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Early History of the Bodos: A Root Cause of Bodo Struggle for Ethnic Identity Formation

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Abstract

Being a part of the North-East India, Assam is the homeland of different races with their composite culture and distinct identity. The Bodos are the largest and dominant plain tribe of Assam. They are also the real roots of the present Assamese culture. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock and their population being concentrated mostly on the North bank of the Brahmaputra river with some of them are staying on the south bank as well. Few of them are staying in Burma, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sikkim and Bhutan. Linguistically, their origin is derived from the Assam Burmese branch of TibetoBurman sub-family. Regarding the migration of the Bodos into India, there is no authentic source of history as because they have been inhabiting in the North-Eastern region of this country since time immemorial. Apart from that, the roles played by different tribal political and non-political organizations had constructed the Bodo ethnic assertion and awakened them in socio-cultural and political fields. These are remarkable inspirational ways which made them aware to regain their lost position in the post-colonial period for their distinct identity formation.

Key words: Bodos, Bodo struggle, Ethnicity, Identity formation, Plain tribes.

Introduction: The North-East India is the homeland of different races with their composite culture and distinct identity. All the major races of India viz., Austric, Dravidian, Mongolian and Aryan had lived in this North-East India particularly in Assam with their own culture and heritages (Chaklader, 2004:p.26). They are divided into two categories viz., tribal and non-tribal ethnic groups. The tribals have drawn more attention of the researchers due to their acute problems of deprivation in the fields of education, society, culture, economic and polity. Because, most of the tribal groups of Mongolian race in Assam could not reap of the fruits of benefit from the British administration. As a result, the growing educated middle class among those tribal communities took up the issues of deprivation and felt the need of organising their communities to address the same. Among those tribal communities in Assam such as the Bodos, the Kacharis, the Karbis, the Mishings, the Deuris, the Tiwas, the Rabhas were prominent with their various organizations e.g., All Bodo Chatra Sanmillan (1918), Kachari Sanmillan (1912), Boro Maha Sanmillan (1924) and so on (Phukon, 2014: p.91). With these organisations the tribal groups tried to articulate the ethnic consciousness and

mobilize their respective communities. Therefore, after independence the Constitution of India made some special provisions to the tribes for redressing their grievances and categorized them into two groups viz., scheduled tribes (Hills) and Scheduled tribes (Plains) (Sen, 2009). Before that, the term “Plain Tribal” was used by the colonial rulers for the first time in the contemporary political and administrative discourse from 1930’s (Pathak, 2010). This generic term was used to denote a diverse set of people defined in semi-geographical and semi-sociological terms. Through this word they meant the Valley tribes like the Bodo Kacharis, Mikirs or Karbis, Miris or Mishings, Lalungs or Tiwas and Rabhas together (Pathak, 2010). The term has been continuously used by the tribal leaders themselves which is an indication of the appropriation of this terminology. Later on the tribal leaders used the privilege of the term to unite different communities of the plains of Assam into a single platform for their political interest. Even the tribal communities also tried to locate themselves by using the term “Plain Tribal” in the socio-political circumstances of the colonial society (Pathak, 2010). Among those plain tribes of Assam, the Bodos are the largest and dominant one.

The Bodos - Who are they?

The Bodos are the largest group amongst the plain tribals of Assam in India, their population being concentrated mostly on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river, with some of them staying on the South bank as well (Bed, 2006:145). The term "Bodo" is derived from a Tibetan word i.e., "Bod" which is supposed to mean a homeland and Kachari is derived from “Kachar” means area near the river (Brahma, 2007). The word “Bodo” first used by famous linguistic B.H.Hodgson as an ethnological term to refer the Meches, the Bodo speaking people of Darjeeling district in 1846 while writing about them. Since then the word “Bodo” has been used as a generic term to denote the different branches of the Bodo language group (Brahma, 2007). However in this context G.A.Grierson said, “*The generic name “bodo” was first applied by Hodgson to this group of languages. The exact sound is better represented by spelling it Bada or Boro. Bodo or Bara is the name by which the Mech or Mes and the Kacharis call themselves*” (Grierson, 1967:1).

