

CHAPTER - V

OUTLINING IMPACTS OF THE BODO MOVEMENTS

The socio-political movements of the Bodos which began as a socio-religious reformation movement by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma in the early part of 20th century and continuing even today with a distinct political demand in the form of a separate state of Bodoland spearheaded by the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) had passed through different phases. As the Bodo Movements that occurred in the post-Independence period were packed with events and counter-events, they were bound to produce considerable amount of impacts on the overall socio-economic, cultural and political milieu of the people of Assam in general and the Bodo people in particular.

The Bodo movement certainly started as a movement for socio-economic and cultural regeneration which even in its political phase, different Bodo organizations in their memoranda had expressed their feeling of socio-economic deprivation and grievances and had sought protection against economic exploitation and land alienation. The Bodo leaders were quite conscious about the need for the educational development of the Bodo community at large to achieve their socio-economic and political aspirations. The language and script movement led by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) to establish the Bodo language as a medium of instruction was largely derived from the feeling and outlook.¹ The initial social movement of the Bodos in the form of revival of language and literature had clear-cut cultural overtones both in terms of its declared goal and in terms of the efforts of the Bodo Shitya Sabha (BSS) to preserve, revive and develop Bodo literature and other aspects of their culture. The leaders and activists of the BSS and other allied organizations of the Bodos were making conscious efforts to motivate and educate the people about the traditional glories and cultural achievement of their ancestors. The publications of the BSS amply illustrated that the elite and leaders of the movement were

actively encouraging and inspiring cultural research and creative work for the development of the Bodo culture² and the results of these efforts are apparent today as the Bodo language has become one of the recognized languages of the 8th schedule of Indian Constitution and this is obviously one of the major impacts of the initial movement of the Bodos led by the educated middle class who took up the leadership of the BSS and other contemporary Bodo organizations at that point of time with a common objective to uplift the downtrodden status of their community. The issue of the script movement had also been based on linguistic and scientific arguments to a large extent apart from the strong desire and aspiration to maintain their ethno-cultural identity.³

The recognition of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction up to the secondary stage was the first concrete achievement of the Bodo movement. They accepted the *Devanagari* script to keep the distinctiveness of their own language from Assamese. Another significant impact of the language and script movement was that the movements had indirectly alienated the Bodos from the composite Assamese society in recent times. For a long time, some sections of the Bodos and other plains tribals were eager for an entry into the lower ranks of the Hindu caste system, but what was once a phenomenon of mass conversion has now stopped altogether.⁴ Therefore, the most important achievement of the language and script of movements led by the BSS was the increase of Bodo ethnic consciousness, particularly among the younger sections and students. There had been a sort of a renaissance or cultural upheaval in terms of creative literature and poetry and cultural research into the distinctive contributions and past glory of the Bodo people. The younger sections had been politically oriented in support of their demand for a separate identity.⁵

Though at the initial stage of the movement, the Government of Assam adopted a policy of denial and non-cooperation with the demand of the BSS, yet, in the subsequent time it changed its attitudes towards the Bodos and other indigenous tribes and adopted a policy of dialogue and mutual understanding in resolving the issues relating to language, literature, education, curriculum, creation of posts etc. and obviously it was due to the persistent endeavor resorted by the Bodo organizations to fulfill their demands without any compromise. The strong linguistic and script movement spearheaded by the BSS and supported by the Bodo organizations like PTCA and ABSU ultimately paved the way for amicable solution to the language issue of the Bodos and the BSS did not have to face any difficulty in solving the later issues relating to Bodo medium of instruction such as

the introduction of Bodo language as MIL subject in the Higher Secondary and Under Graduate level as well as Bodo as a subject of MA at Gauhati University.⁶ So, the achievements with regard to the development of Bodo language can be clearly attributed to the language movement initiated by the BSS and realistically considering them as the distinct results of the movement which chronologically be given as follows:⁷

1. Introduction of Bodo Language as a medium of instruction in Primary School, 18th July 1963.
2. Introduction of Bodo Language as a medium of instruction in Middle English School (ME), 28th September 1968.
3. Introduction of Bodo the Language as a medium of instruction in High English School, 6th August 1972.
4. Introduction of Bodo Language as the Major Indian Language (MIL) in Degree level, 29th February 1978.
5. Introduction of Bodo Language as the subject in MA level in Gauhati University, 18th January 1996.
6. Introduction of Bodo Language as a subject of Orientation Course, October 2002.
7. Introduction of Bodo MIL as a subject of State Level Eligibility Test for the lecturer of Bodo MIL in the Colleges and Universities of Assam, 28th September 2003.
8. Inclusion of Bodo Language in the Eight Scheduled of the Indian Constitution on 22nd and 23rd December 2003 by promulgation of a Parliamentary Act.
9. A Centre of All India Radio in Bodo language was started at kokrajhar on 15th August 1999.
10. Approved by the Govt. of India as the MIL paper in UPSC Examination.
11. Introduction of Bodo Language as Major Course in Degree Level in Gauhati University and Advance Bodo Course at HS level in Assam, August 2006.

