

**Strategic choices and negotiations in insurgencies: National
Democratic Front of Boroland in Assam**

*A thesis submitted to Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati in partial fulfilment
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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Guwahati, Assam, India

September 2021



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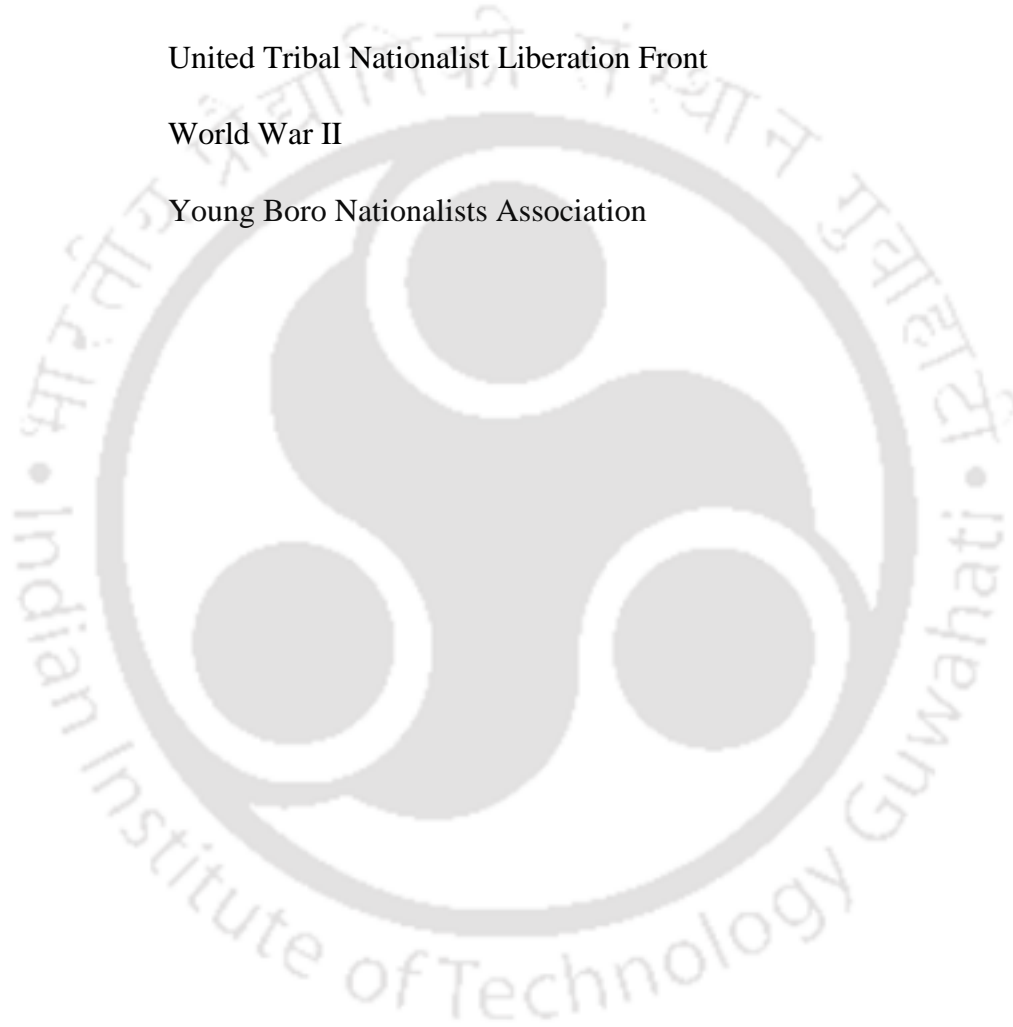
List of Abbreviations

AAGSP	All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAMSU	All Assam Minority Students Union
AASU	All Assam Students' Union
AATL	All Assam Tribal League
AATWWF	All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation
ABEF	All Bodo Employees Federation
ABPF	All Bodo Peace Forum
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ABWWF	All Bodo Women Welfare Federation
AGP	Assam Gana Parishad
ANVC	Achik National Volunteer Council
APBN	Assam Police Battalion
APTF	Assam Police Task Force
ASDC	Autonomous State Demand Committee
ATTF	All Tripura Tiger Force
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BEC	Bodoland Executive Council
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BKWAC	Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council
BLP	Bodoland Legislature Party
BLT	Bodo Liberation Tigers