Regarding this terminology the leaders of the Bodo movement in 1980’s distinguished the term “Boro” from the term “Bodo”. According to them the term “Boro” purely indicates their linguistic affiliation or Boro speaking people while the term “Bodo” refers to all Kacharis and Bodo ethnic groups of people (Chaklader, 2004).

The Bodos were earlier known as Kachari, and one of the earliest settlers of plains Assam (Chaudhuri, 2004:16). The historian H. K. Barpujari says, “The Kacharis who belong to the great Bodo race were perhaps one of the earliest aboriginal tribes of the Brahmaputra valley” (Bhuyan, 2007). According to Rev. S. Endle the Boro Kachari race is the original inhabitants of Assam. There is of course no historical evidence of its early immigration and settlements (Chaklader, 2004). History says, the Bodos are the aboriginals of Assam. They once ruled Assam till around 1854 A.D. (Brahma, [et al.], 2001).

They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock and their language is derived from the Assam Burmese branch of Tibeto Burman sub-family. The other neighboring communities who belong to the same linguistic family are Dimasha Kachari, Rabha, Tiwa, Tipera, Sonowal Kachari, Mishing etc. (Chaudhuri, 2004:16). Most of these tribes are included under this bigger group of Boro.

According to some historians the Bodos are known under different name in different places and ages throughout the North-Eastern region of the Indian sub-continent. In Goalpara and North-Bengal they are called Mech, in North-Cacher Hills Dimasa, a corruption of Dima fisa or “sons of the great river” (Chaklader, 2004). In this context Sir Edward Gait says, “In Brahmaputra valley the Kacharis call themselves Bodo or Bodo fisa (sons of the Bodo)” (Bhuyan, 2007).

Regarding the migration of the Bodos into India there are diverse opinions among the scholars. As the Bodos have been inhabiting in the North-Eastern region of this country since time immemorial and somewhere stated that their history is about 5000 years old, specially onwards eastern bank of the great river Ganges (Bhuyan, 1989:106). Traditional stories prevalent among certain Boro tribes like Garo and Rabha suggest that their ancestral home was Tibet or eastern sub-Himalayan region from where they migrated to North-East India and were distributed in different parts (Sengupta, 2008: p-6). Some scholars agreed that as they racially belonged to the Mongoloid, they surely and certainly migrated from the Central Asia, the mainland of the Mongoloid people.

The Bodos itself has some internal divisions into a number of clans. According to Padmashri Mohini Brahma number of clans is eighteen which are not endogamous. They are Basumatari, Brahmari, Doimari, Gaya, Sibigiri, Musahori, Narjari etc. (Chaklader, 2004). These clan names are used often as surnames. This group of plains tribal of Assam belongs to different religions, some are Hindus, some Christians and some are professing tribal religions (Bhuyan, 1989:55). But originally the Bodos are the worshippers of Shiva means Mahadeva. It also means Bathan, their traditional religion. Though, in course of time they adopted Hinduism and of course some of them professed Christianity but still there is no conflict between Shivaism and Hinduism. Because Shiva was given an important position among the Gods and Goddesses of the Hindus that is why they had no difficulty in adopting Hinduism (Chaklader, 2004). Regarding Christianity they were influenced by the Christian Missionaries who played an important role for socio-religious reforms in their society during colonial period.

Early History of the Bodos: Regarding the migration of the Bodos into India there are diverse opinions among the scholars. Rather there is no authentic source of history regarding the migration of the Bodos into India. As the Bodos have been inhabiting in the North-Eastern region of this country since time immemorial and somewhere stated that their history is about 5000 years old, specially onwards eastern bank of the great river Ganges (Bhuyan, 1989:106). Traditional stories prevalent among certain Boro tribes like Garo and Rabha suggest that their ancestral home was Tibet or eastern sub-Himalayan region from where they migrated to