It is clearly observed that the language was such an important factor that many other demands evolved round the language issue and it was also true that language problem alone could not motivate an entire community to jump into political or other separatist movements unless they were accompanied by other important political, economical, social and educational disadvantages. However, the political movement of the Bodos emerged out of the movement for linguistic rights.⁸ The chauvinism displayed by a section of the *Asomiya* intelligentsia and by the organizations like the *Asom Sahitya Sabha* in regard to the imposition of Assamese as the sole official language in Assam not only triggered the movements by the hill tribes but also by the plains tribes for the ethnic assertion and for the preservation of the socio-cultural and linguistic identities. The Bodos, the largest plains tribe in Assam along with other linguistic minorities spearheaded this movement in the Brahmaputra Valley realizing that they would lose their tribal identity and become part of the Assamese community.⁹

Generally, education was badly neglected in colonial Assam. The response to western education among the Assamese was crippled by the colonial suppression of the Assamese language from 1837 to 1874. However, despite such colonial constraints, a new Calcutta-oriented Assamese middle class gradually emerged in the late 19th century. Obviously, it was weak and very small middle class located in the colonial hinterland. The incipient Assamese middle class composed of high castes like Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kalitas and a few Assamese Muslims, took special interest in developing the Assamese language and literature. Gradually, the language became an important and perhaps the most sensitive symbol of the Assamese middle class and nationality.¹⁰

In fact, it was so emerged due to the situation created by a section of so called Chauvinistic Assamese middle class intelligentsia when they had developed a modern literature representing not only its national outlook but also the anti-imperialist tendencies geared to an idea of Indian unity in the late forties led by the caste Hindus where leadership of both the local anti-imperialist movements and the Assamese national awakening put them in a privileged position.¹¹ While they fostered the growth of Assamese sub-nationalism to the chagrin of the Bengali middle-class, they felt compelled to seize control of the state administration too. The Assamese middle-class sought to use the new and precarious control over the administrative apparatus in the state with a view to furthering the cause of Assamese sub-nationalism and its own class interests. The glorious dream of national awakening was inherited by them from modern education and

the example of Bengal. But from the beginning it lacked the means of translating the dream into reality.¹²

As the Assamese sub-nationalism acquired a chauvinist character in very short period of time refusing to admit and overcome its weaknesses, it adopted the tactics of hectoring and intimidating the other ethnic groups through a nationalistic posture. In spite of that they succeeded in rallying different indigenous ethnic groups under its banner throughout the fifties of the last century. If economic opportunities and social and political equality followed Assamisation they could have been staunch champions of Assamese sub-nationalism. But they realistically failed to do so as chauvinism has never known anything but blind selfishness.¹³ The non-Assamese groups who had so far remained under Assamese leadership without any objection realized that the monopoly of political power was bound to restrict the scope of their aspirations and efforts of development. The Official Language Bill of 1961 in particular was perceived as a barrier to their further advancement and as a deliberately placed obstacle between them and jobs in government offices. Further, it was feared that the domination of Assamese would adversely affect the future of their language and culture. Captain Williamson Sangma, a Garo leader who served in the B.P. Chaliha Ministry as Education Minister, resigned soon after the passage of the Official Language Bill in the State Legislature and the process of disintegration of the composite Assam of British days followed.¹⁴ Therefore, it is evident that the political movement for a separate state of the Bodos genuinely strengthened by their urge to maintain and preserve their language and ethnic identity. M.S. Prabhakara remarked that the demand for language and script is 'thin end of the wedge-the thick end being their political demand of Udayachal'.¹⁵

The most important role played by the language movement of the Bodos was the awakening of nationalist sentiment and identity consciousness which genuinely rescued the Bodos from the linguistic and cultural assimilation by the other advanced caste-Hindu Communities. It also literally helped the Bodos to establish linguistically and culturally as a distinct community.¹⁶ The Bodos had become more and more articulate and identity conscious due to the vibrant role played by the BSS and the movements headed by them were solely responsible for molding the sentiments of the youth force ultimately leading them to the path of more vigorous challenges ahead, i.e., the struggle for political self determination.¹⁷

