CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Having discussed Boro ethnic problem from the conceptual and factual perspectives, one would evidently draw a conclusion that the Boro ethnic upsurge has its origin in the objective situations rooted in the socio-economic, cultural and political conditions of this community. The adverse developments, contracted since the British time, boomerang in the post-Independence era, in the hands of apathetic and slack State Government. Though the Boro intellectuals of the pre-Independence period sought constitutional safeguard against those adversities, no remedial measure came forth from the Government of Assam, letting the Boros suffer from those chronic deficiencies year after year. The post-Independence idea of prescribing the adverse situations, to the law and order model or often opting to a total ignorance jam-packed the Boro grievances to maximum. It is understood that the law and order model, by its very contention does not attend to the roots of the ethnic upsurges and the human needs associated therein. It no doubt upholds the power norms, but cannot bring conflict resolution.

The other traditional concepts like, majority rule and their rights in decision making, imposition of structures which deny people equal opportunities of development and threaten their identity or imposition of the norms of the powerful, have not only proved dysfunctional but also sources of conflict. Besides, the solutions brought about by such proscriptions do not
address the roots of the conflict. As such, they are superficial and temporary.  

Ethnicity as a complex process operates in a structure of its own which reflects in the culture and tradition of the community. Besides, in a pluralistic society and as a part of the total population, the ethnic communities operate in a given political and economic culture, determined by a political structure they are in. As culture and structure are all permeable, they affect influence and change on one another, in varying degrees and according to the dynamics of the variables. More so in the present day economic culture where specialized production and integrated market system have pervaded the notion of isolation of yester year. Yet, the notions and mechanism of inter-dependence, consensus or coercion can not be treated as a neat and simple proscription to bring out integration and cohesion of societies.

What appear more prescriptive to conflict situation are not integration through forceful assimilation or cultural extension of majority nor in upholding the power norms of the majority rule but in the devolution of power to the individuals or group of individuals who are affiliated to the interest group and are able to punctuate the needs of the members. Conflict situation mostly arise out of objective and perceptive sense of deprivation, be it cultural, economic or political. The basic solution to such conflict situation is to share the power through decentralized administrative structure, enabling the members to take up the responsibility of development by themselves. Such structure of shared power also will involve the

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334 Susheela Bhan, Impact of Ethnic Violence on Youth (A Study of Tribal –Non-Tribal Violence in Assam), New Delhi, 1999, p.64.
members in a system of functional co-operation and inter-dependence among the ethnic groups. 335

Following are the findings of this study.

Findings:

One of the social phenomena which had lasting impact on the society and politics of the Boros was the conversion members of this community into Assamese speaking Hindus, which is often referred to as ‘Assamyaisation’ by the present day scholars. In those days, as was the case with other non-Aryan ethnic communities, the Assamese Hindus inflicted social derogation on the Boros, which they could wear off by taking conversion into Hinduism. Many members of this community took conversion to escape such social derogations, leaving their cultures and traditions. In Assam, conversion was accompanied by transformation of the converts into Assamese speaking Hindus. The conversion, so affected, had two major negative impacts on the Boros. It divided the Boro nationality into numerous societies of converts, which later on, established themselves into communities, independent of the Boros. It has been already stated in the related chapter as to how the Census of 1881 had referred to three categories of Boro population, namely, (i) uninfluenced by Hinduism, (ii) in the process of conversion and (iii) wholly converted Boros. The Boro converts, as they climbed the ladder of caste hierarchy, formed different strata of societies like, the Koches, Sonowals, Rabhas and Deoris etc. which later on established themselves as independent communities. The conversion thus broke the territorial compactness of Boro habitation, segregating them into numerous areas of smaller communities. Secondly, inclusion of the Boro

335. Ibid, p. 64.
converts into Assamese fold, as was found in the subsequent census report, reduced the Boro population, while the same process, boasted up the Assamese population significantly. The negative impact of the conversion still persists, particularly, when population factor becomes the criterion of making a democratic settlement of any issue involving the Boros. The Boro intellectuals of the early decades woke up to this situation to find Boro society divided and derogated. The fact that the conversion and misrepresentation of the tribal converts in the subsequent census reports was taken seriously by the early Boro intellectuals, may be understood from of the clause 4 of the agreement concluded between the Tribal League and the Assam Congress Committee in September 1939. By signing the agreement, both the parties, as specified in the clause 4, agreed to include plains tribal converts “in the schedule of the tribal people.”

