CHAPTER I

ETHNICITY, AUTONOMY AND SUB-NATIONALISM VIS-À-VIS
BORO MOVEMENT FOR AUTONOMY:

In the recent years, ethnicity as an objective and subjective concept has become the central theme of analyzing the changing pattern of relationship between the ethnic groups, in a given power structure. Prior to 1960s, the expectation was that the rise of nationalism, within the modern state would create cohesive ethnic communities, defusing the ethnic cleavages. But the political phenomena of the 1970s and 80s proved this expectation wrong. In these two decades, ethnic mobilization did not decrease as expected, but began increasing in both developing and developed countries. Global survey also provides data supporting the proposition that development in the social communication and mobilization, accelerates the process of cultural awareness, as well as, aggravates the inter-ethnic conflict.¹

Scholars of ethnicity and nationalism have, over the years, attempted to define the term ethnicity, but it has remained complex and elusive as ever. The Western anthropologists have defined ethnic groups largely as biologically self-perpetuating communities sharing fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, and as having membership which identifies itself and is identified by others, as constituting a category that is distinguishable from other categories of the same order. The Soviet ethnographers have defined 'ethnos' (a community of people) as a

historically established community characterized by common relatively stable, cultural features and distinctive psychological traits and by an awareness of their identity and distinctiveness from other communities.

Some scholars have looked at ethnic groups as minority groups. For instance, Louis Wirth defines ethnic group in terms of minority group of a subordinate position, a group of people who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are single out for differential and unequal treatment and who, therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination. Similarly, Wagly and Harris have defined ethnicity as a minority group as suffering discrimination and subordination within a society; set apart by physical or cultural traits disapproved of by the dominant group; units with sense of collective identity and common burden, having membership that is determined by the socially invented rule of descent and characterized by marriage within the group. American social scientist Paul R Brass defines ethnic groups on three criteria, —in terms of objective attributes, with reference to subjective self-consciousness and in relation to behavior. The definition of objective attributes refers to the distinctive cultural feature or features, like language, religion, dress, food, race, territory etc. by which an ethnic group differs itself from others, bearing the fact in mind that these attributes are pervasive and invariably changeable. The definition of subjective self-consciousness ascribes to the phenomenal emergence of self-consciousness, by which an ethnic group asserts its existence, separateness, status etc. The behavioral definition refers to the distinctive and concrete ways in which an ethnic group behaves or does not behave in their intra and inter-ethnic relationship. As such, the behavioral definition is intrinsically related to the objective attributes of an ethnic group. Since objective

2. Ibid, p.5.
attributes are all pervasive and changeable, such distinctive segregation is possible only in as isolated an simple society.³

Ethnicity, in the definition of the social scientists, is a sense of ethnic identity, which David Brown interprets as an ideology, which individuals of an ethnic group use to safeguard themselves from the insecurities arising out of a given power structure they are in.⁴ Ethnicity is a state of self-consciousness of an ethnic group in which it uses the objective and subjective attributes, be it language, religion, dress, food, race, customs, etc. to create an internal cohesion, as well as, to differentiate itself from the other ethnic groups. An ethnic group that uses ethno-cultural symbols as the parameters for the differentiation, transits into self-conscious community. Such an ethnic group now lays down criteria for the inclusion into or exclusion from the group, such as descent, birth, sense of kinship etc. Other social scientists like Patterson, Parenjpe, Glazer, and Moynihan describe ethnicity as a complex phenomenon, a plastic, variegated and originally an assertive trait, which in certain socio-economic circumstances, is readily politicized. According to Jessel, ethnicity is a process in which both the primordial ethnic stimulants and the corresponding ethnic setting in the changing power structure play their respective roles. Patterson, on the other hand, considers it as a condition in which certain members of a society, in a given context, chose to identify themselves to certain assumed cultural notional or somatic traits.

The role of the variable attributes in the formation of an ethnic identity is not same in all context and situation. There is no specific or fixed variable for the articulation of an ethnic identity. In some cases, one variable

itself is sufficient to generate ethnic consciousness while in others; it may need two or more variables for the same. For in the case of Assamese, language alone has been the forceful variable of nationality formation, while in the case of the Boros, language and their culture have played significant roles.

ETHNICITY AND NATIONALITY FORMATION:

In the words of Paul R Brass, the first stage of nationality formation is the transformation of ethnic group into community. In his words, this is the stage of transformation in which a subjective self-conscious ethnic group becomes conscious of their language, religion, culture, tradition, race etc., depending on the context and situation. The symbolic meaning of the bonds of identity are intensified at this stage. Such as, language now no longer remains as a mere means of communication but becomes a priceless heritage, their religion no longer a matter of personal faith, but a bond of unity among the members, the historical sites of the past become the citadel of their freedom. In the second stage of its transformation, a subjective self-conscious community strives to articulate its consciousness for achieving various kind of demand from the Government, ranging from civil, educational to political. When a subjective self-conscious community succeeds in achieving and maintaining its political rights by mobilizing and undertaking political action of its own, it transforms itself into a nationality.

Scholars of ethnicity and nationalism, point out that in a multiethnic or pluralistic society, the state policy tends to benefit particular group or region more than other, creating a sense of deprivation among the ethnic groups failing to partake the benefits. In this context, state itself acts as a responder

---

5. Paul R Brass, op. cit, p. 22.
to the demands of an organized group or community, as well as, precipitator in the formation of new groups. The deprived group, once undergo awakening and mobilization, attains subjective self-consciousness. The emerging indigenous elites, who themselves are the products of the awakening; now mobilize the members of the community into a growing sense of solidarity, furthering it to the extent of major political demands. Social scientists, attempting to deduce definition, ascribe emergence of nationality to the perception of persistent sense of unequal distribution of resources, social benefits and opportunities among the ethnic communities.

However, the contemporary scholars on ethnicity and nationalism observe that mere existence of inequality alone is not sufficient to produce a nationalist upsurge among the ethnic communities. There are examples of nationalist uprisings even among the dominant ethnic communities. The objective existence or subjective perception of inequality is indispensable for the emergence of nationalism, but it is not in itself an explanation for it. Though every nationalist movement justifies itself in terms of existing or expected oppression, it is not the sole analysis to the rise of nationalism. In the words Myron Weiner, inequality, relative deprivation or status discrimination are not the actual precipitants of ethnic nationalism. But the root of the ethnic nationalism lay in the relative distribution of the ethnic groups in the competition for resources, social benefits and opportunities. The potential for ethnic nationalism exists where there is a system of ethnic stratification in which one ethnic group is dominant over the other. But this situation is usually not realized until some members come into competition with the elites of the rival group. Paul R Brass observes that “ethnic self consciousness, ethnically based demands and ethnic conflict can occur only

---

if there is some conflict either between indigenous and external elites and authorities or between indigenous elites. In the words of Mohan Lal Sharma, “regionalism is not something which is irregular and impulsive, but it is a cover or a plank through which the elites compete and fight for power.”

Ethnicity in India: Autonomy and Sub-Nationalism from National, Regional and Sub-Regional Perspectives:

1. National Perspective:

India, a vast geographical entity is inhabited by numerous ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious groups. As such, this diversity largely influences the nature and kind of ethnic cleavages and agitations in different parts of the country. This very existence of pluralistic society appeared to have influenced the makers of the nation-state of India to adopting more futuristic constitution by rejecting religion, language and other ethnic criteria. But within five years of adopting the Constitution, the provincial states had to be reorganized into language-based states to accommodate the growing aspirations of the major ethno-linguistic communities. Feasibility of creating language based states was more for those ethnic groups living compactly identifiable region or territories.

India, as stated earlier, is a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual nation-state and cherishes multiculturalism which it expects to percolate on the principle of ‘unity in diversity.’ In cognizance to this principle of multiculturalism, the Constitution proclaims guarantees to its

---

entire citizen social, political, economic, liberty of thought and expression, equality of status and opportunity etc. The fundamental rights engraved in the Part Three of the Constitution provides right to equality, right against the exploitation, right to freedom including freedom of religion, cultural and educational rights to all its citizens. The Article 29 (I) of the Constitution guaranties the linguistic minorities’ right to conserve their distinctive language, script and culture. This right of the minorities is re-enforced by the provision of the Article 30 (I) of the Constitution. The Article 30 (I) embodies provisions reaffirming the right of the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The Seventh Amendment act of 1956 enacted the article 350 A, which gives directives to every state to provide education to the linguistic minorities in their mother tongue in the Primary stage of education. The Article 350 B of the Amendment Act of 1956 empowers the President to appoint a special officer, known as Linguistic Minority Commission (LMC) to investigate and keep vigilance on the operation of the linguistic minorities. Besides, the Union Government constituted a Minority Commission in 1978 for overseeing the operation of the safeguards guaranteed by the Constitution to the religious and linguistic minorities.

The multilingual and multicultural principles of the Nation state of India is also reflected in the Part Seventeen of the Constitution, which professes to pursue multilingual policy in all spheres, be it in legislation, education, judiciary or administration. The Union Government, by the Official Language Act of 1963 and reinforced by the Official Language (Amendment) Act of 1968 retained English as an associate official language at the centre, while by the Article 351, the Union Government makes itself duty-bound to spread Hindi language in order to make it a lingua franca of the country. The Article 345, on the other hand, empowers the State
legislature to adopt one or more languages as official language or languages of the state.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are thus integral traits of Indian nationhood, which are however, not only symbolic segregations but also value-based concepts and ideologies, having power to mobilize people on those lines. It is this cognizance of the existence of linguistic minorities that has become indicative of their entity and their possible emergence into nationalities. In fact, not long before, the basic principle of India's multiculturalism, that is, 'unity in diversity' came under scanner for scores of time, under increasing 'sub-nationalism' or 'little nationalism.' There have been increasing emergence of sub or little nationalism, as it is often termed, in the regional and sub-regional level of the country.

(I). The Roots of Sub-Nationalism in India:

The multiplicity of languages, religions and castes made the British regard India as a non-nation entity. The colonial regime, guided by the principles of administrative convenience, randomly reorganized the territories of India into geographical provinces. Their adherence to the divide and rule strategy, discouraged the British from reorganizing the administration on the principles of linguistic provinces.