North-East India and were distributed in different parts (Sengupta, 2008: p-6). Some scholars agreed that as they racially belonged to the Mongoloid, they surely and certainly migrated from the Central Asia, the mainland of the Mongoloid people (Sonowal, 2013). Again, another group of eminent scholars stated that the Bodo-Kachris in the ancient times, were living in Mongolia and Siberiya and they migrated from there towards the Northeastern part of India and settled on the north bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra later on (Basumatary, 2012). S.K.Chatterjee in this regard stated that the original home of the Mongoloid people were the places in the North of China in between the head-water of the Huang-Ho and the Yang-tzse Kiyang rivers from where they moved and scattered in different places (Chatterjee, 1974:36). Later on, some people of this Mongoloid community came to Tibet where they settled down. Rev.S.Endle also in this context opines that the two Trans-Himalayan countries viz., Tibet and China were the original home of this race of Tibeto-Burman (Sonowal, 2013). In this regard though Sanyal (1973) was not very clear about the migration of the Bodos from where they came from but provided some information. In this context, he stated,

“Such was the history of a Tibeto-Burmese speaking Indo-Mongoloid tribe, the Bodos, who migrated into India through Patkoi Hills between India and Burma and gradually spread themselves into the whole of modern Assam, North-Bengal and parts of East-Bengal. They ruled over these tracts of land for many years. It is probable that they marched towards three directions. One part went south up to Kachar and were called Kacharis. The second part went along the river Brahmaputra and established themselves in the whole of modern Assam up to Goalpara and parts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar under the name of Bodo and Bara.”(Ray,Tamang,et.al 2013 p.4)

Again, S.K. Chaterjee stated that the Bodo group of people had migrated into Assam since 1000 B.C. (Chatterjee,1974:36, Sonowal,2013:3), where B. Narzari believes that they started to migrate into Assam since 2000 B.C.(Narzi,1962:54). However it becomes clear that this group of people is one of the original inhabitants in this part of North-East India. When the Bodos started to Migrate to India because they were in migratory habits, followed the routes of North-Eastern India passes across many mountains and rivers of the Himalayan region. It is the general agreement among the historians and the anthropologists that the flow of the Mongolian people to the North-Eastern part of India was a continuous process which started long before especially from the pre-historic period. Some other smaller groups of the Mongoloid people who migrated into Assam after passing across the various points of mountains along the Indo-Bhutan borders and most of them came through upper Burma considered as Tibeto-Burman in origin as was identified as by the Anthropologists (Sonowal,2013). After entering Assam, the Bodos were found migrating from one place to another and took a long time to be settled permanently in a particular place. Therefore, they spread all over Assam as mentioned above. Consequently, in course of time these scattered people got their variation in their language, culture and customs in different circumstances and places and even the isolation of their original kinsman. Apart from that, some other tribes with different names were created out of the parent group due to the close relationship or inter

marriage with other local communities that brought the variation on their physical appearance to some extent. Therefore, Lalungs, Rabhas, Koches and Sonowals are found in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Dimasas in the Cachar Hills, the Tripuris and their allied tribes in Tripura, Garos and Hajongs in Garo Hills of Meghalaya, lower Assam and Bangladesh and Meches in lower Assam, North Bengal and some parts of Nepal and so on (Sonowal,2013:4). That is why all these groups belong to the whole of Bodo language speaking people.

