

CHAPTER-III

SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CAUSES OF THE MOVEMENT

3.1.0 Tribal people of Assam

The north-east India is a land of composite culture, religion, language and different communities and it is one of the ancestral homes of many tribal communities. Assam is also not exception from it. Tribal people of Assam are divided as Hills and Plains. There are 14 (fourteen) tribes who generally live in hilly areas are regarded as Hill Tribes and other who live in plain areas are included in the Plains Tribe list.¹ Plains Scheduled Tribes are-

1. Barmans in Cachar
2. Bodo , Bodo –Kachari
3. Deori
- 4 Hojai
5. Kachari, Sonowal
6. Lalung (now known as Tiwa)
7. Mech
8. Miri (Mising)
9. Rabha

3.2.0 Bodos are part and parcel of Assam

The Bodos are one of the major plains tribes of Assam. They are scattered all over Assam. The main pocket areas of settlement of the Bodos are northern part of the Brahmaputra valley. The Bodos and some other tribal communities felt themselves as part and parcel of greater Assamese society. The Bodos, Garos and Rabhas of the then

¹ Das, JN: Genesis of Tribal Belts and Blocks in Assam in BN Bordoloi (ed)Alienation of Tribal Land and Indebtedness , Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati 03 (Assam),1986,p.82.

Goalpara district in the matter of the transfer of Goalpara to Bengal urged to the Governor of Assam not to transfer the Goalpara sub-division to Bengal. It is said,

“So your Excellency’s memorial list begs most respectfully to pray that your Excellency will be graciously pleased to consider the general opinion and interests of the great bulk of population of the Goalpara district and hold out this view of the question of its transfer to the Simon Commission and for this act of kindness.”² The Bodo community of Goalpara district also against the transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal.

3.3.0 Awakening of the socio-political consciousness

The Bodos were treated as Asura, Danava, and Mlechcha in the mythological or pre-historic period. They were educationally backward, neglected and exploited socially, economically, politically and like the other backward communities of Assam. The society was full of indiscipline and fragmented. *Bathou*, the chief religion of Bodos, could not unite the Bodo society, instead,” the society was plagued with illiteracy, superstition and self abnegation.”³ They engaged themselves in drinking rice beer excessively in the time of festivals and other occasions without caring their health and economic conditions and indulged in rioting⁴ that caused immeasurable pathetic and downfall condition.⁵ The situation was very grimed and unhealthy and no proper guidance was there to lead them in proper direction. So the scattered Bodo people converted to Christianity and *Ek Soronia Nam Dharma* under the influence of some *Gossai* and even converted to Islam denouncing their age old traditional religion *Bathou*.⁶ There was no socio-political and educational consciousness till the later part of the 19th century. Germination of the offshoots of the socio- political consciousness started just after the first part of the 20th century. The Bodo community got awake after the relentless efforts of the few pioneers and organizations.

² Brahmachoudhury, B.L. The Bodos (Kacharis) At a Glance , Bongaigaon, Assam, 1993, p.28

³ Boro, Anil: Brahma Movement and the socio-religious reform in Bodo society in the early twentieth century in Nailojalo Ujir (ed) Jwhwlaofurini Thandwi, Sovenir , published by the reception committee on the occasion of the 35th Annual conference of the Sadou Brahma Dharma Parichalana Samiti, Naokata, Baksa, 2010, p.117.

⁴ Endel Sidney: The Kacharis, Delhi-52, 2011 reprint, p.2.

⁵ Kachari, Gangacharan and Kachari, Harichandra: Boroni Phisa O Ayen, Dudhnoi, Goalpara, 1915, p.43.

⁶ Brahma, Manik, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, His Life, Deeds, Dotoma, Kokrajhar, 2001, p.8.

3.4.0 Kalicharan Brahma and Bodo society

One of the important and indispensable figures is Kalicharan Brahma (1860-1938), a true lover of the Bodo society, who fought for the all round development of the Bodo society, including social, political, economic and religious aspects. He is the preacher of *Brhama dharma* and to educationally uplift the society he established ME school, carpentry school and weaving school one each at the Bodo dominated area at Tipkai in the year 1912-13. He also founded Brahma Trading Company to impart the knowledge of business among the Bodos for their economic development and went to Shillong to submit memorandum before the Simon Commission to address the grievances of the Bodos.⁷

3.5.0 Literary contribution

An Outline Grammar of Kachari Language of Anderson and the Kacharis (1911) of Sidney Endel gave new direction to the development of Bodo language. The Habraghat Boro *Sanmiloni* under the district of Goalpara, published the first printed Bodo social law book '*Boroni Fisa O Ayen* (Son of the Bodos and Laws) in 1915 to uplift Bodo society in proper direction. The social laws are divided in three parts viz- i) laws relating to the marriage, ii) laws relating to the faults and iii) laws relating to the purification (*udhar, farasit*) and in the same year *Bibar* (1924) mouthpiece of *Bodo Chatra Sanmilian*, edited by Satish Chandra Basumatary, *Jenthakha* (1926), a magazine edited by Surya Kumar Brahma, *Boroni Gudi Sibsa Arw Araj* (1926) (Principal concept of the Bodos Faith and Hymns) by Moda Ram Brahma, *Bitharai* (1932), *Alongbar* (1938) published the various issues of Bodo society, story, poetry, drama, essay and besides the information of the national and international issues.