The forces which activated the Indian nationalist movement were also catalytic in the formation of nationalities on linguistic and regional lines. The colonial capitalism provided the necessary backdrop for both the processes. The British regime, in order to have a homogeneous market and a common language, felt it essential to undertake territorial expansion in large scale. It therefore, after having occupied the territories introduced uniform
administration. Then it introduced modernization and developments, which were however capitalized mostly by the relatively advanced cultural groups transpiring them into nationalities. The same process however left the incipient ethnic communities suppressed and dominated. The advance communities, not only dominated the backward nationalities, but also tried to absorb them into their fold. In the process many minor backward communities lost their identities, while others aware of the intension, resisted the absorption attempt and at times, even asserted themselves into a self-conscious nationality. The British idea of homogenizing the administration by constituting new provinces criss-crossing the cultural and geographical boundaries sowed the seeds of conflict among the ethnic communities. For instance, the territories of Marathas was divided to form parts of Bombay Presidency, Central Provinces, Hyderabad and small principalities in Deccan; the Andhra areas were made parts of Madras Presidency and Hyderabad; the Malayali territories divided between Madras and Travancore-Cochin principalities; the Oriyas trifurcated between Madras and Bengal Presidencies, as well as, in Central Provinces; while the Bengalis in Bengal and Assam. Such division and conglomeration of ethnic nationalities created conflict situation among the ethnic communities.

In India, the process of nationality formation reflected itself in many ways. It manifested itself in the growth of vernacular languages; in the agitations to establish particular languages as the official languages of particular areas and states; movements of recently awakened nationalities to break away from the advanced nationalities and establish themselves as the independent identities; movements of the ethnic groups for their reunification with the parent area, who were once divided into parts due to administrative reorganization and the movements of the ethnic groups who were still in the tribal stage of development but struggled against the
exploitation and encroachment of outsiders and to have provinces exclusively their own with all round power to minimize the exploitation and encroachment of the outsiders.\(^2\)

The genesis of visualizing India as a federation of autonomous provinces traces back to the dispatch of the British Government, dated 25\(^\text{th}\) August, 1911. Though the Government recognized the possibility of reorganizing the administration into ethno-linguistic provinces, it refrained from affecting immediate altercation on colonial consideration.\(^3\) As a result, despite repeated agitations, Bengali speaking Sylhet and Cachar remained as the parts of Assamese speaking state of Assam. The principle of linguistic provinces was recognized by the Indian National Congress as a means of tackling the problems arising out of multi-nationality character of the country. It also stated to have visualized federalism for India in which the federating units would be constituted on the basis of linguistic provinces. The Congress commitment to the principle of linguistic provinces first reflected in its opposition to the partition of Bengal. It reaffirmed its commitment by constituting the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee, a Congress unit for the ethno-linguistic Biharis, even much before the formation of the Bihar Province. Sylhet, a Bengali speaking district, remained under the Bengal Provincial Congress even after it was transferred from Bengal to Assam. The Congress gave official cognizance to the principle of linguistic provinces in its Calcutta session of 1917. However, the Congress actually incorporated it into its official policy only in the Nagpur session of 1920, where a resolution to this effect was passed expressing Congress commitment to the idea of dividing India into number of language-based provinces. Having given commitment to the principle, the

---


\(^3\) Ibid, p. 122.
Congress initiated formation of its regional units on the basis of linguistic areas. The overhaul in the policy of the Congress was primarily due to strong pressure from its Andhra Unit, which had been demanding separation from Madras province. The Nehru Committee, appointed by the All Party Conference in 1928, recognized the linguistic principle and advocated for the reorganization of the provinces into linguistic provinces. The Committee, taking cognizance of the demands for separation and formation of linguistic provinces, in the memoranda and representations given by the respective ethnic and nationality groups, identified a number of ethno-linguistic areas for the formation of linguistic provinces. The Committee identified linguistic areas such as the Assamese area, the areas of the Bengalis, Oriyas, Telegus, Tamils Kannares, Marathis, Gujaratis, Malayalis and the Sindhis etc.

Movements of ethno-linguistic nature first began among the Bengalis, Tamils and the Marathis of the three British presidencies. These port cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, where Bengalis, Marathis and Tamils had respective overwhelming majority, were not only the headquarters of administration, but also the centers of British trade and industries. As such, modernization and developments started in these cities much before the other areas, which facilitated nationality formation among the communities living therein. As a result, the Bengalis, Marathis and the Tamils emerged as advance communities, while other communities were still incipient or their nationality formation was in embryonic stage. Under such circumstances, the movements of the Bengalis, Marathis and the Tamils were often hegemonic, attempting to retain their socio-economic domination over the others. For instance, in Bengal Presidency, the Bengalis tried to maintain their socio-cultural hegemony by decrying the Assamese and Oriya languages as mere

variations of the Bengali language itself or in Bihar, they would like to retain their lion share in the job opportunities. Likewise, the Marathis would like to retain their socio-cultural hegemony over the Gujaratis, Kannadigas and Konkanis in Bombay Presidency. Similar was the attitude of the Tamils over the Telegus and Malayalis. Such socio-cultural and economic domination of the three advanced communities prevailed until they were challenged by the separatist movements of those communities.

Another form of movement in progress was for the reunification of the territories or areas which were divided into parts due to the reorganization of the administrative units by the British. For instance, the 'Swasdeshi Movement' launched during the anti-partition agitation in Bengal, which manifested not only the communal solidarity of the Bengalis but also mobilized a large portion of Indian population into nationalist movement. Following this trend, in Maharasta, a 'Samyukta Maharasta Movement' was launched for the reunification of all the Marathi cultural areas into a single province. This movement aimed at reunifying the Maratha areas of Nagpur-Vidharbha region which was brought under the Central Provinces by the British and the Marathawada region which was put under Hyderabad principality. While in Madras, the 'Dravida Movement' sought to unify all the branches of Dravidian race against the Hindi-speaking casteist Brahmanism. Similar kind of movement was launched by the Gujaratis of Saurastra-Kutch region for their unification with the parent areas. The Bengalis of Sylhet and Cachar also moved for their unification with Bengal. Thus began a host of movements which attempted to unify their areas with the parent region to form ethno-linguistic provinces of their own.

Another significant development of this era was the formation of communities into nationalities. The kick-start was given by the communities
living in the three British presidencies. For example, the movements among the Kannadigas and Gujaratis of the Bombay Presidency; among the Telegus and Malayalis of Madras Presidency and the Assamese, Oriyas and the Biharis of the Bengal Presidency. All these communities had number of grievances against the three dominant communities of their respective presidencies. They accused them of socio-cultural domination, economic deprivation and so forth. They therefore launched movements for their separation and for the formation of linguistic provinces of their own. Most of these movements began by the end decades of the 19th century. For instance, the Kannadigas formed the ‘Kannadiga Ekikaran Sangha’ in 1890 and launched movement for their separation from the Marathis till the creation of the then Mysore state in 1956. The Gujaratis formed the ‘Gujarat-Sabha’ in 1884, which later on launched the ‘Maha Gujarat Movement’ for the unification, as well as, for the separation from the Marathis of Bombay Presidency. Similarly, the Telegus of Madras Presidency formed the “Yuva Jana Samiti” in 1903, which transpired the idea of a separate state. Ultimately, the Telegus began their movement for a separate state from 1913 under the banner of the ‘Andhra Mahasabha’. Similar sentiment began emerging among the Assamese, Biharis and the Oriyas alike.

The process of nationality formation was not confined to the communities of three presidencies alone. It spread to the other parts of the country, mobilizing the ethnic communities to assert themselves into nationalities. The situations, whether objective or subjective, differed from community to community, as well as, the nature of their movements varied.

The Addivasi tribals of the Jharkhand and Chattishgarh region launched another type of movement against the exploitative rulers and against the encroachment by the non-tribal outsiders. The areas of these
ethnic communities were rich in forest and mineral resources which caused large scale encroachment into their land. The encroachment not only led to the exploitation of the resources, but also brought change in the demography destroying the compactness of the tribals. The Adivasi tribals have a long and obdurate history of movements against the exploitative rulers and encroachment of outsiders. Many of these movements took place as early as the end decades of the 18th century itself. However, it was only in 1930 that Jaipal Singh, a Munda Christian, formed the 'All India Adivasi Mahasabha' an umbrella organization of the ethnic groups, which resisted British domination and encroachment by the non-tribal outsiders. Later, as the level of consciousness grew, the Jharkhand Party was formed and an organized political movement for the formation of a separate state for the Adivasis was launched.

2. Regional Perspective of Sub-Nationalism:

A region is a contextual notion referring to an area defined by certain specific criterion or criteria, geographical, cultural, political or administrative. In the context of India, a state or province is referred to as a region by the social scientists.

Though movement for the reorganization of provinces on linguistic principle was well afoot, after the Independence, the Congress Government retained the British provinces as the regional administrative units. The Indian National Congress however remained committed to the principle of linguistic provinces. It reaffirmed its commitment in the pre-Independence election manifesto of 1945-46, wherein it promised to reorganize the administration on the principle of linguistic provinces if voted to the power. However, the Congress, having formed the Government under the leadership
of Jawaharlal Nehru, found itself overwhelmed by things of priorities. Of all, integration of the Indian states, which was expected to precede the reorganization, posed itself as a formidable task before the Congress. As a result, when some members of the Constituent Assembly pressed hard for the implementation of the linguistic provinces, Nehru differed. He preferred to give the matter low priority, but constituted a Commission with delegated power to examine and recommend on the feasibilities of linguistic provinces. Accordingly, the Dar Commission was instituted under the chairmanship of Justice Dar. The report of the Dar Commission recommended against the formation of linguistic provinces on the grounds that the formation of linguistic provinces would undermine the national awareness and that it would hinder the development of a national language. The adverse report of the Dar Commission created widespread discontentment among the Congress members of the units. The discontented members brought the matter to the Congress Working Committee (CWC) for reconsideration. Consequently, the CWC formed another Commission under chairmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru assisted by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and P Sitaramaya as members. The Commission, in the report, recommended for the postponement of the issue of linguistic provinces for a few years, so that the Government could concentrate on the matters of vital importance. The Commission however decided to differ in case of Andhra demand, leaving it to the wisdom of the Government and the parties concerned. The Congress still declined to give itself to the idea of linguistic provinces. This could be seen from the content of the CWC resolution of 1949, on Karnataka which expressed Government’s unwillingness to affect an administrative change of that magnitude at that time.  

