

# **Quest for Peace in Assam**

## **A Study of the Bodoland Movement**

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Centre for Land Warfare Studies  
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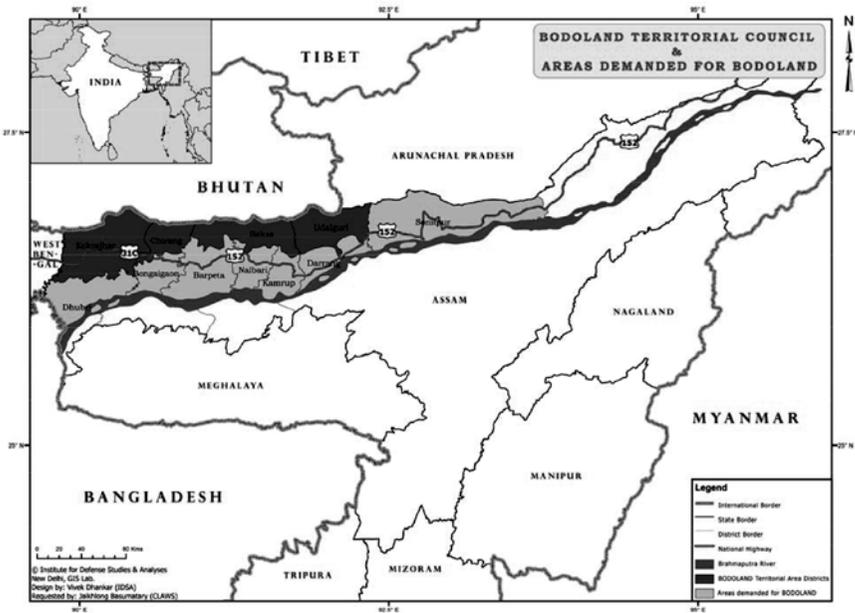


# Abbreviations

AAGSP	All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAPTL	All Assam Plains Tribal League
AASU	All Assam Students' Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ACMF	Adivasi Cobra Militant Force
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BCF	Bisa Commando Force
BLT	Bodoland Liberation Tigers
BNC	Bodo National Conference
BPAC	Bodo People's Action Committee
BPF	Bodoland People's Front
BPPF	Bodoland People's Progressive Front
BSF	Bodo Security Force
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
BTF	Bengali Tiger Force
CCBM	Coordination Committee for the Bodoland Movement
KLO	Kamatapur Liberation Organisation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NDFB (P)	National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive)
NEFA	North-East Frontier Agency
PDF	People's Democratic Front
PTCA	Plains Tribal Council of Assam
SJSS	Sanmilita Janagoshtiya Sangram Samiti
ST	Scheduled Tribe
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
VCDC	Village Council Development Committee



## Bodoland Territorial Council and Areas Demanded for Bodoland



## Quest for Peace in Assam A Study of the Bodoland Movement

### Introduction

Since millennia, Assam has been at the crossroads for interaction between several cultures and peoples. It was home to corporate groups of migrants, traders and smaller subsistence-agriculture-based ethnic groups. These groups moved consistently between South Asia, Southeast Asia and Inner Asia.<sup>1</sup> The Bodo-speaking group was one among the many that settled in the region and these people are considered today one of the denizens of the 'crossroads'.<sup>2</sup>

In the present arrangement of the modern Indian state, Assam is one of the seven states of northeast India. Sikkim is now counted as

the eighth, artificially tagged on as a part of northeast India for political reasons.<sup>3</sup> The British annexation of Assam began in 1824 as a response to the Burmese invasion in 1822 and was complete by 1839. After India became independent in 1947, the northeastern region underwent a drastic change.

Until 1963, with the exception of Tripura and Manipur<sup>4</sup>, the two erstwhile Princely States administered as Union Territories since their merger with the Indian Union, the rest of India east of the Siliguri Corridor comprised Assam. Only the tribal areas of the 'Frontier Tracts'<sup>5</sup> bordering Tibet were administered separately from Assam as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA)<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, the President of India was put in charge of the administration of these frontier tracts and representation for NEFA was provided by the Representation of the People's Act of 1950.<sup>7</sup> By 1969, when the Panchayat Raj Regulation was extended to NEFA, it became a Union Territory in 1973, with its name changed to Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state in 1987, along with Mizoram.

In the post-independence period, different ethnic groups within the administrative domain of Assam began voicing their aspirations for self-determination that ranged from the demand for autonomy within the Indian Union to complete secession. To cater to regional and tribal aspirations, the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram were carved out of Assam. Nagaland achieved statehood in 1963, Meghalaya on January 21, 1972, and Mizoram in January 1987. The creation of Meghalaya can be said to mark the first phase of the complete fracturing of colonial Assam and a relative lull was observed in the territorial demands based on tribal/ethnic/linguistic identity till the 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

The genesis of the existing situation in Assam goes back to the colonial policy of the organisation of provinces. Assam witnessed clubbing up of people from Sylhet district and from the Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Naga and Mizo Hills, in the process rupturing the homogeneity of the society. The post-independence period was initially one of calm, with the speedy amalgamation of the northeastern region with the rest of the country. The Bodos, however, did not gain, despite being a distinct tribal group. The Sixth Schedule<sup>9</sup> of the Constitution, which granted special protection and privileges to the tribal

people of the region, covered the Naga tribes and the tribal population of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. It aimed at safeguarding the interests of the tribal people and their cultures and customs. However, the Bodos, who lived in the plains of Assam, remained uncovered. This also left the Bodos without a District Council of their own. In addition, since the Fifth Schedule<sup>10</sup> did not include Assam, the Bodos were left with nothing.

Tribal movements, especially in the northeastern region, for self-determination are an enigma to many in the rest of India. The cultural presuppositions of the Government of India after independence have not been very different from those of the erstwhile colonial rulers.<sup>11</sup> While the Hindus had to be accommodated on a higher evolutionary scale, the tribals were treated as social strata below even the lowest caste in the Hindu hierarchy. This is even more true of the Bodo movement since it is taking place in a state on India's periphery, which itself had been the locale of a regional movement.<sup>12</sup>

In 1979, the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) launched the anti-foreigners agitation against Bangladeshi immigrants, popularly known as the Assam movement.<sup>13</sup> The movement enjoyed unprecedented mass support from all the constituent ethnic groups and ended with the signing of the Assam Accord<sup>14</sup> in 1985.

Not all the contributing constituents of the Assam movement were happy with the aftermath of the Assam Accord as many found that the terms of the agreement were not as favourable as they would have liked them to be. In a case of such disgruntlement, one Upendranath Brahma<sup>15</sup>, a close collaborator of AASU during the Assam movement, launched the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) movement for self-determination of the Bodo people.

This study aims to highlight the aspirations of the Bodo people under the polity of Assam and the Indian state and analyse the reasons for their quest for a separate state of Bodoland. The discourse on the quest for peace in Assam vis-à-vis the Bodoland movement will take into account the peace deals agreed upon by the Bodo leadership with the government agencies, along with various opposing forces facing the Bodoland movement. Since violence has been an integral part of the Bodoland movement, divorcing of the same will make the study inconclusive. Therefore, the study will highlight the protracted conflict that stems from the Bodo extremist groups and the

extremist groups that it has spawned through the violence meted out to other communities opposing the movement while underscoring the way forward, keeping in mind the policies and measures of the state in its attempt to bring about a permanent solution to the Bodoland movement.

### **The Bodos**

The Bodos, also referred to as Kacharis in the pre-colonial historiography of Assam, are considered aborigines of the Brahmaputra Valley. It is generally believed that the Bodos inhabited the fertile plains of the Luit (Brahmaputra) river in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and due to frequent skirmishes, with waves of migrating groups of people like the Tai-Ahom from the east and Indo-Aryan group from the west, they moved to Karbi and North Cachar Hills in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman speaking, Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group. In the present times, the Bodos are considered to be the largest plains tribe of Assam who inhabit the northern areas of the Brahmaputra Valley, namely, in places like Kokrajhar, Udalguri, Chirang, Baksa, Darrang, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, and Dhubri among other places. Elsewhere, the Bodos inhabit the lower regions of Nepal, West Bengal, Meghalaya, and Tripura.

