CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The pluralistic society of BTAD is poised for a delicately balanced future. As it seeks to keep pace with the modern world, it has to contend with an abysmal level of human development standards in terms of health, hygiene, education, infrastructure, gender equality and human rights issues thanks to being witness to cycles of unrest and violence resulting in the paralysis of normal life during the Bodoland movement. Of the many indices of human development, health is a major concern as BTAD woefully lacks basic infrastructure in primary health care and safe drinking water as well as proper sanitation facilities. Human trafficking is also a major concern as recent studies have revealed that BTAD has become the hunting ground for vested interests to target poor girls and women from interior villages who are exchanged for money in places like Haryana and Punjab (Upadhyaya, Sarada: 2015). Equally distressing as the social sector is the state of economy that is fast changing from the traditional mode of employment generating economic system to a technology driven jobless growth. In recent decades, the migration of rural population to the urban centres has been an increasing trend. In the urban space, there is little difference between a Bodo youth and a Nepali youth when it comes to the issue of meaningful employment. As the rural agricultural sector has shrunk in terms of job generation, there is a rise in the incidence of out-migration among the Nepali and Bodo youths to the metropolitan centres of mainland India. Much of the employment that these youths are handed is not meaningful in the sense that the remittances they accrue are not sufficient to support family obligations in financial terms. If this trend has to stop, then BTAD has to have a favorable investment environment where big companies can come over and set up their industries. For this to happen, there has to be a peaceful law and order situation. Gradually, this new paradigm of economic mode of production has started to sink in the mindset of the Bodo and Non-Bodo people of BTAD.

However, more crucial than the socio-economic sectors discussed above is the ground reality pertaining to the political domain that is in crying need of resolution. The inclusion of hundred of villages where the Bodos are not in an overwhelming majority into the BTAD has been consistently disputed by a section of the non-Bodo
organizations. From time to time, these organizations have been demanding a review of the demarcation of BTAD areas since the inception in 2003. Besides, some disgruntled sections of Bodo extremist organizations have been still operating in the area often resorting to bandh calls and even sporadic incidents of violence. Law and order situation is still in a fragile state in spite of the efforts of the state machinery to promote political stability through dialogue, bipartite and tripartite talks among the extremists, the state government and the central governments. Ground rules for negotiations have been initiated to bring all the extremists into the mainstream with declaration of ceasefire and schemes of surrender of arms and personnel before the government. Amnesty offers have also been extended to the militants and as a result, the NDFB faction led by Ranjan Daimary has since surrendered and disbanded its organization. However, another faction (Sangbijit) has emasculated itself with considerable operational strength and strike power, throwing the balance of law and order into quandary. Permanent peace has therefore eluded the people of Bodoland who deserve it more now than ever before since they have begun to repose their trust in the democratic process as testified by a series of general elections and the council elections held since the formation of BTC in 2003.

In 2014, on the 2nd of June, to be precise, the Union Government through an act in the Parliament granted statehood to the long-standing demand of the people of the coastal region of Telengana. The act virtually effected the bifurcation of the state of Andhra Pradesh into two newly created states of Seemandhra and Telengana. This constitutional provision triggered off a new dynamics of fresh demands for the creation of a separate state among certain sections of the Bodo society. The ABSU has been in the forefront of spearheading a democratic movement for the demand of a separate state for the Bodo supported by outfits such as NDFB (pro-talk) faction. Although the movement has been peaceful so far, it has the potential of thwarting the development agenda carried out in the BTAD and even of putting considerable pressure on the maintenance of law and order in the near future.

In other words, the peace that prevails in the BTAD is of an extremely fragile nature that bears the threat of being thrown off-balance. However, there are signs of the shaping up of a host of healthy traditions in the Bodoland. The foremost is the tremendous clout that the Bodoland leadership enjoys in the polity of Assam today.
The political discourse in Assam can ill afford to ignore or sideline the political aspirations of the people of BTAD any more. This has allowed better bargaining power for political power-sharing as well as for developmental agenda for the sake of the Bodo and non-Bodo people of BTAD in the politics of Assam today. On the cultural front as well, there is greater interaction between the Bodo intellectuals and the rest in the state of Assam in matters related to cultural and intellectual output. This interaction now hinges on the healthy respect that the rest of Assam has developed to display towards Bodo cultural expressions. All these developments are the fruits of the politics of identity assertion practiced by the Bodos over the last four or five decades. A healthy respect for each other based on mutual understanding is a sign of the flourishing of democratic ideals in a pluralistic society and the Bodoland movement has accorded the space for such mutual understanding.