The gravity of the problem was re-focused in the clause 7 of the agreement, concluded between the Tribal League and the Assam Muslim League in March 1940. Under such circumstances, regeneration of the morale of the Boro society by reforming it on western line and by inculcating self-respect through the glorification of their ancient past, language, and culture etc became the prime concern of the early Boro intellectuals. Nonetheless, the fact that Assamese hand was behind the happenings, whether in conversion or in the manipulation of the census report, sowed the seeds of differences between the Assamese and the Boros. This continued to become a subject matter in the memoranda of the student body and the political organizations of this community till the recent times.

336. Text of the agreement concluded between the Tribal League and the Assam Congress Committee, dated 10th September, 1939, Shillong.
337. Text of the agreement entered into between the Tribal League and the Assam Muslim League, dated 16th March, 1940, Shillong.
The Boros formed the second largest ethnic community in the post-Independence Assam plains population. But whether due to lesser consciousness or as often said, due to their good faith in the new-found freedom, the Boros did not acquire a separate administrative unit of any form. They however, through representation, got 12 reserved seats constituted in the State Assembly of sixty legislatures and one in the Parliament. But they soon realized that the few legislatures, elected from the reserved constituencies were numerically far from being a political force and so they were unable to influence the house in policy making and in their enforcement. There is also an accusation that the reserved seats, so created under the provisions of the Articles 330 and 332 of the Indian Constitution, did not follow the guiding principle laid in the Section 9 (1) of the Delimitation Commission Act of 1962. The Boro socio-political organizations accused that "the Scheduled tribes Constituencies in the plains Assam are delimited in such a way that tribal population ranges from 28 to 48 per cent only to total population of the constituency, though in most of the cases it could be raised from 60 to 70 per cent." Whatever were the reasons, political participation through separate electorate failed to redress the grievances and aspirations of the Boros. The student and political organizations realized that unless they acquire political power in their own hands, their grievances, expectations and aspirations would remain unaddressed for ever.

Alienation of tribal land within the Tribal Belts and Blocks has been another objective condition for the Boro ethnic upsurge. Realizing the importance of land to the agricultural economy of the plains tribal

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338 Memorandum to the President of India, by the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam, Kokrajhar, dated May 20, 1967.
population and apprehensive of its alienation by the outsiders, the Tribal
League leaders, by the terms of their pre-Independence election agreement
with the Congress got the Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue
Regulation Act 1886 amended whereby 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks were
created within which, occupation and transfer of land by the non-tribals was
made illegal. But not long before, the tribal land within the Belts and Blocks
began to be alienated in large scale by the non-tribals, particularly, by the
immigrants coming across the border. The League leaders were so
apprehensive of the possible land alienation that they submitted memoranda
to the Constituent Assembly and the Minority Advisory Committee urging
the Government of India to make provisions for the creation of Scheduled
Areas in the plains districts of Assam in order to give all round protection of
tribal interests, including their land.339 Often the alienation of tribal land
took place with the knowledge and help of the Government authorities
themselves. Different socio-cultural and political organizations raised this
issue over and again, seeking enforcement of the provisions of the amended
act of Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886, also
known as the Assam Act XV of 1947. The Sub-Committee of Advisory
Council for Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on Settlement of Land in
Tribal Belts and Blocks and of Forest Land, constituted in 11974 by the
State Government found out the provisions of the Chapter X of Assam Land
Revenue Regulation Act “nowhere being sincerely implemented”, making
large scale land alienation within the Belts and Blocks possible. The Sub-
Committee has given a lengthy list of lands which were already occupied
either by the non-tribals or by the Government itself. Alienation of tribal
land was so acute that it became the focal point of Boro socio-cultural and
political organizations for year after year. After the Tribal League, the Tribal

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Sangha was the first to pass resolution in 1965, expressing its concern over the alienation of tribal land. But the Government remained indifferent to the problem, letting the situation deteriorate year after year. As a result, by 1960s, the Boros were of the opinion that their land alienation would never be checked so long as they were under the State of Assam. In their opinion, creation of a separate state was the only solution to the land alienation problem of the Boros.