The political phase of the Bodo movement began before the 1967 elections with the formation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA). It was formed towards the later part of the language movement with the aim to demand full autonomy which they thought would provide the plains tribals the necessary facilities to protect their language and culture while aiding their economic development according to their own choice. They had the defining objective to create an autonomous region called *Udayachal* comprising the areas of the Brahmaputra Valley dominated by different tribes of the Bodo groups within the federal structure proposed by the Government of India in 1967.¹⁸ The demand for autonomous region became a demand for a separate Union Territory in 1973 and it plunged the Bodos into a vigorous movement which continued till 1974. The movement for a separate Union Territory was simultaneously followed by the movement for Roman script for the Bodo language instead of the prevailing Assamese script. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, however, persuaded them to accept *Devanagari* script as a compromise.¹⁹

In many occasions the Bodo leaders themselves had repeatedly argued that since the nature of the movement had been political and their aspirations were based on political and economic principles, they should be dealt with on a political and democratic level.²⁰ As the feeling of relative deprivation and backwardness had initially goaded them to the path of movement, the Bodo leaders were mostly involved not only with the cultural traditions and socio-economic welfare of the Bodos but were deeply inspired by national cultural traditions and this was the reason why they were more or less successful in leading the Language and Script movements without any ideological diversion to their objective.²¹ At the initial stages of their operation, the PTCA was not in favour of participating in elections as an organization and had even boycotted and agitated against the elections during the bye-elections of 1967 and 1968. However, individual leaders of the PTCA had contested elections both at the local and state levels before the PTCA was formed. In fact, the lack of success of these leaders in the 1967 elections had been suggested to be a contributing factor to the formation of the PTCA.²²

The political movement which started with a sole motive to fulfill political rights of the entire community received a serious jolt when the individual political aspirations of a section of Bodo leaders ran above the community interest that considerably pulled back the momentum of political movement of the Bodos during the later part of the PTCA movement for *Udayachal*.²³ The latter part of the leadership of PTCA had been

seen as opportunistic in nature as they started hobnobbing with the mainstream political parties of the province and deviated from their declared objective i.e. demand of *Udayachal*. This hobnobbing and opportunistic nature of the PTCA leaders alienated them from their own people. So the movement received a blow when the leadership decided to give up the demand of separate Union Territory. Such an abrupt decision of the leadership obviously led to split. Binoy Khungur Basumatary, a hardliner, left the PTCA and formed the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (Progressive) in May 1979. The All Bodo Students' Union supported it and both these organizations continued the movement for a separate Union Territory.²⁴ Ultimately, the PTCA (P) was dissolved and a new regional party called United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) was formed in 1988, which was subsequently renamed as the United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front (UBNLF). The UBNLF along with the ABSU spearheaded the Bodo agitation. In addition to the demand for a separate Bodoland for the Bodos of the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, the other demands of the UBNLF included the inclusion of the Bodo language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian constitution and formation of a District Council for the people of the Bodo group living in the south bank of the river Brahmaputra as well as enlisting of the Bodos of Karbi-Anglong district into ST (Hills) list.²⁵ Nevertheless, the Bodo political assertion was marked by a sharp transformation in the character of Bodo political assertion when the PTCA leadership had come to the centre-stage of the Bodo movement. For the first time in the history of the Bodo struggle, they provided a concrete form in the creation of a separate territorial unit, which later on became the principal and sole objective of Bodo political assertion.²⁶ Therefore, the prime achievement of the PTCA leadership and its movement was probably that they were successful in arousing a popular sentiment of a separate political unit and making the Bodo people dream of a separate Homeland called *Udayachal*. The immediate impact of the failure of the PTCA leaders to sustained the movement for political autonomy was the arrival of ABSU leadership which provided the most tumultuous phase of the Bodo movement.²⁷

It is to be noted that the Assam Governments' repressive measures to deal with BSS movement tended to create a mental divide among the Bodo intelligentsia which gradually created a conducive environment for necessary social mobilization to realize the ethnic and political demands of the Bodos. Coupled with the realization and the shaky leadership of the PTCA activists, the Bodos handed over the responsibility of the movement to the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) to mobilize the masses behind its

ideology of a separate state. When Upendra Nath Brahma became the president of ABSU in 1986, the Bodo movement for political autonomy entered into new height of prominence and acquired new dimensions with exercise of civil hegemony over large section of Bodo masses.²⁸ The ABSU movement from 1987 especially showed that the entire movement was directed against Assamese hegemony and anti-tribal attitude of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government. The redefining of Assamese identity began with the commencement of the ABSU movement in 1987 when the young and dynamic student leadership of ABSU asserted themselves as distinct ethno-linguistic community and tried to reverse Assamese formation and that could be considered as one of the most glaring impact of Bodo movement.²⁹ According to them the inherent intension of the Assamese intelligentsia was to Assamise, assimilate and dominate the non-Assamese people whether they were indigenous or outsider but those who lived in Assam. Their definite viewpoint was that Bodo speaking people could not be Assamese.³⁰

