CHAPTER V

MOVEMENT FOR AUTONOMY

The nascent Boro nationality consciousness, so far engaged in reforms and mobilization, soon grew into political awareness. The social reformers of yesteryear now drew their attention to the political needs and aspirations of their people. This new development first manifested itself in the submission of memoranda to the Simon Commission in 1928, in which, they raised voice for their political rights urging the British Government to create a separate electorate for the Boros. The growing political awareness led to the formation of the Tribal League, the lone political organization of the tribals of Assam plains, in 1933. Formation of the Tribal League was the mastermind of the Boro intellectuals, where the leaders of other tribal communities were pulled along to satiate the numerical equation, much needed in a democratic political endeavour. The League was formed with an objective of partaking in the forthcoming election, ensued by the enactment of the Government of India Act 1935. Passing of the Government of India Act 1935, brought-forth the proposal of reorganizing the administrative set up of the country on the principles of local-self Government. This development thus opened up new vistas of political participation even for the lesser communities. The Boros too responded with the same political sagacity, as was done by other advanced communities.

The prime objective of the League was to secure constitutional safeguard of the socio-economic and political interests of the plains tribals by taking direct part in the politics of the country. In the 1937 election, 5 of the League members were elected to the State assembly. With these five
legislatures, the League formed coalition Governments, once with the Assam Muslim League in 1939 and the other with the Assam Congress Committee in 1946. The Tribal League thus emerged as a deciding political force in the pre-Independence Assam politics. As stated, the formation of the tribal League was solely the handiwork of the Boro intellectuals, and as such, it was nursed and navigated by them alone, while the leaders of the minor tribal communities provided them with the moral and numerical support, much needed for their political campaign.

After the Independence, the Tribal League was transformed into a socio-cultural organization called the Tribal Sangha. The League leaders said to have taken this decision in good faith in their new found Independence, which, they thought, would attend to their grievances and aspirations without having to go for political campaign on ethnic line. Besides, they signed a pre-Independence election agreement with the Assam Congress Committee, whereby the later agreed to make provisions for the protection of tribal lands and their socio-economic and political interests. The Congress returned with absolute majority in 1946 election and formed the ministry. But a breach faith, on the part of the Assam Congress Committee, began not long before. The trend continued under successive Assam Governments, relegating whatever accommodation of tribal interests done by the 1946 agreement. The legislations passed from time to time in the interests of the tribals proved deficient either due to lack of political will or slackness in the execution. Under such circumstances, the grievances of the plains tribals continued gathering and within a period of two decades, it assumed a formidable proportion. The gravity of the situation may be understood from the resolutions passed and the memoranda submitted by the Tribal Sangha to the concerned authorities from time to time. The resolutions of this organization, adopted in the 1960s and 70s, repeatedly
mention about the growing problem of the plains tribals, especially about the faulty delimitation of the reserved seats and illegal transfer of tribal lands, which appears to have assumed alarming proportion by then itself. They were the records of gathering indignations of the Sangha activists and of the people they represented.

After the Independence, the Boros, as well as other tribals of Assam Plains, did not get separate administrative units of their own. However, the tribal League, by the terms of the pre-Independence election agreement, concluded with the Assam Congress Community, got certain provisions of the Chapter X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act amended, whereby 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks were created.\footnote{The Assam Gazette, 22nd October, 1947.} This legislation made transfer of tribal lands within the Belts and Blocks to the non-tribals illegal. But the administrative loop-holes of the successive state Government led to large scale alienation of tribal lands by the non-tribals Indians, as well as, by the people of foreign origins, particularly, that of neighbouring Bangladesh. Other legislations, passed in the letter years, also became the victims of this very systemic failure. Only a spectacular change in the Government policies towards the tribals could improve the situation. But without such steps forthcoming, the problems of the tribals continued brewing. Advent of the new settlers, who were often comparatively advanced and of different mode of life, outplayed the tribal inhabitants. The plains tribals, having practically no inclination towards trade and business, often found themselves incompetent in the new situation. The settlement policies of the State Government, whereby the tribal belts and blocks were deconstituted in parts to accommodate the new non-tribal settlers, also hastened illegal transfer of tribal lads. In fact, in many areas of the tribal belts and blocks, the tribals themselves were reduced to ineffective political minorities. In course of
time, this problem grew into a magnanimous proportion, becoming one of the major factors for the upsurge of the Boros.

The post-Independence Assam was a composite whole of diverse ethnic communities, and as such, the seed of disunity was inherent within itself. Assam’s guardianship over various tribal nationalities, especially, over the hill tribes which had hardly any history of being parts of Indian mainstream culturally or politically, was a challenging fabrication and needed delicacy and statesmanship in handling. But the Assam Government, often backed by a section of the Assamese intellectuals, proved itself deficient in farsightedness and accommodative policies. There had been occasions when the State Government and the Assamese intellectuals ignored the objective conditions of these communities, adding to the conflict situation. In this regard, The Statesman observed, “No one cared to inquire whether the Assamese had not also contributed to estrangement by for instance their conduct in the Naga Hills or indifference when famine devastated Lushai Hills.”

The Assamese idea of maintaining the integrity of the state by extending their culture and language over other communities, proved counter-productive. It rather created a fear of Assamese domination among those ethnic communities, which became one of the prime factors for the disintegration of Assam.

The Boros, who formed the major constituent community of Assam plains population, bore the brunt of all these developments. The conversion and the consequent doctoring of the census reports registering the Boro converts into Assamese fold or otherwise, State Government’s apathy to the land, educational and unemployment problems of this community, language policies of the Assamese vis-à-vis their opposition to the Boro language and

political movements etc. provided the Boros with the objective conditions to struggle for an independent identity of their own. Once subjective self-consciousness emerged among the Boro intellectuals, these situations were analyzed and interpreted from various prospective, be it from the angles of deprivation, insecurity or fear of domination. With the growth of self-consciousness, there had been rise in the expectation and aspiration as well, balance of which could be struck only by creating a new administrative set up. Thus the objective and subjective conditions developed in such direction, where Boros found co-existence with the Assamese under a single state practically impossible. By 1960s, separation from Assam became a declared policy of the Boros.

Formation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA):

Despite mounting grievances however, the Boro politics remained in a state of doldrums for several more decades, until the pronouncement of the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi to reorganize Assam on federal structure. Her pronouncement appeared to have given a new lease of life to the aspirations of the plains tribals. The Boros, together with other plains tribals expected to share the outcome of the Prime Minister’s proposal.\(^{259}\) Their endeavour ultimately took a definite shape when an ad-hoc committee called the Plains Tribals’ Council of Assam was formed on February 27, 1967, in a meeting held at Kokrajhar. Formation of the ad-hoc committee was later on endorsed in a general meeting, resolving to convert it into a full-fledged political organization under the name and style of the Plains Tribals’ Council of Assam (PTCA). Mr. Biroson Doley of the Mishing community became the first president of the Council, while Samar Brahma Chaudhary

\(^{259}\) Press Note No. 1. of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam refers to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s proposal and announces its decision to move for a full autonomy.
and Saran Narzari of the Boro community became the first vice-president and secretary respectively. Though the PTCA theoretically represented all the tribals of Assam plains, in reality it was a handiwork of the Boro leaders alone. Association of the other plains tribal leaders was nominal, and often they did so only when leadership was forced on them. For instance, Mr. Biroson Doley of the Mishing community, who was made the first president of the Council, remained inactive for several years and was absent from most of the party meetings. The politics of the other plains tribals still being on the threshold could not join the PTCA. As a result, in reality, the PTCA became an organization of the Boros, all its programmes and action plans designed by the leaders of this community alone.