As mentioned above, the Bodos are the original settlers of the Brahmaputra valley and they ruled the North-eastern part of India with their powerful kingdoms since time immemorial. There is no doubt that they do have a glorious past with the kingdoms over Brahmaputra valley, down to North Bengal, Cachar Hills, Sylhet and Tripura (Prakash, 2008:262). Due to their settlement in different places, their different kingdoms were identified with different names. For example, Kachari Kingdom, Koch Kingdom, Dimasa Kingdom, Chutiya Kingdom, Moran Kingdom, Borahi Kingdom and so on was some of prominent Kingdoms of the Bodos (Sonowal, 2013:8). But the Bodos lacked cohesion among themselves hence they had not a single unified kingdom under the Bodos. As per the works epic Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas and others have also referred that Assam was a land of Mlechhas (uncivilized people) like Kiratas, Asuras (inhuman beings), Danavas (giants) and Rakshashas (demons). The ethnographical studies have also proved that Assam was a land of non-Arya people or mongoloid people (Mosahari, 2011). Most of the scholars are also agreed upon that the Mongoloids once practically occupied the whole of the north-eastern region as was mentioned as the *Kiratas* in ancient Sanskrit literature. The early rulers from the period of fifth to mid eleventh century were from Indo-Mongoloids of various dynasties in the plains of Assam (Basumatary, 2012). This land of Assam was called Pragjyotispura (it was called in the age of Mahabharata, latter on it was known as Kamrupa as mentioned in 'Puranas' i.g., 'Kalika Purana' and 'Vishnu Purana') and the Kingdom of Pragjyotisha was mentioned in the epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana and which is generally accepted by the scholars with the view that the Western Assam along with some portion of North Bengal were the core parts of this Kingdom (Choudhury, 2007). Grierson in this regard mentioned that the Mech people ruled Pragjyotishpura for over 4000 years (Prakash, 2008:262).

As mentioned in the great ancient works, the legendary kings like Mahiranga, Narakasura, Bhagadutta, Banasura, Bhaskar Barman etc. are described to have been the Bodos (Mosahari, 2011). Among those, Narakasura was the first king of the ancient Brahmaputra Valley in the real sense though some historians believe Mahiranga Danava as the first king of Pragjyotishpura but he was not a king in real sense (Sonowal, 2013:9). It was Narakasura, who first established a kingdom in real sense after Mahiranga dynasty. This dynasty was forwarded by his son Bhagadatta who was also known as the chief of Kiratas or Mlechas and registered his name in the ancient epics of Bhagabata Purana, Bishnu Purana, Kalika Purana, the Mahabharata and so on (Sonowal, 2013:9). These texts have mentioned that these legendary kings are Kiratas and the Kiratas are the major component of the population of Pragjyotispura. The Mahabharata in its Sabhaparvan, the Kiratas are described as very rich in supplying gold, silver and gems which they obtained from the mountains and

also the experts in making cloth of various kinds. Some of them served as the army of the king Bhagadutta. The Ramayana also describes the Kiratas as fearless as a tiger (Choudhury, 2007). Again, the Kalikapurana and the Yoginitantra describe the Kiratas as the original inhabitants of Kamrupa (Kakoti, 1967). However, King Bhagadatta was a very strong and powerful king of Pragjyotishpura as was praised in the epic of Mahabharata. He died in the great Kurukshetra War.

Suniti Kumar Chatterjee in this regard describes Kiratas as:

It would appear that during the centuries immediately before Christ and in the early Christian centuries, the Kiratas were known to the Hindu world as a group of peoples whose original home was in the Himalaya slopes and in the mountains of the East, in Assam particularly, who were yellow in colour and presented a distinct type of culture. They had spread all over the plains of Bengal up to the sea and appear to have penetrated as far as West Bengal. They were rich with all the natural wealth of minerals and forest produce with which the mountains and hills and jungles where they live abounded, but they were adept in the art of weaving cloth (as their descendent still are), the cotton and woollen fabrics they made being very much in demand among the more civilised Hindus of the plains (Choudhury, 2007).

Apart from that, another Bodo dynasty, the Barman Dynasty reigned Kamrupa for a long period of three hundred years which was founded by legendary king, Pushya Varman (350-380 A.D.) lineage of Bhagadutta (Sonowal, 2013, Mosahari, 2011). King Bhaskar Varman (594-650 A.D.) was the last king of this dynasty but he was a powerful and the most influential ruler of this region. During the time of his rule, Kamrupa became one of the important learning centres of India. The famous Chinese traveller and Buddhist scholar Hiuen Ts'ang visited Kamrupa on the request made by Bhaskar Varman. Hence, it was the evidence that the Bodos had been maintaining a proud link with the Chinese people, once from where they migrated (Sonowal, 2013:9-10).

