Das also points out the issue of ethnic minorityisation with making reference to that of Assam movement. In conclusion, Das talks about possible strategies to bring peace and harmony in North East India by favoring short term strategies in the region so that one can prevent the possibility of state to wither away and also maximizing the future freedom of choice for ethnic groups of the region and also the Indian state. The work helps to look into the possible strategies and shortcoming of existing policy in the region. The policies of state in globalization period and its impact on ethnically diverged North Eastern region and ethnic movements in the region are critically examined in this study with the help of this article. His explanation on the issue of ethnic minorityisation in the context of Assam movement helps the study to explain the xenophobia among ethnic minority groups in North East region of India.

Nani Gopal Mahanta (2007), in his article 'Ethnicity, State, and Identity: From Confrontation to Co-existence.' Published in Problems of Ethnicity in the North East

India, edited by B.B Kumar, Astha Bharati, Delhi, talks about how confrontation could be transformed into co-existence in the North East India. He points out the issue of nation-building process and also states the phenomena of ethnic exclusion in the region. He also deals with concept of identity and argues that the identity is multi-layered so that one can identify oneself in multi ethnic lines. Moreover, he critically examined the present structure of Indian political system based on 'the first past the post' and its impact on ethnically diverged state like Assam. Later on, Mahanta views that lack of effective communication among communities also lead to conflict in the region. He proposes to establish such a platform that everyone's voice could be heard. Mahanta's work on the ethnic phenomena of the region helps to analyze the reasons for increasing demand for separate identity in the region. Mahanta's suggestions and recommendations also help the study to analysis of Government's role and possible alternatives to resolve the ethnic issues in the North East region of India.

Sudhir Jacob George (1994) , in his article 'The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord' published in Asian Survey, vol.34, No10, Oct, by University Of California Press views that the North East of India is predominated by ethnic groups. He deals with different phases of the movement and the activity of different organizations with their objective to achieve the solution of Bodo problem. He tries to identify principal causes of the movement. He points out the economic issue and discusses how internal and external migrations in Assam lead to decrease the percentage of Bodo people in the region. To prove his point he takes the example of census report of 1947 and 1971 and shows how Bodo people were decreased from 49% to 29% in the region. He also argues the land issue and unemployment in the heading of economic causes. In addition to these,

Jacob also mentions the other causes such as language and identity, political causes of the emergence of the movement. Jacob's work helps to define the causes of Bodoland statehood movement. His work helps the study in describing the structural issues of statehood movement.

Subungcha Mwshahary(2016), in his thesis 'Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 to 1993', deals with different issues that were interrelated with the movement. On theoretical framework he tries to define ethnicity and nationalism and describe the ethnic phenomena of Assam. He gives a brief introduction to Bodo community and points out the similarities among tribal groups in Assam. He critically describes the emergence of movement, its evolution, and causes of the movement and different phases of the movement. He also looks into the leadership of ABSU and their activity as pressure group in the movement. Mwshahary also examined feasibility of a separate Bodoland state. He discusses the Bodo Accord and its impact on Bodo community and state politics. In addition to these he tries to analyze the violent activities of different extremist groups of Bodo People and their ideological clash with regard to the concept of separate Bodoland. The work helps to explain the nature of movement. His description on role of different organizations in Bodo movement helps the study to articulate the role of the ABSU.

Nani Gopal Mahanta (2013), in his article, "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", published in Economic and Political Weekly, vol XLVII no 23, p.49-58, discusses the issues of peace and violence in the Bodoland. He views that the violence are occurred due to the failure of the state to address the structural issues and the

multicultural, multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic composite culture of the region. He briefly pointed out the policies of colonial administration which create a gap between the tribal and non tribal peoples. The colonial policies are continued in post-independence period, which created a permanent structure of identity as the tribal and non tribal in post-independence period. He discusses the Bodo identity in pre and post- independence period, where he tries to points out the reasons for the Bodos' quest for separate identity and homeland. The militant phase of the movement is analysed to look into the impact of violence in Bodoland movement. At last, Mahanta discusses the issue of immigration in Bodo inhabited areas and show how the immigration process, mounted tension among Bodos' and Bengali Muslims. He also relates the ethnic conflict of 2012 and discusses the future of Bodoland. The work helps to find out the structural issues of the Bodoland movement and also helpful to analyse socio political implications of Bodoland statehood movement in Assam. The government policies are also critically analysed with the help of this work.

Susmita Sen Gupta, in her article (2014), "Identity Assertion by the Bodos of North East India: Exploring the Role of the Educated Middle Class", published in 'Global Journal of Human-Social Science: Linguistics & Education' Volume 14 Issue 2, Global Journals Inc. (USA), examines different phases of identity assertion by the Bodos. She focuses her work on the role of educated middle class of the Bodos .She views that the educated middle class of Bodos play major role in transforming and consolidating the identity of the Bodos as distinct and unique form the Assamese identity. She critically analyzes that the educated middle class of the Bodos is able to serve their class interest in the name of separate Bodoland movement in different phases. She concludes with that,

the ethnic movement of separate homeland or Bodoland is nothing but a movement to serve class interest of the educated elite class of the Bodos. Her analysis on the role of middle class helps the study to articulate the role of middle class in Bodoland statehood movement. The role of educated middle class is very important to analyse the nature of a movement. Gupta's view on educated middle class of Bodos helps to look insight the role of educated middle class in context of Bodoland movement in general and the ABSU in particular, so that the nature of separate Bodoland can be defined.

The prior studies on the issue of Bodo movement did not cover the present context of the movement. The demand of separate Bodoland is still continued in Assam. The major role is played by the ABSU in separate Bodoland movement. The ABSU launched the separate Bodoland movement in 1987. From 1987 onwards, the ABSU's role is very important in defining the nature of Bodoland statehood movement. The available literatures on the topic do not concentrate the role of ABSU in particular. The study therefore tries to describe the role of ABSU in the context of separate Bodoland movement. The study also analyses the changing nature of the ABSU and its impact on the Bodoland movement. The study also explains the nature of Bodoland movement and the role of ABSU in present context of the movement.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study discusses the issues which led the Bodos to the movement for identity and separate Bodoland. The evolution and present status of the movement is analyzed from different perspectives to understand the reality of the movement through which one can critically evaluate the nature of movement and predict the possibility of continuing

the movement. Moreover, the study analyzes the role of government in different phases of the movement and critically examines the initiative of government that had taken to resolve the Bodos' issues. The study tries to find out different opinions on Bodoland. The study carefully looks into the demographic context of Bodoland and examine if separate Bodoland is the only alternative to ensure identity of Bodos. Prime focus of the study is to look into the role of ABSU regarding this movement and their activity and positions in different phases of the movement. The study tries to find out the views of ABSU regarding current context of the movement and the impact of the movement on socio-political affairs of the region.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the proposed study focuses only on the role of ABSU in the context of Bodoland statehood movement. It discusses the nature and evolution of movement and the role of ABSU in different phases of the movement. The study briefly highlights the response of state and central government with regard to the movement and the socio-political implications of the movement in the region.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The research work has its significance on the issue of ethnic phenomena of Assam. As Assam is a homeland of diverse ethnic groups, so reaction to demand of one ethnic group may impact on other ethnic groups of the region. The region has witnessed lots of violence due to the Bodoland movement. The study tries to find out a possible solution that could be mutually accepted as it will bring peace in the region. In addition to

this, recently the movement got energized after the new state of Telengana was created. So it is the need of hour which signifies the relevance of the study and its significance.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the reasons for Bodo's quest for separate identity and Bodoland.
- To study the role of ABSU in the context of Bodo's movement for separate Bodoland.
- To analyze the government's attitude and response in dealing with the Bodo issue.
- To examine the socio-political effects of Bodoland statehood movement in the state.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study has attempted to answer the following research questions-

1. Is Bodoland Statehood Movement able to address the demand of separate state?
2. What is the role of All Bodo Students' Union in the Bodoland statehood movement?
3. What are the socio-political implications of Bodoland statehood movement for Assam?

METHODOLOGY

A number of methods have been used in this study in order to help achieve success. This has been done with a view to see that all aspects relating to the subject of this study can be achieved.

Historical Method has been adopted as the first and foremost suitable method of study as the subject of study is deeply related to recent historical facts. All facts mentioned and reasons cited have been looked from the point of history.

Analytical Method has been used as the second most dependable method of study. The historical facts and figures cited have been duly analyzed from practical points.

Inductive Method has been applied in order to solicit historical information required for this study. A few facts have been inducted so as to help arrive at desirable conclusions in this study.

Deductive also has been duly applied with a view to segregate the historical facts as felt required and place them in their rightful place in the course of history. Deductions of facts have been done with a view to arrive at conclusions desired in this study.

The research work is qualitative in nature. Because, the research tries to study opinions, views and perspective with regard to concerned topic. The study uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are collected using unstructured interviews and observation. The study uses judgment sampling for selecting the respondents for interviews from different organizations of Assam concerned with the

topic. The judgment sampling is used in the research for selecting items as convenience for the research work. Interviews were conducted to the leaders of All Bodo Students' Union, National Students' Union of India, Bharatiya Janata Party, Asom Gana Parishad, Students' Federation of India, All Assam Minority Students' Union, All Assam Students' Union, Satro Mukti Sangram Samiti, All Bodoland Minority Students' Union, Asom Sahitya Sabha and different stakeholders of Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) region so as to get firsthand knowledge about their perspective to the Bodoland statehood demand.

Secondary data collected through available literature on the topic, various publications of the central, state and local governments, reports and publications of various associations connected with the research topic.

CHAPTERIZATION

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.

The first chapter covers the introduction of the topic, significance of study, statement of the problem, review of literature, research questions, and methodology.

CHAPTER II: BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

The second chapter deals with the concept of ethnicity and tries to analyze ethnic phenomena in North East India. The chapter gives a brief introduction to the Bodo people. The nature of movement is also explained in order to critically evaluate the

objectives of the Movement. The chapter also deals with the reasons for the community's quest for separate homeland.

CHAPTER III: ROLE OF ALL BODO STUDENTS' UNION IN BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT.

The third chapter discusses the causes and factor that led to emergence of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in 1967 as student wing of the Bodo community who plays a significant role in the Bodoland statehood movement. The leadership of ABSU and its demand and activity to secure its objective is critically analyzed in this chapter. The chapter deals with the current activities and position of The ABSU in context of the statehood movement. Recently, The ABSU started a mass movement by demanding separate homeland.

CHAPTER IV: STATE RESPONSES: STATE AND UNION GOVERNMENTS.

The fourth chapter is to analyze the government position, central as well as state from two broad points of view. The government took the accommodative and suppressive methods in order to deal with the Bodo problem. Also, it discusses the pre independence provisions provided by colonial power. Later on, the constitutional provision of 6th schedule that was based on the report of Bordoloi Committee is discussed. It looks into the matter of Indian Nationalism and its impact on ethnically diverged state like Assam. The Bodo accord (1993) and the post development of the accord is critically analyzed in this chapter. The chapter explains the establishment of Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003 and its working in the Bodoland. The chapter deals with the repressive attitude of the central and as well as the state governments towards the movement. The language

policy of state government, the land issue, and the military operation from government is analyzed here and also the impact of Bodo Accord (1993) and BTC (2003) is viewed.

CHAPTER V: SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.

The fifth chapter highlights the socio political implication of Bodoland statehood Movement in the region. Issues of non-Bodos, impact on other plain tribes, present political development and paradigms like peace, development and violence in the region are analyzed and critically examine the impact of the movement on these paradigms.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION.

The last chapter summarizes the study and includes concluding remarks as part of its major findings.

CHAPTER II

BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Northeastern region of India is considered as the homeland of multi ethnic groups. Ethnic groups with their own uniqueness reside in the region. In contemporary time, movements with demand of identity assertion are commonly observed in the region. The Bodos are one of the major ethnic groups of the region. They led Bodo movement to secure their demands a long ago and still it continues in Assam. An attempt is made in this chapter to give a theoretical framework to the Bodoland statehood movement. The chapter deals with the concept of ethnicity and tries to analyze ethnic phenomena in the North East India. The chapter gives an overview of Bodo people and tries to analyze the Bodoland statehood movement critically. The chapter looks into various causes of ethnic assertion of the Bodo group in Assam.

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is a sense of belongingness to a particular group and culture. An ethnic group or an ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, society, culture or nation.⁷ This definition of ethnicity emphasizes the importance of psychological feelings of a person to identify oneself with a particular ethnic group on the basis of common culture, language, society and nation.

James people and Garrick Bailey define ethnicity and ethnic group as “In essence, an ethnic group is a named social category of people based on perception of shared social experiences or one’s ancestors’ experiences. Members of the ethnic group see themselves

⁷ Oxford Dictionaries, “ethnicity: definition of ethnicity”, Oxford University Press, Retrieved 9 November 2017.

as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups. Ethnic group identity has a strong psychological or emotional component that divides the people of the world into opposing categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’.⁸ The uniqueness of culture, history as well as socio-political evolution of particular group creates the boundary between them and other groups. The categorization of ‘us’ and ‘them’ are clearly visible on the attitude of a person, representing one particular ethnic group towards the member of other groups.

One can categorize the composing element of ethnicity in two categories, such as objective markers and subjective feelings. Edwards’ explanation of ethnic identity emphasizes the role of objective markers and subjective understanding. He argues, “Ethnic identity is allegiance to a group-large or small, socially dominant or subordinate-with which one has ancestral links. There is no necessity for a continuation, over generations, of the same socialization or cultural patterns, but some sense of a group boundary must persist. This can be sustained by shared objective characteristics (language, religion,etc.) or by more subjective contributions to a sense of ‘groupness’, or by some combination of both.”⁹ This definition draws particular attention to the importance and role of objective markers and subjective understanding in formation of ethnic identity. Objective markers are those which have physical appearance to show the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The objective markers help to bring sense of belongingness to one particular group among peoples with shared these markers. Cultures, customs, traditions, languages, physical appearances are objective markers of

⁸People, James; Bailey, Garrick (2014): “Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology” (10th edn.), Cengage Learning, p.23.

⁹ Edwards, J (1994): “Multilingualism”, Routledge, London, p. 128.

ethnicity. On the other hand, subjective feelings are psychological element. Subjective feelings depend on an individual mindset whether he want to identify him selves with the group or not. The groups' recognition is also important in considering a person to be part of their particular identity.

Other Definitions of Ethnic groups or Identity: Different scholar forwarded different definition of ethnic group. Some of most widely accepted definitions are mentioned below-

- According to Max Weber “(E)thnic groups are those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.”¹⁰

- According to Donald Horowitz: “Ethnicity is based on a myth of collective ancestry, which usually carries with it traits believed to be innate. Some notion of ascription, however diluted, and affinity deriving from it are inseparable from the concept of ethnicity.”¹¹

¹⁰ Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith (1996): “Ethnicity”, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 35

¹¹ Horowitz, Donald (1985): “Ethnic Groups in Conflict”, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 52.

- According to Fearon and Laitin, an ethnic group is “a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, and has a conventionally recognized “natural history” as a group.”¹²

- In a subsequent refinement, Fearon defines a “prototypical” ethnic group as one that has several of the following features as possible: (1) Membership is reckoned primarily by descent (2) Members are conscious of group membership (3) Members share distinguishing cultural features (4) These cultural features are valued by a majority of members (5) The group has or remembers a homeland (6) The group has a shared history as a group that is “not wholly manufactured but has some basis in fact.”¹³

- According to Anthony Smith, an ethnic group is, “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity.”¹⁴

Basic sources of ethnic group: Basically, the identity of a group is defined on the basis of the source from which the members of the group are recruited. From the above mentioned definitions, some sources of ethnic groups are discussed below-

Language: Language is one of the major elements in the formation of an ethnic group. Shared language among a section of people unites them and brings a sense of peculiar identity to them. If an ethnic group’s membership criterion is exclusively based on language and dialect then it will categorize as ethno-linguistic group.

¹² Fearon, James and David D. Laitin (2000): “Ordinary Language and External Validity: Specifying Concepts in the Study of Ethnicity.” Paper presented at the October 2000 meeting of LICEP, University of Pennsylvania, p.20.

¹³ Fearon, James (2003): “Ethnic Structure and Cultural Diversity by Country” *Journal of Economic Growth* 8.2: p.7.

¹⁴ Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith (1996), *op.cit*, p. 6

Physical Appearance or Race: Belonging to one common race and having similarity in physical appearance also bring the sense of belongingness to a particular group. Race is also important in formation of sense of separate identity. It is worth to mention that race and ethnicity is not same. Race remains unchanged and it is permanent, but on the other hand constructivist and instrumentalist school of thought argue that ethnicity can be constructed and it is not permanent.

Religion: The element of religion is one of the major sources of ethnic group. It plays vital role in formation of ethnic group. Religion helps people to bring sense of belongingness to particular group. Ethno religious group is formed by ethnic groups that emphasizing shared affiliation with a particular religion, denomination and sect.

Common history and geographic element: Shared history and process of evolution bring psychological unity among the people. Due to these factors, peoples grow common consciousness regarding their identity, issues, demands and problems. The process of socialization and political socialization is more or less same among the peoples with shared history and geography. So it helps them to unite and identify themselves with a particular group with the sense of belongingness. Geographical element also plays major role in formation of ethnic identity. Emphasizing on distinct local sense of belonging stemming from relative geographic isolation, ethno regional groups can be formed.

There are different approaches to study the phenomena of ethnicity. Sociological theories of ethnicity have basically categorized into two major approaches. Firstly, the primordial approach argues that ethnic identity of a person or a group is given. The supporter of this approach views that ethnicity is a priori status to a person before his

birth and it remains same throughout his life. Primordial theories emphasize identity based upon affective ties.¹⁵ Secondly instrumentalist or circumstantial school of thought holds that ethnicity is not given rather it is created by interest groups for achieving secondary goal such as, for instance, an increase in wealth, power, or status. Circumstantial theories emphasize the instrumental basis for ethnicity, particularly the role of self interested rational action.¹⁶ Besides these two major approaches, a new approach to the study of ethnicity is there. The primordial and circumstantial theories have been seen as incomplete in explaining the problem of ethnic boundaries, so efforts have been done in recent years to devise a new approach that combined aspects of both primordial and circumstantial approach.¹⁷ The new approach is called ‘constructionist’ which views that ethnicity is both given and constructed. This school of thought recognizes the independent role of ascriptively-based affective attachments in determining ethnic group boundaries, yet also discusses the way in which such attachments are negotiated and mobilized in a dynamic fashion in reaction to political and economic incentives.¹⁸ Thus, the approach gives its viewpoints as ethnicity is constructed and in its process of construction some given or created objective markers play driving role to bring sense of uniqueness and group identity to its members.

The term ethnicity is often used synonymously with ambiguous terms such as nation, nationalism, nationality. Nationalism, like ethnicity, is essentially a manifestation of group identity. The difference between the two is that nationalism includes the desire

¹⁵ Scott Jr, G.M. (1990):" A Resynthesis of the Primordial and Circumstantial Approaches to Ethnic Group and Solidarity: Towards an Explanatory Model", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13 (2), P.147-171.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 147-171

¹⁷Chai, Sun-ki (2005): "Predicting Ethnic Boundaries", *European Sociological Review*, 21 (4), 2005. P, 376-377.

¹⁸Nagel, J. (1994): "Construction Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culturew", *Social Problems*, 41(1), p. 152-76.

for political autonomy, for self government, in addition to the component of ethnicity of the belief in shared characteristics.¹⁹ Paul Brass views that ethnicity and nationalism are not givens, but are social and political constructions. The elite society of a community plays vital role in formation of such concept by taking help from some cultural element of the group that they wish to represent. Brass explains “ethnicity and nationalism are not given, but are social and political constructions. They are creations of the elites, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from the culture of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as themselves.”²⁰ Brass explanation signifies the role of elite society of a community in formation of such concept by taking help from some cultural element of the group that they wish to represent. Benedict Anderson, prominent scholar holds that a nation is an art of imagination by underlining that nations were not the determinate products of some given sociological conditions like language or race or religion- they had been imagined into existence.²¹ Another leading authority on the issue, Ernest Gellner acknowledges that nationalism is an artificial phenomenon- a construction.²² Thus, the emphasis is given on constructive element of ethnicity. Presently, the constructivist approach of ethnicity is widely accepted.

Scholars also critically analyze the role and the activities of modern centralizing state, the power structure of the existing political system and interaction among elite class of particular community regarding the construction of ethnicity or nationalism. Brass

¹⁹ Leoussi, Athena S.(2001): “Encyclopaedia of Nationalism”, Transaction Publishers, p.170

²⁰Levinson, David and Melvin, Ember (eds.) (1996): “Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology”, Vol II, New York, p.8.

²¹Sharma, Chandan Kr (2005): “The Indian State And Ethnic Activism In North East India”, North East India Studies, vol I no I, Guwahati, p 32.

²²Ibid, p.32.

views, “ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state.”²³ He continues, “(E)thnic identity and modern nationalism arise out of specific types of interactions between the leadership of the centralizing state and elite from non dominant ethnic groups, especially but not exclusively on the peripheries of those states.”²⁴ The increasing role of the state and the power structure make great impact on the formation of ethnicity. With the increasing role of state, the concept of ethnic identity arises due to the struggle of elite class to enjoy advantage position in power structure.

Present day, the activities of modern state which has extended their range of activity and take part on controlling or modifying social consciousness and behavior has developed a close relationship between ethnic consciousness on the one hand and the activities of the state on the other. David Brown holds that “Ethnicity is interpreted here as an ideology which individuals employ to resolve the insecurities arising from the power structure within which they are located. Accordingly, the explanation of ethnic politics must begin with the examination of the state’s influence upon the power structure.”²⁵

Ethnic phenomena in North-East India: Assam is homeland of different ethnic groups with a variety of culture. In present today the issue of ethnicity becomes more prominent into socio political sphere of the region. Prominent social scientist Apurba Kumar Baruah views that, “the process of proliferation of ethnic movement is so rapid and continuous in this region (North East India) that it is really difficult to find parallels in human history.

²³Levinson, David and Melvin, Ember (eds.) (1996),p.8.

²⁴Ibid.p.8

²⁵Brown, David (1994): “The State and Ethnic Politics IN Southeast India”, London, p.1.

These movements are threatening to destabilize existing social and political arrangements leading to serious inter- community conflicts.”²⁶ Baruah continues, “ the history of ethnic assertion in this region, now known as North East India, has been closely connected with the history of political evolution, administrative structuring and restructuring, and of course the emergence of new forces.”²⁷ The new forces include the emergence of new elite classes of all ethnic groups, who lead the demands of ethnic communities.

