Chapter 4

NATURE OF THE BODO MOVEMENT

The history of the Bodo Movement is a highly contested one and has been shaped by a long trail of events taking place within the Bodo community and in its surrounding social setup. The movement started as one for self-assertion and regeneration of the Bodo community. This chapter will explore the nature of the Bodo Movement from its very beginning to the formation of BTAD in 2003.

First phase: 1929-1947

As noted earlier, different Bodo organizations were established from time to time with the aim of reforming, regenerating and raising awareness within the community of its past glory. The history of Bodo political activism begins with the submission of four memoranda to the Simon Commission in 1928. Establishment of distinct ethnic identity was the main motive of the Bodos from beginning of political consciousness. The Plains Tribes, including Bodos, had no representatives in the Legislative Council of the Chief Commissioner of Assam. This caused deep political resentment in the tribal minds.

1. For detail see chapter 2, p.16
2. In 1912 after revocation of partition of Bengal, Assam was reverted to a Chief Commissioner's province with a Legislative Council to help the Commissioner in discharge of his responsibilities.
So they decided to co-operate with the Indian Statutory Commission against the powerful call for boycott by the Congress. The text of the four memoranda were more or less same, hence the Commission accepted the one submitted by the Bodo community of Goalpara wherein the backwardness of the Bodo community and their distinct identity was stressed upon. It says: “Out of one lakhs 50,000 have been treated as Hindus, which is the cause of decrease in the number of Bodo population. The Bodos have a distinct civilization of their own. There should be a separate category ‘the Bodos’ in the Census Report”\(^3\). However, the main aim of their memoranda was to gain political participation, educational and job opportunities from the colonial Government which was thought necessary for the development of the community. The Bodo elite were definitely aware on the complex play of numbers, political reforms and power which found reflection in their strong demand for a separate electorate and their insistence on being identified themselves as a separate community.

The formation of the Tribal League was the second step in the political journey of the Bodo community. In its resolutions the League demanded that all the backward tribes and communities should be considered as one unified group and at least seven seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly should be allocated to them in proportion of their numerical strength.\(^4\)

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\(^3\)Memorandum by the Bodo community of Goalpara drafted by Ghyasuddin Ahmed, 1929

\(^4\) Deori, B in Asom Tribal Sangh, part –II.pp.17-20
The Government of India Act of 1935 was the turning point in political history of the Plains Tribes. It awarded them separate electorates on the basis of the recommendations of the Simon Commission. Four seats were reserved for them in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Bhimbor Deori became a spokesman of the tribals. With this opened the hitherto closed door of politics and power to the Plain Tribes.

In 1937 the All Assam Tribal League participated in the general election held throughout the country under this new Act and bagged all the four reserved seats and consolidated their position for future mobilization and participation. Bhimbor Deori was elected to the Legislative Council. This marked the beginning of their total involvement in State politics. As has been observed earlier, the main aim of Tribal League was to serve the interests of Plains Tribes. In doing so they never hesitated to shift their support from Congress to

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5 The Indians were not satisfied with the reforms of 1919 and they were agitating for self-government. The deliberations at the third round table conference finally resulted in the passing of the Act of 1935. The British Government issued a white paper in March 1933 which gave detail of the new reform introduced in India. On March 27, 1933, a Joint Selection Committee of both Houses (16 members from each) was appointed to consider the Government's scheme of Constitutional reforms for India as formulated in the White Paper. The committee published its report by the end of the November 1934. A Bill drafted on the basis of the report of the Joint Select Committee, and after some amendments it was passed on July 1935. The Bill received the royal assent on 2 August, 1935, and it came to be known as the Government of India Act of 1935.

6 Rupnath Brahma from Goalpara, Rabichandra Kachari from Kamrup, Dhir singh Deori from Nowgong and Karka Chandra Doley Miri from Sibsagar Districts were elected in the first election.
Muslim League taking full advantage of the prevailing political situation of that period.

Gopinath Bordoloi formed the first Congress Ministry on 20 September, 1938 with the support of Tribal League. The support was earned followed by an agreement to protect tribal interests. The Tribal League, which was the only representative organization of Plains Tribes, worked hard to stop the onslaught by the land hungry immigrants and shrewd and crafty money lenders. According to this agreement imagery lines were drawn dividing the areas occupied by the tribals from other non-tribal areas and the East Bengal immigrants were debarred from settling in tribal areas inside the line.7 And, thus Line System came into being to protect tribal interests. But, the Ministry did not last long. In 1939 Gopinath Bordoloi and many Congress leaders were put behind bars following the Nationwide Satyagraha. When the Congress ministry resigned in 1939, the Tribal League shifted its support to the Muslim League who formed the subsequent Governments.

Bhimbor Deori following the agreement signed with Sadullah ministry on 16 March, 1940, proposed that all tribal people irrespective of religion, must introduced them as tribals in the census of 1941. As a result, the Census Report of 1941 showed 28,24,133 numbers of tribal population against only 12,29,280 in its Report of 1911. The total population of the State was only 70.60 lakhs in 1911. In the 1921 it rose to a total of 80 lakhs and in the 1931 it exceeded 86 lakhs. In 1941 it was 109,30,000 lakhs. The tribal population on the other hand decreased from 1921 figure of 12.57 lakhs to 9.92 lakhs in

7 Memorandum to the President of India by PTCA, Kokrajhar, 20 May, 1967. p.4
1931 Census. This increase of tribal population figure in 1941 Census was perhaps the result of the above agreement. However, this growth was viewed as a threat for the caste Hindu position. The Congress then was consisted mainly of caste Hindu members. Therefore, it adopted very unfair means to obstruct the normal functioning of the Tribal League. They adopted certain means to allure the tribal people to reduce the number of their population. The Congress Party in the beginning adopted the policy to allow the various tribal communities of the State to identify themselves as tribal. But, when as a consequence the number of tribal population increased largely, the Congress attacked the tribal leaders by calling them anti-Government, etc. The trend of growth of tribal population in Assam from 1911 to 1941 has been given below in table 1:

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Tribal population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>70,60,000</td>
<td>12,39,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>80,00,000</td>
<td>12,00,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>86,00,000</td>
<td>9,00,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>109,30,000</td>
<td>28,24,133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nayak, November, 1948, p.14
Despite their endeavours to maintain separate identity the Tribal League leaders were totally against the regrouping scheme of the British Government. It was the time when most of the Congress leaders were behind the bars, influx from the Mymensing district had formed a sizeable chunk of the immigrant population as the Sadullah Government had always supported their cause. The question of regrouping provided them an advantageous position and they proposed that Assam should be grouped with Bengal. The Tribal League leaders opposed the Muslim League on this issue strongly. The tribal leaders insisted that the Plains Tribes were more akin to Assam than to Bengal. The Quit India Movement proved a boon to Muslim League and on 25 August, 1942 Sadullah came to power, actively supported by Rupnath.
Brahma. Rabichandra kachari and Karkachandra Doley. In December 1944 the Sadullah ministry organized an All Party Conference with the idea of solving the problem pertaining to land. Rabichandra Kachari represented the Tribal League. The outcome of the Conference had gone in favour of the immigrants rather than the tribal people of Assam and the obvious consequence was the net loss of confidence of the Tribal League leaders with the Sadullah ministry.

Gopinath Bordoloi took advantage of this breach of faith by the Muslim League towards the Plains Tribes. In 1946 Congress leaders were released from jail and they started political regeneration on their part to win the faith of people. Tribal League leaders, however, were suspicious of Congress activities owing to the caste Hindu factor. But the endeavors of Congress bore fruit, the Tribal League came closer to Congress and with latter’s acceptance of Joint Electorates with reservation of seats, Bhimbor Deori was inducted into the Cabinet.

On 16 May 1946, Cabinet Mission declared its Grouping Plan for India and Assam was put under Group C along with Bengal which created stir in Assam. The Congress protested against this decision and refused to be a part of Bengal. The Tribal League leaving aside all its Caste Hindu prejudices joined the Congress in the greater interests of Assam and its people.

At the initial phase of the Bodo Movement, the Bodos articulated their political aspirations, through the platform of Tribal League, which was an elite organization of all the Plains Tribes of Assam. The League’s activities remained mostly within Constitutional limits, it

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10 *ibid.* p337
took part in electoral politics, through which it tried to protect the interests of the Plains Tribes. At the same time it refrained from any type of agitational politics. It also stayed away from the nationalist movement of the time. But many Bodos individually participated in the struggle against imperialism. They had entered into agreements with both the Muslim League and Congress at different juncture of time to abide by Line System but their efforts could hardly bring any desired results. In December 1947 the Tribal League succeeded in its endeavours when Bordoloi ministry created 33 tribal belts and blocks based on ‘Line System’ by amending the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1986 so that tribal land alienation could be prevented.11

The post-independence successive Governments, however, could not fulfill the expectations of Plains Tribal people. The perpetuation of the inherited colonial state system without the benefit of industrialization could not change the structure of inequality, deprivation and underdevelopment. The problems became more acute in contemporary period. Tribals were forced to be dependent economically and subservient politically to the Hindu Upper caste landlords and ruling class in the post-colonial period.12 Their leaders too were seen competing among themselves for power. These years were the worst years in political history of Plains Tribes of Assam.

12 no7, p.72
Second phase: 1967-1986

The second phase of Bodo Movement lasted from 1967 to 1986. In the years following independence, socio-economic conditions of the Plains Tribes remained unchanged. The partition of India and eventual creation of Bangladesh led to an incessant influx of migrants which proved detrimental particularly to their land interests. The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Amendment) Act, 1947, which was enacted to protect tribal land alienation and encroachment by outsiders, proved to be inadequate. Moreover, the Plains Tribes of Assam could not avail themselves of the constitutional safeguards the hills tribes enjoy under the provision of the 5th and 6th Schedules of the Constitution of India. This happened because while the hill tribals were acknowledged to be entirely different people in the plains, the Plains Tribes were seen historically as part of the Assamese society. This is the reason why in 1946, the Assam Congress sent Dharanidhar Basumatary, a Congress worker as one of the ten members to the Constituent Assembly despite sending a selected delegate of the Tribal League. The inability of this tribal member of Congress to voice the interests of Plains Tribes had a long-lasting effect. Later the Tribal League leaders were criticized for lack of political vision and also for the goodwill they showed toward the Congress on the issue.

During 1960s language dominated political scene in Assam. With Linguistic reorganization of States, the political mainstream of the region tried to implement the Official Language Bill and made Assamese the sole official language of the state. The different linguistic groups strongly opposed this and demanded due recognition to their languages by introducing as medium of instruction in schools.
in tribal areas. The Assam Government's position on this issue finally led to the separation of the hill areas from Assam by 1972 and aroused linguistic passions among the Bodos too.

Till 1967 Bodo politics remained more or less dormant. Neither the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) nor the ABSU were very active. The Assam Tribal League had also been transformed into a socio-cultural organization known as All Assam Tribal Sangha in 1954. It was against this backdrop that the Plains Tribal Councils of Assam (PTCA) was formed in 1967.