The adverse report of the Commission dissuaded the Constituent assembly from making a concrete proposal on the issue of linguistic provinces. Later however, under the pressure of popular movement and discontentment among the members of the provincial units, the Government was forced announce the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1953, under the Andhra Pradesh Act of 1953. The creation of Andhra Pradesh opened the flood gate to the movement for the formation of linguistic states. Movements for linguistic states began pouring from various parts of the country. In Andhra itself, the Telenganas demanded for the separation of their region from the Telegus. The Telenganas accused the Telegus of economic deprivation and socio-cultural domination. As the demands for linguistic provinces continued pouring from different parts of the country, the Central Government could not but institute yet another commission, known as the State Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1955. The Commission, consisting of Syed Fazi Ali, H N Kunzru and K M Panikar was to examine the issue of reorganizing the provinces on linguistic principles, as well as, other considerations related to it. The Commission examined 152,250 documents, including memoranda and interviewed about 9000 persons. The report was published in 1955, which recommended formation of linguistic provinces with specific reference to Kerela and Karnataka. The State Reorganization Act was passed in 1956, under which a number of linguistic states were created according to the recommendation of the SRC report. The Commission however differed in case of North-Eastern region. According to the recommendation and under the State Reorganization Act of 1956, as many as 14 states and 6 Union Territories were created. Till 2000, total number of state rose to 28 and that of Union Territories to 7. But

---

reorganization of the state has not yet been complete as demands of many
linguistic communities are yet to be attended to. The unattended
communities are continuing the struggle for separate administrative units till
date. Hence the movement for redrawing the political boundary of regions
continues unabated.

3. Sub-Regional Perspective of Sub-Nationalism:

Another development of the recent years is the sub-regional
movements launched on the linguistic and cultural lines, within the states
already reorganized under the State Reorganization Act of 1956. It is termed
sub-regional because the movement involves a part of a region or in the
Indian context, a part of a state. Sub-regional is a relative term, having
physical, cultural and other characteristics of a region but without a political
status. It is an area within the boundary of a state where a particular cultural
group distinct from the dominant group is concentrated and aspires for autonomy. 19

Sub-regionalism, like regionalism is a value-based concept, an
ideology having power to mobilize people into ethnic solidarity and further
into a political entity. It is a feeling of attachment and belonging of the
people, born out of their age-old association with the area they had been
living in. The members of the ethnic community venerate it as their mother
land and adore it as the abode of their fore-fathers. This attachment gives
rise to a strong emotional feeling for the area they live in. Besides, the intra-
ethnic solidarity is built up by other primordial variables, like language,
religion, race, tribalism etc. The lop-sided policies of the national and
regional Governments often act as the catalysts to the process of

mobilization and assertion of such ethnic communities. Thus the sub-regionalism, which is often referred to as sub-nationalism or “little nationalism” is molded.

Sub-regional movement is the continuation of all India ethnic and linguistic movement which has now galvanized once incipient ethnic minorities into self-conscious nationalities. These movements have occurred within the states already reorganized under the State Reorganization Act of 1956, mainly because many of these states still remained heterogeneous linguistically and culturally. For instance, on 26th January 1950, the northeastern region was constituted into the State of Assam and union territories of Manipur and Tripura. The entire region had about 217 scheduled tribe groups besides the plainsmen. In the new administrative set up, the Assamese, by their relative advancement and larger population maintained hegemony over other ethnic communities of the state. But their linguistic and political hegemony began to be challenged by the emerging ethnic nationalities. The first toll was taken by the Nagas whose district was conferred statehood in 1963, under the pressure of popular movement. The Assamese themselves created the objective conditions by adopting anti-tribal language and educational policies from time to time. The movements of the ethnic communities were so intense that the Centre was forced to create states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura between 1971 and 1972, reducing the areas of Assam to the present size. However, the movement for the creation of linguistic states has still been carried on in Assam by newly emerging ethnic communities like the Boros,

Karbis and etc. The creation of Jharkhand, Chattishgarh and Uttaranchal were the ultimate outcomes of similar movements.

(A). Sub-Regional Movements in North-East India:

During the British regime, the Government of India Act 1935 gave constitutional recognition to the exclusive character of the tribals by dividing their areas into the Excluded, Partially Excluded and Frontier Areas. Though the Governor of Assam was vested with authority over these areas, he exercised his powers only as an agent of the Governor-General. In 1945, the Government contemplated introduction of local self-government in the hill areas and directed P. F. Adams to look into the feasibility. The objective behind the contemplation was to "secure advancement by peaceful and progressive administration, the growth of democratic spirits among them and the equipment of the hill people to play their part in any larger unities of which they would form a part." Apart from P. F. Adams, a number of British officials put forward their proposals in matters of forming self-governing institution for the tribals of the region. While Adams recommended for the constitution of a tribal council, the others suggested for the formation of a separate North Eastern Frontier Province for the tribals of the region. The British desire for the establishment of local self-government for the tribals reflected itself in the report of the Cabinet Mission which suggested for the formation of an ‘Advisory Committee’ on the ‘Rights of Citizen, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas.’ Sir Stafford Cripps suggested for the formation of an influential committee to make proposals for the administration of the tribal areas. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly set up an Advisory Committee, which on its part, appointed a Sub-Committee, known as the North-East Frontier (Assam)

Tribal an Excluded Areas Committee with Gopinath Bordoloi as its Chairman. When the Bordoloi Sub-Committee visited the areas of the hill tribals, they submitted memoranda putting forward their proposals for self-governing institutions in their respective areas. The Khasis and Jaintias, the Lushais, the Garos, the Mihirs and the people of the North Cachar hills came up with the proposals of their choices. The Nagas however differed by aspiring to attain independent of their own. On the basis of the contents of the memoranda of the tribes, the Bordoloi Sub-Committee recommended for the formation of district and regional councils with considerable administrative, executive and financial powers. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly translated the recommendations of the Bordoloi Sub-Committee into the formulation of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. In 1952, district councils, mostly based on linguistic and cultural principles, were created in the hill areas under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. These district councils, created mainly to mitigate the needs and expectations of the ethno-linguistic communities, became the foundation of linguistic provinces of the later years.

After the Independence, the North-Eastern region was constituted into the state of Assam and union territories of Manipur and Tripura. The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills district councils were amalgamated into one district and put under Assam. Mizoram and Nagaland were also incorporated into Assam as districts.

The post-Independence movement for autonomy began with the demand for a single state for all the hill areas of the region. Members of the district councils soon realized that the provisions of the Sixth Schedule were not adequate enough to mitigate the expectations and aspirations of the hill tribes. The Executive Members of the Garo hills, Khasi and Jaintia hills, the
Lushai and North Cachar hills met in Shillong under the Chairmanship of B. M. Roy, the CEM of Khasi and Jaintia hills on 16th June 1954. The meeting was called for mainly to discuss two important matters; that is, formation of a separate hill state for the hill areas and the amendment of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. In the meeting, Captain Williamson Sangma, the CEM of Garo hills district council expressed his strong advocacy in support of the hill state demand. Strengthening his argument, Captain Sangma pointed out the inadequacy of the Sixth Schedule in protecting the identity, language and culture from the growing Assamese language nationalism, which had manifested itself in the policies of the Asom Jatiya Maha Sabha or in the statement of Nilmoni Phukan, made in the Legislative assembly in 1948, advocating in favour of Assamese as the state language. Though the CEMs of the Lushai Hills and North Cachar Hills did not support Sangma’s view, a resolution deciding to demand a separate state covering an area of 27599 sq. miles was passed.23 The second conference was held at Tura on 6th October, 1954, where a resolution resolving to submit a memorandum to the State Reorganization Commission, demanding a separate for the hill areas was passed. Besides, different organizations of the ethnic nationalities also submitted memoranda to the State Reorganization Commission. However, the State Reorganization Commission appeared to have approached “the problem of Hill State with prejudiced mind.”24 As a result, though the Commission recognized the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual character of the region, it failed to recommend for the creation of linguistic states.

When the move for a separate hill state was already gaining ground, the Asom Sahitya Sabha raised the demand for the introduction of Assamese

---

23 Ibid, p. 337.
as the state language adding fuel to the movement. The B. P. Chaliha Government, under the pressure of the Assamese intellectuals, introduced Assamese as the Official Language of the state in 1960. There was tremendous opposition to the language bill in all the hill districts except in the Mikir and North Cachar Hills. On the 14th October 1960, the Council of Action decided to organize processions, public meetings and hartals at Shillong, Aizwal, Tura and if possible at Haflong. It also decided to observe 24th October as a protest day and constituted a delegation to go to Delhi. The third conference of the APHLC was held on 16th November 1960, at Haflong with Jayabhadrab Hagzer as the Chairman. The conference demanded separation from Assam and decided to send a delegation to the Prime Minister in this connection. Accordingly, a delegation was sent in November 1960. In 1962, when the Chinese invaded North East India, the APHLC suspended the agitation and accepted membership of the War Committee. This was resented by the members of the Mizo Union. They wanted the APHLC to take advantage of the situation in getting its demands conceded from the Government. When the APHLC refused to change its decision, the discontented members of the Mizo Union broke away from the former. However, Assamese could not be introduced in the hill areas as the state language due to timely intervention of the Prime Minister. But the Assamese language movement of 1960 created fear of Assamese domination among the non-Assamese ethnic nationalities.

1. Formation of Meghalaya:

Once the Mizo Union broke away from the APHLC, the movement for a single hill state became the movement of the leaders of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills alone. The leaders of the North Cachar and Mikir hills had already expressed their preference to the amendment of the Sixth
Schedule rather then a separate hill state. However, the APHLC leaders of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills carried on their movement for a separate hill state.