3.6.0 Bodo Chatra Sanmilian

Gradually, spread of education germinates the socio-political consciousness amongst the Bodos. Few Bodo youths with the initiative of Kalicharan Brahma founded the *Bodo Chatra Sanmilian* in the year 1915. The first session of the organization was held at the Kokrajhar Upper Primary school in 1919. Sobha Brahma and Satish Chandra Basumatary were the president and secretary respectively. The

⁷ BrahmaPatgiri, Satya: *Fwrlang Babajim Gwswkhang Bijab, Khagrabari Gwjw Faraisali, Kokrajhar*, 1986, p.66.

objective of the *sanmilan* was to unite the whole Bodo students' of the Goalpara district and to spread education amongst the Bodos.⁸

The seventh conference of Bodo *Chatra Sanmilani* was held in Rangia along with the *Bodo Maha Sanmilan*. The conference was renamed as *Sadou Aosom Bodo Chatra Sanmilani*. Because, the earlier *sanmilan* was confined only with the district of Goalpara. But in Rangia conference representatives came from all over Assam. The chief objective of the conference was to spread the education amongst the Bodos.⁹

3.7.0 The Bodo Maha Sanmilan

To unite the whole Bodo people under the roof one platform, Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, alongwith Rupnath Braham, Birnarayan Brahma, Jmadar Brahma, Satish Chandra Basumatary, Malsing Brahamchoudhury, Bijoyising Braham, Kalicharan Brahma(jr)and other convened the first Bodo Maha Sanmilan at Bhaoraguri under the Gossaigaon police station in 1921.The meeting was presided over by Jadav Chandra Khaklary. The *Sanmilan* adopted the following resolutions:

- i) that the Bodo *Mahasanmilan* be observed annually.
- ii) that the executive committee be formed to decide the annual convention of the Bodo *Mahasanmilan*.
- iii) that the women conference be accommodated along with the conference.
- iv) that a magazine be published for the spread of knowledge and creative writings among the Bodos.
- v) that more primary schools be established and girls and boys be sent to such schools.
- vi) that use of alcohol (rice beer) be avoided in marriages and any other social celebration.
- vii) that the fee to be paid during daughters marriage stands fixed at Rs.51/ and anybody found violating this be penalized.¹⁰

⁸ Brahma, Manik Kumar, Ibid, p.52.

⁹ Basumatary, Shatish Chandra (ed), Boro Chatra Sanmilan Presidential address in Bibar 1925 in Mangasing Hajoary (comp) Kokrajhar, 1992, p.71.

¹⁰ Narzary Bidya Sagar: Gurudev and Bodo Mahasanmilani in Gopinath Borgayari (ed) Khouseni Guthal, Kokrajhar, 2010, p.79.

The resolution of the first *Maha Sanmilani* could not be executed fully. The second conference held after four years at Rangia in 1925. This conference was presided over by Jadunath Khaklary and that conference also adopted few resolutions. Number of renowned personalities like Jadav Chandra Khaklary, from Dibrugarh, Rabi Chandra Kachari from Cotton College, Kalicharan Brahma, Bijoy Kr Brahmachari, Srijut Surya Narayan Braham, headmaster from Dhubri and others from different parts of Assam and Bengal attended the meeting. Besides them, honourable member of Assam Legislative Council, Mahadev Sarma and Nilamoni Phukan graced the occasion. The important points were-

- i) Resolved to be requested to the neutral and respected government not to curve out the Bodo dominated Cachar district from the state.
- ii) Resolved to be requested the government of Assam to consider to nominate the member to the legislative council from the Bodo community when nominated from the depressed and Backward classes.
- iii) Resolved to be requested to the government of Assam to provide special scholarship for higher education to the Bodo students'¹¹

The third Bodo *Maha Sanmilani* was held at Roumari Jyuoti Ashram near Bongaigaon. This conference also adopted few resolutions. They were-

- i) Resolved that the consumption of alcohol be stopped completely.
- ii) Resolved that pig rearing be completely banned.
- iii) Resolved that women folk be prevented to go to the market, *puja* etc.,.
- iv) Resolved that the abduction of Bodo girl with a purpose of marriage strictly be banned.¹²

3.8.0 Awakening of political consciousness

The young and educated Bodo youths became conscious about their legitimate rights and interest and to fulfill the same, a number of times with the initiative of Kalicharan Brahma appealed to the colonial ruler but they could not draw the kind attention and expected response. On the other hand they saw that the upper caste Hindu from the Brahmaputra valley and the newly educated Muslim youths from

¹¹ Basumatary, Chatish Chandra (ed): Ibid,p.72.

¹² Brahma, Patgiri, Satya:Fwrlang Babaji Gwswkhang Bijab, Khagrabari Gwjw Faraisali, Kokrajhar, 1986,p.66.

Surama valley enjoying the benefits of government through their elected and nominated representatives in the Reformed Council which was formed as per the Government of India Act.1919. There was no representative in the Reformed Council from the backward classes (including the Bodos) to voice for said classes. So the “*Bodo Chartra Sanmilan* decided to offer a candidature to the Reformed Council election and accordingly the president, 23 years old Sobha Brahma contested in the election.”¹³ So the reform movement followed the nationality consciousness and that consciousness gave the rise of political consciousness

3.9.0 Simon Commission

Simon Commission or Indian Statutory Commission visited Assam in the late 1928 to January 1929. Taking the opportunity of the visit, four different memorandums were submitted by the four different organizations belonging to Primitive and Backward Tribes viz-1) Bodo community of Goalpara District 2) Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani 3) Harish Chandra Das, Darrangiri on behalf of the Bodos, Garos and Rabhas of the Goalpara Sub-Division and 4) Dhubri *Boro Jubak Sanmilan*.”

“The six young educated and dedicated youth viz-1) Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, 2) Sardar Bahadur Belbung Ram Kachari 3) Jadav Chandra Khaklary 4) Ghyasuddin Ahmed 5) Karendra Narayan Mandal and 6) Babu Ram Brahma”¹⁴ went to Shillong to submit memorandum. The main points were- The memorandum said that though the Bodos of Assam had a glorious past with their own language and cultural heritage but now they were totally ignored. So, it is urged for separate electorate in the council and “urged for 1(one) out of 3 (three), non Mohmmadan seat be reserved for Bodos”¹⁵ and in point 6 they vehemently opposed the transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal. They also urged for special treatment in matters of education and appointment (point 9). Free and compulsory primary education for the Bodos and scholarship for giving facility for higher education and also pleaded for separate regiment in the armies for the Bodos which would be termed as Bodo Regiment (point 10).