The Bodos considered themselves as part of the Assamese identity till the 1980s and they never rejected Assamese as one of their own languages. Many Bodo students continued their studies through Assamese medium even though Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction in 1963. Though they demanded separate autonomous region along with other plains tribes known as *Udayachal* under the guiding force of PTCA comprising all the tribal belts and blocks of Assam, yet, that demand was also the result of the Union Government's decision to reorganize Assam on federal lines where they never resorted to any unconstitutional and undemocratic means to achieve their goal and the movement had died down soon.³¹ The Bodos had supported the Assam Movement for Assamese cause during its initial stage but the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) resulted in the withdrawal of Bodo support and the Bodo leaders completely dissociated themselves with the mainstream Assamese leadership.

As the influx of immigrants in the post-independence era, especially after creation of Bangladesh, placed increasing strain on the limited resources and employment opportunities and radically changed the demographic composition of Assam, finding no alternative to save Assam from this menace the Assamese people had to start movement against them. However, during the Assam Movement on foreign national issue both non-tribal and tribal segments of Assamese society stood together across class and caste lines. This unity did not last long and soon the Bodos withdrew their support from the

movement. Their dismay grew along with the signing of the Assam Accord. The Assam movement reinforced Assamese middle class's desire for policies that would protect Assamese cultural identity. The AGP Government ushered in a new wave of enforcement of the domination of Assamese language in schools, universities, administrative offices and communication systems to demonstrate that the Assamese were the effective masters in their own house.³² In doing so they paid little attention to the sentiments and fears of other linguistic groups. Different tribal communities of Brahmaputra valley and perhaps even a few hill tribes like the Karbis and Dimasas, in the natural course of events, would have probably integrated themselves with the Assamese identity but, the forceful imposition of the Assamese language created a sense of identity crisis among them and the process of construction as well as assertion of distinct identities gained momentum among them. According to U Mishra³³ the Assamese overzealousness in protecting their language has alienated the tribal communities of the Brahmaputra valley. For the same reason the Bodos started disowning themselves from the Assamese identity. In addition, the new Assamese leadership, politically secure, also tried to convert this security into economic security of their community and to a certain extent they neglected the interests of tribal population. In fact, in the process of forming Assamese community, the Assamese political leadership never attempted to bring together the exclusive ethnic formation within them.³⁴ Instead, they took it for granted that all sections would accept to be part of Assamese identity and culture since they had adopted Assamese as one of their own languages. Therefore, the efforts and attempts of Assamese leaders to equate the territorial identity of multi-ethnic Assam with the ethno-linguistic identity of Assamese speaking people of Brahmaputra valley led to assertion of a distinct Bodo identity.³⁵

The Assam Accord consisted of two controversial clauses- 6 and 10. The Clause 6 of the Assam Accord especially created a mind of apprehension to the Bodo leaders that promised constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.³⁶ The Bodo leaders feared that the Clause might give legitimacy to the imposition of Assamese language and culture on them and that apprehension resulted in believing that without a separate state their language identity would soon become extinct. That state of mind ultimately led to the starting of a vigorous mass movement for a creation of separate state during the first tenure of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government spearheaded by All Bodo Student' Union (ABSU) and later actively joined by the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC).³⁷ The ABSU led movement for a separate statehood

was later on given a new nomenclature as *Bodoland movement* which began on 2nd March, 1987 and lasted for a period of six years.³⁸ The Bodoland movement during its course of agitation and up till the BAC, 1993 and BTC Accord, 2003 produced a considerable degree of positive and negative impacts on socio-economic, cultural and political spheres of the Bodos in particular and the entire Assam in general.