In January 1963, the Government of India announced its decision to reorganize the state of Assam on federal structure. The Federal Plan also known as the Nehru Plan, aimed at granting equal status to the hill areas under the state of Assam itself. It contemplated to dividing the subjects of common interests between the state and the hill areas which would be parts of the federation. The APHLC welcome the proposal and decided to partake in the federation. After the death of Nehru in 1964, his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri appointed the Pataskar Commission to examine and recommend on the Nehru Plan. However, the recommendation of the Pataskar Commission was rejected by the APHLC on the ground that it adopted partisan attitude in favour of the state Government and that some of the recommendations fell short of the Plan for full autonomy outlined by the late Prime Minister. Thereafter, it resumed its movement for the Separate hill state. In 1966, the Council of Action made preparations for launching a non-violent Satyagraha. As situation built up, the Government of India initiated a talk between the representatives of the Centre, State and the APHLC. In the mean time, the APHLC gave a representation to the Home Minister and discussed on the possible alternative of reorganizing Assam. The Council of Action decided to abstain from the tripartite talk initiated by the Centre and announced its firm stand on launching movement in case the Government failed to honour the commitment of reorganizing Assam on federal structure. The joint discussion, held without the representatives from the APHLC, constituted the Mehta Committee, with a responsibility of finding an amicable solution to the political problem of the hill tribes. The

Mehta Committee recommended for granting maximum autonomy on the ethno-linguistic lines. The Government of India placed the report before the APHLC. The APHLC rejected it on the grounds that the recommendations attempted to break the unity of the tribes and that the recommendations would also tie them to the chariot wheel of the Assam government.

When series of plans and talks failed, the responsibility of taking final decision was left to the Prime Minister. On the 14th May 1968, Home Minister Y.V. Chauhan indicated a plan for the creation of an autonomous hill state which would be separated from Assam except for a few subjects of mutual interests. The autonomous state was to be granted extensive autonomy and Assam was to have no say except for the subjects of common interests. The autonomous state was to be consisted of the Khasi and Jaintia and the Garo Hills Districts. The Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts were also given the option. The APHLC, met on 19th September 1968, decided to suspend the agitation and appointed a committee to examine the merits and demerits of the Plan. The report of the committee was discussed in October 1968 and it was resolved to give a fair trial to the Plan. The bill for the creation of the autonomous state of Meghalaya was passed in December 1969, and April 1970, the autonomous state was inaugurated. The Mikir and North Cachar Hills decided to exclude themselves from the new state.

However, acceptance of the autonomous state created intra-party conflict in the APHLC. A faction of the Conference was not willing to accept anything less than a full-fledged state. The dissident members formed a new party called the Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP). The APHLC, finding itself in a precarious situation, raised the demand for a full-fledged statehood for Meghalaya. In September 1970, the State Legislative
Assembly passed a resolution requesting the Central Government to upgrade Meghalaya into a full-fledged state. In November 1970, the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi informed the Parliament about Government’s decision to grant full-fledged statehood to Meghalaya. Accordingly, after the completion of the Parliamentary procedures, the State of Meghalaya was brought into existence on 21st January, 1972.

2. Formation of Nagaland:

The movement for a separate Naga homeland began when in June 1947, the Nagas for the first time demanded separation of their district from the Indian Union. The demand for the separation was however not unanimous. They were divided mainly in three groups in this respect. One group favoured immediate separation from India and declaration of Independence of their own, the second group desired to continue under the Indian Union till it was able to take over the administration, while the third group wanted Nagaland to remain under British for a period of ten years. In 1947, the Naga National Council (NNC) sent a delegation to Lord Mountbatten suggesting that the Government of India might remain as the guardian power of the Naga Hills for a period of ten years, after which the Nagas would decide their future political status by themselves. This view was reiterated when the Bordoloi Committee visited Kohima on 20th May 1947. Following the trail of this development, Sir Akbar Hydari, the then Governor of Assam, concluded a nine point agreement, popularly known as the Hydari Agreement, with the NNC on 27th June 1947. But the 9th point of the Agreement, which stated that the Governor of Assam, as the agent of the Indian Union, would have special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this Agreement, and that at the end of this period the NNC would be asked whether to or not extend the Agreement for
further period. Controversy arose over the interpretation of this point. The Government of India interpretation was that after the end of ten years, the Nagas would be free to opt for the kind of autonomy or administration they wanted under the Indian Union itself; whereas, the NNC members interpreted that at the end of the stipulated period, they would be free to declare Independence of their own. When none of their proposals were materialized, the NNC, under the leadership of Phizo, declared Independence of its own on 14th August 1947. In 1951, Phizo became the president of the NNC after his release from the jail. Same year, he conducted a plebiscite where thousands of Nagas voted for independence. Between 1954 and 1956, the NNC activists launched their armed struggle causing bloodshed in the Naga Hills. In 1956, the NNC constituted a parallel Government, known as the Naga Federal Government. The situation so bad that army had to be called in to deal with the NNC activists. The constant presence of the army and their counter operation forced the moderate NNC members to organize a Naga Peace Organizing Committee in the same year. The Peace Committee appealed to the people to abandon the path of violence. The church leaders joined in the campaign for peace. In the following years, the Peace Committee organized several conventions of representatives of different tribes and areas. The first Naga People’s Convention, held at Kohima on 22nd August 1857 where as many as 1765 delegates and over 20001 visitors representing every tribes and areas were present. The convention resolved expressing Naga people’s willingness to remain under the Indian Union however suggested amalgamation of Naga Hills district of Assam and the Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA into a single administrative unit. The Naga demand was accepted and in the same year, the Naga Hills Tuensang Area was created. The third Naga People’s Convention, held in October 1959, resolved to demand for separate state of

Nagaland within the Indian Union, under the Ministry of External Affairs. The Presidential Promulgation of 24th January 1961 brought a forty-five member elected Interim Body to act as an Advisory Council to the Governor in the administration of the Naga Hills Tuensang Areas. In 1962, the state of Nagaland Act was passed and the state was inaugurated by the President on December 1, 1963. Thus the state of Nagaland was brought into existence in 1962.

3. Formation of Mizoram:

When India attained Independence, the Mizos also decided to join the Indian Union for one reason. The emerging Mizo intellectuals thought that the so called Mizo independence would mean continuation of the traditional institution of the chieftainship, depriving them from the political opportunities. Therefore, the Mizo leaders, in a meeting held at Aizwal on August 14th 1947, expressed their willingness to join the Indian Union for a stipulated period of ten years. Immediately after the accession, the Mizo Union had a historic conference on October 6, 1947, where a charter demanding abolition of chieftainship was prepared and submitted to the Government. The Assam Government however hesitated to take such drastic action against the traditional institution of the Mizos. In 1948, the Mizo Union therefore launched a civil-disobedience movement demanding abolition of the chieftainship. The agitation turned into riot. The chiefs were assaulted and their properties destroyed. They were pacified only when in January 1949 Government promised to set up Sixth Schedule at an early date. Accordingly, district council was constituted, election was held and the council was formed.
However, the Mizos soon discovered the deficiencies of the district council. It fell short of the expectations and aspirations of the emerging Mizo intellectuals. The district council had no constitutional power to stop the introduction of Assamese as the state language, nor could check the illegal intrusion of the outsiders into their territories. Hence the Mizo Union joined the APHLC in demanding a separate state for the hill tribes. But in 1962, the Mizo Union broke away from the APHLC over the controversy of abstaining from direct action during the Indo-Chinese war. While the Mizo Union leaders were in favour of taking direct action during the war period, the APHLC leaders suspended the agitation and accepted membership of the War Committee. After the split, the Mizo Union moved independently for a separate state of its own.

In the mean time, Landenga came to the forefront of the Mizo politics. The Mautam Famine of 1959-60 gave him an opportunity to project himself as a potential leader. After the famine, he converted the Mizo National Famine Front into political party called the Mizo National Front (MNF) on 28th October, 1961. It was easy for Landenga to mobilize the Mizo youths on radical line. Particularly, the idea of an independent and greater Mizoram was appealing to the Mizo youths. When political campaign failed the MNF volunteers took up arms. The India–Pakistan War opened up opportunities for Laldenga to establish friendship with Pakistan. Throughout the February 1966, the MNF volunteers attacked Government establishment, kept the Deputy Commissioner in detention and virtually took control of the district. The situation became so tense that the district was handed over to the army. They began offensive operations, moving into the villages to hunt the MNF volunteers. The MNF volunteers, including Laldenga himself, fled to Pakistan. The struggle however continued even after Laldenga had fled the country.
The Pataskar Commission recommended creation of a Union Territory out of the Lushai Hills District. In July 1971, the Government of India approved the Pataskar proposal. The leaders of the Lushai Hills District welcome the proposal. Ultimately, on July 21, 1972, despite strong opposition from the Assam Government, the Mizo Hills District was converted into a Union Territory. The post-Independence Mizo politics took yet another significant turn when a historic accord was signed in June 1986, between Laldenga and the Government of India. According to the terms of the Mizo Accord of 1986, statehood was conferred on Mizoram in return of Laldenga’s denunciation of his demand for an independent and greater Mizoram.

The above examples amply point to the fact that the North-Eastern region has a long and obdurate history of autonomy movement on ethno-linguistic lines. Some of these movements began even before the Independence of the country, and is still continuing among the lesser ethnic communities of the region. The obduracy of movement ultimately caused break up of the region into ethno-linguistic states. By 1974, Assam was split into five political units namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. However, the autonomy movement on linguistic principle is still continuing, particularly, in multilingual and multicultural state of Assam where a large number of ethnic communities are accommodated. The Boros and the Karbis have been moving for their separation from Assam for the last several decades.

Sub-regional movement is invariably associated with ethno-linguistic or religious communities. As such, the variables of ethnicity and nationalism defined by the social scientists are active in the rise of sub-
regional movements too. The two categories of variables or conditions associated with the ethno-linguistic or sub-regional movements, referred to by the social scientists may be mentioned as under:

4. **Objective Variables:**

1. Existence of an ethnic community, concentrated in a defined geographical area within the state who are more or less isolated from the other ethnic communities.