¹³ Deuri, Indibor: Baro Jagaran Aru Baro Juba Chartra Sakti in Kamal Kumar Basumatary (ed) Khwrwandi, Sovenir of ABBWF(The 5th Annual Conference of ABBWF), Tangla, 1998, p.76.

¹⁴ Basmatary, Binai Khungur, (comp), Plains Tribal before the Simon Commission or the Indian Statutory Commissio, Tangla, Harisinga, Udalguri, p.22

¹⁵ Basumatary, Binay Khungur (comp), Ibid, p.23.

3.10.0 The Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani

This organization also submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission and played active role to shape the future of the tribal. The Sanmilani appended its resolution adopted in the meeting held at Titabor, Jorhat along with the memorandum. The *Sanmilani* pointed out, The Kacharis are one of the principal races of Assam and held an exalted position in history. The Kacharis are divided into several sub races. It includes Rabhas, Sonowals, Mechas, Thengals Lalungs Saranias, Dimachas and their population is near about 16 (sixteen) lacs. But they are politically deprived, socially neglected. So the organisation urged for helping by recognizing their position providing their rights in all respects. The organization also appealed for separate electorate, more scholarship for higher education.

3.11.0 Assam Tribal League

The chauvinistic and negligence attitude, social discrimination from the upper caste Hindus, bitter experience of cotton college where the low born Hindus compelled to stay in Second Mess, aspirations to uplift the society and political participation, the few Bodo and other tribal intellectuals gave the birth of first tribal political organization in the name and style as Plains Tribal League, conference held at Barapujia (Raha) under the district of Nagaon in 1933.¹⁶ The political scenario of Assam had changed after the election held in 1937. Because as per the government of India Act'1935 mad a provision of reservation of 5 (five) seats for the tribes and by getting the advantage of the reservation policy 4(four) candidates viz-Rupnath Brahma, Dhirsing Ingti, Kark Chandra Doley and Rabi Chandra Kachari from Goalpara, Nagaon Sibsagar-Lakhimpur and Kamrup district respectively in Assam Legislative Assembly and Bhimbor Deuri was nominated in Assam Legislative Council¹⁷. No party was able to manage the magic number 108 in assembly seat. Though the Congress party became the single largest party,winning the 38 seats but not willing to form the government. The Tribal League agreed to support Sadullah and accordingly with the help of Tribal League and other parties formed the government but the government could not last long. The Tribal League withdrew its support due to apathy towards solving the tribal problem instead, encouraged Muslim

¹⁶ Sonowal, Khema, Why Bodo Movement, EBH Publisher, Guwahati-25, 2013, p.19.

¹⁷ Swargiary, Katindra, Boroni Jarimin Arw Somaosarnai,, Fatasil, Guwahati-25, 1992, p.54.

immigrants to settle here.¹⁸ In the meantime Gopinath Bordoloi offered proposal to protect and safeguard the interest of the tribal and Tribal League also accepted the proposal of Gopinath Bordoloi, before supporting the government, between Tribal League and Congress party come into an agreement.

Some of the important points were -

- i) Preservation of its own free distinctiveness,
- ii) Continuation of separate electorate for the tribals,
- iii) Assurance of tribal representation by the Tribal League,
- iv) Insertion of one member of Tribal League in the Ministry.¹⁹

There was a long debate in Assembly session of 1937 regarding the devise of Line System introduced by the colonial ruler in 1920 in Nowgon, Kamrup Darrang and Barpeta. So, keeping in mind, the gravity of the vexed problem, the government of Assam constituted a nine member Line System Enquiry Committee in April 1937.

The composition of committee tried to give all representation to all interests concerned.

Rabi Chandra Kachari was appointed as one of the prominent members of the committee. He had direct and vast knowledge of land problem. He was a direct spectator of the land problem of tribals and immigration issues of Darrang and Kamrup district.

The Committee submitted its report in February 1938. There was a sharp divisions of suggestions amongst the members .and all the Hindu members in favour of the Line system but the Muslim members opposed it and in favour of abolition of Line System implementation of Line System²⁰. Being an MLA from Tribal League he was very conscious of the interests of the tribal and suggested that

- i) For strict implementation of Line system to control the Muslim immigrants

¹⁸ Narzary Charan, Dream for Udayachal and History of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA 1967-93), N.L Publications, Kokrajhar, Guwahati-1, 2011 p.67.

¹⁹ Swargiary, Katindra: Ibid, pp.96-97.

²⁰ Dewri, Indibor: Janagosthiya Samasya: Ateet Bartaman Bhabishyat, Bandhab 2015 (Enlarged edition), p.7

- ii) Fluctuating cultivation which was a tradition of tribal should be kept outside from the jurisdiction of Prohibition of Squatting Act.
- iii) For the future generation of indigenous people that whole Orang Mouza should be reserved for the indigenous people
- iv) The annual *patta* land of mixed village shouldn't be promoted to periodic *patta* because he observed that the tribal people after getting the periodic *patta* sold their land in high price to the immigrant and went away to the indigenous dominated areas.²¹

The few recommendations of the Committee were-

- i) The problem, that we consider undesirable at present to relax all the restrictions on the immigrant in the matter of where he should or should not take up land and avoidance of collision as well as to protect the interest of the most simple minded and peace loving people specially the tribal races of Assam.
- ii) Instead of a line dividing the area of a village, "a larger area of restriction should be adopted such as a *Mouza* or a Block of *Mouzas* involving a considerably shorter length of frontier to be protected from encroachers."²² However, Congress- Tribal League Ministry could not last long because in response to the Central Working Committee of the Congress party, the Assam Congress also resigned from the government following the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The leader of the Muslim League again sought the help of Tribal League to form the government. The Tribal League also agreed to support Muslim League in Condition that the Muslim League must follow the Agreement and accordingly the Tribal League and the Muslim League made an Agreement to form a new government in March 1940. But Sadullah was not interested to implement the agreement instead; he encouraged the immigrant to settle Assam at the cost of Tribals interest. So the Tribal League discussed the matter regarding pros and cons and resolved to withdraw support from the ministry in the Fifth Session of the conference

²¹ Ibid,p.7.

