Preface

The topic "Autonomy Movements of the Plains Tribes of Assam: A Case Study of the Bodos, 1967-1993" forms part of the politics of recent past and belongs to the history of contemporary Assam. The study of the history of this nature, i.e., contemporary history, inevitably presents some difficulties. As part of contemporary history, an in-depth study of these movements has some limitations. Because, in the first place, as the players of the Movements are still alive and the issues are still being debated and source-materials are not easily available, I have had to face enormous difficulties while collecting materials and in meeting the leaders. In the second place, I did not have the opportunity to verify and cross-examine the documents that are with the Government, (as they are not yet put for public scrutiny) mainly relating to the discussions held between the leaders and the Government at different points of time. I have had, therefore, to depend much on the materials and documents including minutes of discussions provided by the leaders concerned and on the Reports and News-items published in the print media.

Despite these initial difficulties I have made an attempt with all humility and sincerity to study the history of autonomy movements of the Plains Tribes with special reference to that of the Bodos during the period 1967-1993. I have held several meetings with the leaders of the movement to personally know their opinions on different aspects of the movement. I repeat, this work is a humble attempt to highlight the autonomy aspirations and assertions of the plains tribals of Assam, particularly the Bodos.
As a matter of fact, the history of ethnic revivalism in Assam had begun with the formation of the Ahom Sabha (Association) in the year 1803. This set in motion a process for the rise and growth of ethnic consciousness in the disparate ethnic groups inhabiting in the different parts of the province. The newly emerged elites took the leadership in the creation of a consciousness of its being separate and distinct from others in terms of language, culture, religion and racial origin and history.

The process of assimilation which had been the natural course over the periods of history in Assam came to a sudden halt in the wake of the coming of the British in 1824-26. The new Assamese middle class which began to emerge under colonial patronage did not find it proper to work for the well-being of the tribes inhabiting the province and neither the colonial rulers showed any sympathy for their material and cultural progress at all. They therefore had been languishing under colonial rule. However, the tribes became important to the colonial rulers when the time came for them to face the political movement led by the Indian bourgeoisie from the early twenties of the 20th century.

The lot of the tribes did not show any marked improvement in the post independent era. The constitutional provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for the well-being of the tribes proved to be insufficient and the tribes, both living in the hills and the plains of Assam gradually took, one after another, to the path of political separatism and statehood. The Bodos, among the plains tribes are comparatively numerous and powerful and they, too followed the path of political separatism and organised and led the autonomy movements for their own tribe at different points of time.
The study has been based on materials gleaned from official reports and despatches, secondary materials gleaned from published Books and Journals and information from the memoranda, petitions, News-items and newspaper write-up and articles published in the print media. The study has spread over to Eight Chapters dealing with different aspects of the movements of the plains tribes in general and the Bodos in particular. First Chapter deals with the history of the rise and growth of ethnic consciousness, the second with the socio-economic condition of the plains tribes, the third with the nature and character of the movements, the fourth with the Bodo autonomy movements, the fifth with the division of the autonomy movements of the plains tribes and the Bodos, the sixth with the progress of the Bodo autonomy movement through different phases, the seventh with the hurdles and prospects of the movement and the eighth with the conclusion.

While preparing this work I am highly benefited from the discussions I have had with Sri Padma Lochan Boro, ex-M.L.A. and President, PTCA (P) and Mohini Mohan Brahma, ex-M.L.A. They also provided me with valuable documents, paper-clippings and some important information relating to the Movement of the Bodos. Sri Sulochan Rabha, the General Secretary, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee, also helped me by supplying some documents and information. I acknowledge my debt to them with all humility and respect. I am specially indebted to Dr. Ramesh Chandra Kalita, Lecturer, Selection Grade and Head, Department of History, Tezpur College, Tezpur, whose pains-taking guidance and supervision have been a source of inspiration to me throughout the whole course of the study. Finally, I am thankful to those scholars whose writings and works have been a great source in the preparation of this work.

Debendra Chandra Das