According to Rev Sydney Endle<sup>16</sup>, the Bodos are the autochthons of Assam. Historically, the Bodos came under different rulers at different points in time – more prominently under the Kiratas, Asuras, Mechchas, and Danavas. In the comparatively recent history, the Bodo Kingdom was at its zenith during the reign of the Koch King Nar Narayan (1540-84). It was only after the assassination of Raja Govind Chandra in 1832 that the last Bodo Kingdom in Cachar fell with its annexation by the British. It was following this demise that the Bodos started feeling marginalised amidst the fear that they would be subsumed and submerged under other more dominant cultures. The Bodos have a glorious past, an ancient ancestry, and are, thus, rightly proud of their roots.

### **The Bodoland Movement**

Ethnicity and identity have been the key issues of mobilisation in all of Northeast India. Within Assam, the Bodos have historically been a marginalised community. From the colonial period, the Bodos have been

defining themselves as a community in opposition to other communities for which the educated Bodo elites and intellectuals have been articulating their divergence from the Assamese society and highlighting issues like land alienation and social and economic backwardness. Therefore, in its long genesis, the Bodo movement has had several forms moving gradually towards the demand for a separate state.

During the colonial and post-independence period, there had been attempts to subsume the Bodos under the umbrella of Assamese nationalism. Therefore, to begin with, it was under the British rule that the Bodos first raised the demand for a separate homeland along with the hill tribes of the northeast. The formation of the All Assam Plains Tribal League (AAPTLL) in 1933 was evidence enough. Subsequently, formation of organisations such as the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952, Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in 1967 reflected the Bodo people's quest for political power and self-determination.

Initially, the ABSU and PTCA worked in tandem to put forth the demand for a separate homeland for the Bodos, but ABSU withdrew its support to PTCA in 1979 when they felt that the PTCA had failed to fulfill the aspirations of the Bodo people for a separate state during the reorganisation process of Assam.<sup>17</sup> The ABSU movement, however, took a new turn with the election of Upendranath Brahma as its President in 1987. Brahma decided to launch a democratic mass revolution based on the principles of Gandhian non-violence aimed at attaining Bodoland by 1990 through a 50-50 division of Assam. The demands were for a Bodoland within the Indian Union, and not within Assam. The Bodo nationalism in Assam, thus, emerges through a multifaceted contestation: against the Indian state, against the dominance of the Assamese nation, and a clash with other dominant identities.<sup>18</sup>

Though the origins of the Bodo movement in Assam can be traced as far back as 1967 in the form of the PTCA, which raised the demand for separation from the state, it was only after the formation of ABSU on the lines of AASU that the Bodo demands began to be highlighted. Constitutional provisions under the Sixth Schedule<sup>19</sup> for forming autonomous District Councils were extended only to the Hill Tribes as the 1952 Report of the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes suggests

that tribals have to live either in the forests or in the hills. Therefore, the present upsurge of the Bodos, who inhabit the plain districts of Kokrajhar and parts of Udalguri, the then sub-division of Darrang district and other plains districts in Assam, has to be seen against this background. It is the government's bias against granting even District Council status to the Plains Tribes that has pushed the Bodos to take up the position for a separate state of Bodoland.<sup>20</sup>

The movement for a separate state of Bodoland, therefore, has its origins in the economic and socio-cultural aspirations of the Bodo people. The general feeling of the Bodos is that of neglect, exploitation, alienation and discrimination for decades. They felt that in the atmosphere of the campaign for assimilation into non-Bodo cultures, especially into the Assamese culture, they had no chance of preserving their own cultural heritage. Therefore, the Bodo elite and middle class with a certain level of formal education began to establish forums to mobilise Bodo intellectuals to address the issues concerning their community.

During the Assam movement, AASU and ABSU demanded the eviction of all non-tribals from essentially "Tribal Belts and Blocks."<sup>21</sup> Clause 10<sup>22</sup> of the Assam Accord addressed the issue of habitation in the Tribal Belts. However, the Bodo leaders strongly opposed Clause 6<sup>23</sup> of the accord, which promised safeguards to protect the cultural identity of the "Assamese People." This led to the fear that Clause 6 of the Assam Accord would give legitimacy to the imposition of the Assamese language and culture upon the Bodo people and other tribal communities of Assam. The Bodos, along with other tribal communities, resented the campaign of assimilation as they felt that they had no chance of preserving their own cultural heritage in the atmosphere dominated by the majority Assamese culture.

Even if there was a synergy between ABSU and AASU in the Assam movement, the signing of the Assam Accord came as a rude shock to the Bodos when they realised that AASU had not protected their interests, and that the accord did not take into account their worries and apprehensions. This resulted in the movement taking a violent turn, reflected in the Bodo-Assamese clashes in the late 1980s. Their initial demand for autonomy changed into a demand for a separate state which eventually got adopted by groups like the Bodo Security Force (BSF) later renamed as the National

Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), which demanded a separate country.

The separatist ideology that the leadership of the movement articulated with a powerful impact is rooted in a deep sense of alienation in relation to the Assamese society of which they had been considered to be a peripheral part. The ideology of the Bodoland movement carries strong elements of nativism and revivalism, but this nativistic ideology has been presented as one of liberation.<sup>24</sup> The Bodo leadership propagates the idea of Bodoland through the assumption that political autonomy will remove their deprivations.

The Bodo movement was neither a reform movement nor a revolution but rather one in between these two, i.e. a transformative movement aiming at bringing about middle level structural changes in distribution of power and in the system of differential allocation of resources.<sup>25</sup> The element of conflict in this movement acquires a sharper focus than in the reform movements, of which the Brahma movement among the Bodos is a good example. Again, the Bodoland movement is not a revolutionary one as the conflict is not based on the ideology of class struggle but is more between ethnic groups with some elements of class struggle built into its ideology.<sup>26</sup>

Bodo nationalism has gone through distinct phases from the pre-independence period till the present times. The first phase commenced with the formal organisation of the Bodo polity with the Bodos feeling the need for a political party that represented their interests. This phase is also considered the phase of political awakening that lasted from 1933 to 1966. The second phase, from 1967 to 1986, saw growing demands for autonomy though it was yet to resemble a struggle backed by groups capable of employing violence as an alternate means to achieve their aims. The third phase, 1987-1992, was characterised by open and persistent demands for autonomy, with ABSU taking over from the PTCA and spearheading the movement. The fourth phase from 1992 to 2003, after a brief period of large-scale agitation, demonstration, etc. led to the signing of the first Bodo Accord but violence commenced soon after due to the ambiguities in the terms of agreement of the accord and lapses in power sharing in the newly formed Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), heralding yet another low intensity conflict in the region till the second Bodo Accord was signed in 2003.

The present phase of the Bodoland movement started after the signing of the 2003 Bodo Accord after which there was the disbanding of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and its leadership taking over the administration of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). This phase also saw the NDFB agreeing for a dialogue with the state agencies and entering into a ceasefire agreement. One of the determining factors of this phase in the Bodoland movement was the formation of the Bodo National Conference (BNC), an umbrella organisation of all Bodo groups to strengthen and bring about a holistic approach to the demand for a separate state of Bodoland.

The struggle for Bodoland, therefore, needs to be seen as a story of resistance of a small ethnic nationality trying to preserve its identity, which is so inextricably tied up with land.<sup>27</sup> Under the present circumstances, the Bodo community is endangered by elements of uncertainty and insecurity. In many senses, the successive waves of violence in the Bodo areas are a reflection of that. Experts go on to argue that “Bodo militancy has its roots in the paternalistic attitude of the Assamese caste Hindu elite.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***Conflict and Peace in Bodoland Movement***

The Bodoland movement has now and then erupted in violence. As the movement progressed, violent tactics were used – cadres attacked bridges, roads, railways, schools, and government offices and also engaged in conflicts with other communities living in Bodo-dominated areas. The Bodo leaders, who claim that their movement is largely peaceful and non-violent in character, remain unruffled by the outbursts of violence, which have already claimed hundreds of lives.