²² Kar, M: Muslims in Assam Politics, Omsons Publications, New Delhi-271990, pp.53-54

of the Tribal League held at Mangaldoi on 25 April 1945.²³ Gopinath Bordoloi led Congress party came into power in the election held in 1946. The Tribal League also extended its full support to the Congress party. The Plains Tribal League reminded the government about the agreement and accordingly to give effect to the spirit of Line System and notes given by the member of Tribal League, initiated steps to constitute tribal belts and blocks having population of tribal people 50% and above. The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886 was amended by adding Chapter X. In accordance with the law 11(eleven) Belts and 24(twenty four) Blocks, altogether 35 Belts and Blocks were created.²⁴ These Belts and Blocks were created primarily to safeguard the interest of the tribal's cases on land.

The Tribal League also submitted a seven point memorandum to the British Cabinet Mission on 23rd April, 1946 signed by Mr. Moda Ram Brahma, Office Secretary, Plains Tribal League, Rupnath Brahma, MLA and Sitanath Brahma Choudhury.²⁵

The important points were-

- i) Instead of 4(four) seats as provided in the Government of India Act, 1935 they rightfully claimed at least 16(sixteen) seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly
- ii) The Government India Act made a provision of only 1(one) nominated member to the Assam Legislative Council. But the tribal people had rightfully claimed to have at least three seats.
- iii) Minimum 1(one) member in the EC and minimum 3(three) births in the C L C.
- iv) That the tribal people have been demanding for separate seats with separate electorate on population basis as they feel that it is only through such separate electorate system they can expect to send their fit and chosen representatives.
- v) The tribal people of Assam were strongly against the inclusion of Assam in the Pakistan zone.

²³ Deuri, Indibor: Ibid, p.16.

²⁴ Bordoloi, B.N.: Report on the Survey of Alienation of Tribal Land of Assam, Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati-22, 1999, p.11.

²⁵ Brahmachoudhury, BL: Bodos At A Glance, mTribal Research Institute, Bongaigaon, 1993, pp.35-36.

- vi) That the tribal people along with other progressive communities demand for independence of India with adequate provision for safeguarding the interests of the tribal and other minority communities.
- vii) That the tribal people of Assam rightfully claimed to have at least one or more representatives in the proposed Constituent Assembly or any such to determine the future of own. Assam Plains Tribal League submitted a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly on 20th March 1947 which was signed by Satish Chandra Basumatary, Secretary, Assam Plains Tribal League and six other office bearers.

The points of memorandum were -

- i) Equal Fundamental Rights
- ii) Reservation of seats for the tribal people in respect of elections to all Legislative Bodies-Central, Provincial, Urban and Rural.
- iii) Recognition of indigenous people as tribal including the Tea Garden Tribes living outside garden areas.
- iv) Creation of separate electorate system.
- v) Creation of Statutory Cabinet in the Centre and the Provinces and inclusion of tribal member in proportionate manner.
- vi) Allocation of funds by the State, Local, Urban or Rural Budget for educational, religious or charitable purposes.
- vii) Introduction of adequate facilities for instruction in their educational institutions through the medium of their own vernacular.
- viii) Due share in all public affairs, trades etc.
- ix) Sufficient statutory provisions to ensure full protection to the lands of the tribal people.
- x) Full power to the tribal members of the Legislature to see the provisions of safeguards made in the constitution.
- xi) Permission to carry arms for their protection in the hilly tracts and jungle areas.²⁶ Many tribal people at that time of census included their names as non-tribal. So the number of the tribal people decreasing and to find out the actual number of tribal, the Tribal League requested again and again to provide their

²⁶ Brahma Choudhuri, BL:Ibid,p.37.

communities name also to the census worker along with their converted Hindu religion.²⁷

After independence many leaders of the party joined in the Congress party and gradually lost its hold in the politics and finally converted it into socio- promotional organization in the name and style of All Assam Tribal Sangha in 1952.

Tribal League, the first tribal political party of Assam was formed with the initiative of few students' from Cotton College and others to safeguard the interest of the tribal in 1933. The party demanded reservation of 5(five) Assembly seats for the tribal. The Tribal League was able to capture all the four reserved seats in the 1937 election, Rupnath Brahma, Dhirsing, Karkchandra Doley and Rabichandra Kachari from Goalpara, Nagaon, Sibsagar and Kamrup district respectively and Bhimbor Deuri was nominated to the Legislative Council.²⁸ The Tribal League played very active role in coalition politics from 1937 to 1947. The party supported Sadullah ministry and became the alliance partner but because of the indifferent attitude and apathy to the fulfillment of the agreement of the government withdrew the support and supported the Bordoloi ministry and made an agreement with the Bordoloi ministry also for the interest of the tribal.²⁹ The Gopinath Bordoloi showing the sincerity of the agreement amended the 'The Assam Land and Regulation 1886' added Chapter X and created 35 Tribal Belts and Blocks (11 Blocks and 24 Belts) to protect the land interest of the tribal."³⁰

3.12.0 Bodo Sahitya Sabha

The Bodo Sahitya Sabha is one of the sole literary organizations of the Bodos. It was founded its present form in 16 November, 1952. The BSS has been struggling for the development of Bodo language and literature since its foundation. The long journey of BSS with the formation of Bodo Literary Club by the students' of Dhubri Government High School in association with Bodo Employees at Dhubri and

²⁷ Deuri, Indibor: 2015 Ibid, p.4.3

²⁸ Kachari, Rabichandra: "Bhimbor Deuri" quoted article from Nayak(1948) mouthpiece of Assam Tribal League (Bhimbor Deuri special issue), published in Budheswar Boro (ed) Dwrbi, Rabichandra Kachari Special issue, mouthpiece of Darrang District Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Vol-III, Harisinga, Udalguri, 2003, p.25.