Baruah points out the role of educated elite class in formation of ethnic identity in the region. Baruah views that in the absence of powerful feudal or bourgeois class, the educated elites of the various communities have come to occupy hegemonic positions in their respective communities and have started competing with the relatively advanced sections of their nearest rival communities for material gains. He also opines that these educated elite use emotive issues to establish hegemony.²⁸ In all ethnic movements in the region, the emotive slogans are cried to drive the sentiments of the common people to the movement. The feelings of being exploited and neglected, identity crisis as member of the particular group are raised in the course of ethnic movement.

On the issue of ethnic assertion in North East India in context with Indian state, Chandan Kr. Sharma summarizes his observation regarding ethnic phenomena in North East India into three types of explanation. Firstly, geopolitical and cultural historical differences of the region with rest of India, secondly, lack of socio economic development and thirdly, role of external hand (forces operating from foreign soil).

²⁶Baruah, Apurba K. (2005): “Communities and Democracy: A North East Indian Perspective”, North East India Studies, vol I no I, Guwahati, p23.

²⁷Ibid. p.24.

²⁸Ibid. p.24.

Sharma holds these reasons responsible for the phenomena of ethnic assertion in North East India.²⁹ The first explanation states that the differences of geo political and cultural differences stood in the way of emotive unity of the people of the region with the rest of India. Therefore, any disgruntlement among the people of the region almost immediately takes an ethnic turn. The second explanation tries to argue the poor socio economic scenario of the region pushed the people of the region to feel being neglected. This second explanation also took note of exploitation of resources from the region which raised the hatred feelings towards the nation state. According to Sharma, third explanation can be viewed as statist explanation aimed at externalizing the causes of the ethnic upsurge in the north east.³⁰ These explanations are basically summarized the ethnic assertion of the Northeast as a whole. It gives an overview of ethnic assertion in Northeastern state in context with Indian state. The internal issues within Northeast India like competition of elites from different ethnic groups in the region, the response of bigger communities towards small nationalities, and the state role are also a major cause in ethnic assertion of the Northeast India.

Regarding nature of ethnic groups in the region, Baruah make reference to Paul Brass's concept of three stages of ethnic groups. Baruah classified the ethnic groups of Northeast India into three stages of development as argued by Brass. First stage ethnic groups are those who implying an existence of cultural markers recognized easily but their political significance are unnoticed. The second stage ethnic groups are those who have political consciousness regarding their separate and unique identity. Basically,

²⁹Sharma, Chandan Kr (2005): "The Indian State and Ethnic Activism In North East India", North East India Studies, vol I no I, Guwahati, p 38-39.

³⁰Ibid, p. 40.

medium size groups are found in this stage. The Third stage refers to those larger ethnic groups who are arguing for nationality formation, involving right to self determination.³¹

Bodo is one of the major ethnic groups in Assam. It holds the status of Scheduled Tribes (plains). Among the other tribes residing in Assam, the Bodos constitutes 40% of total tribal population in Assam.³² Their demands for identity assertion was started a long back ago. In present day, they are demanding a separate statehood for them. The ABSU plays leading role in this movement for separate homeland.

Brief introduction of Bodo: Bodo peoples are linguistically belong to Tibeto- Burmese stock and racially they are categorized as Indo Mangoloid stock. Linguistically, the Bodos include a large group of people who are the speakers of the tibeto-burman speeches of North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma.³³ Sidney Endle remarked that the Bodos approximate very close to the Mongolian stock on the basis of their features and general appearance, and this would seem to point Tibet and China as the original home of the race.³⁴ Nothing is sure about the origin of the Bodos. There are not available of authentic documents on the origin of Bodo peoples so every scholar explains the origin of Bodos according to their own viewpoint. It is also found the reference of Bodo peoples in Hindu religious book like the Mahabharata. In the Mahabharata the Bodos people were

³¹Baruah, Apurba K. (2005): "Communities and Democracy: A North East Indian Perspective", North East India Studies, Vol I No I, Guwahati, p.20.

³²Census Report of India (2001)

³³Brahma, Dr. Kameswar (1992): "A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs, Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos (With special reference to the Bodos of Kokrajhar District)", Puthi pustak, calcutta, p.1.

³⁴Endle, Sidney (1997): "The Kacharis", Low Price Publication, New Delhi, p.3.

known as kirata. The kirata belongs to the clan of Mangoloid tribes and was resided in the Himalayan borders.³⁵

Regarding, the migration of the Bodo people, Dr. S.K. Chatterjee wrote that “different branches of the great Sino-Tibetan speaking people which had their nidus near the head-waters of the yang-tsze-kiang and the Hoang-ho rivers, to the west of China pushed south and west, probably from 2000 B.C. onwards and these tribes infiltrated into India mostly along the western course of the Brahamaputra. The great Bodo tribe would appear to have been established over the valley of the Brahamaputra fairly early and to have extended into the North and East Bengal and into North Bihar”³⁶ The presence of peoples from the Bodo-Kachari stock in Cooch Behar, Rangpur, and Dinajpur district of North Bengal and even North Bihar help to understand the map of their migration in line with the statement.

Dr. Maheswar Neog said, “In the Brahamaputra Valley and its neighboring hills and forests the Tibeto-Burman Bodo people have been dwelling from ancient period. They are mainly Chutiya, Mech, Rava, Tipra, Garo and the Hajong of the Moimensingh district. They also ruled the state in different periods and in different places for a long period. The ruling period of the Bodos is the longest of all the ruling groups of the same stock. The Bodo name of the places and rivers may prove this that they maintained their powers as a ruling class for a long period.”³⁷

³⁵Brahma, Dr. Kameswar (1992), op.cit. p.6.

³⁶Chatterjee, S.K. (1955): “The place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India”, Gauhati university, Gauhati, p.9.

³⁷Neog, Maheswar: Purani Asamiya Samaj Aru Sanskriti, Guwahati, New Book Stall, 1957 (Assamese), p.2.

Kachari is the another name of Bodo tribe but with the time passes many tribes were come out from the fold of kachari and tried to establish their own existence as separate group on the basis of their culture and language. The ‘Kachari’ is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mythical ancestry.³⁸ The Kacharis are regarded as aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of Brahmaputra Valley.³⁹ In the course of time the groups belonging to Kacharis stock divided into different tribal communities. It is well understood that the ethnic boundaries of various communities are not strictly fixed and as they constantly subjected to the process of fission and fusion.⁴⁰ But still many tribes of the region shared some common features in their respective culture and have language similarity to some extent.

The main habitat of Bodos in Assam 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 ABSU views that earlier the following tribes were known with one single name but at present they have different names to represent their groups. Tribes like Bodo or Boro, Borok, Barman Kachari, Chutiya, Dimasa, Deuri, Dhimal, Hajong, Mech, Modahi, Koch, Rabha, Sonowal, Thengal and Tiwa. They are but cognate tribes of the same ancestry.⁴¹

³⁸Anderson, J.D (1985): ‘Preface’ to collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes, Folklore Society of Assam, Guwahati.

³⁹Gait, E.A.(1963): “A History of Assam”, Lawyers’ Book Stall, Guwahati, 1963. P. 247.

⁴⁰Burmon, S. (2002): “Tradition to Modernity, Everywhere, Guwahati. P.2.

⁴¹All Bodo Students Union (2017): “History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle”, p.4.

Bodoland Statehood Movement: Bodo, the largest plain tribes of the region had gone through different phases to assume its present nature of the Bodoland statehood movement. The movement for identity assertion was started a long back ago. In the first initial stage of the Bodo movement, the issue of identity assertion was more emphasized. The consciousness about identity among the Bodos was grown with the reform movement in Bodo society led by Kalicharan Brahma.⁴² He was able to influence the youth section of Bodo society and made them conscious regarding their identity.

In 1928, Kalicharan Brahma⁴³ led a team and met the Simon commission and submitted the memorandum. . Kalicharan Brahma led the delegation team of the Goalpara District Community, while Jadav Khaklari submitted another memorandum to the Simon commission as the Secretary of the Assam Kachari Juba Sanmelan, on behalf of the entire Bodo community of Assam. The memoranda urged the Government to grant a separate electorate for the Boro-Kachari community, both in the Assembly and local board elections; to provide compulsory free primary education to the students of this community, to establish Bodo Regiment in British Army and to provide separate category for Bodos in the census report.⁴⁴ Dhubri Bodo Jubak Sanmilani, and another delegation team representing the Bodos, Garos and Rabhas o f the Goalpara Sub-Division appealed the Government not to transfer Goalpara District of Assam to Bengal province.⁴⁵ This was the first time that the plain tribes of Assam presented the memorandum with demand to ensure their identity.

⁴²Mwshahary Subungcha (2016): "Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 TO 1993", Guwahati, p. 65.

⁴³Kalicharan Brahma (1860-1938), originally Kalicharan Mech, was a 20th century social and religious reformer of Bodo society. He established a new religion called Brahma Dharma around 1906.

⁴⁴Mwshahary Subungcha (2016), op.cit .p.65

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.65

The demand for separate electorate for Bodos and to consider Bodos as separate category in the census report highlighted their consciousness for their identity. Although the demand for separate electorate was not accepted, a reservation provision was incorporated in the Government of India Act 1935 for the plain tribes of Assam. Five seats were reserved for the plain tribes in Assam Legislative Council.

Also the plain tribes formed political organization in 1933 with the name of All Assam Plain Tribal League to represent the voice of plain tribes in political framework of the country. In the pre independence period the party had importance in political scenario of Assam. But later on, during the post independence period, leader of the League merged with Congress and the party was dissolved to a Tribal Sangha, just a socio-economic body and lost its prior importance in political structure of the state.

The Bodos, largest plain tribe of Assam was successful to produce a middle class who raised the issues of plain tribes in new way. The issues relating to language, culture and tradition came to forefront. Even the exclusion of the plain tribes from purview of 6th scheduled of constitution made the plain tribes of the region more conscious to their identity. Although major plain tribes came together but due to the numerical majority of Bodos in comparison to other tribes, sometimes the issues of Bodos were more emphasized. The Bodos are more organized and they claim that most of the plain tribes of the region share same history and ancestry and part of larger Bodo-Kachari clan.⁴⁶

⁴⁶All Bodo Students Union, op. cit.p.4. The claim of Bodos is also supported by some historical facts. The Census of 1881 listed 12 subgroups of the clan, where as Endle counted fifteen of them. Grierson identified nine communities as members of the Bodo speaking group. The combination of lists present the list of eighteen groups, eg. Bodo, Dimasa, Lalung, Madani, Mech, Rabha, Saraniya, Hojai, Garo, Rajbongshi or Koch, Chutiya, Moran, Hajong, Triperra, Mahalia, Dhimal, Solaimiya, Phulguriya.

Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS)⁴⁷ was formed in 1952 to revive the Bodo language and ensure development of the language. The Sabha is one of the major organization who fight for ensure a separate status for the Bodos language. The major element of Indian regionalism and basis of state re organization is language. Realizing the importance of language element to ensure identity, Bodo Sahitya Sabha works for the development of the Bodo language. In the first half of 1970s, the Sabha along with the support from THE ABSU and other plain tribe organizations fought for ensuring Roman script for the Bodo language. Later on very convincingly Government of India imposed Devanagari Script to Bodo language. The approach of Assam government was criticized and it made plain tribes of Assam very conscious to their own unique identity.

The Bodoland statehood movement can also be categorized as movement for autonomy. With the exclusion of plain tribes of Assam from purview of Sixth schedule of the Constitution put question on the intention of Government of India. A separate administrative mechanism was provided for hill tribes of North Eastern region of India under the above mentioned schedule to govern hill tribes with the intention of less interference in their local issues. But regarding plain tribes there was no special mechanism was adopted.⁴⁸ So, it raised consciousness among plain tribes of the region for their own autonomy in governance and management of other local issues. The

(Goswami, Madhurima "The Bodos: Culture and Society", Journal of Bussiness Management & Social Science Research, vol 1, no1,oct 2012, p.88.)

⁴⁷Bodo Sahitya Sabha was founded in 1952 under the presidency of Joy Bhadra Hagjer in 1952. It promotes the Bodo language and Bodo literature. It consisted of representatives of Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, and Nepal in abroad. Presently Kameshwar Brahma (2008-present) hold the presidentship of Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

⁴⁸The 1952 report of the Commission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes states that the dwelling place of tribals are either the 'forests; or the 'hills'. TheConstitutional provisions under the Sixth Scheduled for forming autonomous districts councils, therefore, extended only to the hill tribes of Assam, it did not cover plain tribes under this provision.

consciousness of the plain tribes regarding autonomy could not articulate in proper manner due to the absence of strong leadership. When Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India announced that Assam would be restructured on federal basis in 1965,⁴⁹ the issue of Autonomy once again gained importance in the political scenario of Assam. In 1967, people witnessed the birth of two strong organizations of plain tribes, namely the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA).

The ABSU as a student body keep a safe distance from direct politics. The PTCA was formed as political party with the motive to enter in direct politics. The PTCA demanded a separate union territory namely Udayanchal for plain tribes of Assam. They started movement for Udayanchal and the stand of the PTCA was supported by different plain tribal organization. In the meantime, the national emergency was declared⁵⁰ and the demand of Udayanchal was forcefully pushed in back seat from political scenario of India in general and Assam in particular. In the general election and provincial election of Assam in 1977 and 1978 respectively, PTCA allied with Janata Government in central and state as well. In keeping a successful and trust ties with Janata Government, the then general secretary of PTCA and the lone Bodo member In Parliament Charan Narzary announced about giving up the demand of Udayanchal, which led to split in Plain Tribal Council of Assam. The PTCA suffered split over the demand of Udayanchal. Many of young leaders of did not like the intention of PTCA leaders to give up the demand of Udayanchal. Benai Khungur Bosumotary from Udalguri, one of the hardliner of the PTCA left the party and formed PTCA (Progressive) to fight for the cause of separate

⁴⁹Indira Gandhi in her meeting with the leaders of All Party Hill Leaders Conference ensured that Assam would be restructured on federal line to address their demands.

⁵⁰National emergency was declared in 1975 and existed till 1977.

Udayanchal for plain tribal peoples of Assam. The ABSU supported the PTCA (Progressive) and both these organizations in 1980 demanded the creation of Union Territory to be called 'Mishing Bodoland'⁵¹. An attempt was made to bring PTCA and PTCA (P) together under the platform of newly formed party namely UNTLF. But the difference among the leaders of both organizations regarding the proposed area for autonomy and its nature made them unpopular among common masses. So, in 1987, the ABSU took the responsibility to lead the movement. The then president of the ABSU, Upendra Nath Brahma argued that only a separate statehood could ensure and protect the identity of the Bodos. From 1987 to till date the movement for separate statehood is going on and the movement has passed through different phases during this time to assume its present nature. In order to deal with the Bodos problems, the government also took some steps to ensure autonomy to them. For example the creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council under Bodo Accord 1993, establishment of Bodoland Territorial Council under Bodo Accord in 2003 in accordance with the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. But still the demand of separate homeland of Bodoland is carried by a strong influential Bodo students union namely, ABSU in the region. They opine that only a separate statehood of Bodoland can able to secure and ensure the identity. They alleged the current authority of BTAD⁵² for its corruption and mismanagement and view that without separate homeland the problems of Bodo peoples could not be solved. They also condemned the Government of India and State Government of Assam for their negligence and indifferent attitude towards the issues and demands of Bodo peoples.

⁵¹'Mising Bodoland' demand was raised by PTCA (P). The demand was to establish separate homeland for Mising and Bodo tribes of Assam. Mising are the second largest plain tribes in the region.

⁵²BTAD was established under the Memorandum of Settlement(2003). The areas of BTC is called BTAD. Presently, Four districts namely Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri come under BTAD jurisdiction.

The Bodoland statehood movement is also categorized as movement for development in the region. Some argue that the violent and non violent activity of the Bodoland statehood movement is the prime cause for the undevelopment of the region but on the other hand some people opine that due to the non development of the region, the Bodoland movement is still continued. Generally, the Bodo society is agrarian in nature and very close to their land but in pre independence period during the Sadullah Ministry in Assam, the region witnessed the influx of non Bodos, especially Bengali Muslims in the region. This phenomenon is still continuing in the post independence period also. Bodo peoples lost their land and make non Bodos especially the Bengali Muslim peasants responsible for change in the demographic outlook of the region. Bodo peoples treat non Bodos as potential threat to their land. They blame the government mechanism for their failure to stop the influx of Bengali Muslim peasants in the region. Moreover, the absence of proper development policy for Bodo dominated areas in Government development project made them cry for a separate statehood.

CAUSES OF BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT:

1. **Historical Reasons-** The Bodos are one of the earliest settlers of the Assam. Historians claims Bodos (another name of Cacharis) are the original autochons of Assam.⁵³ Anderson and Gait also hold same view that Bodos are earliest known inhabitants of Brahmaputra Valley. In course of time, the Bodos lost its significant place in Assam. The migration of other non tribes to the region made them conscious about their own identity and land. The Bodos felt deprived of protective measures of the Colonial administration. They blamed the caste structure of Hindu society for their

⁵³Endle, S (1911): "The Kacharis", Macmillan And Co.,

deprivation. In the memorandum, submitted to the Simon commission by plain tribes stated that "in spite of our large numbers all advantage of the reforms are being enjoyed either by a Brahmin or by a Kshatriya, or by a Sudra."⁵⁴

Even the Governor of Assam, Andrew Clow, the then Governor of Assam (1942 - 46), who observed, the Assamese, both caste Hindus and the Muslims professed solicitude for the tribes, but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathy with the tribes. This feeling of deprivation among these communities thus fostered the growth of local organisation i.e. the Cachari Sanmilan, the Koch Rajbansi Sanmilan, Chutia Sanmilan, the Muttock Association throughout the province. Initially, each organization worked independently and confined its activities but in the thirties they joined hands and formed the All Assam Plain Tribal League (AAPTL).⁵⁵ This negligence attitude towards plain tribes was continued in the post-Independence period also. The demands and issues of Bodos' regarding culture, tradition and identity are not emphasized.

Thus, the emergence of new force of plain tribes in against continues deprivation of plain tribes in socio-political scenario of Assam provided the ground for movement with the demand of ethnic assertion among the plain tribes. Now, the movement took the nature of separate statehood demand to ensure their identity and demands.

A memorandum of the Bodos submitted to the Bhupinder Singh Committee appointed by the Center to study the Bodo issues, states, "whosoever and whatsoever name the Bodos may be known to others now, after all, the allied tribes belonging to the

⁵⁴Basumatari B.K.(edited): "Plain Tribal Before the Simon Commission", p.44

⁵⁵Ibid. p.44.

great IndoMongoloid living in the proposed Bodoland territory are often same Bodo groups. Ethnically speaking, the majority population of the proposed Bodoland territory has got its own distinct and quite separate ethnic identity and background which is completely different from that of Assamese.”⁵⁶ This statement reflects the perspective of Bodo community in context of Assamese people and culture, where they prefer to identity as Bodos than Assamese.

2. Alienation of land to tribal people- Prior to independence, British colonial administration welcomed large scale of migration to the land of Assam for economic purpose. The colonial administration settled the migrant people in the land where plain tribes used to stay. The newly migrant peasants of Bengali Muslim were welcomed by the colonial administration for cultivation of wasteland of the region. The tea planters were also migrated from other parts of India to work on tea estate of the region. In 1941, the Sadullah ministry in provincial government of Assam made policy of ‘More Food Campaign’⁵⁷ under which a large scale of migrant peasants of Bengali Muslim origin settled in the area of plain tribes. Plain tribes protested against this stand of the Sadullah ministry and in response to it, tribal league also suspended its support to Saddullah. The plain tribes felt insecure due to pressure on their land. Later on, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 was amended in 1947 and made provision to preserve the tribal land. Under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (1886) Amended Act 1947, the State Government had constituted 37 Nos. of Tribal Belts and Tribal blocks in the

⁵⁶A Memorandum to the three member Expert Committee Under Dr. Bhupinder Singh, on Bodo issues- by All Bodo Student Union -1991.

⁵⁷The More Food Campaign in Assam was started with the objective to grow more food during the phase of Second World War The prime motive behind the campaign was to provide war assistance to British soldiers. In Assam, Sadulla ministry was in Assam and they supported the campaign. In the name of campaign, a large scale migration of Bengali peasants was advocated by the Sadullah Ministry to grow the muslim population in the state.

state so far in those areas predominantly inhabited by tribal and backward classes of people who, on account of their primitive condition and lack of education, are incapable of looking after their own welfare in so far as such welfare depends upon their having sufficient lands.⁵⁸

This step was welcomed by the plain tribes of Assam but in reality still the reserved lands were not protected in effective manner. Till today, the influx of non tribes in such areas is a common phenomenon. So, it is obvious on the part of the Bodos to ensure and protect their land from continue influx of non tribes in their reserved land in general and Muslim with Bengali acsent peasants in particular. Thus, the feeling of insecurity led them to start the movement against the governments' failure to ensure and protect their reserved land.

3. **Assamese Chauvinism-** The Bordoloi Committee under the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights, Minority and Tribal and Excluded Areas to look after the issues of tribal peoples of Assam, in its report did not address the issues of plain tribes of Assam. The Bordoloi committee excluded the plain tribes of the Assam under the purview of separate administrative mechanism under sixth schedule of Constitution and opined that the plain tribes would be treated as minority in all practical purpose. The reason behind this stand on plain tribes, committee viewed that it was not taken too long to assimilate the plain tribes with the composite culture of Assamese. But the Bodos felt that with the assimilation in non tribe culture would destroy their uniqueness, culture and tradition. So, the plain tribes started to assert their unique

⁵⁸ The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (1886) Amended Act 1947, Section 161 of Chapter X.

identity in the same way as with the hill tribes. Moreover, the Bodos viewed that imposition of Assamese culture to them poses a serious threat to their identity and existence.⁵⁹ They blamed the Assamese people for their imposing attitude of culture to them.

The state governments' power was in the hand of Assamese people so it was obvious that the resentment against government also viewed as imposition of Assamese peoples' will by using state mechanisms on plain tribes of Assam in general and Bodos in particular. The state and central governments' indifference attitude in the event of movement for roman script for Bodo language, where Devanagiri script was imposed later on unilaterally, the negligence of governments' mechanism towards Bodos issues, exclusion of any provision for plain tribes in regard to protection and ensure their identity in the Assam Accord, Asom Gana Parishad's (AGP) government decision on making the Assamese paper compulsory in secondary classes, and governments' indifferent attitude on alienation of land to tribal people made Bodos to rethink about their destiny. These incidents made Bodos more organized to stand against such imposition of Assamese hegemony. These issues raised questions on Bodos mind about the intention of Assamese people. So, they chose the path of movement to prevent such injustices that had been done to them.