The demand for political autonomy for the Plains Tribes of Assam was first voiced in 1967 by the ABSU. ABSU is a non-political organization. It was formed on 15 February, 1967 following the announcement of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 13 January, 1967 to reorganize Assam on a federal structure. The Plains Tribes welcomed the proposal of federal reorganization and subsequently the PTCA a pressure group aiming at securing autonomy for all the Plains Tribes of Assam was formed on 27 February, 1967 by the ABSU leaders. The main aim of the PTCA was to demand a political unit for the Plains Tribes of Assam in the form of Union Territory to be called Udayachal. Issues and concerns over the Line System and immigration formed major items in their political agendas.

On the other hand the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, gaining full support from ABSU, launched a vigorous movement demanding introduction of Bodo language as a medium of instruction up to the secondary stage of education in most of the Bodo dominated areas from 28 February, 1968. This peaceful movement continued till 11 March of that year and on 23 September, 1968 Bodo was introduced as medium of instruction. This proved to be one step forward in the direction of Bodo linguistic
identity and BSS’s successful move. Prior to this the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* had fought hard for and their efforts had borne fruit when Bodo was introduced at the primary stage of education in 1963. The *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* also showed serious concern when the Assam Language Bill was passed. The Sabha passed a resolution expressing their viewpoints on the issue stating that Hindi rather than Assamese should be the only official language, thereby placing every linguistic community on equal footing which would prove beneficial to national unity. The resolution further stated that the Bodo cultural heritage, so far maintained, must not be forgotten under the shadow of the assimilation policy of the State Government.

The formation of PTCA gave a new direction to the Bodo movement. Just after its formation the PTCA submitted a memorandum to the President of India, Zakir Hussein, on 20 May 1967. Full autonomy was demanded in the Plains Tribal areas from the northern tract of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts so that the tribals could protect their land and themselves from the economic exploitation of the non-tribals bringing to an end the political domination over the tribals by the non-tribals, to have the opportunity to grow according to their genius and to conserve their traditional culture and language.\(^{13}\)

As part of the movement for an autonomous region, the 1968 parliamentary bye-election was boycotted by the PTCA. More than 80% of the tribal people refrained from casting their votes. In another major step, the PTCA was turned into a political party. The party first contested elections in the 1971 mid-term poll followed by general

\(^{13}\textit{ibid}, p.14\)
elections in 1972. In 1972 the PTCA defeated a Cabinet Minister Ramendra Narayan Basumatary and returned its General Secretary Charan Narzary from Kokrajhar West (ST) Assembly Constituency.\(^{14}\)

The Bodo linguistic passions erupt again when the Assam Government declared in 1972 that the sole medium of instruction in the two universities in Assam would be Assamese. Immediately after this declaration the Assam Linguistic Minorities’ Rights Commission (LMRC) was set-up. Charan Narzary, the G.S. of PTCA, became its Vice President. The LMRC with full support from PTCA fought in favour of retention of English as the medium of instruction in the universities of Assam. At the same time, PTCA launched their movement in demand of Union Territory with which began a new phase of the movement.

The passing of the North-Eastern Areas Reorganization Act of 1971 in the Parliament and the division of Assam into five states and two Union Territories encouraged the PTCA to further its demand from Autonomous Region to its next level. They had come out of their former tactic of submitting memoranda too. In December 1973, PTCA demanded a Union Territory by the name of ‘Udyachal’ comprising of all the Plains Tribal areas in the entire northern tract of Assam. But, PTCA was not successful in initiating a programme towards this end since it coincided with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha’s movement demanding Roman Script for Bodo language. Therefore, the Udayachal movement had to be postponed for the time being.

The ABSIJ gave their full support to the BSS's effort for the upliftment of the Bodo language. They further articulated the linguistic passions among the students. The Assam Government tried to crush the movement. In the event, 15 Bodo people lost their lives in police firing. Many Bodo villages were raided, Bodo houses were burnt, properties either damaged or looted, not less than 50 thousand Bodo people were arrested and put into jails. Ultimately Devanagiri Script, in lieu of Roman Script, was accepted by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha after the intervention of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.15

With Roman Script issue being somehow solved with the intervention of the Centre, the PTCA movement for Udayachal gained momentum. But, the tempo of the movement got clamped by the declaration of Nationwide Emergency.

In 1977 when the Emergency was lifted, the PTCA entered into an alliance with Janata Party to contest the forth coming elections. The PTCA won only one seat and that too the reserved ST seat from Kokrajhar. However, the recognition of the PTCA as a political Party by the Election Commission inaugurated a new era in the political history. According to the electoral agreement with the Janata party, stipulated on the setting up of an autonomous administrative apparatus for the tribal areas on the north bank of Brahmaputra and enforcement of the provision of Chapter X of Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act for the south bank tribal people16 PTCA contested the 1978 Assembly

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15 A memorandum to the Three Member Expert Committee by ABSU and BPAC. April, 1991, Kokrajhar, p.77
16 no14.p.116
elections and joined the coalition ministry headed by Golap Borборa. Samar Brahma Chaudhury was inducted, became a Cabinet Minister.

The Janata Government, however, was dissolved before this agreement could be implemented. The dissolution of the Janata Government created an unstable political situation in the State. At that time PTCA thought it unwise to launch a movement to pressurize the Centre to fulfill their demand to create Udayachal. The Party therefore confined itself to submitting memoranda from time to time. The Party participated in the 1983 elections and won three seats and became a part of the Keshab Gogoi headed Congress-I ministry. Samar Brahma Chaudhury was again allotted the responsibility of the Forest Department. The PTCA made virtually no effort for the creation of Udayachal. Charan Narzary, Member of the Parliament even, openly denounced the demand for Udayachal in Parliament.

Criticism within the PTCA itself started to grow for its policy of pursuing double standards. The Tribal people at large were also criticized their policies. Dismay grew within the party for its alliances with the Janata and Congress-I Governments between 1978 and 1982 overlooking the genuine political aspirations of the Plains Tribes. This eventually led to a split in the party. The rebels headed by Binoy Khungur Basumatary formed the PTCA (Progressive), which later demanded a Union Territory called ‘Mishing- Bodoland’.

The Udayachal issue was the main election agenda for the PTCA in 1985 election which brought victory to the PTCA candidates in one Parliamentary Constituency and three Assembly Constituencies.17 In 1985, Charan Narzary was elected to the Legislative Assembly while

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17 n.15 p.117
Samar Brahma Chaudhury was elected as an M.P. There again he forwarded the earlier demand of Autonomous Region instead of voicing for a separate Union Territory. ABSU which had tried to unify PTCA but, had unfortunately failed to do so, vehemently opposed this move of the PTCA. Most of the tribal leaders and BSS too was dissatisfied with the PTCA. Hence, they withdrew their support for the movement. 18

When Udayachal demand fizzled out, the issue of a separate state once again cropped up when the PTCA (P) met the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh, between 8 and 9 July, 1980. They were assured of talks on ‘separate state issue’. As a result all tribal organizations were invited to join the discussion that was held on 20 August, 1980 at Raj Bhawan, Shillong. Seventeen representatives from PTCA, PTCA (P), All Assam Tribal Sangha, All Assam Tribal Students’ Union, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and All Bodo Students Union were present in the meeting that discussed the issues relating to a separate state for the tribals and the problem of foreign nationals.

Between 1980 and 1983 a number of memoranda were submitted to the Centre in support of a separate tribal state by different organizations of Assam. It was the time when foreign national issue engulfed the political discourse in Assam; the Bodos too got alarmed at the presence and influx of huge number of immigrants. On 10 July, 1985, an ABSU delegation met Prime Minister Rajib Gandhi and submitted a memorandum with a plea to create a separate state. Again

18 Datta, P.S. “Settlement on Bodoland: a few points to ponder”, in The Shillong Times, 6 March, 1993
on 8 August, 1985, the ABSU delegation met the Home Minister, S.B. Chavan urging for a separate state and solution to the foreign national issue.

Another ABSU delegation, led by its President, Upendra Nath Brahma met and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, on 22 January, 1987 in New Delhi. This memorandum dealt in detail the demand for a separate state with the Union Territory Status for all the Plains Tribal people of Assam in the northern tract of Brahmaputra valley. The delegation also submitted a memorandum on the same issue to the Union Home Minister Buta Singh on 24 January, 1987 and to President of India, Giani Zail Singh on 30 January, 1987.

The ABSU also submitted to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Bhishma Narain Singh, a 92 Point Memorandum on 10 January, 1987 in Guwahati and also to the Assam Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.\textsuperscript{19}

Though so many memoranda were submitted and many reminders were sent, nothing evolved to solve the Bodoland issue. Under such circumstances, the ABSU and BPAC resolved to initiate a vigorous movement with effect from 2 Mach, 1987, with a determination to create separate homeland for the Bodos and all the Plains Tribes of Assam under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, the then ABSU President. The target set to achieve through this movement was the creation of a separate state by 1990.\textsuperscript{20}

Bodo aspiration throughout was taken for a ride by the Indian National Congress which never hesitated to unilaterally withdraw from

\textsuperscript{19} n7,p. 20

\textsuperscript{20} n.9,p.77
their own promises made towards Bodo people."21 The Bodos accepted
Devanagiri Script with assurance from Indira Gandhi to reorganize
Assam on federal lines but nothing of that sort had been done. They
entrusted PTCA to take up their cause seriously but too much political
flexibility of PTCA and rigidity of Assamese leadership disappointed
them and ultimately caused the bonfire of 1987.

Third phase: 1987-1992

The State Government’s repressive measures to deal with the BSS
movement tended to create a mental divide among the Bodo
intelligentia. Gradually a state of mind was created that social
mobilization was necessary to realize the ethnic and political demands
of the community. This realization handed the responsibility of
leadership to ABSU to mobilize the masses behind its ideology of a
separate state. ABSU came to the limelight in 1986 with the election of
Upendra nath Brahma as the President of the organization. It began to
acquire new dimensions with exercise of civil hegemony over large
section of Bodo masses.

The ABSU began its mass mobilization programme through
circulation of pamphlets against Assamese Chauvinism. The Assamese
people were blamed for alienation of the tribals of Assam. They
submitted a number of memoranda stating genuine aspirations and
grievances of all the Plains Tribes of Assam, especially the Bodos.
They also made clear their plan to launch a democratic mass movement

21 Bhattacharjee, C in Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of the Bodo-
Kacharis of Assam, Vikas, New Delhi,1996, p.107
following Gandhiji's path of non-violence from 2 March, 1987 unless their demands were fulfilled.\textsuperscript{22}

Little attention unfortunately was paid to ABSU’s claim. This compelled the ABSU to initiate a movement to fulfill their long standing political demands. A series of non-violent course of action was organized by ABSU at the initial stage as has been declared on the eve of their mass agitation. On 12 June, 1987, ABSU organized a huge rally at Judge’s field in Guwahati. This was the first mass rally organized by ABSU in demand of a separate state. The Bodos from almost every corner of Assam participated in the rally to make it a success. Slogans like “Divide Assam – fifty –fifty” and “no state, no rest” rent the air.