The initial phase of the Bodoland movement was marked by *bandhs*, road and rail blockades and mass mobilisation efforts. But it did not take long for the ABSU-led struggle to deviate from peaceful forms of protest. Ever since the movement intensified, the ABSU leadership formally disowned the violent acts but did not hesitate to declare that if necessary, they would even seek foreign help to achieve their goal of a separate Bodoland.<sup>29</sup>

The Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) whose formation in 1988 is considered an important landmark in the history of the Bodoland movement, was accused of adopting militant practices in its efforts to mobilise the Bodo people. Not only was it labelled as the armed wing of the ABSU but the BPAC

was also accused of adopting terrorist methods against perceived spoilers of the movement within the Bodo community and against non-Bodos living in the mixed population villages of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur districts.

When ABSU emerged as a force to reckon with by 1988, a marked feature of their violence had been the attacks on PTCA supporters. The ABSU-PTCA clashes not only placed the two major Bodo organisations on an irreconcilable path but also led to the emergence of a fratricidal element in the Bodo agitation, resulting in the division of the Bodo people on the question of Bodoland and its equation with Assam.

Apart from victimising those sections of Bodos who are opposed to separation from Assam, the militant elements within the Bodo community were adamant on creating a situation, especially in Kokrajhar and Udalguri, which would compel an exodus of the non-tribal population from these areas. The emergence of militancy in the Bodo community contributed to the escalation of violence, extortions, kidnappings, murders and the like in Assam.

When ABSU resumed its movement in February 1989 after a brief suspension in October 1988, “to create a peaceful atmosphere for discussions,”<sup>30</sup> it faced rising opposition. Such opposition, in turn, gave rise to insurgent activities in areas like Kokrajhar, resulting in the culmination of the Bodo insurgency. The formation of militant groups such as the Bodo Security Force (BSF)<sup>31</sup> with an agenda “to liberate the Mongoloid dominated Indo-Burma region”<sup>32</sup> is a case in point. Like the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the BSF was a secessionist outfit, which resorted to armed violence.

Failing to get its demands acceded to, certain sections of the Bodo leadership also created the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) who took up arms to wage a bitter battle with the state. While the BSF had extended considerable influence in Bodo areas, the creation of the BLT, with an ideology and agenda different from that of the BSF on the issue of Bodoland, unfortunately, drove the two groups into a collision course, which resulted in hostility between them that was to dog the Bodoland movement for a long time and entailed a heavy human cost.

Violence by the BSF and BLT in the Bodoland areas could be seen as a part of “contentious politics”<sup>33</sup>. The violence of these extremist groups drew inspiration from extremist organisations like the ULFA, which believed that

the political elite in Delhi and Dispur would not listen to the voices of non-violence. Thus, they adopted violent means, with serious implications.

Subsequently, after a period of agitation, which was marked by both peaceful protests and violence, the central and state governments worked out some form of settlement with the Bodo leadership to restore peace and order in Assam. In a move towards that endeavour, the First Bodo Accord was signed on February 20, 1993.

The accord provided for a democratically elected Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC)<sup>34</sup> in the Northern Valley of the Brahmaputra river. The accord was on the creation of an administrative authority within the state of Assam called BAC and not of Bodoland as a state separate from Assam.

Though the Bodo Accord of 1993 provided some sort of platform towards restoring peace in Assam, the accord itself delivered very little in terms of political or financial authority to the proposed BAC. In spite of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) admitting that “the objective of the scheme is to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement”<sup>35</sup>, the powers and potentialities of the envisaged BAC fell short of the expectations of the Bodo leaders. Many vital and highly complex and contentious issues relating to demography, territory and boundaries of the proposed BAC areas, particularly the inclusion and exclusion of villages with a mixed Bodo and non-Bodo population composition were rendered undefined and were not addressed appropriately.

The BAC Act of 1993, which was subsequently passed by the Assam State Assembly provided for a General Council to be constituted by 40 elected members, including 30 seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes (STs). The BAC was also provided functional autonomy over 37 subjects and an interim BAC was formed on that basis.

Unfortunately, elections in the BAC could not be held because of the disagreement and confusion over the territorial jurisdiction of the council. Under such circumstances, analysts have argued that the BAC could never exercise whatsoever limited autonomy was provided by the BAC Act mainly because of insufficient financial powers and the overwhelming domination of the state government over most of the transferred subjects.

When the Assam government formalised the creation of the BAC by December 1993 sans the 515 “contentious villages”<sup>36</sup> that the Bodo leadership had demanded for inclusion in the BAC, most of them rejected the accord and termed it anti-democratic and anti-Bodo. On the other hand, the Bodo militants resorted to large-scale violence in and around these 515 villages when the Assam government contended that the state was responsible for the interest of a large section of non-tribal residents in these villages.

From 1994 onwards, the BSF resorted to extreme violence, which resulted in worsening of the situation, negating the primary objectives of the Bodo Accord. By October 1995, less than three years from the initial euphoria, the BAC was in tatters. While the Bodo insurgents had rejected the accord out of hand, by mid-1995, even the moderate Bodo leaders started to get disillusioned at its tardy implementation. The situation among the Bodo leadership was such that if ABSU was threatening to revive its original demand of a separate state of Bodoland, it was to be understood in terms of the competitive radicalism of various Bodo groups.

As the BAC faltered, the BSF reorganised itself as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). Further, by 1995, there was the emergence of another Bodo militant group in the form of the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), which allegedly came into being as a rival to the NDFB. In the context of Bodo militancy, it is important to note that one group was the nemesis of the other. As a result, from 1995 till 2001, these two groups fought the security forces as well as each other.

At the peak of the Bodo armed movement, Assam accounted for nearly more than half of India’s population of internally displaced persons.<sup>37</sup> The Bodo-Muslim violence that occurred in October 1993, is argued to have displaced about 3,568 families, consisting of 18,000 persons; one of the most serious incidents of killings took place in a relief camp at Bashbari in Barpeta district on July 24, 1994, where over 100 people were killed and 70,000 were rendered homeless.<sup>38</sup> Further, the first spell of Bodo-Santhal clashes in May 1996 devastated the villages of both communities and displaced over 2,02,684 persons or about 42,214 families; while the second spell of Bodo-Santhal clashes in 1998, displaced over 3 lakh people.<sup>39</sup>

On the violence front, it is important to note that the volatile situation that prevailed in the Bodo areas in the 1990s can be attributed to the two main Bodo militant groups constantly fighting among themselves, besides the ethnic clashes. As a matter of fact, the clashes between the BLT and NDFB had largely restricted free movement in the Bodoland areas. Killing of innocent people was rampant with areas designated on the lines of a 'drug cartel.' In other words, a person belonging to a particular area believed to be patronising one group would be murdered with no questions asked if that person ventured into the areas which patronised the other group. Such a situation eventually resulted in fratricidal killings among the Bodos. Bodo militant groups killed 260 people in 1996 alone.<sup>40</sup>

On the political front, the post-accord scenario in the Bodo areas appeared equally unstable. With growing disillusionment over the arrangements of the BAC, the entire Bodo leadership split. There was a split in the ABSU, one of the signatories of the accord. The NDFB opposed the accord, and sought opportunities to strike. The NDFB also made a commitment for an armed struggle for a separate state of Bodoland. Overall, the split in the Bodo leadership, coupled with the existence of two extremely active militant groups who swore by each other's blood, made the Bodoland movement in the 1990s extremely grim. Killings, kidnappings, extortion, and conflicts took centre-stage.

Unfortunately, along with the NDFB, the BLT also emerged as a most dreaded armed group with its objective of creating a separate state of Bodoland. Such assertions hugely boosted the confidence of these groups. It has also been argued that besides the ideological differences between the NDFB and the BLT, fratricidal clashes between these two groups sharply increased due to the alleged religious divide between the two, with the BLT being perceived as adherents of the Bathou<sup>41</sup> faith and the NDFB being perceived as neo-convert Christians.

Despite the large-scale counter-insurgency campaign such as Operation Rhino II launched by the state by May 1996, relations between the BLT and NDFB continued to be tense. Both groups engaged each other in violent confrontations. When the BLT entered into tripartite talks with the central and state governments, the NDFB stepped up its violent campaign. It kept up the pressure by bombing passenger trains and blowing up convoys of the security forces by planting landmines.

