CHAPTER III

The Dynamics of Bodo Movement

Bodos - The Historical Epithets

The North Eastern part of India constitutes of several tribal communities and all have their separate cultural and community identity. Assam, which is one of the seven sister states of North East India comprise of various tribes, both, in hills and plain regions. One of the most or rather the most remarkable among these tribes is Kirata and it also finds a mention in Mahabharata. The Kirata belongs to the clan of Mongoloid tribes and Bodo tribe is linked to the Kirata of the Mahabharata period.

A memorandum of the Bodos submitted to Bhupinder Singh Committee appointed by the Center to study Bodo issues, states, “whosoever and whatsoever name the Bodos may be known to others now, after all, the allied tribes belonging to the great Indo-Mongoloid living in the proposed Bodoland territory are often same Bodo groups. Ethnically speaking, the majority population of the proposed Bodoland territory has got its own distinct and quite separate ethnic identity and background which is completely different from that of Assamese.”

The historians classified the Indo-Mongoloid people into four branches:

1) Tibetan
2) Himalayan
3) Assam Burmese and
4) North Assam branch

109 A Memorandum to the three member Expert Committee Under Dr. Bhupinder Singh, on Bodo Issues- by All Bodo Student Union -1991
The Bodos are categorized as “Assam Burmese” branch and those who speak the Bodo language are the Cacharis, the Meches, the Garos, the Rabhas, the Tripuris and the Koches. The Morans, the Chutias, the Lalungs, Sonowal, Cacharis, Thengal Cacharis, Dimasa Cacharis, the Hazongs also speak the Bodo language which has partial influence of Bengali and the Assamese languages. The Bodos are known by different names at different places. They are known by names of Cacharis or the Mech in plains of Assam to the neighboring Hindus, while they prefer to call themselves as Bodos in other places. In the North Cachar Hill District they are called Dimasa, the dwellers of North Lakhimpur and Nowgong Districts call themselves Sonowals.

The Bodos are ethnically linked to Tibet Burmese origin, belonging to Tibet-Chinese linguistic stock and constitute a very important section of population in Assam. At present, the tribe is mainly concentrated under the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan in the northern tract of the Brahmaputra valley. Apart from here, they are also found today in the states of North Bengal, Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland and in Mymensing of Bangladesh and also in Nepal.

The Bodos are one of the earliest settlers in Assam, who migrated from China, Tibet, Mangolia and Siberia. The Cacharis, another name for Bodos, according to Rev S. Endle, are the original autochons of Assam. Anderson describes ‘Bodos’ as original people of the Brahmaputra valley. Gait too holds them as the earliest known inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley. S. K. Chatterjee locates the original home of these Sino-Indian speakers in North West China, who had eventually come towards the South-west direction in the pre-historic times. He mentions that the Bodo tribes, who were in large numbers, had occupied the plains of the Brahmaputra valley even prior to Mahabharata period. D. Anderson, in the introductory section book by S. Endle, “The Cacharis”, observes that members of Cacharis, Garos, Mechas, Rabhas

---

110 Bhattacharjee C.; Ethnicity and Autonomy Movements: Case study of Bodo Cacharis of Assam, P 71 Vikash Publishing, New Delhi, 2000
111 Endle S, The Cacharis, Calcutta,
112 Gait E, A History of Assam, Calcutta, Thacker Splint, 1967
and Tripuris of the Bodo tribe are recognised that they belong to the same linguistic groups.

Though historically the Bodos did not have any known script, they exhibited their inclination towards Roman script since 1884, that is, since the publication of an authentic monograph, The Cacharis, in 1911 by Rev. S. Endle where-in he narrated some Bodo folktales in Roman Script with analogous English translation. And these analogues became crucial point of the Bodo Movement in the post independence era. 114

Rise of Bodo Middle Class:

The beginning of the 20th Century has been a very significant era in the history of Assam. This was marked by the emergence of the Bodo middle class. Though, very meagre in number, they emerged with the introduction of English education by the British. During the British period, the middle class grew from the external compulsions of quest and the need for playing a role, even if they were subservient to the conquerors. A Vedic Movement under Kalicharan Brahamchari in 1907 saw the growth of a small middle class among adherents of a new faith who adopted the suffix Brahma after their name. They conquered relationships at several strategic points but still comparatively minor achievements in comparison to others. 115 Since earlier time, the Bodo economy was basically based on agriculture while its age old technology had never been improved despite the wave of capitalist market economy making some inroads here and there in the country. 116

On December 12, 1911, the Fifth Emperor of England, George V and his Queen visited Delhi. On that occasion it was declared that Assam would be separated from Bengal and a Chief Commissioner was appointed for the state. At the backdrop of this

114 Bhattacharjee C; Op. cit. P. 96
115 Singh B P: The Problem Of Change, A study of North East India Delhi, P. 1 Oxford University Press. 1987
administrative re-arrangement, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, leader of the Brahma Movement opened the Brahma School, a boarding school, and made various efforts to make education compulsory. The school of handicraft among one of them received government patronage later on. The boarding (Brahma Boarding and Mech Boarding) became the center of Bodo intellectuals and their activities with the passage of time. Some of it's members, with the assistance of some Bodo students, went further on to form the Bodo Chatra Sammelan in 1919.\textsuperscript{117}

It was during the same time that other developments for mobilizing the Bodo people were at move. The Bodo Mahasamellani was another organisation of the kind of Bodo Chatra Sammelan formed by the Bodo intelligentia, and within no time this Mahasammalani turned out to be the main platform for activities of the Bodo intellectuals. This organisation held conferences from time to time in which important decisions were made and resolutions passed. These conferences emphasised mainly the need for eradication of social evils. Jadhavchandra Khakhlary was appointed its first President.\textsuperscript{118} The members of such organisations were mainly the products of Brahma Boarding. But till then the emphasis was much on the side for curbing the evils in social life, like in Bengal. The political space was neither occupied by the Bodos nor was craved for.

Maturing of the Bodo Identity

Towards the end of 1920's the Bodos showed a definite sign of Bodo consciousness. The Simon commission was constituted at St. James, London, on 26\textsuperscript{th} November, 1927 with nine members under the Royal Notification to look into tribal affairs throughout the Indian Dominion. It called for a memorandum to be submitted to the Simon Commission. The aspirations of the Bodo leaders were reflected in their drafting of the memorandum to be submitted before the Simon Commission to identify them as a

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. Pp.72-73
\textsuperscript{118} Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma (in Assamase Jorhat- Asom Sahitya Sabha, 1983 p.20); quoted in Bhattacharjéee C Op. cit, P.73
separate nation. Hence in reality, the Bodo movement may be identified to have started from the year 1929 with the submission of a memorandum by the Plains Tribal.

The Memorandum submitted by the Bodo Plains Tribal highlighted their glorious past. They reacted sharply against mixed electorate, which was proposed during the British Rule. This system, as they put it, deprived them of sending their representatives to the Legislative Councils even though they constitute a very large number of Assam's population. They clarified their argument by saying that due to the lack of representative to the Council from their community; their community is lagging behind since no reform measures are implemented for their development. They wrote in the memorandum, “in spite of our large numbers all advantage of the reforms are being enjoyed either by a Brahmin or by a Kshatriya, or by a Sudra. It is important to note here that though in Assam, the caste distinctions are not manifestly important, but it started to get noticed in public.”

