

CHAPTER - II

AFFINITIES OF OTHER TRIBAL MOVEMENTS OF INDIA WITH BODO MOVEMENTS

The Bodo people, who spread over the whole of Brahmaputra valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid *bloc* in North-eastern India, are the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India.¹ The Bodo-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. In the past, their self-awareness might have been of limited range and depth, but there were numerous instances of their participation in the socio-cultural and political processes. The plains tribals reacted sharply when their economic interests got affected, cultural beliefs scoffed at and their freedom attacked. They got infuriated when their traditional customs and manners were curtailed; their judicial system and their codes were ignored.² 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 the landlords reached unbearable heights they reacted, at times violently, against those established interests who had the backing of the Government. This ultimately, became a fight against the Government or political power which represented the status-quo. At times the tribal movements were also against the social evils like liquor addiction, superstitions etc. During the last hundred years, due to rising awareness in the tribals, the agitations against bonded-labour practices, land

alienation, economic exploitation increased. Leaders from tribals and non-tribals were instrumental for such movements.³

The tribals in India are basically engaged in agricultural and related production. They had a compact economy with tribal forms of property ownership and communal mode of production relations. They were ecologically more or less insulated, geographically concentrated in certain contiguous areas, economically wedded to land and forest, culturally enjoyed a distinct style of life, with distinct language heritage, love for freedom, and respect of self identity. They revolted more often and far more violently than any other community in India when the colonialism bore harshly on them.⁴ There seem to be less socio-economic differentiations within a tribal community than among caste-Hindu peasants; and their community consciousness is strong. While the peasant movements tend to remain purely agrarian as peasants lived off land, the tribal movements were both agrarian and forest based, because the tribals' dependence on forests was as crucial as their dependence on land. There was also the ethnic factor. The tribal revolts were directed against *zamindars*, moneylenders and petty government officials not because they exploited them but also because they were aliens.⁵

In anthropological term, a tribe is a social group the members of which lives in a common territory, have a common dialect, uniform social organization and possess cultural homogeneity having a common ancestor, political organization and religious pattern. However, possibly it would be very hard to find many tribal groups in India who possess all these characteristics. The classification of tribal population in India is rather complex and difficult. Moreover, recognition of new communities as scheduled tribes also influenced the total tribal population. Roy Burman in 1971 noted 427 tribal communities in India.⁶ The Anthropological Survey noted 314 communities in 1967. The number of scheduled tribes was 212 in 1950 and Danda noted in 1973 that out of 642 communities identified, data on 32 tribes are lacking and in 226 cases, they are mostly sub-tribes.⁷ According to the 1981 Census, the tribal population of India comprising 427 communities was 51,628,638 constituting 7.76 per cent of India's total population.⁸ However, ethnographic data on a number of tribal communities are lacking. Many of the large tribal communities are scattered and circulated in a wide region and usually profess to different occupations. Again, a few tribal groups are divided into a number of sub-groups which are practically distinct tribal groups. Besides these, the scheduling of tribes has also created a problem as in many cases; a tribe may be scheduled in one state and

not so in another state⁹ or even within the state so as the case with Bodo-Kacharis living in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam.

There are variations in tribal movements from region to region. In the Northeast, the tribals are in an overwhelming majority; the tribal system, both social and economic, is relatively secure excluding Assam plains and Tripura where, like elsewhere in India, the immigration and encroachment issues are creating unrest and tension. Tribal movements in this area have been essentially political and secular in nature. As against this, the situation is far more complex in middle India. The tribals have been reduced to a minority in many areas, and have been exposed to the process of rapid change. Industrialization has come about in a big way; the centers of industrial development have shifted from the coastal and metropolitan pockets to the tribal regions. Agrarian issues have also been in the forefront. Therefore, the tribal movements in this region have developed an essentially agrarian character, even while the tribes have emphasized ethnicity and articulated demands of a political nature. There are no agrarian movements in the northeast except in Tripura.¹⁰

Tribal movements are not a new development in our country and have their origin in the Colonial Raj. Since then tribal movements have taken varied types, forms and dimensions in various pockets of the country. In the past the articulation of movements were different and were mostly in the form of out-burst, depredations, uprisings, or raids and these were described as incidents or episodes as their character could not be ascertained. But they may be characterized as movements as they are an integral part of social system.¹¹ The basic forces underlying these movements were more economic and ethnic. These movements were regarded as attempts on the part of a group to effect changes in the face of resistance. During the course, the movement became more political in articulation, and the political culture became a strategy of the movement or consequences of the various forces rather than a determining factor. Of course, the tribal movements do have, invariably, political implications in the social system.¹²

Many scholars have developed different typologies of tribal movements. Mahapatra¹³ applies the typologies widely used for social movements to tribal movements: (1) reactionary; (2) conservative; (3) revisionary or revolutionary. The reactionary movement tries to launch a movement to bring back the good old days, whereas the conservative movement tries to maintain the status-quo. The movements that are organized for improvement or purification of the cultural or social order by

eliminating evil or low customs, beliefs or institutions are called revisionary or revolutionary movements. Surajit Sinha¹⁴ classifies the movements into: (1) ethnic rebellion; (2) reform movements; (3) political autonomy movements within the Indian Union; (4) secessionist movements; and (5) agrarian unrest. K.S. Singh¹⁵ makes more or less the same classification except that he uses the terms Sanskritization instead of reform movement and cultural movements instead of ethnic movements. S.M. Dubey¹⁶ divides the tribal movements in Northeast India into four categories: (1) religious and social reform movements; (2) movements for separate statehood; (3) insurgent movements; (4) cultural rights movements. There is no substantial difference among the scholars who use different typologies. Mahapatra excludes political movements whereas others do not. These typologies do not include the recent movements around the issues of forest rights and environment, and displacement of the tribals due to development programmes of the state and the market. K.S. Singh¹⁷ observes that in recent years with the rise of the international movement of indigenous people in the post-modernist phase, the focus has shifted to self-determination or self-management of the resources, identity, and ethnicity. The environmental movement has focused on communities *in situ*, their relationship to resources, their rapport with nature, their world-view. Therefore with the growing concern for environment, particularly bio-diversity, pluralism, ethnicity, and identity - all are now interrelated - the tribal movements are assuming a new character. They are all now becoming more and more identity-based movements, with various issues concerning control over resources etc. being considered as ramifications of this central issue.