4. Inadequate policy to address tribal issues: The Governments' failure to implement appropriate policies to ensure the identity issues of Bodos led them to revolt

⁵⁹The Assamese culture was treated as potential threat to the cultures of other small communities of the region. Bodo leaders view that this Assamese culture was just manifestation of caste Assamese. The other small communities have not equal share to represent their own culture within this constructed Assamese culture.

against the system. Governments' indifference response on protection and promotion of the uniqueness of bodo community made them conscious about their own existence. The post-independent India followed the colonial policy to deal with the tribal issue of North Eastern region. The separate administrative mechanism was introduced by Constituent Assembly of India to govern the tribes of the region with granting maximum autonomy to tribes in management of their local issues. The special adjustment was done primarily to the hill tribes of the region as colonial administration did. The plain tribes were not taken under the purview of special mechanism. The plain tribes felt neglected and in the absence of any special mechanism they felt insecure about their existence. Moreover, the governments' failure to ensure development in the region also caused the Bodoland statehood movement. The condition of law and order in the region is always subject of criticism. The Bodos blamed the state governments' pro- Assamese stand for undeveloped condition of their language, culture and tradition. The Governments' inability to protect the tribal lands from influx of non tribes, especially the Muslim peasants with Bengali descent and giving pattas to non tribes in those reserved land for tribes by illegal way led to serious dissatisfaction with the government among tribal peoples.

The absence of adequate policy to deal with the structural issues of Bodos led them to revolt against the system. The central leaders of India did not familiar with the reality of plain tribes dominated areas. The imposition of will of centre and state did not consolidate the demands of Bodos peoples. The failure of the BAC accord (1993) and resentment against Bodo Peace Accord (2003) is a good example of failure of governments' policy to deal with structural issues of Bodo dominated areas. Moreover,

the policies were formed with more emphasizing on leaders of the various organization and their organizational demands but the opinions of common masses were not incorporated. Thus, absence of proper inclusive policy provides the fuel to the movement and it still continues.

5. Absence of effective leadership- The Bodoland statehood movement had witnessed different phases. It was claimed that due to absence of definite articulate objective of the movement caused problems to the movement. The movement has witnessed violent phase also which was condemned by common masses. Sometimes, personal aspiration hindered the real objective of the movement. Almost every plain tribal organization faced split due to absence of strong leader. The demand of separate homeland is in trouble because of absence of all inclusive policy for other peoples residing in the proposed Bodoland areas. Moreover, some leaders are able to mobilize common masses in a new direction regarding objective of separate Bodoland movement.

At the present context, two major organizations namely, the Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) and the ABSU have their own agendas to lead the movement. Due to lack of common agendas and common views on separate statehood demand, they fight for the movement by own union perspective. A large section of Bodo people like to be loyal to Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) party and supported them in electoral process with their vote, on the other hand the ABSU has its own follower who denounce the present structure of government in the BTAD areas. The ABSU demands for a separate homeland and BPF tries to secure the present structure of the BTAD as they were signatories of BTC accord 2003. National political parties and other political parties view it as option to become majority party by giving support to separate Bodo groups. This political development due

to the absence of strong leaders in Bodo dominated areas cause to lead the movement with various objectives from separate groups' perspective. It hinders the way of common consent, so, the movement adopts new form and nature time to time and still the movement is going on without a predictable outlook of the movement in near future.

6. Emergence of Bodo Middle class: Emergence of the Bodo middle class is one of the reasons behind the movement for separate homeland for the plain tribes in general and Bodos in particular. The beginning of 20th century was marked with the emergence of middle class in Bodo society. Kalicharan Brahma initiated reform movement in Bodo society in the first decade of 20th century. In 1919, the followers of Kalicharan Brahma took the lead and formed Bodo Chatra Sanmiloni. Later on with the assistance from Bodo intelligentsia class, Bodo Mahasanmiloni was also formed which was main platform of activities of Bodo society. Mahasanmiloni and Chatra Sanmiloni played very crucial role at that time in organizing Bodo society and forming Bodo nationality. They hold conferences time to time in which important decisions were taken.

The first attempt to assert identity of plain tribes in front of colonial administration at political level was organized in the form of memorandum that submitted to the Simon commission in 1929. Sharma accounted two main reasons for the emergence of middle class among the Bodos of Western Assam. Firstly the advent of cash economy in the Bodo society and its proliferation during the colonial period which transformed the tribal social and economic structure and the emergence of a religious reform movement among the Bodos led by Kalicharan Brahma which transcended the domain of religion and extended itself into the realms of society, polity and economy. The impact of this 'renaissance' on the sphere of education facilitated the entry of many

Bodo youths into the colonial job market, thereby triggering the advent of a middle class among the Bodos.⁶⁰

Sushmita Sen Gupta analyzes the role of Middle class of the Bodos and views that the Middle class has been instrumental in articulating demands of the Bodos in these various phases. She argues the role of middle class to build distinct ethno-linguistic identity of Bodo peoples and the change of nature of plain tribes' movements in the wake of Bodo middle class as "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."⁶¹ The Bodo Sahitya Sabha (1952), the All Bodo Students' Union (1967), the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (1967) and other Bodo organizations are criticized for not

⁶⁰Sharma, Chandan Kumar (2000): "The Bodo Movement – A Preliminary Enquiry into the Role of the Middle Class and the State", in Girin Phukan (eds), 'Political Dynamics of North East India', South Asian Publishers, New Delhi, p. 128–129.

⁶¹Gupta, Susmita Sen (2014): "Transformation and Consolidation of Bodo Identity: An Enquiry into the Role of the Middle Class", The Standard International Journals.

giving too much attention to the common causes of plain tribes like peace, development, and land rights.

One may view that the Bodo middle class with the help of these organizations, mobilize the common masses for the cause of separate homeland. Although their views on separate homeland are different from each group but they all agree autonomy as primary objective of the movement. They want autonomy in governance process and ask for equal share in power relation of the state. That is why it is believed that the emergence of middle class Bodos who thought Assamese and non Bodos are the potential threat for their existence, led the movement to ensure their existence in socio-political and economic sphere of the region.

To sum up, the ethnic phenomena in the North- East India can be categorized under constructionist approach of ethnicity. The Bodo movement can be observed in the same category as the other ethnic phenomena of North east India. The causes like historical experience of exploitation, alienation of land, dominant groups' chauvinism (assamese chauvinism), failure of government to address issues of Bodos, emergence of middle class give the shape of the movement. The consciousness regarding identity among Bodos causes the movement. The movement for separate statehood is still continued in the region by raising the point that the issues of identity, culture, language, tradition, political rights of Bodos is not still ensured and protected.

CHAPTER III

ROLE OF ALL BODO STUDENTS' UNIONS (ABSU) IN BODOLAND STATEHOOD MOVEMENT

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) is a student organization (non-political) of Assam. It plays the role of pressure group in the region. The ABSU was formed in 1967 with the objective to provide a platform for plain tribes to raise their issues and demands. The ABSU plays major role in the movement of plain tribes. The ABSU launched separate Bodoland statehood movement in 1987. The ABSU is still carrying on the demand of separate Bodoland. From 1967 to onwards, the demands of the ABSU has undergone through different changes to assume its present nature. The headquarters of the Union is located at Bodofa House, Kokrajhar. Promodo Boro is present president of the Union. An attempt is made in this chapter to discuss the causes and factors that led to emergence of the ABSU. The role of the ABSU in different phases of the movement is highlighted in the chapter. The present status of the movement is also briefly discussed.

Emergence of the ABSU: The youth organization of plain tribes played an important role in the movement for identity assertion of plain tribes in the region. Kalicharan Brahma, who led the movement for reformation in Bodo society in early 20th century, was able to organize the youths of Bodos. The first attempt to identity assertion of plain tribes including Bodos was traced back to 1929. Kalicharan Brahma led a delegation and submitted memorandum to Simon commission. The Bodo Community of the Goalpara District, the Assam Kachari Jubak Sammilani, the Dhubri Bodo Jubak Sanmilani, and a

group of plain tribes representing Garos, Bodos and Ravas from Goalpara subdivision also submitted their memorandum to the Simon Commission.⁶²

Later on, in 1933 a political party was formed, namely the All Assam Plain Tribal League (AAPTL) to represent the voice of plain tribes and their issues in the political scenario of Assam. The Government of India Act (1935) also provided the provision for reservation of five seats in the Assam provincial legislative assembly. The AAPTL was able to secure votes from the plain tribes of the region in their respective contesting constituencies. But the league was overshadowed with congress dominance in post independence period. The Tribal League was dissolved in 1956 and leaders of League identified themselves with congress. The league was transformed to the All Assam Tribal Sangha, only socio economic body. The plain tribes including the Bodos felt need of strong organization to represent their hopes and aspirations.

On 13th January, 1967, the announcement of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India to restructure Assam as federal basis was welcomed by different tribal organizations of the state.⁶³ Realizing the need of the situation, an attempt was made to bring all plain tribes of the region under common platform. As a result, two strong organizations, namely the All Bodo Students' Union and the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) were born to lead the issues of plain tribes of the region in 1967.

On 15th February, 1967, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) was formed at a meeting held at Kokrajhar, Assam. Baneswar Basumotary and Kankeswar Narzary were

⁶²Prakash, Ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", Vol 2, New Delhi, p.687.

⁶³All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.7.

elected as founder president and general secretary of the union.⁶⁴ The ABSU viewed that the union was formed with the vision of ensuring justice, dignity and peace. The ultimate mission of the ABSU is to “work with the purity of heart, solemnly resolve to unite the students of Bodo groups living in different parts of the world into an organization for the better and mutual understandings of their selves to safeguard and develop the socio-economy, education, culture, tradition, language and literature of the great Bodo nationality”.⁶⁵ The ABSU viewed that a proper representation of issues of plain tribes including Bodos was missing. It was need of hour to reunite all plain tribes of Assam including Bodos under one common platform to raise their issues and demands. The statement of ABSU on their mission clearly shows their concern for socio-economy, education, culture, tradition, language and literature of the great Bodo nationality.

In the initial phase of ABSU, it maintained distance from direct politics in the region. The ABSU worked mainly as a youth force in different struggles of Bodos in its initial stage but later on, the ABSU assumed political nature with the change of political scenario of Assam as well as change in the leadership of ABSU. From 1987 to onwards, the demand for separate Bodoland is the prime objective of ABSU. Although many developments were there and still going on which change the nature of Bodoland statehood movement in course of time but still the objective of separate homeland remains same.

The Role of ABSU: The role of ABSU is divided into four different phases to understand its role in Bodoland statehood movement and nature of activities with the change of time.

⁶⁴ibid, p.7.

⁶⁵ibid,p. 8.

First phase (1967-1987): From the ABSU's emergence, it maintained apolitical approach till 1987. During this period it functioned mainly as youth force in the struggle of Bodos. This phase had witnessed different struggles of Bodos. The ABSU played active role in those struggles, like their participation on Bodo language movement,⁶⁶ demand for Udayanchal.⁶⁷ The ABSU also tried to bring unification of leaders of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive) by forming a new political entity, namely the United National Tribal Liberation Front (UNTLF). In the last few years of this phase, the decline of other tribal political organizations paved the way of the ABSU to emerge as strong union body representing the hopes and aspiration of Bodo tribes.

The ABSU extended its full support to the Bodo language movement that was launched by Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the year of 1973-74, demanding Roman Script for Bodo Language. In the early stage of the movement, both centre and state governments did not accept their demands. The protest against the government was started. About 18 Bodos lost their lives for the purpose of Roman script. Later on, convincingly the Devanagari script was imposed on Bodos by union government. This imposition raise question on Bodos' mind and the disintegration process of Bodos from Assamese society was escalated. The issue of insecurity of plain tribes including the Bodos regarding their identity once again came to the forefront of socio political scenario of Assam.

⁶⁶The Bodo language movement was led by Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1973-74 with the demand of Roman Script for Bodo language.

⁶⁷'Udayanchal' was demanded by Plain Tribal Council of Assam. The demand was to establish separate homeland for plain tribes by diving Assam. They proposed the status of Union Territory for Udayanchal within Indian Union.

The ABSU supported the six year long movement led by All Assam Students' Union (AASU) against illegal immigrants in the year 1979-1985. The AASU leaders accused illegal immigrant Bangladeshis as potential threat to the identity of Assamese people. AASU held immigrants responsible for changing demography in Assam. Basically, illegal immigrants of Bangladeshis were Muslim people with Bengali accent and the influx of peasants from this community was one of the main causes of alienation of tribal lands from tribal peoples. So, the ABSU joined hands with the AASU in the movement. But later on, when the Assam accord was signed, the ABSU leaders and their demands were sidelined. The ABSU leaders felt betrayed. The clause 6 of the Assam Accord stated about the legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote "the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people".⁶⁸ The ABSU leaders viewed that by incorporating such provision in the Accord, the leaders of the AASU tried to continue with the Assamese chauvinism over tribal peoples. The Assam Accord also included the issue of encroachment in tribal belts and blocks,⁶⁹ but it was not emphasized in comparison to demand of clause 6.

When the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)⁷⁰ government came to power after the Assam Accord, a circular was issued by the Secondary Education Board of Assam in 1986, with the direction to make assamese paper compulsory in secondary classes. The Bodos under the leadership of ABSU, together with Bengali minorities fought

⁶⁸ Assam Accord (1985), Clause 6. Assam Accord was signed in 1985 among leaders of All Assam Students' Union, Asom Gana Sangram Samiti and Rajib Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India.

⁶⁹ Assam Accord, Clause 10 stated about the protection of tribal belts and blocks from encroachment of non tribal people.

⁷⁰ Asom Gana Parishad was a result of a six year long Assam agitation against illegal infiltration of foreigners from Bangladesh into Assam, led by AASU.

vehemently against this circular.⁷¹ The circular was viewed as mechanism to impose Assamese culture over the other small communities. The ABSU and other tribal organizations⁷² treated the circular as potential threat to their language.

The ABSU also protested against the Assam administration dominated by Assamese officials who helped non-tribal peoples to get land illegally in the 33 tribal belts and blocks.⁷³ These belts and blocks were established under the amendment of chapter of X of the Assam Land Regulation Act, 1860, in 1947. According to the Act, non tribes were prevented from buying or transferring land within these belts and blocks. The alienation of land to tribal peoples is one of the major problems of the plain tribes of Assam. The governments' ineffective and illegal action compelled the ABSU to raise their voice in against to the response of state government.

The plain tribes of Assam formed another organization, the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in the year of 1967 to represent the issues and demands of plain tribes within political framework. The PTCA led the political movement of plain tribes including the Bodos. The PTCA demanded a separate homeland for plain tribes of the Assam in nature of union territory. The PTCA viewed Udayanchal, the name of proposed territory, could ensure identity, culture and tradition of the plain tribes of Assam. The PTCA launched a political movement for creation of separate of Udayachal on 2nd

⁷¹Mwshahary Subungcha (2016): "Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 TO 1993", Guwahati, p.79.

⁷²Plain Tribal Council of Assam, Plain Tribal council of Assam (Progressive), United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and literally unions of other tribes criticized the circular of Secondary Education Board of Assam in 1986.

⁷³All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.9

December, 1972⁷⁴ with the objective to attain autonomy. The ABSU supported the stand of PTCA and joined them in the movement for Udayanchal.

At that time, national emergency was declared by Indira Gandhi,⁷⁵ the then Prime Minister of India to suppress the voice of her opponents in whole India. The movement for Udayanchal was directly affected by this stand of Indira Gandhi. The demand for separate homeland was suspended and the leaders of PTCA kept silent to the issue of Udayanchal to escape from the arrest and maintained a safe distance from the political scenario of the region.

In 1977, when emergency was suspended, a new anti-congress political sentiment was raised all over India against the political dictatorship of Indian National Congress led by Indira Gandhi. The Assam was no exception. The sentiments of Anti-Indian National Congress were also realized in the political structure of Assam. As a result, in Assam, an agreement was signed between the Janata Party and the PTCA at party level before the General Election in India, 1977. When the provincial election of Assam was held in 1978, the alliance between the Janata party and PTCA remained same.⁷⁶

In 1978, for the first time a non-congress government was formed in Assam after independence. A ministry was formed with 12 cabinet ministers and 4 ministers of state headed by Golap Borbora including the PTCA ministers also. The ABSU opined that after joining hands with Janata party, the leaders of PTCA started to neglect the demand of Udayanchal. Later on, the announcement of lone Bodo member in parliament Charan

⁷⁴Ibid.p.9.

⁷⁵Indira Gandhi announced national emergency in 1975 and it existed till 1977.

⁷⁶Borbora, Golap(1988): "Asomor Jana Jati aru Pachpora Jati Samuhor Samashya" Sutradhar, vol 1 ,no 1. p .21-22.

Narzary, then PTCA general secretary that PTCA had given up the demand of separate Udayanchal led to split in PTCA. Young leaders of PTCA were hurt by this statement and formed PTCA (Progressive) and retain to its objective of Udayanchal. The ABSU supported the stand of PTCA (Progressive) to make alliance with Mishing tribe, the second largest tribe of the region in order to pursue the demand of separate homeland, namely Bodo-Mishing land for both the tribes. But the demand did not get support from the common people of both tribes. Slowly the PTCA and the PTCA (P), both the parties were losing their hold over common people day by day.

In this stage of downfall of PTCA, the ABSU tried to bring unification of PTCA and PTCA (P). A convention was held from 17th to 19th April, 1984 at Harishing and a new political party was formed namely United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF).⁷⁷ But the party did not able to become influential due to the presence of ideological difference of PTCA and PTCA (P) leaders. Thus, the declination of the PTCA made a vacuum place in political scenario of plain tribal peoples and the ABSU took the opportunity to grab the power to represent the voice of plain tribes of Assam.

At this juncture in 1986 the leadership of ABSU was handed over to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma⁷⁸ in the conference of the ABSU held in Darrang District. From then, the ABSU under leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the task of political movement for separate state has been taken over by the students' organization and continues till today.

⁷⁷Mwshahary Subungcha (2016): "Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 TO 1993", Guwahati, p.74.

⁷⁸Upendra Nath Brahma took the presidentship of THE ABSU in 1986. Under his presidentship, the ABSU launched movement for separate Bodoland. The 'Bodofa' title was conferred upon him posthumously, which means 'father of Bodos'.

Second phase (1987-1993): The new leader of ABSU, Upendra Nath Brahma was of the opinion that there was nothing apolitical in the hardships faced by the plain tribes of Assam. According to him all the injustices, exploitation, discrimination and underdevelopment faced by the tribes of Assam were for political nature.⁷⁹ For the first time ABSU came to the fore front in the political scenario of Assam with a demand of separate state. The ABSU viewed that without a separate state their demands of equality, justice would not be actualized. Only separate state within the Indian Union could able to ensure their demands and provide protection and preservation to their culture, tradition, language and identity. The ABSU blamed the then political structure for not addressing the issues of plain tribes.

The ABSU under Upendra Nath Brahma submitted a 92 points charter of demand to the then Chief Minister of Assam Prafulla Kr. Mahanta on 1st January, 1987. Three (3) major political demands were incorporated in the 92 points charter of demand. They were,

- To create a separate state on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra for the plains tribal of Assam.
- To create an autonomous council on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra.
- To create Karbi Anglong regional council for the non-Karbi tribals under the district council.

⁷⁹All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.9.

The other 89 demands were related to socio-economic, education and other problems.⁸⁰ The ABSU's demand of separate state consist the geography area of the plains of Himalayan foothills below the kingdom of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the northern bank of Brahmaputra. Its starts from the river Sankush in the west and extends up to Sadiya in the east. Total area of the demanding state is approximately 25,478 sq km.⁸¹

TABLE 1: Area of Proposed Bodoland demanded by THE ABSU

| District/ subdivision | Area in Sq. km | Area to be included in Proposed UT (Sq. |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|
| Kokrajhar | 4716.5 | 4716.5 |
| Dhubri | 2745.5 | 1372.5 |
| Goalpara | 2843.8 | 710.8 |
| Barpeta | 3307.3 | 1653.6 |
| Nalbari | 2022.8 | 1111.4 |
| Kamrup | 4625.9 | 1155.2 |

⁸⁰Ibid. p.10.

⁸¹Ibid, p.10.

| | | |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| Darrang | 3465.3 | 2752.3 |
| Sonitpur | 5255.2 | 4204.2 |
| Lakhimpur | 5646.4 | 5646.4 |
| Majuli | 1241.0 | 1241.0 |
| Sadia | 914.0 | 914.0 |
| | Total | 25,478.1 |

Source: ABSU's pamphlet (1987): "Why separate state?" p. 22.

On 22nd February, 1987, for the first time the above mentioned demands were placed before the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi in New Delhi. The charter of demands was submitted to the Home Minister, Buta Singh, and the Honorable President of India, Giani Jai Singh on 24th and 30th February 1987 respectively.⁸² For ABSU, it was the first ever event that raised the separate state in the national capital for the plains tribes of Assam.

The ABSU held a mass rally for the first time with the demand of separate state in Bodo dominated districts of Assam on 2nd March, 1987. Under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the ABSU started to hold mass rally and protest against administrative

⁸²ABSU (1987), op.cit, p. 10.

machinery with the demand of separate state.⁸³ This was the first huge public rally with the demand of separate Bodoland in Assam.

On 23rd March, 1987, the ABSU took out demonstration in front of administrative offices throughout the state.⁸⁴ The ABSU organized a mass rally at Judges Field, Guwahati on 12th June. On that day a clash was broken out and Sujit Narzery, a student from Kokrajhar lost his life on that day. From then on, the day was observed as Martyrs' day every year by ABSU.⁸⁵

With the time, the movement for separate statehood was intensified and number of demonstrations, hunger strikes, and bandhs were called under the leadership of ABSU. During those bandhas, there was report of clash between bandh supporter and state police which caused to death of many people. The normal life of peoples in those tribal areas hampered with series of violence and bandhs.

On 10th November, 1987, the ABSU with 1500 activists staged a demonstration at Boat Club, New Delhi.⁸⁶ On that same day, a procession was performed from India Gate to Rafi Marg over the Rajpath and met the then Prime Minister Rajib Gandhi, and Balram Jakar, the then Lok Sabha Speaker and submitted memorandum to each of them.⁸⁷

The highway blockade and rail rokho programmes were also launched in support of the movement. Realizing the importance of the issue for the first time the then President of India R.Venkataraman invited a representative of the ABSU to the capital

⁸³The Assam Tribune. Dated 03.03.1987.