Another Bodo dynasty, the kingdom of Banasura was popular during the time of the reign of Narakasura. The capital of his kingdom was at Sonitpur and he was a worshiper of Shiva (Choudhury, 2007). As a symbolic relic of his worship of Shiva, Mahavoirab Shiva Temple still exists in Tezpur which was once constructed by him (Sonowal, 2013:10). These descriptions proved that before the advent of the Aryans, the Bodos maintained their powerful independent Kingdom with their traditional culture, religion, language and economy. They were never influenced by other language, culture and religion and were free from caste divided society as was introduced by the Aryans since the fifth century and also started to influence the Bodo kingdoms and their societies (Sonowal, 2013:10). Moreover, the history of Assam plains shows that the local dynasties of Mongoloid origin had contacts with the Hindu societies of India and by the twelfth century they became Hindus, even in the later period the patronization of the Hindu religious institutions by the Ahoms also influenced them in this regard. But their counterparts i.e., the Mongoloids in the hills and mountains remained untouched by the Hindu influence and its caste based structure (Basumatary, 2012).

Hence, it can safely be assumed that in ancient India, the people known as the Kiratas are the common ancestors of the Bodos and other allied tribes of both the eastern and north-eastern India. Since 335 A.D., many other Bodo Kings ruled the land till around the last part of the 15th century. It is mentioned, the Kamrupa included the then Assam, East Bengal and Bhutan (Mosahari, 2011).

Before the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, by which the British acquired to control over the whole of Brahmaputra valley of Assam was ruled by the Ahoms (Gait, 1984:248). The Ahom Kingdom was formed by Sukapha in the 13th century i.e., in 1228 A.D., who ruled over Assam for merely 600 years till the advent of the British in 1826 and started to consolidate their rule. This period was significant where the Ahom rulers became successful for establishing a well-integrated administrative system in Assam (Basumatary, 2012). As a result, the first three hundred years of Ahom rule witnessed the gradual disappearance of the Bodos from the field of political activities. One after another, the Bodo principalities submitted to the Ahom rule. This process continued till 1536 AD; when Ahoms occupied the entire Kachari Kingdom and this year also equally important because the mightiest Bodo state of Assam, the Dimasa Kingdom of Dimapur was destroyed by the Ahom troops (Sen, 1986). When this kingdom was in Dimapur as its capital, it was so wealthy and powerful that became a glorious past for them. It forced them to settle towards the North Cachar Hills from Dimapur and later the Capital was shifted to Maibong (Narzary, 1998). But again the Ahom King Rudra Singh occupied Maibong and the Bodos were forced to settle in Khaspur of Cachar District where they founded another Bodo Kingdom. But due to the frequent attacks made by the Manipuri Prince in 1818 and later the Burmese troops forced the Bodo Kingdom to enter into a treaty with the Britishers and remained tributary ruler. After the death of King Govindachandra, the Kingdom was included in the British Empire in 1832. However, another group of Bodos led by Tularam Senapati maintained himself as an independent chief in the hills of North Cachar but he was also compelled to enter into a pact with the British giving up Central Cachar in 1834. After the death of Tularam Senapati the Bodos lost their entire kingdoms completely in 1854 to the British (Sonowal, 2013) and it was merged with Nowgaon district by the British (Narzary, 1998). Likewise, in course of time, the Boro Kachari lost their Kingdom, palace, land and everything though the ruins and relics of the last kingdom of the Boro Kachari are still lying in Dimapur city (Brahma [et. al.], 2001).

After coming under the British annexation the Bodos lost their political existence and sovereignty. Gradually, they were becoming more and more backward with their traditional mode of economy. They could not compete with other communities and with the Assamese caste Hindu elite due to the lack of education and other privileges in socio-political and economic spheres. Therefore, they were placed in the lower position in the society and deprived from getting equal position and status in the caste Hindu dominated society. To get rid of this situation, some of the Bodos converted themselves to the Hinduism but even that they failed to get equal social position and respect (Sonowal, 2013:13-15). So, it was the time that the Bodos started to feel marginalized and also were submerged under other hegemonies in the region. Though they do have glorious past history, the present Bodo movement for

distinct identity is therefore an attempt to revitalize their past glory. In this regard the Missionary activities played an important role to address the issues of their backwardness in the region and showed the ray of hope for improving their living standards with modern western education.