The signing of the BAC Accord on 20 February 1993 may be considered as the first major political impact of the Bodo movement. As a result of the six years long Bodoland movement, several rounds of talks held between the Government and the Bodo leaders but remained fruitless and inconclusive. The Bodo leaders remained adamant on the number of villages to be included in the proposed BAC. The ABSU kept on demanding additional 209 more villages along with 1035 other villages which had no tribal population according to the Government.³⁹ 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 but the villages without any tribal population and also not falling within the compact areas must be excluded to constitute the territory for the Bodos. The proposal of the Assam Government was rejected by ABSU-BPAC representatives.⁴⁰ 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 the Bodo problem into a point of positive solution. Rajesh Pilot came to Guwahati to sort out the differences and also to get the State Government's approval.⁴¹

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. Under the memorandum of settlement, the Autonomous Council would comprise about 2000 villages and 25 tea gardens from *Sankosh river* to *Majbat Pasnoi* in North bank of the Brahmaputra. The Council would have forty members-35 elected and five nominated by the Governor.⁴² Hence, under the leadership of ABSU-BPAC the six years long agitation for a separate state 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.

One of the notable impacts of the Bodo movement was also observed on the reactions and sentiments expressed by the other non-Bodo communities especially the

Koch-Rajvanshis right after the signing of the BAC Accord. There arose a vehement opposition by the non-tribal population of the proposed Bodoland Autonomous Council with regards to the demarcation of the boundary. Several non-tribal groups of population from the proposed Bodoland territory submitted several memoranda to the Government of Assam even during the period of dialogue between the ABSU-BPAC leaders and the Government of India and Assam opposing formation of separate Bodoland or in the alternative not to include their localities in the proposed Bodoland territory. The public sentiment to oppose the formation of Bodoland had skillfully utilized by the AGP Government.⁴³

The Government of Assam issued a notification on 10 December, 1993, demarcating the boundary of 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 two thousand five hundred seventy 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.⁴⁴ Apart from the villages with fifty per cent tribal populations, villages with less than fifty per cent tribal population also were included to maintain the contiguity of BAC. Twenty five tea gardens and Reserved Forests, subject to the guidelines laid down by the Central Government, were also included in the BAC.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), CPI (M), National Trade Union Congress (NTUC), 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 NTUC (Assam branch) and the ACMS directed their criticism at the inclusion of twenty five tea gardens within the BAC territory.⁴⁷ 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 people should be in the Scheduled Tribes list as they were in large numbers working in the Assam tea gardens.⁴⁸

All Assam Koch-Rajvanshi Kshatriya 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 eighteen lakh people of whom twelve lakh belonged to the Koch Rajvanshi community. He alleged that their fate had been placed at the mercy of the Bodo people.⁴⁹ 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, 1992.⁵⁰ 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 was with the Government of India in other areas, the Bodo Accord vested the power in case of the BAC area to the Council authority which created apprehension among the Koch-Rajvanshis about their future.⁵¹

The BAC Accord, however, faced strong opposition from the Bodo people themselves and the militant activities especially of two outfits *i.e.* BLT and NDFB reached new heights after 1993. The BTC enthusiasm began to disappear fairly very soon because the Bodos soon realized the futility of the kind of autonomy they had been endowed with which included neither in the 5th nor in the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.⁵² The lacked of sufficient power, mutual disagreement on boundary demarcation coupled with non-implementation of the major clauses of the Accord ultimately not only let loose ethnic violence on a great scale but also created a favourable situation for rejection of BAC and revival of another movement for Bodoland.⁵³ One of the outstanding impacts of the six year Bodoland movement was the emergence of a serious dispute between the signatories of the Accord over the territorial jurisdiction of the BAC. Sansuma Khungur Bwisumuthiary, the Chief of Bodoland Executive Council (BEC) resigned from his post protesting against the non-inclusion of additional five hundred villages in BAC area. Prem Singh Brahma, the former Chief of the ABSU Volunteer Force during the six years Bodoland movement immediately became the new Chief of BAC. The result was the division of ABSU into two sections- the Sansuma group and the group led by Prem Singh Brahma.⁵⁴

Another significant impact of the six years Bodoland movement was the strong emergence of Boro Security Force (BdSF or BrSF or BSF) which gained upper hand in the later stages of the Bodo movement. The BSF was formed on October 3, 1986 at

