Chapter 2

BODO-ASSAMESE CONTACT SITUATION IN ASSAM
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The Bodos, the largest plain tribe of Assam (India), has a history of glorious past. Once this great race inhabited the entire northeastern region of India extending from southeast Nepal through north Bengal and Assam, Meghalaya right up to Tripura as well as the foothills of Bhutan and Bangladesh. The descendents of this Mongoloid race are still living throughout the region under various ethno-cultural and linguistic identities. But, it is an irony of their history that this once most powerful tribe has now been fighting for the recognition of their distinctive identity in Assam. Their powerful existence had almost disappeared in modern Indian polity till the fifties of 20th century. The widespread Bodoland movement started during the sixties and continued till late nineties has been able to draw a national attention towards this tribe and to study the background of their seething unrest. The Bodoland movement started as a socio-cultural movement with the issue of promoting the language of Bodo speaking people who are concentrated in the northern part of the river Brahmaputra in lower Assam area. The movement later on developed into a socio-political movement for a separate state within India. Finally, the socio-political movement has led to formation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), a self-governing body for the Bodo inhabited areas of Assam under the VI Schedule of Indian Constitution on the basis of a tripartite settlement between Govt. of India, Govt. of Assam and the leaders of those organizations spearheading the movement. The movement vigorously started with the issue of Bodo language revival. So, it seems to have set an example of how the revival of indigenous languages of minority groups can be fruitful in asserting separate socio-political identity of minority indigenous people.

2.1 Who are the Bodos?

The ‘Bodo’ is a generic term which connotes the ‘Kacharis’ living in the northeastern region of India. About the origin of this race in history, it is still largely a matter of conjecture and inference. They are one of the oldest inhabitants in the region and a race of Mongolian people who constitute the largest tribe scattered in different parts of the region with different names and identity. The most widely accepted inference is drawn as between 3000-2500 BC, this Mongolian race migrated from Mongolia and Siberia to the north of the Himalayas and the west of China - the land described as ‘Bod’ country, is supposed to mean the original homeland of the race (Endle, 1911). The inhabitants of the...
'Bod' country (now it is Tibet) were called as 'Bodo Ficha' or 'Bodocha' ('Bodo' means 'land' and 'Fiche' or 'Cha' means 'children', hence 'children of Bod country'). In course of time, they were simply known as Bodo and migrated towards the northeastern parts of India and settled down on the bank of the river Brahmaputra (Brahma, 1989; Paul & Narzary, 2004). Some scholars have pointed physiognomic similarities between the Bodos and present day Kham tribes of Tibet. This school of thought states that this yellow-skinned race left its original habitat in southeastern Tibet and moved towards southwards in search of a better terrain and enter the plains of Brahmaputra valley (Roy, 1995). The descendents of this early migrant tribe, the 'Kacharis' are now scattered throughout the northeastern region and divided into several groups.

The Kacharis living in the present north Bengal and western parts of Goalpara district of Assam are known as 'Mech'. It is believed that Bodo-Kacharis living on the bank of the river Michi flowing through Nepal are called as Mech or Meche, which originated from the name of the river Michi. The Kacharis of Cachar district (North Chachar Hills of Assam) call themselves Kacharis. They are simply known as 'Dimasa Kacharis' means 'son of a big river', 'Di' means 'river' and 'cha' means 'children' (Brahma, 1989). The Bodo, a plain tribal community of Brahmaputra valley of Assam along with closely allied other tribes (Sonowal-kacharis, Hajong-kacharis, Garos etc.) are the descendents of those early migrants from southeast Tibet came through upper Burma. So anthropologically, the race is identified as Tibeto-Burman origin. This Bodo-kachari tribe of lower Assam parts of Brahmaputra valley call themselves as Bodos or Boros. They had inhabited the valley for centuries as the land being fertile enough for cultivation (mono cropping). By the second half of 12th century, many Bodo chiefs started establishing different kingdoms in various parts of the region. From the Brahmaputra valley, many moved to north Bengal, Garo Hills, North Cachar and Tripura Hills and to a lesser extent had changed in physical features through intermarriages and also identified themselves with landmarks of their new localities (Bordoloi, 1984; Pegu, 2004).

The Dimasa-kacharis, who in the early years resided in the Brahmaputra valley later established kingdom on the bank of the river Dhansiri and in the North Cachar Hills. During 4th century, the Bodo-Kacharis of Brahmaputra valley were driven out from the riverbank. They established their new kingdom on the bank of the river Dhansiri. They also built their new capital at Dimapur in 1086 A.D. The Kacharis ruled for over 450 years from Dimapur. In the 13th century, Ahoms rulers led by Sukapha came to Assam and occupied one portion of Kachari kingdom. By 1536 A.D., they occupied the entire Kachari kingdom
of Dhansiri riverbank of middle Assam and forced them to flee towards North Cachar hills where they ruled till the end of 17th century (Bordoloi, 1984; Paul & Narzary, 2004). Thus, the Bodo-kacharis are spread out throughout the region, specially they are highly concentrated in the northern belt of Assam (Krokrajhar district). The Bodo-kachari or the Kacharis are now fragmented and seen as individual groups (Sarania, Hajong, Sonowal-Kacharis etc. are the splinter groups). Today, these groups regard themselves as distinctive from each other by having acquired differences in their language and culture to a large extent (Roy, 1995).