Summing up the different typologies of the tribal movements, Ghanashyam Shah¹⁸ classifies the tribal movements in India as follows: (1) ethnic movements which include culture/religion identity; (2) agrarian and forest rights movements; (3) environmental movements (4) involuntary displacement and rehabilitation movements; and (5) political movements around the nationality question for a separate state. He also says that there is not only a great deal of overlapping among all five types, but they are also inter-connected, and one leads to the other.

K.S. Singh¹⁹ divides the tribal movements in India in pre-independence period into three phases. The first phase was between 1795 and 1860. It coincided with the rise, expansion and establishment of the British Empire. The second phase covers the period between 1860 and 1920. It coincided with the intensive phase of colonialism, during which merchant capital penetrated into tribal economy affecting their relationship with

the land and forest. The third phase covers the period from 1920 till the achievement of independence in 1947. During this phase the tribals not only began to launch the so-called separatist movements, but at the same time participated in nationalist and agrarian movements.

Tribal Movements in the Mainland India:

Surajit Sinha²⁰ traces the origin of tribal movements from the time perspective and even points out that during the pre-British period also there were contradictions and conflicts between high-castes Hindu Aryans and the tribals. He says that even though the Aryans evolved stable regional economic and social units in which the relatively isolated and backward ethnic groups (tribes) also found a place in terms of corporate social status and economic and political functions at least at the time of Buddha through a liberal process of Hindu method of Tribal Absorption while assuring cultural autonomy to the newly integrated tribes, ultimately released a cultural process by which the dominated and lowly ranked tribes gradually emulated the cultural pattern of the dominant Hindu upper caste, and this process, on the whole provided the tribes with sufficient economic, social and cultural security so as to generate large-scale rebellion, yet, in spite of this general pattern of harmony the tribes were not without an awareness that they were looked down upon and given a low status.

While the Aryans allowed the residual tribals to pursue their own ways of life in the relatively inaccessible terrain and to gradually evolved patterns of regional synthesis, the British became immediately concerned with establishing a uniform network of law and order throughout their empire. It is well known that the illiterate and economically backward tribals failed to take advantage of the British introduced courts and lost large portions of their land to the non-tribals in various regions. Opening of new channels of communication increased the volume of non-tribal immigration into these regions. Later on opening of mines in these regions further increased the tempo of immigration. Thus the confrontation between the indigenous tribals and the immigrants attained a massive proportion without allowing enough time to evolve a regional cultural synthesis and inter-ethnic moral order. Under such a situation of economic, social and cultural threat a series of tribal revolts took place during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In response to these tribal rebellions the British government, after an initial phase of repression, initiated a series of protective legislations and administrative devices in favour of the groups officially labeled as tribals and very soon tribe as a social category

distinct from the Hindu and the Muslim peasantry crystallized. In the process, while certain areas like Chhotanagpur, Central Provinces (now Madhya Pradesh), etc., continued to have interaction with the non-tribal sections of Indian population, other areas, such as NEFA, Naga Hills District, etc., were virtually cordoned off from contact with Indian civilization.

The spread of the British administration into these areas was closely followed by the coming of the European missionaries. In general the missionaries harped on the social and cultural differences between the Hindus and the tribals and also pointed out that the Hindu civilization was essentially backward, superstition-ridden and oppressive in contrast to the benevolent Christian (European) civilization. Europeans thus appeared as a reference group for the new tribal elite. This was also the period when literacy and formal education spread among a section of the tribals, some of whom moved into jobs as clerks, officers, and teachers and so on. Thus, educated elite class had emerged. This schism between the so called tribals and the non-tribal Hindus was further accentuated by the creation of special tribe constituencies in terms of the India Act of 1935 which laid down the historical basis for forming various tribal associates like Jharkhand Party.²¹

A special feature of the peasant rebellions had been the role of the tribal population. A large number of the peasant uprisings were spearheaded by the tribals – the *Kols*, *Mundas*, *Oraons* and *Santals* of East India, *Bhils* and *Meos* of the North and *Koyas* in South.²² The major tribal communities like the *Santhals*, *Oraons*, *Mundas* and *Hos* had their original homelands in the fertile Gangetic plains and from where they had been pushed into the inaccessible, and wild beast-infested forest areas by the more advanced Indo-Aryans who forcibly occupied the plains and further enriched themselves with their vast pastoral experience, skill and adventure. The successive rulers of the country commencing from the Hindu kings down to the British, looked upon the tribal people as mere curios and object of benevolent amusement and were content with leaving them severely alone. This policy of non-interference was continued by the British rulers till portions of Assam were annexed by them and as a result of which the suspicions of the border tribes were roused. The tribals of Assam who justly apprehended that their freedom, culture and safety were threatened by the British Raj, retaliated effectively and this sparked off several clashes that broke out between the British and the freedom loving tribes of Assam.²³ The tribals were thus the first to bear the brunt of expropriation by the British colonizers, traders and money lenders in league with the feudal landlords. The

tribals believed that unless they resisted with all their might, their freedom and also their culture would be wiped out by the foreigners and non-tribals who had shown no regard for their religious beliefs, their mythological heroes and their cultural traditions. It is this spirit that marked all the uprisings amongst the tribals that broke out in India against the British Government.