The first press note of the PTCA, issued on April 11, 1967, briefly highlighted the problems of the plains tribals along with its decision to move for full autonomy comprising the majority tribal populated areas of Assam, which they thought, would help in the protection and promotion of the tribal interests. The press note reads:

It is for the general publication in the press that an emergent meeting of Plains Tribals Council of Assam was held at Edenbari on the 8th April, 1967, 3 miles off towards the north of Harisinga in the District of Darrang. The meeting discussed the various problems pertaining to the plains tribals of Assam, particularly the land problem and political situation arising from the Government of India’s decision to reorganize the state on federal structure. The Council views with great concern that the lapse of the state Government of Assam in the matter of implementation of various legislative measure made to safeguard the vital interests of the Plains

Minutes of the PTCA general meeting, held at Kokrajhar, dated March 18, 1967.
tribals of Assam. The Council feels such lapse as lack of sincerity and goodwill towards the plains tribal people of Assam and a consequent result of the policy of assimilation which tends to impose language and culture and absorption of tribal communities and thus bring extinction in every sphere of their life. After full round of discussion the Council decides to move for full autonomy in the plains tribal areas which alone will help the rehabilitation of the tribal people and create favourable condition to grow according to their own genius.\textsuperscript{261}

The PTCA began its political campaign by submitting a memorandum to the President of India, on May 20, 1967. The memorandum contained the following demands;

(1). Full autonomy in the predominantly plains tribal areas of the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar Districts including all the tribal Belts and Blocks of those areas so that tribal can (a) adequately protect their land; (b) give effective check to economic exploitation of tribals by non-tribal; (c) conserve their language, culture, customs and what is best in them; (d) prevent political domination by non-tribals over the tribals and imposition of anything which would disrupt their traditions and customs and (e) grow according to their genius traditions.\textsuperscript{262}

The Boro search for a separate political identity thus began in the 1960s, with the formation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam. It remained in the helm of the Boro politics for about two decades till its split

\textsuperscript{261} Press Note No. 1, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{262} The PTCA memorandum, submitted to the President of India, dated May 20, 1967, New Delhi.
and inactivity towards the end of 1970s. The first annual conference of this organization was held at Harisinga in 1970, from February 12 to 14. Till then, the PTCA had deputed five delegation teams to the Central and State Governments, at different times, reiterating their demands. The history of the PTCA’s political campaign would be incomplete if no mention is made to the boycott of Parliamentary bye-election, scheduled on May 19, 1968 and the consequent mass demonstration organized by the Council. The bye-election was caused by the death of Rupnath Brahma, the ‘Grand Father’ of the Boro community, who represented the Kokrajhar reserved Parliamentary constituency. The PTCA boycotted the bye-election to reiterate its demand, as well as, to “protest against the crafty delimitation of the scheduled tribe reserved constituencies ...”, and therefore, demanded reconstitution of the reserved seats “in such areas where the proportion of tribal population is the largest.”

Mass demonstrations of similar kinds were organized in different parts of the Kokrajhar constituency. Thousands of Boro volunteers joined the “satyagraha”, as the Council termed it, launched at Daligaon and Chatpur polling canters. In the Sidli polling center, the demonstrators came under police firing. On May 19, about 3000 demonstrators, including prominent party leaders like Samar Brahma Chaudhary and Saran Narzari were arrested. The Amrita Bazar Patrika, while reporting on the boycott noted that the polling was “completely disrupted in more than 60 booths”, and that more then 400 persons were arrested in this connection.

---

263. He is depicted as the ‘Grand Father’ of the community in different literatures, especially, in the text books of the schools.

265. Ibid.
The incidents that took place in different polling centers shot up tension in the entire constituency. The Operation Election Boycott Action Committee of the PTCA gave an ultimatum to the Government to release the arrested persons before May 22, failing which, the Action Committee threatened to launch a mass agitation, starting from May 22, 1968. The State Government however did not give in to the demand, which forced the action Committee to go ahead with its priory decided agitational programme. A show of strength, on the part of the Action Committee became imminent when thousands of demonstrators flocked to Kokrajhar to partake in a proposed meeting, to be followed by a public procession. Accordingly, on the same day, at around 3.00 p.m. a procession of thousands of volunteers was taken out only to be dispersed by police gun-fire, on their way to the Sub-Divisional office.

The boycott agitation, for all its magnitude, ended in a failure. The Government remained unmoved and unyielding. However, what attributes some significance to the boycott agitation is that, it was the first and the last direct action taken by the PTCA, in its entire two decades long political career. Thereafter, no such mass agitation was ever launched by this organization, in connection with the Boro demand for an autonomy or a state. On the contrary, in the late 70s and early 80s, the PTCA leaders were found drifting in their commitment, even to the extremity of baiting the very demand of an administrative autonomy or a state for their political gain.

In the year 1969, the Government of India once again announced its decision to reorganize Assam on federal structure, giving the PTCA an opportunity of reiterating its demand for an administrative autonomy. Accordingly, the PTCA, in its annual conference held at Tezpur from January 12 to 14, 1969, resolved to move the Government of India
demanding an administrative autonomy comprising the northern tracts of the then Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Lakhimpur up to the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. In the mean time, the Assam Reorganization Act 1969 was passed by the Parliament, generating hopes and aspirations among the Boros. The PTCA General Secretary Mr. Saran Narzari wrote a letter welcoming the decision of the Government of India. The letter stated that:

The Plains Tribals under the banner of the PTCA favoured the Center’s decision to reorganize Assam on federal structure or on any other agreeable basis. The Plains Tribals have been demanding a separate administrative unit with status of full statehood comprising the compact tribal area, in the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts along the foothills of Bhutan and NEFA from the river Sankosh in the west to the eastern boundary of Assam within the framework of the Indian Constitution.

From 1967 to 1970, the PTCA was mostly absorbed in organizing the party in the grass-root level. During this period, the Council had ten Executive Committee Meetings and one annual conference. It also sent five delegations to the Center, reiterating its demand for a separate administrative unit. The year of 1972 has considerable significance in the history of the PTCA. Mr. Saran Narzari, the General Secretary of the Tribal Council won the 1972 Assembly election from Kokrajhar constituency against an imminent Congress leader Mr. R. N. Basumatari, giving moral boaster to the Council. Another development of this year was the formation of the youth

---

268 Letter vide No. PMS/24/2, issued by the Under Secretary, M Malhotra from the Office of the Prime Minister, New Delhi, January 13, 1969.
wing of the PTCA, known as the Young Plains Tribals' Council of Assam (YPTCA), initially in the district level, which was later on centrally constituted in the third annual conference of the PTCA, held at Baginadi of Lakhimpur district, in April, 1973. Formation of the YPTCA appeared to have established the popularity of the PTCA among the younger generation. In fact, the activists of the youth wing played an important role in the 1972 Assembly election, leading to the victory of the Council candidates in many constituencies.

1972 was an year of trial and turbulence for the state of Assam. In this year, the Academic Council decided to introduce Assamese as the medium of Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities creating tremor among the ethnic communities of the state. If this decision of the Academic Council was an attempt of hardening the grips of the Assamese over other ethnic communities, the all out protest and communal violence were also nothing less than the manifestation of the ever increasing nationality consciousness of the later. The fall-out of the Assamese language policy was grave enough to put the very integrity of the state at stake. The prevailing situation brought the ethnic minorities together to form the Linguistic Minorities' Rights Committee, which apart from appraising the situation to the Government, demanded adequate protection of rights of the ethnic minorities of the state. The PTCA too submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister appraising the fall-out of the Academic Council's decision and reiterated its demand for a separate administrative unit for the plains tribals. The memorandum noted;

The flare-up of the language fanaticism of the issue of medium of instruction of university state has once again confirmed our fear and
The memorandum noted that the “status quo” recommended by the State Reorganization Commission was impracticable in view of the prevailing situation of the state. It also noted that the status quo of the state was often broken by slicing parts of Assam in piecemeal into number of separate states, though nothing such was done to solve the long standing demand of the Plains tribals. The PTCA therefore reiterated its demand for an autonomous region in the “northern tracts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts along the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh” for the plains tribal people of Assam. In the following month, the Council sent a two-man delegation to the Prime Minister to press for its demand. The Government remained unyielding, which the PTCA reciprocated by raising its demand into a full-fledged state of ‘Udayachal’, first on January 7, 1973, in place of a autonomous region. Later on, the PTCA proposal for a separate state of Udayachal was warmly welcome by the people of this community in a crowded meeting and procession, organized at Kokrajhar on February 27, 1973.
The vigour and spirit of PTCA’s movement for an autonomous region or a separate state however died down towards the end of the 1970s. One of the reasons, as was the case in the language movement, was the lack of steadfastness on the part of the Boro leaders themselves. Without strong determination, the Boro leaderships often drifted from their proclaimed objective to suit their convenience. For instance, the PTCA leaderships were accused of taking a softer stand during their coalition with the State Janata regime, which, later on, became one of the causes for the split in the PTCA. The younger leaders of the Council were critical about the luke-warm policies of the veteran leaders. They prepared tougher line of action in matters of their demand for a separate state. The veteran PTCA leaderships added to their unpopularity by drifting from one demand to another, and by passing statements which often hurt the sentiment of the people whom they represented. The PTCA thus appeared to have failed to rise to the expectation of the people, causing speedy decline in its popularity.

