CHAPTER-IV

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ASSUMPTION OF LEADERSHIP BY ABSU:

By the mid-80s, the mass-movement for a separate Tribal Homeland carving out of Assam became feeble due to fractions in the Tribal Leadership. As the pioneer political party of Assam Tribals – PTCA got divided into many functions, with time to time superficial unification and manifestation in different new names. Yet factionalism persisted in the Tribal Leadership and no faction in reality strong enough to lead into a vigorous mass-movement for a separate State.

In the meantime, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was preparing the ground for Tribal Leadership undercurrent since 1980s. The Assam Movement for deportation of foreigners was at peak at that period and the All Assam Students Union (AASU), tried its level best to secure support from all the ethnic groups of the State towards that movement. With this purpose, the AASU Leadership held talks with the ABSU Leadership. The ABSU Leadership found an ample scope to represent the causes of the Bodos and their causes and took advantage to assert its independent leadership. The ABSU placed the grievances of the Bodos before the AASU Leadership and sought their agreement for their solution soon after the Assam Movement was over. Those all points raised by the ABSU were deeply/intimately related to the long time political aspiration of the Bodos and other Tribals of Assam. At first, the Bodos tried to strengthen their language and literature and afterwards prove them fit for a separate State of their own with distinct culture and language.
As expected, the AASU Leadership could not agree to many points raised by the ABSU. Among such points, one was agreement for recognition of Bodos as Associate Official Language of Assam. Soon after, the ABSU began to exploit this response of the Assamese leadership and spread venom of hatred against Assamese people and Assam Government as Anti-Bodo. The ABSU was able to convince the Bodo masses that Assamese people were against the Bodos and the Assam Govt. represented just the causes of Assamese people. Thus, very soon Bodo people got alienated from the Assamese Mainstream.

By refusing to accord the status of Official Language to Bodo, the Assam Movement leadership appeared in the eye of Bodo people as dead anti-Bodo. It created the impression in the minds of Bodo people that the Assamese people cannot tolerate the growth and development of Bodos. This intolerance attitude of Assam Movement leadership turned the Bodo masses against the movement for deportation of foreigners, which was a noble cause indeed and concerned to the Bodos too. Now, there are many taker’s of the view that had the AASU leadership agreed to proposal of the ABSU, one could expect success of the Assam Movement and consequent deportation of foreigners from Assam soil.

Another point the ABSU made before the AASU leadership was that eviction of landless Tribals from the forestlands and adequate protection of lands in Tribal Belts and Blocks. But the Assam Movement did not show much enthusiasm on the point, rather its emphasis remained deportation of foreigners from Assam. Then the ABSU leadership came to believe that even if the Assam Movement succeeded, Bodo people shall not able to get adequate protection of their lives and properties in Assam. Hence the ABSU leadership could convince the Bodo people
about insecurity of Bodos in Assam in near future and of the need for a separate Homeland where the Bodo people can expect adequate protection and all-round development.

In the Assam Accord, the ABSU leadership found no meaningful provisions beneficial to the Bodos. The AASU leadership very promptly pointed to Chapter 10 of Assam Accord, which very clearly specified that all encroachers shall be evicted from Tribal Belts and Blocks and adequate protection shall be given to Tribal Lands. But the ABSU leaders found lacunae in the provision that the landless Bodo Tribals in the reserved forest also shall be identified as encroachers and shall be evicted. The ABSU demanded that the landless Bodos in reserved forest be excluded from the category of encroachers and be not evicted. But the AASU leadership was jubilant enough to turn a deaf ear to this point. Thus constant terror from eviction persisted in the minds of the Bodos and began to disown Assam Accord.