⁸⁴ABSU,(1987),op.cit,p.10

⁸⁵Ibid, p. 10.

⁸⁶The Hindu, dated 11.11.1987.

⁸⁷Ibid.

for a dialogue on 4th January 1988. The representative team was led by Upendra Nath Brahma and they met the president and placed their demand of separate state in front of him. On that same month the group also met the then Home Minister for State Sintaram Panigrahi.

The ABSU continued their movement in Assam by different activities like organizing rally, blocking highway, calling for Bandh. During these bandhs, many incidents of violence were taken place. The ABSU boycotted the celebration of Independence Day in 1988. During this phase, a new chapter was added to this movement with the formation of Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) on 8th November 1988, which also supported the separate statehood movement.⁸⁸ The ABSU gave a nomenclature to the demanding state as Bodoland in their 20th annual conference held in December, 1988.⁸⁹ In that conference a decision was taken to drop the 89 points of demands related to socio economic problems out of original charter of 92 demands.⁹⁰ The ABSU decided to focus and emphasis three political demands of the charter and viewed that these demands should be fulfilled as soon as possible.

After the conference, a series of bandhs was called by THE ABSU. The daily life of people was disturbed and the government faced much more problem to administer the region and failed to bring normal situation in the region. The state government was criticized because of its failure to handle the situation. In the midst of all these, a talk was

⁸⁸Amar Asom, dated 09/11/1988.

⁸⁹ABSU(1987), Ibid, p.11.

⁹⁰The original charter of 92 demands was presented to Prafulla kr. Mahanta by THE ABSU in 1st Jan, 1987.

proposed between the ABSU and the Assam Government on 17th April, 1989.⁹¹ But it was not organized in reality.

In 1989, a meeting was initiated by union government to resolve the issues of the Bodos. A series of meeting was held from 1989 to until Bodo Accord was signed in 1993. The leaders of the ABSU and BPAC represented the Bodo Community in the talk process. Authorities from union as well as state government participated in the talk process. First talk was held in New Delhi on 28th August, 1989. During the talk, the ABSU raised their three major political demands. The second tripartite talk was held on 5th October, 1989. But no positive result was come out. The third round of tripartite talk was held during the National Front Government at the center on 11th January, 1990. The talk was headed by the then Union Labour Minister Ram Vilash Paswan. During the talk there was debate between Bodo leaders and Assam state Government on issue of separate state of Bodoland.⁹²

It was followed by 4th round talk on 9th March, 1990, 5th round on 18th April, 1990. The 5th round is the last talk process where Upendra Nath Brahma headed the ABSU-BPAC team. He was died on 1st May, 1990. 6th round talk was held on 2nd July, 1990 and this time the ABSU-BPAC team was led by Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, the new president of the ABSU. The 7th talk was held on August, 1990. This was followed by 8th talk which was held in September, 1990. In this talk, central government recommended committee of three members to study the Bodo issue. On 25th January, 1991, the central government formed an expert committee of three members

⁹¹Amar Asom, dated 18/04/1989.

⁹²ABSU (2017), op.cit, p.12.

under headship of Dr. Bhupinder Singh⁹³ with two other members namely Dr. KS Singh⁹⁴ and A.M. Gokhale⁹⁵ to study the Bodos' issues and power them to analyze the possibility administrative, legislative and financial mechanism within autonomous set up. Later on, the ABSU rejected the recommendation of the expert committee by arguing that those recommendations would be not able to actualize their demands.

The new government of P.V.Narashimha Rao, resumed the tripartite talks and gave responsibility to the then Defence Minister Sharad Power to look after the Bodos' issues. The 9th round of talk was held on 7th January 1992. But no positive result was come out and the leaders of ABSU were upset for being neglected their demands by central as well as state government. The protest and demonstration was going on the region in support to separate statehood. The ABSU organized hunger strike, called for bandh to show their resentment against the delay in solving their problems and demands. Large scale violence broke out during the 1001 hour bandh called by the ABSU-BPAC leaders.⁹⁶ Realizing the complexity of the situation the then Home Minister S.B. Chavan assured the Bodo leaders to solve their problem and appropriate measure would be taken. In 1993, Rajesh Pilot⁹⁷ was charged with the responsibility to look after the issue of Bodoland. On 20th January 1993, a talk was held between the president of ABSU, S.K. Bwiswmuthiary and Rajesh pilot. And on 10th February of that year pilot had talk with

⁹³Dr. Bhupinder Singh, IAS (Retd) led the committee which was appointed by Central Government to study Bodoland issue on 13th September, 1990.

⁹⁴Dr K.S Singh was one of the members of Bhupinder Committee. He was Director General of Anthropological Survey of India at that time.

⁹⁵A.M. Gokhale was joint Secretary of Dept of Rural Development, Govt of India during his appointment as member of the Bhupinder Committee.

⁹⁶The ABSU-BPAC declared a 1001 hour total Assam Bandh starting from 21st November 1992.(Assam Tribune, dated 22/11/1992.)

⁹⁷Rajesh Pilot was Minister of State (Internal Affairs) under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. He was also one of the signatories of Bodo Accord (1993).

the then C.M. of Assam Hiteswar Saikia in that issue. Finally, an agreement was reached to resolve the issue and on the basis of mutual agreement of Bodo leaders and government authority, an accord was signed on 20th February, 1993 with the provision to create Bodoland Autonomous Council according to the accord. The Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) was signed in Guwahati and the signatories were K.S. Rao⁹⁸, S.K. Bwiswmuthiary, Rabiram Brahama⁹⁹, Subhash Basumotary¹⁰⁰ in the presence of Rajesh Pilot and Hiteswar Saikia.¹⁰¹

Third phase (1993-2003): This phase of the movement witnessed large scale of violence. The violence hijacked the Bodoland movement and extremist elements of the movement came to the forefront of the movement.

The Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) was signed in 1993. The Accord stated its objective as “to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement”.¹⁰² In the accord, there was a clear indication to the Assam Legislative Assembly that it would enact legislation to constitute a Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) comprising contiguous geographical area between the river Sankush and Mazbat or Pansoi River. The Accord also stated that “The lands records authority of the State will scrutinize the list of villages furnished by the ABSU/BPAC having 50% and more of tribal population which shall be included in the BAC. For the purpose of providing a contiguous area, even the villages having less than 50% tribal population shall be

⁹⁸K.S. Rao was Add. Chief Secretary to Government of Assam.

⁹⁹Rabiram Brahma was General Secretary of ABSU.

¹⁰⁰Subhash Basumotary was chairman of BPAC.

¹⁰¹Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) signed in Guwahati, Assam on 20th February, 1993.

¹⁰²The Memorandum of Settlement.(1993),ibid, Objective, p. 1.

included.”¹⁰³ The accord did not fix a definite boundary BAC, which caused lots of problems in this post Accord era.

The Bodo Volunteer Force, an armed group who had demanded a separate statehood for Bodos within India was led by Preamsingh Brahma had surrendered their arms after the accord. This initiative brought hope to the common masses to restore peace and non violence in the region. The Government of Assam enacted and passed the BAC Act, which was gazetted on May, 1993.¹⁰⁴ After the act was passed, an interim Bodoland Executive Council was sworn in within three days from notification in Kokrajhar with S.K. Bwiswmuthiary as the Chief Executive member and Preamsingh Brahma as his deputy.

The problems started once again due to failure of government and the interim executive council of BAC to maintain law and order in the BAC areas. The Bodo Security Force, an armed group who demanded sovereign status for separate homeland of Bodos had denounced the accord and made the supporters of Accord as their targets. They also targeted the non Bodos of the region. The violence was took place in the BAC areas.

In October, 1993, Bodo- Muslim clash was broke out, which led to death of many people and had displaced about 3568 families consisting of 18000 persons.¹⁰⁵ Major violent incident was occurred on July in the following year at the relief camp Bashbari in

¹⁰³The Memorandum of Settlement.(1993),ibid, part 3, p. 1

¹⁰⁴The Assam Tribune, dated 20/05/1993.

¹⁰⁵Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): “Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23.p. 52.

the Barpeta district, which caused casualties of around 100 Muslims with Bengali descent and hundreds of houses were torched and 70000 were rendered homeless.¹⁰⁶

The BAC administration and state government was criticized for not maintaining the law and order in the region. Once again, the area became a hotpot of violent activities. The Bodo Accord (1993) got serious setback when it was denounced by the ABSU itself in March 1996. The ABSU under the leadership of Jwhlwao Swmbra Basumatary in its 28th Annual Conference held from 3rd to 5th March 1996 at Langhin Tinali, Karbi Anglong, adopted a resolution in its delegate session on 4th March to denounce the Bodo Accord and to resume the movement for separate state of Bodoland. The ABSU made state and central governments responsible for the failure of the Accord. The ABSU denounced the notification of Assam Government which was issued on 10th December, 1993 regarding demarcation of boundary of BAC areas. Assam government announced unilaterally that BAC would include 2570 villages with an area of 5186 square km.¹⁰⁷ The provincial government also excluded 10 km wide belt in the north touching the international border with Bhutan. The ABSU protested against the notification and demanded inclusion of the border belt as also additional 515 villages in the BAC. The ABSU also claimed that governments' unwillingness to held election for BAC executive council compelled them to denounce the Accord.¹⁰⁸

The Accord lost its significance and viewed as failure to ensure peace in the BAC areas. The prime objective of the accord was to ensure peace but it became worse for

¹⁰⁶Barooah, R.N (1994):" The Ethnic Violence in Barpeta", The Sentinel, 4th September.

¹⁰⁷Prakash, Ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", Vol 2, New Delhi, p.706.

¹⁰⁸All Bodo Students' Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students' Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.20.

peace after post accord era. Dissatisfied with the political development, the surrendered BVF took up arms and formed the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) with demand of separate homeland for Bodos within India. The reason behind the formation of the BLTF was also to counter the activities of BdSF, who viewed ABSU and BLTF as targets for their pro-India stand. The clash of arms groups among themselves, the active of part of extremist groups in direct politics of the region, the extremist activities, absence of governments' clear policy for BAC and unwillingness of political parties to resolve Bodos issues led to the death of Bodo Accord (1993).

The violent clash of Bodo- Santhals in 1996, which spread over 2500 square km, devastated 75 villages on the both sides, rendered 200000 people homeless and caused casualties around 100 lives in Assam made the newly elected AGP government of Assam and other organizations of the region to think the seriousness about the problem.¹⁰⁹ On the one hand, the ABSU resumed the movement for separate Bodoland. The ABSU welcomed the statement of the then Prime Minister of India, Devegowda on the eve of Independence in 1996 that GOI was in favor of creating new states of Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Chatisgarh. The ABSU requested to central government to consider their demand on separate statehood. The ABSU submitted a memorandum demanding a separate state on his visit to Assam on 25th October, 1996. The ABSU also organized mass rally in guwahati and went to Delhi to met the then Lok Sabha Speaker P.A. Sangma and asked him to raise the booland issue in parliament.

To put a full stop to violence in the region, the organizations of the region extended their full cooperation to each other to bring peace in the region. Peace

¹⁰⁹Prakash, Ved(2007), Op.cit,p.706.

Committees were set up comprising representatives of THE ABSU, Bodoland Statehood Movement Committee, Peoples' Democratic Front and Bodo Sahitya Sabha to stop fratricidal killings among the Bodo outfits.¹¹⁰

The government also showed seriousness about the Bodoland issue. Some talks were held again to reach any possible solution to Bodoland issues. Groups representing Bodos, and non Bodos, ceasefire extremist groups, state government, and central government discussed the issues of Bodoland, but no positive results came out. It was hard to come to mutual agreement among the groups with different viewpoints. The region was ready to face another series of violence again. The fear of violence was actualized again the region. The ABSU started the movement for homeland and organized events like Bandh, rally, hunger strike in Assam. The extremist groups were also active in that time. The violence was continue, the law and order situation in BAC was paralyzed. At last, worrying about the situation the Government authorities came and negotiate with the BLTF, which announced unilateral ceasefire since kargil war, 1999 to provide moral support to India in that war. In result, the negotiation came to an end with a Memorandum of Settlement among the BLTF, state government and central government with the provision of establishing Bodoland Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution.

Fourth Phase (2003- to continue): The ABSU supported BLT during the talk period between GOI and BLTF. The Bodo Peace Accord was signed on 10th February,

¹¹⁰BLT and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was engaged inter-group conflict. NDFB was rename of Bodo Security Force, who demands a sovereign Bodoland.

2003, to provide political autonomy to Bodo peoples.¹¹¹ In accordance with the Accord an interim executive council was formed for the newly created Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Hangrama Mohilary¹¹² was selected as chief executive for the interim executive of the council. Four districts, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang come under purview of BTC. This area of BTC is known as Bodoland Autonomous Districts Council.

The formation of BTC was welcomed by large section of Bodos but non Bodos in the BTAD area criticized this action for not considering their rights and problems.¹¹³ The hopes and aspiration was still in doubt as secessionist outfits were not part of this accord.

The ABSU decided to allow the newly formed council to work smoothly and suspended their agitation and protest against the government. In the Annual Convention of the ABSU in 2005 reduced their 92 demands of charter in to 26 demands.¹¹⁴

In the initial phase of the Accord, the ABSU as an organization was more focused on socio- economic issues.¹¹⁵ The ABSU declared 2006 as Year of Education and the following year they declared Mission of Quality Education for 10 years to support development of education among the peoples.¹¹⁶ The ABSU limited their activities to socio- economic issues with a hope that the Accord would bring peace and ensure their identity issue.

¹¹¹Memorandum of Settlement, 2003 (BTC Accord)

¹¹²Hagrama Mohilary was leader of BLT.

¹¹³ Prakash,Ved (2007), op.cit. p. 706.

¹¹⁴All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p.25.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.25.

The split in BPPF party which was formed by ex- ABSU leaders and BLTF was one of the major political setbacks for Bodos. Hungrama Mohilary led a section and renamed it as Bodoland peoples' Front (BPF) and the other section remains same with the name of BPPF. The political structure of BTAD has been controlled by BPF since its inspection to till today. There is different vision about Bodoland between BPF and THE ABSU.

The ABSU claims that after assuming power the BPF leaders have forgotten the real issues and problems of Bodo society. The ABSU questioned BTAD authorities for maintaining silence on issues of Bodos.¹¹⁷

An ethnic clash was occurred in 2008, between Bodos and Muslims. The ABSU claimed that the government's failure to resolve the Bodoland issue was the main reason for this unstable peace situation in the region. The ABSU told that from 2007 to 2010 there were 200 innocent lives lost under the very nose of police administration. The ethnic clash of 2008 between Bodo and Bengali Muslims led to lose many peoples' lives and around 300000 people were displaced.

The announcement to create new state of Telengana¹¹⁸ worked as fuel to demand of Bodoland. The ABSU criticized the government for not taking their demands for separate homeland in consideration. The ABSU withdrew the decision for suspension of movement during its annual convention on 2010 held on the month of January in

¹¹⁷In an interview with Promod Bodo held by Sangeeta Barooah Pisarothy on 19.03.2016, published by The Wire. Updated in 23.04.2016.

¹¹⁸On 9th of December 2009, the then Union Home Minister of India, P.Chidambaram, while visiting Hyderabad announced that the new state of Telengana will be created carving out of Andhra Pradesh state. (THE ABSU'S Pamphlet "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", published in 2017,p.27)

Udalguri.¹¹⁹ The ABSU extended its support to the movement for the creation of a separate Telegana State. In a statement, the ABSU president Pramod Boro stated that the student body supported the “democratic and peaceful movement” for the creation of the Telegana. They requested to union government to look into the matter of Bodoland and Telegana.¹²⁰ The ABSU also blamed the BPF party for poor development in BTAD areas. On the other hand, BPF viewed that the common masses actualized the sense of development.

In the 2010 BTAD election, the BPF secured majority with 31 seats out of 40 contested seats.¹²¹ But the ethnic clash in 2012 between Bodo and Muslims in BTAD put the ruling authority in question. The law and order situation was again in question. The ABSU labeled the BPF as corrupted and failure government and told that in the hands of BPF the security of Bodos’ identity and culture was not assured.

The ABSU resumed the statehood movement in 2010 but it was intensified once again with the creation of Telengana in 2nd June, 2014.¹²² The ABSU started activities like agitation, calling bandhs, hunger strike, and rally for their demand of separate Bodoland. Once again, Assam hears slogan of Divide Assam 50-50. They opined that only separate Bodoland can ensure Bodos’ identity and solve problems of Bodos.¹²³

The ABSU argues that until and unless a solution arrived at, the ABSU will continue the movement. The ABSU blames government both state and centre for

¹¹⁹ABSU (2017): op.cit. p.28.

¹²⁰The Hindu, dated October 05, 2011.

¹²¹[http://Wikipedia.com/BTAD election](http://Wikipedia.com/BTAD%20election). Retrived in 4th September, 2017.

¹²²“Telegana Fallout in Assam: Bodoland and Kamatapur”, The Hindu, August 1,2013,

¹²³“Four statehood demands lead to large scale violence in Assam”, m.timesofIndia.com, updated Aug 2, 2013.

neglecting five decade old demand. They want justification from government that if Telengana can be created, why not Bodoland. In a statement, Pramod Boro stated that “In 1999, we were told by the then Central government that the creation of a separate Bodoland was not feasible as the government had no policy to create new states. However, only a year later in 2000, the three new States of Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Uttarakhand were created. That is why the ABSU was not a signatory to the second Bodo peace accord (2003) signed by the erstwhile the BLT with the Centre and the Assam government. However, we suspended the statehood movement to give peace a chance and therefore backed the peace accord. We have been forced to renew our Statehood movement as the Assam government turned a deaf ear to our demand for taking the necessary steps for the promotion the Bodo language and giving protection to the lives and properties of the Bodo people. We will continue our democratic and non-violent movement till we get our Statehood.”¹²⁴ The ABSU views that the problems of land alienation, influx of non tribes cause a fear in tribal peoples which is not listened by government compel them to continue the movement for separate homeland. The ABSU tries to justify that Bodoland statehood movement is not exclusively for Bodos, it’s a movement for the plain tribes residing northern part of Brahmaputra.

The ABSU in present days also takes active part. Although they do not come forefront in electoral process but they play active role in electoral process of Bodoland Autonomous District Council, State assembly and general election of India. In the General Election 2014, the ABSU announced its support to BJP. In an interview Pramod Boro, the president of the ABSU told that “BJP, as that party promised in its additional

¹²⁴Talukdar, Sushanta (2011): “Create Bodoland or face blockade, student union to Centre”, The Hindu, dated November 15, 2011.

manifesto for the parliamentary elections that it will solve the Bodo problem if it comes to power at the Centre along with the Gorkha problem in West Bengal. The then BJP president, Rajnath Singh, also assured us that a solution to the Bodo problem will be found soon. So we declared our support to the BJP”.¹²⁵

In the 2015, the BTAD election, ABSU supported the candidates of Peoples Coordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR). PCDR was formed with the objective to counter BPF party. The alliance was made among ABSU, BPPF and pro talk NDFB with PCDR. PCDR stood as independent party and was able to secure nine seats in BTAD council. In the 2016, Assam legislative election, ABSU declared its support to United Peoples Party (UPP), led by U.G.Brahma. The UPP was in alliance with Congress (I) to counter BJP-BPF alliance. But in election result, the alliance was lost very miserably. And BJP-BPF alliance came out as winner. These political scenarios clearly reflect the political difference between BPF and ABSU.

Recently, the separate movement gains momentum with the activities of ABSU. They start agitation, protest, highway blocking, rail rokho, hunger strike, organize rally to attain its objective of separate homeland for plain tribes in general and Bodos in particular. The ABSU joined hands with the National Federation of New States (NFNS)¹²⁶ in July, 2016.¹²⁷ The ABSU views that their decision to join hands with NFSN would boost the struggle for their Separate Statehood demand.

¹²⁵In an interview with Promod Bodo held by Sangeeta Barooah Pisarothy on 19.03.2016, published by The Wire.

¹²⁶NFNS was a combine organization of ethnic groups demanding statehood. The organization is formed with few ethnic groups of Assam and other parts of the North Eastern region- the Bodos, Karbis, Kokborok and the Kukis.

¹²⁷“N-E tribal groups ready to intensify Statehood movement”, The Hindu, dated July 10, 2016.

Recently, the ABSU submitted a memorandum to Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh along with their allied group seeking early solution of Bodoland issue as soon as possible on the eve of Tripartite Talk among Government of India, State Government and Bodo representative group including members from ABSU, NDFB (P), and People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) on 25th April, 2017. The memorandum includes the demand for creation of Bodoland state in the Northern Bank of Brahmaputra from the Sankosh to Sadiya; ensure Constitutional safeguard for protection of land and political rights of the Bodo people living outside the proposed Bodoland; grant ST (Hill) status to the Bodo people living in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.¹²⁸

Presently, the demand of separate statehood is being opposed by other non-Bodos groups residing in BTAD areas. A non Bodo movement is emerged in BTAD areas with the demands of equality, security of non Bodos in BTAD areas. Regarding the non Bodos stand against the demand of Bodoland, The ABSU president Promod Bodo stated in interview that although Bodos are leading the movement but their demand for separate state is not for only bodo community. He continues that in their charter of demands, there is mention about every ethnic group who reside in that particular land mass.¹²⁹ The ABSU also stated that the non Bodos' movement is designed to counter the Bodoland movement and it is basically a political gimmick.¹³⁰ The ABSU said, in support of separate Bodoland that smaller States were able to give fair social, political, economic

¹²⁸The Assam Times, Tripartite talk held on Bodoland Issue, Apr 26,2017.

¹²⁹In an interview with Praomod Bodo, held by Ratnadip Choudhary of Tehelka, aug 31. Published in Meghalaya times.

¹³⁰In an interview with Dipen Boro, present Vice president of THE ABSU, by author, on 08/10/2017.

and cultural justice to all section of society. They supported smaller states for better administrative and governance process.

To sum up, the ABSU has been playing very crucial role in Bodoland Statehood Movement since its inception and continues till today. The ABSU, as a regional pressure group has very strong hold among common masses of Bodos. Although in its first phase, ABSU maintained a safe distance from political framework, but from second phase onwards ABSU is playing major role in political framework of Assam. The common resentment against the government authorities and mechanisms compelled ABSU to revive the demand of separate statehood once again. ABSU viewed that the measures and initiative that were taken to resolve Bodos' issues were not enough.