**Split in the PTCA:**

The PTCA and YPTCA came into a conflict in 1977, when the former decided to enter into a pre-election agreement with the Assam Janata Party, despite strong opposition of the later, causing rift between the veteran and younger party workers. The members of the YPTCA opposed the alliance fearing possible sabotage of their demand by the Janata Party. But despite opposition, the PTCA, in its Executive Committee meeting, held on October 2, 1977, resolved endorsing the terms of the alliance. The memorandum of agreement signed between the Assam Janata Party and the PTCA, contained the following terms;

---

(1) With a view protecting the various interests of the tribal people in their lands and areas and to promote economic, educational and social progress very rapidly and help them to be at per with rest of the population of the country within the shortest period possible. Areas will be demarcated along the North Eastern bank of the Brahmaputra. In respect of the South Bank of the Brahmaputra the provisions of the Chapter X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation shall apply, and if necessary, area demarcation may be considered. (2) A separate administrative apparatus of autonomy type will be set up for the above purpose. The parties have agreed to work together for solution of the common problems. For the purpose of election both the parties will fight from the common platform as one. So far as the selection of candidate is concerned, both the parties will sit together and finalize candidates in the schedule tribe constituencies. The PTCA has approved that Mr. Saran Narzari will sit and work with Janata Parliamentary group in the Lok Sabha hence forth. The state Janata unit will arrange intimation to the Center.\footnote{Minutes of the discussion held on June 4, 1977, between the Chairman of Janata Party of Assam unit and leaders of the PTCA, in Guwahati.}

The PTCA won four seats in the Assembly election of 1978. Mr. Saran Narzari had already won the Parliamentary election from the Kokrajhar constituency defeating veteran Congress leader Mr. Dharanidhar Basumatari. As per the terms of the pre-election agreement, the four newly elected legislatures joined hands with the Janata Party and formed a coalition Government, where Mr. Samar Brahma Chaudhari was installed as the Minister of Forest.\footnote{Khangkhu, An Introduction of the Mishings and the Boras, Kokrajhar, 1982, p.84.} But the understanding between the PTCA and the Janata Party soon began eroding, particularly, when the terms of the pre-
election agreement were not implemented by the later. The youth wing of the Council was already opposed to the formation of an alliance with the Janata Party. Their resentment became all the more when the PTCA legislatures failed to get the terms of the agreement implemented. Besides, after joining the coalition, the PTCA legislatures compromised their original demand for a separate with that of an autonomous region, furthering the estrangement of the younger leaders. The YPTCA workers also accused the lone Parliamentary Member Mr. Saran Narzari of being a “mere watch-man” in the Lok Sabha, during his tenure of 27 months. The differences between the PTCA and YPTCA leaders grew with the passage of time and it came to a breaking point not long before.

The differences between the older and younger leaders were not an altogether new development. It traces far back as 1974, the year in which the Boros were engaged in the Roman script movement. About this time, some of the PTCA leaders made certain statements, which went against the sentiment of the Boros. For instance, the PTCA General Secretary, Mr. Saran Brahma himself gave a press statement expressing preference to the Assamese script, while the party President, Mr. Biroson Doley, in the same paper, advised the Boro to give up the demands of a separate state and the Roman script. Such statements of the President and the Secretary were resented by the members of the YPTCA. They accused the President of following a policy of “catching fish in troubled water.” The luke-warm programmes, followed by the PTCA were another point of resentment for the younger activists. They preferred more radical line of action for the

---

278 Ibid, p. 84.
279 Saptahik Niliachal, December 11, 1974.
280 Annual Report of the YPTCA, presented in the 2nd annual conference of the YPTCA, held at Kokrajhar, on May 1 and 2, 1975.
materialization of their demands. As the older leaders did not care to reconcile the differences, split between these two groups became inevitable. When bad bloods were already in the vein, conclusion of the PTCA-Janata alliance took place, giving final blow to the unity of the party.

The actual split of the party appears to have been initiated by the PTCA leaders themselves. They having faced opposition, dissolved the YPTCA, by a resolution in a Central Executive Committee meeting, held at Kokrajhar, on April 18, 1977. But the members of the YPTCA refused to accept the dissolution and sought dialogue with the parent body in this regard. Consequently, a talk was arranged in the mediation of the newly selected PTCA General Secretary Mr. Binoy Basumatari, on September 2, 1977. The talk thrashed out a compromise of the differences, which was however short-lived.

By the month of November, accusations against each other were mounting once again and in the following months, their differences grew into a breaking point. Ultimately, the Council split into two on May 22, 1979, when the alienated younger leaders formed a new political party called the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (Progressive) shortly known as the PTCA (P). Mr. Padmalosan Boro and Mr. Kanakeshwar Narzari were elected President and General Secretary respectively. The new party announced its decision to move for a Union Territory, under the name and style of the ‘Mishing-Bodoland’, comprising the northern tracts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts of then Assam. The

---

281 Ibid.
282 Minutes of the Central Executive Committee meeting, held at Kokrajhar, April 18, 1977.
283 YPTCA, op. cit. p. 1.
284 Minutes of the discussion held at Deulguri Harisinga, between the PTCA and YPTCA on September 2, 1977.
proposed Union Territory was to cover an area of 17,000 sq. km. with a total population of 12,00000 (1971 Census), out of which, 7,78478 were to be tribals.286

Political Venture of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (Progressive):

The Plains Tribals’ Council of Assam (Progressive), popularly known as the PTCA (P), initially thought to be a harbinger of the Boro community, proved itself a failure in its five years long political venture (1979-80). A child of the ‘foreign national’ agitation era, its political programmes mostly centered around the fall-out of the agitation, with readiness to exploit the situation to the advantage of his community. It would be proper to mention here that the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), over certain differences, decided to observe neutrality in the foreign national agitation. For instance, the statements of the All Assam Students’ Union that the tribal belts and blocks are the safe haven of the foreign nationals or that Assam for the Assamese only are greatly resented by the Boro counterpart. The PTCA (P) too, with larger number of younger activists in it, was forced to observe neutrality in the line of the Students’ Union. As it observed neutrality, the PTCA (P) attempted to gain Government’s favour to redress its demands. With this motivation, the PTCA (P) submitted a number of memoranda basically focusing on two main points. First, it appraised the problems befalling on the plains tribals in the wale of the ongoing foreign national agitation and then secondly, raised the demand for a Union Territory in the name and style of ‘Mishing Bodoland.’ The first delegation, headed by the party President Mr. Padmalosan Boro himself, met the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on July 8, 1980 and placed their demand for a

286. Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, by the PTCA(P), dated April 22, 1983, New Delhi, p. 6.
Union Territory, for the "full protection of the 33 tribal Belts and Blocks" and therefore sought immediate "eviction of all the immigrants and foreigners including the non-bonafied encroachers who settled down within such Belts and Blocks."\(^2^8^7\) The representation also urged the Prime Minister to hold a talk between the Government and the representatives of the Plains tribals organizations of Assam, for threshing out an amicable solution to the foreign national issue.\(^2^8^8\) The Prime Minister said to have shown marked sympathy to the Boros and asked the members to "wait till normalcy returned to the state."\(^2^8^9\) The PTCA (P) continued to press for its demand in the following years. It submitted two memoranda, one in October 1980 and the other in May 1981, where it welcomed Central Government’s decision to solve the foreign national issue through negotiation. At the same time, the Council reiterated its demand for a Union Territory for the plains tribals.\(^2^9^0\) Another memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister on 22nd April, 1983. This was the period, when the magnitude of the foreign national agitation was at the zenith, resulting political instability and chaos in the state. In this memorandum, the PTCA (P) gave an ultimatum to the Central Government demanding a Union Territory for the plains tribals. It also appraised the situation faced by the Boros and other plains tribals in the wake of the agitation and expressed strong indignation towards the ongoing movement. The PTCA (P) perhaps made a calculation that an ultimatum, submitted at that time of crisis might compel the Central Government to concede their demand. In their memorandum it was clear that;