²⁹ Swargiary, Katindra: Ibid, p.94.

³⁰ Narzary, Charan: Ibid, p.52.

then it converted as Bodo Sahitya Sabha in November 16. The first meeting was held in Basugaon with two day programme on 15 and 16 November, 1952. Joybhadra Hagjer and Sonaram Thosen were elected as the president and secretary respectively. One of the main objectives of the formation of the BSS was to develop and expand Bodo language by introducing it as medium of instruction for the Bodo children; with this view the BSS launched several movements since its inception.

3.13.0 Causes of Autonomy Movement

Bodos those who believed themselves once as part and parcel of greater Assamese society but gradually alienated themselves from the feeling of oneness, a part of greater Assamese society and they became conscious about the preservation of their distinct identity, culture, language etc of their own by seeking the autonomy or homeland through the democratic and arms struggle movement. Autonomy movement of the Bodos is getting new height today. The factors may be discussed in following heads.

3.13.1 Socio-political Causes

Indian Hindu society is associated with the belief of caste system or based on Chaturvarna system.-the Brahmina, Baishya, Khatriya and Sudra. The Brahmins are the top in the caste hierarchy, “A sense of highness and lowness or superiority or inferiority is associated with the grading or ranking” ³¹...It restricts the food habit, social relations, social and religious disability of certain caste privileges to certain castes, feeling of purity and profane which created the greater social distances and the idea of purity and impurity creates the idea of untouchability.

The Kirata origin Bodos are also regarded as untouchables since the time immemorial. Bodos are also regarded as Mlechha, Danava , Asura , Rakshasha since the mythological period. The first Bodo king of Assam, Mahiranga was denoted as Mahiranga Danava.³² In course of time, a process of sanskritisation started and slightly upgraded their social status and designated them as lower caste Hindu.” Sanskritisation is the process by which “a low” Hindu or Hindu caste or tribal group changes its customs, tribal ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and

³¹ Srinivas ,MN: Social Change in Modern India, Orient Longman,New Delhi-2,1998,p.56.

³² Bruah, KL: The Early History of Kamrupa,LBS, Guwahati-1,2005,p..43.

frequently twice born caste.”³³ The Brahmins or upper caste Hindus by means of deception or roguishness or cheating to collect gifts in the name of sacrament or atonement for sins or in the name of sins or imitation into the Hindu society upgraded or sanskritised up to lower caste Hindu. In that way they continued the minor domination over the majority simple minded tribal. Bodo people also not exception from it. The Kachari king of Cachar Iragdao (later on Govinda Chandra) converted to Hinduism and for that purpose on the advice of the Hindu priest arranged a religious ceremony *Hiranyagarbha* by making a big cow of brass metal on the gold plate for purification from mothers for sins or penance. The king and his council of ministers entered into the cow through the mouth and came out through the anus and got the rebirth, purified, sanskritised and elevated to lower caste Hindu as Khatriya.³⁴

The people those who sanskritised never got equal treatment or equal status like upper caste Hindu, on the other hand compelled to give up their traditional non-Hindu rituals or rites. So, sanskritisation is also one of the major causes of the loss of cultural identity or one’s own identity.

The ongoing progression of adjustment in the name of Sanskritisation imposed the Assamese culture sacrificing their own culture and identity, “they got scared of losing their own identity. The conscious attempt at assimilation thus ended in un hoped –for alienation.”³⁵

“The normal progression of adaptation of diverse ethnic groups into promising Assamese society was severely affected by this linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class which in turn provided a suitable found for the Bodos who plainly refused to be the part of it choosing their own path of identity.”³⁶

A group of Bodo well educated youth noticed the negative development of so called sanskritisation and deeply realized the need of preservation of their culture and traditional identity and to go against the look down upon attitude of the higher caste

³³ Srinivasan,MN: Ibid,p58.

³⁴ Guha, Upendrachandra:Kacharer Itibritta, Asom Prakasan Parishad, Guwahati-21,1993,p.42.

³⁵ Barman, Sibnath: Why Separatism An Assessment of Tribal Turmoil in Assam in Jyotiprasad Gogoi(ed) Assam College Teachers Association Journal, Vol-.XXVIII, 2004-2005,P.55.