CHAPTER IV

STATE RESPONSES: STATE AND UNION GOVERNMENTS

India's population includes nearly one hundred million tribal peoples. The tribes of India are categorized in two different types. Firstly, the country's north eastern states bordering China and Burma and secondly, the highlands and plains of its central and southern regions. The Constitution of India provides two different structures, 5th schedule and 6th schedule to deal with two different categories of tribes that exist in India.¹³¹ In this chapter, an attempt is made to explain the state responses both central and state governments in order to understand the changing nature of the Bodoland movement and the current phase of the Movement. The chapter deals with tribal demography of Assam with special focus to Bodos of Assam and their movement for separate homeland. The responses of colonial administration are critically analyzed in the chapter to provide the background of establishment of special administrative measures for Northeastern tribal people and its impact on Bodoland statehood movement. The responses of union and state governments with their initiatives are discussed in this chapter in relation with Bodos' issues.

The North Eastern tribes have some differences with the main land tribes of India on the basis of their history of geographical isolation, distinct culture, the process of

¹³¹The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India deals with the administration and control of scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribes in India. The Fifth Schedule covers tribal areas in nine states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Odhisa, and Rajasthan. The Sixth Schedule is a self-contained code for the governance of the Tribal Areas. The Sixth Schedule provides the tribal people with administration, which would safeguard their customs and way of life. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule assure the tribal people autonomy in the management of their own affairs. Presently, it functions in four north eastern states, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram

sanskritization, the traditional governing system. These elements make difficult to combine the Northeastern tribes with other tribes of India under one fold. So the Constituent Assembly of India followed same foot step as the British did to deal with the tribes of Northeastern states. The Constitution of India provides the sixth schedule to deal with the issue of tribes of Northeastern region of India.¹³² Again in Assam, there are two different categories of tribes, Hill tribes and Plain tribes. The hill tribes are basically belonging to that categories of tribes who are residing in hill areas¹³³ and Plain tribes are those who used to settle in plain areas of Assam. Assam was homeland of large section of ethnic population before ethnicity became the basis of formation of new states in the region. At present, in Assam there are as many as 23 tribal communities which constitute 12.82 per cent of the total population of Assam. Bodo is the largest plain tribes of the region and Bodo constitutes 40% of total population of tribes in Assam.¹³⁴

Table 2 : Population of Major STs

| Sl No. | Name of Scheduled Tribe | Total Population | Proportion to the ST Population |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 | All ST | 3,308,570 | 100% |
| 2 | Bodo | 1,352,771 | 40.9 |
| 3 | Miri | 587,310 | 17.8 |
| 4 | Mikir (now recognized as | 353,513 | 10.7 |

¹³² For more details see Bordoloi Committee Report.

¹³³ Basically hill areas refer to North Cahar districts and Karbi Anglong districts.

¹³⁴ Census of India, 2001.

| | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------|-----|
| | | | |
| 5 | Rabha | 277,517 | 8.4 |
| 6 | Kachari | 235,881 | 7.1 |
| 7 | Lalung (now known as | 170,622 | 5.2 |
| 8 | Dimasa | 110,976 | 3.4 |
| 9 | Deori | 41,161 | 1.2 |

Source: 2001 census.

The Bodos of Assam had passed through different stages of Bodoland statehood Movement, and presently the demand for a separate homeland is being cried by the ABSU, who plays major role in the movement to ensure and secure their tribal culture and tradition. The ABSU is a powerful Bodo student organization and it has been leading the movement of separate Bodoland since 1987.¹³⁵ They claim that the Movement is not exclusively for the Bodos but for plain tribes to ensure justice to them against exploitation, negligence and discrimination that had faced by plain tribes of the region. The ABSU also viewed that due to lack of proper policies and failure of government machineries, the culture, tradition and identity of plain tribes is in threat. The ABSU argues that only separate Bodoland state can ensure and secure the basic necessity of their

¹³⁵For setail see 'Second phase (1987-1993)', Role of All Bodo Students' Union, Chapter III.

way of life. The Bodoland statehood movement is also criticized on the ground of its non inclusive policy and over emphasizing the Bodo tribes' issues.¹³⁶ .

In the initial phase of the movement, it was for all plain tribes, but now it is losing their hold over other plain tribes in the region. The critical analysis of the movement reveals that absence of inclusive policy, domination of Bodo issues, emergence of educated class among other plain tribes, failure of political establishment like Bodoland Autonomous Council (1993), Bodoland Territorial Council (2003) to ensure peace and development in the region, Bodos and non-Bodos clash in Bodo dominated areas and violent nature of movement are the prime reasons for breaking the bridge between other plain tribes with this statehood movement.

The ABSU and some other organizations¹³⁷ in the region are still demanding separate Bodoland. They claimed that only separate homeland could justify justice to demands of plain tribes. They hold the opponent groups responsible for creation of gap among plain tribes and making the demand more confusing and critical by using their dominant position and status in the power structure of the region.

Response of Colonial Administration: The policies of colonial administration to deal with tribes made impact on post independence era also. The presence of colonial policies is reflected in some provisions of Constitution of India, which especially deal with tribal

¹³⁶The 92-point charter of demands which the ABSU submitted to the Assam government and on the basis of which it launched its movement in March 1987, as many as 27 demands relate to the Bodo language. Though there are several demands which relate to the plains tribals in general and also some demands which would apply to the non-tribal sections of the population, yet the emphasis is clearly on Bodo demands and not on those of the other tribal groups. Although the ABSU has still been claiming that it represents the wishes of all the plains tribals, its charter does not have any demands relating to the language and culture of the Rabhas or the Mishings. (Misra, Udayan, "Bodo Stir: Complex Issues, Unattainable Demands", Economic and Political Weekly, May 27, 1989, p.1148.)

¹³⁷Peoples Joint Action committee for Bodoland.(PJACB) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive) are also extending their support for separate Bodoland.

issues of Northeastern India. So, this chapter discusses some important policies of pre-independence period of India which gave future shape to policies and administrative structure in post independence period in dealing with tribal issues of North Eastern region of India.

In the colonial period, colonial administration adopted the policy of segregating the hill tribes from the plain areas of Assam. The British justified their policy by providing following points: (1) to protect the plains from raids and plundered by the hill tribal (1873-1900); (2) to protect the hill tribes from exploitation by the plainsman (1900-1928); (3) to foster an enlightened public policy aimed at cultural survival of the hill tribes (1928-1947).¹³⁸ The British made some regulations to affect these policies in reality.

The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, popularly known as Inner Line Permit or Regulation was enforced in Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgaon, Sivsagar, Lakimpur (Garo hills), Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga hills and Cachar from 1st of Novemebr, 1873.¹³⁹ According to this Act, a person was not allowed to visit all these above mention areas without taking prior permission from the British Government. It was believed that this act was enforced to prevent the spread of nationalist movement in these areas against British Government. Moreover, the communication was not at all in good condition and the tribes had their own system of governance so the British took the decision not to interfere too much in their day to day life activity. In 1874, the Chief Commissioner Province of Assam was created by reorganizing the geographical area of Bengal and

¹³⁸ Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23, p. 50.

¹³⁹ Eastern Frontier, Part III, Regulations made under the Government of India Act, 1870 (32 & 34 vict., C.30) AND Government of India Act, 1915, in force in the province of Assam, Regulation 5 of 1873, 27th August 1873.

Kamrup, Darang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur came under purview of new commissionership to full extent and Garo Hills, Khasi and Jantia Hills, Naga Hills and Cachar to some extent.¹⁴⁰ The provision of ILP continued to function in the above mentioned districts.

The Schedule District Act of 1874, declared some districts as Scheduled District, which signify those backward districts where normal administration could not be carried out. All the tribal dominated backward districts were incorporated under this act.¹⁴¹

The Chin Hills Regulation of 1896, empowered the British to remove those that they counted as undesirable element in hill areas. Major decision was taken by colonial administration to exclude these areas from purview of general laws of the country by an order under Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, 1880.¹⁴² These developments hindered the way to enter nationalist feelings in these areas and these areas remained isolated from the force of nationalism.

1. Government of India Act, 1919: Later on, Government of India Act 1919 issued a notification about declaration of these scheduled districts as the Backward Tracts and gave wide powers to chief commissioner to ensure development of these areas. Governor- in-General declared some tracts as backward tracts.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Commissioner%27s_Province. Retrieved at September 6, 2017.

¹⁴¹<https://www.legalcrystal.com/act>, retrieved at September 9, 2017.

¹⁴²Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013),op.cit. p. 50.

¹⁴³Garo Hills District, Khasi and Jantia Hills excluding Shillong municipality, Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills, Naga Hills,Lushai Hills, Sadiya Frontier Tract,Balipara Frontier Tract, Lakhimpur Frontier Tract.(Government of India Act,1919.)

This notification on the Backward Tracts by the British was primarily on the basis of level of development. Special protective measures were formulated by considering the level of development, not on the ground of geographical location, like plain or hill areas. Due to prior policies of the British like ILP, Scheduled Act (1874), Chin Hills Regulation of 1876, the hill tribes were isolated and undeveloped in compare to plain tribes of the Northeastern region. On the other hand, the plain tribes of Assam communicated with other non tribes and had experience a level of development. This Act emphasized the hill tribes and their areas. Thus, it led to exclusion of large section of plain tribes from such protective measures of British. This incident made the plain tribes conscious about their identity. A consciousness level was raised among plain tribes regarding their identity and culture. They feared that without any protective measure their identity, culture and tradition would not be ensured. This level of consciousness encouraged them to place down their demands before the Simon Commission in 1929. The young Bodo leaders took the lead and submit their demands before Simon Commission.

2. Simon commission, 1928¹⁴⁴: The British conservative government under Stanley Baldwin to report on the working of the Indian constitution established by the Government of India Act of 1919, formed a commission namely the Simon Commission on November, 1927. The commission faced criticism from different parts of India due to absence of any Indian member in that commission. After the declaration of Indian

¹⁴⁴The commission consisted of seven members—four Conservatives, two Laborites, and one Liberal—under the joint chairmanship of the distinguished Liberal lawyer, Sir John Simon, and Clement Attlee, the future prime minister. Its composition met with a storm of criticism in India because Indians were excluded. The commission was boycotted by the Indian National Congress and most other Indian political parties. It, nevertheless, published a two-volume report, mainly the work of Simon. (“Simon Commission: Tribal League for Reservation in Assembly. Is Bodoland Demand a Saga of Failed and False Promises?”, Bodolandwatch, July, 2015.)

national congress that dominion status was to be goal of Indian Freedom Movement in 1929, the Simon Commission lost its validity but still they published their reports and favored provincial autonomy in India. The Government of India Act (1935) incorporated many recommendations of the report of the Simon Commission. This signifies the importance of the report of the commission. The prime objective of the Commission was to establish a responsible Government in India. To achieve this objective the Commission wanted to inquire about working of the system of Government, the growth of education, and development of representative institutions in British India and to report with necessary recommendations to establish the principle of responsible government.

In 1928, the Commission reached Assam and remained functional in the state till January, 1929.¹⁴⁵ The commission asked for the memoranda to be submitted to the commission. The plain tribes including the Bodos also submitted their memorandum through different organizations. Kalicharan Brahma led a team and met the commission and submitted the memorandum. . Kalicharan Brahma led the delegation team of the Goalpara District Community, while Jadav Khaklari submitted another memorandum as the Secretary of the Assam Kachari Juba Sanmelan, on behalf of the entire Bodo community of Assam. The memoranda urged the Government to grant a separate electorate for the Boro-Kachari community, both in the Assembly and local board elections; to provide compulsory free primary education to the students of this community, to establish Bodo Regiment in British Army and to provide separate category

¹⁴⁵ "Simon Commission: Tribal League for Reservation in Assembly. Is Bodoland Demand a Saga of Failed and False Promises?", Bodolandwatch, July,2015

for Bodos in the census report.¹⁴⁶ Dhubri Bodo Jubak Sanmilani, and the one team representing the Bodos, Garos and Rabhas of the Goalpara Sub-Division appealed the Government not to transfer Goalpara District of Assam to Bengal province.¹⁴⁷

3. Government of India Act, 1935: Although the report of the Simon commission was rejected by Indian people but the British government took some of their recommendation to establish a responsible government. The announcement of Government of India to reorganize the administration of India on the principle of self-government and provincial autonomy was the outcome of the report and the growing protest against irresponsible government. During this period the All Assam Tribal League was formed to represent the plain tribes on political scenario of Assam in 1933. Meanwhile the Indian Act of 1935 announced five (5) reserved seats in the State Assembly for the plains tribes of Assam.¹⁴⁸

Once again some measures were taken to protect the interest of hill tribes under Government of India Act, 1935. The Act provided for some special provisions to deal with the Northeastern tribes. The isolated and undeveloped tribes' issues were more emphasized, so it was obvious that the benefit went to isolated hill tribes, resulting by prior policies of the British. They categorized tribal areas into two broad categories. Excluded and partially excluded. The former one provision was for those tribal areas where normal administration was not carried out due to their backwardness and isolated geographical location. On the other hand the other areas where normal administration

¹⁴⁶Prakash, ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", vol 2, Atlantic publishers, New Delhi, p. 687-688.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.687-688.

¹⁴⁸ Bodolandwatch, July, 2015, op.cit.

could be carried out to some extent included in Partially Excluded Areas. The Simon commission also recommended excluding of the backward tracts from the province of Assam and should be administered by the Governor-in-General and financing by the Government of India. The Government of India Act 1935, classified the hill districts in such a manner that there was no representative in provincial legislature and the Governor was entrusted to administer these areas which came under the purview of excluded areas. In partially excluded areas, they had representatives to the provincial legislature but the law enacted by provincial legislature could not be enforced in these areas without the prior approval of the Governor. The colonial power declared the tribal areas of the North east India as Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas.¹⁴⁹

The excluded areas included North East Frontier Tract,(Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur), the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District and North Cachar Hills subdivision of Cachar District, The Partially Excluded Areas included the Garo Hills District, the Mikir Hills in the Nowgong and Sibsagar District, the British portion of the Khasi and Jantia Hills, other than Shillong municipality and the cantonment.

This act did not take into account of plain tribes of Assam. Although five seats were reserved for plain tribes in the provincial legislature of Assam under the Government of India Act (1935), it did not declare any special provision for administering these plain tribes' inhabited areas of Assam. The colonial administration viewed that the plain tribes' inhabited areas of Assam were not undeveloped in comparison to the hill tribes' inhabited areas, so no special provision was required to

¹⁴⁹ Government of India act 1935 in part III, chapter V, NO 91 and 92 categorized tribal areas in excluded and partially excluded areas.

administer these areas. The British government also argued that plain tribes would assimilate with non tribal people due to their close communication with non tribal people. So, the British provided only the provision of reserved seats under one provincial legislature of Assam to represent their voice in political scenario of Assam.

The Tribal League, a political body of plain tribes contested in the Provincial Assembly election of Assam in 1937. The League extended their support to different parties in different times with a condition to fulfill the demands of plain tribes. During that period, the main issues of plain tribes were related to identity issues. Moreover, the migration to their inhabited land also caused problem to plain tribal peoples. The non-tribes settled down in plain tribal inhabited areas and poses threat to plain tribes' land and culture. The Sadullah Ministry's decision to encourage migration of Bengali Muslim peasants in the name of policy 'More Food Campaign' on the eve of Second World War compelled the plain tribes to withdraw their support from the Muslim League.

The Government of India announced its decision to hold general election on August 21, 1945 and the general election was held on January 6, 1945. The congress party emerged as victorious in that election and formed government with the support of Tribal League under leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi.

4. Bordoloi Sub-committee Report: With regard to the tribal community of undivided Assam, a sub-committee was formed under the Advisory Committee of the Constituent Assembly on Fundamental Rights, Minority and Tribal and Excluded Areas to look after the issues of tribal peoples of Assam under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. The committee submitted its report and argued for a separate status for hill tribes of North

East India. The report was discussed with different viewpoints in the Assembly. The special provision for self government under regional and district council under the provision of sixth schedule in the report was criticized by Rohini Kumar Choudhury, Brajeswar Prasad, Kuladher Chaliha, Lakshmi Narayan Sahu, Prof. Shibben Lai Saxsena by making the point that this separate provision would create permanent separation of tribal people of North East India from the rest of India. The report was welcomed by Rev. Nichols Roy, B.R. Ambedkar , Gopinath Bordoloi by arguing that the tribal should be treated in separate manner to protect and preserve their own culture and to ensure the development. At last, the Constitution Assembly granted the proposal of Bordoloi Sub-committee and adopted the provision of sixth schedule in Indian Constitution. In that whole process, the causes and issues of plain tribes of Assam was not taken into account of as expected by plain tribes. The members of Constituent Assembly believed that with the passing time, the plain tribes were assimilated with non-tribal plain people. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee viewed that plain tribes should be treated as minority for all practical purpose.

Initial phase of Independent and Governments’ response to Plain tribes’ demands:

India got its independence on 15th august, 1947. Indian National Congress was in power in the state of Assam as interim government. Gopinath Bordoloi headed the government. The government amended ‘The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886’ to address the demands of plain tribes in regard to preservation of their lands. The congress party amended the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 and made a provision to preserve the tribal lands. Under the provision of Section 161 of Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 Amendment Act, 1947, the state government had

constituted 33 tribal belts and blocks in the state so far in those areas predominantly inhabited by tribal and backward classes of people who, on account of their primitive condition and lack of education, are incapable of looking after their own welfare in so far as such welfare depends upon their having sufficient lands.

In 1952, report of the Commission of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes states that the dwelling places of tribe peoples is either the 'forest' or the 'hills'. The constitutional provision for forming autonomous districts council under Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution was extended only to hill tribes. In Assam, the Government of India granted right to form autonomous districts council to the hill tribes of Assam within the state. The plain tribes felt being neglected and it has pushed them to take up necessary action to ensure their demands.¹⁵⁰ The bias towards the plain tribes made them conscious, but lack of strong union to represent their voice sidelined their issues.

The decision to constitute tribal belts and blocks was welcomed by plain tribal leaders with a view that their rights on land would be preserved with this provision. In the initial phase of post Independence, the Tribal League leaders merged with congress and the League was transformed to Tribal Sangha, a socio-economic body. In the absence of political body, the issues of plain tribes were sidelined.

In the second half of the decade of 1960s, a new political development was occurred in the political scenario of Assam. The ethnic identity became a major driver in the political development in North eastern region of India. The first state based on ethnicity was formed in 1963 as Nagaland, in response to the demands of Naga ethnic

¹⁵⁰ Gohain, Hiren (1989): "Bodo Agitation: wages of Prejudice, in Economic and Political Weekly, 1st April, p.645-646.

group. This move attracted the other tribes of the region to propose their demand for homeland on the basis of their unique ethnic break ground.

Demand for Autonomy and Governments' Response: On 23rd January, 1967, Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, while talking to delegations of All Party Hill Leaders Conference assured that Assam will be restructured on federal basis.¹⁵¹ This statement was welcomed by different tribal bodies and organizations. In that phase, the plain tribes of Assam did not have any strong political party to raise their issues and demands. Because, already the Tribal League was transformed into Tribal Sangha which acted as only socio economic body. So, realizing the development in political scenario of Assam, young student leaders came to the forefront and tried to unite plain tribal peoples under one common platform. They opined that hill tribes were organized but the plain tribes were disintegrated into several political formations. So it was the utmost important to bring each and every plain tribal communities of Assam under common platform. As a result, in 1967 Assam had witnessed the birth of two strong plain tribal organizations namely, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA).

In 1971, the Government of India enacted, The North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act, especially to deal with the demands of preservation and protection of culture and identity of ethnic communities of North Eastern region of India and to ensure development in the region. The North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act, 1971 (Act No.81 of 1971) being the Act of Parliament was assented by President of India on 30th December, 1971 and on next day to it, the Act was published for general

¹⁵¹ ABSU, (2017), op.cit, p.7.

information.¹⁵² The Act was mainly to provide establishment of the state of Manipur and Tripura and also the formation of state of Meghalaya and Union territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh by re-organizing Assam.¹⁵³ No measures were taken for the plain tribes under this Act. Once again the plain tribal communities of Assam felt being neglected by Government. The newly born political outfit of the plain tribal peoples of Assam, Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) demanded Udayanchal, a separate homeland as union territory for plain tribal peoples of Assam to justify their demands and issues.

In 1974-1975, the Bodo intellectual class with the support of other plain tribal organizations led a movement for their language. They demanded the Roman script for Bodo language. Central and state government did not pay any attention to their demands. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha (1952) started to protest against government's negligent attitude to their demand. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) extended their support to the Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The Government took repressive measures to stop the movement which caused death of 18 Bodo peoples.¹⁵⁴ Later on, unilaterally the Devanagari script was imposed on Bodo language by the central government. The approach of government was criticized during the movement. The Plain tribes felt insecure regarding their identity and it made them more conscious of their own unique culture and tradition. The incident put question on Assamese chauvinism in the region and intensified the movement for Udayanchal among plain tribes including Bodos.

¹⁵²www.lawyerslaw.org/the-north-eastern-area-reorganizations-act-1971/, retrieved at September 10, 2017.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Mwshahary Subungcha (2016): "Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 TO 1993", Guwahati, p. 70.

In the meanwhile, national emergency was declared in 1975 by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. During emergency the demand of 'Udayanchal' was kept aside and the leaders of PTCA maintained a safe distance from political scenario to escape arrest. The emergency was suspended in 1977 and a fresh election was held in 1977.

PTCA alliance with Janata governments and its effect on demands of Autonomy: A

A new political development was developed after the announcement of fresh election for central government and provincial government. Development of Anti- Indian National Congress (INC) sentiments paved the way for alliance among other political parties against INC. Assam was no exception, PTCA made agreement with Janata party for general election in 1977 and it was continued in provincial election of Assam in 1978. In 1978, for the first time a non-congress government was formed in Assam after independence. A ministry was formed under Golap Borbora including the PTCA members also. Janata Government with their alliance PTCA assured to work for all round development of plain tribal of Assam. In the regime of Janata government, some developments and provisions were introduced, which were to meet the aspirations of plain tribes to some extent. The Assam Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Reservation of Service and Post) Act, 1978¹⁵⁵ was passed in Assam Legislative Assembly, which was welcomed by tribal peoples of Assam. Tribal peoples of Assam

¹⁵⁵The Assam Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Reservation of Service and Post) Act, 1978 was enacted in order to provide for reservation of vacancies in services and posts for the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who were the Backward Classes of citizen and were not adequately represented in the services and posts in the affairs of the State within the State. The act provided the provision of reservation at seven percent for Scheduled Castes and ten percent for Scheduled Tribes (Plains) and five percent for the Scheduled Tribes (Hills) in case of direct recruitment and promotion in state offices. The Act was published in the Assam Gazette Extraordinary, dated 28th May, 1979. (<https://vlex.in/vid/assam-scheduled-castes-and-545553450/>, retrieved on September 12, 2017.)

were satisfied with the work of Janata-led Government. The PTCA as alliance of the government did not raise the demand of separate Udayanchal. The then general secretary of PTCA and the lone Bodo member in Parliament Charan Narzary announcement about giving up the demand of Udayanchal led to split in Plain Tribal Council of Assam.¹⁵⁶ Many of young leaders of did not like the intention of PTCA leaders to give up the demand of Udayanchal. Benai Khungur Bosumotary from Udalguri, one of the hardliner of PTCA left the party and formed PTCA (Progressive) to fight for the cause of separate Udayanchal for plain tribal peoples of Assam. The ABSU supported PTCA (Progressive) and both these organizations demanded the creation of Union Territory to be called 'Mishing Bodoland' in 1980. The Mishings are the second largest plain tribe community of Assam.¹⁵⁷ Mishing peoples did not demand for separate homeland from Assam rather they demanded for greater autonomy in governance in those areas where they are in majority.

