CHAPTER II

PRE-INDEPENDENCE PROBLEMS
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Pre-Independence Problems:

Before the Treaty of Yandabo, 1826 by which the British acquired the control over the whole of Brahmaputra Valley Assam was ruled by the Ahoms with the exception of hills areas. Prior to that the province was ruled by various rulers. In the thirteenth century it would seem that the Kachari Kingdom extended along the South Bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Dikhou to the Kallang or beyond and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North-Cachar Sub-division.\(^1\) The Ahom Kingdom was founded by Sukapha in 1228 A.D. The Ahom kings to consolidate their rule did not attack the Bodo Principalities first. So the first three hundred years of Ahom rule witnessed the gradual disappearance of the Bodos from the field of political activities. One after another, the Bodo Principalities submitted to the Ahom rule. This process continued till 1536 when the mightiest Bodo State of Assam - the Dimasa Kingdom of Dimapur was destroyed by the Ahom troops.\(^2\) Later the capital was shifted to Maibong and then to Khasur in the plains of Cachar. In the Cachar Kingdom, the Bodo kings maintained their sovereignty until 1854 when the last king Tularam Senapati died childless and it was merged with Mowgli district by the British.\(^3\)
The ruins of Dimapur which are still in existence, show that at that period, the Kacharis attained a state of civilisation considerable in advance to that of the Ahoms. The use of brick for building purposes was then practically unknown to the Ahoms. Thus the Kacharis have left in delible traces of their civilisation in different parts of Assam. The ruins of Dimapur and the rock-cut temple at Maibong bear testimony to their attainments in sculpture, architecture and engineering.

As regards the Hills Tribes, the Ahom rulers followed a policy of appeasement and established cordial relations with them through various means. Thus the Hills Tribes maintained their sovereignty under the Rajas, Chiefs etc.

(a) **Socio-economic condition**: Being the rulers, the tribes developed to a large extent socially and culturally. They led a community of lives independently of other and had a tribal economy free of exploitation. They plains tribes as they came in contact with other people of plains were more or less Hinduised. The Brahmin priests brought by the Bodo Kings began to preach tenets of Aryan culture amongst the tribes. They were gradually Aryanised and embraced Aryan culture. These tribes contributed much to the Indian culture in general and
Assamese culture in particular. "Not only in the socio-economic sphere, but also in the more important branch of religious beliefs—nay, in the whole field of Indian culture—the Non-Aryans and the Pre-Aryans have really contributed to and laid the foundation of Modern Hinduism whether in India or Assam."

The Hills Tribes remained more or less isolated and there was no remarkable change in their societies till the advent of Christianity which has now become the major force of social change. Hills people were not touched either by Hinduism or Islam. Animism which the tribals practised is alien to both.

Agriculture was the chief occupation of the tribal people and Jhuming (Shifting cultivation) was the usual practice of the hills people. So economically they were backward. In Pre-British and during British period no practical step had been taken for the development of their socio-economic conditions.

Administratively, the hills areas differed from the plains. A regular, routine, standardised and codified administration was in force in the plains. The land revenue system with all its complexities that existed in the plains
was never introduced in the hills. In the hills areas there were diverse political institutions - authoritarian, republican and another type between the two. In North Cachar, there were the village councils for the administration of each village, particularly by village headman (Kunang). The plains tribes also had their traditional institutions.

Historically, the hills and the plains have always been hostile. This attitude was rightly manouvered by the Britishers with their 'divide et impera' policy. It was therefore the tribals lacked Cohesion among themselves politically also. Among the tribes there were again immense diversities. Again the spatial distribution of the tribes is characterised by a tendency to cluster generally in a pocket and do not have socio-cultural interaction among them. This aloofness results in socio-economic stagnation. The multi-ethnicity of the indigenous people of Assam had attracted the then British administration so much that persons like Gait, Hutton, Mills, Gordon, Dalton, Endle etc. had devoted a greater part of their life making research investigations into the life and culture of the tribal people and writing them in the form of research papers and books.
(b) **British Rule and its Impact—the Role of Missionaries**

By the treaty of Yandabu on 24 February, 1826, the British acquired the control over the whole of Brahmaputra Valley. David Scott was appointed the Commissioner of Assam.