A section of ralliers were attacked by a group of Assamese youths, near Tihu Chawk. The victims sought help from the nearest Police Station but in vain. Fifty- eight passengers of a bus were arrested by the men of Patacharkushi Police Station, of whom fifteen were girls. In this clash many were injured and Sujit Narzary, a class x student of Kokrajhar Government Higher Secondary School died of head injury. The next day ABSU delegation met the Chief Minister at his residence seeking justice and accordingly all the arrested Bodos, who were later transferred to Nalbari jail, were released.\textsuperscript{23} Sujit Narzary was declared by the ABSU as the first Bodo martyr, who died for the cause of Bodoland.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Memorandum to Sri Rajib Gandhi, Prime Minister of India by ABSU, 22 January, 1987
\textsuperscript{23} Assam Tribune, 13 June, 1987
\textsuperscript{24} ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 17 June, 1987
This incident, at the initial stage of mass movement, definitely shaped the further course of action of ABSU. As time passed, both integrationist as well as secessionist tendencies grew within the ABSU movement. Violent activities ran almost parallel with the non-violent agitations. But, ABSU reiterated time and time that their's was a democratic and peaceful movement. The police atrocities provoked Bodo youths to take to arms. They also alleged that it was the AASU and AGP volunteers who were inciting violence against ABSU activists in particular and Bodos in general.\textsuperscript{25}

The ABSU further requested all the Bodos to participate in a public protest on July 2 from 10 am to 3 pm in front of Dispur Assembly. Stressing on the non-violent nature of their movement the ABSU reiterated that every Indian citizen Irrespective of caste, creed or religion, had the right to liberty under the Indian Constitution.\textsuperscript{26}

In fulfillment of their 92 point demands, the ABSU organized a mass religious prayer and oath-taking session on 21 July. A mass hunger strike was also organized on 10 August from 6p.m. to 4-30 p.m. in front of the DC's, SDO's, and SDC's offices on the same day. Many ABSU volunteers were arrested in connection with this mass hunger strike and on 27 August, a 12hour Tribal Area Bandh and 24hour National Highway Blockade at Lailangpara near Rowta Chariali in Darrang district was called.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{25} Assam Tribune, 3 April, 1989
\textsuperscript{26} ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 7 July, 1987
\textsuperscript{27} no 15, pp.66-67
Meanwhile, the ABSU submitted another memorandum to the President, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of India on 10 November 1987, reiterating their 92-point demands.

The AGP Government adopted policies to cripple the Bodo Movement, along with which the AASU too campaigned to resist this movement. This only resulted in "the alienation and the separatist tendencies during the 16 month long rule of Asom Gana Parishad Government".28

During the bandh, called by the ABSU, on 9 September, 1987, at Gahpur the ABSU volunteers were attacked by the AASU and AGP supporters. The ABSU volunteers reportedly did not receive any help from the police. The Bandh on the same day at Bongaigaon was also obstructed by these two opposition groups.29

From 24-25 September, 1987 the ABSU organized a 36 hour Tribal Area Bandh. ABSU volunteers were guarding to make the bandh total success and were fired upon and lathi-charged by the police. In the incident one person died and many were seriously injured. Many volunteers were also taken into custody. In protest against the police firing and brutal killing of their volunteer, the ABSU organized a rally at the Anchalik Committee level. Immediately prohibitory orders under section 144 Cr. P.C. were imposed by the district administrators but that failed totally to suppress the public sentiment. At the village level meetings were organized to gain mass support for a separate homeland on 12 October. On 20 October, 1987 processions were taken out at important places throughout the State in which traditional musical

28 Ibid, p.70
29 no 15, pp.40-62
instruments were exhibited. A mass demonstration was organized at the Boat club, New Delhi on 10 and 11 November, 1987.\(^{30}\)

Despite State repression, the ABSU activists did not slow down their activities. 1987 witnessed programmes in 15 phases but no attempt was made to meet the genuine demands of the Plains Tribals. This attitude hardened the tribal mind time and again against the political mainstream of Assam. Hence, the year 1988 commenced with more programmes to accelerate the course of the movement.

The year 1988 started with the protest against transfer of L.N. Tamuli as Additional District Commissioner –cum-Additional District Magistrate to Kokrajhar from Karbi Anglong. Tamuli had earlier exhibited anti-tribal feelings. Apprehending the imminent danger for tribals, the ABSU called for a 12-hour bandh on 11 January from 5am. demanding transfer of Tamuli to any non-tribal area.\(^{31}\)

By this time All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF) became active. They submitted a memorandum to the Home Minister of India on 3 February, 1988 praying for initiating necessary action to protect the Bodo women from inhuman torture including gang rape by the state police.

The United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) another leading organization of the Plains Tribes submitted a memorandum on 3 May, 1988 to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. They criticized not only the AGP Government’s policies but also condemned the PTCA leaders’ acts of treachery. They urged the Prime Minister to meet their demands through the creation of a Union Territory as a Homeland for

\(^{30}\) ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 24 June, 1987

\(^{31}\) ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 11 January, 1988
the Schedule Tribes (Plains) formerly christened as 'Tribal Land' immediately to avoid further deterioration of the situation. 32

The ABSU gave a call for a 72hour Assam bandh from 5am of 27 April, 1988. The bandh turned out to be a violent one. ABSU accused the State Government and the Assam police of letting loose a 'reign of terror' by arresting hundreds of innocent ABSU supporters and inhuman and public torturing them. Further, it was alleged that in Kokrajhar jail, the arrested persons were not provided proper meals for many days.33

Therefore, ABSU resolved to observe 9 May, 1988 as a Black Day in protest against the police atrocities and demanding unconditional release of the arrested volunteers. On 9 May the State Police raided the Sonal Serfung village in Uldalguri sub-division. In doing so the police fired indiscriminately and one Purna Daimary (16) was killed and many other sustained injury. The ABSU thereafter pleaded judicial inquiry and demanded punishment to the culprits.34

The AATWWF also condemned the police atrocities. A group of four MLAs visited the affected village on 16 May to assess the situation and reported to the Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta that they found no reason for the village to be raided. They requested the Government to take necessary action to restore normalcy.35

The United Reservation Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) organized two padayatras or marches on 16 May, one from Sadiya

32 Memorandum to Prime Minister Rajib Gandhi by UTNLF, New Delhi, 3 May, 1988
33 ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 3 May, 1988
34 Assam Tribune, 10 May, 1988
35 Assam Tribune, 17 May, 1988
towards Guwahati and another from Dhubri, both to converge at Judges’ Field Guwahati on 27 May. Their attempts were obstructed by the Government by arresting the padayatris. It should be mentioned here that UMRCA was demanding reservation for all the tribal groups and reorganization of Assam on federal structure by granting autonomy to all the tribal groups.36

The ABSU movement from 1987 especially showed that the entire movement was directed against Assamese hegemonism and anti-tribal attitude of the AGP Government. ABSU held AGP responsible for any adverse situation that arose during their phase of movement from time to time. Allegations and counter allegations between the State Government and ABSU became regular routine.

In protest against the policies of the AGP Government, the ABSU called for a bandh on 1 July, a 100 hour Rail cum Rasta Roko from 5 am on 14 June was a success. The ABSU decided to further intensify the movement for a separate state and called a 100hour Assam Bandh as the twenty-fifth phase of their programme. The programme set for the twenty-fourth phase was Dharmayagna (religious prayer) and oath-taking at Anchalik levels to achieve the target.37 The ABSU circulated a handbill to the people the subject of which was to stop police-raj, restoration of democracy with a slogan Divide Assam Fifty - Fifty.38 The ABSU strongly condemned indiscriminate police firing at Saraibil on 12 May morning and demanded immediate stoppage of police atrocities, raiding villages and killings of innocent Bodos.

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36 no21, p.117
37 ABSU Handout, Kokrajhar, 3 June, 1988
38 The Telegraph, 26 May, 1988
Meanwhile, different newspapers published news accusing ABSU of issuing non-Bodo people with Quit Notices. A joint meeting of ABSU and Koch-Rajvanshi Kshetriyo Sanmilani (AAKRKS) on 21 May, 1988 at Guwahati denied this news as ‘baseless’. They believed that spreading this kind of rumors through press was nothing but the handiwork of some clever agents of the ruling cliques to create communal tension and mistrust between different communities. They said their movement is a democratic one and urged all the people to maintain communal harmony.39 Contrary to ABSU’s claim the Director General of Police reports:

“There were 28 bomb blasts in Kokrajhar and Uldalguri sub-division during the 72 hour bandh. The police recovered and defused 23 live bombs. Two loaded trucks were set ablaze, while several houses belonging to non-tribals were burnt down. At least wooden bridges were set afire. Improvised bazooka type devices were also used by the ABSU. Nearly 300 people have been arrested so far”.40

The ABSU received an invitation for discussion on the Bodo issue with the State Chief Minister that was to be held on 27 June, 1988. On 6 June they submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister forwarding a set of ten demands. The State Government refused to accept the demands made by ABSU. The organization along with other democratic organizations of tribals termed the Assam Government a Liar Government.41

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha had so far remained behind the scenes of the ABSU led movement. On 30 August, 1988, they submitted a

39 ABSU and AAKRAS Press Release, Kokrajhar, 22 May ,1988
40 The Telegraph, 24 May, 1988
41 Assam Tribune, August 11,1988
reminder memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam in connection with Bodo language stating that the "BSS - a literary organization and its role in shaping the Bodo psyche can not be undermined. The present political aspiration in a sense emerged out of language movement launched by BSS".42 Other ethnic organizations like \textit{All Cachar-Karimganj Students' Association} (ACKSA) and \textit{All Assam Minorities students' Union} (AAMSU) extended their moral support to the ABSU led movement from time to time. However, major opposition to the movement at this stage came from the AGP Government in particular and the Assamese in general.

The ABSU, ACKSA and AAMSU resolved to launch a joint movement by organizing a 50 hour \textit{Rail Roko} programme in Assam from 5 am September 26. Before this joint move could materialize on 1 September, Pramila Rani Brahma, the President of AATWWF was held under Narcotic Drugs and Psychopathic Suspense Act 1985 following a raid conducted by Surajit Saikia (SI), Kokrajhar Police Station. This report was strongly refuted by the alleged person in a press release. The written statement of one eye-witness, Rajat Kumar Roy, confirmed that no objectionable article was recovered from the alleged person's residence.43

On 3 October Phukan Chandra Boro, Chairman of the Volunteer Force, ABSU, Anchula Gwra Bodosa, Convener and Assistant General Secretary of the same organization and Haliram Boro were arrested without warrant at Dudhnai. The Volunteer Force according to ABSU

\footnote{42 Memorandum to Chief Minister of Assam by Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Dispur, 30 August, 1988}

\footnote{43 AATWWF Press Release, 7 September, 1988}
was organized for a peaceful, systematic, and well-organized democratic mass movement. The ABSU in protest called for a 12-hour bandh on 11 October from 5am for unconditional release of the arrested persons.44

In the history of ABSU movement for separate state, the Bashbari Conference is important. The ABSU conference held from December 19-22, 1988 at Bashbari, Dhubri district was attended by delegates from ACKSA, Tripura Upajati Yuba Samiti (TUJS), Tripura Tribal Students' Federation (TSF), Tripura Sundari Nari Bahini (TSNB), All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU) etc.45

In this conference ABSU formally declared its suspension of the 89 non-political demands retaining only the three political demands and upgrading “the demand for Union Territory to full-fledged Statehood for more autonomy and political power. A new nomenclature ‘Bodoland,’ was given to the proposed state.”46 By this time it became clear that the Bodos wanted to acquire regional hegemony in the proposed state of Bodoland. The UBNLF extended its support for a separate state which they believed was the only means to preserve Bodo identity. The BPAC also welcomed the decision. They confirmed their decision to remain with ABSU to make the Bodoland movement a successful one. BPAC further requested the Centre to begin talks with the ABSU for the solution of the Bodo issue.47

Meanwhile, all the prominent tribal organizations of Assam held a series of discussions on 16-17 January, 1989, on various problems of
the Plains Tribes of Assam. The meeting which was presided over by Samar Brahma Chaudhury discussed the matter of unity and solidarity of the Plains Tribes.\footnote{Assam Tribune, 18 January, 1989} The ABSU and UBNLF did not join the meeting.