Later on, the ABSU tried to bring unification between PTCA and PTCA (P) under one common platform by forming a party, namely United Tribal National Liberation Front (UTNLF). The UTNLF was not able to gain popular support and led to decline due to absence of common policy among their members. A group of PTCA opined in this regard that the demand of separate homeland on the basis of Divide Assam 50-50¹⁵⁸ was not a practical approach. Because many tribal communities were spreading all over Assam and every tribal community is unique and have their own distinct features. They

¹⁵⁶Singh, Bhupinder (2002): "The Bodo Movement", Autonomy Movement and Federal India, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, p.85

¹⁵⁷Missing holds around 17% population of total ST population in Assam. (Census of India, 2001)

¹⁵⁸Divide Assam 50-50 was slogan of Udayanchal movement. They demanded to bifurcate Assam and establish Udayanchal. In present today the slogan is used by THE ABSU in support of their separate Bodoland movement.

have their own likes and dislikes, so no one can impose one community's will over the other. So the demand of separate homeland for plain tribal people was not a realistic approach.¹⁵⁹ Even the Home Minister of India is reported to have told the delegation of Bodo leaders who submitted memorandum demanding separate homeland in between the years of Assam Movement that the proposed area of the Udayanchal is not contiguous and hence separate state is not possible.¹⁶⁰ The UNTLF started losing its hold over common plain tribal peoples including Bodos, especially among youth and student society. Understanding the importance of the situation, the ABSU took the responsibility to lead the movement. Whole socio-political nature of the movement got a new look under the leadership of ABSU and a new phase of the movement was begin with it.

State response to demand of Separate Statehood: During the 1980s, Assam had witnessed the Assam movement.¹⁶¹ The movement was launched against the outsiders of Assam who settled in the land of Assam and possessed threat to identity of Assamese people. Later on, the movement leaders blamed the illegal immigrant of Bangladesh and made them responsible for the cause of identity crisis of Assam. The All Assam Student Union (AASU) led the movement and ABSU supported the movement. As a result of the movement the Assam Accord was signed between AASU leaders and Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India in 1985. In the Accord, demands of plain tribal communities were sidelined. The ABSU felt neglected and questioned the leaders of AASU for not

¹⁵⁹Das,Parag kr. , 'Prantik', 2nd year. 16-31 July, p. 24-25.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.p.25.

¹⁶¹Assam Movement was launched in 1979 and existed till 1985. Assam Accord was result of six year long movement.

considering the issues and demands of plain tribal people.¹⁶² Following the provincial election in Assam after post-Accord period, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came to power in Assam, which was formed by AASU leaders of Assam Movement.

The AGP government as soon as came to power took the decision to make the Assamese paper compulsory in secondary classes of Assam. Non-Assamese organizations as well as ABSU protested against the decision and opined that it was imposition of Assamese language by the government on non-Assamese students. The Bodos under the leadership of ABSU, together with Bengali minorities fought vehemently against Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA) circular of 1986, where this provision of making Assamese language compulsory was mentioned. The ABSU also protested against the ineffectiveness and negligence of Assam government to ensure reservation of scheduled tribes in government posts. Moreover, the ABSU was critical about the functioning of government on the issue of land acquisition by non tribal people in illegal manners in the reserved 33 tribal belts and blocks where non tribal peoples were prevented from buying or transfer land within those belts and blocks.

Although the AGP government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Durga Das Boro on 21st January, 1986 for the development of ST and SC of Assam,¹⁶³ but the government did not perform any action to justify the recommendation of the committee. The committee in the report which was submitted in April, 1986 to Government of Assam stated that Chapter X to the regulation by Assam Land and

¹⁶²The Bodos were dismayed at the Assam Accord, particularly for its clause 6 where the constitutional, Legislative and administrative safeguards were demanded to protect language, cultural heritage, and identity issues of Assamese people. there was no mention in it of the tribal identities which are also a part of composite society and culture of Brahamaputra valley.

¹⁶³The Assam Tribune, dated 22nd January, 1986.

Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1947 was not strictly followed in the tribal belts and blocks. Secondly, the general tribal people were not issued pattas and the unauthorized settlers were not evicted from these belts and blocks.¹⁶⁴ But the governments' indifferent attitudes on tribal issues put question on Governments' intention to solve the problem of tribal people.

Dissatisfied with governments' response to the demands of Bodos, the ABSU planned to launch the movement for separate Bodoland. Upendra Nath Brahma, the newly elected president of ABSU urged for political movement with the demand of separate Bodoland in 1987 onwards. The charismatic leadership of Brahma and in the absence any strong plain tribes' organizations took ABSU in forefront of the plain tribes' movement.

The ABSU submitted 92 points Charter of Demand to then Chief Minister of Assam Prafulla Kumar Mahanta demanding separate statehood on January, 1987. The ABSU also placed their demands before the then PM of India Rajiv Gandhi, Home Minister of India and the President of India in February, 1987.¹⁶⁵ The ABSU did not get any welcome response from concerned authorities so they decided to launch movement. On 2nd March, 1987 the ABSU launched movement for separate state in Assam. Later on, the ABSU focused only 3 major political demands of the 92 points charter. They were-

- To create a separate state on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra for the plains tribal of Assam.

¹⁶⁴Sutradhar, 16-30 March,1989, P. 22-23.

¹⁶⁵ABSU(2017), op.cit. p.10.

- To create an autonomous council on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra.
- To create Karbi Anglong regional council for the non-Karbi tribals under the district council.¹⁶⁶

The ABSU gave the name of Bodoland for their proposed state and formed Bodoland Peoples' Action Committee to intensify the separate statehood movement. The protest, agitation, rally, hunger strike were organized by the supporters of movement in the region as well as capital of India to attract the attention of national leaders. The movement supporters also organized the protests like the highway block, rail rokho, and calling Bandhs in Bodo dominated areas of Assam. Such nature of protest hit the normal life of common people and economy of the state was affected. Although, whole region faced effects of the movement, the worse effects of such protest were realized in Bodo dominated areas. The Assam state administration also reacted in repressive manner to put a stop to the movement. During the bandhs, large scale of violence was witnessed. Clash between the bandh supporters and Assam police during bandhs led to the death of many youths. The law and order situation was in chaotic position. Realizing the need of peace in the region, state government and central government proposed to hold tripartite talks with the ABSU and the BPAC leaders on the issues of their demands.

First tripartite talk was held in New Delhi on 28th August, 1989, among the Central government, the state government and the ABSU-BPAC representative group. No positive result was out till 7th talks. In the next talks that held in September, 1990, central

¹⁶⁶For more details, see chapter III, 'Role of THE ABSU'.

government recommended for a committee of three members to study the Bodo issue. On 25th January, 1991, when Assam was under President's rule, central government formed an expert committee of three members under headship of Dr. Bhupinder Singh with two other members namely Dr. KS Singh and A.M. Gokhale to study the Bodo issue and power them to analyze the possibility administrative, legislative and financial mechanism within autonomous set up.

The Bhupinder Singh committee submitted its report on 30th March, 1992, recommending creation two Autonomous Councils. One was to be on the western central side and other on the eastern side, after an intervening gap from the date of formation of former one. The committee viewed that the larger council between the two would have total population of 1, 07 million, predominately Bodo, with some Rabhas and Sonowals. They suggested the larger one would cover the Bodo concentrations in the districts of Dhuburi, Kokrajhar, Bongaingaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. The other one would cover the districts of Sonitpur, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur and consists of Mishings and Deuris. The committee also proposed the administration structure of the plain tribes' areas.¹⁶⁷ It recommended for a three-tier structure of self government in plain tribes' areas, one at village level, one at village cluster and the other one as coordinating body above the two. It also proposed a second chamber for the legislature for discussing tribal issues with definite power in certain matters regarding self rule and the cultural and social autonomy of the various ethnicities.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷Reports of Three Member Committee on Bodoland Issues (1992), p.119-124.

¹⁶⁸Ibid.p.119-124.

The ABSU rejected the recommendation of the expert committee by arguing that those recommendations would not be able to actualize their demands.¹⁶⁹ The government of P.V.Narashimha Rao in central once again resumed the tripartite talks which was held on 7th January 1992. But, no positive result was possible. In Assam, the ABSU and BPAC were continuing their agitations and protests which disturbed the normal life of common people.

Realizing the complexity of the situation, the then Home Minister S.B. Chavan assured the Bodo leaders that appropriate measures would be taken to solve their issues. In 1993, the then Home Minister Rajesh Pilot was charged with the responsibility to look after the issue of Bodoland. On 20th January 1993, a talk was held between the President of the ABSU, S.K. Bwiswmuthiary and Rajesh Pilot. On 10th February of that year Pilot held talks with the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar saikia on that issue. Finally, an agreement was finalized to resolve the issue. An accord was signed on 20th February, 1993 with the provision to create a Bodoland Autonomous Council.

In this phase, the domination of Bodo issues and peoples were observed in the scenario of movement of plain tribes. Bodos were the largest plain tribes groups and more organized in compare to other plain tribes of Assam. From the beginning of the struggle of plain tribes, Bodos were in the forefront but during this phase the domination of Bodos leaders were questioned by other plain tribes. Other plain tribes started to raise their voice and ask question on the nature of the movement. It is also worth mentioning

¹⁶⁹Prakash, ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", vol 2, Atlantic publishers, New Delhi, p. 698-699.

that the Assaminisation process among different plain tribes differs from each other groups. So their demands from government are also different.

Memorandum of Settlement (1993): The accord defined its objective as to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the constitutions to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement.¹⁷⁰ The Government of Assam enacted and passed the Bodo Autonomus Council (BAC) Act, which was notified in the Gazette of Assam government on May, 1993. The BAC act made provision to constitute a Bodo Autonomous Council comprising villages with a Bodo majority population within geographical area between the river Sankush and Mazbat/Pansoi River. The Act made provision for elected members to represent BAC. The BAC would have 35 directly elected and 5 nominated members, including chief executive member of the BAC. Regarding the finance of BAC, the Act stated that finance was to be taken under a separate sub-head within state budget in keeping with the central guidelines and the BAC would receive grant in-aid and have limited powers to raise finance and regulate trade and commerce within the BAC areas. Judicial powers were vested to executive council of BAC in respect to customary law and practices and ownership of land within BAC areas. After the act was passed, an interim Bodoland Executive Council was sworn in within three days from notification in Kokrajhar with S.K. Bwiswmuthiary as Chief Executive member and Preamsingh Brahma as his deputy.

Bodo Security Force, an armed group demanding sovereign status of separate homeland, denounced the accord and carried out their violent activities in the region. In October, 1993 Bodo-Muslim clash was broke out, which led to death of many people and

¹⁷⁰ Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord), 1993.

had displaced huge population. Major violent incident was occurred in July in the following year at the relief camp Bashbari in the Barpeta district. The Bodo Volunteer Force who surrendered after the Accord, once again took up arms due to dissatisfaction with the political development. The law and order situation in BAC areas was in chaotic situation. The possible condition of peace was miles away in the BAC areas.

The ABSU also withdrew its support from the Accord in 1996 and resumed its activity for the demand of separate statehood. The ABSU denounced the notification of Government regarding boundary of BAC areas. The failure of Government to hold executive council election in BAC was also proved as valid point for losing validity of the Accord. The Accord promised to hold election for BAC executive council within six months from establishment of interim executive council. Non-Bodos of the BAC area criticized the accord for its unequal nature of power structure.

The clash of two armed Bodos groups, Bodo Liberation Tigers (surrendered members of BVF formed this armed group) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (BSF renamed it as NDFB) , their violent activities in region, their entry into political scenario of BAC, ethnic clashes in BAC, activities of organizations demanding separate Bodoland devastated the economy and normal life in the area. The normal law and order situation was not possible in that situation. The violent activities dominated the movement during this phase.

Alarmed by the growing disruption, riots and strikes the central government and state government once again proposed to hold talks with Bodo leaders on the issue of Bodoland to restore peace in the region. The Government of India negotiated with BLT

because BLT was in unilateral ceasefire at that time and had pro- Indian sentiments as their demands was not for sovereign status of their homeland. They were demanding separate statehood within India. Moreover, during the war period between India and Pakistan, BLT show solidarity with Indian Government and announced unilateral ceasefire during the Kargil war between India and Pakistan. In response to this positive move by BLT, Government of India (GOI) showed some interest to hold talks with BLT on Bodoland issue. Later on, the result of the talks came out as Bodo Accord of 2003. The ABSU supported BLT during the talk period between GOI and BLT.

Memorandum of Settlement, or Bodo Peace Accord (2003): The Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council was signed by Assam government, union government and Bodo Liberation Tigers on February 10, 2003 in New Delhi. The settlement stated that jurisdiction of BTC would extend over 3082 villages and have legislative powers over 40 subjects.¹⁷¹ The objectives of the agreement are: to create an Autonomous self governing body to be known as 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.¹⁷² The BTC area covers four districts of Assam and known as Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD). The area under those four districts has been estimated as follows:

Table 3: BTAD area and its population.

¹⁷¹Memorandum of Settlement(2003).

¹⁷²Ibid.

| Sl. No | Name of District | Area in Sq. KM | Population (as 2011) |
|--------|------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Kokrajhar | 3,169.20 | 887,142 |
| 2 | Chirang | 1,069.96 | 482,162 |
| 3 | Baksa | 3,056.89 | 950,075 |
| 4 | Udalguri | 1,673.93 | 831,668 |
| | | 8,969.98 | 3,151,047 |

Source: Census Report 2011.

With respect to the BTC, a provision was made in Para2 (1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 reserved for Scheduled Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities for BTC area.¹⁷³

The BTC enjoys power and functions under Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. About 40 subjects were transferred to the BTC to legislate these subjects in BTC. The BTC also have executive, administrative and financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it.

The Government of India included Bodo Language in Devanagari Script in the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution under ‘The Constitution (Ninety- second

¹⁷³Memorandum of Settlement (2003) among Govt. of India, Govt.of Assam & Bodo LibertationTigers.

Amendment) Act', 2003.¹⁷⁴ Bodo language was announced as official language of BTC with the condition that Assamese and English should also continue to be used for official purpose.¹⁷⁵ In post-Accord period, BTC also received a huge amount of financial assistance from Government of India to develop socio economic infrastructures in BTC areas.

Hagrama Mohilary¹⁷⁶ was selected as chief executive for the interim executive of the council. A new political party, the Bodoland Peoples' Progressive Front (BPPF) was formed by the leaders of ABSU and ex-BLT members to contest in the first ever election for the new council. The party BPPF won the election and formed council with Mahilary as their Chief executive of BTC.

Response on Recent Development: Two major ethnic clashes after creation of BTAD put question on stability of peace in the BTC area. The ethnic clash of 2008 between Bodo and Bengali Muslims in Udalguri district led to loss of many peoples' lives and properties. The clashes left over 50 dead, fifty four villages were directly affected arson and mob attacks, in which 2,505 houses were either completely burnt or partially destroyed, while residents of 150 other villages fled their houses. Over 2.12 lakh people took shelter in relief camps.¹⁷⁷ Another ethnic clash in 2012 between Bodos and Bengali Muslims made impact not only in the region but also all over India. The law and order situation of BTAD once again is another concern. The ABSU held the Bodoland People's

¹⁷⁴https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninetysecond_Amendment_of_the_constitution_of_India

¹⁷⁵Memorandum of Settlement (2003).

¹⁷⁶Hagrama Mohilary was leader of Bodo Liberation Tigers.

¹⁷⁷Talukdar, Sushanta, "2008 Riots:probe panel blames MUSA and Assam police intelligence wing" in The Hindu, dated July21, 2010.

Front (BPF)¹⁷⁸, the ruling authority of BTAD responsible also for not ensuring peace in the region. Other opposition groups of BPF criticized the authority for mismanagement, corruption, nepotism in BPF's regime.

The Government of India's declaration of creation of new state Telengana added the fuel to the demand of separate statehood. The separate statehood movement is reenergized once again with the declaration of creation of new state Telengana.¹⁷⁹ The ABSU questioned the Government of India for not considering their demand of separate statehood. The ABSU resumed their activities for separate Bodoland with a view that only a separate homeland can ensure culture, tradition and ethnic identity of plain tribes in general and Bodos in particular. The Bodoland People's Front¹⁸⁰ also put pressure in favor of separate Bodoland. In the wake of demand, Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi rejected the demands to divide Assam and stated that all communities and groups should live in one common umbrella as Assamese in the state of Assam from Sadiya to Dhuburi.¹⁸¹ The activities demanding Bodoland is still continued in the region.

Recently, on 25th April, 2017 National Democratic Alliance government led by Bharatiya Janata Party took up the issue of Bodoland and held a tripartite talk among Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo representative group including leaders of the ABSU, National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive)¹⁸² and

¹⁷⁸BPF is current ruling authority of BTAD. From its inception, BPF is able to hold power in BTC executive council. BPF was carved out from BPPF. BPF is led by Hungrama Mahilary.

¹⁷⁹Telegana was created in 2nd June, 2014 as 29th States of India.

¹⁸⁰The executive council of BTC was run by BPF during creation of new state Telengana.

¹⁸¹The Hindu dated August 09, 2013.

¹⁸²National Democratic Front of Bodoland – Progressive is one of the factions of NDFB. This NDFB (P) faction is now in ceasefire and in peace talks with the Government of India. The prime objective of this group is to carve out a separate Bodoland from the state of Assam.

People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM)¹⁸³. The Bodo delegation demanded early solution of Bodoland issue in democratic process.

To sum up, the government role to ensure justice to plain tribes including Bodos is criticized by different Bodo organizations. The present Bodoland movement can be viewed as the result of failure of government to ensure culture, identity, tradition, language of Bodos. Since the pre independent period to till date, government has been initiating lots of measures to deal with the Bodos' issues, but lack of proper policy lead to failure of those measures. The failure of Bodo Accord (1993) and continuity of separate Bodoland movement in the post Peace Accord era (2003) reflect the picture of failure of government initiative to address the structural issues of Bodoland demand.

¹⁸³PJACBM is a organization that was formed by different bodo organizations to intensify their struggle for Separate Bodoland.

CHAPTER V

SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The movement which was started in 1920s by plain tribes with the demand of identity assertion is still continued in the region. The movement has gone through different phases to assume its present nature. The movement dominates the socio-political scenario of the Assam. It makes impact on socio political foundations of the state. Starting with the demand of identity assertion to demand of autonomy and later on with the statehood demand highly influence the state politics as well as common people of the region.

According to 2001 Census, total population of Assam was 26,655,528. Of them 3,308,570 persons is Scheduled Tribe, consisting 12.4% of the total population of the state. There are total 23 notified STs in the state. Assam has two categories of STs, ST (hills) and ST (plains). Among the STs, Bodos represents nearly half of the total STs of the state (40.9%).¹⁸⁴ The Bodos are the largest plain tribes of the Assam. The Bodos claim themselves as original inhabitants of Assam and viewed that in earlier period all most all tribes of Assam was part of larger Bodo- Kachari Group and almost all tribe communities in Assam share same ancestry.¹⁸⁵

Different phases of Bodo movement and its impact on the region: The plain tribes of Assam fought for their rights to preserve and protect their own unique identity. The fight was started a long back ago and still it is continued in the region. Although initiatives

¹⁸⁴ Census of India, 2001.

¹⁸⁵ All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.4.

were taken by state and union governments to deal with the issues but still a large section of plain tribes is suspicious and critical on those initiative and raise question on viability of such initiatives.

The first movement of plain tribes started with the demand for identity assertion. The colonial administration categorized tribal areas of Northeastern region in special category to administer. They separated hill peoples with the plain peoples with introducing the Bengal Eastern Regulation Act (1873), Scheduled Act (1874), Chin Hills Regulation Act (1896), Government of India Act (1919) and Government of India Act (1935). They justified these policies with a view that it would protect and preserve the culture, tradition and ethnic identity of tribal peoples.¹⁸⁶ The British preferred non interference policy into local issues of tribal peoples. All these policies benefitted the hill area tribes as they were included under the jurisdiction special policies due to their backwardness and primitive condition. The question raised in the part of plain tribes who were residing in plain areas of Assam. Plain tribes were not included under the supervision of these policies. British viewed that the condition and communication among the plain tribes with other non tribes was not so bad and normal laws could be implemented in plain tribes' areas. Moreover, the Colonial administration argued that with time plain tribes would assimilate with non tribes of plain areas due to their regular interaction and communication.

The exclusion of plain tribes under protective measures of colonial administration made them conscious about their unique identity. The Plain tribes feared that they would

¹⁸⁶Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23.

lose their culture, tradition and ethnic identity in the process of assimilation with non tribe peoples. So, they organized and submitted memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 demanding protective measures to their culture and ethnic identity including demand of separate electorate, separate status in Census Report.¹⁸⁷ In 1933, the plain tribes of Assam including Bodos formed a political party, All Assam Plain Tribal League to represent their voices in political platform. The Government of India Act 1935 provided a provision of five reserved seats in Provincial Assembly especially to represent the issues of plain tribes. In the pre independence period, the AAPTTL was vocal but it was dissolved in 1956 with merging plain tribal leaders with Congress. It was transformed into a socio economic body only. Later in 1967, with the emergence of two strong plain tribal organizations, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), the issues and demands of plain tribes came to forefront in socio-political scenario of Assam once again. This time the demand was for autonomy. The PTCA cried for separate homeland namely Udayanchal for plain tribes within India in a nature of Union Territory.