Cachar was originally ruled by an independent native dynasty. During the time of king Govinda Chandra, the Burmese invaded it. Govinda Chandra sought the help of the British who restored the kingdom to him. In 1830 Govinda Chandra died leaving no heir to the throne. This situation encouraged his rival Tularam Senapati to claim the territory of Govinda Chandra but the British annexed it in 1854 and pensioned off Tularam Senapati.  

The problem of the Hills Tribes in North-East Frontier was indeed a challenge to the British Government. The Britishers understood the diversities among the tribes and the difference between the plains and the hills. In the name of protecting their entities, the Britishers adopted the evil design of keeping them away from the mainstream. "The British administrative policies discouraged further sanskritisation and for the most part encouraged the maintenance of district tribal entities." Therefore, the British Govt. followed a conciliatory policy in general. They did not aim at the annexation of the tribal areas in the beginning. Most of them came under...
effective control, others remained semi-independent while a few were not only left independent but were paid Posa.\textsuperscript{10}

In 1838, the Mikirs (new Karbis) were brought under revenue assessment. In North Cachar, the hill tribes were helped by the British to resist the attack of Angami Nagas. When Naga Hills District was constituted, North Cachar Sub-division was broken up and distributed among the neighbouring districts. But it was re-established in 1880 and placed in charge of a police officer.\textsuperscript{11}

Though the British adopted a policy of minimum interference, open clashes could not be stopped and in the long run a forward policy was advocated with the imperialist Disreli coming to power. Ultimately measures were adopted for the complete subjugation of the territory of the tribes since 1872. Within the framework of isolations and the creation of 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas, some protective legislations were enacted. To avoid disintegration in tribal social and economic life and to minimize tribal-non-trial contact, the British promulgated Inner Line Posa - some sort of compensation.
Regulation in 1873. This Regulation aimed at controlling trade and industry in tribal areas of North-East, discouraged trade and industry and put curbing outsiders. The Regulation also aimed of restricting the transfer of land to non-tribals coming from outside. The Scheduled District Act of 1874 provided for special tribal administration. This Act excluded the tribal areas from the operation of ordinary laws of the country. Showing increasing concern to tribal affairs, the tribal areas were divided into "wholly Excluded Areas" and "Areas of Midified Exclusion" according to the Govt. of India Act, 1919. Under the Govt. of India Act, 1935 these areas were regrouped as 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas. Because of the then Assam the 'Partially Excluded Areas' were within the jurisdiction of the Minister and the 'Totally Excluded Areas' under the personal direction of the Governor. Besides, the Govt. introduced English language as the medium of Instruction in hills to separate them from the plains. But these measures neither enabled the tribes to be free from exploitation nor to retain their identities. Thus a separate tendency had grown up among the tribes which possibly be one of the causes of their demand for the creation of separate state in post-independence era.

As stated earlier, no separate arrangement was made for the administration of the plains tribals of Assam by the
British Govt. They were brought under the same type of administration as was adopted for Brahmaputra valley. The new land system and the monetised economy deprived many tribal peasants of their land. In the beginning of the 20th Century, there were large scale of immigration mostly from Mymensing District, encouraged and endorsed by the British, who made inroads to tribal land shook the very socio-economic structure of the tribal society. As a result, clashes and conflicts occurred. The district officers declared certain villages as 'Closed' to the immigrants, certain as 'Open' to them and yet others as 'Mixed' village. In the 'Mixed' villages there was a line beyond which they could not go. This gave rise to the term 'Line system'. But this line system could not solve the complicated problem which gradually gathered political overtones. In 1936, a line system committee suggested that the unit of prohibition should be larger. The Congress Coalition Ministry in 1936, resolved to constitute whole Mouza or compact parts of mouzas inhabited predominantly by tribals and backward classes into prohibited areas. Thus, the line system was created in some tribal areas to protect them from infiltration.