BMF	Bodo Militant Force
BPAC	Bodo People's Action Committee
BPF	Bodoland People's Front
BPPF	Bodoland People's Progressive Front
BSF	Boro Security Force
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
BTR	Bodoland Territorial Region
Congress (I)	Congress (Indira Gandhi)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka
GSP	Gana Suraksha Party
HNLC	Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IRA	Irish Republican Army
Kamrup (M)	Kamrup (Metro)
KKE	Communist Party of Greece
KLO	Kamatapur Liberation Organization
KNU	Karen National Union

MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MMK	Mishing Mimak Kebang
MNF	Mizo National Front
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Boroland
NLFB	National Liberation Front of Boroland
NLFT	National Liberation Front of Tripura
NSAGs	Non-Sate Armed Groups
NSCN-IM	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah)
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
PCDR	People's Coordination for Democratic Rights
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PJACBM	People's Joint Action Committee for Boroland Movement
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PTCA	Plains Tribal Council of Assam
RAW	Research and Analysis Wing
RBA	Royal Bhutan Army
TADA	Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act
TMPK	Takam Mising Porin Kebang
UBNLF	United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front
UBPO	United Bodo People's Organization
UHSS	Udalguri Higher Secondary School
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Asom
ULFA (I)	United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent)

UMF	United Minorities Front
UNLFW	United National Liberation Front of Western South-East Asia
UPDF	United People's Democratic Front
UPDS	United People's Democratic Solidarity
UPPL	United People's Party-Liberal
UTNLF	United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front
WWII	World War II
YBNA	Young Boro Nationalists Association





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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled, “**Strategic choices and negotiations in insurgencies: National Democratic Front of Boroland in Assam**” is my original research work carried out in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India, under the supervision of Dr. Pahi Saikia, Associate Professor of Political Science, in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian institute of Technology Guwahati.

In keeping with the general practice of reporting observations, due acknowledgement has been made wherever the work described is based on the findings of other investigations.

Jimmy Sebastian Daimary

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Strategic choices and negotiations in insurgencies: National Democratic Front of Boroland in Assam**” submitted by Jimmy Sebastian Daimary for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, embodies bonafide record of research work carried out under my supervision. The collection of materials from the primary and secondary sources has been done by Mr. Jimmy Sebastian Daimary himself. All assistance received has been duly acknowledged. The present thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted to any University/Institute for any degree or diploma.

pahi saikia

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of years of work and I would like to thank several people who have contributed in making this a reality. I would like to first express my sincere and deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Pahi Saikia. I am indebted to Dr. Pahi Saikia for the continuous support and guidance throughout my PhD. During the Post-Graduation years too, Dr. Pahi Saikia was my supervisor and she mentored and guided me which helped me academically in the subsequent years. It was her patience, motivation and immense knowledge which helped me in my PhD study as well as other related research activities. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my PhD study. I have been extremely lucky to have a supervisor who cared so much about my work, and who responded to my questions and queries so promptly. I would like to thank Dr. Pahi Saikia for encouraging my research and for allowing me to grow as a researcher. Ma'am, your insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and brought my work to a higher level. Without your support and persistence, this study would not have been possible. I will always remember those insightful, enjoyable and illuminating discussions which have helped me at every stage of my PhD and my stay here in IIT Guwahati.

My sincere thanks goes to the Doctoral Committee Members, Dr. Ngamjahao Kipgen (Chairperson, D.C.), Dr. Dilwar Hussain (Member) and Dr. Sovan Chakraborty (Member) for their valuable suggestions and guidance throughout my PhD study. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for their insightful comments and encouragements and at the same time for their queries which helped me to widen my research from various perspectives and also helped me to critically examine and introspect about my research.

I would also like to thank and express my gratitude to Professor Sukanya Sharma, the HOD, Humanities and Social Sciences, IITG for the consistent support during my PhD years especially in administrative matters. A special thanks to former HODs, Professor Arupjyoti Saikia and Professor Mrinal Kanti Dutta for their support during my study in IIT Guwahati.

A Special thanks to Professor Bipul Bhuyan from the department of Physics who has continuously motivated me to work harder and who has been a wonderful guide and friend. Thank you very much Sir. I would also like to thank the faculty staff of the department of HSS, IITG who have helped me and guided me since my Post-Graduation days.