During this phase in 1974-1975, a new movement was started by Bodo intellectuals. Bodo, the largest plain tribes of Assam launched movement demanding Roman Script for Bodo language. Bodo Sahitya Sabha which was formed in 1952 led the movement to recognize roman script for their language. The Government authorities did not listen to the issues and demands of Bodo peoples. The government authorities did not give so much importance to the demands. So the protest was started against the state government. The state government took repressive measures to deal with problem. About

¹⁸⁷ Prakash, Ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", Vol 2, New Delhi, p.687.

18 Bodos laid their lives for the cause of Roman script.¹⁸⁸ Later on, Devanagari Script was imposed by central government to Bodos very convincingly. The approach of Assam government was criticized and it made plain tribes of Assam very conscious to their own unique identity. The incident also intensified the demand of Udayanchal. The demand of Udayanchal was not conceded. The political development in the state and absence of common proposal for Udayanchal among plain tribal leaders paved the way for decline of the demand of Udayanchal.

From 1987 onwards, the demand of separate statehood gained more prominence among plain tribes, especially among Bodo peoples. The movement for separate statehood was led by the ABSU and still the movement is carried on. During this phase of the statehood movement, from 1987 to onwards many developments have occurred which give the present structure of today's movement.

From 1987 onwards, the ABSU lead the movement of separate statehood. Upendra Nath Brahma, the then President of ABSU opined that there was nothing apolitical in the hardships faced by the plain tribes of Assam. According to him, all the injustices, exploitation, discrimination and underdevelopment faced by the tribes of Assam were for political nature.¹⁸⁹ The ABSU viewed that without a separate state their demands of equality, justice would not be actualized. Only separate state within Indian Union could ensure their demands and provide protection and preservation to their culture, tradition, language and identity. The ABSU started the movement with the

¹⁸⁸Mwshahary Subungcha (2016): "Bodoland Movement : A Study in Ethnicity and Political Development among the Bodos of Assam from 1967 TO 1993", Guwahati, p.70.

¹⁸⁹All Bodo Students Union (2017): "History in Glimpse: All Bodo Students Union (1967-2017); A Journey of Struggle", p.9.

demand of separate statehood in 1987. Even they gave the nomenclature of the proposed statehood as Bodoland.¹⁹⁰ The ABSU took various activities that made impact on social as well as political scenario of the Assam. The movement for separate statehood was intensified and number of demonstration, hunger strike, and Bandh were called under the leadership of ABSU. It hampered the normal life of people in that region. During the Bandhs, violence was witnessed, which led to the death of many peoples. The state government also took repressive measures to control the law and order in the region. The clash between the police and bandh supporters made the situation more problematic to ensure peace in the region. The economy and development in Bodo dominated areas was badly impacted during the period. Some viewed backward economy was the one reason for such movement; on the other hand, some viewed that due to such activities the development agenda was not possible to implement in such areas. The ABSU argued that the real issue of the movement to ensure and protect the unique identity of plain tribes which was neglected by state as well as central government.

The violent phase of the movement was begun with the emergence of armed organizations like the Bodo Security Force¹⁹¹ (1986) and Bodo Volunteer Force. The both bodo groups had different vision regarding separate homeland. Former one demanded sovereign status for their homeland and other demanded separate homeland with in India. The religion was also a matter of concern. The BSF had Christian majority

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Bodo Security Force was renamed as National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1994. Presently NDFB has three factions. NDFB (progressive), NDFB (Ranjan Daimary faction) and NDFB (Songbijit faction), the former two is now in ceasefire, but NDFB (Songbijit) faction is still engaged in armed activities for sovereign Bodoland.

and BVF was Hindu dominated.¹⁹² A majority of Bodos are Hindus and only a sizable section is Christian. A new competition began between these two parties to claim their own party as real representative of Bodos. These organizations joined hand with other insurgency groups of North eastern region and made the situation more complex. The hostility between two armed groups of Bodos entailed a heavy human cost and devastated the economy and peace in the region.

Although there were different views on the nature of Bodoland among different armed groups, but their presence on the scenario of movement decreased the nature of democratic and peaceful element in the movement. The period from February to August 1989 was the first violent phase in the Bodo agitation with the Bodo activities embarking on a series of killings, kidnappings and bomb attacks in which 350 people were killed.¹⁹³ The presence of violence nature in the movement was slowly decreasing the role of ABSU in the movement. On the other hand, the movement was leaning towards armed organization to take control of the movement. Understanding the complexity of the issue, Union government proposed to talk with non violent organization of the movement to solve the problem and ensure peace and harmony in the region. As part of talks, a committee was appointed by Union government to study the issues of plain tribes of Assam in 1991 under chairmanship of Dr. Bhupinder Singh.¹⁹⁴ The recommendation of the Committee was rejected by ABSU and BPAC.

¹⁹²Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23. p.51.

¹⁹³Chadha, Vivek (2005): "Low Intensity Conflict in India", Sage publication, New Delhi, p.264.

¹⁹⁴Prakash, Ved(2007): "Encyclopedia of North East India", Vol 2, New Delhi, p.697.

Later on, in 1993, the talks reached an agreement point and Memorandum on Settlement on Bodo Autonomous Council was signed among Union government, Assam State government and ABSU-BPAC leaders. The Memorandum provided the provision to create the Bodo Autonomous Council and leave the decision regarding boundaries of BAC to state government. The state government failed to demarcate boundaries of BAC because ABSU denounced the notification of Assam government on BAC boundary.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, growing presence of armed groups and activities in the scenario of the Bodoland movement made it difficult implement the provision of Accord. Ultimately, the Accord was proved as failure.

Post 1993 Accord, the BAC area witnessed too much violence. Normal law and order situation was devastated. The Accord was failed to ensure peace and harmony in the region. At last, the accord was dissolved. The provision of Accord was criticized by non Bodos of BAC for not considering the demography of the region. The state government action towards the Accord also dissatisfied the signatories of the Accord.¹⁹⁶ Violent activities dominated the BAC scenario. The absence of proper policy to solve the Bodoland issues caused more damage to the region.

The clash between Bodos-non Bodos made the situation more complex. The human lives were not secure at that time. In October 1993, the Bodo-Muslim violence was occurred. It had displaced about 3,568 families consisting of 18000 persons.¹⁹⁷ It led to the death of 19 person, almost all of them were Muslim.¹⁹⁸ Another massacre was

¹⁹⁵For details see chapter III, Role of THE ABSU.

¹⁹⁶ABSU(2017),op.cit , p.12.

¹⁹⁷Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013),op.cit, p.52

¹⁹⁸Prakash,Ved (2007),op.cit,p.701.

happened in July, 1994 in northern part of Barpeta, almost a few hundred Muslims of Bengali descent were killed in that massacre.¹⁹⁹ In 1996, Bodo-Santhal clash was occurred in Kokrajhar district. It was spread over 2,500 sq km, devastated 75 villages in both sides, rendered 200,000 people homeless and left 100 dead,²⁰⁰ where 200 Adivashis being killed and forced 250,000 people to take shelter in relief camps. Moreover, during the phase, the clash between armed organizations, NDFB and BLT made the situation worse. In this context, scholar Baruah, Mahanta defines the presence of violent activities of NDFB and BLT as part of “contentious politics” which they view as representation of violence as continuum with other non-violent social movements, political parties and interest groups in the area.²⁰¹ Thus, in the BAC area at that time witnessed violence “interweaves incessantly with non violent politics.”²⁰² The next accord was signed in 2003 among Union Government, state government and BLT to ensure peace and address Bodoland issue.²⁰³ But the structural issues were not dealt properly, for which the BTC area witnessed large scale violence in the ethnic clash of 2008 and 2012.

Impact on other Autonomy Movements led by other Tribes: The Bodo movement made the other plain tribes also conscious towards their identity and uniqueness. The

¹⁹⁹The incident was occurred in the relief camp Bashbari in the Barpeta district on 24th July, 1994 in which more than 100 immigrant Muslims were killed, hundreds of houses were torched and 70,000 were rendered homeless. (Baruah, R.N.: “The Ethnic Violence in Barpeta”, the Sentinel, Saturday, 4th September, 1994.)

²⁰⁰Prakash, ved (2007), op.cit, p.705-706.

²⁰¹Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): “Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland”, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23.

²⁰²Baruah, Sanjib (2012): “The Rise and Decline of a Separatist Insurgency; Contentious Politics in Assam, India”. in Rajat Ganguly (ed.) *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and South-East Asia* (London and New York: Routledge).

²⁰³Memorandum of Settlement or Bodo Peace Accord in 2003 was finalized and signed as a result of the negotiation process between Bodo Liberation Tigers and Union Government.

question on Assamese Chauvinism was raised from other tribes of Assam. The Bodoland Movement also gave the momentum to other tribes of Assam to cry for autonomy.

A movement was launched against state government and Assamese chauvinism under the platform of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). The ASDC was demanding the constitution of the two autonomous hill Districts of Assam, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar, into an autonomous state within Assam. Although, both hill districts were under sixth schedule of the constitution, they thought the autonomy under the then sixth schedule was not enough for them. Robinson Kro, the then advisor of ASDC said that the political parties of Assam were anti-tribal, so their only hope was autonomous state.²⁰⁴ As a result, Centre agreed to accommodate some of the ASDCs demand within the Sixth Schedule. A memorandum of understanding was accordingly signed in Delhi on April, 1, 1995, by the ASDC leader of the NC Hills and Karbi Anglong and the Assam Chief Minister, in the presence of the Union Home Minister.²⁰⁵

On March 10, 1995, a Memorandum of Settlement was signed constituting a Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council to fulfill the demands of Rabha, a plain tribe of Assam.²⁰⁶ It was followed by the creation of two more Autonomous Councils for Tiwa and Mising in 13th April and 14th June in 1995 respectively.²⁰⁷ In 2005, 3 more Autonomous councils were created to justify the demands of other plain tribes of Assam, for e.g. Thengal cachari Autonomous Council, Deuri Autonomous Council and Sonowal Autonomous Council.²⁰⁸ All these 6 Autonomous Councils are not included under the

²⁰⁴India Today, dated September 15, 1987.

²⁰⁵The Assam Tribune, dated April 2, 1995.

²⁰⁶http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabha_Hasong_Autonomus_Council.in

²⁰⁷http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_Council_in_Assam.in

²⁰⁸ibid.

purview of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. So they enjoy less power. Now, these councils are demanding for the sixth schedule status for them to access more autonomy.

Bodoland Statehood Movement and Issues of Non-Bodos: Bodos consists only 32% of total population of BTAD. Other major groups of BTAD are Bengali speaking muslims, adivasis including santhals, Koch rajbonghi. Other communities including Bengali hindus, nepalis, caste assamese, sarania kachari and rabhas also share good portion of total population of BTAD areas.

Table 4: Ethnic composition of BTAD areas.²⁰⁹

| Ethnic groups | Percentage to population |
|---|--------------------------|
| Bodo | 32 |
| Bengali Speaking Muslims | 19 |
| Adivasi communities including Santhals | 17 |
| Koch- Rajbngshi | 16 |
| Other communities including Bengali Hindus, Nepalies, Caste Assamese, a Kachari, and Rabhas | 16 |
| Total | 100 |

Source: Kalita, Uttam(2016), p. 825-826.

²⁰⁹Kalita, Uttam(2016): "Viability of Bodo Movement for a separate State in Assam: A politico-Geographical Analysis." International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 6(9), September, p. 825-826.

Meanwhile, the ABSU's demand of divide Assam 50-50 to establish a new state of Bodoland has very little share of Bodo population. They view that the proposed state is not just for Bodo speaking people but also for all plain tribes of the region who used to share same ancestry. But the differences that existed among plain tribe groups made this proposed land very unrealistic. Every group tried to identify their selves in their own community perspective. The levels of development and the process of assimilation with Assamese culture are also differing from each other. Every plain tribe group comes with their own demand of autonomy so a dream about Bodoland on principle of divide Assam 50-50 is not acceptable.

Even when the PTCA leaders suspended their demand of Udayanchal, they justified their reason that the demand of separate homeland on the basis of 'Divide Assam 50-50' was not a practical approach. Because, many tribal communities are spreading all over Assam and every tribal community is unique and have their own distinct features. They have their own likes and dislikes, so no one can impose one community's will over the other. So the demand of separate homeland for plain tribal people was not a realistic approach.²¹⁰ When the ABSU and Bodo leaders dominated the scenario of the movement of separate homeland, non-Bodos felt that Bodos' domination would be prevailed over their wills and they have to act according to Bodo leaders.

In the BTAD areas, although Bodos are the largest community when compared to other groups in terms of population, but combination of all non Bodo groups, including Bengali speaking Muslims, Koch Rajbangshi, Bengali Hindus, Nepalis, caste Assamese, Sarania Kachari and Rabhas than it would be much higher than the total population of

²¹⁰Das,Parag kr. , 'Prantik', 2nd year. 16-31 July, p. 24-25.

Bodos in BTAD areas. Regarding the failure of Accord (1993), Hiteswar Saikia, the then C.M of Assam criticized union government for their hurriedness to sign the Accord. He advised that the problem would be raised if they include non Bodos areas under purview of BAC without taking consent from non Bodos, as Bodo dominated areas in Lower Assam were not contiguous.²¹¹

Non Bodos share almost 2/3 percent of total population of BTAD areas. When there was talk about the formation of BTC. The non Bodo population represented by an apex body of such population under the banner of Sanmilito Janagostiyo Sangram Samiti (SJSS) had opposed the idea on the grounds of the demographic reality of proposed area and suggested that the recommendation lay out by the three members Expert Committee led by Bhupinder Singh should be the basis of Bodo autonomy.²¹²

The Accord on BTC in 2003 was also criticized by non Bodos groups of the BTAD. Non Bodo organizations opposed the formation of BTC as they felt such administrative structure recognized the Bodo hegemony in legal way. The ethnic clash in 1993, 1994 and in 1996 raised question on non Bodos' mind, residing in BTAD area about the security of their lives. They also condemned the power sharing structure of BTC for its unequal treatment and over emphasis on Bodos. The two most important constituents of BTAD, Koch rajbongshi and Adivasi have been demanding inclusion in ST category, but Bodos did not agree such demands as their political space would be reduced.²¹³ Non Bodos also criticize the present structure of BTC. Non Bodos question

²¹¹ Chaudhury, K (1994): "The North-East Area of Darkness: Accord Unclear of Territories", Frontline, 26th August, pp 30-31.

²¹² Hussain, Banajit(-): "The Bodoland Violence and the Politics of Explanation."

²¹³ Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23.

the composition of BTC council. They view that the percentage of political representation does not logically correspond to the actual demographic strength of the Bodo. In the BTC, 30 seats reserved for STs to the council of 46. five open for all, five for non tribal and six to be nominated by governor from unrepresented communities. The non Bodos, especially non tribal groups of BTAD claim that it is injustice to them to have 30 reserved seats for ST in the council. The non Bodos claim that the selection of reserved seats promotes the interest of Bodos. The reserved constituencies to BTC are drawn in such a manner where Bodos have minimum presence. So the provision of reserved seats helps Bodos to make presence in the political scenario of those areas without getting opposition from non tribal groups. The other open seats are in bodo majority areas so non Bodos have only remote chance of being elected.²¹⁴

Another major issue comes in the way of Bodos' demand for separate statehood from Koch rajbonghi community who is the one of the major groups in BTAD and in proposed statehood area of Bodoland. In the BTAD, Koch rajbonghi used to share almost 16% of total population of BTAD. Koch Rajbongshi community led by All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU) has also demanding 'Kamatapur' state in Assam. The areas that they demand for separate kamatapur state includes some areas of proposed Bodoland. AKRSU demands that proposed Kamatapur would be created including 11 districts from Assam namely Lakhimpur, Sonitpurr, Darrang, Morigaon, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, Goalpara, Dhuburi, Bongaingaon, and Kokrajhar and 5 districts from West Bengal.²¹⁵ So it is difficult to resolve the demands of either of these two groups that

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Kalita, uttam (2016), "Viability of Bodo Movement for a Separate Stae in Assam: A Politico-Geographic Analysis", International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications. Pp 823-827.

could lead to community clash in the region. In 1993, when the Bodo Autonomous Council Bill was introduced, Koch Rajbanshi was against the Accord. Their immediate demand was Scheduled Tribe status for them to secure equal share in political sphere of the BAC.²¹⁶ Even in 2003, BTC Accord, when the provision of 30 reserved seats for ST was declared, the Koch Rajbanshi continued their demand for ST status for them to ensure equal representation in BTC. Still the demand for ST for Koch Rajbanshi is present in Koch rajbongsi organization's agenda. In 2014, general election BJP gave pre-poll assurance to include Koch Rajbanshi in ST list along with six other communities of Assam. At present, Koch Rajbanshi enjoys the status of other backward class only in Assam, no action is yet taken by Government to fulfill its pre poll promise.

On the issue of separate Bodoland, Arup Jyoti Das²¹⁷ stated that the right of self determination of Bodos could not be denied, but the demand of separate Bodoland was not acceptable. He viewed that the demand of separate Bodoland was not historically supportive as earlier the proposed Bodoland area was under Koch dynasty. He also mentioned that the exclusive homeland for Bodos would create conflicting situation in the region as other communities' rights would be hampered.²¹⁸

The Adivashis or Tea Tribe²¹⁹ one of the major groups in BTAD is also demanding ST status for them. Adivashis are Munda, Oron, Santhal and other tribals of Jharkhanda origin who were brought to Assam as plantation laboureres after the rapid growth of the tea industry in 1880. The Bodo based organizations like BPPF denounced

²¹⁶Prakas, ved (2007), op.cit, p. 702.

²¹⁷Arup Jyoti Das is present Managing Director in Centre for Koch Rajbanshi Studies and Development.

²¹⁸In an interview with Arup jyoti Das by author, dated November 2.11.2017.

²¹⁹Tea tribe is a politically given term to denote labourers and ex labourers who are engaged in tea plantation in Assam. Basically the term 'tea tribe' is used because some communities of this 'tea Tribe' enjoy ST status in other parts of India.

the claims of tea tribes as they are not basically original inhabitants of Assam. Nani Gopal Mahanta views that the main reason for opposing ST status to the adivasis is their numbers. Nearly three million tea garden or ex-tea garden labourers would make up about 50% of the total ST population of the state thereby making it the most powerful ST group replacing the Bodos.²²⁰

The issue of illegal migration is also one of the major issues in BTAD areas. The tribal peoples along with other Assamese peoples held them responsible for change in the demographic equation in the land. The issues of encroachment of tribal belts and blocks remain a major issue for conflict in the Bodoland area. Although there are different viewpoints on the issue of illegal migrants; one section claims as Assam is flooded with Bangladeshi Muslim Immigrants and another denies the existence of such immigration, but from pre independence period the issue of Muslim peasants with Bengali accents remains vital in Bodo dominated areas. Plain tribes criticized the colonial policy and the Sadullah Ministry's pro- immigration stand in pre independence period. Later on, their population growth in all over Assam provided the ground to believe the synthesis of the influx of the Bangladeshi immigrants. This phenomenon made the Bodos against Muslim peasants or labourers with Bengali accent as Bodos held them potential threat to their land and socio-political structure of Bodo dominated areas.

The emergence of strong Non-bodo bodies in BTAD like All Bodo Minority Student Union (ABMSU) and Ona Bodo Surakha Samiti (OBSS) can be viewed as resentment against socio political structure of BTAD. It has widened the gap between Bodos and Non Bodos. Ona Bodo Surakhya Samiti (OBSS) claim to have support from

²²⁰ Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013), op.cit, p.54.

27 organizations in Lower Assam including the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU), the All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union, the All Assam Tea Tribe Students' Association (AATTSA).²²¹ All of these groups have strong hold over their common peoples of respective communities. The growing importance of non-Bodos groups in the BTAD election and Assembly election in BTAD area lead to new phenomena in BTAD politics. The non-Bodos issues come to the forefront in socio political scenario of Assam.

The problem of non-Bodos in BTAD is that each group of non-Bodos has their own unique goals and objective. So, although they used to take stand against any injustice to them but the common objective is absent. The alliance of non-Bodos can be viewed as necessity to Bodos' domination, nothing else. So the political, social phenomenons easily make impact on the alliance of non-Bodos. The stability of alliance is still a question. For e.g. Bengali speaking Muslim are the second highest groups in BTAD areas²²² but other groups don't feel comfortable to unite their goals and objectives with them because they, Bengali speaking Muslim are tagged as immigrant Bangladeshi who are condemned for changing demography of whole Assam. The demand of Kamatapur led by All Koch Rajbanshi Students' Union is also conflictual with the interest of other non-Bodos groups in BTAD.

In an interview with Shahkamal Khandakar, present General Secretary of All Bodoland Minority Students' Union, he opines that the main reasons for outbreak of non-Bodo movement in the region are failure of proper execution of the BTC Accord and

²²¹Seven sisters post, guwahati,,28 may 2012.

²²²Table 4.

BTC administration to protect and ensure the rights of minority groups in Bodoland. Moreover failure of administration to ensure peace and normal law and order in the region and political deprivation of minority groups in BTAD led to emerge non-Bodo movement.

Regarding the non-Bodos groups' stand against the proposed Bodoland, THE ABSU views that such movements are politically motivated to counter the movement for separate Bodoland. There is no reason for fear to non-Bodo communities, because if Bodoland is created, the rights of non-Bodos will be secured through provisions of the Constitution of India.²²³

Bodoland issue and Post-Accord (2003) Political Development: The Bodo People's Progressive Front (BPPF) party, led by Hungrama mahilary was in power of interim government after the Accord. The BPPF party faced split due to different vision of Bodoland among their leaders. Later on, Hungrama led one section of BPPF and renamed it as Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF). The other section remains the name of BPPF with them and continues their work. BPF is in power in BTC since its formation. Many allegations rose against BPF administration for promoting nepotism, corruption in BTC, but the serious attack is raised regarding its failure to maintain the law and order in the BTAD areas. The outbreak of riots in 2007, again in 2012 and in 2014 put question on BTAD administration's ability to govern the area. The opponent of BPF alleged that the availability of illegal arms in BTAD areas is still burning issue in BTAD and it poses a

²²³In an interview with Praomod Bodo, held by Ratnadip Choudhary of Tehelka, aug 31. Published in Meghalaya times.

danger threat to human security and peace of the region. Along with this, other serious allegation on BTAD administration are corruption and nepotism.

The ABSU alleged BPF members and its chief for ignoring the real issues of Bodo people for their own political aspirations. The creation of new state Telegana worked as fuel to the issue of separate Bodoland. Once again ABSU pointed out the ignoring attitude of government mechanisms to resolve the Bodos' issues and problems. The recent political development in BTAD, where BPP joined hands with BJP in legislative election of Assam in 2016 was criticized by ABSU for not representing the demands of Bodos. The ABSU argued that the step that had taken by BPP would create problem to maintain the secularity and uniqueness of Bodos demands and issues.