Land alienation in the tribal areas had been continuing for the last several decades and in the face of a situation where very large areas of land had passed hands from tribals to non-tribals, it is therefore quite natural for the tribals to feel agitated. Large scale industrial ventures, hydro-electric projects, irrigation dams involve displacement of the tribal land on which he had been completely dependent hitherto. From 1961 to 1981, the percentage of tribal cultivators had gone down from 68.18 percent to 54.43 percent, and the percentage of landless agricultural labourers among tribals had gone up from 19.71 percent to 32.67 percent. All this goes to suggest the process of pauperization among the tribals. Thus, it is no wonder that there had been a feeling of deprivation among the tribals which manifested itself by their joining hands with the leaders of Naxalite movement in the state of West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Tribals generally are denizens of forests and their life style is completely interwoven and dependent on forests. It is only natural in this situation that they would resent introduction of any regulation which curtails their hitherto unlimited access to forests on which they subsist. But the traditional rights of tribals in the forest have been constantly encroached upon right from the year 1894 when the Forest Policy Resolution was announced by the British Administration. Similarly, the commercial plantations in the forest areas that deprived the local tribal population of their life systems have led to popular unrest in the tribal areas.²⁴

As mentioned above, the genesis and roots of tribal movements in India lies in the colonial rule of the British. In the nineteenth century, the British came into conflict with various tribes in different parts of the country when they annexed tribal kingdoms and introduced British administration in the tribal areas. The tribals in general and the chieftains in particular felt the loss of power and resources in the new administration. They revolted against the British.²⁵ The ultimate aim of British colonialism was to exploit the rich and untapped socio-economic resources of the country and drain them off to make the British Empire prosper.²⁶ With this aim in view they subjugated progressively various part of India and expanded the complex network of exploitation to

encompass every nook and corner which could not spare even the tribal areas. The expansion and consolidation of colonial power set free different forces and brought the economy of India into the orbit of the world capitalist order. The rulers of the princely states and the landlords were either crushed totally or co-opted by the British through concessions.²⁷ The introduction of new mode of colonial system into the tribal economy in turn produced new types of property owning systems which in turn gave rise to new social formations, which were unknown to the tribals previously. The British brought them into the historical process of conflict and change. This had broken the compactness of tribal social relations and their mode of production. The tribal-feudal social formation came in direct conflict with colonial production system with its new market forces, administrative and politico-legal system to safeguard the emerging system. A multi-caste and multi-community village organization and territorial system emerged. This gradually led to the collapse of tribal-feudal system based on communal land relationships. Money as a medium became capital. Land was transformed into commodity for the first time and was thrown open to market for sale. This made the hereditary communal rights on land defunct. The new system of land ownership resulted in the emergence of a novel class of landlords, a lower rank of cultivating tenants, and large scale of tribal agricultural landless labourers. The colonialists empowered their agents and new breed of landlords to evict the peasants, at any time, if they did not pay tax.²⁸ Thus, the tribals' image of their own world came in direct conflict with the new world image of bourgeois imposed on them.

The various socio-economic forces set free by the colonialism increasingly encroached upon tribal lands and forests, and thereby distorted their socio-economic organization. Unique types of repression had fallen on them and they had been reduced to the extremity of wretchedness. This was due to the expansion of money market with rack-renting, unequal terms of trade, usury and even slave labour were order of the day and the obligation to grow more cash crops for little or no return made the tribal life bitter and choked. Land ownership gradually slipped away from the tribals to non-tribal landlords who came with the expansion of commercial economy. New forces of modernization like missionaries, modern education created a new minority social group who increasingly began possessing the socio-economic resources at the cost of majority mass of tribal peasants.²⁹ For more than last two centuries the tribals had been undergoing a diverse socio-economic changes and much of which were initiated by the penetration of British colonialism. The British introduced a new economic system

gradually in consonance with their own economic system. It was characterized by commercialization of land and forests, well-defined property rights, occupational structure, marketing of agricultural surplus, etc. These in turn, produced unprecedented contradictions in the tribal society which was earlier based on relatively undifferentiated economic relations collective mode of production and consumption. The colonial penetration had diverse purposes and motives to exploit the socio-economic resources of the native economy and this thus introduced new social tensions and conflicts in the society. In other words, the colonial intervention resulted in the gradual encroachment upon their entire way of life.³⁰

In numerous occasions, there were riots, revolts, uprisings, etc. against colonial rule and its exploitative socio-economic network. In almost all pockets of India, tribals were surging with resistance of this sort against the deprivation of their land and forests. Surface-observation of these phenomena may lead us to categorize them as scattered events or episodes and not as movements. But, these events of resistance by the tribal people were centred around the issues affecting their existence itself. Resistance, as we know, is a core characteristic of a social movement.³¹ Viewed from a particular period of time and space it may not look like a movement in the proper sense of the term but these events were surely phases of a movement where persons in hundreds and thousands rose against the high-handed exploitative forces. Over a period of time, during the colonial rule such movements in tribal society might have taken different nature, forms, dimensions and magnitudes. But these were surely sustained attempts on their part to oppose the exploitative system which affect their existence in one way or the other. Such attempts have continued even after independence and have not ceased.³²

Surajit Sinha³³ categorically placed five types of tribal movements in India that occurred since the British rule and thereafter by giving some of the following examples of tribal movements:

- (i) Ethnic or Tribal rebellions during the early days of the British rule in the 18th and 19th centuries: Sardar Larai (1885) and Birsa movement (1895-1900); Ganganarayan Hangama (1832) among the Bhumij, Kol Rebellion (1832), Santal Rebellion (1857-58), Rebellion of the Kacha Nagas (1880s) and so on.
- (ii) Reform movements emulating the cultural pattern of the higher Hindu castes: Bhagat movement among the Oraon, Vaishnavite reform movement among the

Bhumij, social mobility movement among the Bhumij for Rajput recognition, Kherwar movement among the Santal and so on.

- (iii) Emergence of inter-tribal political associations and movements for recognition as tribal states within the Indian Union in the post-Independence period. Jharkhand movement among the tribes of Chotanagpur and Orissa, Hill States movements in the Assam Hills, Adisthan movement among the Bhils and so on.
- (iv) Violent secessionist movements among the tribes located near the international frontier. Nagaland movement, Mizo National Front movement and so on, and;
- (v) Pockets of violent political movements in the tribal belt linked with the general problem of agrarian unrest and Communist movement. Hajng unrest (1944), Naxalbari movement (1967), Girijan Rebellion at Srikakulam (1968-69), Birsa Dal movement in Ranchi (1968-69).