2.2 The Bodo Language and Its Speakers

The Bodos constitute the largest ethnic group among the plain tribal population in Assam. Ethnologically, the Bodo speech area includes the areas dominated by tribes of Bodo-kachari origin. The fragmented groups of Bodo-kachari origin, the Hajong, Mech, Sonowal-Kacharis, Dimasa-kacharis, Garo etc., all belong to Bodo ethnolinguistic group of Tibeto-Burman language family; although each has its own distinct dialect/language (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982). Assam is a land of heterogeneous population where Assamese is the majority linguistic group and its language is the main official language and lingua franca of the state. The plain tribal population of Assam is highly concentrated in mainly two districts - Krokrajhar, where the dominant tribe is ‘Bodo’ and Dhemaji, where the dominant tribe is ‘Miri’. In 1991 census of Assam, out of 22.4 million population, 9.2% are the plain tribes. Among them, 5.3% people identified themselves as speakers of Bodo language. This official document has failed to distinguish linguistically the original Bodo tribe as a whole from the non-Bodo origin tribes because many of this tribe has now lost the original Bodo language and adopted Assamese language (Baruah, 1999). So the official list does not include the Sonowal-Kacharis, Moran-Kacharis and Chutias etc. (Bodo origin) of upper Assam. This official figure is drawn on the percentage of people who are currently speakers of the language known as Bodo language while excluding total percentage of people (Rabhas, Dimasas, Deoris, Garos etc.) whose languages are defined by linguists as belonging to the Bodo group. In the classic ‘Linguistic Survey of India’, G.A. Grierson (1903) noted that in the Colonial Official Document of Racial Theories in 1901, the ‘Bodo’ is used as the name of the Assam–Burmese branch of Tibeto-Burman language family. Endle (1911) wrote on the basis of this reference that Bodos in earlier days were dominant race in Assam, which was widely distributed and it left traces of their domination in the nomenclature of some of the physical features of the region. Thereby, Endle (1911) inferred
that a number of distinct tribal people of Assam speaking different languages or dialects of their own - Bodos, Rabhas, Lalungs, Garos etc., were all members of the Bodo-Kachari or Bada (means ‘big race’) group. Grierson (1967) also included nine languages/dialects in Bodo group.

The word ‘Bodo’ was originally applied only in the linguistic connotation than the ethnic connotation. This language of Tibeto-Burman language family has some preponderance of words allied to Chinese group of languages. It led the scholars to have reasonable assumption that their original ancestors might be residents of sandwiched between east of Tibet and west of China (known as Bod). When this Bodo race entered the Brahmaputra valley, there was no written language and in absence of any written record, their original form of language/dialect cannot be ascertained with any precision (Roy, 1995). By the time the Bodos settled well on the valley, several small Aryan stock and other Mongolian stock of people (the powerful Ahoms) established big settlement in the region. When the Aryan language and culture came into contact with Bodo language and culture, both are mutually influenced by each other. The evidence of Bodo language and culture as being predominant element in the pre-Indic culture of Assam is over-whelming, specially in the names of the rivers e.g. Dikho, Dihing, Disang, Dibru etc., as the first syllable ‘Di’ is a Bodo word for water.

Assamese is a language of Sanskrit origin, which grew out of Praha Magadhi Aprabhramasha dialect sometime around 400-600 A.D, when the Aryan race started their settlement in the region. It took a shape of separate language around 900-1000 A.D. In the process of developing as an independent language, it was substantially influenced by Bodo language. So the influence of Tibeto-Burman speech is visibly marked in it (Barthakur, 1971; Roy, 1995). According to eminent linguist Dr. B. Kakaty (1962), nearly 10 percent of the vocabulary of modern Assamese comes from Bodo and other allied languages.

The scholars of 18th century gave an intellectual thought in the process of ethnic change of the race with the process of extension of Indic culture into the region. This history of assimilation of Bodos into Assamese language and culture provides the most potent example of how the primitive tribal people in the northeastern region merged into the Indic civilization while adopting Hinduism (Baruah, 1999). The Bodo kings patronized Hindu religion after the contact with Aryan culture. Since the Bodos did not have any written form of their language and the Hindu priest/Aryan scholars, imported from the mainland India in the royal houses, could not adopt the local Bodo language, the Sanskrit language was used as a language of court and all religious practices. The common people still retained their
own dialect for domestic use. So, the religious conversion to Hinduism and patronizing the Sanskrit language for religious purposes by the rulers is the most potent cause of linguistic assimilation into Assamese of many sub-tribal groups of original Bodo-kachari stock. When the Koch rulers (of Bodo origin) in lower Assam adopted Hinduism and Sanskrit language, they were no longer identified as tribe, since they occupied higher status in the Hindu cast hierarchy. Thus, they underwent a process of ethnic change from Bodo-Kachari tribe to Assamese (Baruah, 1999).