Towards the end of 1996, the Bodo leadership appealed for a ceasefire between the two Bodo militant groups. Apparently, even the ULFA had requested the NDFB and BLT to stop the fratricidal killings, suggesting that such killings would only benefit the state forces. However, despite such appeals, both the BLT and NDFB continued with their fratricidal activities, besides regular clashes with the state forces. Sadly, efforts by both the militant groups to sort out their differences did not yield any result, allegedly because of their ideological differences. This failure led to increased violence in the Bodo areas.

Though violence by the NDFB and BLT in the Bodoland areas can be seen as a part of 'contentious politics', it actually represents a continuum with other non-violent social movements, political parties and interest groups in the area. Violence in the Bodo areas emanates from the failure of the conventional groups to derive certain benefits from the state, which is detrimental to their identity and existence.<sup>42</sup>

While informal talks between the government and BLT started in 1999, there was the emergence of a hegemonic Bodo leadership by 2001 that helped in culling the violence in Bodo areas. However, though formal cessation of hostilities was declared only on March 15, 2000, the ceasefire did not bring the BLT any closer to the NDFB. As a matter of fact, all hell broke loose on the violence front when suspected NDFB militants killed the President of the BSS, Bineshwar Brahma<sup>43</sup> on August 19, 2000, in Guwahati. Bodo MLA Mohini Basumatary<sup>44</sup> became the victim of a counter-killing by suspected BLT cadres within a few days of the NDFB killing the BSS President.

The killings and counter-killings once again triggered fears of another round of fratricidal clashes between the rival Bodo factions. Such fears were substantiated due to the fact that the BLT's ceasefire gave the group freedom to move within Bodo areas, increasing its violent activities and launching attacks on its rival, the NDFB. It is important to note here that the government security forces did not curb these ceasefire violations nor did the central government revoke the agreement. The worst BLT-NDFB clash took place on December 12, 2000, which left nine BLT cadres dead.<sup>45</sup>

Not only were the NDFB and BLT poles apart, their political wings, the People's Democratic Front (PDF) and ABSU were also divided on political issues. One of the main differences between them was the choice of script for the Bodo language. Such differences between groups backed by armed militants became a recipe for an all-out conflict between these groups. Subsequently, after the killings of the BSS President and the MLA, Kokrajhar and other Bodo areas witnessed a string of killings, including the assassination of the ABSU President, Simbla Basumatary, by suspected NDFB cadres and the shooting of the President of the PDF, Garla Batha Basumatary by a suspected mercenary of some Bodo element. The BLT-NDFB acrimony got accentuated with the BLT entering into a ceasefire agreement because during the ceasefire period, the BLT carried out fratricidal killings of prominent personalities who patronised the NDFB.

Under such circumstances, the Bodo Accord of February 1993 did not improve the situation in the Bodo areas; rather, the situation was reminiscent of the violent pre-accord days because of the constant bloody clashes between the two Bodo armed outfits. Further, non-Bodo communities such as the Koch Rajbongshis were discontented due to the inclusion of their villages in the BAC. Such discontentment and uncertainties due to unreferred inclusion of their villages in the BAC and the constant threat by the Bodo militant groups, led the non-Bodo communities such as the Santhals, Koch Rajbongshis, and ethnic Bengalis living in the BAC to form their own militant outfits with the motive of countering the depredations committed by the Bodo militants. The Santhals formed the Bisa Commando Force (BCF) and Adivasi Cobra Militant Force (ACMF), the Koch Rajbongshis formed the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO), and the ethnic Bengalis formed the Bengali Tiger Force (BTF).

Given such a violent scenario, peace did not seem to have a chance in the Bodo areas. Not only have the elections for the regular BAC not taken place, in spite of repeated promises, the finalisation of the BAC area itself was subjudiced as the interim BAC had submitted a petition to the Supreme Court in 1999. In the meantime, the BLT was observing the ceasefire agreement while secretly eliminating any opposing element within the Bodo community. The NDFB also continued with its violent activities.

By 2003, negotiations between the state government, the central government and the BLT led to the signing of a peace accord popularly known as the Second Bodo Accord. The Second Bodo Accord created the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under modified provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Subsequently, the BTC was to comprise four districts: Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, and Udalgur, which were to be created by reorganising the existing districts of Assam. These four districts are otherwise known as the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD).

In contrast to the 1993 Bodo Accord that was signed by the ABSU, the sole signatory on behalf of the Bodo people to the 2003 Accord was Hagrama Mohilary, Chairman of the BLT, whose relations with the ABSU remained tangential. The creation of the BTC met various formidable challenges, including that of the NDFB which was committed to a sovereign Bodoland. Besides internal opposition from within the Bodo community, the creation of the BTC also faced opposition from the non-Bodo community, that, under the aegis of the Sanmilita Janagoshtiya Sangram Samiti (SJSS), an organisation comprising 18 non-Bodo groups, was opposed to any form of greater political autonomy for the Bodos.

The successful completion of formalities witnessed the biggest ever surrender ceremony in the country as a total of 2,641 BLT militants along with varieties of sophisticated weapons bade farewell to arms on December 6, 2003.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, the unarmed section of the Bodo groups such as the ABSU and erstwhile Coordination Committee for Bodoland Movement (CCBM), which spearheaded the revived Bodoland state movement were sidelined at the signing of the 2003 Bodo Accord even though they are argued to have enjoyed more popular support. Nevertheless, these groups backed the peace deal signed by the BLT.

Initially, some ABSU/CCBM leaders were accommodated in the ad hoc BTC, but at the time of the formation of the full-fledged BTC, and during the election to the Tribal Council, the ex-BLT leaders sidelined them. As a result, there was a split in the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF)<sup>47</sup>, a political party constituted by former BLT and ABSU/CCBM leaders. With this split, there were widespread clashes between the factions of the BPPF during the first election to the BTC which the BPPF (Hagrama) won.

The split between the BPF and BPPF widened in the subsequent Assembly elections of 2006 and 2011. While the BPF won the Lok Sabha election in 2009, in 2008, the BTAD areas witnessed a fresh round of fratricidal killings when gunmen apparently killed numerous people who were allegedly supporters of the ABSU, NDFB and BPPF. According to an ABSU publication, nearly 100 Bodo people were killed in 2008 in their effort to control Bodo politics and society.<sup>48</sup>

While the leaders of the erstwhile BLT were entrusted with the task of framing the Constitution of the BTC under the amended provisions of the Sixth Schedule, they were also accused of bullying their opponents or even killing them. The NDFB, however, remained a formidable challenge as its agenda revolved around a sovereign Bodoland and even in the present times, the NDFB cadres persistently clash with the erstwhile BLT cadres.

The NDFB sees the formation of the BTC as an exercise in futility. Nevertheless, on October 8, 2004, the NDFB announced a six-month-long ceasefire with effect from October 15, 2004. The move by the outfit was not reciprocated by the government then —instead, the government and the security forces continued operations against the outfit. However, the government, later realising that the NDFB represented the Bodo ethnic group, considered the significance of its announcement for which the Assam government released Govinda Basumatary, the arrested General Secretary of the NDFB with the motive of opening a channel of communication with the outfit's top leadership based in Bangladesh.

Subsequently, several discussions between the outfit's leadership and representatives of the Union government and Government of Assam led to the signing of a tripartite ceasefire agreement on May 25, 2005. The ceasefire with the NDFB since then has been periodically extended and several peace talks with the NDFB (Progressive) led by Govinda Basumatary have taken place.

While the NDFB (P) is in talks with the state agencies, the Ranjan Daimari faction of the NDFB also declared a unilateral truce in August 2011 after its top leadership, including Ranjan Daimari, was arrested. However, the Ranjan Daimari faction still maintains the armed wing of the NDFB under the leadership of I K Songbijit who runs the anti-talks and armed faction of the NDFB from Myanmar. While the cadres of the NDFB (P) faction are lodged

in various designated camps located across the Bodoland areas, the NDFB (Songbijit) faction continues to carry out violent armed activity, including kidnappings and extortion, in the lower Assam areas.