The ABSU revived the statehood movement once again in 2012 onwards and it is continued till today. The ABSU demands that only a separate statehood can ensure the identity of Bodos people. They argue that the ruling authority of BTAD areas is not able to secure peace and development of the region.

In 2016, the ABSU declared its support to the United Peoples' Party (UPP)²²⁴ in assembly polls. UPP allied with congress party to counter the alliance of BJP-BPP alliance. Although the ABSU supported BJP indirectly in the 2014 general election, but they argued that after come to power BJP neglected the issues of Bodo peoples and Bodoland.²²⁵ Moreover, ABSU criticized BJP's decision to fight the election with BPF in 2016 Assembly. The ABSU always stand against BPF in political ground and condemned

²²⁴ UPP is a political party. UPP participated in State Assembly Election in 2016. It contested for Assembly seats in BTAD areas. The party is basically formed as opposition of BPF party in BTAD areas.

²²⁵ In an interview with Promod Bodo held by Sangeeta Barooah Pisarothy on 19.03.2016, published by The Wire, dated 20.03.2016.

their inability to secure peace and ensure development. It was obvious that the ABSU support went with United Peoples' Party that allied with the congress.

The non Bodos play a prominent role in political scenario of BTAD areas. The Bodo Peoples' Front led by Hagrama Mohilary dominated the political scenario of BTAD in the initial phase of post accord (2003). After ethnic clash in 2008 and 2012, the issues of non-Bodos came to the forefront. Differences among Bodo groups also paved the way of new political phenomenon in BTAD areas. During first and second election of BTAD, BPF dominance was all over in BTAD areas. BPF was an alliance with Congress party in the above elections. BPF supported Congress during State Assembly election in 2007 and 2011 and general election in 2014. But with the emergence of non-Bodos organizations and victory of BJP in general election in 2014, BPF switched their loyalty to BJP. In 2014, an independent candidate from non-Bodo community, Naba Kumar Sarania was elected from Kokrajhar constituency of parliament. The candidate got full support from Sanmilita Janagostiya Aikkyamancha (SJA), which is the common banner of 20 non-Bodo ethnic and linguistic communities.

In against of BPF, a new political party Peoples Coordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR) was emerged from Bodo community in 2015 BTAD election. The PCDR had support from the ABSU, BPPF and pro talk NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) unit. The PCDR managed to win 9 seats in the election.²²⁶

From the non-Bodos groups, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) contested 8 seats and managed to win 4 seats in the constituencies having large number

²²⁶Siddique, Nazimuddin (2015): "Bodoland Territorial Area District Elections 2015", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol 50, 1st august, 2015.

of Muslim population in 2015 BTAD election. The common banner of non-Bodos under SJA was able to win only 4 seats because a new non-Bodo organization namely, Obodo Suraksha Samiti (OSS) came to the political scenario. The presence of two non-Bodo organizations led to division of non-Bodo votes in 2015 BTAD election. The OSS was splintered out from SJA and got 2 seats in the BTAD election, 2015.²²⁷

Witnessing such developments, BPF which got only 20 seats in the BTAD election 2015, and survived small majority shifted their loyalty to Bharatiya Janata Party. In the state assembly election, 2016, BPF was in alliance with BJP. On the other hand, the ABSU supported the United Peoples Party (UPP) which was in alliance with Congress to counter on BJP-BPF alliance. Non-Bodos in the region could not take a common decision and each group provided their support to parties in their own communities' perspective. Anti-BPF stand of non-Bodos in earlier phase were not observed in 2016 State Assembly election. Because, the other powerful group to counter BJP-BPF was Congress-UPP alliance which got support from the ABSU, and non Bodos are not in favor of ABSU and their demand of separate Bodoland. So, elements like religion, ethnicity made a way to polarize non-Bodos and divide them. The BJP-BPF alliance emerged as victorious party in state assembly election 2016. Once again, the BPF was able to attain its dominance in the political scenario of BTAD. But, recent announcement of BJP to field a candidate in Kokrajhar Constituency of parliament raises tension between the two parties, BJP and BPF.

Recently, a political level tripartite talks with Government of India, Assam and Bodo representative group including leaders of the ABSU, NDFB (Progressive) and

²²⁷ Ibid.

People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) was held over Bodoland issue on 25th April, 2017 at New Delhi. The talk was observed by Rajnath Singh, present Union Home Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, present Chief Minister of Assam, Satyendra Garg, Joint Secretary for Home in North East. A memorandum was submitted to the Union Home Minister from Bodo delegates seeking early solution of long standing demand of Bodoland statehood to meet good governance in the region and demanding solution of the Bodoland issue through democratic movement as soon as possible.²²⁸

Other organizations' views on the Demand of Separate Bodoland: The Indian National Congress and Asom Gana Parishad dominated the scenario of Assam politics. Recently Bharatiya Janata Party assumed power of the state government in the Assembly Election, 2016. They all have their own perspective on the issues of Bodos and Bodoland.

When the separate Bodoland movement was reenergized in the post-Bodo Peace Accord (2003), Congress was in power in state as well as union government. The Union government decision to create Telegana has made some impact on the course of Bodoland statehood movement. In the wake of the demand of separate Bodoland demand, Tarun Gogoi, the then Chief Minister of Assam viewed that he was not going to divide Assam. He suggested to live all the communities of Assam under one umbrella as Assamese.²²⁹ In an interview with Jyotibikash Changmai, the President of National Students' Union of India (NSUI)²³⁰ stated that the rights of Self- determination of Bodos could not be denied, but idea of exclusive Bodoland could make problems in the region.

²²⁸ The Assam Times, Tripartite talk held on Bodoland Issue, Apr 26,2017.

²²⁹ The Hindu, dated August 09,2013.

²³⁰ NSUI is student wing of Indian National Congress.

He said that he was not in favour of separate Bodoland, but wanted that government should adopt adequate policies to address structural issues of Bodos like preservation of their culture, tradition, language and ensure peace and development in Bodo dominated areas.²³¹

The Bharatiya Janata Party emerged as victorious in Assam Legislative Assembly election in 2016. At central, the NDA government led by BJP party is in power. In 2009 General Elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supported the movements for greater autonomy or statehood in their manifesto. In the manifesto, BJP promised to create smaller states with keeping in mind its commitment to good governance and all round development.²³² In the wake of Bodoland statehood demand after declaration about creation of Telegana, Sarbananda Sonowal rejecting the demand of separate Bodoland said that his party was not in favour of any further division of the state, but would work for the creation of a greater Assam.²³³ In 2014 General Elections, the BJP, as that party promised in its additional manifesto for the parliamentary elections that it would take initiatives for the permanent solution of the long pending issues of the Bodo along with the problems of other tribal communities.²³⁴ The NDA won the parliamentary election in 2014, but Union government did not take any step regarding separate Bodoland. The groups demanding Bodoland statehood once again revived their activities against Union Government. The BJP joined hands with BPF in Assam legislative Assembly Election, 2016 and seized majority in Assam Assembly. Recently a

²³¹In an interview with Jyotibikash Changmai, President of NSUI, held by the author, dated 02/10/2017.

²³²"BJP's New Proclivity for smaller States formulation", The Hindu, dated April 20, 2009.

²³³"Four statehood demands lead to large-scale violence in Assam", The Times of India, dated Aug 2, 2013.

²³⁴www.bjp.org>press-releases/addendum-election-menifesto-2014.in

talk process was held in New Delhi on 25th April, 2017 on issues of Bodos.²³⁵ Ajay Hazarika²³⁶ stated on issue of separate Bodoland that Assam should not be divided and viewed that the right of self determination of Bodos could be enjoyed within Assam.²³⁷

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)²³⁸ stated in the wake of Bodoland Movement after declaration of creation of Telengana that further division of the Assam would not lead to economic development of the state and its people.²³⁹ In an interview with Brindaban Goswami²⁴⁰, Goswami doubted on separate Bodoland concept to address the structural issues of Bodos regarding their identity, culture, language, tradition. Moreover he also raised issues like peace and development and viewed these issues should be addressed first. He stated that division of Assam on ethnic line would damage the brotherhood of Assamese people including Bodos.²⁴¹

The Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF) and United Peoples Party have their strong hold in Bodo dominated areas. BPF also supported separate Bodoland and stated that after the Telengana announcement, Bodo people were feeling being cheated. Therefore, the BPF geared up separate statehood demand as only through separate statehood, the problems of backwardness and development of Bodos could be assured.²⁴² The ABSU alleges that BPF did not emphasize the demand of separate statehood and they are

²³⁵Tripartite talk was held among Union government, State government and representatives of Bodos on 25th April, 2017. ("Tripartite talk held on Bodoland issue", The Assam Times, dated April 26, 2017.)

²³⁶Ajay Hazarika is current President of BJP (Udalguri Unit).

²³⁷In an interview with Ajay Hazarika by the Author on 04/09/2017.

²³⁸AGP is one of the major regional political party of Assam. In 1986 and 1996, AGP formed government in Assam. Currently, AGP is in alliance with BJP in state power.

²³⁹The Hindu, dated Aug 2, 2013.

²⁴⁰Brindaban Goswami is a senior leader of AGP. He is now MLA of Tezpur Assembly Constituency, Assam.

²⁴¹In an interview with Brindaban Goswami by the Author on 08/09/2017.

²⁴²"Home Ministry Wary of Bodo- Gorkha solidarity", The Hindu, dated August 11, 2013.

enjoying their political benefit by misusing Bodoland demands.²⁴³ Another major political group in BTAD, UPP demanded separate homeland is only a solution to resolve Bodos' issues.²⁴⁴

The major student organizations of the region forwarded their views on the issue of separate Bodoland, as demanded by the All Bodo Students' Union.

The Students' Federation of India (SFI)²⁴⁵ viewed that the decision of creation of separate Bodoland rest on Government's policy and it depend on the stand of ruling party regarding the issue. The SFI also recommended that more provisions should be given to Bodos people in order to ensure identity, culture and tradition of the group according to Constitution of India. The SFI also took note of issues of non Bodos and said that any further restructuring of Bodoland region should look into the issues of non-Bodos.²⁴⁶

The Satra Mukti Sangram Samiti (SMSS)²⁴⁷ stated on the issue of separate Bodoland demand that Assam should not be divided again.²⁴⁸ The All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU), rejecting further division of Assam said they were in favour of greater Assamese nationalism, where every communities of the region have equal share to represent their culture, tradition and identity.²⁴⁹

²⁴³In an interview with Dipen Boro, Vice President of Central ABSU by the author, on 8/10/2017

²⁴⁴In an interview with Derhassar Boro, District President (Youth wing), Udalguri, UPP by author on 11/10/2017.

²⁴⁵The Students' Federation of India is a student wing of the Communist Party of India.

²⁴⁶In an interview with Kashyap Choudhury, present President of SFI (Assam Unit) by the author held on 10/09/2017.

²⁴⁷SMSS is student wing of Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti, a leading non political pressure group of Assam.

²⁴⁸In an interview with Babul Hussain, Central Executive member of SMSS by author held on 15/09/2017.

²⁴⁹In an interview with Azizur Rahman, President of AAMSU, a leading minority students' organization of Assam by the author held on 22/10/2017.

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) rejected the concept of separate Bodoland and said that there was no difference between Assamese and Bodos. Bodos are part of Assamese society and division of Assam would lead to damage the Assamese unity.²⁵⁰

To sum up, the chapter reveals the impact of Bodoland statehood movement in the socio-political foundation of Assam. Separate Bodoland movement has intensified the demand of autonomy in Assam. The emergence of non-Bodos movement in BTAD is also outcome of concerned governments' failure to address the structural issues of BTAD region. The growing presence of non-Bodos issues in political scenario of BTAD has mounted tension between Bodos and non-Bodos. Although major regional organization or parties, be it political or non political rejected the concept of further division of Assam, but still Bodo based political parties are demanding and extending their support for separate Bodoland. One cannot predict the future course of separate Bodoland movement. One can view that if the structural issues of Bodos regarding identity, language, culture, tradition can be addressed in proper way and ensure peace and development in the region than the situation will be controlled.

²⁵⁰In an interview with Duldul Borkotoki, central executive member of AASU held by the Author on 06/09/2017.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The Bodo movement was started with the demand of identity assertion. The basic and prime objective of the movement was to ensure and protect the identity of plain tribes of Assam. Presently, the movement assumes political nature and demanding separate statehood for Bodos. The ABSU opines that only a separate statehood can solve the Bodo issues. Both union and state governments took initiative to resolve the Bodos' issues but still the demand for separate statehood is viable in Assam. An attempt is made in this study to explain why the demand for separate statehood is still present and what course will be best suited to resolve the Bodos' issues.

The main concern of plain tribes is to ensure and protect their culture, tradition and identity. They feared that assimilation with non tribes lead to decline of their own existence. They started movement against all non tribal elements whom they thought a potential threat to their existence. One of the major issues is land loss. The loss of land means loss of collective resource to which they are attached since time immemorial. Nani Gopal Mahanta views that the land is not piece of commodity but also a part of their culture and customs. The encroachment of protected tribal land by non tribes creates xenophobia among plain tribes against non tribal people.²⁵¹ The negligence and indifferent attitude of government and their inadequate policies regarding the problems of Bodos work as impetus to the Bodo movement. The emergence of new forces in ethnic movement of North East changes the nature of the movement in different time of the

²⁵¹ Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23. P. 56.

movement.²⁵² The movement paves the way for different administrative structuring and restructuring in the region in its different phases in order to achieve a commonly agreed outcome of the movement but the existence of demand of separate statehood put question on those outcomes. The ABSU views that the demand for separate statehood exist because the main issues of Bodo peoples regarding identity, political self determination, protection of tribal land is not solved.²⁵³

Critical analysis of Bodoland statehood movement reveals that the major reasons for continuing of the movement are lack of adequate policy to resolve Bodo's issues, ethnic polarization in the region, and failure of Government mechanism.

The lack of adequate policy to address the Bodos' issues is one of the main reasons for continuing of the movement. The main demand of Bodos' since pre independence period about protection of their land is not still solved. Nani gopal mahanta argues that the Indian state's policy of top-down to resolving conflict is not adequate one to implement in the Bodo case. State should recognize the important role of local peoples and grass root leaders in formation of policy making.²⁵⁴ The proposed Bodoland state, as viewed by the ABSU consists of different communities so state needs to promote an all inclusive policy that ensured justice, fairness and representation to various communities living in the BTAD areas. Uddepanna Goswami views in order to achieve a desired end and to restore stable peace, policy should be formulated to address the four gaps, interdependence gap, justice gap, a process structure gap and an authenticity gap, in the

²⁵²Baruah, Apurba K. (2005): "Communities and Democracy: A North East Indian Perspective", North East India Studies, vol I no I, Guwahati, p23.

²⁵³In an interview with Dipen Boro, vice president of ABSU by author on 8/10/2017.

²⁵⁴Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2013): "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XLVIII No 23.

process of peace building and transforming conflicts.²⁵⁵ Indian state's policies in handling Bodos issues creates such gaps which should be addressed very soon in near future to restore peace and achieve a desired end. Goswami criticizes the Indian state's policy of cooption that created interdependence gap; giving birth to an ethnic elite and making them as part of the establishment, thus dissociating them from the grassroots. She blames the Indian state for not addressing the justice gap. The justice gap is created due to failure of policies to address structural violence because it creating a gap between the expectations for peace and what it delivered. The failure of Bodo Accord in 1993 reflects the inability of the Indian state policy to address the justice gap. Regarding the violence in BTAD after post Accord era (2003), Goswami comments that surrender of the BLT insurgents in Bodoland following the Bodo settlement of 2003 did indeed de-escalate violence for a while, but since the structural violence remained unaddressed and the interdependence gap was deepened, the BTAD has once again become the epicenter of violence. Goswami questions on the missing of attitudinal changes, developing a culture of peace in state policy because only through restructuring power allocation by creating new administrative institution is not able to ensure peace in the region. The manifestation of institutions, policies time to time lead to authenticity gap between common people and Indian state. The government should focus on definite and stable policy for the situation so that manifestation time to time can be prevented and the issue of authenticity gap can be looked after.

Another major reason for continuing of the movement is the failure of Government mechanism to resolve the issues of Bodos. Still the major issue of land loss

²⁵⁵Gupta, Susmita Sen (2014): "Transformation and Consolidation of Bodo Identity: An Enquiry into the Role of the Middle Class", The Standard International Journals.

of tribes is not solved. The continue influx of non tribes to their land posses a potential threat to Bodos. The population growth of non tribes, especially among Muslim population of BTAD makes Bodos conscious about their social, political rights in the region. The concern for identity among Bodos once again revives after post accord (2003) era with the increasing role of non-Bodos in the political, social and economical structure of BTAD once again. The Bodo elite class plays active role in Bodo movement since its beginning but now their division and competition among them lead the movement in new way. Dipen Bodo viewed that after assuming power, the BPF members forgot the real issues of Bodo peoples.²⁵⁶ Assamese chauvinism is also categorized as one of the major issue for breakout of the movement. The Bodos complain against the Assamese chauvinism for imposing Assamese culture upon them. The Bodos opine negligence and misuse of state mechanism on behalf of Assamese people's pre dominant position in state socio political structure of the state compels them for demand of separate statehood. So they prefer a separate identity for them to ensure their culture from imposition and the ABSU views only separate statehood can ensure and able to protect their identity.

State and National political parties' tactics to secure vote bank on ethnic line in election also proves as ethnic polarization on the region. In 2014, the BJP's pre poll assurance to hold talk on Bodoland issue and later their indifferent attitude to their promises after assuming power put question on government indifferent attitude towards Bodos issue. Indian national congress and BJP, the both major political parties made alliance with two different Bodo organizations in the state assembly election in 2016 to

²⁵⁶In an interview Dwipen Bodo, vice president of ABSU, held author on 8/10/ 2017.

secure Bodos vote but they don't have any definite agenda to address the Bodoland issue. Such electoral politics to get majority only make the situation more complex and conflictual.

The issue of non-Bodos in the proposed Bodoland can also be considered prior to any new structuring and restructuring in process of resolving Bodos' issues. Non-Bodos organizations views BAC (1993) and BTC (2003) accord did not do justice to them. Moreover, the presence of violence in BTAD compelled them to question the authority regarding their rights. A non-Bodo movement is emerged in BTAD region dissatisfying with the governance process of concerned government authorities. A non-Bodo member, Naba Kumar Sarania won from Kokrajhar parliamentary constituencies in 2014 general election. Sarania was backed by Sanmilita Janagustiya Aikyomoncha (SJA), a non-Bodo political platform. The incident signifies the increasing role of non-Bodos in political scenario of BTAD against prior political establishment.

The demand of separate Bodoland which is planned by carving out from Assam is not supported by major political parties and as well as non political organization of the region. Every political and non political organizations are concerned and show sympathy to the issues of Bodos regarding identity, tradition, culture, language, development but the idea of separate and exclusive homeland for Bodos is rejected. Major political parties and non political pressure groups recommended addressing the Bodos' issues within constitutional framework. They are not in favor of further division of Assam on ethnic line.

Some possible solutions to Bodos issues are discussed below as concluding remarks of the study.

Government can take adequate policy to resolve Bodos issue. The policy can be based on inclusive way so that all communities' rights can be ensured and protected. Policy can be directed to set up multi-layered, multi-structured institutions that could give representation and justice to the indigenous as well as other groups residing in the area.

Government can also take care of structural issues of Bodos. Effective action can take to protect land, identity, culture and tradition of plain tribes. Without solving the structural issues, a desired end could not be established. The present demand of separate movement reflects the loopholes of prior establishment in solving structural issues.

The formation of composite culture in Assam can be based on multi ethnic way that every smaller nationality has equal share in formation of the composite culture. Only a multi ethnic culture can counter chauvinism of bigger communities in the region.

State machinery can ensure peace and development in the region. Democratic institution and procedure can be encouraged and people to people communication can be developed so that a stable culture of peace can be attained in dealing with separate Bodoland issue. The role of civil society groups and other institutions with democratic values can be emphasized to prevent polarization on ethnic ground in the region and to ensure peace in the region.

To sum up, the major issue in Bodoland is to ensure peace and development. If peace and development can be ensured, the structural issues of Bodos will be addressed.

The development is not refer only infrastructure development, but the all-round development where Bodos issues like language, culture, tradition could be protected and ensured.²⁵⁷ The different stakeholders of BTAD area argue for the all-round development policy where every issue of Bodos can be ensured and a culture of peace can be developed among different communities of BTAD. In the absence of peace, even a separate Bodoland state would not able to survive.²⁵⁸ The importance of peace can be realized by these views. The role democratic institutions in BTAD region can be emphasized to ensure the culture of peace.

²⁵⁷In an interview with Sanjib Talukdar, President of Gauhati University Students' Union (2016-2017), held by author on 10/09/2017.

²⁵⁸In an interview with Guna Baruah, Central Executive Meber of Asom Sahitya Sabha, a literally body of the region, held by author on 24/10/2017.

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Rotendra Boro, President, All Bodo Students' Union (Udalguri Dist.). (Dated 4/10/2017)

Shahkamal khandakar, General Secretary, All Bodoland Minority Students' Union.
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Kashyap Choudhuri, President, Student Federation of India (Assam unit).(Dated
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Duldul Borkotoki, Asst. General Secretary(present), All Assam Students' Union
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Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| AAPTL | All Assam Plains Tribal League |
| AASU | All Assam Students' Union |
| ABSU | All Bodo Students' Union |
| ABMSU | All Bodoland Minority Students' Union |
| AGP | Asom Gana Parishad |
| AKRSU | All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union |
| BAC | Bodoland Autonomous Council |
| BLT | Bodoland Liberation Tigers |
| BPAC | Bodo People's Action Committee |
| BPF | Bodoland People's Front |
| BPPF | Bodoland People's Progressive Front |
| BSF | Bodo Security Force |
| BSS | Bodo Sahitya Sabha |
| BTAD | Bodoland Territorial Area Districts |
| BTC | Bodoland Territorial Council |
| OSS | Obodo Surakshya Samiti |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NDFB | National Democratic Front of Bodoland |
| NDFB (P) | National Democratic Front of Bodoland(Progressive) |

| | |
|----------|--|
| PTCA | Plains Tribal Council of Assam |
| PTCA (P) | Plains Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive) |
| ST | Scheduled Tribe |
| UNTLF | United National Tribal Liberation Front |
| UPP | United Peoples' Party |