E.A.Gait (1905) observed the process of assimilation of Bodos into Assamese. By analyzing the language data of 1891 census, he revealed that the languages/dialects of the Bodo group were dying out and would gradually be extinguished. He commented on the decline of number of speakers of Bodo language group from 1881 to 1891 census. The Bodo-Kachari (today’s Bodos) speakers declined by 24% from 263.186 to 200.129 people, whereas Hinduised Bodos of lower Assam (Meche) increased by 19.6 percent. According to him, most of the converted Bodo Hindus could move into some higher status Hindu caste. As a result, those joined the Assamese formation no longer identified themselves as Bodos (such as Koch Rajbongsis of Assam). Many of them such as Sonowal-Kacharis, Chutias, Rabhas etc. changed into different ethnic identity (Assamese under S.T. category), lost their original Bodo language. But, in spite of that a large portion had retained their original language and culture and continued to do so till present day (Baruah, 1999).

While the process of ethnic change from Bodo-kachari to Assamese is clear, it is also evident that not all fractions of Bodo stock had the same history of assimilating into Assamese. To a large extent, the assimilation was the consequence of political ties. Not all of them interacted with powerful Mongoloid Ahom rulers - the makers of pre-colonial Assam and the language/culture, which is more constitutive in building the modern Assamese language/culture. For instance, the Sonowal-Kacharis who completely lost their original Bodo language are now concentrated in Dibrugarh district of upper Assam - the center of Ahom kingdom. But the Bodos in the foothills of Bhutan (lower Assam) had much less contact with Ahoms culturally. This division of Bodo-kacharis has been able to retain their own language and culture and is highly concentrated in Kokrajhar district of lower Assam. The Bodos from this area have a history of active struggle for cultural differentiation and political autonomy from Assamese.
2.3 Reversing Assimilation

The central theme in the Bodo cultural politics today is to repudiate the process of unequal assimilation into the Assamese sub-national formation and to seek differentiation from, and equality with, the ethnic Assamese (Baruah, 1999). The most potent weapon of the battleground of Bodo cultural politics is the Bodo language. The Bodo speakers started to assert their separate identity from Assamese by reviving their language since the beginning of 20th century. The Bodos had a glorious past history and retained their cultural tradition to a large extent in Assam, indeed they are socio-economically suppressed section of tribal population living with a comparatively an advanced socio-economic group-Assamese under a common political system. A greater portion of them is today living under below poverty line. A cultural manifestation of such socio-economic deprivation has resulted in the language revival movement (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982; Singh, 1999). Since 60s, the Bodos have struggled for a separate political identity for themselves. Starting off modestly with the demand for inclusion of Bodo language in the educational institutions of Assam, they gradually started demanding the creation of a separate state on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra to be named ‘Udayachal’ and have complete control over the economic, social and political life in the region through a widespread movement. Later on, the name of the separate state, demanded by them has been changed to ‘Bodoland’.

Origin of Bodo Movement

The history of Bodos like the history of any great civilization of the world went through ups and down with passage of time, as these most powerful early settlers were marginalized to a minority community in the valley. Indeed, after the death of the last legendary king of Kachar dynasty in 1830, their royal dominance had disappeared in the region. With the passage of time, the process of assimilation into a greater Assamese community was started, which induced a sense of identity crisis among those who tried to retain their original language and culture. Towards the end of 18th century, in the social hierarchy of Assam, they were being placed in a substantially lower strata and faced relative deprivation in all walks of life (Narzary & Mitra, 2004).

Economic Downfall

The beginning of 19th century was a time of political degradation and economic downfall of Bodos. They became an isolated fractional tribe without any power in administrative affair of the region. The economic downfall started with the land alienation
system during British rule as agriculture was the mainstay of their economy. Till 18th century, they were prosperous agriculture based community; produced various seasonal fruits, mastered seeds, cotton etc. besides the staple food crop rice. The economic problem began during first part of 19th century. The disruption caused by Burmese invasion resulted in the take over of Assam by the British. The first casualty of the new political change was seen in the old cross-border trading practices of the Bodos with the hill tribes of Bhutan, Tibet and China along the foothills of Bhutan. These foothill passes were known as ‘Kachari-doars’. This border trade substantially supplemented the Bodo economy. It was dependent on the border peace making policy of the Ahom kings and annual gift exchange between them and the hill tribes. The Burmese invasion disrupted this cross-border trade intensely and adversely affected the Bodo economy. When British rulers reopened it, Marwaris and some Assamese-speaking traders from Barpeta district of lower Assam became active in it. Gradually, monetary transactions replaced the old barter transactions practice of Bodos and need for command over capital emerged in both retail and small scale wholesale trade. The Bodo traders could not meet this need and failed to compete with outside traders due to lack of capital resource investment in the wholesale trade. The British rulers also introduced the new system of monetary revenue payment, due to which, the Bodo peasants fell shortage of money. The new traders took the opportunity and started land alienation in the region by doing false mortgage deeds with poor and illiterate Bodo farmers with the help of some Govt. officials (Roy, 1995). Besides this, illegal transfer of land, the Muslim immigrants of east Bengal also encroached upon the lands of Bodo inhabited areas at massive scale. The British rulers in 1938 introduced Line System to protect the tribal block from the land encroachment by Muslim immigrants. The system created more havoc for the Bodo villagers as the immigrants were given license to settle freely in open villages under the tribal block (Narzary, 1976). The land alienation in the Bodo inhabited areas in upper Assam (Assamese majority areas) was quite less as compared to Bodo inhibited areas of lower Assam (Bordoloi, 1986; Roy, 1995).