The formation of the Bodo National Conference (BNC) in 2010 with the intention of bringing all political and non-political Bodo organisations under one umbrella signalled some hope for a united struggle for a separate state of Bodoland. But by November 2011, the NDFB (P) distanced itself from the BNC, on the issue that a separate state of Bodoland was not in the BNC's agenda. On the contrary, the NDFB (P) stated that it was in talks with the Indian government on the issue of a separate state of Bodoland.

By December 2010, there were visible signs of the ABSU reviving the chant of "Divide Assam 50-50".<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the BTC was accused of having failed to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the Bodo people. The ABSU also went to the extent of accusing the Assam government of failing to protect the identity, culture and language of the Bodo people. The BPF, the ruling party of the BTC, on the other hand, claimed that it has been demanding the creation of separate state of Bodoland and took a position similar to that of the ABSU. Under such circumstances of claim and counter-claim, the Bodo people have been shoved into utter confusion as to which organisation they should side with in the demand for a separate state of Bodoland.

The recent developments, as far as the NDFB is concerned, are that its leader, Rajan Daimary has been released from jail on bail and the NDFB (P), the pro-talks faction of the outfit, in the aftermath of the declaration of Telengana, has changed its stance from a demand for a separate state of Bodoland to a demand for a Union Territory of Bodoland. Some analysts have viewed the release of Ranjan Daimary, who is likely to negotiate with the central and state governments, as giving rise to a scenario wherein there is a high probability of a clash with other personalities who are already negotiating on Bodoland with the government at various levels. This probable clash between Ranjan Daimary, Govinda Basumatary of the NDFB (P) and the present Chief of the BTC, Hagrama Mohilary comprises a highly destabilising scenario not only for the BTC but the whole of Assam.

The period 2012-13 has been quite significant, particularly for the BTC and the Bodoland movement in general. The July 2012 riots between the Bodos and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants once again highlighted the volatility of the Bodo areas. The conflict not only highlighted the antagonism against Bodoland by certain sections of the non-Bodo community in Assam but also rejuvenated the debate on the illegal migrants issue in Assam. Besides, the non-Bodos have organised themselves in order to oppose any form of arrangement in the form of Bodoland. As a matter of fact, a faction of the All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRSU) has appealed to the Bodo people to merge the demand for a separate state of Bodoland with their demand for Kamatapur state, as the Bodos do not have any history in Assam. Such a point of view not only deligitimises the Bodoland movement but also promotes acrimony between the two communities.

After the declaration by the Congress Party on the creation of Telengana on July 30, 2013, the Bodoland movement, after a lull, was rejuvenated in a massive way. Suddenly, there was a realisation among the Bodo leadership that the issue of a separate state of Bodoland had become stagnant and there was a need to relaunch the movement.

By and by, various Bodo organisations declared *bandhs* for weeks on end in the Bodoland areas, and also observed hunger strikes, besides carrying out massive rallies in both Dispur and New Delhi, while negotiating with the central and state governments at the same time. The Bodo leadership, under the BNC, on September 5, 2013, met with the Joint Secretary (Northeast) of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, and put forward the demand for upgrading the powers of the BTC to include the powers for home affairs and finance.

### ***The Bodoland Movement and the Non-Bodos***

The July 2012 clashes between the Bodos and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the three BTAD districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, and Baksa, and in Bongaigaon and Dhubri districts, and the clashes between the two communities in 2008 in the two northern districts of Darrang and Udalguri are indications that peace between the Bodos and non-Bodos in the Bodoland areas continues to be fragile.

The genesis of the conflict between the Bodos and non-Bodo communities can be traced back to the British bringing in Adivasis and assigning them small pieces of land in exchange for their work in the tea gardens. Subsequently, by the mid-1930s, settlers from what is now present Bangladesh, started arriving in Assam, which continues illegally to this day. With such influx, given the limited resources, tensions between a tribal society like the Bodos and the non-indigenous immigrant community, are inevitable. Such tensions also get highlighted through student politics, militant activities, etc.

The Bodos have clamoured for political and cultural autonomy through movements spearheaded by mass organisations as well as armed groups, with each group claiming to be their sole representative. In the course of this movement, the Bodos have not only developed sharp contradictions among themselves but also with various communities sharing the same territory, which have often overshadowed the Bodo people's movement for autonomy.

Despite the Bodos being perceived as the 'sons of the soil', they have been made to feel like outsiders due to the subsequent Assam government's faulty policies related to habitation of the 'tribal belts and blocks' and particularly the Congress government's policy of "opportunistically allowing large-scale illegal migration of Bangladeshi Muslims into Assam for the purpose of building a 'captive vote bank'"<sup>50</sup>, which has led to simmering communal tension, creating deeply adversarial relations, and eventually, resulting in incidents of violence.

The BTAD has a mixed population, which includes communities such as the Bodos, Koch-Rajbongshis, Rabhas, Adivasis, Tea Tribes, Assamese, and Bengali Hindus and Muslims. Although the Scheduled Tribes have exclusive rights over land in the tribal belts and blocks, the Bodo Accord guaranteed protection of land rights of all the communities living in BTAD. However, "Over the years, there has been a massive increase in the number of illegal Muslim migrants, which has posed a serious issue of identity crisis for the indigenous population."<sup>51</sup>

Over the years, the Bodos and other tribal people who once comprised a proud and productive agricultural community, have lost their lands and have been reduced to landless agricultural labour or, worse, to beggary in small towns.<sup>52</sup> As such, the Bodos have found themselves in conflict with different people from time to time, with devastating results for both sides. The Bodo

leaders attribute such clashes to 'rights' and not only on claim over land and local resources.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the Bodoland movement, and especially during the BAC time period and the present BTC governance, the region experienced inter-community tensions and violence as the territorial claims to a Bodo homeland acquired strength in the political rhetoric and historical imagination, and the attempt to prove the rights of the autochthons over the land became a priority. The Bodo political organisations have always made strong territorial claims on land and its demarcation.

Even though the Bodos are accused of issuing threats to non-Bodos to quit the Bodo-dominated areas, the situation on the ground does not substantiate such accusations. There are many areas where Bodos and non-Bodos exist symbiotically, which substantiates the claim of the Bodo leaders that they never even tacitly endorse ethnic cleansing. There is no denying the fact that the Bodoland movement has adopted more violent means, resulting in conflict situations, but it can also be stated that the violence has been directed not only towards non-Bodos at various points in time but also towards its own people. Though intra-Bodo conflict cannot be explained through the 'sons of the soil' and 'outsiders' concept, such concepts help in understanding conflicts with the non-Bodo community.

The alleged majority building politics of the Bodos has been blamed for the Bodo-non-Bodo conflicts in the 1990s, as those were the times when intense negotiation for areas to be included in the BAC took place. Politically speaking, during the 1990s period, the state government always clandestinely pitched non-Bodos against Bodos in an attempt to prevent ceding of areas to the BAC. On the violence front, instances such as of the Adivasi Cobra Militants and the Bengal Liberation Tigers attacking several Bodo villages proved that violence was not one-sided and was never about ethnic cleansing by the Bodos. Rather, it was about violence and counter-violence, resulting in a chain of violence, with each party trying to assert its own point of view.

The demand for a separate state of Bodoland is not the only demand for self-determination in Assam. As a matter of fact, there are numerous demands by various ethnic groups of Assam for autonomy and a separate state, among many other demands. Among such demands is the demand

for Kamatapur which overarches the area in which the Bodos have been demanding Bodoland.

Kamatapur is a demand for statehood comprising areas of both Assam (specifically lower Assam) and the northern tip of West Bengal. In reality, it is far more complex than the Bodo demand for Bodoland, since the territorial contours of the proposed Kamatapur are transnational. While the Bodos in Bengal did not respond to the demand for Bodoland of the Bodos of Assam, the Koch Rajbongshis of both Assam and West Bengal are enthusiastic about the demand for Kamatapur, even resorting to insurgency through the KLO, an extremist outfit that has links with ULFA and NDFB.

It is an irony that these extremist organisations have links to each other despite opposed ideologies. While ULFA through its indirect support to SJSS, an umbrella organisation of non-Bodo organisations, is opposed to the creation of Bodoland, the KLO's objective is to carve out a separate Kamatapur state which also includes areas demanded for Bodoland, especially Kokrajhar.