The memorandum also clearly stated that there should be four seats for Assam in the Central Legislature, one for Mohammedans and three non-Mohammedans seats should be reserved for the Bodos of Assam. At the same time, the Bodos had opposed the merging of Goalpara with Bengal and rather opted to remain in Assam as they felt culturally they are more akin to Assam than to Bengal. The tone of this memorandum, however, was very different from their present stance, which is vivid in the following sentence, “we, the Bodos, can by no means call us other then Assamese.” They also stressed specifically to increase job opportunities for the Bodos. Though some other factors were given room in the memorandum, the cry was mainly to have a share in the political power through representatives to the Council as well as in the Local Boards.

119 Ibid. Pp 74-75
120 Ibid.
121 Bhattacharjee Op. cit. P. 78
122 Bhattacharjee, Op cit P.75
Though the urge in the memorandum was for free education, fellowship for students and job opportunities, the main cry was mainly to have a share in the political power.\(^{123}\) The latent desire of the Bodos to share the political power along with the Assamese slowly became apparent. Gait puts the scenario in these words: “historically and traditionally, they stand on a very high level and socially they enjoyed splendid isolation and educationally and politically they are backward having fallen on evil days.\(^{124}\) The other important point, which the memorandum clearly reflected, was that “this community (the Bodos) shares with other communities that Indians are fit to self government, the diarchy is unworkable and that provincial autonomy should be granted immediately”.\(^{125}\) These were initial signs of the desire for autonomy and self-rule according to their customary laws and regulations.

**The Initial Stage of the Movement**

In the initial period very few Bodo leaders came forward to constitute a forum to give vent to their grievances and demands. They mostly relied on the Assamese leadership but gradually realised that external leadership (the Assamese leadership) is unable to put forward their grievances and demands in a proper way and they lag behind in the developmental process. The Bodo leadership, basically the elite among them had developed a reformative tendency with a distinct political mind. Yet for a long period nothing substantial was achieved, as Binay Khungur Basumatari writes:

> “we have also seen that the primitives started their political activity through the Simon Commission, in the form of representing and appearing before itself a maiden venture of primitives. But what a dismal performance it was”\(^{126}\).

When the demand for provincial autonomy grew stronger and stronger, the British Government played with the idea to reorganise the administration of India on the basis

---

\(^{123}\) Gait E, A History of Assam, P.77, Calcutta, Thacker Splint, 1967

\(^{124}\) Ibid. P.11

\(^{125}\) Ibid

\(^{126}\) Basumatari B.K. edited – Plain Tribal Before the Simon Commission, p.44
of local self government and provincial autonomy which provided the Bodo leaders with some hope to prepare themselves to use this opportunity. Their reparation began with the formation of “The Tribal League” in 1933, with a view to participate in forthcoming election. The Tribal League became a very powerful organisation and its presence was effervescent even after India achieved independence.

Various other tribal communities of Assam like the Ahoms were also unhappy with the role of the national political parties. Not only for political reasons but socially too, the tribal felt exploited and suppressed. The existing stratification in the Hindu society was the root cause as found by Andrew Clow, the then Governor of Assam (1942 – 46), who observed;

“The Assamese, both caste Hindus and the Muslims professed solicitude for the tribes, but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathy with the tribes. This feeling of deprivation among these communities thus fostered the growth of local organisation i.e. the Cachari Sanmilan, the Koch Rajbonsi Sanmilan, Chutia Sanmilan, the Muttock Association, etc. throughout the province. Initially each organisation worked independently and confined its activities but in the thirties they joined hands and formed the All Assam Plain Tribal League”.

Caste distinctions are not as deep in Assam as else where in the country. But language and ethnicity matter, specially with successive reorganisations and political-structural changes in Assam sharpening minority consciousness in the new dispensation and creating a sense of deprivation among those not designated a favoured son among the many sons of the soil. The cultural and demographic heterogeneity of the territory of Assam was given formal recognition in various administrative provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935 (Section 11) which invested the Governor General with special power in respect of his ‘actions in or in relation to the tribal areas and

Section 11 (1) which defined these tribal areas and Section 91 (1) which provided the expressions 'excluded areas' and partially excluded areas – and the government of India (Excluded and partially Excluded Area) Order 1936. The areas coming within the ambit of this order in respect of Assam were the North East Frontier India, Balipara and Lakhimpur Tracts, the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills and the North Cachar sub-division of Cachar District (all excluded areas) and the Garo Hills and the Mikir Hills (in Nagaon and Sibsagar Districts) and the British portion of Khashi and Jaintia Hills District other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment (all partially excluded areas).

Post Independence Developments

Following further political and administrative changes after the constitution of free India was adopted, these tribal areas were specified in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution under two parts: Part A; comprising the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills; and Part B; comprising the North Eastern Frontier tract including the Balipara Frontier tract, the Tirap frontier tract, the Abor Hills District and the Misim Hills District and the Naga tribal areas.

The Bodos once had strong influence over Assam but was eventually subjected to dismal submergence under other hegemonies in later times. Increasing land alienation, indebtedness and the continuing influx of immigrants witnessed the rise of Bodo cultural and political expression for socio-economic improvement. The formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 led to demands for the use of Bodo language, as the medium of instruction in secondary education, in the wake of the language controversy. Such controversies were very delicate to the tribal identity and this gave birth to the Plains Tribal Council of Assam in 1967. The subsequent demand for Udayachal, as a separate state for Bodos, was compromised for the time being and

---

129 Ibid P.51
130 Hidayullah M. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the Constitution of India, the Second Anundoram Barooah Memorial Lecture, Guwahati, 1979
stress was given to their language identity. Devnagari was accepted as the Bodo script. Ethnic consciousness was increasing but the Bodos decided to cast their lot with the Assam Movement against the influx of foreigners.

The Bodos rallied for the Assam Movement thinking that, first, once they come in power, the Bodo problem would get better attention and secondly, going against the Assam Movement would have only antagonised the masses and had led to reduced sympathy for their cause. But after the Movement found its reconciliation in the Assam Accord, their support began to ooze out. Great then was their disenchantment with the Assam Accord which sought to protect the Assamese identity and culture but made no mention of tribal identities.  

From the 1970s the Bodo leadership under PTCA demanded vigorously for Udayachal, a separate autonomous region within Assam. The Bodos demand for Udayachal than changed to a union territory only and finally they demanded its status for a separate state.

**Development of the Bodo Movement in the 1970 onwards**

During the period 1967-71, when the hill state demand was being agitated in the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, the backward tribes of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills, who were Hindu faith followers, were persuaded to remain within Assam with the promise of greater autonomy. Their separation would have severed the Barak Valley from the Assam valley. The Karbi and NC Hills District Councils were transferred 18 development departments or subjects in addition to those inherently provided for under the Sixth Schedule. Subsequently, another 12 departments were added, bringing the total number of entrusted subjects to 30. What still remained outside their jurisdiction was law and order, supplies, excise, elections, census and District Rural Development Agency (DRDA). The Chief Executive Member (CEM)

---

131 Singh Bhupinder Singh etc. in Verghese B.G. India’s North East Resurgent, pp 60-62, Konark Publication, New Delhi, 1992

---
and executive members were as before, responsible to an elected council with some members nominated by the state government in order to have a fair representation for smaller tribal groups and minority interests.

