Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The Bodo politics of identity forms an important part of the post-independence political developments in Assam. Apart from its significant impact on socio-political history of Assam, the Bodo Movement is instrumental to a very large extent in bringing similar identity aspirations among other communities in Assam. Therefore, a complete study of the movement could help to grasp ethnic imperatives under a democratic political set-up.

Non-academic interpretation and emotional comments on the issue abounds in the intellectual writings. But, such interpretation and comments can only convey a partial picture of the whole scene. In order to be objective, one should try to understand the historical compulsions as well as political motives which led to the assertion of a distinct Bodo identity in Assam during late 1980s.

This work has been done keeping in mind all probable aspects related to the problem while analyzing the relevant Government official documents, documents of different Bodo organizations, views of different Newspapers and interpretations of different people of the Bodo community many of whom were directly involved with the movement. And the following conclusions have been arrived at:

1. The Bodos went through both conflict and assimilation throughout their existence in the Brahmaputra Valley. Their socialization with
various other communities has greatly metamorphosed the language and culture they brought with them from their original habitat. But, despite interaction and assimilation they have retained some aspects of their cultural identity intact over the ages, i.e. language, religion, way of living etc.

2. Bodo Movement in Assam was the result of a long process of identity formation among Bodos that started during the colonial period and became gradually assertive in the post-independence period. From the very beginning the Bodo elite was aware of the Bodo identity and past history. At the same time, they were also aware of the Assamese identity. As occasion demands, they not only expressed full support to the Assam Congress leaders but also accepted themselves as part of the composite Assamese community.

3. In post-independence period the Assamese became numerically the major group in Assam and tried to ensure its social space at the apex of the society by implementing some vigorous language policies during 1960s and 1970s. In 1960s the Assamese leaders implemented Assamese as the official language in Assam while negating at the same time the multi-ethnic nature of its society. This created a big wedge between Assamese speakers and other linguistic communities who looked upon this measure as a tool to dominate them. As a result a crisis of identity emerged among them. The hill tribes even got separated from Assam over the language issue and formed their own states.

4. Although with independence, the Bodos gave up their separate political identity, they did not give up their lingo-cultural identity. With the issue of official language gaining ground in Assam, the Bodos too started demanding implementation of their language in
the schools and colleges in Bodo dominated areas. And they were successful in that. But, they had to face Government repression while demanding Roman Script for the Bodo language. Until then Assamese script had been widely used in Bodo writing. Devanagari Script was accepted finally with Central Government intervention. But, the bitter experience during the movement concretized Bodo linguistic passions.

5. In the years following independence, their problems of land alienation, poverty, indebtedness, severe unemployment, economic exploitation and cultural and political neglect became increasingly acute. The Bodo leadership realized that if they remained politically ineffective they would not be able to address the genuine needs of the Bodo community. And with this assessment, the political mobilization for a separate Bodo state began in 1987 under the dynamic leaders of ABSU.

6. As the Movement for a separate state gained momentum, a process of reversing Assamese formation and with that Bodos disowning Assamese identity gained ground. The Bodos showed a tendency to go back to their pristine culture and way of living. Bodo language, religious practices, food habits, dress etc were used widely by the Bodos as never before to exhibit Bodo distinctiveness from that of the Assamese people against whom the whole Bodo antagonism was aimed at.

7. Initially ABSU single handedly led the movement but within a year other Bodo organizations like the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation and Bodo Sahitya Sabha came to their support with which it grew in intensity and both integrationist as well as secessionist tendencies grew within the Movement. This was also
the time when the movement could bring nation-wide attention to the Bodo issue.

8. For a long time no solution could be arrived at, as the State Government was not ready to consider the question of division of Assam. Fruitful negotiations started by 1991 with the Central Government involvement in the issue and a series of talks followed. Eventually, the Bodoland Autonomous Council was formed after an agreement between the State Government and ABSU in 1993. This Accord brought an end to the six year long unrest and it was hoped that it would usher in peace.

9. The Bodo leaders soon realized the futility of BAC without the protection of the Sixth Schedule. Moreover, non-implementation of the Accord due to the uncertainty in demarcation of its boundary and internal rivalry among Bodo leaders and growing dissatisfaction of certain radical sections of Bodo society created havoc in Bodo areas for about a decade. A section of them even repudiated the Accord and floated an insurgent outfit organization - 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. Extortion, killings and burning of entire villages became a regular feature in BAC areas.

10. Uncertainty on the issue of the number of villages to be included in BAC led ABSU to regain their movement by end of 1997. As a result, all the warring factions came together and restarted pressing for a separate state for the Bodos. At this juncture, 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. With BLT’s consent for negotiation the solution to the Bodo issue brightened. Government announced to extend Schedule Sixth to new Council. On 10 February, 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Government and BLT leaders ended the era of violence. A certain section of the community is still nurturing the desire of a Sovereign Bodo State.

11. The Language Policy of the mainstream Assamese political leadership antagonized as well as alienated the Bodos from the Assamese community and identity. In their overzealousness to protect Assamese language, the leadership failed to see the genuine grievances of the Bodos and other tribes and their issues of land, education and employment remained unattended. Under such circumstances, it was inevitable that the new Bodo leadership decided on a new line of political action for a separate of Bodoland. Bodo linguistic passions had been largely instrumental in shaping their political aspirations for hegemony.