2. They have distinctive markers, like language, religion, race, and tribalism, their ways of life which distinguish them from the dominant community of the state.

3. They are minority in the state by their ethnicity.

4. They are discriminated socially, economically, educationally and politically by the dominant group.

5. The area is backward despite advancement in other parts of the state. It is a victim of uneven economic development and unequal distribution of resources. Administrative policies of the State Government are often lop-sided leaving the community out of the perview of the developmental programs.

5. **Subjective Variables:**

1. Modernization makes the members of the community conscious of the distinctiveness. Continued mobilization mobilizes the members into communal solidarity furthering into an assertion for separate identity independent of the dominant group.

2. A sense of deprivation, insecurity, fear of being dominated by the majority communities grow among the minority communities.
(3). Increase in the social communication and mobilization raises the level of their expectations and aspirations, widening the gap between their real position and their expectations. A balance of which can be struck only by raising the political status of the region.

STATE AND THE SUB-REGIONAL MOVEMENT:

According to David Brown, the explanation of ethnic politics must begin with the explanation of the state's influence upon the power structure. The concept of the state refers to the Government and administrative institutions of a society, and the ideological claim of sovereignty through those institutions.\(^{27}\) In the group pluralist perspective, state is regarded as a neutral arena of interest group conflict. The results of such conflicts are that the state adopts policies, distributes resources or creates agencies mostly relevance to particular categories of population, depriving the others. Those policies, resources and agencies themselves then become catalysts for further interest group formation. The state, in the group pluralist approach is thus seen as both a responder to the demands of organized groups in the society and as a precipitator in the formation of new groups, including ethnic groups.\(^{28}\)

The view that state is an instrument of class or cultural domination, shared by the group pluralist theorists, is originally formulated by Marxists and neo-Marxists. In the classical Marxist view, the state is not only partial, but also an instrument of one class, that is, bourgeoisie, which they use in their struggle against the proletariat. It is an organ of oppression of one class by another. The neo-Marxists theorists have however modified the classical

---

\(^{27}\) David Brown, op. cit. Pp. 1-3

Marxist view responding to the fact that the modern industrial and non-Communist states are not simply a product of the class struggle. They are the fields of power balance and conflict resolution of multiple group interests. They argue that under present conditions, ethnic struggle are more persuasive and salient than class struggles. The reasons behind the conflicts are the differential distribution of the state resources and valued employment opportunities among the ethnic groups. In the process, one cultural or ethnic group monopolies power, controls the state apparatus, and dominates over other cultural or ethnic groups who are admitted to participation in their own governance in a limited way, if at all given. The state as a responder and a precipitator of the interest group conflict, or as a differential distributor of the state resources and employment opportunities, thus play direct and indirect roles in the maintenance and mobilization of ethnic groups.

In the context of sub-regional movements in India, it is the federating states that play the ascribed roles necessary for the ethnic conflicts and assertions. This is because despite reorganization on linguistic criterion, under the State Reorganization Act of 1956, many of these states could not be made homogenous. They remained multiethnic and multilingual, in which, domination of minority communities by the majority community reoccurred. Prevalence of this objective condition inevitably spurted ethnic conflicts and sub-regional movements, for curving separate administrative units out of the already reorganized states of the Indian Union. The states Governments, by their differential policies further multiply the objective conditions, widening ethnic cleavages. They adopt policies which tend to favour the majority ethnic group in resource distribution, employment opportunities, education, legislation, developmental programmes, wooing their good-will and support, which is

much sought by the leaderships in the power. The same policies however accrue negative results for the ethnic minorities, often becoming reasons for their discrimination, deprivation and domination. One of the policies, which have significant bearings on the ethnic minorities and their upsurges, is the policy of cultural-homogenization, often percolated through a policy of unilingualism. The states, empowered by the Article 345 of the Constitution, choose one or more languages of the majority community for administration, education, judiciary and legislation etc. This policy of the states often has grave consequences. Particularly, after the reorganization of the states on linguistic consideration, language has become the sole parameter of sub-regional movements. Adoption of the language of the majority community as the official language has caused not only practical difficulties for the minority communities but it has also acted as a resonant to their emotive feelings. Without proficiency in the language of the majority community, it became difficult for the minority communities to partake in the administration, education and employment etc. Continuance of English as an associate official language has, to some extent, been punctuating the problems of the ethnic minorities. The minority communities are however apprehensive of possible displacement of English by the language of the majority community completely, which will amount to cultural subjugation by the majority. Situation will then ensue an unequal competition of greater degree between the majority and minority communities, in which, the later will find their language, culture, economy and identity subdued and threatened.

The states, on the other hand, are in apprehension that the Centre, having procured constitutional sanction, may rightfully undertake steps for the spread of Hindi, replacing the existing link language English, within earliest possible time. Particularly, the non-Hindi speaking states fear that
the possible use of Hindi as the link language may undermine the official languages of the states.\(^{30}\) This apprehension has already fueled the states to adopting language policies of their own which they implement in all the spheres of states' functionaries. The assertion of the states has further been strengthened by the recommendation of the Education Commission of 1966, which authorizes the states to use the official language in the educational institutions and for legislations, administration and judiciary etc.\(^{31}\) Even for the employment in the state services, proficiency in the official language of the province became an essential requirement. Basing on the Article 309 of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the states have also organized their respective State Service Commission for the recruitment of cadres in the state services. Even for this highest rank of state recruitment, proficiency in the official language of the state is made compulsory.

The homogenization policy of the states causes cultural decimation, political subjugation and economic deprivation of the minorities by the majority communities. Under such circumstances, a section of the society, having undergone modernization, mobilize the people into communal solidarity, furthering it into political campaign for separate administrative unit of their own, where they expect to develop themselves according to their need and capacity without any undue interference from others.

The state policy of homogenization generates varied response from the minority communities, depending on their degree of cultural awareness, socio-political consciousness, size and concentration of their population, and the geographical location of the area of their habitation. Accordingly, some minority groups tend to become assimilative, some segregative, some

---

\(^{30}\) Soehmoy Chakiader, op. cit. p. 2.

pluralists, while others separatists or secessionists. The assertion of the minorities also depends on the attitude of the majority community. If they are intolerant and authoritarian, the minority groups, in a democratic set up, tend to be either segregative or secessionists, while an accommodative attitude creates congenial atmosphere for pluralism.

BORO AUTONOMY MOVEMENT FROM ETHNIC AND SUBREGIONAL PERSPECTIVE:

The Boros, who form one of the constituent communities of Assam plains, began their ethnic movement in the early decades of the 20th century. Like any other ethnic movement, the Boro movement too began with cultural and intellectual awakening, which was then followed by political movement of the later years. The Boro movement is ethnic and sub-regional in character. It was the ultimate outcome of the existing objective conditions and emerging subjective self-consciousness.

A. OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS:

(I) The Boros are the Aborigines of Assam:

Scholars, basing on the existing physical evidences and stray references made in the ancient literatures, consider the Boros as the earliest known inhabitants of the North East Indian region. The Boros themselves have no written records in support of this argument. However, referring to the physical evidences, particularly, the names of the rivers bearing Boro prefix 'Di' or 'Doi', the Boro word for water, and basing on the linguistic affinities of scores of tribes with the Boros, scholars like Rev. S Endle, Sir
Edward Gait, A G Grierson and S K Chattarjee etc. have considered them to be the "most numerous", "the oldest inhabitants" and "the aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley." Dr. S K Chattarjee, who has done extensive studies of the Kiratas of Mahabharata fame, identifies the Kiratas of ancient Assam, with the Boros. The kingdom of Tripura, which was ruled by the kings of the Boro race also found mention as the 'Eastern Kiratas' in the Sanskrit literatures of the Epic Era. On the same criteria of linguistic affinities and physical evidences, A G Grierson has identified the places of Boro habitation, which were located almost in all the parts of the North-East Indian region.

The Boros founded powerful kingdoms, at different times, in different places of North-East India. In the pre-historic period, that is, in the 7th century A. D., they founded the Kamrupa kingdom under Bhaskara Barman, whose inhabitants were found to be of short stature and yellow complexion, having affinities with the tribes of South-West China. This observation conforms to Captain Fisher’s reference to Kamrupa as the original seat of Boro kingdom. In the historical period, that is, in the 13th century A D, after the advent of the Ahoms the Boros were still the rulers over several kingdoms. The eastern Boros ruled over the Chutia kingdom, the western Boros established the powerful Koch kingdom in western Assam, while the southern Boros founded their kingdoms in Cachar and Tripura. The rampant the Cachar kingdom lasted till it was annexed by the British in 1854, while the king of Tripura joined the Indian Union after

having signed the Instrument of Accession in 1949. These evidences of Boros being aborigines and rulers over large part for centuries provide them historical and political base for their movement. If prolonged habitation is the qualifying criterion for being the 'sons of the soil', the Boros would not have lesser claim than any other aborigines of the region.

(II). Distinctive Markers: Race, Language, Religion etc:

Every ethnic group has its distinctive markers or identity symbols like race, language, religion, culture etc., by which members of the group differentiate themselves and maintain their separateness from other ethnic groups. A subjective self-conscious ethnic group not only becomes aware of these distinctive markers but also intensifies their meanings and values for the mobilization of the members into communal solidarity. Unless an ethnic group is assimilated completely by a dominant group, these distinctive symbols serve as the life-lines for the survival and emergence of an ethnic group into a social and political community.

(a). Racial Origin:

As an ethnic group, the Boros too have distinctive markers of their own which have been the identity symbols and the life-lines in the face of centuries of assimilation. Racial origin has been one of the fundamental segregative markers which identify the separateness of this community from the majority Assamese community. The Boros belong to the Indo-Mongoloid origin, whose original abode was North-Western part of China, the Tibet of ancient times. Till the recent times, the racial origin of this community has been an assumed conclusion. However, the recent researches, which have been detailed in the next chapter, have scientifically
proved Indo-Mongoloid origin of the Boros. Race or ethnic origin is one of the distinctive markers which an ethnic group uses to differentiate itself from other groups. As such, ethnic movements are essentially racial and ethnocentric in character. In the case of the Boros too, racial origin, as a distinctive marker of differentiation has been active all along. It is not for nothing the programmes of the Boro movements, whether linguistic or political, invariably aimed at protecting and promoting the 'distinctive cultures and traditions' of the community, which they have inherited as the population of a particular race, and by which they maintain their separateness from the Assamese or from the communities of other origins.