During the historical past tribal chiefs, warriors and individuals had been active in various parts of the country. The name of the Bhils figures in many such episodes. The names of *Umed Vasava*, a Bhils from the Panchdongri District was associated with the unrest around the Rajpipla state between 1873 to 1882.³⁴ In 1832, the Santhals started a movement called Bhumij Movement under the leadership of Ganga Narayan Santhal.³⁵ This was continued by Kandu and Siddha Santhal, who during 1850 stood very firm against the tribal exploitation by landlords and traders. The name of Birsa Bhagwan Munda is well-known for his leadership in the movement against tribal exploitation in 1897.³⁶ The Oraons, under the leadership of Nana Bhagat started a non-violent movement against the British in 1914, for getting equal justice. Tribals from the Kohan area of Orissa started a movement against the British for exploitation which the British had to yield and assured legal protection to tribals.³⁷ The Khonds, Koyas and Saprass from Orissa started movements as early as 1879 and 1890 for getting their rights. There were also movements in Madhya Pradesh by Bastar tribals for the demand of an autonomous state in 1910 which proved to be abortive. In 1879, the Pahadi Reddy tribals of Andhra Pradesh also started a movement for getting the ownership rights of their lands. In 1940, Gonds started a movement under the leadership of Bhima Kurma Gond, while the Koyas agitated under Aluri Sitaram Raj.³⁸

During and since colonial period Chotanagpur region was the hot bed of rebellions and insurrections of varied nature and dimensions.³⁹ There were many rebellions occurred in this region and the mention may be made of the rebellions such as

(i) The Rajas of Dalbhum, 1779-84; (ii) The Chuar tribes of Midnapur, 1799; (iii) The Bhumij Chuar of Manbhum, Chotanagpur, and Santhal Pargana, 1795-1800; (iv) The Kols, Hos and Mundas of Chotanagpur, 1831-32; and (v) The Santhal Insurrections, 1855-57.⁴⁰ All these tribal movements were the powerful expressions of collective protests of tribals against conditions of economic exploitation and social oppression. It is seen that in the first phase these tribal movements were in combination of traditional cultural element and values with new themes, sometimes derived from the oppressing classes, in an utopian vision of 'Golden Age'.⁴¹ These movements had divine or prophetic leaders who believed to possess super natural powers and looked forward to a terrestrial state of righteousness and justice in which their enemies would be removed or defeated. Most of these movements were transformative rather than reformatory in their expectations of a sudden, total change and most believed the Golden Age to be imminent and subject to some kind of supernatural intervention. The leaders of these movements promised that their land would be recovered from encroachers through God. The Bhagat movement among the Oraons of Chotanagpur in 1895 and the Tana Bhagat Movement active during the World War II were such movements launched with religious overtones against the *diku* or outsiders, oppressors, Christian missionaries and the converts because they were identified as exploiters.⁴² But these movements eventually turned into a more political and violent form towards the end and was ultimately connected with social and economic interest. The Oraons' background of socio-economic unrest and the armed uprising ran parallel to that of the Mundas; they had a series of uprising in the year 1811, 1820, 1832, 1895-1900, against the oppressive landlords and moneylenders.⁴³

The Hos or the Larka Kols who are allied to Mundas ethnically, linguistically and culturally, mostly settled in Singbhum district of Chotanagpur division of Bihar, also rebelled against the unjustified socio-economic subjugation by the colonialists and their lackeys who came along with the *British Raj*.⁴⁴ Similar movement with messianic overtone was organized among the Santhals too. The single most important event in the history of Santhals, the rebellion of 1855-57 has changed the history of the Santhals in Chotanagpur. It was a massive revolt against the British colonialists and their agents. The tribals mobilized a peasant army of between 30 to 50 thousands and attacked the landlords and usurpers. But the superior British army brutally suppressed them.⁴⁵ This Santhal movement came out at a time when destitution and suffering had reached an extremely high level along with oppression and merciless exploitation by the trinity of colonialist, landlords and merchant class. This historic movement was led by two Santhal

brothers, Sidhu and Kanhu.⁴⁶ Similarly, there was the Munda tribal movement in 1890 led by Birsa Munda, a powerful charismatic leader against the British exploitation and oppressions. This movement had a religious overtone to mobilize people in large numbers against the landlords and oppressive moneylenders. But the movement was gradually taken over by the politics and violence and led to armed clashes on several occasions to liberate themselves and acquire their right on communal lands forcefully possessed by the literate outsiders in 1789, 1796 and 1832.⁴⁷ The Santhal movement was mainly concerned with the improvement of their general socio-economic situation and the question of agrarian issues had supreme importance. Because for tribals, land gave not only economic security but also provided a powerful link with their ancestors. Thus, for them land becomes a part of their spiritual as well as economic heritage.⁴⁸

K. S. Singh⁴⁹ categorized the tribal movements in middle India into four sections as identified by the ASI. They are- a. Movements for political autonomy which includes the demand for separate state by the Gonds and Bhils at the beginning of the Second World War consisting the areas of Chattisgarh and contiguous districts of Rewa regions and Vidarbha, tribal autonomy movement in South Gujarat in 1960s, tribal autonomy demand of Chotanagpur which was most advanced and exposed tribal regions of Bihar emerged as Jharkhand movement which touched even Orissa and Bengal politics, b. Agrarian and Forest based Movements includes a forest Satyagraha led by a dominant tribal peasant community of Kharwar of Palamu and Gond tribals across the borders, agrarian struggle of the tribals of Dhulia, emancipation of the bonded Dablas of South Gujarat, Naxalite movements against the oppression by rich to poor peasants etc. c. Sanskritisation process includes Bhagat movements in MP, Gujarat and Rajasthan, Sant Samaj movement led by Gahira Guru among the Kaware to promote social reform, propagation of Swaminarayan sect etc. d. Cultural movements includes Sarna Dharam, Adi Dharma etc. against the conversion to Hinduism (Sanskritisation) and Christianity, assertion of tribal identity through evolving cultural symbols, script and indigenous literature like Adi Samaj movement of Ho tribe, Santhal revivalism movement concerning Oi Chiki script etc.

The tribal movements in Maharashtra had religious, social and economic aspects but they were on the whole against tribal exploitations. The movements for tribal awareness like non-drinking and non-eating of meat started by Ramdas Maharaj also fought for the cause of rehabilitation of tribals displaced by Ukai dam had major impacts on the government's policy towards tribals. The Kisan Sabha under the leadership of

Godavari Parulekar organized a strong tribal movement at Thane district for the problem of bonded-labour, Begar (forced labour), less payment of wages etc. In the post independence period many such tribal movements continued in Maharashtra for acquisition of land rights, against bonded-labour and against the displacement of Adivasis etc.