The significance of the demand for Kamatapur vis-à-vis the Bodoland movement lies in the fact that the Koch Rajbongshi leadership has been very vocal in denouncing the existence of a Bodo history in Assam. These Koch Rajbongshi leaders are of the view that since the Bodos do not have a history in Assam, the Bodo people should merge their demand for Bodoland with Rajbongshis' demand for Kamatapur. Such denouncement of the people who are considered the autochthons of Assam is a dangerous precedent in so far as the quest for peace in Assam is concerned. Besides, the influence of the KLO which has links with ULFA in the bordering areas of the BTC has been seen as a looming threat for ethnic conflagration between the Bodos and the Koch Rajbongshis. As a matter of fact, tensions between the Bodos and Koch Rajbongshis have been rising in the recent times.

### ***Challenges of Peace-making in Bodoland***

After the failure of the BAC, one of the serious attempts of the Indian state in promoting peace-making in Bodoland was the creation of the BTAD in the BTC in 2003 even though Assam did not fall in the 'Schedule Areas' administration of the Fifth Schedule<sup>54</sup> of the Constitution. In other words, the BTAD was created through an amendment of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which deals with the administration of the tribal areas of

Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. Subsequently, Bodo inhabited areas were recognised as ‘tribal areas’ that were organised to form the BTAD, which later on was carved out of Bodo dominated districts mainly in lower Assam and were placed under the direct administration of the BTC.

Such initiatives undertaken by the Indian government highlight the commitment and seriousness of the Indian state in peace-making. Peace-making can be defined as an appropriate response to the actors involved in a conflict (either as a party to it or as intermediary) that moves (or intended to move) the human system away from violent confrontation towards cooperative inquiry.<sup>55</sup> While peace accords generally mean, “a formal commitment between hostile parties to end war; at minimum, they are ceasefires, and at most, they are frameworks for social and political transformation.”<sup>56</sup>

The peace-making initiatives of the Indian state in the Bodoland context can be substantiated from the fact that in the two Bodo Accords (1993 and 2003) that the Indian government has signed with the Bodo leadership and the BLT respectively, and the 2005 peace agreement with the NDFB, there were ceasefire agreements, surrenders and frameworks. The tragedy, however, is that there is a huge lacuna in such peace-making initiatives as violence by different militant groups (both Bodo and non-Bodo) and pressure groups to voice their consent or dissent on the initiatives taken towards peace-making has not ceased.

For instance, the initial optimism of the 1993 Accord was overshadowed by its failures to defuse the conflict situation in the then BAC areas. Issues such as the ‘contiguous geographical area’ in the BAC let the cat among the pigeons. Such issues, despite the framework for peace in the Bodo Accord, led to large-scale violence, particularly in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, and Barpeta districts. Instances of gruesome massacre in 1994 that took place in Barpeta district proved that peace could not be achieved despite the accord. The Bodo militant groups – the BLT and NDFB as well as other non-Bodo militant groups that carried out armed attacks and counter-attacks against each other—gave rise to conflict situations not only in the Bodo areas but also created a volatile situation in the whole of lower Assam.

The fact of the matter is that peace processes were stalled and militant groups chose maximum violence as the only alternative. There were intense phases of attacks and counter-attacks between the government forces and the Bodo militants, and the Bodo militants carried out attacks against each other and against non-Bodo communities in the Bodo areas through the late 1990s to early 2000.

Peace-making in Bodoland also took a back seat because of alleged pressurising strategies of the state both before and after the Peace Accords were signed, particularly after the 1993 Bodo Accord. Bodo leaders are of the view that they made all efforts to arrive at a settlement, but the Union and state governments instead sent the Army and the police to massacre the Bodo people.<sup>57</sup> Subsequently, the years 1989, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, and 2000 witnessed the highest number of violent activities by Bodo rebels as the NDFB and BLT adopted brutal and extreme strategies. In part, these extreme strategies were attributed to the inconsistencies shown by the state authorities in accommodating the interests of the Bodos, combined with widespread repression.

One of the marked features of peace-making failing in the BAC was that, as the Bodoland movement progressed and counter-insurgency measures became more and more widespread and indiscriminate, the BLT and NDFB became more organised. Subsequently, they used violence more strategically and in a planned manner by carefully selecting their targets. Unfortunately, these targets were mostly non-combatants, individuals and groups that were suspected of having possible links to government forces or affiliation with rival organisations or because they belonged to opposing ethnic groups.

Most peace accords are not solutions in content but if the negotiated processes are followed, they can bring change in the expression of the conflict and provide avenues for redefining relationships. Therefore, after the BLT surrendered in 2003 and formed the BTC, the leadership of the BLT was aware of the importance of living up to the expectations of the people, including its non-Bodo populace in the newly constituted BTC. It is in this context that Hagrama Mohilary, the Chief of the BTC and a former BLT leader commented, "As we turn to a new chapter, our responsibility has increased...as we bid farewell to arms, we have to pick up a new kind of weapon of love and duty to the people and bear the responsibility to implement the BTC Accord."<sup>58</sup>

A discourse on peace-making in Bodoland will not be complete without deliberation on the conflicts and differences among the Bodos who are affiliated to various political, non-political, and extremist groups. In the present scenario, there has been a tremendous row between various factions of an organisation in the BTC, which seems irreconcilable and is threatening to tear the BTC apart. While the BTC is governed by the BPF, which largely constitutes the former cadres of the BLT, its opposition is led by the BPPF which comprises veterans of the political movement for Bodoland. The formation of the BTC has also faced formidable challenges primarily from the non-Bodo community living in BTC areas, thereby stirring up unrest, which has resulted in sporadic acts of violence and ethnic conflicts.

Though the state has intended to aim for reconciliation with the Bodos through the 1993 and 2003 Bodoland agreements, these agreements have not been able to aid peace-making in Assam. This is so because of the fact that in the process of subsuming the Bodo leadership under the state, the different communities in the Bodo areas have split into what are known as integrative and disintegrative blocs. While one bloc tries to take advantage of its given position, the other drifts away.

Such developments have evoked uneven competition and promoted a sense of deprivation, which has eventually led to conflicts that are ethnic in nature. The conflict situation prevalent in the Bodoland areas till today is substantiated by arguments of deprivation as the numerous conflicts that have occurred, besides the issue of land and habitation, have been explained as due to uneven development, differential modernisation, relative regional deprivation, internal colonialism, failures of assimilation and cultural oppression.<sup>59</sup>

The July 2012 violence between the Bodo and illegal Bangladeshi immigrants was the latest instance, which highlights the breakdown of the peace-making process in the Bodoland areas. Due to the numerous clashes of the Bodos with other communities, any concept of the arrangement of Bodoland faces accusations of being an exclusive entity. On the contrary, many of the ethnic clashes that have frequently rocked the North Bank of Assam have been attributed to conflict over land.

The land comprises the most burning problem of the tribal people. Unfortunately, the so-called protective measures of 'Tribal Belts and Blocks'

have not been able to protect the interests of the tribal people.<sup>60</sup> In this context, a large number of non-indigenous people are being found to have entered the present BTAD areas between 1993 and 2003 and occupied land. “Non-tribal encroachers such as non-indigenous people (mainly Bangladeshis) have formed a majority in tribal areas and oppressed the tribal people and, thus, the interests of the tribal people are not protected.”<sup>61</sup> Such influx of a non-indigenous community, coupled with political backing, leading to demographic change not only in the Bodoland areas but in the whole of Assam is not only a spoiler in the peace-making initiatives but also breeds conflict situations, which are protracted in nature and have serious ramifications.

### ***The Way Ahead***

Before the declaration of Telengana by the Congress Party, the Bodoland movement was dormant in nature, as the present Bodo leadership seemed to be content with the arrangement of the BTC. Another major reason for the stagnation in the Bodoland movement was the political infighting between the Bodo leadership, which not only brought the movement to a halt but also created a political fog for the Bodo people.