Although additional subjects had been allocated to the District Council’s as indicated, disenchantment set in early. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1973 they expressed distress at the continuing policy of “Assamisation” of the linguistic minorities (following the medium of instruction order), the misuse of Central Grants made under article 275, the procedures and conditions accompanying the “entrustment” of transferred subjects, and the failure to grant to schedule tribe status to their kith and kin in the contiguous plain District of Assam. Accordingly, the Mikir and the NC Hills leaders had petitioned that they be granted separate statehood under Article 244A. The demand also embraced 500 square km of contiguous areas in the adjacent plains of Assam.

A further representation to the Prime Minister in 1980 by the Action Committee of the Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Separate State Demand committee, expressed the fear that the All Assam Student Union and Asom Gana Sangram Parishad (AASU-AGSP) on to destroy the language, culture and tradition of the tribal and minorities. The Assam Language policy had handicapped tribal students who were anxious to learn English and Hindi “to maintain the precious link with India and the rest of the world and were being prevented from joining the North East Hill University in Shillong.

The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) came into being under CPI – Marxist Leninist leadership. It was more outspoken. In a memorandum to the Prime Minister in 1987, it castigated the arrogance of plainsmen towards the backward hill tribes and condescension towards the Indo-Mongoloid tribes of the North East. “The hill areas have been turned like a sanctuary for the overflow of job seekers, contractors and other businessmen from Assam Plains…..Over 90 per cent of all

---

133 A memorandum to the three member expert committee Under Dr. Bhupinder Singh, on Bodo issues- by All Bodo Student Union -1991
government and semi-government employees and about 95% of all contractors and businessmen in the hills are from plains of Assam.” It accused the state government of exploiting reserved forest, which had come under its control as part of its “expansionist policy”\textsuperscript{134}.

While the underlying causes of the Bodoland movement lay in the urges and inspirations of the ethnic Bodos, the immediate occasion was provided by the example of Assam Movement and its apparent success. The Assam Accord provided a series of safeguards for protecting the distinctive identity of the people of Assam. It is possible to think that if proper safeguards for different communities were actually worked out, the Bodoland movement might not have assumed the proportions, it did.

“Clause 6 of the Assam Accord said, “Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural social linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people”\textsuperscript{135}.

“Clause 10 provided; it will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of enforcement of government lands and lands in tribal areas/belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws”\textsuperscript{136}.

Thus, the failure of the Assam Accord in implementation of the clauses is essentially and particularly contributed to the gathering storm in the Bodo dominated areas in Assam.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid
\textsuperscript{135} Dutta Anuradha, Politics of Identity and Nation Building In North East India ed. By Phukan Girin and Dutta N.C. P. 180,81, South Asian Publucation, New Delhi 1997
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid
In March 1987, All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) initiated a fresh mass mobilisation for ‘nothing less’ then a separate state of Bodoland on the North bank spread over 25,478 square km from Sunkosh to Sadiya, the creation of two autonomous Districts of Neelachal and Lalung (Tiwa) on the South bank, and notification of Bodo Cacharis as Scheduled Tribes living in Karbi Anglong. Based on an informal census taken by them, the population of the proposed state was estimated at 4.47 million, 71% of this tribal and with a 51% as Bodo majority. The grounds for the demand included land alienation, a niggardly tribal sub plan allegedly designed to perpetuate tribal backwardness and discrimination in education, language and employment, gerrymandering of constituencies, atrocities and the fact of exclusion from the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constituencies of the plain tribes. It was said that plains tribal had been denied central grants under Article 275 after Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya had separated from Assam. The catalogue of grievance was long and was traced basically to Assamese chauvinism. As many as 92 demands were listed in a flurry of memoranda addresses to Delhi. Though the initial demand was for a union territory, this was soon upgraded to that for a separate state. Lack of contiguity as of between the territories designated on the North and South banks were justified by reference to statehood to “Goa, Daman and Diu” which is even more widely dispersed.

Post Assam Accord Development - 1990s

By this time, taking inspiration from the Assam Movement and Assam Accord, many other small ethnic movements started to come up mentioned above. The Bodo Movement in the 1990s was the gravest in Assam posing gravest challenge to the political structure in Assam and it’s current boundaries. It challenged the very concept of the Assamese as people who like several other nationalities in India constitute a recognisably distinct and unique group of people inhabiting a historically recognised “homeland” of their own—the Brahmputra Valley. The demand for a Bodoland unlike other demand for greater autonomy or separation touched a raw nerve; for the

138 Ibid
people on whose behalf the demand was being articulated were historically viewed (and even now are) as an inalienable part of the Assamese people even while possessing a distinct language and cultural mores of their own.\(^{139}\)

**The Assam Accord and Discord**

The Assam Accord which was a result of the long drawn Assam Movement and had both overt and covert support of the Bodos against the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, promised quite a few things, both, in terms of development and also to protect the identity and culture of the Bodos. It was a happy moment for the one and all. But the gradual developments that occurred under the Asom Gana Parishad leadership had an aggravated result because of non-implementation of the provisions of the Accord. Disillusioned by what it read as the AGP’s lack of commitment to equity and justice for the tribal, the Bodos prepared for battle, with the Bodo Volunteered Force (BVF) under Prem Singh Brahma as it’s militant head of the wing.

The Bodos had been exposed to elementary guerrilla tactics as far back as 1962 when the Special Security Bureau, established in the wake of Sino-Indian conflict, set up training camps at Halflong, Chakrata and elsewhere\(^{140}\). Large number of Bodos had volunteered in these camps and knew the use of weapons for guerrilla war. Subsequently it begun to be beefed up about the Congress that they had moved to build up the Bodo Security force through Central Agencies to counter both ULFA and the AGP.

Violence and intimidation escalated with the familiar cycle of extortion, kidnapping and killings while the Bhutanese forests afforded the miscreants a safe heaven across the border. Convinced to the need of conceding autonomy to the plains tribal of Assam, the Government of India had set up a three-member expert committee under Dr. Bhupinder Singh in February 1991, while Assam was still under President’s rule.

\(^{139}\) Prabhakara M S in Seminar, P 50, Feb. 1990

\(^{140}\) Hazarika Sanjoy; Strangers of the Mist, Tales of War and Peace from India’s North East, Viking Pub, Delhi 1994
It was called upon to determine the territorial extent of the proposed autonomous area of north of the Brahmaputra, and the quantum and pattern of autonomy to be granted. The report submitted in March 1993 makes rewarding reading. The expert committee said its mission was “to discover the soul of Assam and through that the soul of India”. It found the whole process “rent by malevolent forces”. It discovered a common thread in the aspiration for self governance and self identity. Therefore, the committee proposed a restructuring that would enable a multiethnic society of Assam to discover a new basis for a harmonious and happy co-existence. Looking to the settlement pattern of tribal on the North Bank, it recommended the establishment of two autonomous councils, one on the west central side with a total population of 1.107 million based on 1991 census, predominantly Bodo but with Rabhas and Sonowals, and a second in the eastern sector with a population of 3,15000 with a Mishing majority intermixed with Sonwals.