(b). Language:

The Boro language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, has been the strongest and the most distinctive identity marker of the Boro ethnic group. It has also been the most vibrant life-line of the community which survived even centuries of assimilation. In fact, language has been the single-most mobilizing symbol of Boro move for awakening. The Boro nationality consciousness itself began with Boro intellectuals' move to preserve and promote their language, along with other traits of their culture. The Boro society underwent a process of assimilation since 7th century A.D, in which, a large part of the community population was transformed into Assamese speaking Hindus. However, despite professing Hinduism, larger part of the community did not give up their cultures and traditions, of all the language. Existence of the language, distinctive from that of the majority group, enabled the early Boro intellectuals to use language as the citadel of their awakening movement. In fact, the political
movement of this community was preceded by the language movement. The Boro awakening movement took more organized form, when in 1952, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, a literary organization was formed. Then came in 1963, the introduction of the Boro language as the medium of instruction in the schools, followed by its up-gradation to the university level in the later years. Recognition of the Boro language as the Associate Official Language in 1985 or inclusion in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution were the ultimate outcome of Boro struggle for independent linguistic identity of their own. Thus the fact that the Boros had been having a distinctive language of their own greatly helped the community in mobilizing itself into a self-conscious nationality.

(c). Religion:

A brief discussion on the society and religion has been done in the next chapter in a way of giving introduction of this community. It would therefore be sufficient to state here that the Boros have a religion which stands out as a distinctive marker and identity symbol of this community. Unlike the religions of the tribes around, the Boro religion ‘Bathousim’ has a religious philosophy of its own and thus it is far from being animistic. It ascribes to simple rituals, involving an individual, a family and in certain occasions, the whole village community. Its role as a mobilizing symbol had however been minimal until a full-scale movement for the reorganization and revitalization was undertaken in the recent years. Of late, there has been an all-out attempt to transform ‘Bathouism’ into a religion of the community. Steps have been taken to check and counter conversion of the members into other religions. Thus the fact that they have an ancestral religion, distinctive of other is cherished by the members and they use it for the mobilization of the community into a communal solidarity.
(III). Situations: Social, Political, Educational and Economic:

The Boros have an egalitarian society, devoid of casteist social structure of the Braahmanical religion. The clannish social division the Boro society, which was totemic, as well as, based on the professions, had no casteist implication of that of the Hindus. Though the clans were strictly endogamous in olden days, members of the community were not debarred from inter-dinning and other day to day social activities. The clannish social division has however lost its implication and in the present day Boro society, they only imply the surnames of corresponding groups. Rev. S Endle, narrating the position of women and overall social situation of the Boros observes, “Probably for the most part far sounder and more wholesome than the life of great cities, whether in Asia or Europe—” He however did not overlook the advent of the Aryan culture and its negative affects on the non-Aryan communities of Assam plains. He found a group of Boros completely Hinduised even losing their culture and traditions, being transformed into Assamese speaking Hindus. When census was taken in 1881, a large number of non-Aryan Hindu converts figured in the report. The report furnished three categories of Boro population, namely, (i) uninfluenced by Hinduism numbering 3, 75,538, (ii) in the process of conversion numbering 82, 889 and (iii) wholly converted numbering 3, 95,902. One of the prime reasons for the conversion was to escape the racial derogation which the Aryans attributed to the non-Aryans non-Hindus. The derogatory terms like ‘Ashuras’, ‘Dasas’ and ‘untouchables’ etc were damaging to the very morale of the communities. Like other non-Aryans, the Boros too were looked down

38. Ibid. p. 8.
upon by the high caste Hindus so much so that they were considered ‘Mlech’ or ‘Mes’, meaning untouchables. They were debarred from social associations like inter-dinning, inter-marriage and were deprived of political participation as well. ‘Kachari’, the other name given to the Boros by the Assamese Hindus is considered to be a deformation of the term ‘Ku-achari’, meaning ill-mannered people in Assamese. Thus the social discrimination and conversion continued hand in hand for centuries. The process had multiple negative impacts on the Boro society. The immediate impact fell on the solidarity of the community. The Boro community was divided into smaller societies of converts, who later on, transformed themselves into independent communities. When awakening began in the early decades of the 20th century, Boro intellectuals took up conversion and its negative impacts seriously. Changing of surnames to escape derogation and giving up of cultures and traditions were decried. Measures for regenerating the morale of the Boro society were undertaken.

The conversion had still greater impact on the politics of the Boros. As stated earlier, the conversion divided the body population of this community into numerous partially and wholly converted independent communities. For instance, the Rabhas, Saranias, Chutias, Koches and Rajbangsis, who were once members of the Boro population, had now identified themselves as independent communities and whose population had now been recorded in the Assamese fold. This issue has been taken up in more detail in the next chapter showing how the Boro converts were recorded as Assamese in the census of 1881. The data provided therein also shows as to how the Boro converts riding the ladder of conversion entered into the first stage hierarchy, qualifying themselves to represent the Assamese fold. Division of the community had direct bearing on its

40 Asom Sahitya Sabha, Gurudv Baba Kalicharan Brahma, 1983, Introductory Chapter.
population. It not only reduced the Boro population, but also increased the population of the Assamese by adding the converts into their fold. Though presentation of the non-Aryan converts as an ethnological class was found objectionable, it continued since 1881, till the recent years, in varying degrees though. It is on this ground that the Boro activists rejected the population figure of the decadal census report, which is otherwise the most authentic document of the country. When the Simon Commission came to Assam, objection against the presentation of converts as an ethnological class was raised along with the demand for a separate electorate for the Boros.41

Another impact, which was more of a by-product but had in-depth consequence, was the bad-blood that the process of Assamyaisation spilt between the Boros and the Assamese. Particularly, when Boros acquired modernization and subjective self-consciousness, conversion into Assamese speaking Hindus became a matter of serious concern for the intellectuals of this community. Though steps were taken by the Boro intellectuals for the reversal of the process, the discrimination meted out to the Boros created ethnic cleavages between these two communities, which at times appeared irreparable. In fact, the Boro search for a separate identity, whether linguistic or political, has its roots in the social equation they were fabricated into,—an equation that gave a resultant of suspicion and fear in the Boro minds for the fellow Assamese.

The Boros, who along with the other plains tribals played significant role in the pre-Independence state politics, left their politics in a state of doldrums for almost two decades, that is, from the dissolution of the Tribal Sangha in 1948, till the formation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam in

1967. Unlike the hill tribes, the Boros did not acquire a separate administrative apparatus after the Independence. They, through representation, secured a few seats reserved in the Legislative Assembly and one in the Parliament, which however proved insufficient to redress the grievances and aspirations of the Boros. As the time passed by and the aspirations of the up-coming Boro intellectuals grew, the limitation of the existing administrative arrangement became all the more disproportionate. The Government of Assam itself added to the situation by adopting administrative policies, whether in education, language or appointment opportunities, which tended to benefit the Assamese at the cost of other communities. Such policies of the state Government further alienated the minority communities from the majority Assamese. On the contrary, there had been erosion in the efficacy and sincerity of the state Government in enforcing the laws and regulations enacted for the protection of tribal interests, be it in land, education, employment opportunities or political participation. Under such circumstances, the Boros, who were well afoot in their consciousness, formed the Plains Tribals Council of Assam, with an objective of launching movement for a separate state. The prevailing political situation thus provided the Boros with another objective condition for launching movement for an administrative autonomy.

Education has been another sphere of conflict between the Boros and the Assamese, particularly, when language has been in the front-stage of nationality formation for both the communities. For Assamese themselves, language has been the sole mobilizing symbol of their nationality formation. The process of Assamyaisation, involving transformation of non-Assamese non-Hindus into Assamese speaking Hindus had already added a large number of converts into the Assamese fold. The Assamese were able to institutionalize their urge for linguistic nationalism by having their language
introduced as the State Official Language in 1960 and by getting it adopted as the medium of instruction in all levels of state education in 1972. The last legislation in the line came in 1986 when the Secondary Education Board of Assam introduced Assamese as the compulsory Third Language in all the educational institutions of the state.

The Boro educational and language movement started as a response and reaction to these educational and language policies of the Assamese. As Boro nationality consciousness itself began with their language as the prime mobilizing symbol, they took utmost care to ascertain that the Assamese educational policies did not obliterate the language interest of their community. Going by this temperament, the Boros joined the caravan of protesters at Silchar in 1960 and demanded Hindi as the official for the state of Assam.  

When Boro medium was introduced in 1963, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha adopted the Assamese script provisionally, keeping an option of switching over to a more suitable script if and when felt necessary. When in 1972, Assamese was introduced as the medium of instruction in the educational institutions, the Boros reacted by launching movement for switching over from Assamese to the Roman script (1972-75). The Assamese intellectuals themselves, on their part, were determined to see the last lineage of Assamese culture being carried by the Boros and formed a formidable barrier of opinions. The strong opposition of the Assamese intellectuals largely contributed to the failure of Boro movement for the Roman script, forcing them to accept the Devanagari script.

---

43 An interview with Mr. Maniram Mosahari, the ex-President and founding member of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha.
reciprocation of their constant fear of being outstripped by the immigrants coming across the border and therefore the need of maintaining their majority by Assamyaisation of the tribals and the immigrants themselves.\textsuperscript{45} Whatever was the motive behind, the Assamese educational and language policies often became chauvinistic and hence discriminative for the non-Assamese communities on whom they were enforced upon. Such circumstances, as often seen in the history of ethnicity and nationalism, provide objective situation for an ethnic upsurge. So was the case with the Boros. The Assamese educational and language policies, discriminative as they happened to be, provided objective condition for mobilizing the members of the community into communal solidarity on linguistic line. It was the challenge and response to the Assamese educational and language policies that molded the educational and language policies of the Boros. The introduction off Boro as the medium of instruction in 1963, recognition of the Boro language as the Major Indian Language in 1977, followed by its declaration as the Associate Official Language of the state in 1985, culminating into its inclusion in the Eight Schedule of languages in February 2003 were the ultimate results of Boro desire to establish themselves as an ethno-linguistic community, together with their response and challenge to the educational and language policies of the Assamese.

