

CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

The Bodo movements certainly started as a movement for socio-economic and cultural regeneration that ultimately turned into movement for political rights clearly fall under the tribal movement category of social movement emerged due to the structural changes in the society as well as feeling of relative deprivation which is one of the typology of theoretical approach of social movement. There are different types of social movements and tribal movement is one of them. The Bodo movement is tribal movement not only because Bodos are constitutionally categorized as scheduled tribe for certain basic features of tribal way of life inherent in them but also for the reasons that like any other tribal movements elsewhere in India the Bodos also have similar issues and encountered the same either one or the other problems ranging from encroachment, immigration, land alienation, conversion and assimilation, identity crisis, language and script issues, backwardness, illiteracy, insecurity, political crisis and so on.

The Bodos, like other Indian tribals have been in general a peace loving people. The Bodos and other tribals of India, as witnessed, in most cases, traditionally lived in their ancestral habitat dependant on nature, and having meager wants, they were complacent with their life. Even when there were intrusions in their areas and exploitation by outsiders, they were slow to react. However, as and when the atrocities of the money-lenders, the confiscation of their lands by any other highhandedness agents of the government reached unbearable heights they reacted, at times violently.

Social changes as well as socio-political movements of the Bodos are recent phenomena. The Bodo Society had always been static and buried under the primitive age old traditions as simple as it was only to run the compact religious, socio-economy and cultural milieu of the undemanding peaceful village population. They remained backward

in every sphere of human developments in pre and post independent period. But by the beginning of the 20th century they had suddenly began to assert socially and politically. A gradual change in their outlook appeared in the perception of their miserable and pathetic socio-economic background.

The Bodo movement was basically the product of Socio-political change among the Bodos which led to the identity articulation. As the Bodos had their own kingdoms in different chronological periods in the Brahmaputra valley and beyond, their last kingdom was seized by the British in 1854. During the Colonial rule up to the early part of 20th century the Bodos remained socio-economically very backward. The economic backwardness and exploitation, the influx or immigration problem, land alienation, identity crisis, linguistic and cultural assimilation policies, political domination by the ruling clique etc. made the Bodos to rise from the suppression and oppression which eventually created favourable atmosphere for social and political movements and as such the Bodoland Movement became the testimony which was not emerged out of a vacuum but through a process of long series socio-economic and political changes and upheavals among the Bodos.

The Bodos-Kacharis, the plains tribals as an ethnic groups display a distinct cultural and demographic position in Assam Valley of North Eastern India. Despite their comparative insulation they have maintained a unique place in the Indian history and civilization since time immemorial. The Bodos of the Assam plains like the tribals of elsewhere India suffered the same agony of destitution, poverty, hardship and misery even though they had a flourishing dynasties in various historical periods. To begin with, like any other tribal regions of India, the British colonial rule initiated the early phase of destruction by exploiting the socio-economic resources of the plain tribals; followed by their agents, their petty administrative officials, traders, moneylenders who in different ways oppressed and suppressed the simple and illiterate plains tribals of the region and compelled them to scattered around and split over into various pockets of the Brahmaputra Valley bringing them into abject poverty stripping them off their ancestral lands and habitats. Next was the ultimate legal sanction provided by the successive Governments' policies during British regime as well as by the post-independence rulers to the encroachers, immigrant labourers and outsiders to settle down and snatch off the tribal lands made them so miserable and pathetic that in their own soil of origin they became landless wanderer.

Assam is a land of diversity and home of diverse ethnic groups. The culture, language and customs of ethnic groups contributed considerably over the centuries to the growth and development of a composite Assamese society through a process of socio-cultural fusion. Independence made Assamese the dominant group in socio-economic and political sphere of Assam. Therefore, the Assamese tried to safeguard this social space by imposition of Assamese language on its diverse people and in that process gave rise to political conflicts around identities in Assam. In the years following independence, Assam had witnessed a number of identity movements including Bodo identity assertion. The Bodo leadership emerged at that point of time was no exception to that idea of feelings and eventually developed a strong sense of alienation in the light of their socio-economic and political backwardness and deprivation for which they held the high class Assamese Brahmin ruling group responsible. Vastly apprehensive of losing their identity by the aggressive assimilating policy of Assamese ruling class, the educated Bodo middle class began mobilizing themselves in the form of different organizations to protect their community which played crucial and determining role in the Bodo identity formation and in the articulation of nationalist sentiment. The Bodo movement did not emerge out of a vacuum. It was the product of a long historical process of identity formation among the Bodos that started in the colonial period and became gradually assertive in the post-independence period. The twentieth century brought about some momentous changes in the collective life of the Bodos. The spread of education led to the emergence of a small number of Bodo elite class which felt the need to reform the Bodo society to save it from complete extinction and from caste-Hindu domination.