The larger of these Apex Councils would spread over areas of Bodo concentration. The second apex council would cover areas of Mishings and Deoris. It suggested that these Apex Councils be underpinned by Panchayati Raj type lower tier based on traditional institutions. It further proposed an upper chamber in the Assam legislature with tribal representation and a list of 22 subjects that might be devolved.

The ABSU and BPSC commonly rejected the recommendations submitted on 30th March, 1992, by the Bhupinder Singh Committee, on the following grounds:

A) It failed to meet the political hopes and aspirations of the Bodos and other plain tribes of Assam;
B) It misled the entire Bodo issue by furnishing all bogus datas and
C) It was so prejudicial that it attempted to legitimise the anti tribal policies of the ruling cliques.

The Bodo Accord of 1993

The Bodos rejected the Expert Committee scheme as it fell short of their expectations. In a new initiative to solve the Bodo problem quickly the newly elected Congress Government under Hiteshwar Saikia, then Chief Minister of Assam, decided to negotiate a fresh offer resulting in a bipartite Bodo Accord. This was signed on February 20, 1993 by the ABSU President, S.K. Bwismutiary, on behalf of the movement, and the Additional Chief Secretary of Assam, in the presence of Hiteshwar Saikia and Rajesh Pilot the then Central Cabinet Minister for Internal Security. The Bodo Autonomous Council was inaugurated in Kokrajhar on March 7. Premisingh Brahma, the BVF Chief and ten others surrendered with weapons and 200 more youth followed suit in various Districts over the next few days. There was a promise of rehabilitation on the same terms as given to the Surrendred United Liberation Front of Assam or SULFA boys.

The Memorandum of Settlement defined the objective as, ‘to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement’. The Assam Assembly would enact legislation to constitute a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) comprising contiguous geographical areas between the river Sunkosh and Mazbat/Pasnoi River. While as a rule only villages with a Bodo majority population would be taken as falling within BAC areas, other villages would be included to provide contiguity, along with reserved forests ‘not otherwise required by Government for manning the international borders’ in accordance with guidelines laid down by the Ministries of Environment and Forest, and Defence. Tea gardens located completely within the BAC area would also be included. In other words, the BAC area remained to be defined, let alone demarcated.

The BAC comprises a General Council of 35 directly elected members with five members nominated by government to ensure due representation of all groups.

---

Finances are to be earmarked under a separate sub-head within the state budget in keeping with the Central guidelines and the BAC will receive grants-in-aid and have limited powers to raise finances and regulate trade and commerce. It has been vested with judicial powers in respect to customary law and practice and ownership of land within the BAC areas. However, the BAC shall 'within the laws of the land, take steps to protect the democratic complexion of areas falling within its jurisdiction'\textsuperscript{143}. This casts on it the onus of preventing further infiltration and land alienation.

The Assam legislature duly passed the Bodoland Autonomous Council Act which was gazetted on May 14, 1993. An interim Bodoland Executive Council was sworn in three days later in Kokrajhar with Bwismutiary as Chief Executive Member and Premsingh Brahma as his Deputy. A few days later, the Bodo Security Force (BdSF) formally denounced the Bodo Accord, having signalled its dissent loud and clear by abducting Bolin Bordoloi, son of former Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi\textsuperscript{144}.

The situation was worsened with a series of rallies, bandhs, killings, explosions, arsons, and sabotage of schools, railway installations, bridges and forest property. This had disrupted the administration and cast a spell of fear over the land. Much wilful deforestation was reported. The BPAC and the BVF were dissolved and a Bodoland People’s Party was formed. Tension mounted, with continuing uncertainly regarding the boundaries of BAC. Communal riots broke out in October in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon. An All-party committee was appointed soon thereafter to demarcate the BAC area because, critics argue, the Assam government needed the support of nine Bodoland legislators to survive a no-confidence motion in which Congress dissidents had threatened to vote against the administration. Later on, the government unilaterally announced that the BAC would cover 2750 villages. Bwismutiary, the Chief Executive Member resigned in protest and was replaced by Premsingh Brahma.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{143} The North East Times, Guwahati, March 15, 1993
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid
ABSU denounced the notification demanding inclusion of the entire area up to the international border as well as 515 additional villages to the South. The Assam government pleaded that in accordance with the Bodo Accord, the Defence Ministry and the Ministry of Environment and Forest, the demands of the Bodos have been to a great extent met. The disputed territories have to be cleared by the Central Government Departments and not by the Assam Governments as some of this deals with international borders.

Alarmed by the growing disruption, riots and strikes, army was called out and Operation Kranti was launched to clean up the adjacent areas and the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, in particular, from where the BdSF had been operating from sanctuaries inside Bhutan.

The People’s Democratic Front’s (PDF), a political party of Bodos demanded that first, the boundary of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) should be drawn according to the Bodo people’s wishes; secondly, the BAC scheme should be “concretised” by including in it the 10 km wide belt on the Indo-Bhutan border, and thirdly, certain tea gardens and forests which are outside the 10 km belt should also be given to the BAC.

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), which, as socio-cultural organisation is held in high esteem by the Bodos, was also of the view that the BAC has not been helpful to the Bodos. The BSS is still not demanding a separate Bodoland outside Assam, but its general secretary, Mr. Gopinath Borgayeri, said, ‘if the structure, composition and functioning of the BAC could not be changed suitable so that it could met the expectations of the Bodos, the BSS would have no alternative but to extend moral support to the formation of a separate State’, “in tune with the wishes of the Bodo people”\footnote{The Assam Tribune, March 23, 1993}. This clearly marked the fact that Bodos were increasingly disappointed with both the Centre and the State government and envisaged a separate state as the only solution.
While the public opinion among the Bodos was gradually gravitating towards a separate Bodoland State, the Assamese seemed determined not to allow any further dismemberment of the State. All political parties agreed that a separate Bodoland is out of question and that the BAC is the maximum that Assam could concede.

The Turn Around in the Bodo Leadership

By a sudden volte-face, the same leadership which agreed to take nothing less than a separate state, agreed to sign the Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) on 20th February 1993. The Accord promised maximum autonomy within the framework of Constitution of India to the Bodos for social educational, economic, ethnic and cultural advancement. This 'promised' autonomy was however, a delusion. States, under the constitution do not enjoy autonomy. It is farcical of the extreme kind to find any real trace of autonomy in power sharing in any meaningful way in the Bodo Accord or for that matter in Bodoland Autonomous Council Act, 1993. One failed to understand why such an Accord was accepted. The Accord led to further division both within the leadership and support for the masses.

Demanding New Boundaries - Disputing Old Boundaries

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) in a joint memorandum, in 1991, claimed that over 50,000 hectares of land has been alienated (presumably from tribal belts and blocks inhabited by Bodos) while a memorandum of the All Tiwa Students Union (1992) complained that 3256 acres of Tiwa land had passed on to non tribal and another 24,039 acres acquired as reserved forest, 1327 acres of this for industry and 19971 acres for tea gardens. Earlier, in 1986,
the United Tribal National Liberation Front had protested against the AGP Government evicting plains tribal from traditional lands that had been in their possession for centuries, for lack of land records of rights. They accordingly sought a constitutional directive under Article 339 (2) to register record of rights of all plain tribal in Assam forest areas.\(^{149}\) State official however denied any de-notification or descheduling after 1969.