The UBNLF submitted another memorandum to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya, Bhishma Narayan Singh, on 29 January, 1989, demanding separate Bodoland. They also urged through this memorandum that discussion and negotiation with the ABSU and UBNLF leaders should be immediately initiated by the Central Government.\footnote{Memorandum to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya by UBNLF, Shillong, 20 January, 1989}

The ABSU -BPAC decided to resume movement. Earlier on 30 October the duo had decided to suspend their movement for creating a congenial atmosphere for dialogue with State Government. The Government held an informal talk with ABSU on 11 January, 1989. No satisfactory solution could be achieved. ABSU accused the State Government of lack of moral courage to invite them for a formal dialogue. As a further programme of the movement they called for 120hour Assam bandh from 5 am on 16 February and next 175 hour Assam bandh from 5am on 2 March to realize their demand.\footnote{ABSU Press Release, 26 January, 1989}

By 1989 terrorist activities in Kokrajhar district had increased significantly. The State Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan had a two day visit to different areas of Kokrajhar district after which he passed strict instructions to the Director General of Police, Assam to

\textit{\footnote{Assam Tribune, 18 January, 1989}}
\textit{\footnote{Memorandum to the Governor of Assam and Meghalaya by UBNLF, Shillong, 20 January, 1989}}
\textit{\footnote{ABSU Press Release, 26 January, 1989}}
adopt stringent measures to tackle the law and order situation. He held a high level discussion with Senior Civil and Police officers to review the law and order situation in Kokrajhar. Special arrangements also were made for maintenance of normal life during the Assam bandh on 16 February. Police security was tightened and army assistance was also sought.

The ABSU was eventually invited for negotiation by Bhrigu Kumar Phukan on 28 February. He urged them to call off their programme to create an atmosphere favorable for discussion. In a letter to Union Home Minister, Buta Singh, Phukan stated that the movement had proved to be neither mass based nor democratic. The movement had become an excuse to murder innocent persons, including political workers, to loot highway drivers and selected businessmen and to destroy public property. It certainly could not be the objective of any democratic and peaceful movement to shoot dead an Assistant Headmaster, who went to hoist the national flag on 26 January, 1989.

He also highlighted some other incidents by the ABSU activists to reveal thoroughly to Centre that this organization reached the height of terrorism in the disguise of a democratic movement for Bodoland.

The ABSU refused to accept the State Government's invitation to participate in talks to find a solution to the tribal problems. This refusal strengthened the view that the organization believed only in violence. The supporters of ABSU had killed seven innocent people, burnt 43 wooden bridges, 29 Government buildings, and school building and 31

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51 Assam Tribune, 9 February, 1989
52 Assam Tribune, 10 February, 1989
53 no 21, p.125
houses of the poor people. Moreover, at the same time they exploded 19 bombs, attacked police and CRPF 59 times. The police had to resort to firing on 55 occasions to stop violent activities of the extremist elements. Six extremist died due to firing by the police.  

The Home Minister of ruling AGP, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan suspected the Congress's patronage behind the violent move of the ABSU. The ABSU immediately denied such allegations including Congress's handling the situation from off screen. They warned the Government that unless proper initiative has taken to solve the tribal problems, they would not hesitate to paralyze the normal course in the State through agitational programmes. The ABSU demanded immediate resignation of the AGP Chief Minister.

AATWWF called a 48 hour Assam bandh on 20 March from morning 5 o'clock as a manifestation of their disapproval of the state of affairs which was the handiwork of AGP Government. The Indian People's Front (IPF) criticized the police brutally on innocent people, the selfish and opportunistic role of the Government, increasing tension and violence which was alarming, spread of communal feeling and underrating the tribals in the state. The Assam Students' Solidarity Convention held at Sarupathar in Golaghat district on March 25-27, 1989, sponsored jointly by All Assam Tribal Students' Union (AATSU) and All Tai-Ahom Students' Union (ATSU) and attended by Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association, Rabha Students' Association, AAMSU, All Assam Man (Tai-Speaking) Students' Union, Lalung

54 Assam Tribune, 2 February, 1989
55 ABSU Press Release, 7 March, 1989
56 Assam Tribune, 19 March, 1989
57 IPF Handout, 15 March, 1989
Youth Front, All Assam Tai Juba Chatra Parishad (AATYCP) and Sonowal Kachari Students Union condemned the police torture on Bodo people and demanded tribal autonomy. 58

The scale of violence escalated as the movement progressed. At first there were clashes between the ABSU activists and AASSU AGP workers or PTCA activists. This later developed into communal or inter-tribal violence. Due to the prevailing differences between the AGP, AASU and ABSU communal feelings started to spread among different communities. The State Home Minister invited ABSU for a talk on 17 April, 1989, in reply to which the ABSU stated their willingness to join the talk in the presence of any central representative as witness. 59

Another conditional invitation was received by the ABSU from the Assam Chief Minister for a tripartite talk on 29 June on its demands. One of the conditions was that the question of division of Assam must not arise. This very proposal of the AGP Government reaffirmed that this Government had no interest in solving the Bodo problem through negotiation. The Central Government, too, never came forward to solve the issue.

The ABSU, however, agreed to join the tripartite talk on 28 August, 1989, with the Union Government. ABSU called off the on going 1001 hour bandh as a positive response to make the negotiation fruitful. But the AASU and PTCA demanded their participation in the talk. In this context, the ABSU-BPAC issued a strongly worded statement questioning the propriety of the AASU to intrude in the negotiation on

58 Assam Tribune, 28 March, 1989
59 ABSU Press Release, Guwahati, 13 April, 1989
the Bodo issue. As for the PTCA such demand though dangerous was understandable. The ABSU and PTCA looked upon each other as arch enemies and hence the presence of the PTCA in negotiation would have undoubtedly polluted the atmosphere and jeopardized the prospect of any understanding rather than creating congenial atmosphere during the session. 60

The talk was held in a friendly manner. An understanding was reached whereby all punitive measures would be withdrawn provided the Bodo agitation was suspended and violence stopped. Since it was a casual understanding and not a written accord, the contracting parties, remained free to indulge in violence due to natural distrust. 28 August, 1989, talk therefore was not a success. 61

The situation showed no sign of improvement. And the second round tripartite talk was organized on 5 October, 1989, though scheduled much later. The only outcome of the meeting was that Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Minister of Labour and Welfare, suggested the setting up of a committee which would comprise of the Central Government, the State Government and the Bodo representatives. The ABSU-BPAC reiterated their demand to initiate a third round of talks at the earliest failing what they would be compelled to resume agitation. 62 Moreover, they earlier said that they would not compromise for the Bodoland issue.

Six rounds of tripartite talks were held on the Bodoland issue but no solution was arrived at. In every talk both the Governments rejected

61 ibid, 323
the creation of Bodoland whereas the ABSU-BPAC insisted. Eventually, ABSU-BPAC threatened to break off negotiations unless their demand was seriously attended in the next round. In the seventh round talk, the State Government came forward with a proposal for autonomous three-tier Panchayai Raj Structure for tribal areas. The ABSU delegation, however, was disappointed as their political aspirations were not seriously considered hence they expressed their disapproval. The eighth round of tripartite talks on 11 September was a failure and discussions were adjourned till 13 September, 1990. The dissatisfaction among ABSU-BPAC grew. However, the extended session of eighth round of talks proved to be a crucial one. On serious consideration of the Bodo problem, the Government of India proposes that a three-member committee of experts may be set up to determine the areas of the Bodo and other plains tribes to the north bank of the Brahmaputra river and make recommendations as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial powers that may be given to them. The committee will consult all groups concerned and submit its report within forty-five days to the Government. 63

This move was appreciated by different Bodo and non-tribal groups alike. For the ABSU-BPAC the proposal was a positive step in right direction towards the solution of the tribal problems. The Assam Government, however, did not consent immediately. This further aggravated anti-AGP Government feeling among ABSU people. They came to the conclusion that without the Center’s intervention nothing fruitful would come about.

63 no60, pp.322-323
The leaders of the movement at this stage faced difficulties in continuing the movement, to convince the common people, who started reacting against the various agitation programmes that shattered the tribal economy and paralyzed normal course of life. The ABSU leaders too could not ignore the signals that the movement was going out of its control. Fifty Bodo militants were held in connection with bomb blasts in different places of Assam’s Kokrajhar district. A press statement released by the ABSU and other tribal organizations said that policemen had committed arson, looting and gang raps on fifty Bodo women on 10 May in the villages of Baghmara, Akhra, Bargaon, Majtabari, Khusrabari, Dangapara, Sonitpur etc under Patacharkuchi and Barpeta PS. when the people came to attend the Sardha of U. N. Brahma. The ABSU-BPAC also condemned the harassment meted out to its Vice President, Pradip Kr Daimary, at Rowta Balsia Police Camp on 10 May.

Internal rivalry of different Bodo sections also affected the psyche of the movement. Political parties too did not lag behind in worsening the situation.

In this backdrop, a joint meeting of ABSU-BPAC and Adivasi Seva Samiti was held at Debargaon in Kokrajhar urged the Government to appoint the Three Member Expert Committee for the solution of the Bodo issue. Adivasi Seva Samiti in a joint meet declared to cooperate with ABSU-BPAC in all organizational programmes for creation of Bodoland along with their demand for the inclusion in the ST list.

64 Assam Tribune, 11 May, 1990
65 Assam Tribune, 17 April, 1990
66 Assam Tribune, 13 May, 1990
Three organizations of the Koch –Rajvanshi Kshatriyas also declared their support to the ABSU-BPAC movement on condition that their communities were included to the ST list. Meanwhile, the political scenario at the State level changed with the 1991 Legislative elections. With formation of Congress Ministry led by Hiteshwar Saikia, the stage for a meaningful solution of the Bodo issue had been created.

On 25 February, 1991, the Central Government constituted the Three-Member Expert Committee headed by Bhupinder Singh to demarcate the area of Bodos and other Plains Tribes to the north of river Brahmaputra and to make recommendation as to the autonomy, legislative, administrative and financial powers to be given to them. ABSU suspended their movement for the time being. S. K Bwismuthiary stated, “At present we have suspended our operation in the hope that the Expert Committee report would be able to give us justice”, He further stated that in case the verdict of the panel went against the demand for carving out a separate state, there would be no other option but to revive agitation.

The Expert Committee paid a visit to Guwahati, Barama, Nalbari and Kokrajhar during its first trip to Assam, between 31 March and 9 April.