Many tribal movements were also associated with preserving the forest environment like the Chipko movement of Garhwal-Kumaon mountain tracks of the central Himalayan region presently Uttarakhand consisting of Dehradun, Uttar-Kashi, Tehri, Paudi, Chamoli, Almora, Pithoragarh and Nainital districts where the tribals started an agitation to protect the forest from company agents and contractors from cutting the trees by following an symbolic idea of embracing the tree trunks came to be known as *Chipko* movement. A similar movement was also started by the tribals to safeguard the ecology in the forest of the Gadchiroli District in the triangular nexus of the borders of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.⁵⁰ Thus, there have been many tribal movements in the mainland Indian regions with varying nature, degrees and dimensions.

The above conditions form the background of tribal peasant movements in the tribal areas since the British colonial rule till today. In fact, the basic factors underlying the contemporary tribal movements are the same as in the past. The difference lies in relation to their articulation and dimension of the movement. The tribal peasants reacted sharply when their communal land ownership was disturbed, their religious beliefs were scoffed at, their independence were attacked; when traditional customs, manners and civic rights, standard of etiquette and prestige, code of conduct were brushed aside, and deep-rooted conventions ignored, insulted and violated. Directly or indirectly the policy of colonialism created a lot of contradictions in the tribal self-sufficient economy and social relations. The perpetuation of the same system with some modifications in the post-independence period with its inherent characteristics like inequalities, underdevelopment and deprivation became the catalyst of social movements of various forms, nature and dimensions. All the movements, of course, embodied ideas of freedom from undue socio-economic exploitation and deprivation. The underlying factors of these movements, in varying degrees, were more of economic than religious and political in character. The later was progressively used as an instrument of mobilization when the movements get articulated on the basis of ideology.⁵¹

There are many more tribal movements having the similar issues of origin almost everywhere in India, and all of which are not necessary to mention here. But, as a contiguous to the movements of the Bodos, the various tribal movements of the Northeastern region are needed to be highlighted in this work as all of these also bear, though not all, more or less the same roots of origin like elsewhere in India.

Tribal Movements in the North East India:

North East India is a mosaic of races and cultures. It is also the most important tribal belt of the country, covering seven states namely Assam, Manipur and Tripura with sizeable tribal population and the tribal states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The Great mountain ranges of the eastern Himalayas and its southern branches which form the great divide between South Asia and South East Asia, and three important river valleys, the Brahmaputra, the Imphal and the Barak, have for centuries, provided the physical ecology for the various ethnic groups who migrated to the region from the pre-historic times down to the present day. The fertile river valleys are the cradles of human civilization where the migrating and conquering ethnic groups including tribes, built up their own kingdoms and principalities. In the resultant process of migration and settlement which was a part of the struggle for economic and social survival and political domination, there were contacts between various ethnic groups resulting into integration and assimilation of their respective cultural traits. Yet, despite the impact of the contact with Hindu kingdoms, the conquering Ahoms, the invading and migrating Muslims and the British colonial administration, the tribes, more or less preserved their distinctive identity. The North-East has emerged as a distinctive regional identity in India's national life.

The tribal people of north east India are referred to in the classical Indian literatures as the *Kiratas*. They are the Indo-Mongoloids divided ethnically and linguistically into Austric, Tibeto Burman and Siamese Chinese who form a cultural bridge between India and South East Asia, Inner Asia and China. The Tibeto-Burmans are the Bodos, Tripuri and the Garos; the Karbis, the Nagas, the Kuki-Chins including the Mizos and the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh like the Monpas, Daflas, Apatanis, the Adis, etc. There are several Plains tribes in the Brahmaputra valley also. The representatives of the Austric are the Khasis including Jaintias who have linguistic Affinity with the Hos and Mundas of Bihar and Nicobarese of Andaman and Nicobar, and with the Mon and Mon-Khmer of South East Asia. The Siamese (Tai) speakers are the Khamti and Singpho

tribes of Arunachal Pradesh who are the kith and kin of the Ahom-Tai of Upper Assam. The Indo-Aryans who migrated from the West to the north east India established political supremacy over the Brahmaputra valley, and Hinduised the tribals wherever possible and ultimately forced the tribes to confine themselves in the interior regions of the Brahmaputra valley and the surrounding hills.⁵² In the early part of the 19th century, with the decline of the Ahoms due to internal rebellions and civil war, and ultimately the Burmese, the political fortunes of the tribal states were greatly affected. The Burmese conquest of north east India (1819-1826) and the First Anglo-Burmese War created a radical change in the contemporary political situation. The British conquest of north east India was just started and gradually the British were determined to occupy all the tribal areas of the region-Jaintia and Kachar were under protection of East India Company. Tripura and Manipur were independent; on the other hand Assam lost her independence. There was of course, strong resistance among the hill tribes, to British imperialism, starting with the Khasi rebellion under U. Tirot Singh and Sadya uprising. But gradually the British captured the Khasi state which accepted the British suzerainty. Jaintia was annexed, Cachar was annexed in 1832. Mathak under the Moran in 1842, upper Assam in 1838 and North Cachar was annexed in 1854.⁵³

Thus by the middle of the 19th century, all the tribal states were annexed into British India. Only Tripura maintained her independence.⁵⁴ Manipur by the time had become completely Hinduised state.⁵⁵ The British penetration under the Forward policy into Naga Hills was resisted in the form of the Revolt of 1879-80 which was serious attempt to push out the British. The revolt was suppressed with severity and since then the British gradually pushed into the interior and by the end of the 19th century, except the Tuensang area of the Konyak Nagas, the Naga areas were brought under the regular administration.⁵⁶ Likewise, the Lushai Hills expedition in 1871-72 ultimately led to the subjugation of the Mizos and their region was constituted into Lushai Hills District in 1896 under the British province of Assam. The tribes of Arunachal were also brought under the Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadya Frontier Tract which were later on combined into North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) now Arunachal Pradesh.⁵⁷ Though the established tribal kingdoms lost their status, a new phase in tribal history of north east India started with the British penetration into tribal areas which were not earlier organized into principalities or states, though they had village level polity formations. After the British conquest the hill tribes came under their colonial policy which aimed at the extension of the British empire, collection of revenues, maintenance of law and

order, adjudication of disputes, exploitation of natural resources for capitalist enterprises, encouragement of Christian missions for proselytizing activities on the pretext of civilizing the tribal people and provision of some welfare services.