The genesis of socio-political consciousness and identity articulation among the Bodos may be traced back to the socio-economic and religious reformation movement initiated by Kalicharan Brahma in the early part of 20th century. In the ancient and medieval period and up till the annexation of Kachari kingdom by the British in 1932, the Bodos had been playing an important role in the political, cultural and socio-economic spheres of north east India as evident by the existence of their several kingdoms in different periods. Over an extensive period of centuries spanning from ancient times to till the advent of colonial rule in the Brahmaputra valley the Bodos had split up into many a groups and sub-groups and scattered over in a vast area of territory beyond inter-state as well as even across international boundary of present day Indian union of states like Bangladesh and Nepal. So it is obvious that they had gone through a several stages

of transformations owing to their contact, association and intimate social relationship like inter-caste marriages with the other neighbouring communities.

Aryan influence over the Bodos remained confined mostly to the Bodo royalty. Although the process of Hinduization continued till the advent of British in Assam, the masses remained untouched. No attempt was made before the *ek saran* dharma of Sri Sankardev to draw the masses into the pale of Hinduism. But regardless of all these transformations within the Bodo society, they have retained some of their tribal traits, such as, language, culture, religion, etc. which in turn helped them to maintain their ethnic identity.

As there were many factors for the origin of Bodo movement, the socio-economic and political background may be seen as basic determining forces for the occurrences of Bodo movements such as the socio-religious, language and script, autonomy, statehood and separatist movements. The central theme of social basis of the Bodo movement was that the Bodos remained backward in social sphere. In the Assamese society they failed to earn social respectability. The life-style of the Bodos was different from the advanced section of the Assamese Hindus. They used rice-beer, sacrificed birds and animals, reared pigs and so on for they were treated as lower class and untouchable. They could not occupy equal status in the Caste-Hindu dominated Assamese society. Later on, the bulk of the Bodo people of the different parts of Northeast India converted to Hinduism in view of getting social respectability or equal status in the society, leaving their language, culture, dress, religion and so on.

The fact was that they could not occupy social respectability even after their conversion to Hinduism, as they could not dine with them and the Hindus did not receive them into their society. The students of the Bodo community were not allowed to mess together with those of the Hindus. They were Hindu only in name. They remained as low class citizens of the state. Nevertheless, the Bodos could not shut themselves out of the cultural configuration that prevailed during the British rule. The emerging Bodo elite therefore took up the challenge to uplift their community through comparative antagonistic feeling targeting the caste Hindu Assamese hegemony as their main hurdle in their way of development.

Christianity brought new life and vitality to the Bodo people. The education that the missionaries imparted had a lot to do with the formation of a national consciousness which helped them to understand their genius and ethos. The activities of missionaries

directly or indirectly freed the indigenous people from certain superstitious beliefs and practices. The missionaries' contribution in the field of education cannot be underestimated. They erected schools and imparted education in backward Boro areas, when there were hardly any institutions even in the, so called, developing Bodo areas. The contribution of the missionaries to the Bodo language and literature is worth-mentioning. They showed a new direction to the already disintegrating Boro language in the early part of 20th century. The missionaries penetrated into such interior place where no government's welfare measures had ever reached.

Similar or perhaps more effective contribution towards emancipating the Bodos from the darkness and arousing a common sentiment of Bodo nation building was made by a simple man of extra-ordinary caliber popularly known as Gurudev Kalicharan who brought about a remarkable change with regards to socio-economic, religious and political outlook of the Bodos and paved the way for national awakening. Though the impact of his religious preaching was less commanding, yet, Kalicharan Brahma, by that time, had already created a bunch of dedicated and committed enlightened group of social workers who in the immediate future would be leading the Boro community towards certain level of development which had never happened in the history of the Bodos before and herein lies the crucial contribution of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.