In the Post Assam Accord period, when the AASU leaders came to power in the guise of A.G.P. compulsory Assamese Paper was imposed on Non-Assamese Students in Secondary Classes. The Bodos under the leadership of ABSU, together with Bengali minorities, fought vehemently against the SEBA Circular of 1986 in this respect. Due to stiff resistance from the ABSU and the Bengali Minorities, the Circular had to be kept in suspended animation and that Circular was dubbed by ABSU as infamous Four Language Formula. Very surprisingly, Assamese Paper had to be taken up by Non-Assamese medium Students on compulsory basis, but there were no passing mark for the Paper. That was seen just a ploy to make Non-Assamese people of the State bow before Assamese people and their language and recognise Assamese as supreme.
On 1983, in its conference at Dhamdhama, the ABSU adopted a Resolution demanding a Separate State curving out of Assam, for Bodos and other Plain Tribals. This Resolution gave a new turn to the ABSU Movement, as it was a political resolution whereas the ABSU is a non-political organization. The various Bodo and Non-Bodo organisations and individuals criticised this resolution of ABSU and tried to nullify its validity. But the ABSU leadership defended this resolution pointing out that the ABSU right since its inception in 1967 has been working for the Bodos and other Bodo Tribals. For that, the ABSU can go to any extend no matter anything of political nature if that also can help bring welfare to them. If the demand and resolution on a Separate State can bring about well being among the Bodos & other Tribals, the ABSU would not hesitate to take up the matter whatever be the nature of the demand – Political or Non-Political.

The infamous Gohpur killing on the Bodos, altogether with ones of Nelly and North Guwahati in 1983 by Assamese people provided an impetus and support to the demand for a Separate State. The ABSU found a point to convince Bodo people that only in a Separate State the Bodos can feel secured and get security of life and property. Of course the news media strongly condemned those killings and tried to divert the growth resentment against Assam Movement leadership from turning to a mass upheaval against the Assamese Mainstream.

But the ABSU persisted its campaign against the Assamese people and continued to preach that from the time immemorial, the Assamese people have been dominating the Bodos and exploiting them socially, economically and politically. Assamese people took the Bodos as number one enemy. The Assam Movement targets the Bodos more than
Bangladeshi Foreigners for deportation. But where the Bodo have to go? They have born and brought up here in Assam Soil and hence they the real “son of Soil” of Assam. They have no other place to go like Begalis, Biharis, Marowaris, Nepalis, or Bangladeshi foreigners. They have to live and die here on Assam Soil but the Assam Movement leadership want to evict the Bodos and other Plain Tribals from Assam as they have been sought P.R.C. (Permanent Residence Certificate) in official works.

The infamous SEBA Circular of 1986 and the Four language Formula of Assam Government in Secondary Level Education have added flame to fires already burning. This Circular though evolved Language Policy of Assam Government made an Assamese Paper compulsory for Secondary Students, alongwith English, hindi and Mother Tongue. The ABSU and Linguistic Minorities in Assam took pain to point out that this policy of Assam Government goes against the Three Language Formula prevalent Nationwide. Nut this argument and Assamese leadership. Then the ABSU Linguistic Minorities together formed a strong movement against this and resisted vehemently implementation of this Four Language Formula. The Accused the Assam Movement leadership that in the name of forming “Sonor Asom” (Golden Assam) they are trying to extinguish the existence of other ethnic groups and engulf their culture and language. Due to strong opposition, the Circular had to be kept in suspended emanation as Bodos and Minorities refused to read Assamese on compulsory basis. Of course, not quite a few Bodos offered to read Assamese in Schools as an additional subject on the condition that failure in the subject should not affect. The ABSU was very clear to maintain that these whoever have the capacity to offer
Assamese as additional subject can do the same. The ABSU termed this incident in the following words:

They made an attempt to smother Bodos and other languages of the State by imposing Assamese language on the non-Assamese speaking people.