There is no way for solving foreign national issue in Assam except splitting Assam to concede the demand of every ethnic group just to

\(^2^8^7\) *Press Handout*, issued by the PTCA (P), New Delhi, dated July 11, 1980.
\(^2^8^8\) Ibid.
\(^2^8^9\) *The Times of India*, July 12, 1980.
\(^2^9^0\) *The PTCA (P) memorandum to the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi*, New Delhi, dated October 13, 1980 and May 20, 1981.
protect their language, culture and traditions and to prevail permanent peace in the North East India. The basic intention of the foreign national movement is nothing but to suppress the growth of the Bodo speaking plains tribals of Assam as it has been proved by their act of killings of the Bodo people and burning of the Bodo medium school buildings and their houses in those agitations spearheaded by the AASU and AAGSP.²⁹¹

As it was accused by the PTCA (P), the Students’ Union and other socio-political organizations, the agitation unleashed wide-spread communal riot between the Assamese and the plains tribals in different parts of the state. The killings of Gahpur and in other places of the state proved that the agitation caused violence on the indigenous people as well. And that, it appeared to have been an expression of Assamese wrath on the tribals, who, on their part, abstained from extending active support to the agitation on certain grounds, which they considered harmful to their interests. When situation had already taken its toll, the PTCA (P) called a convention of the leaders of tribal organizations, at Rowta of Darrang district on 7th April, 1983, to take stock of the situation, befalling on Boros and other plains tribals. The convention estimated a total tribal death of 613, number of villages burnt at 105 and the number of Boro medium schools burnt to be 45.²⁹² Though these informations need cross examination, they become pointer to the fact that the foreign national agitation divided the state population on ethnic line, making co-existence more difficult then before. It also caused wanton anarchism and political instability in the state. It was

²⁹¹ Memorandum to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, New Delhi, submitted by the PTCA (P), on 22nd April, 1983.
²⁹² Minutes of the Plains Tribals Organizations’ Leaders’ Convention, held at Rowta of Darrang district on 7th April, 1983.
logical that a socio-politically conscious community would use this situation to transpire their grievances and aspirations, and so did the PTCA (P).

The move of the PTCA (P), appeared to have had considerable impression on the Central Government leaderships. This was evident from the talk arranged by the Center, between its representatives and the delegates of the socio-political tribal organizations of the state, with an objective of threshing out a negotiated settlement of the foreign national issue. The talk might have been arranged in response to the repeated suggestions of the PTCA (P) to the Center. Such suggestion was made once to the then Home Minster Mr. Giani Zail Singh on the 9th July, 1980. The talk held on the 20th August, 1980, at Governor’s House in Shillong was represented by six tribal organizations, namely PTCA, PTCA (P), Tribal Sangha, All Assam Tribal Protection Committee, All Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Students’ Union and Mishing Bane Kebang. It was presided over by the Union Minister of State for Home affairs, Jogendra Makhwana. He was assisted by the Additional Home Secretary, M.L. Kampani and the Joint Secretary, Mr. Chabra. The then Governor L.P. Singh and his principal adviser H.C. Saring were also present in the talk.

The Talk, thus arranged in the mediation of the PTCA (P) however failed to evolve any solution to the foreign national issue. Though the matter was discussed, stress was given not on the foreign national problem but on the need of creating a Union Territory for an amicable and lasting solution to the problems of the plains tribal communities. Mr. Kanakeshwar Narzari, the General Secretary of the PTCA (P), reiterated his party’s demand for the ‘Mishing Bodoland’ for the protection and preservation of the ‘distinctive

identities' of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. On the whole, the talk evolved solution neither to the foreign national issue nor to the demands of the plains tribal communities. On the contrary, it gave the Center a fair chance to adopt the 'divide and rule' policy in defusing the situation of Assam. Yet, the Centre found it more expedient to sidetrack the Boro demand, rather than to add fuel to the Assamese fury by conceding it. However, the talk revealed the degree of estrangement prevailing among the ethnic communities and their polarization on communal line. It was perhaps conceivable even for the Central leaderships that further fragmentation of Assam was unavoidable and could be only a matter of time.

The split of the PTCA had been a blow to the Boro movement for a separate administrative unit. It not only divided the leaders but also the masses into two rival camps. The impact of this division could be seen from the results of the 1983 Assembly election, in which, candidates of both the parties lost almost in all the constituencies. Negative impact of the division also fell on their demand for a separate administrative unit, which the Centre could now undermine, by letting poise one against the other. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), realizing the gravity of the impact, came forward to forge an understanding between these two warring parties. Such attempt to unify the PTCA and the PTCA (P) was undertaken even in the year of 1980, first on February 24, in the mediation of the 'Negotiation Subcommittee', which resolved to hold further talks on 5th March 1980. But the proposed talk could not take place due to the abstention of the PTCA leaders. When another proposal for reunification came, the PTCA (P) readily welcomed it. But the PTCA, once again turned it down. The leaders of the

296. Resolution No. 5, passed in the Executive Committee meeting of the ABSU, held in Gauhati Tribal Rest House, on 13th March, 1983.
297. Minutes of the talk held between the PTCA and PTCA (P), held on February 24, 1980, at Kokrajhar.
PTCA perhaps found it difficult to reconcile with the younger leaders of the PTCA (P), who severely criticized them on many occasions terming their policies as "luke-warm" and "opportunistic." But despite negative response from the PTCA, the ABSU went ahead with its programme and called a convention of tribal organizations at Harisinga of Darrang district, on 17th to 19th April, 1984. The convention was attended by the leaders of the PTCA (P) and by Mr. Binoy Basumatari, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, who was lately expelled from the PTCA for criticizing the fellow members of the party. The convention formed an action committee, under the name of United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF), which was to work out the future course of Boro movement for a separate state. This action committee was later on transformed into a political organization in a conference held at Dotoma, on 12th to 13th October, 1984. The new political party, named as the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front, shortly known as the UTNLF, was headed by Mr. Binoy Basumatari and Mr. Kanakeshwar Narzari as the Chairman and Convener respectively.

In the mean time, like in the Assamese politics, the Bodo Students' Union came to the political fore-front changing the scenario of the Boro politics. Particularly, from the early 1980s, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), began launching vigorous mass agitation for the linguistic and political identity of the Boros which raised the popularity and prominence of this organization. The rise of the Students' Union coincided with the decline in the morale of the Boro political organizations. Though new political parties like the UTNLF and the United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front (UBNLF) were formed, they failed to rise to the expectation of the Boro community. Contrarily, the ABSU, hitherto spearheading the language and

298 Leaflet, issued by Mr. Kanakeshwar Narzari, Convener of the UTNLF, Harisinga, dated 30th June, 1984.
299 Leaflet, issued by the UTNLF, Dotoma, dated 22nd October, 1984.
political movements, emerged as an ultimate alternative to the Boros. With popular support ever tilting towards the Students' Union, it overshadowed the Boro political organizations, ultimately reducing them almost into obscurity. The ABSU on its part, having seen the success of the Assamese counterpart in the language and foreign national agitation, appeared to have drawn a logistic conclusion of taking decisive role in the future politics of the Boros. The circumstantial developments were on the side of the ABSU leaderships, helping them transform the Union into a major platform of the community politics. It is in this context that the history of the ABSU since the 1980s becomes the history of the language and political movements of the Boro community.