The tragedy of the Bodoland movement in its present form is that only a few Bodo organisations, now and then, drum up renewed vigour for a separate state of Bodoland; The massive participation of the Bodo people in the recent mass rallies, hunger strikes and protest marches in the aftermath of the Telengana declaration is proof in itself that the Bodo masses are eager to take the movement ahead but lack of convergence among the leadership prevents them from doing so.

In spite of the various phases of violence that the Bodo people and those living in the Bodoland areas have gone through, there is no sign of lessons being learnt by the people who claim to lead the Bodoland movement. The Bodo political class still does not converge even on the very idea of Bodoland though all sections of the Bodo leadership claim a separate state of Bodoland to be their ultimate goal. Acute lack of power sharing among the Bodo leadership combined with political bullying is perhaps another major reason for the lack of cohesiveness in the present-day Bodoland movement.

It is only a conflict situation such as the 2012 Bodo-non-Bodo conflict that puts the spotlight on Bodoland on the national stage. But the fact of

the matter is that the Bodoland areas are always in the spotlight, especially for the violent conflicts and lack of peace in that part of the country. Such selective attention arouses the ire of the general Bodo public against the Indian state, as in a situation where fratricidal killings have continued for years, the state apparatus is least perturbed.

Overall, there has hardly been any peace in Bodoland. There is some situation or the other that massively disturbs the tranquillity of the area. The emergence of armed militant groups and their nexus with political groups has added to the volatility of the situation. Even in the present times, with one militant group disbanded and the other split and under a ceasefire, there are elements within the Bodo community who participate in violence against their own people, besides the regular violent ethnic conflagration. Bodoland is also deprived of peace due to the rampant instances of kidnappings, extortion, murders and other violent events such as the murder of a Chairman of the Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) in Kokrajhar, the kidnapping and murder of a young boy (also in Kokrajhar) because his father could not pay the extortion amount. They do not instill confidence in the likelihood of peace prevailing in the Bodoland areas any time soon. Therefore, those at the helm of power in the BTC, the Assam and central governments need to take radical steps to address all the burning issues of the Bodoland movement.

To begin with, there is a need for an update in the powers that the BTC exercises. As a matter of fact, if the BTC is able exercise powers in maintaining the law and order situation, there are chances of the situation improving vastly. The meeting of the BTC Chief, Hagrama Mohilary as a part of the BNC delegation on September 5, 2013, with the Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, and the placing of the demand for devolution of home and finance powers for better functioning of the BTC is a step forward towards a peaceful Bodoland. In this context, it is important to note that the escalation of the 2012 violence is largely attributed to the lack of power to the BTC to maintain law and order.

A majority of the Bodo population and other indigenous people living in the Bodoland areas are agriculture oriented for which major steps need to be taken towards preventing illegal migration and settlement of non-indigenous people. So long as illegal migrants intrude into the Bodo areas, there will be

a constant tussle for control of resources that are limited, which will lead to constant communal tensions.

For the attainment of Bodoland as a separate state, the Bodo leadership should realise that there is a need for collaboration with other indigenous communities living in the area. At present, there is too much opposition to the Bodoland movement from various non-Bodo communities for which, besides having a cohesive Bodo leadership, there is a need to cooperate with different tribal communities to garner support for the movement. The tragedy is that many great Bodo leaders who were visionaries have been lost in the unintelligible killings due to factional rivalry within the Bodos. If such rivalry continues, there is a high possibility of the Bodos being run down by the ambitious non-indigenous population who have illegally migrated into the Bodoland areas from countries such as Bangladesh. Such a situation is undesirable and will tear the Bodoland movement apart, and breed a conflict situation in Assam. The situation at this juncture is that there are far too many factions within the Bodo community for which no Bodo leadership is being taken seriously.

There is no doubt that the Bodos are the autochthons of Assam who are striving to live in peace in the land in which they feel a sense of belongingness. Their quest for peace, therefore, stems from the various instances of mistreatment from the so-called dominant cultures, which epitomised with the demand for a separate state of Bodoland. Countless lives have been lost and the situation remains grave in the areas that the Bodos inhabit. As such, there is need for an inclusive model of development for these areas so that the autochthons are not forced to resort to underground movements, which is just a recipe for trouble. In this context, it is worth mentioning that after the BTC was formed, there has been a visible change in the development and opportunities being created in the Bodoland areas. Such changes are welcome, particularly in view of the endeavours to curb militancy in those areas in the quest for a lasting peace.

The Bodos have been generally blamed for the instability in Assam because of their insurgency and the frequent incidents of violence in the Bodoland areas. At the same time, Assam has been accused of trying every trick up its sleeve to disrupt the Bodoland movement. There is a feeling within certain sections of the Assamese society that the Bodos cannot live in peace with other communities, hence, Bodoland should not be granted. Such

assumptions are taken seriously not only in the political circles of Assam but also at the national level. On the contrary, however, the Bodoland movement is an attempt of the Bodo people to reassert themselves in the place where their ancestors once roamed about, and not at all about asserting cultural dominance over others.

One of the primary reasons behind the Assam government not ceding home and finance powers to the BTC can be attributed to the state's reluctance in giving up the capability to manipulate peace and order in the Bodoland areas. Popular belief suggests that once the BTC has the power to look after its own law and order situation and finance its developmental projects, peace and stability will prevail in the Bodoland areas, which is perceived as a uniting force for all the people living there and will eventually strengthen the Bodoland movement. Therefore, there is the *real politik*s of certain vested interest forces within Assam to disrupt the peace in the Bodoland areas so that the Bodoland movement does not achieve its primary objective of a separate state. Such forces have to be identified and neutralised to achieve a tenable result in the quest for peace in Assam.

The division of the Bodo leadership has also been attributed to the politics of those at the highest level of hierarchy in the Indian state. It has been argued that certain sections of the Bodo leadership have been offered a carrot so that they get subsumed by the state while others have been shown the stick. Such a selective approach not only polarises the Bodo community but also creates an environment of conflict. Therefore, for Bodoland to be basking in the glory of peace and stability, the whole gamut of the Bodo leadership has to be given a very high stake. Facilitating division through the carrot and stick method will further drown the peace initiatives and, in time, will result in more and more violence.

Finally, in a nutshell, the Bodoland movement is a movement that is striving for peace, prosperity, tranquillity, equality and justice of the neglected Bodo people. But certain sections of the non-Bodo community in Assam, in collusion with various forces, are deliberately destroying the peace in their attempts to garrote the Bodoland movement. The failure of the 1993 Accord and the constant violence in the present BTC suggests that there is some underlying force whose motive is to disrupt and tatter

the Bodoland movement by taking advantage of the already divided Bodo society and the opposition to the formation of Bodoland by various forces. However, the ignorance of the Bodo people as a determining factor in the politics of Assam and any actions and intentions of any force to garrote the Bodoland movement, be they state sponsored or otherwise, will not only disrupt the quest for peace in Assam but will also further destabilise the state.

The recent declaration on the formation of Telengana state has reignited the voices of those who are demanding a separate state in various parts of the country. In Assam, the Bodos have vowed to reinvigorate the Bodoland movement in a massive way. While creation of smaller states will not guarantee prevalence of peace, statistics have shown that smaller states have achieved higher growth and development in comparison to their parent state.

Therefore, along with attempts to douse the conflict situation and bring about permanent peace in the BTC and cull the violent situation, there is a need for the political class of Assam and those in national politics to consider the endless possibilities of the achievements of not only the Bodos but also those living in the BTC areas (which are among the least developed in Assam) with some sort of a permanent resolution of the issue of Bodoland. It is worth mentioning here that one of the solutions to the issue of Bodoland can be the realisation of Bodoland as a state. The achievement of political self-determination of the Bodo people and others living in Bodo areas will not only kick-start the developmental process in these areas but will also address the niggling problem of Bodo insurgency in Assam. In the pursuit for peace in Assam, the demand for a separate state of Bodoland needs to be looked into seriously, with due consideration for the endless possibilities in terms of prosperity, prevalence of peace and tranquillity in the state.