³⁶ Mushahary, Gautam: Socio-Political Movements of the Bodos in Post Independence Period (1947-2003) (unpublished Thesis, Department of History, Bodoland University, 2018,p.214.

adopted a resolution in the conference of the Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani held at Titabor on 12 August , 1928 that, “Resolved that this meeting is the opinion that the Kachari community of Assam does not recognize themselves as lower caste Hindu or untouchables and do hereby declare that they are quite independent from the Hindu community in all respects such as political, social and religious etc.”³⁷ Attitude of the caste Hindus deeply hurt the feelings of the Bodos. At every step, the Bodos or the tribal were neglected, ill treated, socially exploited, and isolated by the upper caste Hindus leveling them as untouchables. Even the student from cotton college Ravi Chandra Kachari, Kark Chandra Doley Dhising Dewri, Mahi Chandra Miri, Bhimbar Deuri, Satish Chandra Basumatary also became victims of unhealthy attitude of the upper caste Hindus because they were placed them at Second Mess. Because, the door of the General Mess was closed forever to the so called untouchables. So the students’ from the tribal communities took a firm determination that that type of discriminatory attitude, look down upon must uproot from the college and promised, “Second Dining Hall must go.”³⁸

Big boss attitude of so called Assamese people also responsible for alienation of Bodo people from the mainland Assamese society. But once upon a time “The Bodos vehemently opposed the transfer of Goalpara over Bengal. Goalpara is a part and parcel of Assam. **Sibnath Barman** also agreed that why conspiracy against the Bodos, “the chauvinistic attitude of Assamese people would lead anger and resentment .”³⁹

“Linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class which in turn provided a suitable found for the Bodos who plainly refused to be the part of it choosing their own path of identity.”⁴⁰

The ABSU also raised the same question expressing their grievances in a booklet by saying, “One of the most responsible factors as to why the tribal become alienated from the mainstream of Assam is the attitude of the Assamese people. The Assamese people have never accepted the tribal as a part and parcel of the Assamese

³⁷ Basumatary, Binai Khungur: Ibid, p.24.

³⁸ Kachari, Rabichandra: Ibid, p.35.

³⁹ Barman, Sibnath, Asamar Janajati Samasya : Aitihāsik Utsa Sandahn, Progressive Book House, Guwahati-1, 1995, p.32.

⁴⁰ Phukan Girin: Politics of Regionalism, Spectrum Publication, New Delhi, 110002, 1996, p.62.

community and society in real sense, though they give a motivated slogan of greater Assamese nationality. As for instance, a Goswami Brahmin will never allow or agree to give its daughter for a social marriage with a tribal youth.”⁴¹

So, it aggravated situation by the upper caste Hindus in the name of assimilation.

3.13.2 Language policy of Government of Assam.

North east India is a land of composite culture. Different communities have their own language. They love and learn from it and it is a bridge of communication amongst the community. Ignoring the above aspect, the government passed “The Assam Official Language Act 1960. The Assamese language was imposed upon the non-Assamese speaking people. “Growing inequalities between the communities and hegemony of dominant Assamese middle class have created a sense of relative deprivation among the various ethnic groups. The degree of relative deprivation i.e the intensity with which it is felt, has reached zenith with attempt to impose Assamese Language backed by the movement made the tribal suspicious about hidden motive of the dominant section of the Assamese.”⁴² The indigenous people from Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh strongly reacted and vehemently opposed it. The Bodos of Assam also showed strong resentment against the Act and reacted it as dictatorial imposition upon them. The BSS strongly protested against the Act.⁴³ The government of Assam again on September, 1972 adopted a resolution that Assamese would be the compulsory language as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions. This resolution aggravated the situation. The Bodos of Assam went against the decision of the government and in many places they protested it and followed the confrontation clashes and firings which claimed the lives of the twelve Bodo youths.

⁴¹ Datta, PS: *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi-52,1993 p85 and ABSU Leaflet *Why Separate State, Kokrajhar*,1987,p.13.

⁴² Phukan Girin : *Ethnicity, Politics of Language and Reorganisation of States in North-East India* in BC Bhuyan (ed) *Politics of Reorganisation of North East India*, Omsons Publications , Amnsari Road, New Delhi 110002,1996.p.54.

⁴³ Brahma, B: *The Bodo Identity Question Mark* in Praban Borgaoyari(ed) *The Bodo , the mouthpiece of Bodo Sahtya Sabha, Hagjer Bhaban, Guwahati-6,1993,p.p.25-26 .*

Another case of turbulence and tension amongst the tribals, specially the Bodos were the introduction of Assamese language as the compulsory third language in the non- Assamese medium school. The government of Assam by a notification provided that the “knowledge of Assamese language was condition for entry into the various government services in Assam. The ABSU vehemently opposed the circular and announced some programmes of movement for the withdrawal of that SEBA circular and last compelled government to suspend the same -92 points of demands.”⁴⁴

The attitude of AGP Government was not in favour of the development of the Bodo language, The Government tried to crush the Bodo language. “The AGP government took a serious decision to stop salaries to Bodo language teachers in the primary schools Perhaps the AGP Government, dominated by Assamese mainstream people, believed that once Bodo language in the Roman script is allowed to be taught in primary schools that might help to develop a sense of separatism in the minds of the Bodo people eventually”⁴⁵

“The chauvinist Assamese tried to impose their Assamese language on non Assamese, especially Mongoloid tribal groups. As a result, there emerged as massive resistance, Mongoloid tribal groups were compelled to start agitation against the Assamese high caste chauvinism. In fact, the Assamese chauvinism has given the birth of ethnic consciousness among the tribal groups.”⁴⁶

3.13.3 Script Movement of the Bodos

The Bodos have no inherited scripts of their own to write their language of their own. Quoting the version of Bishnu Rabha , famous Bodo grammarian Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya said that in ancient times there was a kind of Deodhai script among the Bodos. But in course of time they forgot the use of Deodhai script. So they used Bengalee or Assamese script to write their language. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha adopted a resolution for the use of Roman script and accordingly urged them to

⁴⁴ Hazarika, Niru: Ethnic Autonomy Question in North East India, Spectrum Publication, New Delhi, 2005, p.195.

⁴⁵ Basumatary, Prakash : Bodoland Movement and Its Impact on the Bodo Society, (Unpublished Thesis, Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University,2018,p.141.