In this context, the role of Christion Missionaries must also be mentioned. Though they have contributed a lot to Assamese Literature, still they helped in the British policy of divide and rule indirectly to separate the tribals from the
non-tribals. "They were part of the great establishment of foreign rulers and consciously or unconsciously, their mission was directed towards upholding and strengthening of the establishment."¹²

There is no gainsaying that the Christian Missionaries come as a deliverer to the tribals of the North-East. They established schools, hospitals and spread modern education and developed their dialects using Roman script. A sense of awakening had dawned upon the Bodos by the works of the Missionaries. The Bodos started to discover the rich resources and materials in the form of old sagas, romances, folktales, folksongs, legends, usages. On working they had found that they had been exploited socially culturally, economically and politically.¹³

But on the other hand, the Missionaries motivated the tribals in general and the Hills Tribals in particular to remain separate from the mainstream. Their official efforts were successful to the extent of nurturing the seeds of suspicion in the tribal minds against their more developed neighbours in the plains.¹⁴ One may be forgiven to say that the separatist tendency is more visible in the westernised sections of the tribals. It is, therefore, this tendency is acute among the
Bodos and the Karbis than among the Misings or Tiwas.

Thus, it is a matter of reality that the British Govt. always treated the tribal people as backward and tried to keep them separate from the mainstream with the sole objective to consolidate British Imperialism.

(c) Socio-cultural and Political Organisations which articulated their needs aspirations: The part played by the Tribes in the Freedom struggle:

The tribal people under the British administration felt themselves neglected by the British as well as by the advanced people of the plains with the spread of British administration in the hills of N.E. India, administrative units in the form of districts, Sub-divisions, Mouzas, Police Stations etc. were constituted. It helped in developing a sense of identity and alliances between the different tribal groups which culminated in the various demands made by them from time to time.

Tularam Senapati and Sambudhan Kachari of Cachar were the first to fight against the Britishers. The immediate cause was the imposition of a house tax by the Govt. upon the tribes in 1876. At Gunjung Sambudhan occupied the North Cachar Sub-divisional headquarters from the British and hoisted the
in 1878. Again in 1881, an insurrection took place under his leadership. Sambudhan was killed in fighting and his companion Mansing Kachari was exiled. After this, no event of importance took place. The tribes began to adjust themselves with the British administration. In 1895 the headquarters of North Cachar was transferred to Haflong for better administration.

During 1930's, there grew an alliance among the tribes, the main issue was the 1935 Act and the representation of the tribal people in the provincial legislature. The second stage of ethnic alliances started on the eve of independence (1945-47) in the hills areas. In 1945 and 1946, the annual conference of the Karī-Ā-Durbar, the lone organisation of the Mikir Hills, under the leadership of Khorsins Terong and Samsonsing Ingti demanded separate district for the Mikir Hills, besides protection of their land, preservation of their customs, beliefs and mode of living and extended support to the freedom movement launched by the Congress.16

As regards the plains tribals are concerned, they were not treated separately from other people of plains except providing 'Line system' for them and that too very lately. It was therefore, they also fought against the British. During the Sepcy Mutiny, the first war of Indian Independence, many tribals, namely Nidhun Boro of Balbala (South Goalpara), Surber Konwar of Nowgong were killed in police firings and other
Lalung and Songbor Lalung were hanged. Many other like Rupsing Lalung, Sipsing Lalung, Norsing Lalung and Behera Lalung were sent on exile.  

So also the Kacharis and their allied races of Phulagarh area; seven miles from Nawgong, took up arms against the British in 1861, being hardhit by the prohibitory measures of the Govt. They not only dispersed the police force but also killed but Lt. Singer, the Asstt. Commissioner. Among those involved in the murder were Bahao, Kati Lalung, Thoma Lalung, Tobo Lalung, Mohi Kach and Kola Koch. Thus they, fought against the British combinely with other people of Assam.  