The economic cause of the Bodo movement was initiated by the British occupation of the Brahmaputra valley that brought about a sweeping change in every walk of life of the people of this region. In order to serve their interests as well as to suit their style of administration, the colonial power in the valley introduced a new legal system, new settings of revenue administration and new courts of British Laws. The illiterate and economically backward tribals failed to take advantage of the new avenues created by the British administration. Further, the Brahmaputra valley witnessed an unprecedented flow of thousands of land hungry immigrants from the different regions of British India due to the opening up of new transport and communication network and most of them were transported by the British officials themselves who in order to engage these immigrants in the newly explored coal, iron and oil mines as well as to employ them in the ever expanding tea plantation areas and industries which created huge demographic imbalance of the valley. The ultimate consequence of this immigrant population was so profoundly damaging and irreparable that even today all the indigenous people of the state, mostly the tribals are immeasurably suffering from the

brunt of these outsiders. These flocks of immigrants compelled the tribal people to migrate into the deep jungles abandoning their ancestral lands and habitations and the land alienation of the Bodo masses started thereof.

As the economic conditions of the Bodos were very backward and fully underdeveloped during the British regime as well as even in the post independent period, they remained very poor and led a life of abject poverty. During the British period, they had fallen into general indebtedness because of their low per capita landholding, lack of modern scientific method of agriculture, lack of infrastructural facilities and proactive government aids, certain traditional practices or habits like excessive brewing and consumption of rice beer etc. The process of depeasantisation also pauperized thousands of tribal peasants who were forced to work at low wages in the tea plantations of Assam. They were the victims of money-lenders, traders, merchants who usurped their lands through various illegal procedures. Illiteracy and ignorance of the Bodos were being extensively exploited. They had not been given proper safeguard. Money-lenders squeezed them with high rates of interest. Enhancement of taxes on lands periodically without considering the poor peasants' well-being, given them a feeling of deprivation.

In the post independent period, the number of educated Bodo youth considerably increased and their level of consciousness became widespread day by day with regards to their individual status as well as realization of their community's dismal condition that was being emotionally perceived as crucial issues by them and therefore they began to closely attached these issues to their thoughts, feelings and psyches ready to face any kind of eventuality to solve them. They became aware of the fact that most of their grievances remained unsolved and the government took only a meager initiative to address their problems which were not at all enough even to a little extent to protect and preserve their identity, culture, language and socio-economic and political interests. As a result, in the post independent period too, the problems of land alienation, poverty, indebtedness, severe unemployment, economic exploitation and cultural and political neglect became increasingly acute among them. The schemes of Tribal Sub-Plan, the Tribal Development Corporation, Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal Development Project, Welfare of Schedule Tribes and Backward Classes, Tribal Research Institute etc. meant for the development of the tribals measurably failed to protect the interests of tribals of Assam.

The emerging Bodo educated elite rightly or wrongly began to feel that they were being deprived of their due share of administrative jobs and other privileges. As such, they remained backward socially, economically and even politically. Hence, the Bodo elite felt that in order to alleviate the Bodo people from the backwardness and enable them to lead a respectful life in the composite Assamese society, the Bodos must have to acquire political power. They must get their due share of power in the administrative affairs of the state. For that, the Bodos must be organized on the basis of their distinct lingo-cultural traits which would help them not only in maintaining distinct identity but also bargain with the ruling elite for sharing power with them. So, one of the major causes of the emergence of Bodo movements especially the identity assertion movements like language, script and literature movements as well as political autonomy movements can be directly attributed to the political aspirations of the educated middle class Bodo elites who combined with their individual ambitions and community development agendas played a very vital role in leading these movements.

Many movements among the tribals in India, though initially started without political motives, yet, majority of them finally appeared to be inclined to political demands. So, the socio-cultural movements of the Bodos also twisting around with different circumstances finally reached to the stage of political movement. Some of the other factors that closely related to the political root of the Bodo movements like language policy of the high caste Assamese Hindu ruling clique, impacts of Assamese nationality formation, lacking of provisions for constitutional safeguards, impacts of AASU movements, insecurity, exploitation, relative deprivation etc. also played major role in molding and arousing Bodo national sentiments and identity formation that led to Bodo movements like the demand for 'Udayachal' or Union Territory. The political factors of Bodo Movements like ambitions for resource manipulation, aims for economic rights and privileges, efforts of nation building and identity articulation, aspiration of power control, protection of rights and demand for equality etc. ultimately guided them to the path of movement for political self-determination.