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67 *Assam Tribune* , 3 October, 1990

68 Prior to election of 1991, the Bodo leaders floated a new political party - Bodoland People’s Party (BPP) to contest the forthcoming elections. ABSU-BPAC extended their support to this new party. This party even hinted a conditional coalition with Congress party to form Government. Although the Congress could form Government single handed yet goodwill was created among the Bodo leaders and Congress Party.


70 *Assam Tribune*, 6 July, 1991
1991. But the constitution of Expert Committee on Plains Tribal Affairs in Assam (ECOPTA) was challenged at its initial stage of working. Bhagagiri Roy Chaudhury supposed General Secretary of Assam Council for Defense of Integration, an organization of dubious existence, filed a writ petition in the Guwahati High Court challenging the legality of the Expert Committee and praying for a stay order on its functioning.  

The High Court suspended the operation of the Government of India's order of 25-02-1991. ABSU-BPAC held Hiteswar Saikia responsible for the High Court's action of suspending the hearing of Three Member Expert Committee. As protest against this suspension the ABSU called a 1001 hour bandh. The All Bodo Employees Federation (ABEF) extended their support to ABSU's 1001 hour bandh call from August 15. They reiterated their stand that the creation of Bodoland was essential for the Bodos and other oppressed groups of people for their survival and existence.  

The ECOPTA resumed its work after a period of dormancy of four months from 13 August and ABSU called off their bandh. The ECOPTA submitted its report to the Government of India in March, 1992, wherein the three experts suggested three-tier local administrative set-up. The Bodo leaders did not accept the Committee's recommendations.  

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71 Roy, A Boro Imbroglio, Spectrum, Guwahati, 1995, p.71  
72 Assam Tribune, 10 August, 1991  
73 ECOPTA submitted its report to the Government of India in March, 1992. Broadly, on the basis of this report, though not fully accordance with its recommendations, a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was set up in 1993.
At this stage ABSU-BPAC organized a special central level meeting of all frontal Bodo organizations and Bodo intellectuals at Debargaon in Kokrajhar on October 9 to discuss the Bodo issue. The meeting expressed concern over the delaying tactics and adamant attitude of the Central and State Governments regarding the political solution of the Bodo issue. Further course of action was also discussed in the meet. The meeting decided to stage hunger strike in all districts and subdivisional headquarters from October 16. ABSU-BPAC also warned the Government that if the mass movement for Bodoland took an unwanted turn owing to the lack of right political approach of the Government, they were not to be blamed.

The question of the areas to be included in the proposed Bodoland remained contentious in solution of the Bodo tangle. The ABSU demanded 4443 villages (out of which 109 were tea gardens and 1035 non-scheduled tribal villages) in the proposed BAC for the Bodos. The Chief Minister regarded it as impracticable. He also said, "I am not king. I can not part with any territory of the State without consulting the people as required in a democracy." The demography of 4443 villages on the north bank of Brahmaputra had to be studied to solve the Bodo tangle. For this purpose an All Party meeting was organized under the Presidentship of Chief Minister at Janata Bhavan and CPI(M), Congress(S), Janata Dal, NAGP, AGP, JSK, RCPI, Congress(I), CPI, UMF, PLP, AJYCP, National Council and Tribal Sangh took part in the meeting. ABSU-BPAC and the SUCI abstained following passage of the Bodoland Autonomous Act 1993, the decision on boundary settlement was left for later settlement.

74 Assam Tribune, 13 October, 1992
75 Assam Tribune, 8 August, 1992
from participation. With this All Party Meet, the solution to the Bodo issue seemed to brighten. The Government proposal to formed Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) was welcomed by all except BJP. BJP opposed the BAC since out of 4443 villages only 1193 villages had a Bodo population of more than 50%.

ABSU-BPAC, however, rejected the all party resolution. They alleged that the decision was an attempt to dilute and reject the genuine and legitimate hopes and aspirations of the aboriginal Bodos. The meeting held between the State Government and ABSU-BPAC also could not reach any consensus on the territory of the proposed BAC. The ABSU renewed its agitation. Outbreak of violence became imminent with fresh agitational programmes started by ABSU-BPAC on one hand and extremist activities of the underground Bodoland Security Force (BrSF) on the other.

A group of 150 ABSU-BPAC supporters were arrested while they were trying to stage hunger strike in front of Kamrup District Commissioner’s office. Later they were kept in temporary jail in Nehru Park. About 2000 volunteers of the ABSU-BPAC and other organizations demonstrated in front of Gossaigaon Civil SDO’s office. Local MLA’s belonging to Bodoland Legislative party and former MP. A.L Basumatary, also joined the agitators. ABSU-BPAC charged the Government with unleashing a ‘reign of terror’ and detrimental policy to crush the renewed struggle of the tribals for a separate state.

76 Assam Tribune, 9 June, 1992
77 Assam Tribune, 1 July, 1992
78 Assam Tribune, 17 October, 1992
79 Assam Tribune, 24 October, 1992
ABSU-BPAC organized a mass march to Dispur on 28 October but their progress was foiled. Police prevented supporters from coming to Guwahati; buses were checked at Amingaon, pressmen were prevented from taking photos of Bodo supporters at Nehru Stadium in presence of Superintendent of Police Ashim Roy. Cameras were taken away which however, were later returned to the pressmen. Rallies were also organized at Kokrajhar, Barpeta and Bongaigaon. Traditional Bodo music was played in a rally at Gossaigaon 2000 volunteers participated in a massive rally organized at NH 31(c) from Sonkosh River to Manas River under the auspices of ABSU Kokrajhar district banner.

ABSU-BPAC declared its action plan of 1001 hour bandh with the intention of pressuring the Central Government to grant a separate Bodo state in the north bank of Brahmaputra and autonomous districts for the Bodos dwelling in its the south bank. On the verbal assurance from the Union Home Minister, the ABSU President, S.K. Bwismuthiyary and BPAC decided to withdrew the proposed 1001 hour bandh.

Incidences of Bodo Security Force (BSF) extremism escalated around this time and news of violence kept coming. Two CRPF men lost their lives when suspected Bodo outfits attacked them with sharp weapons in Kacikata market under Sidli P.S of Barpeta district on October 9. On the very same day two women were killed in Nilachalmari village of Darrang also. In another incidence of violence BSF massacred eight persons and injured several others in Gulandihabi.

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\*\*Assam Tribune, 29 October, 1992

\*\*Assam Tribune, 24 November, 1992

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village under Uldalguri P.S. 82 A group of 16 outfits wearing camouflage and armed with sophisticated weapons cordoned off a dhaba about 4 km from Sonitpur. BSF had been active in Dhekiajuli, especially, in the tea gardens areas.83

Circumstances compelled the Center to deploy army against BSF. Earlier, the Chief Minister urged the Centre to ban the BSF which was creating havoc with their militant activities. The Publicity Secretary of BSF, B. Olongbar, however said that the BSF was not responsible for the killing of five Railway Protection Force personnel on October 4, 2 CRPF men at Kachikatara on October 9, bomb explosion in a train on October 13, attack on Borobandha forest camp on October 12, attacks on Samajora forest camp and Kokilabari from 8 October and killing of two women in Nisilamari near Tangla on 9 October. The release clarified that they had no hand in these human tragedies. The release termed H. Saikia as the enemy of the Bodo people and alleged that without verifying facts, the Chief Minister blamed the BSF. He also warned the media not to publish rumours.84

The Central Government finally declared to ban the outfit on 23 November, 1992, with immediate effect. A notification issued by the Union Home Ministry said that in exercise of the powers conferred by Sub-Section (1) of the Section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967, the Central Government declared BSF to be an unlawful association.85

82 Assam Tribune, 12 October, 1992
83 Assam Tribune, 22 October, 1992
84 Assam Tribune, 23 November, 1992
85 Assam Tribune, 24 November, 1992
So far several rounds of talks held between the Government and the Bodo leaders remained fruitless. The Bodo leaders remained adamant on the number of villages to be included in the proposed BAC. Now the ABSU made an additional demand for 209 villages, along with 1035 other villages which, according to the Government had no tribal population. The State Government proposed that whichever village came within the compact area of the Bodos, would be included in the map even if it constituted only one percent tribal populations. The proposal was rejected by ABSU-BPAC. Their demand for inclusion of non-tribal villages led to the point where State Government was compelled to seek Central Government’s help. Intervention of Central Government brought a silver lining to the Bodo problem. Rajesh Pilot came to Guwahati to sort out the differences and also to get the State Government’s approval.

On February 20, 1993 the Bodo Accord was signed by the leaders of ABSU-BPAC and the representatives of Government of Assam and India in presence of Rajesh Pilot in the Kokrajhar Circuit House. The boundary demarcation of BAC was left to be decided later on mutual understanding of the signing parties.

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86 Assam Tribune, 21 February, 1993
87 Assam Tribune, 20 February, 1993
88 The BAC had two bodies, the General Council and the Executive Council. The General Council having legislative powers over 38 subjects would consist of forty members, of which thirty would be reserved for Schedule Tribes (Plains). The nine member Bodoland Executive Council (BEC) would implement laws and would be responsible to the General Council. The leaders of the movement were allotted the task of bringing all Bodo militants to the mainstream and securing surrender of their arms and ammunition within a month of formation of the BEC. The State
Fourth Phase: 1993 to 2003

Six long years of agitation for a separate state under the leadership of ABSU ended with the signing of Bodo Accord. Organizations, both political and non-political welcomed the Accord in the hope that it would bring peace to the troubled areas. The real test of the Accord started soon with the question of settlement of boundary of the BAC.

The Government of Assam issued a Notification on 10 December, 1993, demarcating the boundary of the BAC area. The list of the villages constituency-wise to be included in the BAC was published vide Notification No. TAD/BAC/26/93/18. A total of 2570 villages situated in a vast and contiguous areas extending from the Western boarder of Kokrajhar up to the Eastern boarder of Majbat constituency of Darrang district were included in the Council. Apart from the villages with 50% tribal populations, villages with less than 50% tribal population also were included to maintain the contiguity of BAC. 25 tea gardens and Reserved Forests, subject to the guidelines laid down by the Central Government, were also included in the BAC. The demarcation did not fully satisfy the ABSU leaders. Many of them demanded some five hundred and odd more villages to be included in the BAC. The Government did not readily concede to the demand but agreed to look into the demand for further consideration. Many were dissatisfied with non-inclusion of Sonitpur, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts within the BAC.

Government then would arrange their rehabilitation. Pending election to BIX an interim Council was appointed by the Government in consultation with ABSU-BPAC leaders.
AGP, CPI(M), National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Assam Chah Mazdur Sangha (ACMS) and All Assam Koch - Rajvanshi Kshatriya Sanmilani remained critical over the issue of inclusion of villages with little or no tribal population in BAC. The INTUC (Assam branch) and the ACMS directed their criticism at the inclusion of 25 tea gardens within the BAC territory, where there was no Bodo population at all. Two other organizations representing the tea garden workers, the Adivasi Council of Assam and the Asom Chah Mazdur Shramik Parishad also echoed these sentiments and demanded that the Adivasis (Jharkhand) people should be in the Scheduled Tribes list as they were in large numbers working in the Assam tea gardens.  