It was Kalicharan Brahma (1862-1940) later known as 'Gurudev Kalicharan' who led a movement among the Bodos of Goalpara which was known as 'Brahma movement'. He was assisted by his disciple Mepal Chandra Brahma popularly called 'Phoring Babaji' in his mission. He founded 'Brahma Dharma' in 1883 and started preaching it amongst the Bodos. Many Bodo elitists, thinkers, students and volunters came under his influence. Signs of revival appeared in many aspects of Bodo society. Many social organisations were set up. The Boro Maha Sanmilani was founded. Some student organisations like - Goalpara Boro Chatra Sanmilani, Assam Boro Chatra Sanmilani and Boro Literat...
came into existence. He resisted the political move to merge Goalpara with Bengal (now West Bengal). He sought Bodo representatives in Local Boards. He incorporated legitimate demands, rights and aspirations of the Bodos in the historic memorandum which he submitted to the Simon Commission at Shillong in 1928, led by Sardar Bahadur Belbung Ram Kachari. He gave the Bodos the charter called "Boro Pandulipi" a sacred constitution of the Bodo society. The great Gurudev Kalicharan from among the Bodos accompanied with the Mahatma while he stayed at Rupsi (Goalpara) and joined in the swaraj movement until his death which inspired the Bodos to fight against the British to achieve independence of the country from the foreign yoke. Thus, under the influence of this movement the Bodos were the first plains tribals who placed their various demands including freedom from the alien rule.

When the Simon Commission visited Assam, 1928, the Plains tribals submitted four memoranda from different organisations, wherein demands were made to protect the identity of the tribals, to provide separate electorate system, to reserve seats in the Assembly, to grant scholarships and facilities for spread of education. In the Memorandum of the Boros, Garos, Rabhas of the Goalpara Sub-division submitted to the Governor-in-council, Assam, demand was made against the inclusion of Goalpara in Bengal and requested to place the same before the commission.

1) Memoranda (1) The Bodo Community of Goalpara by Chyasuddin Ahmad, (2) Assam Kachari Jubbak Sanmiloni, 14th Sept, 1928, Secy. - Jadhab Chandra Khvaloi.
3) Boros, Garos, Rabhas of Goalpara Sub-division, dtd. 8th August, 1928 - Harish Chandra Das and others.
4) Bodo Jubak Sanmiloni of the district of Goalpara, dtd. 14th December, 1928, Secy. - Shyama Charan Brahma.
The Plains Tribals took part in the non-Co-operation and the Civil Disobedience movements also. Tarun Ram Phukan wrote—"With all that amazing ignorance and poverty I found them (villagers in tribal areas) ready to respond to one call more promptly and ungrudgingly as many so called educated did. If they had no education, they had a heart of gold. If they had less intelligence they had their noble instinct. I can assert without fear of contradiction that without active and willing co-operation of these starving people, the glorious non-co-operation in Assam would have been a sad failure. When I recalled the enthusiastic and determined and concerned action of the Kacharis, Boros, their ready response, their sacrifices and suffering my heart bleeds even now. The Miris of Sibsagar, Dafles of North Lakhimpur became our best workers and gave such splendid sincerity and ability that the trained soldiers of the Govt. had to look at them with awe and admiration."

In 1939, the college going Bodo Students formed a Bodo Chatra Sanmiloni at Cotton College, Guwahati with Sobha Ram Brahma Choudhury and Satish Chandra Basumatary as president and secretary respectively to unite the Bodos, to take up programme of social service and social reform. The first conference was held at Kokrajhar High School. It was in this conference the decision to publish a journal 'Bibar' was taken. Accordingly the 'Bibar' was first published in 1920 and Satish Chandra Basumatary was its editor.
But the first step to unite the tribal people politically was taken in 1933 with the formation of Tribal League. Their leaders like Bhimbar Deuri realised that by remaining divided the Mongoloid tribes and communities would never be a position to exert enough political pressure to convince the Govt. as well as national political parties of their needs and aspirations. Audrew clow, the Governor of Assam, remarked (1942-6) - "The Assamese both caste Hindus and the Muslims, professed solicitude for the tribes, but neither had troubled to study the question nor had they any real sympathy with the tribes". The feeling of deprivation among these communities thus fostered the growth of a number of local organisations i.e., the Kachari Sanmilan, the Koch - Rajbansi Sanmilan, the Chutia Sanmilan, the Muttock Association etc. throughout the province. Initially each organisation worked independently and confined its activities within the community it claimed to represent. Thereafter in the thirties they joined hands and formed the All Assam Tribal League.