⁴⁶ Nag, Sajal: Roots of Ethnic Conflict ,Nationality Question in North-East India, Manohar Publication, New Delhi-2,1990,p.63.

implement it. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha also submitted a memorandum to the then prime minister Indira Gandhi on 13 April 1974. But, the government did not show any interest or sincerity to solve their demands. So The Bodos launched a vigorous mass movement from 1974 to 1975. The Government of Assam crushed the movement mercilessly with bullet and 18 (eighteen) persons have died and number of persons became crippled for life for governments barbaric atrocities.

The district of Baksa (erstwhile Kamrup, Nalbari and Barpeta) also participated in the Script Movement. The Bodo people of Baksa District launched script movement on 28 September 1974. Two persons viz- Amla Boro from Helsaguri and Sibram Boro from Asrabari were shot dead by Assam Police when they were on picketing at Sajani Kanta High School, All total 318 people were arrested by the police.⁴⁷

Later on, Devanagiri script was accepted as a script for Bodo language. Government of Assam by a notification No. LGL 199/84/6 has recognized the Bodo language as an associate official language for administrative and other purposes in the district of Kokrajhar and Darrang (undivided) and has become a fully fledged department in Gauhati University. But ABSU and few other organizations still made allegations that “the Assam government has not provincialised maximum Bodo medium lower primary, middle and high school in the last 25 years and as a result 849 numbers of primary, 374 middle school and 218 high school are running as venture which is not found in other states of the country.”⁴⁸

3.13.4 Economic causes

3.13.4.0 Land Alienation

Alienation of land among the schedule tribe is one of the major causes in India. The magnitude of the problem of land alienation differs from state to state, region to region and tribe to tribes, similarly land system and land regulations are also not same throughout the country because land is state subject. Alienation of tribal land in Assam is like a historical process. It becomes a burning problem of tribals. In fact

⁴⁷ Dharanidhar Owari ,Roman Hankhw Soamosarnai (Roman Script Movement) in SitaRam Basumatary (ed) Boro History of Barpeta District, Bodo Barpeta District Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Barpeta2006,p,p,12-13.

⁴⁸ ABSU Leaf let,Why Seperate State,Kokrajhar,2010,p.5.

tribals are known as the sons of the soils and hence they cannot survive without land. “About 70 % of tribal families has become practically landless whereas 90% of tribal people depend on agriculture. Little plots of agricultural land cannot suffice the tribals to procure a good harvest to cover up whole year for their maintenance of food. As a result, most of the rural tribal families remain half starved.”⁴⁹

During the end of colonial era in India migration from Eastern Bengal has been a vital experience in Assam. Lots of Muslim migrants came to Assam to stay here which was stated in the census report of 1921. CS Mullan who was superintendent of 1931 census stated, “by 1921 the first army corps of the invaders had conquered Goalpara. The second army corps which followed them in the year 1921-31 had consolidated their position in that district and has also completed the conquest of Nowgong. The Barpeta sub division of Kamrup has also fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded....”⁵⁰

So to defend against the incursion of settler introduced a Line System. Under this system the villages were divided into three classes, (i) open village, where migrants could stay openly without any restriction, (ii) closed village, where immigrants could not stay in any form and (iii) mixed villages i.e where a line was demarcated and immigrants could stay just on solitary part of it. But this idea was not effective and encroachment continued and the tribal people were mostly affected by the encroachment. “The resolution on Line System of 1939 conceived the idea of tribal belt and blocks.”⁵¹ But this idea of the creation of tribal belt and blocks were again pushed back by the League Ministry and instead of creating tribal belt and blocks took a resolution to settle more immigrants in the district of Kamrup and Darrang in the name of growing more food campaign which adversely affected the interest of the indigenous people.

But after the change of ministry, the new ministry under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi took a resolution for formation of tribal belt in 13 July 1945 and legislation was passed.⁵²

⁴⁹ Ibid, 2010, p.6.

⁵⁰ Guha, Amalendu Planter Raj to Swaraj, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006, p.79.

⁵¹ Das, J.N: Genesis of Tribal Belt and Blocks in Assam, Tribal Research Institute, Guwahati-3, 1986, p.36.

⁵² Bordoloi, BN: Ibid, p.75.

Protective measures of Tribal Belts and Blocks provided for the protection of tribal land which is practically a farce Act. The figures of land illegally occupied by the non-tribal encroachers in Tribal Belt and Blocks may be much higher than that. As such, “tens of thousands of common tribal mass people have been badly exploited and rendered landless and shelter less. Now many of the tribal are just like refugees that, they are not allowed to live in the forests and grazier fields.”⁵³

On the other hand, Migrations from other general areas into the Tribal Belts and Blocks and land encroachment by them are still a continuous process. So, “only on account of that the earlier as well as present governments failed to protect the tribal areas and if the government fails to free the tribal areas from encroachers tribal are entitled to get a separate state.”⁵⁴ Non tribal encroachers such non- indigenous people have formed majority in tribal areas and oppressed he tribal people and thus interest of the tribal are not protected. As such for the protection of the interest of the tribal’s ethnic identity of the Bodos, the ABSU demands the separate state.

ABSU alleged that due to silent policy of negation of bureaucracy side or ruling machineries over 3,60,601 *bighas* of land out of 45 Tribal Belt and Blocks of Assam have gone to the occupation of non-tribal and Bangladeshi migrants from the tribal’s as per the record of 31st January,1990.⁵⁵

Encroachment in two Revenue Circles under the Tamulpur Tribal Belt in Baksa District.⁵⁶

Table No.3.1

Name of Revenue Circle	Total Area of Land in Bigha	Total area encroached in Bighas
Goeswar	201028	46,181
Tamulpur	287395 B 00K04L	20,000

Source Data collected through Right to Information Act’2005 from the above circle Office, 2017.

⁵³ ABSU Leaflet, Why Separate State, Kokrajhar, 2010, p.7.