The All Assam Koch-Rajvanshi Khatriya Sanmilani opposing the inclusion of non-Bodo villages in the BAC area feared that the non-Bodo population would be deprived of equal political status. The President of the Sanmilani, Phani Medhi said that the BAC area would include a population of 18 lakh people of whom 12 lakh belonged to the Koch Rajvanshi community. He alleged that their fate has been placed at the mercy of the Bodo People. The Koch-Rajvanshi people had been demanding Scheduled Tribe status since long back, which was also supported by the ABSU-BPAC leaders by signing an agreement on October 3, 1992. But, when they found that the Bodoland Accord showed no concern for the Koch-Rajvanshis, they felt betrayed by the ABSU-BPAC leadership. Though the power of enscheduling the tribe is with the Government of India in other areas, the Bodo Accord

89 Assam Tribune, 14 March, 1993
vests this power in case of the BAC area to the Council authority. This made the Koch-Rajvanshis apprehensive about their future.

The major opponent to the Accord happened to be the Bodos themselves. Militant activities especially of two outfits i.e. BLT and NDFB reached new heights after 1993.

The enthusiasm of BAC did not take much time to vapour. The BAC was included neither in the 5th nor in the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Bodos soon realized the futility of the kind of autonomy they had been endowed with the non-implementation of Bodo Accord let loose ethnic violence on a great scale in BAC.

Serious dispute over the territorial jurisdiction of the BAC cropped up between the signatories of the Accord. The Chief of Bodoland Executive Council (BEC), S. K. Bwismuthiary resigned from his post protesting against the non-inclusion of additional 500 villages in BAC area. Prem Singh Brahma became the new Chief of BAC. He was the erstwhile chief of the ABSU Volunteer Force, which was disbanded following the formation of BAC. Thus, the ABSU got divided into two sections the Sansuma group and the group led by Prem Singh Brahma.

The experience of North-Eastern States suggests that signing of Accords with some groups to the exclusion of others could hardly be the best way to bring about peace. In finding solution to the Bodo issue the Government never tried to bring the radical factions to the negotiating table. The result could be seen when the BSF militants denounced the Accord straight away. They were opposed to anything short of a sovereign Bodo state.

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90 Assam Tribune, 5 March, 1993
BdSF or BrSF or BSF. This militant organization gained an upper hand in the later stages of the movement. The BSF was constituted on October 3, 1986 at Odalkhasibari village in the Darrang district. It was the brainchild of Ranjan Daimary, who had earlier formed the young Bodo Nationalist Association (YBNA) in 1983 that became defunct a couple of years later. 91

BSF militants aiming for separate Bodoland were up in arms with a renewed vigor. It started imparting arms training to recruits near Daifam and in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh jungles.92 More than 3000 youths were groomed in guerilla warfare. Sophisticated weapons like carbines and stenguns in large numbers, about 1000 AK47 rifles, a number of LGMs, 2-3 inch mortars and huge quantity of bottle bombs, etc were being piled up by the BSF militants.93 At the Tangla session of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, they appealed for the adoption of Roman Script for the Bodo language. The main aim of the militant organization was to liberate the Bodoland with armed struggle for distinct identity of the Bodos. Following the footsteps of ULFA it believed in violence. The Bodo Security Force started violence from where the ABSU had left it but in a more calculated and ruthless manner.94

The extremist activities of BSF continued unabated and several incidences of raid, kidnapping, extraction of ransom and wanton killing took place in BAC.

91 Indian express, 11 July, 1988
92 Assam tribune, 18 March, 1993
93 ibid
94 Datta, N K. “BSF wrecks havoc in Assam” in Eastern Panorama, July, 1992, Shillong, p. 4
By 1996, a series of killings had been engineered by RSI*. During this time BSF extended their activities to Kokrajhar also. These killings in fact were the result of NDFB’s (political wing of BSF) decision to punish the ‘Chuthur’ or ‘jati ·hatru’ who had opposed their movement for a sovereign Bodo state.6 Pro-Government Bodo leaders became their targets. Bodoland Autonomous Council’s Executive Committee’s member, Jogeswar Basumatary, ABSU President Swambla Basumatary, Jamuna Daimary, the Vice President, Bodo Women Welfare Forum’s Kamrup district branch, were killed during 1996. In most cases the hands of NDFB had been suspected.

NDFB’s violent activities keep rocking Kokrajhar. 21 persons were massacred by NDFB ultras at Gossaigaon in a single day.7 People’s Democratic Front (PDF) meanwhile urges United Nations to come forward to help the Bodos.8 On November 25, 1998, the ban on NDFB was extended. 237 killings had been attributed to them since 1996. 9

Schism in Bodo leadership increased more with passage of time. The issue of inclusion of more villages in BAC soured the relation between

95 The Bodo politics has been divided in two actions: Kokrajhar & Uldalguri. During Hiteswar Saikia’s tenure the Bodo politics was divided into three actions due to division in ABSU leadership in post Bodo Accord period (93). Both Prem Singh Brahma and Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary confined their activities within Kokrajhar. PDF was working from Uldalguri. Bodo Liberation Force has connection with P.S.Brahma, who was cause of immense fear to Sansuma Party. Sansuma came to term with PDF and PDF extended its activities up to Kokrajhar. so also BSF.

96 Asomiya Pratidin, 19 November, 1995
97 Assam Tribune, 3 April, 1998.
99 Assam Tribune, 2 December, 1998
the ABSU-BPAC and the State Government on one hand and among the ABSU leaders on the other.

The Internal clash in ABSU started to grow. BPPF tried hard to bring different Bodo groups to terms. ABSU also joined hands with them. ABSU expressed that the activities of BSF on one hand and the clash between Prem Sing Brahma and Sansuma faction of BPPF became a matter of grave concern and was affecting the socio-economic development of Bodos. In the meeting held on 9 October, 1995 at Rangia Doukuchi L P School, a fifteen member co-ordination committee was formed under leadership of Kamrup district ABSU President as an endeavour to calm the situation.100

Meanwhile, the non-implementation of BAC added spice to the factional squabbles in Bodo dominated areas. The ABSU set 31 October as last day for implementation.101

In the 28th Annual Conference of ABSU held at Longhing, Karbi Anglong, it accused State Government’s unwillingness to implement the Bodo Accord.102 ABSU also abstained from the tripartite talks held in New Delhi on 16 March, 1996. They decided to have no talks with the Government on the boundary demarcation issue and on 15 March, 1996, submitted a memorandum for a separate state to the Prime Minister. Towards the end of 1997, the ABSU declared its intention of resuming their movement for a separate Bodoland state.

Already the two factions of ABSU had come together by the time of General Elections in the summer of 1996 and decided to renew their

100 Asomiya Pratidin, 25 October, 1995
101 This decision was taken in a meeting held at Kokrajhar in July, 1995.
102 Asomiya Pratidin, 7 March, 1996
demand for a separate state. Bodoland People's Movement Council, a joint forum of Prem Singh Brahma and Sansuma faction, was floated for contesting the 27 Assembly and 2 Lok Sabha seats. ABSU welcomed their joint move. The PDF, whose main hold was Uldalguri, was also ready to contest elections.

The political scene in Assam changed after the elections of 1996. AGP led alliance Government took office in May, 1996. The PDF legislators backed by the NDFB, a banned militant outfit successfully won the contested seats. They became an ally of the AGP Government. But, PDF disappointed the aspirations of Bodo people. It has become apparent to the Bodo outfits that the Governments would do nothing to fulfill the tribal aspirations. Extremist activities escalated thereafter in the State. Both NDFB and BLT, remained powerful and created serious law and order problems in the state. NDFB is said to be the strongest with sophisticated weapons and cadres trained even outside India.

A significant development, however, occurred in Bodo Movement during June, 1999. In a joint statement dated June 9, the Bodo leaders said that leaders of the two organizations met on May 30 and decided to “bury the past and stop all internecine clashes.” Now they decided to work together.

103 *Asomiya Pratidin*, 27 March, 1996

104 This alleged link between PDF and BSF became concrete when the former decided to take over support from four month old AGP government. All necessary decisions in this regard will be taken in the Central Executive Committee meet. This decision was taken on face of army action against BSF by the government.

As often happens with militancy, a group perceived to be somewhat soft and moderate is outmanoeuvered by the more radical groups. The decision taken by the NDFB and BLT for coordination had marginalized the BLF. It has been suspected that the outfit’s decision to talk with Government of India is nothing but an effort to overcome its isolation. Bhutan Government’s ultimatum to the Bodo groups to leave the county or face eviction may also have influenced such a move. The editorial titled “Talking to Militants” in Hindustan Times dated 9 September, 1999, suggested that the Government should make efforts to bring larger groups to the negotiation table.

Towards the end of December 1999, the State Government concerned on learning that the BLT has prepared a blueprint to carry out a series of operations by the end of December if their demand for a separate Bodoland was not met by December 31. BLT was formed in 18 June, 1996, separate state within constitutional limit as its goal.

The BLT had been busy in ethnic cleansing in parts of Kamrup and Goalpara districts by forcing people confronting high extortion demands to flee. They were demanding huge amounts of money from non-tribals living in a vast area of Chaygaon of Kamrup district, parts of Nalbari and Kokrajhar districts.

On 4 September, 1995, two Adivasis were shot dead by suspected Bodo militants in Kasugaon 30 km from Kokrajhar. In Kalaigaon, eight lives were lost. Most of the dead persons were Bengali speakers. BSF involvement had been suspected in all the incidences. But, allegations against BLT were also made. The State Chief Minister intended to employ army. ABSU pressurized for the same.

Several lives were lost in an ethnic clash that was started in July, 1996, wherein suspected Santhals torched Bodo houses at Saotal, in
Sidli. Bodo-Santhal clashes took lives of three in Tuklai River under Sidli P.S in Kokrajhar. Over 20,000 are still languishing in Kokrajhar relief camps.\textsuperscript{106} NDFB attacked Adivasi villages at Sapakata. As revenge, three Bodo people were killed by Adivasi miscreants in September 15, 1998, after which fresh violence rocked Kokrajhar.\textsuperscript{107}

The \textit{Bodo Sahitya Sabha} offered to negotiate between Government and the Bodo outfits. The 37\textsuperscript{th} session of BSS was held at Bang Para, Barama. President, Bineswar Brahma called for truce between Government and militants. He urged the militants to declare ceasefire to create a congenial atmosphere for negotiation for the settlement of the Bodo problem. He felt that since the Bodo problem is political its solution must be sought through political dialogue; he also demanded inclusion of Bodo language in the 8\textsuperscript{th} Schedule of Constitution of India.\textsuperscript{108}

The Prime Minister ruled out the creation of a Bodo state. While replying to the debate on the Presidential Address in the Lok Sabha\textsuperscript{109} Atal Bihari Bajpayee declared that the Centre had no intention of setting another State Reorganization Commission. This declaration was a blow to the Bodo separatist movement.

ABSU threatened to resume their stir. No autonomy, except granting of Sixth Schedule status could now calm the Bodos. With immediate effect, they withdrew support to the BJP Government.\textsuperscript{110} In tune with the ABSU demand, BLT Publicity Secretary, Mainao said, “Separate

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 29 April, 1998
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 19 September, 1998
\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 13 March, 1998
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 1 April, 1998
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 4 April, 1998

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state is must." A high level delegation led by Garla Bartha Basumatary of ABSU met Union Home Minister L.K. Advani in New Delhi on October 27, 1998. The delegation requested him to initiate steps to hold tripartite talks at the political level for the creation of a separate Bodoland. The Home Minister assured them of prompt action and the Bodo organizations called off proposed state wide bandh scheduled for November 1.