Agriculturists as they have been, the economic grievances of the Boros centered around the alienation of tribal lands, within the 33 tribal belts and blocks created by the amendment of the Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1886. This problem has however been dealt in detail in the next chapter, along with facts and figures to support the proposition. Of all objective situations, contributing to Boro ethnic upsurge,

\textsuperscript{45} Amlendu Guha, \textit{Nationalism Pan-Indian and Regional in Historical Perspective}, Presidential Address, \textit{Indian History Congress, 44\textsuperscript{th} Session, Burdwan, 22nd -24\textsuperscript{th} December, 1983}. 
land alienation appears to be the most outstanding one. The Tribal League apprehensive of the possible land alienation made it the basis of the pre-Independence election agreement with the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee in 1946, whereby the later, having returned to the power, amended the Chapter X of the Assam Revenue and Regulation Act of 1886 and created 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks. The Regulation made possession and transfer of land within the Belts and Blocks by the non-tribals illegal. But not long before, possession and transfer of lands within the Belts and Blocks by the non-tribals, immigrants and often by the Government agencies themselves began. The acuteness of this problem may be ascertained from the repeated references made by different political and non-political tribal organizations in their resolutions and memoranda. The Tribal Sangha, taking up the land problem seriously, passed resolutions, first in 1965 and then in the subsequent years demanding stoppage of illegal possession and transfer of tribal lands. Though the problem of land alienation was taken up by the student and political organizations of the later years, it continued unabated under the successive Assam Governments. As a result, when in 1974, State Government formed a Sub-Committee of Advisory Council for the Welfare of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) on Settlement of Land in Tribal Belts and Blocks and Forest Land, found out the provisions of the Chapter X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886 not being sincerely implemented anywhere in the Belts and Blocks, making large scale land alienation possible. The seriousness of the land alienation problem may be well understood from the observation of the then Revenue Minister Mr. Thaneshwar Boro himself who admitted that about 2 lakhs 13 thousand and 40 Bighas of tribal lands were under the illegal occupation of the non-tribals. 46

46. S Chakiadher, op. cit. p. 32.
Added to this has been the limited employment opportunities, whether in the State or Central services or in the private establishments. Particularly, in the State services, the State Government has often found being averse to appointing tribal applicants. The fact that a Government census, conducted in 1975 on the appointment against reserved quota showed 46% backlog, becomes a pointer to this proposition. Another census conducted by some journalists in 1986 found 66.20% backlog in the reserved quota of grade IV post of the state services. In the police department, as many as 5463 posts, reserved for the tribals, were lying vacant till 1989. An Assam Gana Parishad minister, while explaining the reason lamented that the authorities have aversion towards appointing candidates from the listed communities.47 Except for the tea industries, which employ people from the tea garden communities, there is no other industry in the Boro populated areas. The Bobgaigaon Refinery Petro-Chemical Ltd. Situated at Dhaligaon and the Bongaigaon Thermal Power Station at Salakati, are the only two industries located in the Boro areas. Infrastructural facilities, particularly, the employment oriented institutions like polytechnic and other vocational training institutes are not situated in the Boro areas. As a result, the Boros often find themselves comparatively incompetent in the employment opportunities of technical lines. With little inclination towards trade and business and with limited employment opportunities, Boros largely depend on agriculture. The productivity of land has however been fast diminishing due to non-use of modern methods and technologies of cultivation. Such economic situation influenced the Boros to come to a conclusion that “the Bodos and other tribals as Assam are determined to have a Government of their own which will ensure enactment

of proper and effective legislation in their own Assembly for the protection of their own lands, so creation of Bodo-land is a must.\textsuperscript{48}

B. SUBJECTIVE CONDITIONS:

(I). Modernization and Consciousness:

Modernization as the pre-degree of nationality consciousness began among the Boros in the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Chapter III of this work details how Baba Kalicharan Brahma and his associates, with the help of the ‘Boro Maha Sanmelan’ (All Boro Convention) opened English schools in the Boro villages and hostels in the townships for the Boro students hailing from far-flung areas. Kalicharan Brahma and his associates were driven by the thought that only western ideas of humanism, equality and reason could change the Boro society for the better. Opening of schools and hostels, in their turn, produced English educated Boros who became active supporters of the reform movement. The pioneering ‘Boro Maha Sanmelan’, a socio-religious organization, championed the reformation by opening schools and by passing resolutions against the evil practices, prevalent in the Boro society along with punitive prescriptions for the defaulters. The hostels of the townships, particularly, the Brahma Boarding of Dhubri, became the centers of intellectual activities. The Boro journal \textit{Bibar}, which is considered as the first mile-stone of Boro literature was published from this hostel in 1924. The Boro literatures of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century served primarily two purposes. Apart from enriching the language of the community, they also became instrumental in spreading socio-economic and political awareness among the Boros. In this very Brahma Boarding, the

\textsuperscript{48} Memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee on Bodo issues, submitted by the All Bodo Students’ Union and the Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee, Kokrajhar, dated April 8, 1991, (unpaged).
idea of having a literary organization for the community originated. This idea was later given a definite shape by forming the 'Bodo Club', which provided the citadel for the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha of the later years. Formed in 1919, the 'Boro Chatra Sammelan' (Boro Students' Association) was another significant creation of the English educated Boro intellectuals. This students' organization played an important role when the Simon Commission came to Assam. It also laid the ideological foundation for the formation of the All Bodo Students' Union of the recent times.

Thus began the intellectual revolution of the Boros, which not only regenerated the morale of the community, but also inculcated nationality consciousness among the Boro intellectuals. They began taking pride in their historical past, racial origin, language, cultures and traditions. They discovered distinctiveness in those symbols and in them found the power of mobilizing the members into communal solidarity and the basis for maintaining their separateness from other ethnic communities. The emerging consciousness inspired the Boro intellectuals to move for the establishment of their community into a separate identity, independent of the Assamese. With this objective, the Boro intellectuals of the pre-Independence era, formed socio-cultural, literary and student organizations of their own. The awakening of the early decades, made them conscious of the socio-economic and political situation around. This may be understood from their representation to the Simon Commission, where, apart from other things, demanded separate electorate for the Boros. Their consciousness pushed them further to form the Tribal League in 1933 for the participation in the politics of the state. In the post-Independence period, their consciousness and consequent move for linguistic and political identity culminated into the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, a literary organization in 1952, the All
Bodo Students’ Union in 1967 and a political organization called the Plains Tribals Council of Assam in 1967.

(II). Sense of Deprivation, Insecurity and Fear of Domination:

Though the state is expected to be an autonomous and neutral arena of interest group conflict, in practice, it adopts policies and distributes resources which toned to benefit a particular group, depriving the other. The sense of deprivation leads to further formation of interest groups. In the pluralistic society, the state thus becomes the responder to the organized groups, as well as, precipitator in the formation of new groups. The state also adopts a policy of homogenization which causes cultural decimation, socio-political subjugation and economic deprivation of the minorities by the majorities. Under such circumstances, the decimated minorities, once undergo modernization, mobilize themselves into solidarity, furthering into demand for separate political entity.

The Boros underwent the similar situation under successive Assam Government. It is said that after the Independence, the tribal leaders transformed the Tribal League into a socio-cultural organization called the Tribal Sangha, with an expectation that the new-found Independence would fulfill their grievances and aspirations, without having to go for political campaign on ethnic line. But not long before, their expectation proved them wrong. They were soon alarmed when within a few years of Independence, despite legislation, tribal lands were allowed to be alienated in large scale by the non-tribals, Government agencies and largely by the immigrants coming across the border. It is to be noted that in the absence of a separate administrative apparatus, the 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks, created by amending the Chapter X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of
1886, were the sole subsistence of Boro economy and society. Between 1951 and 1971, there had been 93 per cent increase in the number of immigrants over the percentage of 50 years preceding 1951. Such huge magnitude of influx was bound to have pressure on land, whether within or without the Tribal Belts and Blocks. Continued land alienation and the apathy of the State Government created a sense of deprivation and insecurity among the Boros. The problem of land alienation was taken up by the Boro socio-cultural and political organizations of the time. The Tribal Sangha was the first to raise this issue then to reiterate year after year. In 1965, in its 15th Annual Conference, the Kokrajhar District Tribal Sangha passed the Resolution No. 3, in which, apart from giving detail figure of the alienated areas, recorded that “the illegal occupation and transfer of tribal land, the genuine landless cultivator claimants of the Belts and Blocks areas are being deprived of getting land settlement leading them to extreme miseries and sufferings in search of cultivable lands in other areas.” The same was reiterated by the Central Committee of the Assam Tribal Sangha and other district committees. The Plains Tribals Council of Assam, while raising the land problem in its first memorandum wrote, “The bitter experience of the last 20 years of Independence has given rise to a firm conviction among the tribals of Assam that the Assam Government is not interested in giving adequate protection to the tribal land...Underneath the declared policy towards the tribals the state Government experience reveals, pursues an undeclared policy in practice. The critical observation of this undeclared policy of Assam Government and the attitude of the non-tribal officers towards the tribals and tribal Belts and Blocks tends us to come to a conclusion that the State Government is determined to destroy the