**The Communal Divide - Cracks in the Movement**

A majority of the Bodos are Hindu but some 25 to 40 per cent is Christian and is generally better educated. The BdSF is said to have a largely Christian cadre and leadership and started asserting itself with the failure of the preponderantly Hindu over ground leadership to show results.\(^{150}\) The wings of the rightist parties propagated that the Christian leaders are taking over the movement in a bid to dominate the Hindus. The masses did not know how much truth was in it but the suspicion grew stronger as the Bodo Christian leader were more educated and voiced their opinion more freely. This divide between the Hindu Bodos and Christian Bodos created a temporary rift among the supporters if not out right division. Several changes came up with the passage of time. ABSU and BPP revived their original demand for a separate statehood while the BdSF changed it’s name to Bodo Army and set up a political wing called the National Democratic Front of Bodoland.

**Bodoland Accord and the Aftermath**

The Bodoland Autonomous Council Bill (BAC Bill), introduced before the State Assembly on 5 April 1993, was an enumeration of the Bodoland Accord, that is, the formation, powers and functions of the General council and the Bodoland Executive Council within its jurisdiction. The bill enumerated matters of vital

\(^{149}\) Singh Bhupinder Op cit. P.62  
\(^{150}\) Zubair Ahmed Syed; Op cit P.83
importance like election of members to the Council, framing of law by the BAC, etc. The financial power rested with the State Government.

According to the BAC Bill, the General Council, which is the principal body, shall consist of forty members of which thirty sets shall be reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (Plains) and the rest ten seats for the general candidates. Of the total forty candidates, thirty-five will be elected on the basis of adult franchise, while the rest five members will be nominated by the Governor of Assam, particularly from the groups that would otherwise remain unrepresented.

The main criteria along which a candidate can contest the election are that the candidate must be a citizen of India and not below eighteen years of age. He must not also hold any position in the Municipality, Panchayat or office of the Central and the State Government. A member will be elected for a period of five years, 'provided that the said period of five years may, if the circumstances exist which, in the opinion of the Governor, render the holding of election as aforesaid impracticable, be extended by the Governor for a period of not exceeding one year'\textsuperscript{151}. However, the Governor would have the power to remove an elected member of the General Council if the member is found dishonest.

This General Council had to meet at least once in every three months for the smooth functioning of the business. The quorum necessary for the transaction of business at a meeting of the General Council shall be thirteen members and the decision of the General Council shall be thirteen members and the decision of the General Council shall be a single majority of votes of the members present.

The General Council had executive powers upon the following thirty-eight subjects and departments within their jurisdiction according to the Memorandum of settlement (MoS)\textsuperscript{152}.

1. Cottage Industry

\textsuperscript{151} Hazarika Niru; Op.cit., Pp 283-92
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid
2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary
3. Forests
4. Agriculture
5. PWD
6. Sericulture
7. Education:
   a) Adult Education
   b) Primary Education
   c) Higher Secondary including vocational training
8. Cultural Affairs
9. Soil conservation
10. Cooperatives
11. Fisheries
12. Panchayat and Rural development
13. Handloom and Textile
14. Health and Family Welfare
15. Public Health Engineering
16. Irrigation
17. Social Welfare
18. Flood Control Schemes for protection of villages (not of a highly technical nature)

19. Sports and Youth Welfare

20. Weights and Measures

21. Museums and Archaeology

22. Library Services


24. Tribal Research Institute

25. College Education (General)

26. Land and Revenue

27. Publicity/Public Relations

28. Printing and Stationary

29. Tourism

30. Transport

31. Any other matter connected with Development

32. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trusts, District Boards and other local authorities

33. Tribal Welfare

34. Markets and Fairs

35. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic Performances and Cinema

36. Vital Statistics including Registration of Births and Deaths
37. Intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives

38. Food and Civil Supplies, etc.

The General Council was given the executive authority to manage the financial matter in the BAC areas. The finance for the said area will be earmarked under a separate sub-head within the State budget. The Council was given the authority to raise finances from levies/taxes/fees, etc. on subjects under their jurisdiction. Whatever revenue was to be collected by the Assam Government from the BAC areas was to be deposited to the BAC fund.

The General Council was responsible for formulating and implementing development programmes within the BAC area, have the power to appoint class III and Class IV staff; regulate trade and commercial activities including the power to issue permits and licenses to individuals, to organise special recruitment drive into army, paramilitary forces and police units, etc, where the preference was to be given to the Bodos, as the Bill had laid down.

Moreover, the Council was to have the power to formulate bylaws, if so required, to be implemented within their territory. But the Council must be consulted in case of any new law to be introduced under any circumstances on the following subjects;

(i) The religious or social practice of the Bodos;

(ii) The Bodo customary laws and procedures; and

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

However, the significant aspect in regard to law-making was that it also ensured the supremacy of the State Legislature. Clause 54 of the Bill clearly states that 'if any provision of any regulation or by-law made by the General Council is repugnant to any provisions of a law made by the Legislature of the State of Assam with respect to that, matter, then, the regulation or by-law so made by the
Legislature of the State of Assam, shall to be extent of the repugnancy, be void and the law made by the legislature of the state of Assam shall prevail”\textsuperscript{153}.

While the General Council could use Bodo language as the medium of instruction within their jurisdiction, following Article 345 of the Indian Constitution, the bilingual formulae would be obeyed to correspond with the offices outside the BAC area.

The Bodoland Accord made provision for setting up special courts in consultation with the Guwahati High Court to try cases between parties, all of whom belong to the Scheduled Tribe in accordance with the Tribal Customary law and procedure in the Village courts and subordinate District Customary Law Courts.

BAC’s General Council and The Bodoland’s Executive Council (BEC) under the Accord ‘will hold office under the pleasure of Assam government; finances for the BAC will stand earmarked under a separate sub-head within the State budget; BEC will have powers to appoint Class III and Class IV staff only; the Government of Assam and Union Government would allow permit for trade and commerce to people residing within the BAC area although with the promise to give preference to the Bodos’. This is the measure of maximum autonomy as conferred under the BAC Act.\textsuperscript{154}

The most significant point in the accord dealt with the geographical boundary of the BAC area. As agreed upon, the BAC area can be changed, if so required, of course with the mutual consent of the BAC members and the Government of Assam. Another significant feature of the Accord was that it was a bipartite Accord and is to be implemented by the state legislation. It in no way affects the territoriality of neither the state nor even its existing administrative divisions. Unlike Autonomous District Councils in the two hill Districts, Karibi Anglong and North Cachar, whose authority is coterminous with the District boundaries, the

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid
\textsuperscript{154} Dutta Anuradha Op.cit. P. 183
proposed BAC was to cover seven Districts (Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, and Darrang) but leaving intact the existing political and administrative structures.