A seventy one member delegation of PDF took out a protest rally at New Delhi on 26 October against the Government’s failure to find solution to the Bodo problem and handed over a memorandum to the President of India. Two new demands were made:

- Nilachal Autonomous District Council on South bank of Brahmaputra
- Inclusion of Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi- Anglong in schedule tribe (H) list. 111

The Ministry of Home Affairs team led by Additional Secretary, P.D. Shenoy stated that the separate state demand would be considered if the concerned State Legislature passed a resolution to that effect. But, the Assam Government was against any division. 112 Sansuma urged Assam MLA’s to pass resolution and send it to the Central Government. 113 But, the Assam Government straight way ruled out such a possibility. Hence, all the prime Bodo organizations decided to boycott the forthcoming tripartite talks. ABSU, however, declared that talks should be held only with the Central Government. ABSU later

111 Assam Tribune, 31 October, 1998
112 Assam Tribune, 15 November, 1998
113 Assam Tribune, 14 April, 1998
consented for tripartite talks on condition of exclusion of BAC leaders.114

The Third tripartite talks were held only with PDF and the Government of Assam represented by Additional Chief Secretary, H.S. Panghtai. The talks remained inconclusive even as the Assam Government announced its decision to include ten kilometers of international boundary along Bhutan border in the BAC area along with 2,935 villages.

According to State Government out of 2,935 villages being sought to be given away to BAC 1,199 villages have over 50% tribal population, 801 villages have no tribal population, 299 have tribal population up to 10% and 201 villages 11% -20% tribal population. Further, the State Government offered more welfare schemes and a medical college at Kokrajhar. The PDF insisted on a separate state. 115

Involvement of non-Bodos in talks for separate state irked BPAC. Sansuma Khungur Bwismuthiary said, “How can the Government involve the non-Bodo groups when we are demanding a separate state and not them?” According to him all non-Bodo groups who had been invited for talks had no right to oppose the creation of Bodoland. Coordination Committee of Bodoland Movement (CCBM) also criticized the participation of non-Bodos in tripartite talks. The organization urged all sections of the proposed Bodoland to raise the slogan of separate state.116

114 Assam Tribune, 11 September, 1998
115 Assam Tribune, 13 November, 1998
116 Assam Tribune, 20 November, 1998
ABSU-BPAC made it clear that there would be no discussion on the boundary demarcation of BAC. ABSU-BPAC and PDF declared the launching of a joint movement and suggested talks at a political level involving Union Home Ministry.

Urukhuau Gwra Brahma, President of ABSU, told that 75% of demanded areas were inhabited by tribal people and the majority of tribal belts and blocks of the state came within it. He denied that the ABSU had any link with Congress. He said, "We started the movement when the Congress was in power. The question in our mind is now to protect our identity and not to get support of any political party." PDF’s decision in this regard assumes significance as it earlier remained confined within the BAC in terms of conferring autonomy to the Bodo people. Now their support had made the movement led by ABSU more powerful. "We must achieve the goal as several persons have lost their lives in the name of Bodoland," said ABSU President. General public opinion was reflected in a section of the Press. The Editorial of *Assam Tribune* (April 1), 2003 read:

"The Bodo leadership would be well advised to demand greater autonomy within the parameter of Assam. It would be wise for them to abandon its demand for a separate state. Admittedly the Bodos had been neglected in the past by the state government but the situation has radically changed and Dispur is now prepared to

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117 *Assam Tribune*, 3 December, 1998
118 The history of PDF is not very satisfactory to the Bodo sentiments. One group of PDF joined ABSU-BPAC and the other group is running the interim BAC that was formed in 2000.
119 *Assam Tribune*, 16 March 2000
remove the leeway in the development of the Bodo people who deserve a separate University and a few technical institutions."  

A new development took place at the 39th session of the BSS held at Mainao Nwgwr, Kokrajhar. The BSS President Bineswar Brahma strongly supported the use of Devanagiri Script despite strong resentment of the NDFB and some sections of the Bodo community. On August 19, he was shot dead by suspected NDFB militants. This was, indeed, a big blow to the efforts of bringing the antagonistic groups together.

The movement for a separate state gain momentum with the decision not to held elections in BAC despite the High Court’s order to hold the elections. All the major Bodo political parties and organizations grouped together to form the Bodoland Parliamentary Party- a united front to press for the demand of a separate Bodo state. A three member committee was also formed comprising the ABSU General Secretary, Nathuram Bodo, PDF General Secretary, Gangadhar Ramchiary and the BPAC Convener, Reva Narzary to organize a political convention.

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\(^{120}\) Assam Tribune, 1 April, 2000,

\(^{121}\) Assam Tribune, 20 August, 2000

\(^{122}\) The GHY High Court directed the state government to hold BAC election within three months which has never been held after 1993. The judgement came following the writ petition moved by Kameswar Mosahary ex-chief of the BAC and Dehagra Mosahary G.S. of the UBNLF who were represented by noted Lawyer Gautam Uzir. The government dissolved BAC in 1996 and an interim BAC was formed in 2000. However, the Bodo movement leaders urged the centre to directly administer the BAC.
to be held at Rangia on April 29, 2000.\textsuperscript{123} BSS and BWWF extended their support to them.

At this stage the Central Government decided to involve the Bodo ultras in negotiations in an effort to solve the Bodo tangle. ABSU and BLT hailed Center's positive move and observed that this would pave the way for a peaceful solution of the Bodo problem. NDFB, however, remained adamant. It started fresh efforts to regain strength around March 2000. The Unified Command operations had severely affected the banned outfit and its eastern Command had been cracked down by army along the Arunachal-Assam boarder. It now started activating its district units and estimated that around Rs. 20,000,000 was collected from sections of people in Bongaigaon, Kokrajhar and Barpeta districts. The sum thus collected was spent the procurement of arms and ammunitions and training.\textsuperscript{124}

The reason for the BLT's pro-talk attitude can be understood in the context of their decreasing popularity among their own people. Earlier they were seen as fighting for a noble cause but, the perception had changed due to senseless violence and acts of extortion by the groups. As the initial step the Centre suspended anti-insurgency operations against BLT.

In its Editorial of 28 March, 2000, \textit{The Statesman} (Calcutta edition), commented that while the Government's initiative was commendable, it doubted the expediency of negotiating with only one faction. It observed that Delhi was likely to repeat the same mistake that it had done in Nagaland by involving only the Issac-Muivah faction of

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 20 March, 2000

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Assam Tribune}, 16 March, 2000
National Socialist Council of Nagaland. Attempts to marginalize agitation leaders would only complicate matters.

On January 10, 2000, the Central Government lifted the ban on the BLT and announced suspension of operations.

In a Press Release of 29 March, 2000, BLT Vice Chairman, Kamal Mosahary and Publicity Secretary, Mainao Daimary stated that mere suspension of operations was not adequate for an amicable and peaceful solution of the Bodo problem. It reiterated three demands: a separate Bodo state on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, a District council on the south bank and Sixth Schedule inclusion of Bodo Kachari people and release of 50 of its arrested or detained cadres. The Press Release further stated that the 5000 year old history, culture, polity and economic would at stake without a separate state. In support of their argument they observed that many indigenous people of North-East India had lost their identity but the Mizos have been able to safeguard their interests for timely creation of Mizoram. The BLT leaders further stated that the NDFB should realize the ground realities and design their approaches accordingly, adding that the demand for a sovereign Bodoland was against the wishes of the Bodo people.\textsuperscript{125}

Meanwhile, the Central Government extended the lease of ceasefire with BLT for one more year.

Differences among the Bodo leaders were partly responsible for delay in the solution of the problem. But, the major hurdle was the NDFB. They had rejected the Government's offer of a joint working group. Even as the peace talks were in progress, clash occurred.

\textsuperscript{125} Assam Tribune, 12 April, 2000
between BLT & NDFB in which eleven BLT men in Barpeta\textsuperscript{126} and four at Hatibari Chuba under Tamulpur Police Station, in Nalbari were killed by NDFB that obstructed the peace process.\textsuperscript{127} The NDFB also declared that BLT, ABSU and BSS leaders would be targeted by them selective killing. The spectre of fratricidal clashes loomed over the Bodo dominated areas of the state with banned outfit NDFB’s decision to ‘shoot at sight’ rival Bodo leaders. NDFB stated that it was compelled to take such a decision to neutralize joint efforts of certain organizations to crush the revolution launched by it way back in 1986 with the aim of liberating the Bodo people. It blamed BLT – ABSU Volunteer force responsible for setting off fratricidal clashes by killing the first ever self-styled action commander of NDFB Bangbar Gwra Basumatary on September 14th, 1988.

The BLT made it clear that they would not be provoked by the NDFB’s statement. ABSU, however, stated that NDFB’s threat was ridiculous and that it reflecting immaturity of its leadership.

The prospect of a Bodoland generated opposition among non-Bodo and non-tribal sections. Organizations like All Adivasi Students Association, Adivasi Council of Assam opposed proposed Bodoland (BTC). They went to the extent of suggesting that the creation of BTC would be a wrong set up as the Bodos were not the majority in many areas. Koch – Rajvanshi Sanmilani, Asom Ana Bodo Adhikar Suraksha Sangram Samiti and Religious Minority Council joined in opposition. Bwismuthiary, however, stated that the alienation between Bodos and

\textsuperscript{126} Assam Tribune, 13 December, 2000
\textsuperscript{127} Assam Tribune, 20 October, 2000
Assamese was complete therefore to force his community to co-exist within Assam would be a futile exercise.

In an effort to prevent clashes between different communities in Assam the Government decided to hold a meeting involving both tribal and non-tribal organizations of Assam on 6 and 7 December, 2001, in order to prevent clashes between different communities. The ABSU informed the Central Government that they were against holding of talks with URMCA, Lower Assam Minority Council and Ana Bodo Adhikar Suraksha Samiti who were opposing the rights of the Bodos from beginning.128 The Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement (CCBM) also warned State Government against holding talks with non-Bodo organizations and MLA’s outside BAC. The Bodo Council demanded extension of the Sixth Schedule for the amicable solution of the Bodo problem.

On Dec 30, 2001, the State Government declared its decision to extend Schedule Six to the BAC with protection to non-tribal groups by January, 2002. With this declaration the prospect of a Bodo settlement brightened. However, the inclusion of 93 additional villages and reservation of ten seats to the non-Bodos in the Council remained a major hurdle129 in the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). The stalemate over the creation of BTC continued as the State Government failed to convince the All Party130 Meet to include the

128 Assam Tribune, 15 October, 2001
129 Assam Tribune, 3 January, 2003
130 The Election Commission recognized political parties were invited for the all party meet which was joined by AGP, Congress, CPI and CPM. BJP and ASDC were absent in the meet hence their stand remained conspicuous.
additional 93 villages in BTC, along with the 3070 villages that had already been agreed to.