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## Notes

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2. Ibid.
3. M S Prabhakara, "Is North-East India Landlocked?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39 (42), 2004, p. 4606.
4. The Princely States of Tripura and Manipur merged with the Indian Union on October 15, 1949 and September 21, 1949 respectively. Under the North-Eastern Region (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, Tripura and Manipur along with Meghalaya became full-fledged states within the Indian Union on January 21, 1972.
5. The Assam Frontier Tract was a Regulation passed by the British in 1880. Also known as the Frontier Tracts, these were the areas of Sadiya, Lakhimpur and Balipara whose administration was handed over to the Governor of Assam as distinct from the Government of Assam.
6. NEFA emerged in 1875-76 as a result of the Inner Line of the Lakhimpur and Darrang districts of Assam being brought under Rule 2 (to be called the Inner Line and prohibited any subject outside the area from going beyond such line) of the East Bengal Frontier Regulation, 1873.
7. An Act to provide the allocation of seats in, and the delimitation of constituencies for the purpose of election to, the House of the People and the Legislatures of States, the qualifications of voters at such elections, the preparation of electoral rolls, the manner of filling seats in the Council of States to be filled by representatives of Union Territories, and matters connected therewith.
8. Parag Moni Sarma, "Ethnicity, Identity and Cartography: Possession/Dispossession, Homecoming/Homelessness in Contemporary Assam, *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 3 (3), 2011, p. 25.
9. Articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) provide provisions for the administration of Tribal Areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The Sixth Schedule is a self-contained code for the governance of the Tribal Areas. The Sixth Schedule provides the tribal people with administration, which would safeguard their customs and way of life. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule assure the tribal people autonomy in the management of their own affairs.
10. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India deals with the administration and control of scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribes in these areas. The Fifth Schedule covers tribal areas in nine states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Odhisa, and Rajasthan.
11. "Wages of Prejudice", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 (13), 1989, p. 646.
12. Ibid., p. 645.

13. The Assam movement or Assam agitation (1979-1985) was a popular movement against undocumented immigrants in Assam.
14. The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam agitation in New Delhi on August 15, 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in Assam soon after.
15. Upendranath Brahma is considered as the pioneer of the Bodoland movement and is presently the 'Father of the Bodos.'
16. Rev Sidney Endle was a missionary from England who came to India in February 1864 on the behest of Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). He was stationed at the Kachari Mission in Tezpur, Assam and worked under Mr. Hesselmyer. After Mr. Hesselmyer's death, Rev Endle took over the charge of the Kachari Mission and became the chaplain of the tea garden areas in the district of Darrang, now Udalguri and Sonitpur. Rev. Endle's book, *The Kacharis* is considered to be a monograph about the aboriginal race, the Bodos, which serves as the original document of the Bodos. His book is the oldest and the first ever historical book on the Bodos and is argued to be a book par-excellence that deserves to be called a 'Magnum Opus'.
17. After the state of Nagaland was created in 1963 through reorganisation of Assam, there was anticipation within the Bodo community that there would be further changes in the political landscape of Assam.
18. Sanjay K Roy, "Conflicting Nations in North-East India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (21), 2005, p. 2178.
19. Articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) provide for the administration of the tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. The idea behind the Sixth Schedule is to provide the tribal people with administration of their own which would safeguard their customs and way of life. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule assure them autonomy in the management of their own affairs.
20. n. 11, p. 646.
21. Tribal Belts and Blocks is a regulation in Chapter X of the Assam Land Regulation Act, 1886, that deals with the government having to take measures for preventing transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal party so that the tribal land is protected since a tribal's welfare depends on having sufficient land for his maintenance.
22. Clause 10 of the Assam Accord states that the accord "will ensure that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands in tribal belts and blocks will be strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws."
23. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord states, "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."
24. Dhruva Pratim Sharma, "Ideological Aspect of Bodo Separatism in Assam" in Bimal J. Deb, ed., *Ethnic Issues, Secularism and Conflict Resolution in North-East India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2006), p. 148.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Udayon Mishra, "Bodoland: The Burden of History." *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVII (37), 2012, p. 30.
28. Ved Prakash, *Encyclopedia of North-East India* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2007), p. 685.
29. Udayon Mishra, "Bodo Stir: Complex Issues, Unattainable Demands", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 (21), 1989, p. 1147.
30. Prakash, n. 28, p. 695.
31. The BSF was later reorganised as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).
32. Prakash, n. 28, p. 695.

33. Nani Gopal Mahanta, "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVIII (23), 2013, p. 52.
34. The BAC covered areas in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Mangaldai and Sonitpur districts on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra in Lower Assam.
35. M S Prabhakara, "The Bodo Question", *Frontline*, 19 (15), 2002, p. 2.
36. The Bodo leadership wanted these 515 villages to be included in the BAC over and above the number agreed to by the government, so that the area remained contiguous. However, the state government took the position that these villages could not be given away as Bodos constituted less than 2 percent of their population. The Guwahati High Court also directed the state government not to include any village in the BAC area in which the tribal people formed less than 50 percent of the population.
37. Subir Bhaumik, "Assam's Paths of Violence", *BBC News*, December 9, 2005, [www.bbc.co.uk] URL: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\_asia/4511378.stm. Accessed on June 19, 2013.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Pralip Kumar Narzary, "Hidden Truth of Ethnic Clash Between Bodo Tribes and Santhals in Assam, India, *Stud. Tribes Tribal*, 4 (1), 2006, p. 58 .
40. Prakash, n. 28, p. 706.
41. Bathou, an animistic faith wherein a certain variety of cactus is worshipped is the traditional spiritual faith of the Bodo people.
42. Nani Gopal Mahanta, "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVIII (23), 2013, pp. 51-52.
43. He was advocating reunification of Bodo political formations to achieve his ultimate aim of Bodoland.
44. Mohini Basumatary belonged to the then Bodo political party PDF, which the intelligence claimed was the overground face of the NDFB. Likewise, BLT is said to be the protégé of ABSU. Since 1996, when PDF won 7 seats to the Assam Legislative Assembly, the PDF-NDFB and ABSU-BLT have been at loggerheads.
45. Prakash, n. 28, p. 283.
46. M Amarjeet Singh, "Challenges Before Bodoland Territorial Council", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31 (8), 2004, p. 784.
47. The BPPF split into the BPPF (Hagrama) and BPPF (Rabiram). The BPPF (Hagrama) was later rechristened as Bodoland People's Front (BPF).
48. Nani Gopal Mahanta, "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, XLVIII (23), 2013, p. 53.
49. Divide Assam 50-50 is a slogan devised by ABSU, which has its roots in the initial stage of ABSU's Bodoland movement. The slogan reflects ABSU's ideology in its demand for a separate state of Bodoland. At the peak of the Bodoland movement spearheaded by ABSU, the slogan resonated among the Bodo people, which helped converge the very idea of a separate state of Bodoland amongst the Bodo masses – both the general Bodo public and its intellectuals alike – thus, catapulting the Bodoland movement to a whole new height. In other words, Divide Assam 50-50 gave direction to the Bodoland movement.
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51. Sushanta Talukdar, "Assam's Sorrow", *Frontline*, August 24, 2012, p. 8.
52. "Hasty Deal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 (11), 1993, p. 420.
53. Simantik Dowerah, "Assam Riots: What Leaves Bodos Angry and Frustrated?" *Firstpost*, July 25, 2012, [www.firstpost.com] URL: http://www.firstpost.com/india/assam-riots-what-leaves-bodos-angry-and-frustrated-391119.html, Accessed on June 21, 2013.
54. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India deals with the administration and control of scheduled areas and Scheduled Tribes in these areas. The Fifth Schedule covers Tribal areas in nine states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Odhisa, and Rajasthan.

55. Andrea Bartoli, "Introduction to Interpreting Peacemaking" in Susan Allen Nan et al. eds., *Peacemaking: From Practice to Theory* (California: Praeger, 2012), p. 546.
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58. Singh, n.46, P.784.
59. Archana Upadhyay, "Terrorism in the North-East: Linkages and Implications", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41 (48), 2006, p. 4994.
60. Nirmalaya Banerjee, "Tribal Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict: Efficacy of Laws and Policies in BTAD Areas", [www.mcrq.ac.in] URL: www.mcrq.ac.in/rwfiles/RW37/4.Nirmalya.pdf, p. 50, Accessed on June 27, 2013.
61. Ibid., p. 51.