The Bodo Inhabited areas are extensively covered by rich forests. Bodo villagers were to a large extent dependant on the local forest products for trading in small industries. But gradually, this trade was snatched by the Assamese traders of Barpeta region and the Bodo traders were rendered mere collection on wage payment. So long as these forests were exploited by small-scale Bodo collectors, the forests replenished itself. But as the more intensive exploitation started by the outside traders, the forests failed to replenish itself and deforestation started. As a result, Govt. imposed restriction on unpermitted woodcutting,
even for their own home construction and other domestic works. All these changes successively created extreme economic hardship for Bodos (Narzary, 1976; Roy, 1995).

Language Development, Educational and Social Reforms

The middle of 19th century was a period of some hope for overcoming socio-economic deprivation of Bodos, as during that period, a section of enlighten Bodos began to realize the need of modern education and development of their own language to revive their political power and socio-economic condition.

By the first half of 19th century, the American Baptist Missionaries became interested in establishing missionary schools in the Bodo inhabited areas of Bhutan frontier as well as preaching gospel and gather converted Christians. In 1844, the corresponding secretary of Baptist Mission Rev. Mile Bronson forwarded a report to East India Company govt. in which, he argued that since the Bodos have no written language, the Brahmins have proselytized them to Hindu faith and imposed religious education in Sanskrit language. But those of Bhutan frontier have become less tainted with Hindu rituals. The East India Company Govt. then decided to recommend two missionaries - one in Mangaldoi for Assamese and the other in the Bhutan frontier for Bodos to teach them their scripture in the same, with element of education and propagating the principle of gospel. The attempt undertaken by the Company in this regard is not only solely based on spreading gospel, but also consideration of spreading cross-border trade through Bhutan with the entire north. The missionaries not only did the pioneer evangelical work among Bodos, but also made pioneer studies on their race, culture and language. The missionaries gave written form to Bodo language for the first time and were able to make it as a recognized language in the Indian literature (Basumatary, 2005). Sidney Endle of British American Church was sent to work on Bodo areas and studied the social customs as well as language of the Bodos. In 1884, he published his book titled ‘Manual of Kachari Language’. So, the written part started with no literature, but with grammar as Endle (1884) composed a Bodo grammar by the name of ‘Outline Grammar of Kachari(Bara) Languages’ as spoken in Drarrang District of Assam’. In 1911, he published another book titled ‘The Kacharis’, in which he gave an account of folk life and culture along with grammar and specimen of Bodo language. J.D. Anderson published ‘A collection of Kachari folk-tales and rhymes’ in 1895. He wrote this collection in simplified Roman scripts. Besides these, though not directly related to literary works of Bodo language; some of the books, journals published by Christian missionaries gave enough idea of Bodo grammatical elements and vocabularies (Baro, 2003).
In spite of the tremendous attempt for uplifting social and educational standard of Bodos by missionaries, the spread of Christianity among Bodos was never as extensive as the other hill tribes of the northeastern region of India. The Bodo people already in general were practicing the rudimentary principles and rites of Hindu religion. Substantial conversion took place in Udalguri and some portion of present Kokrajhar districts, which brought some drastic reforms in the unhealthy social practices of Bodos and enlightenment among them (Roy, 1995).

Another socio-religious movement was started by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma during the beginning of 20th century. He founded the Brahma religion for Bodos. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma was not only a religious preacher. He initiated many social reforms as well as literary movement. It was through his efforts, the Bodo written language took shape of a standard language (mainly based on the Bodo spoken language of Kokrajhar district). For this, he adopted Assamese script. He felt the breaking up of Bodo community by religious conversion into Hinduism. The Bodos during the period used to go through a costly ceremony called ‘Sarania’ while accepting Hinduism. After that, they used to achieve a higher social status and no more called themselves as Bodos (Narzary & Mitra, 2004; Pegu, 2004). Those who could not afford such ceremony, followed their traditional system of life and religion, were looked down in the society by upper caste Hindus. By preaching the Brahma religion Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma not only brought about a socio-religious reforms, but also tried to stop their breaking off and united them under one modified religious practice (Narzary & Mitra, 2004). So the ‘Brahmas’ among Bodos became culturally and educationally more advanced than their unconverted brethren and took over the leadership of socio-political life of Bodos (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982). In fact, the modern history of the Bodos started from the day when he began preaching the Brahma religion among them in 1905. By the end of 19th century, Bodos were despised and neglected by other communities and were confined to low social status. Their conditions even deteriorated further, at the beginning of 20th century, when the other upper cast Hindu communities mistreated them as outcastes. To come out from this crisis, the community needed a leader who could save them from the religious conversion and preserve them from extinction, unite them and strengthen their social status. In such a scenario, he took initiative to revive all fields of social life of Bodos by extending from spirituality to educational reforms, village welfare to well being of women and farmers, organizing Bodo Mahasanmilan (Bodo mass rally) to unite them to fight with the social evils, to compilation of the Boroni Pandulipi - a social law book that would have relevance for entire Bodo
community and would guide them in their day to day activities and social matters. More and more Bodos started showing interest in education, fostered unity and with this they came to realize the need of such Pandulipi for strengthening and binding the community together. Due to his remarkable initiative, the Bodos were granted a separate electoral status by the British Govt.—the first step of searching a separate political identity of Bodos under British Govt.