Odalkhasibari village in the Darrang district. It was the brain child of Ranjan Daimary, who had earlier formed the Young Bodo Nationalist Association (YBNA) in 1983 that became defunct a couple of years later.⁵⁵ The BSF militants denounced the Accord straight away as they were opposed to anything short of a sovereign Bodo state. So the strongest reaction against the signing of the Accord was received from none other than the Bodoland Security Force. While the Bodo Sahitya Sabha hailed the Accord, the BSF marred the session held by the BSS immediately after the historic Bodoland Accord was signed. They opposed the accord as it did not meet all the objectives for which the movement was geared.⁵⁶ They gave a reminder that the Bodos who fought for Roman alphabet for the Bodo language, would continue to fight until the final goal was reached. They also opposed the accord because the BAC area map did not cover Sonitpur, Dhemaji, and Lakhimpur districts land populated by the Bodos. They accused the ABSU-BPAC leaders for signing such an Accord and they declared that they were determined and up in the arms to liberate the Bodo populated areas-for, nothing short of a sovereign Bodoland could satisfy them. By that they mean that the movement would continue.⁵⁷

However, the accord was welcomed by various political and non-political organizations which wanted any form of a positive solution to the Bodo issue so as to establish peace and tranquility in the state. Among them were the Bodoland Legislative Party, the Assam Pradesh Congress (I) Committee, CPI, United Minorities Front, Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Janata Dal, CPI (M), Congress (S), BJP, URMCA, NAGP, IPF, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Mishing Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Karbi-Anglong Students' Union, Rabha Students' Union, Minority Students' Union, Nepali Students' Union, Adivasi Council, Mishing National Congress, Mishing Sangram Parishad and All Cachar-Karimganj Students' Association.⁵⁸ But very soon all the high hopes were belied 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 Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).⁵⁹ In their attempt to achieve their prospective autonomous goal, large-scale attacks were carried out against other ethnic groups which displaced thousands of people including Bodos. Fratricidal killings continued when another Bodo outfit National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) raised its nasty head and extortion, killing, burning of entire villages became regular feature in BAC areas.⁶⁰

The BLT was formed on June 18, 1996 and the demand for statehood was revived. The leading organizations of Bodos like ABSU-BPAC also denounced the BAC and revived the statehood movement. Suddenly the Bodo region was thrown into a quagmire of violence again. By July 1999, the BLT declared a unilateral cease-fire in response to the centre's appeal for peace. Finally, on October 2, 2001, the BLT abandoned its demand for a separate state and settled for a Bodo Territorial Council.⁶¹ A fresh agreement was reached on February 10, 2003 between the Central Government, the Assam Government and the BLT for a durable solution of the Bodo issue. In pursuance of the Accord, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) became a permanent feature under the Sixth Schedule.⁶² The All Bodo Students' Union also for the time being gave up the demand for a separate state. ABSU also decided to convince the 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.⁶³

As a result of the BTC Accord, the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) was disbanded and its cadres were to be rehabilitated through government jobs and self-employment schemes. On August, 2003, the BTC Bill was tabled in Lok Sabha and with the passing of BTC Bill the road of autonomy was opened for the Bodos which provided greater autonomy under the Sixth Schedule. Intended specifically for the hills tribals, it was amended to accommodate the Bodos who are a plains tribe but according to the opposition groups of the BTC Accord, it had sharply polarized the Bodos and non-tribals who felt they had been reduced to second class citizens and no constitutional safeguard was provided to them in the Accord. The BLT, which clinched autonomy, refused to involve the Sanmilito Janagoshtiyo Sangram Samity (SJSS)- an apex body of Non-Bodo groups- in negotiation.⁶⁴ The immediate impact of the signing of the BTC Accord appeared in the form of a mass protests against the BTC Bill called by the Sanmilito Janagoshtiyo Sangram Samity. A statement signed by SJSS's Deputy Convener, Brajen Mahanta, SJSS Convener and All Assam Adivasi Students' Association President, Justin Lakra and President of Koch-Rajvanshi Yuva Chatra Sanmilan, Tridip Pati Singha, UMRCA 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.⁶⁵ Though there was a high expectation with the creation of BTC that the decade long violence would eventually come to an end, yet, the new Accord left various opposing elements

outside its fold creating misunderstanding and discontentment among some section of non-tribals. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) could not be brought to terms while various communities like the Adivasis, Koch-Rajvanshis resented the new arrangement.⁶⁶ But, at last a meaningful and satisfactory solution to the Bodo problem had been achieved in the form of BTC which was a Central Act having more executive and legislative powers that satisfied majority sections of Bodo population and the inclusive welfare of the non-tribal population would be in the hands of BTC rulers who promised prior to the negotiation that BTC would be for the development of all the communities.