The ABSU cited land alienation by the Bodos and other Plain Tribals as the main grievances against the Assamese ruling clique and the Assamese people in general. The Chapter - X of Assam Land Regulation Act, 1860 make provisions for a total of 33 Tribal Belts and Block where non-tribals were prevented from buying or transferring land within these Belts and Blocks after the date notification of these areas. But the Assam Administration dominated by Assamese Officers helped non-tribals to get tribal land transferred to their hands by many illegal ways. A major clunk of Tribal Lands were thus alienated from them to Non-Tribal and they made inroad to the Tribal Belts and Blocks. This pauperised the Plain Tribals including the Bodos, which became one of the major problem which agitated them against the Assamese People and Assam Government.

Also, number of disproportionate blockages in case of appointment in Government Services of the State causes great resentment among the Bodos. The ABSU point out that even the Grade-IV Post reserved for Tribals have been kept backlogged for years. The ABSU was very much agitated to point that the Assam Government and the Assamese People think that the Bodos and other Plain Tribals are unfit for Grade-IV Works even. This reflects the negligence and inborn hatred meted out to the Bodos and other Plain Tribals by the ruling clique as well as the Assamese People in general.
The above growing discontents against the ruling Assamese clique and Assamese People in general soon surfaced a mass discontent and a vigorous mass-movement for a Separate State. The ABSU got every opportunity to highlight these grievances and take advantages to arouse the common Bodo people against the Assamese people and Assam Government. It dubbed Assam Government to have represented only the Assamese people and their interest. It alleged that Assamese people and their Government do not care the Bodos and hence the existing Assam is unsafe for their life and property. Hence it demanded that Assam be divided 50:50 between the Tribal and Assamese Non-Tribals and a Separate State be curved out for the safety and progress of the Bodos and the Plain Tribals. The ABSU agreed that for survival and prosperity of Plain Tribals creation of Separate State has became expediency. For that, it demanded a Union Territory as the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh extending from river Sankosh in the West to Sodia in the East. Ultimately, they elevated the status of the demanded Union Territory to the Separate State through a resolution in the historic 20th Bashbari Conference in 1988.

START OF A NON-VIOLENT DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT:

The ABSU, with a view to attract the Bodo mass adopted a peaceful democratic program of mass-movement for a Separate State. Its program at the initial stage included demonstration, huge-strike before the Government Offices, mass-rally and peaceful procession in the district and sub-divisional headquarters, etc. it also held mass-religious prayers so as to attracts all section of people living in the proposed State area and ensure their participation in the programs. Last but no the least, the ABSU arranged mass oath taking to “DO OR DIE” till a Separate State
is achieved in future. Thus the ABSU turned all Bodo people duty bound
to continue their “peaceful, non-violent, democratic struggle” till the
demand of Separate State is materialised.

On the 12th June'1987 ever first big mass-rally of Bodos was
organised in Guwahati, the Capital City of the State. About One Lac
people turned into the rally and over crowded the Judge’s Field. The
ABSU rallyists then took out a peaceful procession through the main
streets of the city shouting the slogan “DIVIDE ASSAM 50:50”. This
certainly terrified the chauvinists’ Assamese elements. On way back in
the evening, the returning rallyists attacked in Tihu Chowk of Nalbari
district. They pelted stones on the rallyists on buses. Mr. Sujit Narzary, a
student of Class-X of Kokrajhar Government Higher Secondary & Multi-
Purpose School was killed and another student Mr. Subhash Basumatary
lost his eyes in the incident. Many others were injured, while Assam
Police detained the buses carrying the rallyists and rallyists were kept in
lockups.

The above incident added fuel to the fire. The ABSU declared late
Sujit Narzary as the first martyr of the mass-movement for a separate
state. It got a firm ground to convince the Bodo masses that assamese
people were out to finish the Bodos as they can not tolerate the progress
of the Bodos and other plain tribals of the state. The Assamese people
and their Government has not even the least intention to fulfill the
minimum demands of the Bodos and others tribals.