Gurudev also brought an indelible mark in the field of education. The Bodo community as a whole was lagging far behind in education compared to other communities during the period, except few exceptions. This illiteracy had deep impact on their society, which accounted for their backwardness. The first and foremost step he felt, was that immediate action required for the establishment of primary and middle schools in the Bodo areas. There were only handful of schools in lower Assam areas and hardly any in Bodo dominated areas. So the lack of educational institutions accompanied with a mindset, which did not attach much importance to education and thus resulted in the significantly low literacy rate in the community. With the establishment of primary and middle schools in the Bodo dominated area, first in Tipkai, it became the center of learning for Bodos, as more and more flocked there for education. Thus, it was through his efforts, the journey towards enlightenment of the Bodo people started initiating the growth of Bodo nationalism in the beginning of 20th century (Narzary & Mitra, 2004, Basumatary, 2005).

The state of education of Bodos was much inferior than the Assamese community till the beginning of 20th century (Roy, 1995). The non availability of education facility is evident from the fact that till 1901, there was not a single high school in the entire Mangaldoi sub-division, the predominantly Bodo inhabited area, when the premier higher education institution in Guwahati- Cotton College was established. The Bodos till 19th century, exclusively engaged in agriculture, fishing, hunting etc and their spoken language was not used in written form for education. They used Assamese language only in business transactions. Only after the third decade of 19th century, the newly emerging middle class Bodos looking for other avenue of employment rather than the traditional mono cropping.

Till 1975, in the post-independence period, there were only 5,488 plain tribal government employees in Assam, while there was provision of 10 percent job reserved for only the plain tribal population. The feeling of relative economic deprivation of Bodos mainly came due to their unequal share in ‘modern’ occupations which, according to them, discriminately dominated by ethnic Assamese people (Baruah, 1999). The social and religious reform movements (Brahma religion) that resulted in the spread of education,
made the enlightened section to compare their socio-economic status with that of Assamese people and emulated the steps that Assamese had already taken. The first major step taken in this direction was formation of various Bodo organizations to work as a driving force for socio-political, economic, religious and literary development. A student organization Known as ‘Bodo Chatra Sanmilani’ in 1919 was the first Bodo organization. Simultaneously, two other organizations were formed - ‘Kachari Youth Association’ and ‘Goalpara District Bodo Association’. In 1936, the newly emerging educated Bodo youths founded the Tribal League, which perhaps became the first socio-political Bodo organization in Assam. Afterwards, the founder member of the League, R. Brahma, joined active state politics. These organizations took up the issues of development of language, culture and education of Bodos along with economic development by some burning issues like employment facilities for Bodos and political empowerment of the community (Narzary, 2005).

**Publication of Modern Bodo Literature.**

The first session of Bodo Chatra Sanmilani (Bodo Students’ Union) was a remarkable occasion in itself regarding the Bodo language and literature development. One of the most important resolutions that were taken up was publication of first Bodo language magazine for the development of Bodo language and literature. The same resolution was also adopted in the first session of Bodo Mahasanmilani in 1921. The need for starting such a magazine for Bodos and written in the Bodo language was essential to fulfill the vital aim of those organizations – spreading of Bodo language and literature among the masses. Thus, ‘Bibar’- the first Bodo language magazine was published in 1924. Its publication period is of such a monumental importance in the Bodo literary tradition that the period is referred to as the ‘Bibar Era’. In the following years, on lines of the ‘Bibar’, many other magazines were published. They were - Jenthoka, Alongar, Hathorikhi-hala, Siphung and Musri Arw Sansri. They all played significant role in the development of the Bodo language and literature (Narzary & Mitra, 2004).

**The Bodo Language Movement**

The next significant step in the modern socio-political development of Bodos is the formation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) on November 16, 1952 at Kokrajhar, which later became the milestone in the socio-cultural life of Bodos. The avowed aim of the organization was to take all necessary steps to safeguard Bodo ethnic identity through all
round improvement of Bodo language and literature as well as preservation of its culture. Just started on the model of Asom (Assam) Sahitya Sabha, its role in the growth of Assamese nationalism by preserving and promoting Assamese language and culture, BSS initially worked for the development of a standard Bodo Language, which would ultimately become the standard literary language and a link language for all the tribal groups of Bodo-Kachari origin scattered throughout the region. So, the major objective of the BSS was to bring all languages of Bodo origin under one unified organization and unite the people of Bodo origin to assert their distinct identity in the region. As a result, a pan-Bodo sentiment started developing among the Bodos. The Sabha published an annual mouthpiece named ‘The Bodo’. Although, initially it addressed the issue of all round development of Bodo language, later on, it actively participated in the political agitation of Bodos from time to time. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha had played a sole role in the rise of Bodo nationalism in the second part of 20th century by its continuous democratic movement for promoting Bodo language and tried to give the Bodo Nationalism a public recognition (Basumatary, 2005).