**Boro Movement under the Student Leadership:**

When the morale of the Boro political leaderships and their parties was fast fading, the Students' Union came to the front-stage and gave leadership to the Boro politics. Particularly, the new president Mr. Upendra Brahma, who took up the responsibility of the Union from 1986, appeared to have instilled vigour and spirit into the student body. The foreign national agitation of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and consequent capture of power by the Asom Gana Parishad raised desperation among the Boros. Their fear was that the Assamese pledge to provide "safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people" would undermine the cause of the Boros. The ABSU President Mr. Upendra Braham once commented that the "Assamese people have never accepted the trials a part and parcel of Assamese community and society in real sense, though they give motivated slogans of greater
Assamese. This statement very well indicated the extent of alienation prevailing between these two communities. Accommodative policies in social, political and administrative spheres would perhaps still reconcile the relationship between the Boros and the Assamese. But the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), after assuming the power, adopted certain administrative policies which happened to be anti-tribal in character. For instance, the Gana Parishad Government ordered eviction of the encroachers from the forest lands, most whom were however either Boros or other tribal communities. Another promulgation of the AGP Government, having serious implication on the Boros and other plains tribals, was the circular issued by the office of the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA), on 28th February 1986, which contained the directives of making Assamese as a compulsory Third Language of the School curriculum. The State Government also made knowledge of Assamese language a prerequisite for the state services. It is to be noted that the Assam Government, by the provision of Assam Language Act of 1960, Clause No. 7, had already committed that "Subject to the provision of this Act, the state government may by notification issued from time to time, direct the use of the language as may be specified there in provided: -

(a) The rights of the various linguistic groups in respect of instruction in educational institutions as laid down in the Constitution of India shall not be affected;
(b) The state shall not in granting aid to educational and cultural institutions discriminate against any such institutions on grounds of religion;
(c) The rights of appointments in the Assam Public Service Commission and other vocations shall be maintained without discrimination on the ground of language; and

(d) In regard to noting in the offices in the region of district, if any member of the staff is unable to note in any of the district language, the use of English shall be permitted by Heads of Department so long as the use thereof is permissible.\textsuperscript{302}

The Students’ Union was aware of the fact that the new regulations had violated the commitment of the Assam Language Act and thus undermined the interests of the Boro community. Besides, the AGP Government introduced the system of issuing identity cards, known as the Permanent Resident Certificate, to all the genuine inhabitants of Assam, which was to be produced when asked for. This legislation, though positive in motivation, was considered derogatory by the Boros. In their opinion, they being the sons of the soil needed no such certificate to prove their genuineness. Thus during the AGP regime, things developed in a direction which had considerable negative notes towards the Boros and other plains tribals. They were extensive enough to deteriorate the already strained Boro-Assamese relation. The ABSU, under its new and energetic leader Mr. Upendra Brahma, strongly opposed the AGP policies. Being encouraged by the experiences of its Assamese counterpart, the ABSU concluded mass agitation to be the only alternative for seeking constitutional remedy to the wrongs done to their people by the State Government. But before plunging into a mass agitation, the Union submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister on 22\textsuperscript{nd} January, 1987, in which, apart from other things, the demand for the “creation of a separate state with the status of Union Territory for the Plains tribals of Assam” under the Articles 2, 3 of the Indian Constitution was raised.\textsuperscript{303} The memorandum also included the demand of extending the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to the tribal compact areas of the southern bank of the

\textsuperscript{302} All Bodo Students’ Union, \textit{Language Policy of the ABSU}, Kokrajhar, dated 12\textsuperscript{th} September, 1979.

\textsuperscript{303} Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India, New Delhi, by the ABSU, dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} October, 1987.
Brahmaputra valley. Another memorandum, a charter of 92 point demands, which became the basis of ABSU movement of the later years, was also submitted to the State Government. Some of the major demands raised in the memorandum of the Union are noted below;

1. Immediate implementation of Bodo as an Associate Official Language in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri Sub-Division.
2. Extension of Bodo as an Associate Official Language to the other districts of Assam.
3. Establishment of a Central University at Kokrajhar.
4. Establishment of a Medical College, Engineering College, Veterinary College and Ayurvedic College etc. at Kokrajhar.
5. Protection of Tribal Belts and Blocks and creation of new ones.
6. Creation of a separate Directorate for the plains tribal education with separate budget provision.
7. Introduction of Bodo language as an M.I.L. in the M.A degree of the Universities.
9. Grating of Sixth Schedule status to the Boro-Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Districts.
10. Retention of English as a medium of instruction in the colleges and Universities of the State.
11. Installation of Technical and Poly-technique Institute in tribal areas.
12. Increase in the S/T reserved quota for admission into the educational institutions.
13. Introduction of Bodo language as an optional subject in the State Civil Service examinations.
14. Introduction of Bodo as one of the regional subjects in the Civil Service Examinations of the country.
15. Conduction of proper census of the Bodo population.
17. Introduction of the Roman Script for the Bodo language.
18. Launching of a massive industrialization of the tribal areas of the state.
19. Free and compulsory education to the children upto fourteen years of age.
20. Opposition to the Clause No. 6 of the Assam Accord of 1985.
21. Opposition to the Clause No. 10 of the Assam Accord and eviction of the tribals from the forests AREAS OF Assam.
22. Opposition to the introduction of the Assamese as the compulsory Third Language in the schools of the state.
23. Revocation of the introduction of Assamese as the pre-requisite for the state services.
24. Creation of District Councils in the tribal compact areas in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley.
25. Creation of a separate state with the status of a Union Territory in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra for the plains tribals of Assam.  

The proposed Union Territory, as figured in the memorandum to the Prime Minister, was to cover an area of 25,478 Sq. kilometers out of the total 78,523 Sq. kilometers area of the state. The memorandum also demanded for an autonomous state in the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, comprising (a) "the tribal inhabited areas", and (b) "the schedule tribe sub-plan areas." The proposed autonomous state was to be named 'Nilachal' and it was supposed to cover an area of 3,150 Sq. kilometers. It also raised the demand for a regional council comprising 15,222 Sq. kilometers, for the

---

304. Memorandum to the Chief Minister Mr. P. K. Mahanta, submitted by the ABSU, dated 10th January, 1987.
305. Ibid, and the memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, submitted by the Autonomous District Demand Committee, Boko, Kamrup, dated 1987.
Boros living in Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills. However, there was no response from both the Central and State Governments, which further alienated the Boros. The adverse circumstances appeared to have pushed the Union activists more towards radicalism. The President himself was found charged up, raising slogans like; "Divide Assam 50:50; revolution well come; we want human rights; do or die for separate homeland." The situation was thus building up in the Boro areas and it was indicative of the ensuing mass upsurge of the Boros.

**Movement for a Separate State:**

When no positive response was forthcoming from the Governments, the ABSU had no other alternative but to resort to mass agitation. The agitational programmes began from 2nd March 1987, with a pledge of making it a "democratic, peaceful and non-violent movement." The initial phase of the movement was confined to mass rallies, picketing in front of the district and sub-divisional head-quarters, submitting memoranda and organizing demonstrations in the state capital and at Boat Club in Delhi. The agitation took its first toll on 12th June, 1987, when a Class X student Mr. Surjit Narzari was injured fatally by attackers on his way back home after partaking in the demonstration in Gauhati. Another boy named Subhas Basumatari also lost one of his eyes in the attack. The ABSU called a bandh on the following day, in protest against the killing of Mr. Surjit Narzari. On that day, the Boro volunteers organized mass rallies, boycotted classes and submitted memoranda to the authorities.

---

306 Ibid.
307 *Press Release*, issued by the ABSU, Kokrajhar, 1987
308 Ibid.
309 Ibid.
The ABSU nevertheless continued with its pledge for non-violent and peaceful mass agitation. It organized public rallies in different parts of Boros areas, where the Boro girls came out in thousands wearing their traditional attires to show their solidarity and support to the ABSU movement. The Union also organized mass prayer meetings, where Boros of different faiths prayed to Almighty God for strength before launching a ‘do or die’ agitation for their demand. Besides rallies and prayer meetings, the Union also resorted to calling bandhs periodically, both partial and state-wide, to press their demands. It started with the 12 hours tribal area bandh on 27th August, 1987; followed by 24 hours on 24th September, 1987, and then 36 hours bandh from 5 a.m. of 24th September to 5 a.m. of 26th September, 1987. The tribal area bandhs were however not effective enough to draw the attention of the State and Central Governments. The Union therefore decided to make the method more effective by resorting to state-wide bandhs, starting with 48 hours ‘rail ruko’ agitation from 26th to 28th November, 1987. It was followed by 48 hours Highway bandh from 5 a.m. of 9th December to 5 a.m. 11th December, 1987. The ABSU soon discovered that the blockade of the rail link and the highway could be an effective method of their agitation. Particularly, the Boro areas being at the bottleneck of the North Eastern region, any disturbance in this area could affect the regular flow of essential goods to the whole region.

The State Government was not only apathetic but unleashed repressive atrocities on the Boros. The AGP regime let loose the Assam police on the agitators on 25th and 27th January 1988, who gang-raped 9 Boro girls and one woman, in a village called No. 12 Bhumka of Kokrajhar district, on the pretext of flushing the ABSU activists out.310 The cruelty of the State machinery not only failed to quell the agitation but also proved

counter productive. On the first count, the repression diminished whatever little faith people had in the Government, and on the second, the innocent victims of the atrocities now found reasons for joining the agitation, if not for anything, at least to retaliate the Government which caused them miseries. There was element of truth when the ABSU President, in an interview with the editor of Prantik stated, “We are thankful to Mahanta Government for the repressive measures which have enabled our bays to become more firm in their conviction to the cause they are fighting for.”