⁵⁴ ABSU Leaflet ,Ibid,p.11.

⁵⁵ Ibid,p.12

⁵⁶ Source: Data collected tby the Investigator hrough Right to Information Act’2005 from the above circle office,2017.

Encroachment in Revenue Circles under Kalaigaon Tribal Belt in Udalguri district

Table No.3.2

Name of Revenue Circle	Total Area of Land in Bigha	Total area encroachment in Bighas
Harisinga Revenue Circle	4,56,586 B 04K 01L	10,421
Khoirabari Revenue Circle	1,35,235B02K05L	27,134
Majbat Revenue Circle	2,24,045 B01K10L	53,122B01K06L

Source Data collected through Right to Information Act'2005 from the above circle Office, 2017.

3.13.5 Identity Crisis

“We often read and hear about the problem of identity crisis in this country and need of protecting the identity”⁵⁷The Bodos of Assam also have been struggling for separate state and they allege that they have been facing identity crisis.

The Bodo tribe is distinctly different from the present community of Assam so far their language, culture and tradition are concerned. They have the history of independent living since the period of their kings and kingdom in Maibang-Cachar of present NC Hills and undivided district of Darrang , Kamrup, Goalpara and also Cooch Behar of present West Bengal. The language and cultural conflict between present dominant group of people and Bodos resulted physical confrontation and movement in many times in the past. In 1928, before the Simon Commission the then leaders of plains tribal, many Bodos demanded for separate electorate to maintain their political entity separately from the dominant ruling group of people of Assam. Today also there is a cumulative impact of this conflict in entire social and political life. The successive ruling powers in Assam always ail to treat other language and culture with equal respect and status. In first part of 20th century the process of cultural alienation of Bodos to Assamese began but now every tribal group of Assam are on the process of alienation to the so called Assamese .The concept and spirit of

⁵⁷ Kumar, B.B, Small States Syndrome in India, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi-110059, 1998, p.20.

co-existence could not work due to suppressive and oppressive mindset of the ruling clique in the past and present too in the present democratic milieu which is more possessive than the inclusive. The discrimination and deprivation from the ruling partner has pushed all ethnic groups to seek for autonomy for their existence. The political hegemony of ruling community has divided the composite society of the Assam on the line of ethnicity and cultural affinity.

3.13.6 Growing disparity

The growing regional disparities in development needs separate state. The proposed area of demand is a backward from all fronts –infrastructural, educational, and economic.

3.13.7 Historical Evidence

Bakul Chandra Basumatary argues the grounds for creation of separate state for Bodos. the proposed Bodoland was earlier a part of Bodo kingdom, Bhuma, Bodo- Kamatapur, Mech of Coch Behar and Kachari dynasty and it was a kingdom under Bhutan Dynasty also.“ The Bodos, however, in a discriminatory manner, were denied their legitimate right to have a separate state within India. This should be set right now by granting a separate state for Bodos.”⁵⁸

Kalidash Brahma conducted a field study to know the attitude of the respondents .Out of 200 respondents “possible solution to the Bodo problem “ 9% believe that “ restoration of Tribal Belt and Blocks and check on tribal land alienation ,16.50% is the opinion that “economic development of the region 30.50% respondent Believe that “creation of separate state Bodoland ” and 44% is the opinion that all will help to solve the issue.⁵⁹

3.13.8 Conclusion

There are a number of tribal people of Assam who have been living in Assam since the time of immemorial. The Bodos also one of the major tribal groups of Assam. The renaissance in the Bodo society started as a social reformation. Kalicharan Brahma, the Habraghat Bosro Sanmilani, Bodo Chatra Sanmilani, later on

⁵⁸ Basumatary, Bakul Chandra, Why A Bodoland ?Words and Words,Kokrajhar,2015,p.145.

⁵⁹ Brahma, Kalidash : Politics of Identity : a Case Study of Bodos in Assam, 2013,p.118 Unpublished Thesis Political Science Department , Assam University , Silchar.

Bodo Chatra Sanmilani, Bodo Maha Sanmilan and the Tribal League played very significant role in bringing the socio-political reformation and consciousness in the Bodo society. The literary writings of number of writers contributed to wake up the society. The relentless efforts of organizations and Kalicharan Brahma and other few intellectuals, the Bodo society woke up to some extent. The writings of Anderson and Sidney Endel established the identity of Bodo language in written form. The influence of reformation started in intellectual level first and then gradually spread to the grass root level which gave the birth of identity consciousness and feeling of oneness and it followed the political consciousness. The Bodos, for their socio-cultural, economic and political safeguard submitted memorandums to the Simon Commission or Indian Statutory Commission in 1929. The Bodo organization of Goalpara, Dhubri districts vehemently opposed the conspiracy of transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal and submitted memorandum against the transfer. The Bodos thought themselves as the part and parcel of Greater Assamese society. The Bodos along with other tribal groups of Assam founded the Assam Plains Tribal League to uplift the tribal society. The Assam Tribal League participated in the Assam Legislative Election in 1935 and was able to win four Legislative Assembly seats and 1(one) nominated members in the Legislative Council. The members of the Assam Tribal League played active role in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The party supported the Sadullah Ministry with the condition that the government would protect the interest of the tribal but because of the indifferent attitude towards the tribal issue, compelled the Assam Tribal League to withdraw the support and supported Gopinath Bordoloi to for the ministry. Before formation of the ministry the party made an agreement with Bordoloi led Assam Congress party and following the Agreement Gopinath Bordoloi created the Tribal Belts and Blocks for the protection of Tribal land rights. Gradually, the Bodos realized the social negligence and Tribal Belts and Blocks also failed to protect their land rights and rampant encroachment threatened their very existence as the son of the soil. So the feeling of social, economic, political and other causes of deprivation paved the way for autonomy in the form of separate state.

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