Another important impact created by the Bodo movement was that after the creation of BAC and BTC for the Bodos living in the North bank of Brahmaputra threw rays of hope for the other tribal communities who had already began the movement for autonomy and also for those who intend to initiate a movement to achieve the same.⁶⁷ After the BAC Accord was signed, though not Central Act like BTC, several negotiations were arrived at and the like of Mishing Autonomous Council, Rabha-Hasong Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council etc. had come up. The people of these councils never had to shed any blood to achieve their autonomy like the Bodos did and therefore to a considerable extent it was due to the impact of Bodo movement that the Government finally realized to empower certain amount of autonomy to the indigenous tribals for their overall development and survival as distinct communities, though, needless to say, these autonomy arrangements were not at all enough for their overall security and upliftment.⁶⁸ As the Bodo movement and its eventual negotiations fuelled up the political aspirations of all the ethnic tribal communities of Assam including those who merged themselves with the mainstream caste-Hindu Assamese culture, as a matter of fact spates of students' unions, Sahitya sabhas (literary organizations) and autonomy demand councils or committees and even liberation fronts of various tribals communities, some functioning and some others non-functioning, had been coming up of late all over Assam.⁶⁹ Moreover, the development of formation of various apparently militant organizations with the avowed aim of integrating the activities of all tribal bodies of Assam and uniting them under one umbrella organization also reported from time to time, such as the Tribal People's Front (TPF) and Tribal Integration Force of Assam (TIFA).⁷⁰ One of the outlining impacts of the of the Bodo movement could also be observed with regards to the distinct identity assertion by some of the indigenous tribal communities trying to free themselves socio-culturally and linguistically from the caste-

Hindu Assamese community. Prior to the Bodo movement, many tribes of Assam were being culturally and linguistically assimilated and became part of Assamese society and religion but of late the trend was reversed. Many tribes now began asserting themselves as a distinct community trying to develop and safeguard their own language, custom, tradition and culture. Today, they like to be identified themselves as a distinct community of Assam and not as Assamese.⁷¹

There were also many socio-economic and cultural impacts of the Bodo movements but only a few outlining impacts that had given a new form to the present Bodo socio-cultural milieu which developed during and in the immediate aftermath of the Bodo movement would be highlighted. The emergence of middle class in Bodo society and their socio-economic and political hegemony was one of the outlining impacts of the Bodo movement.⁷² With the expansion of modern education and increased scope of jobs in government establishments, the traditional bound Bodo society became pregnant of an untraditional segment, the middle class. Eventually, this very middle class of people, though small in number, played a pioneering role in unfolding, consolidating and then spreading an identity consciousness among the members of the Bodo society like any other similar communities of the tribals of North-East. Their self-determination aspiration with the progress of the movement therefore provoked them to grasp some political power which, as they firmly believed, would meet their aspirations.⁷³

During and after the Bodo movements, not all Bodos were clinging to their traditional means of livelihood i.e. agriculture alone and that was partly because there were large scale awareness programmes carried out by the movement leaders to venture out for other means of economic activities. Compel by the competing situations of survival and some inspired by the vision of the movement to build human resource, many educated Bodo youth ventured out in search of other avenues and opportunities for earning livelihood to acquire a decent standard of livelihood in equal putting with other advanced communities.⁷⁴ They started to join services in Government departments, public sectors and private sectors, and also launching professional and business careers. It resulted in the increase of an educated and affluent middle class in the Bodo society where even in the recent past there was no such class. The ever growing middle class of the Bodo people were becoming not only more and more self-confident and conscious of their rights and privileges but also ready to fight for such rights and privileges. They were also the most vocal and active supporters of all kinds of regional agitations and

movements, overground or underground.⁷⁵ They also became the most immediate beneficiaries of any success in these movements. The politicians, the bureaucrats and the contractor-businessmen were the persons who became the most immediate beneficiaries of any new arrangement of autonomous administration. They all belonged to that middle class and the common classes of people hardly had any chance of reaching out to the benefits provided by the new political arrangements like the autonomous councils.⁷⁶ As such middle class kept on growing in size their aspiration also kept on growing. So also grew their demand for the extent of autonomy and the recent situation of the Bodos was the living example as they again revived the movement for a separate state insisting that the creation of BTC was not their ultimate objective as it would never be able to satisfy the genuine aspiration of the Bodo people and therefore the Bodoland state would be attained by any means for overall security of the Bodo community.⁷⁷ Thus, the movement for the demand of a separate state of Bodoland is going on even today under the leadership of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU).