As the Government considered the Boro issue only as a mere law and order problem, it tried to quell the agitation by repression and by enforcing various draconian laws. For instance, many ABSU activists and innocent Boros were arrested and detained under the Anti-Terrorist Detention (Prevention) Act and Arms Act.

The apathetic and repressive attitude of the State Government compelled the Students’ Union to review its ideology and methods of the agitation. It was debated in its 20th Annual Conference held on 19th to 22nd December 1988, at Bashbari, in Dhubri district of Assam. In this conference, it was resolved to depart from its previous “democratic and non-violent” ideology and action plan, and to adopt more radical agitational programmes. The conference adopted resolutions on the following aspects;

1. To change the demand of a “Homeland” from a Union Territory to a full-fledged state, where the plains tribals would get all-round opportunities to develop themselves according to their own abilities.

2. The proposed state would be known as ‘Bodoland’, where all people, irrespective of heir caste and creed would enjoy equal rights and status, proclaimed by the Constitution of India.

3. The conference also resolved to drop 89 non-political demands of the charter and to launch movement for the remaining 3 political demands. The three political demands were; (i) creation of a separate state under the Articles 2, 3 and 4 of the Indian Constitution; (ii) creation of an autonomous district council in the tribal compact areas of the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and (iii) inclusion of the Boro-Kacharis in Karbi-Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. 312

In the same conference, The Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee (BPAC), an organization of pan-Boro nature, having representatives of all the cognate tribes of the Boro race, was formed. The objective of forming the BPAC, in their words was to lead and represent “the Boro masses in the mass movement along with the ABSU keeping always itself above all party politics by giving clarion call to all plains tribal and non-tribal people of Assam to sympathize and co-operate with the ongoing popular mass movement spontaneously until the cherished goal is achieved through peaceful political negotiation.”313 The BPAC was formed with an objective of involving maximum masses possible and to transform it into a peoples’ movement thereby.

In the second phase of the agitation, bandhs of longer durations were observed, starting with 120 hours, 175 hours to 1001 hours, beginning on the 16th February, 2nd March and 25th August, 1989 respectively. There had also been cases of stray violence, arsons and lootings, which, in the process left 16 people dead. However, despite stray incidents, the ABSU reassured its commitment to “non-violent and democratic means to achieve its

312 Memorandum to the President of India, Dr. V. Venkataraman, submitted by the Bodo Peoples’ Action Committee, Kokrajhar, Assam, dated 13th February, 1989.
313 Minutes of the 20th ABSU annual conference, held at Bashbari, dated 19th to 22nd December, 1988.
objective." Responding to the State Government’s accusation on the stray violence, the ABSU leadership stated that, “The occurrence of stray incidence of violence is natural as the ABSU is bound to the arms for self protection.” The ABSU leaderships blamed the anti-social elements for the occurrence of violence, arsons and lootings, who, in their opinion, tried to malign the image of the Students’ Union. As for the masses, the Union was grateful for being non-violent and extended “greetings for maintaining communal harmony,” during the agitation.

The frequent bandhs and derailment of the supply system disrupted the inflow of essential commodities affecting all the states of the region. But the bandhs still continued unabated. Hard-pressed by the situation, all the Chief Ministers of Congress-ruled states of the region met the Prime Minister, requesting him to intervene. However, the Assam Chief Minister was not willing to involve the Center, fearing duplicity and interference of the later. But the mounting pressure from all sides, forced the Assam Chief Minister to have informal talks with the President Mr. U.N. Brahma. The first round of talk, held at Kokrajhar ended with a proposal of having another round of talk in Dispur. However, the chief Minister himself failed to turn up for the scheduled second round of talk and sent a junior minister, who, according to the ABSU President and his colleagues, was “known for his hostilities to the ABSU leaders.” The failure of these two rounds of talks made it known to the Union that the State Government had not taken the ABSU movement seriously, and that, it needed change in its strategy to assert greater pressure. The Students’ Union therefore laid three preconditions for the resumption of talks with the State Government. They

---

314. An interview with the ABSU President Mr. U.N.Brahma, published in The Khasini, Vol., No. 30, 16th May to June 1, 1989.
315. Ibid.
316. The times of India, February 21, 1989.
were; (1) involvement of Central representatives in the talk, (2) holding of talks outside Assam on security reason and (3) talks should revolve around the demand for a full-fledged state. \(^{318}\) Meanwhile, the situation in the state continued to reel under the spell of the agitation. The Chief Minister, for all his previous insincerity, now found himself in precarious condition between unabated bandhs and unyielding ABSU leaderships. Under such circumstances, he tried to find a solution by holding an all party meeting on the 11\(^{th}\) and 23\(^{rd}\) March, 1989. But despite invitation, the ABSU leaderships refused to participate in the discussion. \(^{319}\) The meeting however ended with a suggestion of holding further dialogue with the agitationists. The State Chief Minister entrusted Mr. Bhrigu Phukan, who was then holding the Home portfolio, to deal with the Boro problem. Soon the Home Minister invited the ABSU for talk but without complying with any of the preconditions laid by the Students’ Union. The ABSU leaderships on their part, right away rejected State’s offer for talk on ground of non-complaisance with their preconditions. In reaction to State Government’s attitude, the Students’ Union resolved not to hold further talks with the state Government, with or without the Central representatives. The ABSU leaderships demanded immediate intervention of the Center, failing which the ABSU and BPAC would be compelled to boycott the forth coming election. \(^{320}\)

The rigid stand of the ABSU and the State Government led to a stalemate, causing untold miseries to the common people. Things started taking communal line, each and every Boro being suspected as a terrorist by the security personals and even by the non-Boros. A conflict situation between the Boros and the Non-Boros was thus building up which could

\(^{319}\) The Assam Tribune, 24\(^{th}\) March, 1989.
\(^{320}\) Press Release, issued by the ABSU, dated 26\(^{th}\) May, 1989.
give vent to a communal riot on the slightest pretext. Ultimately the tense situation gave itself away at Gohpur, where a large scale communal riot broke out between the Boros and non-Boros, rendering thousands of Boros homeless and forcing many of them to take shelter in the bordering region of Arunachal Pradesh, adjoining Assam. It is said that even the Assam police personals joined the riot against the Boros. Mr. Gegong Apang, having to face the brunt maximum, stepped forward to intervene and expose the sordid side of the story. Mr. Gegong Apang’s exposition was an eye opener for many, both politicians and intellectuals within and without the state. The people raised voices putting pressure on the State Government to find a negotiated settlement to the Boro problem. All the responsible citizens of the state urged the Government to initiate talks with the ABSU, without prolonging the sufferings of the people. The people, at the same time, requested the Students’ Union to take a softer stand. The Chief Minister Mr. P.K. Mahanta could no longer ignore the development, particularly, when the public opinion was by and large in favour of a negotiated settlement. Mr. P.K. Mahata agreed to comply with the preconditions of the ABSU, while the later retreated from its recent stand by agreeing to involve the State Government in the proposed talks. Thus began a series of Tripartite Talks between the representatives of the Centre, the State and the ABSU.

The Tripartite Talks:

The First Tripartite Talk of the series was held on 28th August, 1989, in New Delhi. The Central Government was represented by the Minister of State for Social Welfare, while the State Government was represented by the Chief Minister and the ABSU-BPAC by a 52 strong delegation led by its

321 Memorandum to the Three Members Expert Committee on the Bodo Issues, submitted by the ABSU and BPAC, Kokrajhar, dated 8th April, 1991.
President Mr. U.N. Brahma himself. Along with its priori decided three political demands, the ABSU also put forward a set of demands concerning creation of congenial atmosphere for the talk. Those demands were:
1. The AGP Government, which they considered ant-tribal, should be dismissed and Presidential rule should be imposed in the State.
2. Ex-gratia payments should be made to the martyrs and the families affected by the movement.
4. The deployment of the Assam Rifles should be withdrawn and high-handedness of the Assam Police should be stopped.
5. The police camps, erected in the Boro villages should be removed.
6. All the arrested ABSU and BPAC supporters should be released unconditionally.
7. All the pending cases against the ABSU and BPAC supporters should be withdrawn unconditionally.\(^{322}\)

The First Tripartite Talk thus set the ball rolling, creating credentials for further talks. One of the embers of the BPAC, contented with the outcome of the talk, remarked that with the completion of the First Tripartite Talk, the Boro problem had become a national issue and that the talks would continue in the initiative of the Centre till a solution was found out.\(^{323}\) Though the first talk did not immediately address the issue of the separate state, it brought forth a number of positive results, particularly, in matters of creating a congenial atmosphere for the future talks. In response to the call of Mrs. Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, the ABSU suspended the movement.