The political movement of Bodos, more or less, emerged from the movement for linguistic rights, against the language policy of Assam in post-independence period. The language policy of Assam Govt. engendered quite dissatisfaction among the tribal population of the State who retained their own language and culture. The Assamese language, as the language of the majority of people, was declared as a main administrative language in 1960, despite the opposition of the some tribal communities. In fact, Assam had been at least since the eleventh century, a highly multilingual province with several other indigenous languages like Bodo, Mising etc. The educated Assamese sections of the leading literary organization like Asom(Assam) Sahitya Sabha has made tremendous effort to make Assamese the most widely used language both in education as well as in administration. The Assamese language itself has been re-established with official status during the first half of post-independence period, as the arrival of Bengalis during British rule in Assam dealt a death blow to Assamese language, when it was removed from the offices and schools in 1836 (Baruah, 1960). While the process of promoting the Assamese language and making it a language of administration was going on, the protection and safeguard to other minority tribal languages, spoken by sizeable number of people, was not taken into consideration. According to 1951 census, there are 182 Indian and 23 foreign languages prevalent in Assam. Another major objective of the Asom Sahitya Sabha was to encourage on going linguistic assimilation of indigenous population into Assamese. It hurts the sentiments of the tribal groups. In 1972, the Assam Government made Assamese as the sole medium of
instruction in the educational institutions upto college level. Again, in late 80s the AGP Govt. imposed Assamese language as compulsory third language in the non-Assamese medium Secondary schools. The 'Tribal Students Organizations' and the 'Assam Linguistic Minority Rights Committee' (ALMRC) strongly opposed such declaration. The Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) rendered full support to ALMRC's stand in favour of retention of English as medium of instruction in the universities of Assam. This gradually led to vehement protests from various non-Assamese speaking people. They found their linguistic deprivation as a substantial factor of their socio-economic backwardness, since the sufficient knowledge in Assamese language has been a sine qua non for entry into higher education and government jobs (Roy, 1995; Pulloppillil, 1997). The Bodo leadership had found more feasible to direct the feeling of socio-economic exploitation through cultural channels like Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

As a result of such undiversified linguistic policy, a complete linguistic assimilation to Assamese had gradually emerged among the new generation of Bodo people in Assamese majority areas. In order to protect the language from complete disappearance, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha launched a movement for introduction of Bodo as medium of instruction in the schools of Bodo inhabited areas. The BSS therefore, actively involved in translation of school text books into Bodo language. The program in this phase of movement included submission of memoranda to state govt., meeting with the govt. ministers and officials. In 1953, BSS submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam at 'Dhubri'- demanding introducing Bodo medium in the primary schools level in all Bodo concentrated areas under the article 350/A of Indian constitution. It was suspected in the context of 'Naga Rebellion' that this demand was the starting point of a forthcoming separatist movement. However, as a result of the continuous movement, Govt. of Assam conceded to the demand in 1956. A textbook in Bodo language was brought out. The BSS rejected the textbook as it considered the textbook unhelpful for learning and had a large number of Assamese words in it. Till 1962, BSS did not get any positive response from the Government of Assam and this compelled them to start agitation. On November 10, 1962 just after the Chinese aggression, a mammoth rally was held at Kokrajhar. On November 10, 1962, BSS took a large procession of around 15,000 Bodos. Then the Govt. of Assam appointed a committee headed by Rup Nath Brahma (the founder member of Tribal League) to prepare a report on this matter. On the basis of this report, Government decided in 1963 to introduce Bodo medium in the primary schools. The Bodo medium was introduced upto class III in the Kokrajhar sub division. It was however decided that from the upper primary
level Assamese medium would continue. The students who completed their primary education in Bodo medium found it difficult to learn in Assamese medium in the secondary level. Bodo Sahitya Sabha felt that Bodo could be introduced upto secondary level. They started mass movement at the Kokrajhar sub division. The Education Deptt. Of Assam maintained the argument that the Bodo language could not be introduced at the middle school level because it was not a recognized regional language and it went against the clause of article 350/A of Indian Constitution. The movement gathered more and more momentum with the passage of time. The Bodo leadership then threatened the Government on an annual conference of BSS on February 14, 1968 that if the Govt. will not take a final decision within two weeks, a mass agitation will be launched. However, the agitation started at Kokrajhar with the boycotting of schools and colleges. On March 31, 1968 a bilateral meet was held between BSS and Assam Govt. and as a result, the Bodo medium was introduced upto higher secondary level and on September 3, 1968, the State Education Minister formally inaugurated it at Kokrajhar Higher Secondary School. In 1976, Gauhati University (Guwahati) introduced Bodo as modern Indian language (Pulloppillil, 1997; Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982; ABSU document.).

The Bodo language movement did not end up with it. Later, the question of script came up. In 1974, BSS in close collaboration with ‘All Bodo Students Union’ (ABSU) launched the Bodo Script movement demanding introduction of Roman script in Bodo language. Till then, Bodo books were written in Assamese script with slight modification in the vowel notations to conform with the peculiar phonetic sounds of spoken Bodo language. The demand came because better type writing and printing facility was available in Roman script (Roy, 1995). The arguments in favour of Roman script forwarded by Bodo Sahitya Sabha can be summarized as; i) Kotheri Commission permitted adoption of Roman Script, ii) the neighboring Garos of Goalpara district had adopted Roman script, iii) linguists have recommended the Roman script as most appropriate for the Bodo language, iv) the script is widely adopted in the world, v) it would be not a new script for Bodo language as it was first used for Bodo literature in 1886 by Missionaries. The Assam Govt. under British rule in 1904 also prepared Bodo textbook in Roman script to introduce primary education among Bodos and it continued till 1936 (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982). The BSS precipitated the issue by introducing the Bodo English book "Bithorai" in class I printed in Roman script. Immediately, Government of Assam stopped grants to the schools in retaliation. This resulted in protest, mass picketing of schools on September 18 and 21, 1974. Finally, when
the movement was at the peak, the state Govt. referred the issue to the Center for a decision, though it was in a position to grant it.