The main theme in Bodo cultural politics was to repudiate the process of unequal assimilation into the Assamese sub-national formation and to seek differentiation with them as well as to achieve equality and respectability with the ethnic Assamese. Many Bodos of recent generation, especially of the youths, started speaking only Bodo language and prefer not to speak Assamese. There was also a growing preference for Bodo names for people and places.⁷⁸ Another important impact of the Bodo movement was the Bodo cultural revival that helped in popularizing the learning to their pristine culture which could be noticed in their religious practices, death rituals, food habits, preferences for Bodo names, choices of traditional attires, music and musical instruments, dances, fine arts, revival of traditional games and above all, a sense of pride and self-respect for their all national belongings.⁷⁹ Prior to the Bodo movement, it was clearly observed that the Bodos faced identity crisis. They almost lost their self-pride and self-esteem. Many of the Bodos abandoned their own culture, social norms and traditions. They had become religiously messed up, economically unstable, socially broken up, culturally low and their traditional practices were looked down upon. Many had stopped even to speak their own language and totally detached themselves from the Bodo way of living. But the movement initiated by them more or less brought back their national pride and identity.⁸⁰ Today, the Bodos living in different parts of the state even those who cannot speak Bodo language yet, never shy away identifying themselves as Bodos. The Bodos, those who had forgotten their language, the trend began now for

learning their mother language and cultural traditions. Bodo medium venture schools are being opened up in many districts outside the BTC regions. BTC government as well as Bodo nationalist organizations like BSS and ABSU time to time sponsored programmes and workshops of educationists and expert Bodo cultural troops to the different Bodo inhabited districts to train and impart not only Bodo language, music and dance but also to inculcate Bodo national sentiments to unite the Bodos of every nook and corner of Assam.⁸¹ In recent times, many Bodo organizations have successfully built up contact and relationship with the Bodos inhabiting in the states like Bengal, Nagaland, Meghalaya etc. and they have even built up a warmth and cordial association with their brethren of foreign countries like Nepal, Bangladesh etc.⁸²

At present, it seems that establishing a distinct identity is more important than anything else for the Bodos. As long as the term Assamese means all indigenous people and Indian citizens living within geographic boundary of Assam, the Bodos seemed to have no objection to be called Assamese but in the sense of the speaker of the language they objected to be called Assamese which could be seen as a new development that the Assamese today have to digest with a grain of salt.⁸³ The Bodos achieved a new height of identity consciousness due to the Bodo movement and also brought about a new definition to the Assamese identity. The identity of Assamese could no longer be regarded as a monolithic identity. The linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class severely affected the natural process of assimilation of different ethnic groups into emerging Assamese nationality. In actual fact the Bodos clearly rejected being part of it. Following the Bodos, other tribes also began expressing their desires to protect and preserve their own identities. In reality, the Assamese nationality formation came to a halt due to Bodo contestation of Assamese community formation through their movements in different stages.⁸⁴

Another outlining impact of the Bodo Movement could be observed especially in the aftermath of the BAC and BTC Accords that cropped up as a result of the movements has been the structure of social relationship in terms of power manipulation and level of distribution of resources. The BAC that came into being after a long movement for separate state could not do much to improve the condition of the grass root people. As a result it had increased the economic differences between rich and the poor.⁸⁵

The Assam Government and Assamese people were alleged and blamed for the backwardness of the Bodos. Now, though not enough, the power is in the hands of the

Bodo leaders and the way the present situation is developing in the BTC region factually well-fitted to be concluded in the words of M.N. Kama⁸⁵ who, observing the general trend of the present agrarian situation as well as economic conditions of the tribes in the North East stated that the nature of development strategy have transformed the structure of social relationship in the region. Increasing control of communal property by individuals, the growing importance of individual ownership of land and the widening network of economic relationship have started eroding the traditional egalitarian system of distribution and exchange. The growing internal differentiation has led to the emergence of class like groupings which are questioning the virtues of reciprocity and obligatory relationship. The stronger groups and individuals among them are now completely engrossed in pocketing maximum benefits from both the traditional customary systems and the governmental programmes. In addition, under the prevailing political environment they also unleash forces that generate tension and conflict.⁸⁶

Thus, the development of these situations again sparked off the Bodoland movement because the common people are yet to get their due share of inclusive development. Eventhough the Bodos gained some sort political and economic powers through the BTC Accord that eventually came to be seized by a few beneficiaries only, majority of them remained backward and neglected as they were before the movements. The fact is that the privileged section remained very much indifferent to the real problem of the masses. As the Bodoland movement is on, so the question remains as in what way or how the Bodo leaders and power holders would lead the Bodos and other communities if they happen to negotiate and bring a new political arrangement again. Let us hope for the permanent and durable solution to the Bodo problems in the near future which could wholly meet the aspirations of the Bodo people in particular and the whole communities of the Bodoland areas in general.

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