When the first political organization for the plains tribals of Assam, i.e., Tribal League came into existence in 1933 as a common platform of all the plain tribes, the main agenda of it was the preservation of the line system without which they felt that the entire tribal economy and culture would be jeopardized by the heavy influx of the immigrants from the outside (Sharma, 2009: p.99). It became clear from the fact that when Bodo delegation met with the Simon Commission and other British Constitutional groups. A very few educated tribal elite like Bhimbar Deuri and others attempted to identify the tribal identity as a “community of the plains tribes”. The Tribal League tried to unite all the tribes living in the plains of Assam in a same field (Pathak, 1998). Though it was named as “Tribal League”, the Bodos from the very beginning dominated the Tribal League (Chaudhury, 2004: p.57).

In this period two issues were mostly debated regarding the identity formation of the plains tribes of Assam in its legislative Assembly are land alienation and issue of immigration. It was the colonial government which encouraged the immigrants for proper using of the cultivable waste land in the hope of raising more revenue which also created the issue of land alienation for the tribes in the plains. Though, government introduced the line system in 1920 keeping in view protecting the tribal interest but in reality the system didn't work.

Therefore, on the basis of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1880, this organization demanded a separate territory for the plains tribes of Assam. They also supported the line system in 1938 which was introduced by the Britishers in 1920 to protect the interest of the tribal people in general and Bodos in particular to stop the influx of land hungry people, money lenders and traders to their territory (Chaudhury, 2004: p.57). In the meantime of the election of provincial legislature in Assam held in 1937, the League bagged all the four seats reserved for the tribals and extended its support to both the Congress and Muslim League ministries respectively later on (Chaudhury, 2004: p.57). However, the main trust of agreement with any party used to be maintenance of independent identity, assurance of tribal representation, maintenance of line system and protection of tribal areas (Sharma, 2009). Eventually, the Muslim League moved a resolution for the abolition of the Line System in the Legislative Assembly in 1937. The leaders of the Tribal League fought against the constant attack on the tribal lands and accused Shadullah for sheltering the immigrants and led his ministry fall in 1938 (Narzary, 2000). In this regard, a leader of the Tribal League, Rabi Chandra Kachari expressed a protective measure with following words: *“There should be a line system to protect the weak and backward people, without a line of demarcation it is not possible to look into the interests of the poor people who require special protection”* (Pathak, 1998: p.7).

In this regard the tribal representatives defended for the continuation of the line

system in the Legislative Assembly and expressed a fear that if it is abolished then hordes of immigrants will come in to the region and the original ruling people of Assam will have to move to jungles and hills (Pathak,1998:p.7). In September 1939, the Tribal League entered into agreement with the congress and took part in the coalition ministry headed by Gopinath Bordoloi as the Prime Minister of Assam (Narzary, 2000). The Bordoloi Ministry adopted a resolution based on the report of line system Committee. Paragraph 4 of this resolution states:

“The restrictions constituting the so called line system which have been existing in the province for over ten years past were primarily intended against the unending flow of Bengal immigrant cultivators and took the form of constituting the certain areas in which settlement of land with such immigrants was prohibited. The government agrees with the Committee that in future the unit for such restriction of prohibition should, where possible, be larger. They consider that in the subcontinent areas it should be possible to constitute whole Mouza or compact by backward and tribal classes into “prohibited areas” (Brahma, 2008).

But the Bordoloi Ministry could not materialize the resolution because the ministry had to resign due to the Quit India Movement launched by the National party. The League had to keep quiet again when another coalition ministry headed by Sir Mahammad Shadullah came into power in 1939. Hence the land policy of Bordoloi was reversed. Shadullah, instead of introducing developmental schemes, adopted the policy to divide all the waste lands into blocks and allotted to different communities including immigrants on payment of premium of Rs.5/- per bigha. As a result many immigrants were settled down in different areas even in the tribal dominated areas (Brahma, 2008).