Adopting the policy of cultural homogenization and under the pressure of the Assamese intellectuals, the Assam Government introduced Assamese as the State Official Language in 1960 and as the medium of instruction in all the level of education in 1972. The policy of the Assam Government cause widespread resentment among the non-Assamese population of both hills and plains. Ultimately, it became one of the major factors for the break up of the Assam into number of linguistic states. The Nagas, Mizos, Khasis, Tripuris and Arunachalese, through agitation, secured separate administrative set ups for themselves. The Boros, though joined the caravan of protesters, failed to achieve anything out of the language turmoil. However, the language policies of the Assam Government created fear of Assamese domination in the minds of the Boro intellectuals, -- a fear that appeared to have become one of the root causes of Boro movement for separate identity. The Boros, in response to the Assamese language policies, launched language movement of their own, beginning with the introduction of Boro as the medium of instruction in the schools of majority Boro populated areas in 1963, followed by the movement for the adoption of Roman script between 1972 and 1975. Though the script movement ended in a compromised settlement, it led to the replacement of Assamese by the Devanagari script. Thus, the Assamese language and educational policies, to
some extent, acted as the catalyst for Boro language and political movements.

The Boro Language as an objective variable of ethnicity played an important role in the nationality formation of this community. It not only survived centuries of assimilation, but also remained as a dominant identity symbol of the Boros. In fact, the early Boro intellectuals used language as the prime mobilizing symbol in arousing nationality consciousness among the Boros. When the politics of the Boros was in a state of doldrums, the language provided the foundation for the intellectual awakening among the members of this community. Their literary works began as early as 1920s in the forms of journals, periodicals, novels and memoirs etc. One of the major themes of these writings was inculcation of nationality consciousness, by imbibing self-respect through the glorification of their ancient past, spread of western ideas of rationalism and through the growth of language and literature of their own. The intellectual awakening of the early 20th century molded the minds of the educated Boro to form a literary organization called the Bodo Literary Club. This organization was the precursor of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (1952), a literary organization of this community which gave leadership to the Boro language and script movements of the later years. In fact, it was the language movement that prepared the ground for the political movement of this community.

The Governments, particularly the State, has all along been apathetic and indifferent to the Boro problems. Instead of it being more understanding and accommodated, the Assam Government followed a policy of indifference and suppression which added to the suffering and estrangement of the Boros. The genesis of Boro conflict situation itself may be found in State Government’s unwillingness to enforce the laws enacted for the
protection of tribal lands within the Belts and Blocks. While being unwilling to acknowledge the responsibility of rendering administrative justice to the Boros, the State Government showed its favouritism by attempting to homogenize the culture of the majority, further revealing its indifference to the Boro sentiment. Following the same attitude, the Assam Government opposed the Roman script movement in favour of the Assamese. Though various developmental schemes like the Tribal Sub-Plan, Tribal Development Corporation, Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal Development Project and Welfare of Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes etc were undertaken, they were not executed in spirit and letter. As a result, the Boro socio-political organizations termed them “all farce”, not contributing anything substantive to the development of the Boros. The apathetic attitude of the State Government thus wore-off the chances of limiting the conflict arena, letting the Boro situation to the present proportion.

The subjective factor of Boro nationality consciousness became vibrant with the emergence and involvement of the Boro intellectuals in the process of consciousness building among the people of this community. As has been the case with other ethnic communities, the Boro intellectuals too played the role of a kick starter by opening schools, introducing reforms, bringing about awakening and inculcating nationality consciousness, through their literatures, speeches, social gatherings and conventions etc. Many of the early Boro intellectuals took up reformation by educating the people against the prevailing evil practices of the society and by spreading western education of science and rationalism, while others engaged themselves in literary activities, writing on the themes appealing to the

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340 Memorandum to the Three member Expert Committee on Bodo Issues, by ABSU and BPAC, dated 8th April, 1991, unpaged.
infant Boro nationality consciousness. By the end of the 20th century, the Boro intellectuals had gathered enough strength to be able to give representation to the Simon Commission demanding constitutional safeguard of tribal interests, particularly, their interest in land and in the forthcoming administrative setup proposed on the principles of self-government. In the post-Independence period, when situation grew adverse to the Boro interests, whether in land, language or politics, the Boro intellectuals mobilized the members into demanding separate entity on linguistic and political lines. They were the ones to form the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952, the All Bodo Student Union and the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam in 1967. The Boro intellectuals thus availed the existing objective situations to mobilize the members of this community for the linguistic and political movements.