On the face of it, the Bodo movement leaders had settled for a little more than half of what they had been bargaining for, and far less then what they had been maintaining in the public was the irreducible minimum- that is 25,478.1 Sq km of territory. The BAC, which excludes a 10-km-wide belt in the north touching the international border with Bhutan, would cover an areas of 5,186 Sq km with a population of over 2,100,000 of which about 38% are Plains tribal. Instead of the 4,635 (later reduced to 4,443) villages claimed for the Bodo area in the failed 1992 negotiations, the BAC now had 2,750 villages spread over 29 Assembly constituencies of which about half will have a Bodo majority.155

Both the State and the Union Government seem to have the psyche of Article 356 regarding the dissolution of the BEC, as it will hold power only under the pleasure of the State Government. So if at any moment the state government's interest clashes with that BEC, it can dissolve it, which cannot be justified. Even in the matters of finance, they will have to entirely depend on State Government.

Reactions of Various Faction of Bodo Populace on Bodo Accord:

Peace was expected in Assam after the signing of the Bodo Accord in 1993 but this did not happen. Although the Government of Assam formalized creation of the BAC by its notification of December 17, 1993, most Bodo leaders rejected it, terming it anti-democratic and anti-Bodo. They threatened to terminate the accord if 515 contentious villages were not incorporated into the BAC domain. The state contented that it could not incorporate the 515 villages into the BAC, as it was responsible for the interests of a large number of non-tribal residents in these villages.

---

It is worthwhile to see the different reactions of the Bodo groups after the signing of the Accord:

Rejecting the contentions of the Assam Government, the Bodo militants, in a fit of anger, resorted to a kind of ethnic cleansing in and around the 515 villages in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon Districts during September and October 1993. This time the people under attack retaliated, leading to the flight of some 3,500 Bodos from their homes. In all, about 70,000 people were displaced and are seeking refuge in crowded relief camps.156

The Bodoland Legislature Party (BLP) expressed its happiness over the creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council and thanked the Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia, Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan and Union Minister of the State for Home Rajesh Pilot for their help and co-operation.

Welcoming the accord, the Bodoland Legislative Party said that the formation of an autonomous council would not only help in improving the conditions of the Bodos but also the non-tribal, living in their areas, would be benefited. In a statement, Sri Jew Ram Bodo, Deputy Leader of the BLP dismissed the apprehension expressed in some quarters that the creation of the Council would be a threat to the integrity of the state157.

The Minister of State for Food Processing Industry, Tarun Gogoi, welcomed the Bodoland Accord Saying it brought an end to the six-year long Bodo agitation158.

The Chief whip of the Bodoland legislature party, Karendra Basumatary hailed bipartite accord on the Bodoland Council as historic and congratulated the leaders for their achievement159.

157 The Assam Tribune, December, 18, Guwahati, 1993
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
Former Speaker of Assam Gana Parishad, Pulakesh Barua also hailed the accord and expressed the hope that the Bodoland leaders would now play a vital role in bringing peace in the State.\textsuperscript{160}

The United Minorities Front (UMF) welcomed the Bodo accord and hoped it would fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people. The UMF reminded the Bodo leaders of their assurance to protect the rights of the non-tribal and called for necessary legislation in this regard.\textsuperscript{161}

The matter was raised in the State Assembly by the leader of the AGP legislature party, Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as soon as the Chief Minister got up to lay the memorandum of settlement in the House. Sri Mahanta alleged that the Chief Minister did not take the opposition parties into confidence while signing the memorandum of settlement.\textsuperscript{162}

The inclusion of 25 tea gardens in the proposed Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was resented by the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and its associate body, the Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangha. The Assam Cha Mazdur Sangha (ACMS) had warned the state Government to exclude all the 25 tea gardens from the Bodoland Development Council. It has also criticized the inclusion of 25 tea gardens in the council, saying, that the future of about 35,000 garden workers would be in jeopardy under the new administration set up.\textsuperscript{163}

The Adivasi Council of Assam and the Ahom Chah Shramik Parishad criticized the Government allegedly for ignoring their interest, while signing the proposed Bodoland Autonomous Council Accord. In a release issued by Central Committee of the Adivasi Council of Assam stated that both the Government and the ABSU leaders have failed to include the Adivasi like Santhals, Mundas,
Oraons, Gonds, Bheels, etc. in the Scheduled Tribe list in spite of the fact that both Government and the ABSU leaders have supported their demand\textsuperscript{164}.

The non-Bodo inhabitants in Assam resented the Bodo Accord fearing a second class treatment in the proposed council areas. Expressing resentment, leaders of the Koch-Rajbongshi community told a group of visiting journalists at Bongaigaon that according to the accord, several hundred non-Bodo village had been included in the council areas, and alleged that they would be deprived of equal political status\textsuperscript{165}.

The Memorandum of Settlement signed by the government with ABSU-BPAC leadership evoked serious reaction among the aboriginal Koch-Rajbongshi population of the State and their organisation All Assam Koch–Rajbongshi Kashatriya Sammilani staged a dhama on March 16 in front of Janata Bhawan demanding the right of the Koch-Rajbongshis for self-determination\textsuperscript{166}.

The All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) and the local MLA Mr. Karendra Nath Basumatary also expressed similar views. Mr. Baliram Bodo from ABSU Central Committee said that the ABSU was not fully satisfied with the proposed area of the council. But the prevailing unstable political situation in the country on the one hand and the futility of prolonging the agitation on the other hand, had compelled the ABSU-BPAC to give their consent to the Accord.

The Memorandum of Settlement (MoS), no doubt, put an end (though may be temporarily) to the year long agitation of the Bodos. The BAC was given total thirty eight subjects under their control within their defined territory. The Accord, as it appeared from the above, was hailed by the various quarters, political as well as non-political, in the State with the hope that it would be able to restore peace and normalcy in the State. The Accord, indeed, was thought to be a wise decision taken towards maintaining integrity in the country and it was

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid
\textsuperscript{165} The Statesman, Calcutta, 25\textsuperscript{th} Dec. 1993
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid
more significant that it gave the Bodos an Autonomous Council, ensuring maximum autonomy instead of slicing the State once again. But this euphoria was there only for a short while.

However, the major opponent to the Accord happened to be from the Bodos themselves (BSF). Of course, there were also various other non-political organisations like the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the Asom Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS), the Advasi Council of Assam, the Ahom Chah Shramik Parishad and the Koch –Rajbongshis who resented the signing to Bodoland Accord on some or the other apparently genuine grounds. But there was little constitutional back up on all these. The implementation of the Accord entirely depended on the good will of the ruling party in Assam.

**Mushrooming Autonomy Demands and more Regional Accords**

Having conceded for Bodo autonomy, the Assam Government necessarily had to extend the principle to the other major plains tribal, namely the Rabhas, Mishings and Tiwas. They constitute a minority in Bodoland. The Mishings are a larger tribe among these. All these tribes are predominantly Hindu and speak Assamese though the Mishings and Tiwa have their own Tibeto-Burmese Languages, the former being from the Bodo group. Hence the Accord with the Bodos provided impetus to other groups to ask for such autonomy for themselves too.

The three rounds of tripartite talks involving the Union Government, State government and the ABSU (UB) leaders did not reach to any conclusion. With the State Government being very clear that no further division of state and the ABSU leaders stand, ‘No Bodoland, No Rest’, these talks achieved little except to bring sporadic peace intermittently during when the talks were on. The other agitation that has equally gave political implications for Assam is the one being led by a broad alliance called the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), based principally in Karbi Anglong District, which is demanding the constitution of the two autonomous hill
Districts of Assam, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar, into an autonomous state within Assam – a provision the Assam leaders argue that is available in Article 244 A of the Indian Constitution. This provision was included by the constitution (Twenty Second Amendment Act 1969, specifically to enable the creation of Meghalaya as an autonomous state within Assam. This was the intermediate stage that Meghalaya passed before the experiment was quickly put to death and the full fledged state was created by the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation Act) 1971.