\(^{322}\) Memorandum to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of India, submitted by the ABSU and BPAC, New Delhi, dated 12th December, 1989.

\(^{323}\) An interview with Mr. G. Mosahari, a BPAC member, published in the Khasim, No. 2, (A Boro Forth nightly), dated 21st November, 1989.
temporarily, while the State Government promised to withdraw some of the draconian laws enforced in the Boro areas of the state. This meeting also decided to hold further talks till an amicable solution was found to the Boro problem.

As per the previous decision, the Second Tripartite Talk was held in Delhi, on November 5, 1989, in the initiative of Mrs. R.K. Bajpai. The talk agreed to send a good will mission under the leadership of the Assam Assembly speaker Mr. Pulakesh Baruah, together with the ABSU General Secretary Mr. Rabiram Brahma, to visit the movement affected areas of the state. The good will mission tried to instill confidence and mutual respect among the people. It also appealed to the Boros taking shelter in Arunachal Pradesh to come back to their respective homes.

In the mean time, there was change of power in the national politics. After the fall of the Congress, the National Front formed the ministry under the leadership of Mr. V.P. Singh. His Government however continued the process of talks began by the previous Government. The new Government was represented by Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, who was then the Union Minister for Labour and Welfare. The Third Tripartite Talk was held on 11th January, 1990 between the representatives of the Centre, the State and the ABSU-BPAC. Though the third round of talk did not discuss the main demand, the ABSU and BPAC representatives were contented with the initiative taken by the new Central Government. They hoped that the National Front Government would take stock of the objective situations of the Boros and other plains tribals, and would render justice to their needs and grievances.
As it was already resolved, the Fourth Tripartite Talk was held on 9th March 1990, in New Delhi. The ABSU President Mr. U. N. Brahma, who became seriously ill at that time, could not take part in the fourth round of talk. In his absence, Mr. Rabiram Brahma, the General Secretary of the Union took up the leadership. The talk ended with the resolution of holding further negotiation in the future. Besides, as a gesture of good faith, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan himself offered to visit the Boro areas from the 1st April, 1990, which however did not materialize.

The Fifth Tripartite Talk, which was held on 8th April, 1990, made some progress compare to the previous talks. In this talk, an eight member committee called the “Committee on Bodo Issues”, consisting three representatives from the State, three from the ABSU-BPAC and two from the Centre. The ABSU-BPAC was to be represented by (i) Mr. Rabiram Brahma, the General Secretary of the ABSU, (ii) Mr. Sansuma Basumatari, the Convener of the BPAC and (iii) Mr. Satyendra Brahma chaudhary, Adviser of the ABSU. The state Government representation was to be consisted of the (a) Special Commissioner, Home and political affairs, (b) Commissioner, Welfare of Plains Tribals and Backward Classes and (c) Secretary, Welfare of Plans Tribals and Backward Classes. The two Central representatives were Mr. P.K. Krishnan; the Secretary in the department of welfare in the Centre would be the convener of the Committee and Mr. Vinoy Shankar, the Joint Secretary (NE) in the Ministry of Home Affairs as the co-convener of the Committee. The Committee was to examine and recommend on the Boro issues, and then to report in the Sixth Tripartite Talk.\(^\text{324}\) The aforesaid 8 member committee had several rounds of discussions in New Delhi, beginning from 30th April, 1990 to 30th June, 1990. As per the directive, it submitted its report in the Sixth Tripartite Talk.

\(^{324}\) Memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee, op. cit.
held on 2nd July, 1990. In the Sixth round of talk, both the Governments, as they were asking for, were given time to study the report and to bring their views and recommendations to the forthcoming Seventh round of talk. But in the Seventh round of Tripartite Talk, the Assam Chief Minister Mr. P.K. Mahanta, place the proposal for setting up Panchayati Raj in the tribal areas of Assam, raising waves of anger and rejection among the ABSU-BPAC representatives. The ABSU-BPAC leaderships out-rightly rejected the proposal by terming it as a humiliation to the plains tribals. The ABSU-BPAC however, did not withdraw from the talk but insisted on Center's decisive intervention in the matter. The situation was saved by Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, the Union Minister for Labour and Welfare who soothingly observed that "the autonomy proposed by the Government of Assam for the Plains Tribals was not adequate and there was urgent need of consideration for granting greater autonomy."

The 8th round of Tripartite Talk, scheduled on 11th September, 1990, was held two days later on 13th September, 1990. In this talk, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, the Union Minister for Labour and Welfare put forward a proposal in the form of a resolution in which he gave due cognizance to the objective situations of the Boros and other plains tribals of Assam, as well as, proposed for the formation of a three member committee of experts to "determine the areas of Bodos and other plains tribes to the north of the river Brahmaputra and make recommendations as to the Autonomy, Legislative, Administrative and Financial powers that may be given to them. The committee will consult all the groups concerned and submit its report within a period of forty days to the Government of India."
The committee of expert, as proposed by Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, could not be formed during the National Front regime due to its sudden fall on the 7th November, 1990. Though a coalition Government of the Janata Dal and Congress was installed in the Centre on the 10th November, 1990 itself, it took the ABSU some time to familiarize the matter to the new Government. The ABSU and BPAC took out a peaceful demonstration at Delhi Boat Club, on 3rd January, 1991, to press their demands to the new Government. They submitted memoranda to the Prime Minister Mr. Chandra Sekhar and to Mr. Subodh Kant Sahay, the Union Minister of State for Home on 2nd January, urging the Centre to take an urgent step towards solving the Boro problem. But having failed to get any positive response from the Centre, the ABSU-BPAC leaderships were forced to submit an ultimatum to the Prime Minister on the 16th February, 1991, copies of which were also submitted to the Minister of State for Home and to the Deputy Prime Minister Mr. Devi Lai. Ultimately, the Chandra Sekhar Government was convinced enough to announce the formation of the ‘Three Member Expert Committee’ on the 25th February, 1991. The Expert Committee consisted of Dr. Bhupender Singh I.A.S. (retd), as it chairman, Dr. K. S. Singh, Director General, Anthropological Survey of India, a member and Mr. A. M. Gokhale, Joint Secretary, Department of Rural Development, Government of India as its member-secretary. The Three Member Expert Committee visited Assam in April 1991, met the people and collected their opinions in a mammoth gathering at Kokrajhar on April8, 1991. But the recommendation of the Expert Committee was rejected by the ABSU-BPAC because it ruled out the feasibility of creating a separate state for the Boros.

Formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC):

Rejection of the Expert Committee proposal brought the negotiation process to near stalemate. The possibility of resuming the agitation was looming large. But on the invitation of the Central Government, the ABSU-BPAC decided to resume the talk. Thereafter, several rounds of discussions were held between the representatives of the Centre, State and the ABSU-BPAC. The leaderships of the ABSU-BPAC once again found themselves between the jaws of the Central and the State Governments, both remaining rigid and unyielding to their demands. Like in the Roman script movement, it was once again a trying time of the steadfastness for the Boro leaderships. But once again their tenacity gave in to the pressure. The Boro leaderships signed an accord with the State Government on 20th February, 1993, accepting an autonomous apparatus in place of a separate state. The new administrative unit was to be known as the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). The ABSU president, Mr. Sansuma Basumatari became the first Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Autonomous Council. Set up under a State Act, the BAC aimed at giving, as committed in the text of the accord, maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution, so that the boros could achieve advancement in social, economic, educational and cultural spheres. The interim Executive Council of the BAC was reconstituted by the Asom Gana Parishad after it came to the power. Mr. P. K. Mahanta, who became the new Chief Minister, reconstituted it with the help of the Peoples’ Democratic Front, as the later extended its support to the AGP in the State Assembly. Mr. Kanakshwar Narzari was made the Chief Executive Member of the Council.