The socio-economic and political grievances, left unattended for a prolonged period, accrued a sense of deprivation among the Boros. Absence of separate administrative unit, continued land alienation, Government apathy to Boro language and educational problems, backlogs in employment against reserved quotas and Government opposition to the language and political movement etc. made it appear to the Boros that the State Government was not willing to render administrative justice to them. In their observation, the State Government was partial, favouring the majority community at the cost of the minority communities. In the words of the ABSU and BPAC "But after the Independence, with the reorganization of Assam province, the constitution abiding Bodos became subject to untold discrimination in Assam under the leadership of chauvinistic Assamese elites and this domination is machinated by the state machineries. The Bodos as well as other tribes either Hills or Plains were victims of their systematic exploitation, discrimination and domination against the available provisions
of the Constitution..." The hostile fallout of the Assamese language movements of 1960 and 1972, and the communal riots caused by the foreign national agitation, in which, the agitators burnt down a large number of tribal villages, rendering thousands of them homeless and causing loss of lives to some hundreds created a sense of insecurity among the Boros and other tribal communities. The Assamese language and educational policies, on the other hand, created a fear of Assamese domination among the ethnic communities of both hills and plains, a fear that was shared by the Boros as well. These perceptions of sense of deprivation, insecurity and fear of Assamese domination largely influenced the Boros in their search for linguistic and political identities.

The Boros, having been in prolonged dormancy, awakened in the early decades of the 20th century to find themselves pushed into oblivion culturally, politically and otherwise. The Boro intellectuals of the early 20th century took up the task of reforming the society on western ideas of human equality and rationalism. Schools were opened in different parts of Boro areas and parents were forced to send their children to the schools. Reforms prohibiting irrational practices in the society were introduced through various socio-cultural organizations. While the ‘Boro Chatra Sanmelan’ (Boro Students’ Association, 1919) and the ‘Boro Maha Sanmelan’ (All Boro Convention) played significant role in the reform of the Boro society in the era, the ‘Bodo Club’ spearheaded the literary activities of the Boros. Thus began the process of nationality formation among the Boros.

In the pre-Independence era, apart from the socio-cultural organizations, their consciousness gave birth to the lone political

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341. Ibid, unpaged, the ‘Constitutional’ section.
organization the Tribal League in 1933. The objective of the Tribal League was to secure constitutional safeguard of their socio-economic and political rights from the Government. The Tribal League showed its immense political sagacity by form two coalition Governments in the pre-Independence Assam.

In the post-Independence era, the adverse objective conditions forced the Boros to move for separate identity on linguistic and political lines, giving new dimension to the Boro nationality consciousness. The question now was not only the constitutional safeguard of their rights but the perception of their very identity being threatened by the domination of the Assamese. The objective situations were provided by the Assamese language policies of 1960, 1972 and 1968, as well as, by Government apathy to the continued alienation of tribal land and authorities’ aversion to appointing tribal candidates against the reserved quota etc. Like the Kannadigas and Gujaratis under Bombay province, the Assamese, Biharis and Oriyas under Bengal province or the Telegus and Malayalis under Madras province, the Boros too began to move for their separation from Assam. They began mobilizing themselves on linguistic and political lines by forming the Boro literary organization the ‘Bodo Sahitya Sabha’ in 1952, the Plains Tribals’ Council of Assam, a political organization in 1967, and the other political organizations of the later years. They had their language introduced as the medium in the schools and colleges, including a separate department in the University, strengthening the ground for political demand. The Boros thus prepared the ground for ultimate separation from the Assamese, who, in their opinion, discriminated, deprived and dominated them. The Boro movement for autonomy is not an isolated case. It is a part of the all India ethno-linguistic movements, which began since the time of the British and is still continuing till date among various ethnic groups in
different parts of the country. It is a sub-nationalism movement like that of Kannadigas, Telegus, Gujaratis, Meghalayans, Mizos, Jharkhandis, Chattishgarhis, Uttarakhandese and others. Their ultimate objective is to secure a separate administrative apparatus of their own and to establish themselves as a distinct nationality among the people of the world.