The ASDC leaders maintain that they do not seek separation from Assam but greater autonomy within Assam. The kind of autonomy the two Districts presently enjoy is not adequate since the provisions of the Sixth Schedule do not provide for financial powers. Also under the present arrangement, there is less accountability and the District council administration, provided it is on good terms with the government at Dispur, who can get away with misgovernance. A proper legislative Assembly under the autonomous state would be more accountable to the people.

The forgoing account itself incorporates an anomaly. The two major agitations going on in Assam are no doubt both tribal based. But these tribal themselves are classified differently and have separate constitutional dispensation. The tribal in the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Districts are hill tribes and so by virtue of their location advantage, they come under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. They have an autonomous District and a semblance of self government. The experiment according to the leaders of the two hill Districts has not been satisfactory but at least they are in a position where they can capture political office in the District, if only to show up how inadequate these powers are and seek greater power – as indeed the ASDC leaders are now doing.

The Assam Government has taken the view that grants of local autonomy to Rabhas, Mishings and the Tiwas would assure them of their cultural identities. Each has a

---

student union and a Sahitya Sabha and is asserting a differentiation in script, if not in language. Formation of autonomous councils could be a viable means of allaying discontents through a variant of Panchayati Raj which was introduced in Assam as elsewhere in the country under the 11th and 12th Schedules of the Constitution.

In any event, with the centre having set its face against any further division of states, the ASDC was persuaded to compromise. It finally accepted expanded powers within what might be termed as sub-state, an intermediate stage towards a full fledged state under Article 244A of the Constitution; a goal kept in abeyance but not necessarily abandoned.

Negotiations progressed and after a good deal of considerations as the Centre agreed to accommodate some of the ASDCs demand within the Sixth Schedule. A memorandum of understanding was accordingly signed in Delhi on April, 1, 1995, by the ASDC leader of the NC Hills and Karbi Anglong and the Assam Chief Minister, in the presence of the Union Home Minister.

The Rabha movement demanded a Rabha Hasong (Rabhaland) autonomous “state” within Assam on the south bank extending from Jyoramukhi in Goalpara District to Rani in Kamrup, together with an autonomous District in Darang on the north bank and autonomous councils in yet other four Districts with Rabha pockets. They also sought Rabha village councils in several Districts and five reserved seats in the Bodo Executive Council.

On March 10, 1995, a Memorandum of Settlement was signed constituting a Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, an apex body with discontinuous “satellite areas” or Rabha Hasong Village Council in rural areas with more than a 50 per cent tribal population. The Land Record Office would ascertain whether specific villages claimed might be included under the prescribed eligibility criterion. Villages falling within reserved forests will only be included after clearance by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests. An interim Rabha Hasong Council was proposed to be set
up, is pending elections. The Village councils will have executive power over 29 subjects and the apex council over 34 subjects\textsuperscript{168}.

Another Accord was signed with the Tiwas on April, 13, 1995, and with the Mishing on June, 14, 1995, on the basis of the same principles and criteria\textsuperscript{169}. The Tiwa first voiced their autonomy demand in 1967 around the same time as Bodos. But they were peaceful, apart from the frenzied outburst at Nellie against the immigrants’ settlers in 1983. They demanded an area of 3264 square km and allege that “Assamiya Chauvinists” deliberately under-enumerated their population in order to perpetuate exploitation. The Convenor of the All Tiwa Students Federation, Tulsi Bordoloi, is reported to have said that Bordoloi was not his real name: “In our school we had Assamiya teachers who even changed our names without discussing anything with us”.

**The Positioning of the Bodo Autonomous Council**

The budgetary allocation is critical to functioning of any institution and systems. The state government would indicate to the council, before the commencement of each financial year, on the over-all financial allocations that they might expect. Each Council will thereafter prepare and pass it’s own budget and forward it to the state government for inclusion in the overall state budget. The Councils will be consulted and provided an explanation in the event of any change. The new councils will enjoy substantial devolution under the Sixth Schedule through a unique combination of power vested in a sub-state, Union Territory, Autonomous District Council and District Councils. The arrangement provided for the largest degree of autonomy evolved to satisfy local aspirations in recent years. It went beyond the range of powers vested in Zila Parishad, under the upgraded Panchayati Raj structure, granting the Council with legislative and concurrent powers, some jurisdiction in relation to personnel and law and order, and direct access to governor and planning commission.

\textsuperscript{168} The Sentinel, Guwahati, March 11, 1995
\textsuperscript{169} The Sentinel, Guwahati, April 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1995
Although the Memorandum of Settlement with the ASDC preserved the integrity of Assam, it did not represent a further stage in what has been termed political ethnicity and "ethnic secession" from Assam. This later trend had the potential to be disintegrative if the various new arrangements were not worked out in a spirit of accommodation resulting in the evolution of new relationships. Nevertheless, underlying strains were evident in other manifestations by the militant groups.

Mr. Jayant Rongpi, a member of Parliament from Karbi-Anglog criticised the different autonomy Accords which the Assam Government signed with Rabhas and Mishings. He said, the concept of autonomy without a boundary was to his mind 'absurd', while insistence on the majority principle could result in ethnic cleansing. The tribal have a constitutional right over the belts and blocks and tribal sub-plan areas and can be depended upon to workout modalities for co-existing with non-tribal. Mr. Rongpi was of the view that tribal homelands can be protected against further inroads by outsiders and immigrants only by tribal themselves.

The Assam Government was also accused of adopting tactics of divide and rule. Yet it was the Chief Minister who offered to create the three new apex councils. Far from fragmenting Assam, Hiteshwar Saikia claimed to have assuaged growing discontents and by his scheme of things prevented any further division of Assam. He had a point: all the recent Accords provided for autonomy within Assam instead of statehood outside it which was the starting point for most, including the autonomous state demand committee of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills. The hitch was finances and implementation of the clauses of the Accord.

**Functioning of Autonomous District Councils**

In a memorandum submitted to the Bhupinder Singh Expert Committee in 1991, the members of the Karbi-Anglong ADC complained that the council has been dissolved on four occasion during the past decade. The power of nominating some members to

---

171 Sadin (in Assamese). April 18, 1995
172 Ibid.
173 The North East Times, April 20, 1995
the ADC had been misused for partisan purposes; development work has been undermined for lack of policy powers; the government’s order relating to the entrusted subjects virtually mandated that norms adopted for the plains must be applied to the hills. It also stated that funds were invariably delayed.

With job and development discontent being attributed to the inadequacies of the ADC and Assamese manipulation, and with the ASDC strongly entrenched, the demand for separate statehood for Karbi Anglong and the NH Hills found favour despite reservations by smaller tribes and minorities, but in the shape of two states and not one which would be Karbi dominated.