Another healthy tradition that has grown over the last two decades is the renewed love for one’s resources – both natural and cultural resources. One illustrious example of the love for one’s natural resources is the coming together of Bodo youths to conserve and propagate the value of wildlife since the inception of the BTC. The forests in the BTAD were one of the most severely hit sectors during the Bodoland movement. Forest reserves like the Manas National Park were totally ravaged by vested interests for the lure of ill-gotten money that was short changed for arms and ammunition resulting in the near annihilation of the wildlife and the complete shut down of the tourism sector. Now, in many places, including the Manas, volunteers from local Bodo and non-Bodo organizations have come forward and assisted the administration in the restoration of wildlife and tourism sector. New tourist projects have come up in places like Ultapani, Chouki, Bogamati and Bhairabkunda where youth volunteers have ensured that the wildlife protection is strengthened and tourist flow into these sites is ensured. The cultural ethos of the robust Bodo sense of community has been effectively put to advantage in these projects to usher in what one may term as the politics of culture.

There are other signs of the politics of culture bearing fruit in the Bodoland as well that go a long way to promote amity and cordial inter-communal relationship among the people of Bodoland. The centrally organized Kherai puja for example is no longer a cultural event confined only to the Bodos but an inclusive public festival.
where castes, ethnicities and people belonging to all the faiths participate. The political leadership has ensured the success of such public events that thrive on the goodwill of all the sections of the society. They now realize that only through collective and common goals can the people of the area achieve their aspirations. The elements of mutual coexistence based on tolerance, understanding, respect and commonly shared political, cultural and social goals, as traditionally displayed by the Bodos and the Nepalis in their interrelation, as the present study shows, can be the constituents of the politics of culture among the people in the BTAD.

Based on the interaction with the Bodo and Nepali cultural activists, experts and informants in the field as well as on the primary and secondary data presented in the dissertation so far, the present researcher has identified many significant elements of affinity and arrived at the following outstanding findings of the study:

a) The Bodos differ fundamentally from the Nepalis in the sense that they belong to a monolithic social group with equal status among their clans. The Nepalis comprise of caste Hindus with strict hierarchical pattern and ethnic groups having their own clan and kinship organizations.

b) Some ethnic groups among the Nepalis share a common ancestry in terms of their Kirati lineage with the Bodos. These ethnic groups are the Rais, Limbus and Yakhas. The other ethnic groups like the Magar, Gurungs, Bhujels, Yolpos, Newars, Tamangs and numerous others share a common Mongoloid ancestry with the Bodos.

c) In the worldview of the two sets of Nepali ethnic groups described above as well as their way of life and folk beliefs, there is a considerable level of affinity with the Bodos.

d) The Nepali nationality was formed through a painful historical process in which there was dominance of the high Caste Hindus and this nationality was based on Nepali language and caste Hindu cultural practices.

e) The migration of the Nepalis from Nepal happened in three successive waves; firstly, through the recruitment of the Gorkha soldiers in the
British army and their settlement in Assam in early 19th century, secondly, through the advent of peasants from eastern Nepal following persecution of the repressive Rana regime in the mid-19th century, and thirdly, through the arrival of semi literate Nepali citizens looking for employment opportunities in the service sector, as labour resource in coal and oil fields, forestry and civil engineering etc.

f) The majority of the Nepali settlers belonged to the cattle rearing and dairy farming sector and when pressure on grazier reserves increased with the advent of immigrants from Bangladesh, these cattle breeders moved to the plains of the Brahmaputra and set up villages and began their socio-cultural activities.

g) By 1920s, there was a discernible incidence of a nascent middle class that slowly began to articulate its voice. By that time, the Nepalis in Assam had formed themselves into a recognizable whole in terms of a subnational identity based on the dilution of the previously rigid caste hierarchy. This newly emerging middle class preferred to call itself ‘Assamese Nepali’

h) In the subsequent period, the Assamese Nepalis listed Assamese as their mother-tongue in the census of India besides identifying themselves with the greater Assamese nationality.

i) From the early geographic and environmental adaptation for the exploitation of the natural resources, the Assamese Nepalis developed social, cultural and political interaction with the neighbouring social groups, communities and ethnicities with considerable socio-cultural goodwill and fellow feeling. Their whole-hearted participation in the movement for Indian independence is a strong case in point of their socio-cultural interaction.

j) Assam agitation brought agonizing experience for the Assamese Nepalis since their status as citizens of the country was unnecessarily questioned by some sections of the Assamese mainstream. This experience made them aware of the need to define their own cultural boundary in the pluralistic polity of Assam.
k) The Assamese Nepalis have now moved from their niche of dairy farming and agriculture into other fields of economic mode of production. They are now part of the nation building process in various roles as professionals in education, medicine, law, business and so on, like other social groups.