Tribal movements in the north-east are entirely different from those elsewhere in the country and stand in a category by themselves because of its unique geographical situation and historical background. Many tribes living on the international boundaries traditionally acted as bridge or buffer communities until the advent of colonialism and shared ethnic and cultural affinities with tribesmen across the frontiers. Developments across the frontiers have had a profound influence on the situation in the north-east. This region was also not completely integrated within the politico-economic system of colonialism. It remained relatively isolated from the cultural systems of the mainland and the political upheavals of the freedom struggle. Yet another fact to be noted in regard to the development of the tribal movement in this region, as mentioned earlier is that unlike middle India the tribals everywhere except Tripura are in overwhelming majority and have never faced any threat of the kind to their identity that inspired the millenarian movements elsewhere in the country. Their institutions are relatively intact. They remain in possession of their land and forest. Therefore, there were no agrarian and forest-based movements of the type that occur in middle India. Christianity emerged as the strongest factor of modernization, and gave the tribals a strong sense of identity as it has done elsewhere. Considering the geopolitical factor, the relative isolation from the political system and cultural influences from the mainland, the dominant form of movement has been political, seeking goal ranging from autonomy to independence and relying on means ranging from constitutional agitation to armed insurgency. Even the cultural movements in this region have been only a dimension of this political processes.⁵⁸ On the eve of the transfer of power political processes in the hills became active. To accommodate tribal aspirations new states were created. The Six Schedule in the process became outdated. A section of Nagas chose the path of insurgency, so also the Mizos, Meiteis and Tripuris.

The uniform administrative mechanism of elsewhere British India was also introduced in the North East part and the tribals inhabiting this region was also not freed from alien exploitation. Many a movements surfaced in varying forms in this part of the region during the colonial rule itself and the British administrative legacy of divide and rule policy still persist here within the tribals elites as well as tribals and non-tribals in

some states. The tribes of North-East India were also politically and culturally active even during the colonial rule. The Nagas, the Garos, the Khasis, the Bodo Kacharis, the Mizos, the Kukis, etc. of this region were active in surfacing the movements of various forms and dimensions since the colonial rule to the post-colonial era. They fought injustice and deprivation. Series of insurrections, raids, murders, armed actions against the alien rulers were the orders of the day because the colonial occupation was followed by a period of administrative confusions, of extortions and oppressions, and miseries of people.⁵⁹ They organized the movement when they suffered incursions, loss of land, swindling, bankruptcy and undermining of their culture by literate and technologically superior invaders both British and India. There were many instances of attacks on British officials, the landlords, the moneylenders, the revenue agents etc. For example, the head hunting of Lushai-Kukis in Sylhet and Cachar against unfair dealings of some business community, the revolt of Synteng of Jaintia Hills in 1860-62, the Manipur rebellions in 1891, the Assam riots of 1894 etc. to mention a few.⁶⁰

It is to be noted that the tribal movements in this part of the region had not ceased to occur even after the departure of colonial power. In fact, after independence, movements with political overtone and much articulation had increasingly surfaced against the glaring inequality and deprivation. The nature of movements had changed with the accentuation of deprivation and economic exploitation. The tribal peasants had mobilized by the articulated tribal leaders under various political banners to seek justice of the misdeeds done by the colonial masters. Some adopted non-violent parliamentary methods and tactics for autonomy and others adopted non-parliamentary tactics for sovereignty.⁶¹

The Christian missionaries were largely responsible for awakening of the tribals in this region regarding their individual identity. The phenomenal rise of Christianity in all Northeastern states except in Arunachal Pradesh, during 1961-81 became a symbol of tribal regionalism. The nativistic revival movements- Seng Khasi, Sanamati cult, Zeliangrong, Boro and Meitei movements are manifestations of cultural dimensions of tribal regionalism though their strength varies.⁶² The geographical factor too caused these tribes to remain outside the political system as well as cultural influence of the mainland India. During the British period these tribals were brought under the colonial territorial authority. After India's independence many of these tribes emerged very powerful and began seeking autonomy which even ranged to sovereign country.

In developing a sense of larger tribal identity, education and gradual emergence of small and educated middle class among the tribes in the hills and plains have been playing important roles. It started with demand for representation of the tribal population in Provincial Legislative Assembly. The Nagas, Khasis, Bodos, Miris and Deuris pressed their demand in 1930s through Naga Club, Seng Khasi and the Tribal League. On the eve of independence, two political trends were clearly visible. The first was in favour of asserting more tribal autonomy within the Indian Union and the other was motivated by the ideas of independence for tribal areas. The first trend was clearly visible in the policies of the Mizo Union and Garo National Council, East India Tribal Union (1952) and the APHLC.⁶³ The Naga National Council, United Mizo Freedom Organization (1946) and the Mizo National Front (1961) may be included in the second category.⁶⁴ The growing sense of ethnic identity among different communities in Northeast and the fear of losing identity contributed to the growth of regional ethno-political movements in Northeast India. The tribal movement in North-East India is a manifestation of fight for regional identity although based on ethnic considerations. Another prime reason for tribal movement lies in the conflict for controlling of political power and economic resources by the elite tribal societies and neighbouring society.⁶⁵ The Tribal insurgency is a militant assertion for share of limited economic resources. The rising tribal aspirations are expressed through regional movement on cultural identity crisis, the basis of which is economic.⁶⁶ The aspirations arise and economic development is painfully slow and uneven, militancy is bound to grow. The rising middle class and petty bourgeoisie in tribal society are bound to take up arms against their counterparts in other societies.⁶⁷