The Sixth Schedule was proposed to be amended to enable the Governor of Assam to exercise discretionary powers in respect of subjects entrusted to the councils instead of mandating him to act on the advice of his Council of Ministers. Officers of the council are to be included in the state delegation sent to discuss finalisation of the annual plan with the planning commission. The feasibility of separately mentioning the funds meant for the councils, in release made by the union government, will be examined and a suitable mechanism is to be evolved to bring adequacy and promptitude with the state government for the release of such funds.

In order to provide for representation to smaller ethnic, linguistic and other groups, which are presently un-represented in the legislature, the Assam Assembly unanimously, resolved in September, 1995, to constitute a legislative council. While this had been generally welcomed, it was felt that the composition of the upper house should be suitably defined by Article 171 of the Constitution. Some went further and suggested that up to three quarters of the seats in the assembly should be reserved for Assamese and the indigenous tribal under clause 6 of the Assam Accord in an act of “protective discrimination”.174

---

174 Borah Dhruba Jyoti, In Sadin, March 1995
Granting of Statehood and Autonomy

Following the sixteen point agreement between the Naga People Convention and the Government of India and with the drawing up of the North Eastern Reorganisation Act, 1971, the separate states of Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya, (initially an autonomous state within Assam and soon thereafter a full fledged state) Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (initially union territories and now full fledged States) came into being. These new states broadly incorporated all the areas mentioned in the two parts of the Sixth schedule with the exception of the North Cachar Hill and Mikir Hills District (Now Karbi Anglong), though border disputes between and among these various states remain. In other words, the various people yoked onto Assam in the British times, because of political, administrative or fiscal compulsions (as in the case of Sylhet) have over the years been separated and accorded (or in some cases achieved through struggles) separate political and administrative status with their status as separate nationalities, in many cases even as marginal nationalities being formally recognised.

The Sixth Schedule Paradigm

The numerically dominant Karbi people (earlier known as Mikirs) were both suspicious of the leadership of the APHLC and also cherished the links with Assam, the Karbis being among the more Assamised of the several hill tribes of Assam. That the same people, who had two decades ago resisted the blandishment of APHLC were now seeking greater autonomy than that had been provided under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. It is a reflection as much upon the failure of the leadership in Assam to accommodate the aspirations of these people within the present political framework as of the shifts within Karbi Society and the emergence and consolidation of more articulate political elites within this society.\textsuperscript{175} The ABSU's (UB) 92 point charter of demands, mass rallies and later on the turning of the

\textsuperscript{175} Frontline Vol.4 no.22, Oct. 31 Nov. 13,1987
peaceful movement into violent one has achieved little. A series of strikes and fragile peace achieved nothing.

**Some Inherent Contradiction**

In contrast to the ‘Plain tribes’ of Assam, who are about a dozen, the Bodos (or Bodo Cacharis) being the most numerous, have no clearly demarcated area which they can claim as their own. Unlike the hill tribes who were viewed as peripheral to the Brahmaputra Valley, the plain tribal were considered simply as just another caste of Assam, no doubt with some unique features and a language of their own but doomed to eventually absorption into Assamese Society, and not requiring any special constitutional dispensation.

Perhaps this was the case in earlier times when the numerical strength of the Assamese people was augmented principally by accretion into it’s fold of several plain tribal communities by the unique process of assimilation, which finds mentions in accounts of several ethnographers and anthropologists and official administrators. But assimilation for every Bodo is now an offensive concept. Even those who bitterly opposed the demand for Bodoland repudiate equally strongly the concept of assimilation. The extreme protest against the process of assimilation being articulated in political terms is the demand of Bodoland.

Viewed in such a perspective, the Bodoland agitation challenges the process of nationality formation in Assam – a unique process in which various peoples, not merely from the historic homeland of the Assamese people but also from its peripheries and, in some notable individual cases, even from parts of far distant “became Assamese” over a period. Many of them were Assamised by birth and many more by voluntary adoption and assimilation, eventually losing their entire original

---

176 Seminar Feb. 1990 M.S. Prabhakara page 52
177 Seminar Feb. 1990 M.S. Prabhakara page 53
178 The Assam Tribune, 25 February 1993
moorings, especially original language. Though there is an element of romantic idealism in this envisioned process, there is also an element of historical truth.

By seeking various forms of autonomy and even outright separation, this cherished view of Assam and the formation of Assamese as a people have been challenged. The threat is not merely to the “territorial integrity” of Assam or even to the Brahmaputra Valley; the challenge is graver since it seeks to undermine the very personality of Assamese as a people. The Bodo people have been driven to pose such a challenge through sheer desperation because of prolonged social and economic neglect and indeed, many of them can not even comprehend the elements in their own history that have progressively led to the present situation.

The 1993 batch of IAS officials published a study entitled ‘Understanding Ethnic Unrest in Indian Peripheries and the analysis though has its own limitations, it was a very revealing study. It says: “be it Kashmir or the North east, politicians of mainstream political parties are responsible for fuelling ethnic unrest…. The Central leadership of mainstream political parties have manipulated ethnic symbols as much as others… The Congress was responsible for the ‘Bhinderwale Cult’ as it encouraged extremist sections of Punjab to erode moderate Akali leadership…. In the troubled North East region it is a well known fact that various political outfits and individual leaders have supported and nurtured different terrorist and insurgent groups to advance their personal or group political interests and defeat their political opponents…. The frequent imposition of President’s rule, often on doubtful and partisan groups, has also reinforced the imperialist image of the Centre…. The population should derive meaningful benefits from the economic activities rather then being exploited by them… Ethnic violence is the manifestation of a deeper malaise in the system and can hardly be contained by military or political action. The political bosses and the administration have also failed to establish psycho-emotional links with the historically insulated population…. The outsiders have not only grabbed political

\[179\text{ Ibid}\]
\[180\text{ The Assam Tribune, 21 February 1993}\]
opportunities but also created land alienation among the tribal.....The influx of outsiders into the region particularly the North East, has altered the demographic pattern and reduced the local population to a minority. The study recommended a single minded devotion for economic development of the state afflicted with ethnic unrest.\textsuperscript{181}

Even though the study has emanated from the bureaucrats there is much truth in their findings and these add to our insight and understanding of the subject. A good deal of the causes of the ethnic unrest was unfolded in the study. Emerging middle classes especially educated youth are seeking economic opportunities which their traditional occupations cannot satisfy. They suffer from a sense of deprivation and exploitation. Development is thus seen as the key. And if autonomous councils can divert popular energies from agitation to constructive endeavour through local self rule, this could promote stability and prosperity for these communities and the state at large\textsuperscript{182}. Fears of fragmentation, balkanization and ethnic revivalism are sought to be discounted in the hope that such tendencies will be sublimated through development.

If we give a careful look at most of the ethnic movements, they all started with demands of autonomous region or asking for special privileges for their congruous tribal population. But with the gradual development of these movements, which took vehement political turns, the demand changed from special privileges and protection to autonomy, then to union territory and to finally separate statehood and the Bodo movement is no exception. The promised things in the Bodo Accord were neither implemented nor institutions were created, nor were Constitutional Reforms initiated to formally legalise the accepted demands. This gradual shift in the demand of autonomy to statehood took place because their genuine grievances were not looked with care and allowed to swell till it took the form of insurgency and militant sub-nationalism

\textsuperscript{181} The Times of India New Delhi, 3rd May 1995.