BLT Vice Chairman, Kamal Mosahary further criticized the role of Government and said that while the Congress Government was not taking any positive stand the AGP adopted a completely different stand after losing power. The last All Party Meet held on 10 January, 2003, failed to arrive at a consensus. According to him the 93 villages had been included in BAC in 1993 but, later had been excluded. He demanded that the thirty out of forty seats should be reserved for tribals and ten open. He further proposed forty-five instead of forty seats for BTC and stressed on the importance of the forthcoming Meet in view of the expiry of the ceasefire with BLT on 21 January, 2003.131

The next round of tripartite talk between Centre, State and BLT was held on 20 January in New Delhi. The truce with BLT was extended for another one month and Government decided to cede twelve more villages out of ninety-three to the proposed Council.132 The question of allocation of seats among tribals and non-tribals in the proposed BTC remained another issue in delaying the solution of the Bodo problem. The Government decided to keep some seats reserved for the non-Bodos and non-tribals in BTC areas which was opposed by the Bodo leadership. U. G. Brahma, a Rajya Sabha Member and a senior leader of the Bodo Movement opined in this regard that the Bodos were sympathetic toward the Government’s concern for security and safety of non-Bodos but, at the same time the Bodos must be allowed to

131 Assam Tribune, 14 January, 2003
132 Assam Tribune, 21 January, 2003
exercise their democratic rights and ask for new formula for a few seats unreserved. BLT also demanded 25 seats reserved for Bodos, 5 seats for non-tribals and 15 seats open. The Government, however, made clear of its stand to no-revision of its former decision on allocation of seats and offered two options to the BLT:

- Thirty seats for tribals and ten for non-tribals or
- Thirty seats for tribals, five seats for non-tribals, five for general communities and six members nominated by State Government

However, the second option was accepted by BLT and State Cabinet after mutual discussion. This acceptance finally opened the way for further action in the formation of the Bodo Council.

The State Government made its first move in this direction when the Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi and Chairman of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on BTC issue, and State Health Minister, Bhumidhar Barman called upon All India Congress Committee (AICC) President Mrs. Sonia Gandhi to brief her about the likely resolution of the problem. The State Government's major achievement was the new Bodo Accord. At last the three year long talks between the Government and the BLT culminated in the signing of an agreement on February 10, 2003.

The tripartite Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Special Secretary (North-East) R. C. Jain on behalf of Ministry of Home Affairs, State Chief Secretary P. K. Datta and Chairman of BLT Hagrama Basumatary. Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani, Chief

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133 Assam Tribune, 22 January, 2003
134 Assam Tribune, 8 February, 2003
135 Assam Tribune, 11 February, 2003
Minister Tarun Gogoi, State Health Minister Bhumidhar Barman and State Government officials besides the top leaders of ABSU, BPAC, BSS and ABWWF were present on the occasion of signing the Accord.

The Union Home Minister directed the State Government to repeal BAC to pave the way for the creation of BTC under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. The Commissioner of Welfare of Plains Tribes and Backward Communities (WPT&BC) was entrusted with the responsibility of administering the areas till the BTC is formed.

A financial package of rupees five hundred crores for the socio-economic and infrastructure development, a centrally funded technical institution, recognition of the Bodo language under the Eight Schedule of the Constitution besides reviewing of cases pending against the BLT were granted in this new settlement. An interim Executive Council for BTC was to be set up dissolving the defunct BAC. The Bodo language Bill was tabulated in the Parliament in August, 2003. The ST Amendment Bill was passed by Lok Sabha was sent to the President for approval. As Gogoi announces amnesty to BLT 2641 militants joined mainstream. An interim Council was sworn in on 6 December, 2003.

The BLT leaders revealed that they would form a regional party by involving various Bodo organizations. In the decision to create the BTC the Government did not involve non-Bodo organizations. Hence. Sanmilita Janagostiyo Surakha Samiti (SJSS) leader, Brojen Mahanta, Phani Medhi, Tridip Pali Singha and others vowed to oppose

\[136 \text{Assam Tribune, 10 February, 2003}\]
\[137 \text{Assam Tribune, 19 August, 2003}\]
\[138 \text{Assam Tribune, 3 December, 2003}\]
imposition of BTC on Non-Bodos in the so called Bodoland areas. In a
public rally at Telipara under Gossaingaon Police Station, in Kokrajhar
district the leaders of SJSS announced the launching of an intensive
and all out agitation against the BTC.

BLT Publicity Secretary, Mainao, assured equal treatment and equal
care to all sections of people. Commenting on SJSS stand he said, he
saw no reason for the non-Bodos to be apprehensive. The Accord
would solve the socio-economic problems of the Bodo dominated areas
of state and there was no reason for NDFB to keep on fighting. He
appealed them to come to negotiations in the interests of restoration of
peace in the region. The BLT thanked ASSU and all other political
parties and intellectuals of the state for playing positive role in solving
the Bodo problem. As BLT leaders were being felicitated by people in
different Bodo areas of the state, SJSS called for 36 hour bandh as a
protest against the creation of BTC. They called it a destructive
measure and predicted that the situation could become worse if non-
Bodos were not taken into confidence.139

ABSU gave up demand for separate state. It also decided to convince
NDFB to come for negotiations. The 35th annual conference of ABSU
expressed the hope that the BTC would fulfill the hopes and aspirations
of both the Bodos and non-tribals.140 The victory of the Bodos was
celebrated in Bodo dominated areas. BLT was disbanded and its cadres
were to be rehabilitated through government jobs and self-employment
schemes.

139 Assam Tribune, 3 February, 2003
140 Assam Tribune, 17 February, 2003
The BTC Bill was tabled in Lok Sabha on August, 2003. Opening the debate on the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (A) Bill 2003, Senior Congress MP, Madhab Rajvanshi, demanded revision of the reservation of seats. He questioned, how 28% Bodo population could rule over 72% non-tribals. Bwismuthiary of Congress answered that reservation does not exist in other Autonomous Councils so the non-Bodos should feel safe in BTC. With the passing of BTC Bill the road of autonomy was opened for the Bodos.

The SJSS gave a call for mass protests against the BTC Bill. A statement signed by SJSS’s Deputy Convener, Brajen Mahanta, its Convener and All Assam Adivasi Students’ Association President, Justin Lakra and President of Koch-Rajvanshi Yuva Chatra Sanmilan, Tridip Pati Singha, UMCRA President, Hiteswar Barman, Bengali Yuva Chatra Federation President, Sukumar Biswas, AMSU President, Abdul Aziz, Santras Birudhi Gana Mancha Chief, Pravat Sarma and All Assam Minority Youth Parishad President, Saddam Hussain warned of a popular upheaval against the Central Government on BTC Bill. SJSS described BTC as ‘Fascist Imposition’ while All Assam Adivasi Students’ Association (AASA) called 24 hour bandh, 12 hour rail roko on August 8, 2003.

It was hoped that with the creation of BTC the decade long violence would eventually come to an end. But, the new Accord left various opposing elements outside its fold. The NDFB could not be brought to

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141 Assam Tribune, 2 August, 2003
142 Assam Tribune, 3 August, 2003
terms while various communities like the Adivasis, Koch-Rajvansis resented the new arrangement. However, under such state of affairs future violence can not be under mind. The success of BTC thus, will lie on its ability to create mutual goodwill among the different communities living in the BTAD and to work toward the overall development of the area.

From the above discussion the following conclusions can be drawn:

A. Starting during the British period the Bodos had a long history of identity assertion in Assam, the initial stage of which was marked by a desire of reforming, regenerating and raising awareness within the community. The Bodo leaders joined the Tribal League and actively participated in the Constitutional politics only to serve the interests of their community and to address major issues concerning the society like tribal identity, land alienation etc. In doing so they never hesitated to shift their support from Congress to Muslim League taking full advantage of the prevailing political situation of that period.

B. From 1947 to 1987 the Bodo aspiration was taken for a ride by the Indian National Congress which never hesitated to withdraw from their own promises made towards the Bodo people. The Bodos accepted Devanagiri Script with assurance from Indira Gandhi to reorganize Assam on federal lines but, nothing of that sort had been done. Further, the PTCA was entrusted to take up their cause but, due to lack of political expediency PTCA leaders could not stand by the demand of Udayachal for long. This resulted in frustration and disappointment among the Bodos.

C. Different Bodo organizations kept informing the Government about the needs of their community through a plethora of memoranda from time to time. But, nothing substantial was done by the Government to
redress their genuine grievances. Gradually a state of mind was created for social mobilization in support of a separate state to realize the ethnic and political demands of the community. This realization handed the responsibility of leadership to ABSU and its President Upendra Nath Brahma. Under him the ABSU activities began to acquire new dimensions and began to exercise a civil hegemony over large section of Bodo masses.

D. By the end of 1987 ABSU launched its mass movement in support of a separate state. Initially, a non-violent programme of action was organized but with the passage of time, the movement turned out to be a violent one. Both integrationist as well as secessionist tendencies grew within the movement. ABSU, however, kept referring to its movement as a democratic and peaceful one. By 1988, the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF) and Bodo Sahitya Sabha came in support of the ABSU Movement with which it grew in intensity.

The main opposition to their agitation happened to be the AGP Government and the Assamese people. Allegation and counter-allegation kept flowing during the course of the movement. ABSU alleged the State Government of harassing the peaceful movementeers while State Home Minister of ruling AGP, suspected the Congress patronage behind the violent moves of the ABSU.

E. For a long time no solution could be arrived at. The Central Government’s silence aggravated the situation. Fruitful negotiations started with forming of Congress Government in Assam and a series of talks followed. Internal rivalry among different Bodo groups and other opposing elements coupled with lack of geographical continuity among the scattered Bodo settlements hindered in the quick solution of the
Bodo issue. Finally, after the end of eighth round of talks, the Government of India proposed to form a three-member committee of experts to determine the areas of the Bodo and other Plains Tribes to the north bank of the Brahmaputra and to make recommendations on the nature of autonomy to be given to the Bodos. The Committee submitted its report in 1992 and Bodoland Autonomous Council was formed after an agreement between the Government and ABSU in 1993. It brought an end to the six year long unrest and peace was hoped to usher in.

F. All the high hopes were belied as soon as the Bodo leaders realized the futility of BAC without the protection of Sixth Schedule. The uncertainty in demarcation of its boundary and internal rivalry among Bodo leaders and dissatisfaction of certain radical sections of Bodo society created havoc in Bodo areas for a decade. A section of them even repudiated the Accord and floated an insurgent outfit BLT. In their attempt to clean the prospective autonomous areas large-scale attacks were carried out against other ethnic groups which displaced thousands of people including Bodos. Fratricidal killings continued when another Bodo outfit NDFB raised its nasty head and extortion, killing, burning of entire villages became a regular feature in BAC areas.

H. The State Government and Bodo leaders could not come to a consensus regarding the number of villages to be included in BAC. By the end of 1997 ABSU threatened to regain their movement. As a result all the warring factions came together during 1999 and started pressuring for a separate state. The Prime Minister ruled out the creation of a Bodo state which led to large scale killings by Bodo militants of Adivasis, immigrant Muslim, Bengali community and
other people. Violence intensified and Government intervened. The Central Government tried to bring the militant outfits to the negotiation table but, only BLT responded positively. NDFB remained adamant. Due to their increased illegal activities the Government had to ban that organization.

G. with BLT's consent for negotiation the Government announced to extend Six Schedule to the BAC and in February 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Government and BLT leaders brought peace to the violence stricken areas but, at the same time left certain sections of the community dissatisfied.