In order to transform the Bodoland movement into a mass
movement, the Bodo People Action Committee (BPAC) was formed
during the 6 year Bodoland movement. It was first formed as ad-hoc
committee with Mr. Karendra Basumatary as chairman and Mr. Sansuma
Khunggur Bwiswmuthiary as Convenor in a meeting held on 8th November, 1988 in Dotma Surjyakhata. This ad-hoc committee was given full form in the 20th Annual conference of the ABSU held at Bashbari under the Dhubri district from 18 to 22 December, 1988. The BPAC had a great role in Bodoland movement. Without BPAC the ABSU mass movement for Bodoland would have been very difficult. It brought people together and led them to the conviction for separate State till time of signing of Bodo Accord. The last Chairman and the convenor of the committee were Mr. Subhas Basumatary and Dr. B. B. Brahma respectively during the Bodoland Movement.

The following period saw an intensification of the mass-movement under the leadership of ABSU. The organisation was able to mobilise whole Bodo-mass and section of other plain tribals organisations in the state towards the demand of a separate state carving out of Assam. So as to help secure support from all plain tribals the ABSU made out a popular slogan “Boro-Rabha bhai baih”, “Boro-Garo bhai baih” Boro – Sonowal bhai baih” etc. In order to draw support from non-tribal population in the state, the ABSU also coined some peculiar slogans like “Boro-Rajbongshi bhai baih”, “Boro-Musalman bhai baih”, Boro-Adibashi bhai baih” etc. these slogans, though could not beget active support of non-Bodo and non-tribal section of the population, could beget expressed moral support from their end.

VARIOUS MOVEMENT PROGRAMMES TILL THE END OF 1988:

The ABSU began its programme of the mass-movement for a separate state by calling time to time Assam Bandh starting from 12 hours Assam Bandh, 24 hours Tribal area Bandh, 36 hours Assam Bandh, 48 hours Rail Rokho, 96 hours bandh, 360 hours bandh which went on
increasing day by day in terms of period of bandh call given. The period of this bandh culminated into 1000 hours Assam Bandh call given by the organisation prior to the call extended to it for the first round of tripartite talks in New Delhi on 28th August, 1987. in later periods also the ABSU threatened the Government with 1000 hours bandh unless the talks were resumed for solution to Bodo problems. When the Governments did not heed this threatening, the ABSU twice or thrice resumed the 1000 hours Assam Bandh hitherto kept in suspension to which the Governments had to bow and the ABSU suspended the bandhs in persuasion of the Central Government.

The ABSU organised on everfirst big rally of the Bodos in New Delhi on 10th December, 1987. on that day, about 1500 Bodos gathered at the Boat Club and took out a procession from the India Gate to Rafi Marg shouting the slogan – “Divide Assam 50:50 “The processonists demonstrated traditional Bodo dance throughout the way to Rastrapati Bhawan through Rafi Marg. This could draw the attention of the media and intellectual circles alike and consequently Bodo problem got an immense highlight at the national level. On the same day, the ABSU submitted a Memorandum to then prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and speaker Balaram Jakhar under the leadership of its President, Upendra Nath Brahma. It also held a Press Conference at the Press Club of India. There are a large number of media person and Bodo inmates gathered and elaborate explanations was tendered by the ABSU on the demand of a Separate State curving out of Assam for the Bodos and other Plain Tribals living in the State of Assam.

The ABSU thus could draw the attention of the National Leaders towards its demand and the Bodo problem as a whole. The efforts of the
ABSU bore fruit as on the 28th January’1988, the President of India, Mr. R. Venkataraman extended an invitation to the President of ABSU, Upendra Nath Brahma, for a formal discussion on Bodo problem. A delegation of ABSU led by its President met the President, His Excellency Mr. R. Venkataraman and held an elaborate discussion on the Bodo problem. The President assured the delegation team to look into the matter and take steps accordingly for solution.