The political movement in the hills surfaced with the transfer of power. The tribal movement, though apparently political in character, agrarian issues and economic aspirations gave a new dimension to the solidarity movement. Industrialization in the hills was non-existent. Agriculture was primitive unable to cater to the minimum needs of the hill people. The problem of land alienation was acute. The communal ownership of rural land has been notional. The rich in the tribal society cornered all social wealth in the form of forest and agricultural land all over Northeast India. The unplanned exploitation of mineral resources created a class of neo-rich alienated from traditional tribal society. The poverty has become the relief map of the hills in north-east India. The agrarian and economic issues would, therefore, bound to dominate in tribal movement. The new owning class in tribal society needs political instrument to consolidate its hold on economy of the underdeveloped tribal society. This political instrument has been in the

hands of new elite alienated from traditional society with a distinct class affiliation, cutting across inter-tribal distinction.⁶⁸

On the eve of the India's independence, there were a number of proposals for the future political and administrative system of North East India. The hill tribes were affected; the Naga National Council raised the demand for independence and made a nine-point agreement with Governor Akbar Hydari of Assam in 1946.⁶⁹ The Shillong based Khasi and Garo leaders raised the demand for hill state to be carved out of Assam Hills. Mizos were inspired to raise the demand for independence. The Constituent Assembly of India was fully conscious of these ethnic aspirations of the tribes of Assam hills and devised the district level autonomy in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Assam hill leaders accepted it while the Nagas rejected it though the basic points pertaining to land and natural resources, customary laws and judicial process incorporated in the 9 points agreement were accepted in the Sixth Schedule.⁷⁰ The NNC revolted for an independent Nagaland.⁷¹ The extremist wing of NNC under the leadership of Phizo declared independence on August 14, 1947. The 1951 general election was boycotted by the Nagas. Fight for an independent Nagaland began in 1954. On 1 August, 1960, Prime Minister Pandit Nehru announced in the Parliament to make the Nagaland the 16th state of the Indian Union.⁷² However, the leaders of the extremist wing of the NNC remained underground. The formal talks between the Government and the Nagas began in 1964. The efforts to establish peace culminated in the signing of the Shillong Accord on November 11, 1975. The underground leaders who voluntarily signed on behalf of the Federal Authorities accepted Nagaland as an inalienable part of the Indian Union.⁷³ But the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), a secessionist outfit continued the fighting for independent Nagaland and most recently this outfit is on cease-fire agreement with the Government of India paving the way for further solution to the Naga problems.⁷⁴

In the state of Manipur also there were unrest and revolts even from the British period such as the Kuki rebellion and Zeliangrong movement surfaced during the British rule. Manipur was given statehood in 1972 but the problem continued and even to these day tribal movements for autonomy is on. The insurgency groups again troubled Manipur and the outfits such as Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) formed in 1978 by N. Bisseswar and the Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) led by Tulachandra

created huge unrest in the state.⁷⁵ But, at present, both the groups are being brought under control by the Government.⁷⁵

The indigenous tribals of Tripura mostly being dominated by the non-tribals during and after the independence still continued to be in a very miserable condition. Since the economic and political powers have passed on the non-tribal populations, the tribals finding no alternative for survival started several movements ranging from autonomy to insurgent movements to drive out the non-tribals from Tripura. Several underground militant outfits such as Sangrek led by Anant Reang, Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) etc. began insurgency movements. Violence broke out in Tripura in 1979. Ultimately an agreement was signed between the Union Government, the Tripura Government and the TNV leaders which brought an end to the insurgency movement in Tripura.⁷⁶

The Language Bill of Assam, which was tabled in the Assembly on October 10, 1960, was strongly opposed by all the hill tribes. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed with their demand for a separate state within the republic. The APHLC continued their non-violent movement in September, 1968 and finally the Assam Reorganization Bill was introduced on December 15, 1969 to form Meghalaya as an autonomous state within Assam and it achieved the status of a full-fledged state in 1972.

The present state of Mizoram also had witnessed a series of insurgency movements. Lushai Hills District, as it was known before, received the status of District Council in 1952 and dissatisfied with this minimum fulfillment, the Mizo Union began the demand for autonomy in the same year. The Hmar community withdrew its support from the Mizo Union and began identifying themselves as a distinct tribe of Mizoram. They, thus, demanded an Autonomous District Council for themselves within Mizoram. The language issue in Assam led to the formation of AHPLC which also included the members of Mizo Union. However, they withdrew their membership from the APHLC in 1962.⁷⁸ The social welfare organization- The Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) that was floated during the worst famine days in Mizoram- was renamed Mizo National Front (MNF) to give it a political impetus. The MNF got the assistance from the neighbouring Bangladesh (elsewhere East Pakistan) which supplied them arms to sustain their movement for a sovereign state. The Mizos, who were not with the MNF, became gradually dissatisfied with the State Government's attitude towards them and demanded a

separate state within the republic. In February 1966, the MNF and the Mizo National Army (MNA) began insurgent activities when the Pataskar Commission recommendation to establish an Autonomous Council for hill people was not accepted by the Assam Government.⁷⁹ The Mizo insurgent activities continued for ten years but ultimately came to an end with an honourable understanding between the government of India and the secessionist Mizo leaders with the signing of the peace accord on July 1976 and finally Mizoram received Statehood in February, 1987.⁸⁰

The language policy of Assam Government was not acceptable to many non-Assamese communities including the Karbi-Dimasas. A memorandum, therefore, was submitted to the Prime Minister of India by the Mikir and North Cachar (N.C.) Hills Action Committee in November 1980, demanding an Autonomous State comprising of Karbi-Anglong and N.C. Hills. In 1981, a Separate State Demand Committee (SSDC) was formed under the president ship of Dhaniram Rongpi.⁸¹ This committee too demanded a separate state through a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India. In 1986, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was set up.⁸² The Karbi Students' Association (KSA) joined hands with the ASDC, who together laid stress on an autonomous state for Karbi-Anglong and N.C. Hills. A mass-based movement began and in January 1990, the ASDC and KSA jointly submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, and in March in the same year they submitted an ultimatum to the Chief Minister.⁸³ In 1991, the United Peoples' Conference (UPC) emphasized on full-fledged State. The State Government declared in 1992 that the District Council's power would be extended to over thirty-two additional subjects. Though it was appreciated by the ASDC-KSA, they refused to withdraw the ongoing movement for an autonomous state.⁸⁴

Thus, it is seen that the North-Eastern region was also a hot bed for many uprisings and movements beginning from the Colonial period and till to this date. This region, like elsewhere in India, witnessed anti-colonial and anti-foreigner movements, movements against encroachers, socio-religious movements, political self-autonomy, statehood, separatist-secessionist, insurgency movements etc. Though, most of the past movements disappeared and few became insignificant, yet, some of the old movements along with new born movements in the region still holding strong position, especially in the Brahmaputra Valley where many more new ethno-political movements are gaining

ground including the most powerful long-drawn movement for statehood by the Bodos of Assam plains popularly known as the Bodoland Movement.