Again, in 1942 when Sir Shadullah came in power with assurance of full co-operation to the British Government in the eve of the war against Japan took the policy known as policy of “grow more food” which resulted flow of thousands of immigrants into the soil of Assam (Brahma, 2008). Consequently, the Tribal League came out with strong criticism of Shadullah’s policy and there was almost a cessation of political relation with him and his Muslim League by the time of their 5th session at Mongoldoi, on 20th April, 1945. Rabichandra Kachari, a leader of the League openly criticized Shadullah’s land settlement policy and held the view to fight for independence (Barpujari & Bhuyan, 1977).

After the general election of 1946 to the Assam Legislative Assembly Gopinath Bordoloi formed the ministry and also the Tribal League was shown good result in that election. Later, the leaders of the Tribal League merged with Congress party in July 1946 expecting with their tribal interest and aspirations. Consequently, the ministry appointed a special officer to inquire into the land problem of the tribals. Later, on the basis of his report the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 was amended by adding Chapter- X to it in 1947 which created 33 tribal belts and blocks in Assam (Brahma, 2008).

So far as the contribution of the plain tribals in Indian freedom struggle is concerned it is necessary to mention here that a section of tribal leaders like Kulachandra Basumatary,

Aniram Basumatary, Chatrasingh Teron, participated in the freedom struggle under the leadership of Revolutionary Communist Party because there was neither discrimination nor middle class snobbery in the party (Goswami,1996).Though they contributed to the Indian freedom struggle with the Assamese, they were always apprehensive about the domination of Assamese. They had fear that Assam with the rest of India would lead to the strengthening of the caste Hindu element in the Assamese society and give them a leverage which would be denied to the tribals. The All Assam Plain Tribal League expressed its fear of both caste Hindus and Muslims domination and demanded that Assam and its hills should not be made part or province of any federation - Hindustan or Pakistan without the consent of its people. The Kachari Sammelan also expressed similar views (Sharma, 2009).

In the independent India, the earlier Bodo leaders assured the Bodo people to improve their condition with the new opportunities which had brought about by the democratic process. But it did not bring much benefit to the socio-economic condition of the plain tribes of Assam. The conditions of the tribes actually worsened under the new politico-administrative arrangements (Dutta & Bhuyan, 2007:p.95). The State Government also did not have necessary good will towards the plain tribals to help them giving weight age to the grievances according to their own genius and tradition (Dutta, 1993:p.137). Therefore various organizations, government officials, social workers and political leaders of the community felt to establish a literary forum i.e., Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1952 to promote and preserve the Bodo language, literature and culture for their distinct identity. This literary organization discussed about this identity question in its various meetings and demanded for the recognition of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction on the primary level education in the Bodo dominated areas in 1961 (Choudhury, 2004:p.59-61). This organization provided the platform to the Bodos in organizing themselves. At the same time, as stated earlier, some leaders of the plains tribes felt that they are constitutionally discriminated and deprived from getting any type of autonomy which their counterparts i.e., hill tribes of the state of Assam enjoying constitutional protection under the provision of sixth schedule of the constitution of India. They also deprived from the provision under the fifth schedule of the constitution.

As a result, the Bodo leaders formed the Plain Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), a political organization on February 1967 to fight for “full autonomy in the predominantly plains tribal areas” in Assam popularly to be known as Udayachal (Bhuyan, 1989:p.113-114).The All Bodo Students Union(ABSU) formed in 1967 was offered active support to them. Seven years later of its formation the demand was upgraded with union territory status (Das & Basu, 2005:p.178) by influencing the formation of Maghalaya as an Autonomous state in 1970 followed by the passage of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act. 1971 (Dutta & Bhuyan, 2007:p.97). In this part, PTCA could not make much further effort when it entered into a pact with the Janata Party in 1977 (Dutta & Bhuyan, 2007:p.97). This however affected the movement for union territory status and the leaders reverted to the regional Autonomy (Das & Basu, 2005:p.178).

However, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was eager to unify various factions and rivals of the PTCA. As a result, it took the initiative in forming a new party called United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) in 1984 (Basu & Kohli, 1998:p.200). During that period, the achievements of the Assam Movement led by All Assam Students Union (AASU) inspired the leaders of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Bodo youths to fight for new struggle for Bodoland. ABSU touched every section of Bodo society and aroused consciousness among them. Consequently ABSU formally declared the starting of a democratic and peaceful Gandhian mass movement on 2nd March, 1987. It spread the messages of united non-violent struggle among the Bodo masses. This agitational programme of ABSU followed by massive mass participation of Bodos and supported by various tribal groups, minority groups and by different tribal and non-tribal students union to fight against “Assamese Chauvinism”. The ABSU leadership adopted the methods like bandh, rally and mass mobilization to arouse the consciousness among them. Some Bodo youths took violent methods under the banner-ship of BLT and NDFB. BLT was in favor of the creation of a separate state of Bodoland within Indian Union while the NDFB demanded for the formation of a sovereign and independent state of Bodoland outside India.

Due to the complete breakdown of the law and order machinery of the state in its Bodo dominated areas the government initiates dialogue with the ABSU leadership. As a result, the leadership of the Bodo movement agreed to give up the demand for a separate state instead of “autonomy” under the provision of the Bodo Accord 1993. However, the signing of the Bodo Accord on 20th February 1993, paved the way for the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). Though formally it led to the end of six years long Bodo movement but the future of the BAC remained uncertain due to the controversy over its jurisdiction and consequent differences of opinion between and among the various Bodo and non-Bodo groups where in some parts of the BAC the Bodos even do not constitute a simple majority. (Das & Basu, 2005:p.193). A section of Bodo leaders also regarded the autonomy as puppet autonomy and started for another struggle. It takes violent measures and once again the political situation started worsening soon after the formation of BAC and it continued for a long time. After realizing the gravity of the Bodo situation, a series of talks with the BLT representatives were held for its permanent solution. Finally a new Bodo Accord popularly known as BTC, (2003) was signed between the representatives of Central Government, the BLT, and the State Government on February 10, 2003. One of the most important aspects of the BTC accord was that, not only it was done under the Constitutional provisions of the Sixth Schedule but also this provision of the constitution for the first time applied in the plains of Assam. This newly created accord aimed at fulfilling the socio-economic, cultural, educational, linguistic aspirations and ethnic identity of the Bodos. It was entrusted to look after 40 departments/subjects which were earlier looked after by the state government. The BTC would comprise 3,082 villages in the Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts (BTAD), which included four new districts--Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baska (Hussain, 2000). The BTC would have legislative, executive and financial powers with respect to the subjects transferred to it. The council will have total of 60 members out of which 40 elected and 6 nominated representatives. 30 seats would be reserved for tribal, 5 for

Early History of the Bodos: A Root Cause of Bodo Struggle for Ethnic Identity Formation Phanindra Kalita non-tribal communities, 5 from general category and 6 would be nominated by the state government from unrepresented sections (Kalita, 2009). Finally, it can be said that the movement for Bodoland in sub-regional terms was basically one of ethno-cultural recognition and for political autonomy.

Conclusion: In conclusion, it can be stated that the above discussion focuses on the historical roots of the Bodos with their generic details. Moreover, it tried to find out the root causes of composite culture and distinct identity of the Bodo community. The early history of the Bodos and their glorious past with the kingdom over Brahmaputra valley, down to North-Bengal, Cachar Hills, Sylet and Tripura set the foundation of golden age of the community. Apart from that, the roles played by different tribal political and non-political organizations had constructed the Bodo ethnic assertion and awakened them in socio-cultural and political fields. These are remarkable inspirational ways which made them aware to regain their lost position in the post-colonial period for their distinct identity formation.

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