In March’1988 the ABSU took the initiative for forming an umbrella organisation taking Bodo intellectuals from all walks of life with the name and style – BODO PEOPLE’S ACTION COMMITTEE (BPAC). The last one year experience of the ABSU of leading a mass movement made it to realise that without the active support of the mass people, to launch a vigorous mass movement in well nigh impossible. If the common people cannot be involved in the movement directly, it is futile to demand a movement to be a Mass-Movement. The cry of a handful student and youth only in the street is not taken seriously by the authority concerned and try to brand the same as mere Law and Order problem. For the purpose, a huge public convention was convened at village Surjakhata on 7th February’1988. The convention elected Mr. Karendra Basumatary and Mr. Sansuma Khunggur Bwiswmuthairy, President and General Secretary respectively of ABSU, as Chairman and Chief Convener of the new organisation.

The formation of the BPAC and consequent direct involvement of the common Bodo people as a whole, gave a new turn to the Bodo Mass-Movement for a Separate State. The mass participation in the movement made the ABSU led movement to be rally a mass-movement. Lakhs of people came out in the streets crying for a Separate State on the call of
the ABSU. The program of the movement went on uninterrupted. Frequent Bandh, Hunger Strike, Mass-Rally, Cultural Procession, and Peace March like programs made the life a bid difficult. Police and Para-Military forces found it difficult to control the General Public participating in these programs.

From 20th December'1988 began the 20th Annual Conference of the ABSU at Bahsbari at Dhubri district. There the ABSU took a new strategy so as to give new vigour to the ongoing Bodo Mass-Movement. It dropped all non-political demands of the 92 – Point Demand Charter retaining only the 3 (Three) political demands namely, (1) Creation of Separate State on the North bank of Brahmaputra for the Bodos and Plain Tribals curving out of Assam, (2) Creation of 2 (Two) Autonomous District Council on Southern Bank of Brahmaputra namely, Nilachal District Council comprising Goalpara and South of Kamrup district and (3) enlist the Bodo-Kachari people living in the Autonomous District Council of Karbi-Anglong in the 6th Schedule of the Constitution recognising them as the Scheduled Tribe. What more, the ABSU re-christened the demanded Separate State as “Bodoland” though it continue to advocate that the proposed State shall be meant for the other Plain Tribals living in the proposed areas.

**VIOLENT PROGRAMS:**

The beginning of the year 1989 saw a violent turn in the movement led by the ABSU. An Armed Bodo Volunteer Force was formed and as the Government turned repressive on the peaceful agitators it took Law unto itself. The government Machinery also hardened its attitude and intensified its repressive measures on the Bodo people. It let lose the Police and Para-Military personnel on the Bodo masses. The
Police Forces had a free hand and started State-Terrorism. They laid day and night raids on Bodo villages and resorted to arbitrary arrest and torture on the Bodo villagers. In many times, finding that male villagers had fled away from the villages on the fear of arrest, they committed gang-rape on Bodo womenfolk. National Media and all right thinking people condemned such heinous crime, it continued unabated on the blessing of the State Government of Assam.

There are glaring instances of violation of human rights on the Bodo people. On the night of the 10th February 1989 a Police Party raiding Bhumka village in Bishmuri area of Kokrajhar district gang-rapped 19 (Nineteen) Bodo Women. The incident raised the eyebrow of National Media. It highlighted the repression let loose the Bodo people agitating for a Separate State under the Indian Union. This incident raised hue and cry throughout the Nation and was condemned by all right thinking organisations and intellectuals alike. Despite this, such heinous crime in smaller scale throughout in the form of molestation and rape, which failed to draw the attention of the National Media and in the most cases these unfortunate incidents were hidden by the victim and guardian alike on the fear of social condemnation.