Besides, all other tribal communities of non-Indic cultural identity around the region with whom the Bodos have a cultural affinity, adopted Roman script for their respective languages. The Assam govt. wanted Assamese script to continue. Then the script movement turned into violent agitation that invited police action against the agitators. A widespread movement in the Bodo inhabited areas started and it took the shape of a vigorous Bodo ethnic uprising. At least fifteen agitators died in police encounter. The Government refused to adopt Roman script perhaps mainly because it was widely prevalent belief in the Government circle that the demand for Roman script always arises out of pro-Christian Missionary act of anti-oriental attitude (Roy, 1995). The script movement initiated by BSS and Bodo Students Union played an intense role in the rise of pan-Bodo nationalism during that period (Basumatary, 2005;).

Ultimately, Government accepted a compromise option of introducing Devanagiri script instead of Roman Script. The majority of Bodos appeared to be satisfied with it and the Devanagari script is being used for Bodo language in the Bodo medium institutions throughout the region, only a section of non-Hindu Bodos still persisted with the original demand for the Roman script. Thus, the anti-Assamese feeling of the Bodo educated sections was fuelled by replacement of Assamese script by Devanagari script. But the devanagari script was totally unfamiliar to Bodos and much more difficult to them than the Assamese script. Hence, the BSS and the Bodo Students Union had been revising the possibility of adopting the Roman script for Bodo language.

Side by side with the medium movement, a vigorous movement for recognition of Bodo language as an associate official language was started. The BSS stood firm on this demand and submitted several memoranda to Government of Assam. After the four years of struggle, the state Govt. finally granted Bodo language the status of associate official language of Assam. But in practice, only in the Bodo concentrated areas it is little bit exercised. During that period, it became evident that the Bodo people not only wanted to safeguard their ethnic identity but also wanted to assert themselves politically. They started realizing the fact that they have sizeable population in the state, although far less than majority Assamese. They have their distinct identity. So unless they assert politically it would not be possible for them to get rid of the socio-economic and cultural deprivation. The ‘All Bodo Students Union’ (ABSU) - a student’s organization, formed in 1967, became widely active during that time and took the burden of leading the community towards the
direction of socio-economic and political autonomy. It was under this organization’s leadership initiatives, the socio-political development of the community reached a noticeable level (Pegu, 2004). Towards the latter part of the language movement, the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed with the aim to demand full autonomy for Bodos, which they thought, would provide the plain tribals necessary facilities to protect their language and culture as well as economic development of to their own choice. Since ABSU was a non-political association, a purely political organization named - Plain Tribal Council Of Assam was formed in early 1967. In order to agitate for full autonomy, an action committee was formed and the members of the action committee traveled throughout the tribal areas of Assam to mobilize public opinion, to inspire tribal people mainly Bodos—politically, socially and economically and formed various district ad-hoc plain tribal councils. Kokrajhar became the headquarter of these organizations. They wanted an autonomous state within the federal structure proposed by the Govt. of India in 1967. One of the causes for setting up of PCTA was the Government’s proposal to give Assam a federal structure, but the central Govt. had abandoned the federal plan for reorganization of Assam. In 1967, the PTCA session at Edenbari decided to publicize its view in a weekly news magazine entitled ‘Jana Jati’. In 1968, the Govt. of India delegated a team to study the tribal development programmes in Assam. Then the Plain tribal MLAs and a minister from Tribal League jointly submitted a memorandum to the team, listing their grievances and demands. The PTCA also called for boycotting the by-election to the Lok Sabha from the Kokrajhar constituency in July/1967. Later on from 1972, the PTCA with the strong support of ABSU and BSS raised a demand for a separate union territory, to be Named ‘Udayachal’ comprising the Bodo dominated area all along the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra by bifurcating Assam (ABSU document). A vigorous movement took place throughout the Bodo concentrated area of lower Assam region. The demand for the separate state gained more support from the mass because of the imposition of Assamese language on the plain tribals. It was in the wake of adoption of Assamese as sole medium of instruction in the educational institutions (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 1982; Pulloppillil, 1997). Thus, the movement for linguistic rights and the political movement voiced together as complementary to each other and entered into a new phase of the separatist movement. Later on, since 1987 this demand for a separate state has been called as the demand for a ‘Bodoland’ instead of the Sanskrit name Udayachal. It resembles many of the separatist movements in the northeast region of India, which are in general, an assertion of non-Indic cultural/linguistic identity (Baruah, 1999).
The Impact of the Movement at the Community Level.