The first conference of the League was held at Raha, Nowgong where Jadab Chandra Khaklari, as president and Heramba Nath Bora as secretary were elected. The Tribal League created a new aspiration for surviving as a community in the minds of the educated tribal people and the feeling of tribalism emerged out amidst the Mishing and the plains tribals as that of
Nagas, Mizos, Karbi, Khasi-Jaintia, Manipuris and Adis of present Arunachal Pradesh so as to protect their languages, culture, land and Mongolian political separate identity.\textsuperscript{26}

The League acted as the political and social organ of the tribal people up to 1949. It worked consistently for the spread of primary education and eradication of the evils of opium, preservation of the line system, provision for separate electorate and reservation of seats. Consequently five seats in the Assam Assembly were reserved under the Govt. of India Act, 1935 and Dhirsing Deori, Rupnath Brahma, Khorsing Terang, Rabi Chandra Kachari and Karko Chandra Doley were elected from the reserved seats in the election of 1937. Bhimbar Deori who was associated with the league was nominated as a member of the legislative council in 1939. The League entered into an agreement with the Assam Congress on 10th September, 1939, on certain conditions - (a) continuation of separate electorate, (b) Reservation of seats in Assembly and Local Boards, (c) inclusion of tribal people who have embraced Hinduism and Christianity in schedule of the tribal people, (d) treatment of the plains tribals as separate class for Govt. Services and in the matter of appointment and preference for them till the quota is filled up, (e) allocation of financial grants for education, provision for sufficient number of scholarships and stipends to the students, (f) inclusion of one of their members as a minister in the ministry, (g) provision must be made for giving settlements of land to the landless tribals particularly
to the Miri people.27

The Mising Ban Kebang, a socio-cultural organisation was founded in 1938 which acted jointly with the league, demanded building of tribal rest house. But while the swaraj movement took a serious turn the Assam Ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi resigned as a sequel to non-co-operation. The league again entered into an agreement with Assam Muslim League headed by Sir Md. Saadullah on 16th March, 1940, under the same conditions.28 But within the Tribal League the anti-Saadullah trend gradually gained momentum. By the time of their 13th session at Mangoldoi, on 20 April, 1945, there was almost a cessation of political relation with Saadullah. Rabindranath Kachari openly criticised Saadullah's land settlement policy and held the view to fight for independence. Sitangini Brahma choudhury who presided over the 13th session of the Kachari Sanmilan, a constituent of the Tribal League, at Sibsagar on 4 and 5 May, 1945 held similar view. Jogendra Nath Hazarika, the president and Chatrasing Teron, the general secretary of All Assam Hills and Plains Tribal Sanmilan, denounced the demand for Pakistan and expressed their willingness to participate in the freedom struggle and proposed that Assam should become an autonomous unit of undivided India (Home Department Misc. Branch, File No. HMI 67/46, Assam Governor's Secretariat).29
In 1940 a conference of the Local Kacharis held at Ulubari, Guwahati, under the presidentship of Jogeswar Basumatary where it was resolved to - (a) to bring unity among the tribals of the various places, (b) to reform the society, (c) to spread education and (d) to enhance co-operation among the tribal communities of Assam. 30

In the Quit India Movement 1942, the Kacharis took part in Picketings and satyagrahas in Dhekiajuli, Babejia, Bagpati and in many other places. Out of 37 Martyrs in Assam in course of the Movement, 16 belonged to various Plains Tribes. Prominent among them were - Tileswar Koch, Mani Kachari, Raben Kachari, Mahiram Koch, Somnath Chutia, Lerela Kachari, Kamra Koch, Raota Ram Boro, Kunda Kachari Hebond Boro, Raben Prasad Basumatary, Gopi Koch, Moina Kachari, Kamala Mili, Jetuki Sonowal, Hemram Patar. 31

It would not be out of place to recall here that a section of tribals, to mention the names, Aniram Basumatary, Kantaram Rabha, Kulachandra Basumatary, Chatrasing Teron and Bishnuprasad Rabha, participated in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Revolutionary Communist Party, because there was neither discrimination, nor middle class solidarity in the party.