l) As far as the Bodos are concerned, their history is a truncated history with periods of domination and subjugation in the Brahmaputra valley till the modern times. In the awkward shift from pre-modern, semi-feudal society to a modern monetized society, the Bodos suffered the most among the major social groups in Assam. Vast population of Bodo peasants was pushed to penury and relative oblivion following imperial policy on agriculture and industry.

m) When a considerably significant middle class formation took place in Assam, the Bodos were left in the margins. Neither in the popular imagination expressed through much of the expressive arts in the 19th century, nor in matters of policy and planning in imperial scheme of things were the Bodos allowed meaningful participation.

n) It was only in the second decade of the 20th century that the Bodo identity formation took place. What started as a movement for cultural identity soon paved the way for political identity with its attendant corollary of political rights and entitlement.

o) The Bodo identity politics is a fascinatingly dramatic phenomenon in the annals of Assam’s socio-cultural history. The perceived sense of subjugation by the dominant nationalistic discourse had remarkable traction among the Bodo people, both the middle class till the 1960s and the common masses thereafter.

p) The fratricidal ethnic violence almost subverted the cause of the Bodo Movement for identity assertion in the late 1980s but thanks to the concerted efforts of the influential sections of the Bodo intelligentsia including the participation of women, peace was at last negotiated and the formation of the BTC marked a watershed in the Bodoland areas both in socio-cultural and political terms.
The pluralistic society envisioned in the BTC is quite in keeping with the spirit of comaraderie that exists between the Bodos and the Nepalis in the BTAD.

The spirit of comaraderie, which has been studied under the category of 'affinity' in the present study stems from three important elements as identified in the thesis and these three elements are: a) historical - in terms of the shared ancestry of Kirati brotherhood between the Bodos and certain ethnic groups in the Nepali nationalistic formation, b) cultural – in terms of the common or shared heritage of the magico-religious belief systems that exist in both the groups of people, and c) strategies and coping mechanisms that the Nepalis in Bodoland have devised over the decades in terms of physical/environmental adaptation to the Bodo habitat, socio-cultural and economic adaptation with the Bodos and finally socio-political adaptation in the fast-changing politics of identity in the Bodo society in the last hundred years or so.
PHOTOS TAKEN/COLLECTED BY THE RESEARCHER DURING FIELD VISIT IN BTAD:

(Granary) Bhakari of Nepali

(Granary) Bakhri of Bodo

(Granary) Bodo Bakhri with implements *
Musical Instruments of Nepali

Musical Instruments of Bodo

A Bodo Man with Kham (Drum)

Bodo Men playing Kham (Drum) & Ciphung (Flute)

A Nepali Man Playing Benju (Gongana)

Musical instruments Madal (Drum), Bansuri (Flute) and Sarangi of Nepali
Nepali girls in Traditional Dress

Bodo Girls in Traditional Dress

A Little Nepali Girl in Traditional Dress

A Limbu Woman in Traditional Ornaments

Traditional Ornaments of Nepali

Traditional Ornaments of Bodo*
Performing Kirtan by the Nepali Women in Shiva Temple

Performing Kirtan by the Bodo Women in Bathou Temple

A Nepali Woman Preparing Jand (Vodka)

A Bodo Woman Preparing Jau (Vodka)

Nepali Girls Performing Traditional Dance

Bodo Girls Performing Traditional Dance
Bodo & Nepali women in marketing

A Nepali woman in Commercial market

A Nepali woman selling provisions

A Nepali woman selling vegetables

Common market place of Bodo/Nepalis vegetables

Bodo/Nepali women selling vegetables
Wooden grinder of Nepali

A grinding instrument (Dhiki) of Nepali

Household implements of Nepali

Wooden grinder of Bodo

Grinding instruments (Dhenki/Ural) of Bodos *

Utensils of Bodos*
Wooden and bamboo household implements of Nepali

Utensils of Bodos*

Bamboo implements of Nepali

A stone made grinder (Janto) of Nepali

A stone made spice grinder used by both Bodos & Nepalis
PHOTOS OF BODO/NEPALI'S SCHOLARS, INFORMANTS WITH THE RESEARCHER
PHOTOS TAKEN AS OBSERVATION BY THE RESEARCHER DURING FIELD STUDY IN BTAD

Reseracher in the Bathou Festival in Baganpara (Baksa)

Reseracher welcomed by Bathou Committee (Baksa)
Reseracher observing Kherai Dance

*Courtsy : Bhuyan, Paresh. *Folk Art of Culture of Bodo-Kachari and Rabha Tribes of Assam.* Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Kokrajhar.