Overview of the Bodo Movements:

Various tribal movements in mainland India as well as in the Northeastern region of India clearly revealed that there were various tribal movements in most of the tribal dominated regions of India with varying nature, degrees, dimensions, and issues mainly ranging from socio-economic, cultural, religion, political etc. As this work would progress, it would reveal here more or less the similar kind of factors and forces that were mainly instrumental in bringing about most of the tribal movements in India. The Bodo people 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 wanderers. This condition was also same with the other tribals of India. Lack of pro-active political will on the part of the Government to uplift and safeguard the tribal interests made them all the more insecure, hostile and alienated. Lack of education, backwardness, illiteracy, identity crisis due to linguistic and cultural assimilations, insecurity, lack of political consciousness had made them all the more vulnerable for exploitations by the more advanced neighbouring communities. But, all these factors would be appearing as the guiding spirit for the leaders to articulate who would be easily aware of their miserable and pathetic conditions, and they would no longer want their community to remain dormant as a vulnerable, insecure, exploited, backward, marginalized and deprived of rightful privileges in their own soil.

The Socio-Political Movements of the Bodos are also basically characterized by the manifestation of assertive political demand for changing the existing political order

through identity articulation vis-a-vis other community developments agenda in the state of Assam. It was in the late 20th century when the social movement of the Bodos exerted its greatest force with its political character.⁸⁵ In social movement category, these Movements could also be observed and analyzed from the viewpoint of Tribal movement. The uprising of the tribal people against the exploiter groups is not a new phenomenon. There are different forms of tribal movement. Some of them launched with an objective to preserve their political and social identity, some are for the revival of their traditional religious system and some are for the safeguard of their economic interest against the encroachers.⁸⁶ In the pre-Independence period, the tribal unrest or self assertion evolved around land issues. The policies adopted by the British in their economic policy, money lenders and non-tribal contractors forced the tribes to start movements so that they could maintain their rights over the ancestral land and forest. Although the main issue was economic and regaining land rights, yet the movements were not totally devoid of political hues. The tribes felt that the colonial rulers tried to make inroads into the socio-cultural arena of the tribes. They were apprehensive of losing their distinct identity in future.⁸⁷ The dynamics of plains tribal movements show as a product of contradictions introduced by the colonialist and the perpetuation of the same in the post-independence Assam in some form or the other. This has caused acute deprivation, frustration and deep-rooted resentment among the plains tribals. This irretrievable discontentment and deprivation of their land and forest that generated an emotional state of mind wherein the tribals were forced to move for a better alternative of equitable social order for themselves free from exploitation and injustice.⁸⁸

The tribal unrest and identity formation movements of the post independence period in the Northeastern region are in a way continuation of the pre-Independence period but, of course, with more demands coming in, while some are newborn movements with the similar kind of demand. The new movements were largely conceived from the psychology viewpoint of the concerned communities who feared the domination of an alien culture or superior culture would lead to loss their distinct identity. Referring to these identity crisis states and identity formation movements, Apurba Baruah⁸⁹ remarks that the movements of various communities to assert and protect their ethnic identity are the most important aspects of the contemporary socio-political reality of India's North East. J.B. Bhattacharjee⁹⁰ also writes that in the post colonial period, the quest for identity in the Northeast essentially originated in the crisis of under-development. Whereas the political leadership in the states and intellectuals in

general talked of the indifference or apathy (or even neglect) of the Government of India towards economic and infrastructure development of the region, the ethnic and linguistic minorities in various states gradually became vocal in alleging exploitation and deprivation of the minorities by the majority community in respective states. The cultural and linguistic domination of the majority community was another factor that cause alienations and made the minority more conscious of its identity, whereas leadership of the majority community highlighted the threat of cultural invasions from outside and the danger of becoming minority or being swamped by the outsiders. The polarization and alienation eventually resulted in the demand for - and creation of - new states or autonomous areas within the states.

Ethnic assertion or revival of ethnicity becomes a characteristic feature of some of the Indian tribes particularly in the post-independence period. Due to large scale interaction and expansion of educational facilities to the tribal people today, they possess quite a number of educated persons and they no longer tolerate the injustice, mal-administration and oppression. Identity formation has offered new dimensions to the exclusiveness of the ethnic groups. To attain the goal the strategy adopted varies from group to group. Some tribal took language or culture as the easy tools for demanding separate identity, while others resort to backwardness in relation to fellow communities. The avowed non-political character of such movements ends in political aspirations.⁹¹ 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.⁹² The Bodo leadership emerged at that point of time was no exception to this 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 middle class began mobilizing themselves in the form of different organizations to safeguard their community which solely played determining role in the Bodo identity

formation.⁹³ 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 tribe. The spread of education led to the emergence of a small number elite class which felt the need to reform the Bodo society to save it from complete extinction and from caste-Hindu domination.⁹⁴

Thus, the historical background of the Bodos in the free independence British period was characterized by the socio-economic, religious and political backwardness which resemble the other tribal groups of India in a resounding manner. But, there were gradual endeavors for uplifting overall dismal conditions of the Bodos through bringing about certain proactive changes in the society influenced by certain Western educated enlightened individuals, group of individuals and associations that eventually resulted into a series movements in the post independence period ranging from script, language, literature, socio-economy, religion, cultural identity and political self determination Movements. On the whole, the entire parameter of social changes and the consequent emergence of these Movements for survival of identity, equality, political and civil rights, economic and social justice, right to land; language and culture, refinement of custom and traditions, awakening of national consciousness of the Bodos bear the same testimony and affinities to other tribal movements of mainland India in general and North-East India in particular.

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