The political movement for a separate state is initiated and strengthened by the Bodos’ urge to preserve their distinct cultural/linguistic identity. So the movement can be appropriately characterized as a complex of socio-economic, cultural and political factors expressed in a successive sequence. The most important achievement of the movement has been the increase of Bodo ethnic consciousness, particularly among the younger sections just after the first phase of the movement. The ethnic consciousness was quite evident from the fact that between 1981 to 1991 declares of Bodo mother tongue were increased from 28,619 in 1981 (Census 1981) to 1,221,881 in 1991 (Census 1991). There has been a sort of renaissance or cultural upheaval in terms of creative literature and poetry and cultural research of the past glory of Bodos. The traditional folk literature has become modernized which expressively reveal their mode of lifestyle and their interaction with the nature. Dozens of folk literature were collected from the villages by BSS and recomposed to be published. Thousands of books/magazines in Bodo language have been published. Now the Bodo literature is in the line of making itself for perfection (Baro, 2003). Besides, many full-length colour feature films were made in Bodo language. Among those ‘Alayaran’ and ‘Hagramayao Jinahari’, documentary film ‘Worshipo’ etc. fetched National Award for best film and adjudged best environmental feature film of national and international acclaim respectively.

In the process their separate identity assertion, two militant outfits were born. The Bodo Liberation Tigers, which demanded a separate Bodoland within India and the National Democratic-front of Bodoland, which demands a sovereign Bodoland.

2.4 The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Settlement Accord

The history of the fore going years of Assam has been stained with blood-curdling happenings. Group violence and all sort of terrorism pervaded the state. Among the most characteristic features of campaign for Bodoland have been general strikes, which typically brought life to a standstill in Bodo dominated areas, such as Kokrajhar district on Assam, border with West Bengal and to the foothills of Bhutan. The disturbances in the communication infrastructure, such as act of sabotage on roads and trains (linking Assam with the mainland India) have been a favorite campaign of militant organization in favour of Bodoland. A few years ago in 1993, Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed, which was the first political settlement reached between Assam Govt. and the Bodo organizations spearheaded by the ABSU. The objective of such scheme is to provide
maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for their social, economic, educational and cultural/linguistic advancement. But this created problems rather than solving the issue. The Bodo demanded more areas and the non-Bodos feared that their identity would be annihilated. For a long time, violent clashes and killings were going on between Bodos and non-Bodos - particularly the Santhals in Bodo inhabited areas.

At last, an accord was signed on February 10, 2003 by Bodo Liberation Tigers, Govt. of Assam and Govt. of India. On the basis of this tripartite agreement, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formed which comprises 3082 villages. The Constitutional protection is provided to the Council under the VI Schedule of Indian Constitution. According to the accord, the Govt. of India and Govt. of Assam have been making concerted efforts to fulfill the aspirations of Bodos relating to their economic, educational and linguistic development, preservation of land rights and socio-cultural and ethnic identity of Bodos with rapid infrastructure development in BTC area. According to the accord, BTC shall have executive, administrative and financial powers in respects of subjects transferred to it. To reduce the long-term violent clashes on land encroachment issue, safeguards for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance of property etc. of other tribals and non-tribals in the BTC area will be suitably incorporated in para 3 of the VI Schedule. Again, the provision will added in the para 6 of VI Schedule that in BTC area, language and medium of instruction in the educational institution will not be changed without the approval of the state Govt. At present, both Bodo and Assamese medium of instruction is provided in the government schools of BTC area. The Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC, subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purposes. Again, the provisions of 8 Para of VI Schedule regarding power to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes will be applicable to BTC. The amendment of VI Schedule shall include provisions in such a manner that non-tribals and non-Bodos shall not be disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected. There shall be an Executive Council comprising of not more than 12 executive members. There shall be adequate representation of non-tribal members in the Executive Council. The Chief and Deputy Chief of the Council shall have the status equivalent to the Cabinet Minister and other Executive members shall have equivalent status to the Minister of State of Assam for protocol purposes in BTC area. The Council can constitute a Selection Board for appointment of its administrative staff which should ensure adequate representation of all tribal and non-tribal communities living in BTC area. For the educational development,
besides the campus of state university, a centrally funded university/Central Institute of Technology will be established to impart education in various technological/vocational disciplines (Memorandum of Settlement with BLT, 2003, Janasanyog/1647/02 Govt. Of Assam).

Carrying forward the Bodo peace initiative, the Lok Sabha on 22 December, 2003, approved the 100th Constitutional amendment bill by 338-0 votes that incorporated Bodo language in VIII Schedule of the Constitution, in line with a commitment made by the Center in the Bodo peace accord.

Thus, the history of Bodo movement seems to have led to lot of focus on Bodo language and culture as identity makers of Bodo people. Baruah (1999) arguably remarked that the ‘Assam’, Assamese language-based sub-nationalism, like most other Indian sub-nationalism, could not accommodate the cultural diversities of various ethnic groups of the state. There was a less likelihood that the demographic transformation of Assam was operating outside the framework of cultural grammar of nation-province in language-based sub-nationalism and able to accommodate a multilingual conception of Assam or the multilingualism represented by the various indigenous communities in Assam. As a result, the languages other than Assamese were given inadequate public recognition. So, the linguistic deprivation of Bodos was the inevitable consequence of such language based sub-nationalism system of nation province. As a consequence, this scattered community throughout the state is determined to be united and assert themselves through their distinct mother tongue – developed a strong Bodo sub-nationalism.