My sincere thanks and gratitude also goes out to the office staffs of the department of HSS, IITG. I would like to thank especially, Dr. Bandana Khataniar, Durga Sarma, Khanthai Mala Basumatary, Parag Jyoti Kalita and Rubul Gogoi for their consistent help throughout my study in IIT Guwahati. You have helped me in smoothly processing all the official works whenever the need arose since my Post-Graduation days. Once again, please accept my heartfelt gratitude for providing immense help during my stay in IIT Guwahati.

I would also like to thank IIT Guwahati for all the help and facilities provided to me. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Academic Affairs Office, Student Affairs Office, and Equal Opportunity Cum Special Reservation Cell for the continuous support in academic matters, scholarships and my stay in the hostels which contributed in smooth conduct of my study. I am also grateful to Lakshminath Bezbaroa Central Library at IIT Guwahati which allowed me access to numerous books, journals and other documentary evidences which became one of the important source of information for my research.

I thank my senior colleagues, Dr. Aniruddha Kumar Baro, Dr. Bhasker Pegu, Dr. Pankaj Kumar Kalita and Dr. Konkumoni Boro for the support and guidance at different points in time. The suggestions, comments, queries and the group discussions which we had especially during the initial years of my PhD helped me to smoothly conduct my research in the subsequent years. I will always cherish the memories that we have created during our stay in IIT Guwahati. I would also like to express my gratitude to Yuvaraj Gogoi and Kiran GSK for the support and help I received during my stay in IIT Guwahati.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the respondents who have taken part in the interviews during the field study. A special mention goes to Ranjan Daimary, founding President of NDFB, Gobinda Basumatary, former General Secretary of NDFB and present Deputy Chief of BTR, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Cabinet Minister, Assam government, Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatary, former Member of Parliament, Bhraman Baglary, Nileswar Basumatary and several others who actively participated in the interviews during the field study. Besides the NDFB, I would like to extend my gratitude to all those individuals affiliated to ABSU, BLT, BSS, UPPL and BPF who participated in the study and allowed me to collect huge informations about the subject under study. They shared many critical and sensitive information about the NDFB and the region in general. These interactions also allowed me to experience many unknown facts about the

Bodos especially about various socio-economic and political conditions of the Bodos. I would also like to thank the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies located in Guwahati city for allowing me access to newspaper reports, books and other documents during my field study.

My journey in IIT Guwahati would have been less exciting if it were not because of few loving, helpful and adventurous friends. So a special thanks goes to Namrata and Prerona who have always inspired me and encourage me academically and also on the personal level whenever I needed them. Thank you Namrata and Prerona. James, Stuti and Mizinksa, you were my family in the campus and I cannot thank you enough for making my stay in the campus so exciting and happy. Halim, Konku, Nabajit and many others in the department, you all have always been so supportive and helpful. Thank you one and all. My stay in IIT Guwahati became all the more exciting when I met junior colleagues and friends like Nilutpal, Jagadish, Dhanesh, Bastav, Sourav, Bhaskar and Pranab in Dibang hostel. Thank you so much to you all for all the wonderful memories we created.

Last but not the least, my family, whose constant love and support kept me motivated and confident, deserves endless gratitude. My parents always supported me and believed in me. They always instilled a feeling of hope in me without which it would not have been possible to see this thesis through the day. Thank you so much Mom and dad. I would also like to thank my brother Perosh, Esther and Sumi for their continuous love and support.

Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my wife, Sara, who has been my constant support and companion long before I began my journey in IIT Guwahati. Sara, you have been my source of inspiration, courage and determination throughout my PhD. I am forever thankful for the unconditional love and support I received from you throughout the entire PhD years and every day. I am thankful to you for believing in me and for being there whenever I needed you.

Once again, I am deeply thankful and grateful to one and all for all the love and support. Thank you.

Jimmy Sebastian Daimary

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September 2021

Abstract

Insurgencies have been prevalent in many parts of South Asia including India at different points in time with demands ranging from sovereignty, autonomy arrangements to other socio-economic and political inducements. Northeast India also witnessed the onset of several insurgencies with various demands ranging from secessionism to autonomy arrangements and other socio-economic and political incentives for their respective communities. However, a deeper analysis reveals that some non-state armed groups (NSAGs)/insurgent groups decide to renounce the violence after a certain points in time and engage in the negotiation process with the state actors while others chose to remain in conflict. The thesis focuses on the former set of insurgent groups. The conditions or the factors that motivate the insurgent groups to engage in the political process vary from case to case.