---


50. Resolution No. 3 passed in the 15th Annual Conference of the Kokrajhar District Tribal Sangha, held on 25th and 26th March, 1965, Gurubhaga, Assam.
compactness of the plains tribal areas and thereby weaken them as a political force, and thus compel them to die away in favour of the majority community.\textsuperscript{51} In the later years, the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee, the two leading organizations spearheading the Boro political movement, rejected the very Regulation, decrying it only as a Welfare Act under the Directives Principles of State Policies, without provisions to seek constitutional remedy in the law court.\textsuperscript{52} In their opinion, all the tribal development schemes whether the Tribal Advisory Council, Integrated Tribal Development Project or the Tribal advisory authority were farce. In this regard, S Chaklader, who has done research on the Boros observes, “The various schemes and programmes for the developments of tribal groups like, Tribal Sub-Plan, Tribal Development Corporation, Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal Development Project, Welfare of Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes etc. did not improve the lots of the Boros.\textsuperscript{53} Situation could perhaps still be improved and confidence reinstalled had the twelve Boro legislatures been able to put pressure on the State Government to act on that line. But they neither had the numerical strength nor political sagacity to render such role on the floor of the Assembly. The land problem was thus allowed to drag on until it precipitated a sense of deprivation and insecurity among the Boros, influencing them to conclude that the land and other interests of the Boros could not be protected under the State of Assam any longer.\textsuperscript{54}

The situation could perhaps be salvaged had the State Government been far-sighted and accommodative towards the Boros. But the State

\textsuperscript{51} Memorandum to the President of India, submitted by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam, May 20, 1967, Kokrajhar, Assam.
\textsuperscript{52} Memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee, op. cit. (unpaged).
\textsuperscript{53} S Chaklader, op. cit. p. 51.
\textsuperscript{54} Memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee, op. cit. (unpaged).
Government, following the policy of homogenization and favouritism, adopted educational and language policies, which favoured the Assamese, depriving the Boros and other plains tribals. For instance, adoption of Assamese, as the sole official language of the state by the Official Language Bill of 1960, increased the sense of deprivation and insecurity among the Boros. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha, reacting to the Official Language Bill, passed a resolution recording the unity of the state being threatened by the repercussion of the official language issue. The leaders of the Boro community joined the crowd of protesters in the Silchar Conference on July 10, 1960, where the no-Assamese language groups convened to show their solidarity against the Assamese move. The resolution of the Conference demanded that “the status quo based in the intrinsically multilingual character of the state must be maintained for the peace and security of the eastern region of India.” However, despite opposition, the Assam Official Language Bill was passed on October 24, 1960. This policy of forceful Assamyaisation created fear of identity crisis among the minority groups. The ethnic minorities, who were so far not averse to using Assamese as an inter-group link-language, now became alarmed of being dominated by the Assamese. The fear was so great among the hill tribes that they began launching movement for separate states. They could be pacified only by creating separate states and Union Territories for them. For instance, the State of Nagaland was created in 1963. Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were constituted into Union Territories in 1971 and the State of Meghalaya in 1972.

The territorial break-up caused by the language bill of 1960, however did not stop the Assamese from undertaking another language policy in 1972. This time, under the pressure of the Asom Sahitya Sabha and

All Assam Students’ Union, the Gauhati University introduced Assamese as the medium of instruction at all levels of education. The Boros and the Bengalis strongly opposed this move of the Assamese. But the Assam Government suppressed them with the help of the state machineries. The communal flare-up of the language movement further increased the sense of insecurity and fear of Assamese domination more than before. The Plains Tribals Council of Assam, in its memorandum to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi apprised that the flare-up of “language fanaticism...once again confirmed our fear and conviction that not only the interest but also the lives and properties of the linguistic minorities especially the Plains Tribals population...are not safe in Assam, unless they are made to merge completely with, and are fully liquidated by the aggressive linguistic Assamese speaking people who are determined to wipe out our separate identity.” Such was the magnitude of fear of being dominated by the Assamese that the minority communities began looking for opportunities of freeing themselves from the yoke of the Assamese. While no immediate political solution was at the sight, the Boros, on grounds of convenience and in response to the language policies of the Assamese, launched movement for the adoption of Roman script in place of the Assamese. Though the movement ended in the adoption of the Devanagari script, the Boros found in it a better choice than the Assamese, which was, in their consideration, a tag of domination on them.

The linguistic nationalism of the Assamese assumed yet another dimension in the 1980s when the All Assam Students’ Union and the Assam

---

54 Memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, New Delhi, by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam, Kokrajhar, October 22, 1972, p. 1.
57 Memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, New Delhi, submitted by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (Progressive), New Delhi, April 22, 1983, p. 2.
Gana Parishad launched agitation against the foreign nationals. The agitation however failed to remain confined against the foreign nationals alone. More so when the minority communities maintained neutrality on certain grounds and supported holding of 1983 election, boycotted by the Assamese organizations, making themselves targets of the agitationists. There was wide spread communal riots between the Assamese on one hand and the minority communities on the other, in which, as many as 105 tribal villages were burnt down, 313 tribals were killed and 45,050 of them were rendered homeless. 45 no of Boro medium schools were also burnt down by the agitationists. The Plains Tribals Council of Assam (Progressive) submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, appraising the situation arising out of the agitation. In the memorandum, the organization demanded division of Assam between the Assamese and the Plains Tribals “without further delay to save them total annihilation in the hands of the Assamese people.” The memorandum also stated that the Plains tribals could no longer co-exist risking their lives with “the chauvinists Assamese people.”

The policy of Assamyaisation by extending the language and culture to the communities of the state proved counter productive. It deteriorated the relations between the Assamese and other ethnic minorities. The communal riots of 1972 and 1983 so polarized the state population that Assamese attempt of creating a cohesive society through their language and educational policies proved futile. Particularly the Boros, whose script and autonomy movements had been facing strong opposition from the ethnic Assamese, found its explanation in the “inherent intention” of the Assamese

58. Data furnished by the Convention of the Plains Tribals Organizations’ Leaders, held on 7th April, 1983, at Rowta, Darrang, Assam.
59. Memorandum to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, op. cit. p. 8.
“to Assamise, assimilate and dominate the non-Assamese people.” The All Bodo Students’ Union, in its book, *Why Separate state*, accused that “The Assamese people are following the policy of expansionism and imperialism to capture and dominate all corners of Assam including the tribal areas. In fact, they have a plot to conquer all tribal areas and dominate them under their feet.” The Union termed the Assam Government as a “chauvinist Assamese Government”, “anti-tribal” and “repressive Assam Government.” The book concluded making an observation that the “Boros can not survive in Assam, their language, culture, ethnic identity and security are in peril in Assam. ... In a separate homeland only, the Bodos and other downtrodden tribals can get socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, political, administrative and all-round security. Save the Bodos of the world in a separate homeland within the Union of India.”

The growing sense of insecurity and fear of Assamese domination enabled the All Bodo Students’ Union and the Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee to mobilize the people and launch a vigorous movement from March 2, 1987, which continued till the signing of the Bodoland Autonomous Council Accord in 1993. Thereafter, the agitation was further carried on by the Students’ Union and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force till the signing of another accord in February 2003, by which the Bodoland Territorial Council was created under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Thus grew a sense of insecurity and fear of Assamese domination among the Boros, gradually but persistently, till it accumulated into a towering proportion. By the 1980s, situation came to a breaking point,
leaving the Boros and the Assamese standing apart, refusing to join hands even for a common cause like the foreign national issue. The Assamese themselves were largely responsible for such ethnic division in the state. The Boro ethnic upsurge was the ultimate result of Assamese apathy to the Boro situations, their persistent opposition to the Boro language and autonomy movements, coupled with repeated Assamese attempt to impose their language and culture on the Boro community.

(III). Expectations and Aspirations:

With the spread of modernization and increase in awakening, there had also been consequent rise in the number of Boro intellectuals. Along with that, there had been increase in their consciousness and in the level of expectations and aspirations. In the pre-Independence era, when Boro consciousness was still in infancy, their problems too had just set in. When the question of separate electorate found priority in the memoranda to the Simon Commission, protection of tribal land became the prime concern in the agenda of the Tribal League. The League accordingly, by the terms of the pre-Independence election agreement signed with the State Congress Committee, got the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 amended for the protection of the tribal land. It is said that after the Independence, the tribal League, the lone political organization of the plains tribals, was transformed into a socio-cultural organization called the Tribal Sangha, with an expectation that the new-found Independence would take care of all the problems without having to go for a political campaign on ethnic line. But not long before, their expectation proved them wrong. Within a few years, problem of serious natures began to raise their heads. They saw their new-found freedom fast eroding in the hands of the politicians and bureaucrats. Of all their prime concerns, the land within the
tribal Belts and Blocks, so created by the amended Land and Revenue Regulation, began to be alienated in large scale by the non-tribals. Many a times, occupation and transfer of tribal lands took place with the knowledge and help of the Government authorities themselves. The tribal cry for the enforcement of the Regulation went unheard. The safeguards provided to the minorities by the Articles 29 (1) and 30 (1) came under scanner when the Boros had to launch prolonged agitation for the introduction of Boro medium in schools or had to lose fifteen lives when they moved for the Roman script. As the educated Boros increased in number, they realized the meagerness of job opportunities or they were all the more disheartened when they discovered that the Government authorities' aversion to appointing the tribal candidate even in the reserved quotas. The 12 tribal legislatures, elected from the reserved constituencies proved numerically ineffective in the State Assembly of 60 representatives. And as such, they failed to be a party to making legislations and in their enforcement, in the interests of the tribals.

When their expectations failed them, their aspirations did not. It rose along the individual, group and community lines; be it in education, employment opportunities, economy or politics. The level of Boro aspirations, as an ethnic community may be understood from the All Bodo Students' Union's standpoint when it observes, "The Bodos have a genuine aspiration to establish a distinct Bodo nationality and get recognition in the world as a civilized and advanced nationality."64 The Union also argues clamouring Boro right to political self-determination, to have a self-governing apparatus, enabling them to establish and maintain educational institution of their own, in the language and script of their choice. The self-governing apparatus will also enable them to build-up a "sound economic

64. Ibid, p. 59.
condition" through job opportunities, management of vast resources of forestry, fertile cultivable land and plantation industries etc. In the opinion of the Union activists, the plains tribals can achieve "complete and concrete political as well as all-round security -peace and rapid progress" only by securing a self-governing administrative unit. Fulfillment of all these aspirations would not be possible till they remain under the State of Assam. They therefore demanded for a separate administrative unit which will enable them to exercise financial, administrative, legislative and executive powers by their own hands.

---

65 Ibid, Pp. 60 and 77-78.