The hills tribes were also equally perturbed by the prevailing political uncertainty. They extended their
co-operation to the Plains Tribals to hasten the process of forming a common political platform for all the Mongoloid people of the province. The outcome was the inception of the "Assam Tribes and Races Federation" at Shillong in 1945. A convention was held on 21, 22 and 23 March, 1945 at the hill National Durbar where the following two resolutions were accepted. The first resolution stated that - "In view of the fact, historically, Assam proper with its hills, was never a part or province of India, and that its people particularly the tribes and races inhabiting the Hills are ethnically and culturally different from the people of the rest of India. This convention is emphatically opposed to Assam proper with its hills, being included into any proposed division of India-Pakistan or Hindustan and demands that it should be constituted into a separate free state into which Hills Districts bordering on Assam be incorporated." The second resolution stated that - "This convention calls upon all members of the legislatures belonging to Assam valley and the Hills, to take immediate effective steps for stopping further immigration into Assam valley and for evicting all encroachments into reserves and tribal and Assamese areas or Lines and thereby saving the Peace-loving children of the soil from economic and political ruination."

Further, the convention is of the opinion that delay on
the part of the members of the legislatures in taking immediate and necessary steps in this regard will be a gross betrayal of the cause of Assamese people as a whole.

In the general election of 1946, 12 representatives from the tribals were elected to the Assam Assembly. But no tribal member was included into the Bordoloi Ministry. As a result, a conference of the Tribal leaders was held at Shillong on 6, 7, 8 July, 1946 which unanimously decided to place before the Govt. the following demands - (1) the inclusion of the tribal representative to the Constituent Assembly (2) Induction of one tribal in the Ministry and one parliamentary secretary, (3) Reservation in Govt. services As a result, Rupnath Barhma was included in the Ministry.

In 1947, when the question of transfer of power was being discussed between the British Govt. and the Indian leaders, the leaders of the tribal people also decided to press their needs which would determine their future in the independent India.

(d) How for the British Govt. conceded those demands to solve their problems:

Thus the tribals (both Hills and Plains) during British Rule were not protected according to their needs and aspirations and their various demands were not meted out to
their expectation. Moreover, the caste Hindus instead of taking them into the mainstream, neglected them which resulted in the growth of a separatist attitude at least, among a section of these tribes. This was evident in the resolution adopted in the Assam Kachari Sanmilan, held at Titabor in 1928 which said - "Resolved that the meeting is of opinion that Kachari Community of Assam do not recognise themselves as a lower class Hindus as untouchables and do hereby declare they are quite independent from the Hindu community in all respects such as, political, social, religious etc." Therefore, the Plains Tribals in their memorandum to the Minority Sub-Committee alleged - "During the British Rule and under the various reforms, during their rule up to 1935, the welfare and advancement of the tribal people had never attracted the serious attention either of the British rulers or of the much advanced communities to whom the country had been entrusted." They therefore, urged for reservation of seats, services, protection of land and culture in post-independence period and even more autonomy in the form of separate administrative units though after sixties.

The Bordoloi Committee (for Excluded and partially Excluded areas of Assam) in its report contemplated that the hills areas could not achieve all round development. In the North Cachar Hills the development of the people has not been impressive and the sub-division as a whole should be classed as
more backward than other areas. The most backward areas comparatively appear to be the Mikir and Garo Hills. The Mikir Hills have suffered from the fact they were divided between two districts - Nowgong and Sibsagar and thus nobody's child. The Mikir and the North Cachar Hills, in their memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee also alleged that they were too backward in all respects and therefore they should be given special treatment by creating separate districts protecting land, cultures, customs and traditions etc. in the free India. 36

Thus, we find that the British Govt. did not formulate any rational policy for the development of the tribal communities of the North-East India. As such the Govt. did not have any development strategies for them in the true sense of the term. The areas inhabited by the tribals were either excluded or partially excluded ones. The British Govt. allowed the tribals to manage their own affairs with the intention to keep the tribal people at a long distant from the rest of the population. Therefore, the tribals both hills and plains could not be satisfied with the arrangement made for them by the British Govt. They hoped that in independent India, their needs and aspirations would be satiated and could share political and economic power with the rest of the people.
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