Irresistible as was the mass upsurging of the Bodos against these suppression and injustice, the movement continued unrelented. As the repressive measures increased on the part of the Government, the armed volunteers hardened their pressure. Many a raiding Police Party met with fateful ambush by Bodo Guerillas but many a Police Petrol Party were blown up by the Bodo Militants. Many a few police pickets and forest bungalows were overrun and occupied by the Bodo extremists. Railway tracks and trains alike turned to easy to targets of the extremists. Wooden
and RCC Bridges on the National Highway and interior areas were destroyed as these were the routs through which the raiding police and para-military forces moved their vehicles, thus transportation and communication system in the Bodo areas were disrupted altogether. The way in which the innocent Bodo people were meted with tortures and physical violations, many innocent police and para-military personnel lost their lives in the unknown interior places as retaliatory actions by the Bodo volunteers.

As the movement got intensified and turned violent, the movement leaders went underground. The BPCA leaders via Media appealed to the Central Government for holding talks with the movement leaders for finding out an amicable solution to the Bodo problem. The Central Government tried to avoid its responsibility saying that for beginning any sort of talks a nodding from the part of the State Government is necessary. On the other hand, the State Government tried to shirk off its responsibility saying that on us lies with the Central Government for starting the talk. On the contrary, the State Government tried to colour the Bodo Movement merely a Law and Order problem without recognising the issue to be a political one.

The vigorous Bodo mass-movement brought about a grim situation in the entire North-East region. As the Bodo movement caused continued disruption in the communication of north-east with the rest of the country, the whole north-east region suffered from blockade and transport and communication. The region languished from the lack of food and other essential supplies. Therefore, the State Government of all north-east states began to pressurise upon the Central Government for immediate interruption and restoration of essential supplies. But as that time all the
NE States barring Assam had Congress Government, the AGP Government of Assam tried to politicalise it alleging that the demand for Central intervention was nothing but a ploy to impose President's Rule on Assam. For this fluid political cause, the Congress Government at the Centre hesitated to intervene into the Bodo Movement.

Failing to oblige the Centre to intervene into the Bodo problem, the ABSU resorted to a 1000 - hrs Bandh Call from 15th August'1989. This action created a deep fear among the State Government of the NE States and they pressurised the Central Government to intervene into Bodo problem. This compelled the Home Ministry to initiate active consultation with the State Government, the State Government of Assam had to give formal nod to the proposal of the Centre for talks with the Bodo leaders. Consequently, the Centre arranged a triplicate talk on Bodo issue in New Delhi on 28th August'1989.

It may be recalled that even before the triplicate talk, two series of talks were held with the State Government of Assam. But during those talks, the ABSU leaders alleged that the representatives of State Government made a mockery of the talks. The Home Minister representing the State Government though participated in the first round of talks, he did not bother to turn up in the next round.

The first round of the Triplicate Talks was held at the Assam Bhawan, New Delhi on 28th August'1989. Late Upendra Nath Brahma, the then President of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) led by a 40 Member Bodo delegation internally representing various Bodo Organisations including BPAC, AATWWF, BPUHRCL – all non-political Bodo organisations co-operating with ABSU in the fight for Separate Bodo State. All Bodo political parties debarred from representation to
the talk so as to avoid political colour to the movement.

From the side of the Assam Government, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister led a delegation comprising among other Mr. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Home Minister - Mr. Suren Medhi, Law Minister - Mr. Thaneswar Bor, Education Minister, besides the Chief Secretary, Director general of Police and other high ranking officials of the State.

From Union Government of India, Mrs. Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, Minister of Women and child Welfare represented the talk. In that talk, Mrs. Bajpai was expected to play the role of moderator, to maintain a balance between claims and counter-claims from agitating ABSU-BPAC and the State Government.

The holding of the first round of the Triplicate Talk raised the eyebrow of the intellectual circles throughout the country. The National Media highlighted the talks and its contents bringing forth the inside story of the Bodo Movement and the repression meted out to the agitating Bodo by the State Machinery. All right thinking individual and organisations alike hoped that a lasting amicable solution will be found out to the vexed Bodo problem.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:


2. Ibid.