328 Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord), February 20, 1993, Gauhati.
The Bodoland Autonomous Council was a two-tier body, namely, the General Council and the Executive Council. The General Council was to be composed of 40 members, of whom 35 were to be elected representatives, and five were to be Government nominees. The Executive Council was responsible for the implementation of the laws, orders, and rules etc. which were passed by the General Council. The house was to elect one Chairman and one Vice-Chairman from amongst the members if the General Council.

The BAC had legislative, Executive, financial and judicial powers over 38 subjects allotted to it. The subjects included agriculture, cottage industry, fisheries, forest, primary education, animal husbandry and rural development etc. It also had the power to appoint grade III and IV employees. The Council was given authority to use Boro as the official language within the BAC area, but outside the BAC, correspondence was to be in bilingual form. The General council had the powers to regulate trade and commerce within its jurisdiction and in accordance with the existing laws. It had the powers to issue permits and license to the individuals within the BAC area. The Council began its work with an ad-hoc budget and also with an interim Executive Council, appointed by the Assam Government. The first Chief Executive Member resigned from the Chief-ship protesting the indecision of the State Government in delimiting the boundary of the BAC. After his resignation, Mr. Premsingh Brahma, who was the Deputy Chief Executive Member at that time, became the Chief Executive member of the BAC. He was nominated by the Chief Minister Mr. Hiteshwar Saikia. The Bodoland Autonomous Council survived for a period of ten years, till it was dissolved in 2003.

The BAC however proved itself a failure, due to several factors. Right from the time of institution, the BAC suffered from inherent
deficiencies. The foremost of all was the lack of boundary which was not delimitated at the time of its institution and remained undone till it was dissolved in 2003. This was due to the controversy over the numbers of villages demanded by the ABSU-BPAC to be included in the newly created Council. Out of 3085 villages demanded by the Boro bodies, 2570 villages were included in it. Later on, more villages were transferred to the BAC bringing the total number of villages to 2941. The remaining numbers of villages were not included as they said to have had less then 50 per cent Boro population in them. Controversy also arose due to the Boro claim over the Bongaigaon refinery and the villages around. Both the State and the Council did not want to lose it on financial consideration. Thus controversies over these fundamental issues continued for years till its abolition in 2003.

Secondly, the Council had no Constitutional status. It was created under the State Act and thus it was always at the mercy of the State Government. The politics of creating the BAC was perhaps more to defuse the situation rather then to actually solve the Boro problem. It appears to have been a device of giving something without actually parting with anything substantial. Uncertain as the existence of the Council was, the new born BAC became a virgin ground for power game between the rival Boro groups and a milling cow for the parties, whose stay in the office was as uncertain as the Council itself. In this power game, both the Centre and the State Governments exploited the situation according to their political needs. Though the BAC existed for a period of ten years, it was always under threat, particularly, from the State Government under whose act it was created and whom the Boros themselves always looked with an eye of suspicion.

Failure of the BAC gave rise a new political situation among the Boros, particularly, when larger number of the ABSU and BPAC leaderships were against the existing Autonomous Council. The experiences of the BAC
exposed the fact that the administrative set up of the existing kind was not enough to meet the expectations and aspirations of the Boros. And hence, in their opinion, creation of a separate was the suitable alternative for them. Their aspiration ran high when the Centre decided to curve out three new states namely Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattishgarh out of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The Boro leaderships also gave a strong delegation of 40 representatives, led by the lone Boro Parliamentarian Mr. S. K. Basumatari. They met the Union Ministers, submitted memoranda and waited for Center’s response. But when the Central Government announced its decision to introduce Bills for the creation of the three new states in December, 1998, no mention was made to the Boros. Mr. S. K. Basumatari raised the Boro demand for a separate state in the Parliament, but found no response from the Union Government. The Centre thereby showed its unwillingness to create a separate state for the Boros.

**Formation of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD):**

Once again, the Boro politics was in a state of confusion and disappointment. The failure of the democratic movement had in the meantime forced many ABSU volunteers to take up arms and give birth to an armed organization known as the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF). The militant organization found logistic support from the disgruntled Boro activists who rejected the Bodo Accord of 1993 on the grounds of its deficiencies. From thence, the leadership of the Boro movement was given more by this armed organization rather than the ABSU. But the Boro leaderships showed political sagacity by accepting Center’s invitation for further negotiation. Consequently, in response to Center’s call for negotiation, the BLTF unilaterally suspended operation from July 14, 1999.

---

exposed the fact that the administrative set up of the existing kind was not enough to meet the expectations and aspirations of the Boros. And hence, in their opinion, creation of a separate was the suitable alternative for them. Their aspiration ran high when the Centre decided to curve out three new states namely Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh out of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The Boro leaderships also gave a strong delegation of 40 representatives, led by the lone Boro Parliamentarian Mr. S. K. Basumatari. They met the Union Ministers, submitted memoranda and waited for Center’s response. But when the Central Government announced its decision to introduce Bills for the creation of the three new states in December, 1998, no mention was made to the Boros. Mr. S. K. Basumatari raised the Boro demand for a separate state in the Parliament, but found no response from the Union Government. 329 The Centre thereby showed its unwillingness to create a separate state for the Boros.

**Formation of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD):**

Once again, the Boro politics was in a state of confusion and disappointment. The failure of the democratic movement had in the meantime forced many ABSU volunteers to take up arms and give birth to an armed organization known as the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF). The militant organization found logistic support from the disgruntled Boro activists who rejected the Bodo Accord of 1993 on the grounds of its deficiencies. From thence, the leadership of the Boro movement was given more by this armed organization rather than the ABSU. But the Boro leaderships showed political sagacity by accepting Center’s invitation for further negotiation. Consequently, in response to Center’s call for negotiation, the BLTF unilaterally suspended operation from July 14, 1999.

The BLTF submitted a memorandum of demands to resolve Boro problem through negotiation. Thereafter, a series of talks were held between the Centre, State and the BLTF. The talks ultimately led to the forging of a solution by giving birth to the Bodoland Territorial Council, under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Memorandum of Settlement was signed on February 10, 2003, in New Delhi, by the representatives of the center, State and the BLTF. The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District Bill was passed by both the Houses and it got President's assent on September 8, 2003. The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) became operational on 7th December, 2003. Initially, the BTAD included an area of 3082 villages and the question of including 93 additional villages awaited the recommendation of the Three Member Committee, comprising the representatives of the Centre, State and the BLTF. After the installation, the Chairman of the erstwhile BLTF Mr. Hagrama Mahilari became the first Chief Executive Member and his deputy Mr. Chandan Brahma became the Deputy Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District.

The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, envisaged to granting autonomy of developing themselves in economic, educational, linguistic and political aspirations as well as, preserving their rights over land, distinctive socio-culture and ethnic identity etc. Creation of the BTAD was also expected to speed up infrastructural development within the area of the Council.

The Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District shall be a two-tier body, consisting of the General Council and the Executive-Council. The

General Council shall consist of 46 members, out of whom 30 are reserved for the Scheduled Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities and 5 seats are open for all. The remaining 6 seats are for the members nominated by the Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities. The Executive Council shall be consisted of 12 members, including the Chief and the Deputy Chief Executive Members. Their status is equivalent to the Cabinet Ministers of the State. The decision of the BTAD shall be executed through the Principal Secretary, appointed by the State.

The BTAD shall have legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers over 42 subjects allotted to it. Some of the major subjects are agriculture, education, cottage industries, forest, animal husbandry, social welfare urban development and tourism etc.\(^{332}\)

Boro language shall be the official language of the Council, but both the English and Assamese shall be used for outside correspondence. Besides, the Center agreed to include Boro language in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution. The Union Government also agreed to establish an Institute of Technology and a State University within the BTC area.\(^{333}\)

The formation of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District thus appears to have ended the Boro movement for an administrative autonomy for the time being. However, only time will tell how long the present structure would be able to accommodate the expectations and aspirations of the Boros, without having to revive their original demand for a separate. Besides, with the Nationalist Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), an armed organization still continuing their struggle for an Independent

\(^{332}\) Ibid.
\(^{333}\) Ibid.
Boroland, there is every likelihood that the political map of the present Assam be redrawn to further accommodate the demands of the Boros.