Social discriminations, alleged superiority complex of the caste-Hindu Assamese and the caste-based social equations gradually started pushing them away from whatever proximity might have been achieved with the core-Assamese society. Gradually the unresolved economic apprehensions started getting a political direction. The atmosphere of neglect and indifference expedited the withdrawal process further. The hurt sentiments

of the middle class realized that without political power, no malady could be remedied and as a result bargaining for political power began. The Assamese middle class never ever had seriously considered of sharing a political power with the tribal elites and they also sincerely never thought of developing any method to solve the grievances and aspirations of the plain tribals. Furthermore, a hegemonic character developed among the Assamese nationalists that grew in stages through the freedom struggle of the country after independence whereby they remained totally devoted to the *theory of complete assimilation* of all ethnic groups and tribal elements with the greater Assamese nationality. The wishes and aspirations of the plains tribes of Assam did not fit in with this policy of the Assamese middle class elites.

Language policy of Assam Government created displeasure and resentment among the tribes including the Bodos but despite all objections, the Assam Government passed the language Bill making Assamese as the sole official language of the state on 24th October, 1960. The ethnic feeling of the Assamese people had by then antagonized the non-Assamese population, and thus separatist tendencies developed among different communities within the State. The decision convinced the Bodos that they could not preserve cultural identity within the political structure headed by the Assamese. Their aspiration was articulated by the Plains Tribal Councils and the BSS who began the demand for an autonomous area for them and thus the political movement of the Bodo people got a fillip with this language issue. The language and script issue was finally solved by the interventions of state and central Governments but the demand for political autonomy of the Bodo gained the ground under the leadership of PTCA. But it ultimately failed to achieve its goal due to selfish interest of the leaders and finally leadership shifted to ABSU which vigorously led the separate state of Bodoland movement for six years which began on 2nd March 1987 and ended with the signing of BAC Accord on 20 February 1993.

The ABSU-BPAC led movement lasted for six years passed through many stages and phases, and marked by prolonged period of *bandhs* (Blockades, closures), disrupting the rail and road links of the entire North Eastern Region. Although its leaders termed the movement peaceful, it resulted in considerable loss of life due to bomb explosions, police action and wanton acts of destruction.

The Bodo leaders again rejected the BAC Accord in the year 1996 terming it mockery in the name of Autonomy which totally failed to fulfill the aspiration of the

Bodo people and ultimately another Bodo Accord was signed in 10th February, 2003 between the Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT), State and Central Government bringing into end the long pending political autonomy demand of the Bodos. The BTC Accord became a central Act under the provision of Sixth Schedule with many important provisions including a centrally funded technical institution, recognition of the Bodo Language under the Eight Schedule of the Constitution besides reviewing of cases pending against the BLT were granted in this new settlement. The ABSU-BPAC did not become signatory and the reasons probably might have been that they would revive the movement in future again if the BTC fail to deliver the expectations and aspirations of the Bodo people. The ABSU again revived their demand for separate Statehood and continuing their agitation for Bodoland state which recently gained momentum by the recent formation of a new state of Telengana bifurcated from the state of Andhra Pradesh.

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. The most important achievement of the language and script of movements led by the BSS had been 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.

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.

One of the outlining impacts of the of the Bodo movement may 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. Many tribes 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.

The emergence of middle class in Bodo society and their socio-economic and political hegemony is one of the outlining impacts of the Bodo movement. 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.

When the momentum of separate state movement was on, a process of reversing Assamese formation and with that disowning Assamese identity gained ground. The Bodos showed a tendency to go back to their pristine culture and way of living which totally changed their perception and outlook of nationality and nation building. The newly developed changing trends which could be observed in their religious practices, customs and rituals, festivals, 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 all their national belongings never ever had exhibited by the Bodos such a distinctiveness from that of the Assamese people prior to the dawn of their movements. As such the identity of Assamese no longer remained as a monolithic identity.

The natural process of assimilation of different ethnic groups into emerging Assamese nationality was severely affected by the linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class which in turn provided a suitable ground for the Bodos who plainly refused to be the part it choosing their own path of identity. Other tribes also began to follow the footstep of the Bodo people and as a result, today, the Assamese nationality formation process has come to a standstill and faced a natural dead.