Thus the present study attempts to examine why and under what conditions do Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs)/insurgent groups decide to negotiate with the state actors? The thesis examines this question with a specific focus on the insurgency led by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in Assam in India's northeast. The study analyses the probable factors that motivated the NDFB to accept the offer of negotiations after almost two decades of violence. The thesis argues that the incentive structure and relative capabilities may motivate the Non-State Armed Groups to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. The thesis also examined the negotiation process which involves discussions and various stages of bargaining process between the states and the insurgent groups, which is very critical for successful negotiation and bring an end to such armed rebellion. The study also examines how engaging insurgents in the negotiation process may contribute to peace-building especially in countries like India.

The sample selected for the study included former NDFB rebels as well as senior ABSU activists, BSS, ABWWF, former BLT rebels and members of a political party called United People's Party Liberal which comprised mostly former NDFB members and ABSU. These interviews, which included both formal as well as informal, were conducted in BTR as well as in Bongaigaon and Kamrup (M) districts of Assam. Forty four interviews were conducted during the course of the study. The interviews mainly focused on the conditions that led to the onset of the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India in 2005. At the same time, the field study also focused on several critical socio-economic and political developments that led to the onset of

the insurgency and various ethnic mobilizations among the Bodos especially after the independence of the country in 1947. .

Negotiations between NDFB and the Government of India started in 2005. The NDFB leadership were motivated by several factors to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process. We find evidence that destruction of safe havens/bases in Bhutan, arrests, deaths and surrender of rebels as well scarcity of finance motivated the NDFB to participate in the negotiation process. These setbacks further increased the cost of continuing the insurgency for the NDFB. The Bodo intellectuals as well as Bodo non-combatants repeatedly appealed to the NDFB leadership to renounce the violence and engage in peaceful discussions with the Government of India and resolve the core issues of the insurgency. The other significant factor which motivated the NDFB to participate in the democratic process was the continuous appeals from the government especially the Assam Government led by Tarun Gogoi in the early 2000s. The attitude of the Government had changed towards the insurgents by early 2000s. At the same time, NDFB had also showed its willingness to do away with violence and participate in the political process by early 2000s. Thus, the study finds relative capabilities and incentive structure as critical indicators that motivated the NDFB to engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India in 2005.



Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Insurgencies have been prevalent in the post-World War II period especially in the second half of the twentieth century in different parts of the world. Ethnic groups have engaged in armed struggles organized by different insurgent groups at different points in history. Socio-economic, political, cultural grievances and other important issues motivated these ethnic groups to engage in armed movements for the protection of rights and privileges. Relative deprivation and suppression of rights of ethnic minorities mostly by the dominant groups who occupy important positions in politics, economy and the society contributed to ethnic insurgencies. Likewise, northeastern part of India witnessed insurgencies organized by various organizations with demands ranging from secessionism to autonomy arrangements and other socio-economic and political incentives for their respective communities. In many cases, the Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) or insurgent groups decided to renounce the violence after certain point in time and engage in the negotiation process with the state actors.¹ The conditions or the factors that motivate insurgent groups to engage in the political process vary from case to case. Thus the present study attempts to examine why and under what conditions Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) decide to negotiate with the state actors?

The study examines this question with a specific focus on the insurgency led by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in Assam in India's Northeast. The study analyses the probable factors that motivates some non-state armed groups to accept the offer of negotiations. The study argues that the incentive structure and relative capabilities may motivate the Non-State Armed Groups to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. The study draws from the existing literature on insurgencies and civil war, which deals extensively with the conditions that contribute to the onset of negotiations between the conflicting groups. The literature has been divided into five sub-sections, viz. (i) Organizational Structure, (ii) Resources and Capabilities, (iii) Incentive Structure, (iv) Stalemate and (v) Role of Mediators.

¹ The present study uses the term insurgent groups and Non-State Armed Groups interchangeably. The study will also use insurgency and internal armed conflicts interchangeably.

This set of literature examines the conditions or the factors that affects the strategic choices of the NSAGs/insurgent groups.

States encountering insurgencies resort to different tactics in order to bring an end to the armed insurgencies. These measures ranges from repressive tactics to accommodation and sometimes the host governments resort to a combination of the two approaches. Likewise, India has also resorted to various counterinsurgency tactics towards the insurgent groups at various points in time. The Indian Government have used negotiations as a means to counter insurgencies and thereby bring stability in the country. Kashmir and Punjab for instance, witnessed high levels of violence due to the insurgent movements prevalent in these two states. Similarly, northeastern part of India also witnessed several insurgencies at different points in time but unlike the previous two cases, the intensity of violence has been low. Armed groups such as Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram, National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) in Nagaland, People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur, United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) in Assam and many such insurgent groups were formed in northeast India. The common tactics employed by the Indian security forces towards these insurgent groups has been a mix of repression and accommodation. The Government of India resorted to stringent counterinsurgency operations against insurgent groups in order to bring an end to such insurgencies. At the same time, India has also employed accommodative approaches towards some insurgent groups.

In some cases, insurgent groups renounced violence and engaged in the negotiation process with the Government of India and respective State Governments. One such example of negotiation is the case of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram. MNF signed a peace agreement with the Indian government on 30 June 1986. In recent decades, others such as BLT and the NDFB in Bodoland also signed a peace accord with the Government of India. The NSCN-IM in Nagaland has been engaging in the negotiation process with the Indian Government since 1997. All these organizations were motivated by different factors to renounce the violence and engage in negotiation process. Therefore, it is essential to understand why insurgent groups decide to forgo the violent methods and embrace peaceful negotiations with the state actors/host governments. Further, the study makes an attempt to examine how negotiations

to insurgencies contribute to peace building in conflict-ridden countries. The study also examines the process of bargaining between the NSAGs and the host states which has an impact on the outcome of negotiations.

Existing studies on internal conflicts highlighted the significance of various factors that may motivate the NSAGs to renounce the violence and engage in negotiation process with the state actors. Changing dynamics of the insurgency and the insurgent groups may also affect the outcome of the insurgency. For instance, some of the existing studies on internal armed conflicts have highlighted the importance of organizational structure and relative capabilities on the dynamics of insurgencies (Connable & Libicki, 2010; Sinno, 2011; Bapat, 2005; Akcinaroglu, 2012). These sets of scholars argue that the organizational dynamics, resources and capabilities of the NSAGs play a significant role in the outcome of the insurgency. Leadership as well as the way the NSAGs are organized may have an impact on the dynamics of the insurgency. At the same time, scholars have argued that resources, which contribute to capability building of insurgent groups, have a direct effect on the outcome of the insurgency (Bapat, 2005; Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Salehyan, 2007). Few others further highlighted the significance of incentive structure, stalemate and the role of mediators on the overall dynamics of the insurgencies (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999; Zartman, 2000; Clayton, 2013). These sets of literature argue that offers of autonomy arrangements, political power-sharing, cost-benefit calculations by the NSAGs as well as stalemated conditions and mediation motivate NSAGs to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process. The present study draws insights from the existing literature and makes an attempt to understand the significance of contextual factors to examine the case of the NDFB insurgency in Bodoland in India's northeast. The aim is to explore the factors which motivated the NDFB leadership to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process after almost two decades of insurgency with demands for sovereignty for the Bodos. Eventually, after almost fifteen years of negotiations with the Indian Government, NDFB along with other Bodo organizations signed a peace accord in January 2020 which came to be known as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord. However, it is to be seen whether the provisions of the new accord contribute to peace building in the Bodo region and how the accord helps in preventing the resurgence of armed conflicts in the Bodo region. The next section deals with the definitions of some of the basic concepts used in the study. It provides

a basic understanding of these concepts with reference to the definitions offered by previous studies.

1.2 Understanding basic concepts

A. *Insurgency:* Insurgency/irregular warfare has been predominant in various parts of the world especially after the end of the WWII. Ethnic groups/communities have engaged in armed struggles against the relative economic, social and political deprivation they suffered at the hands of the dominant ruling groups. There is no such agreed or uniform definition of insurgency and the term ‘insurgency’ has been defined in different ways by the existing studies on internal armed conflicts/insurgency. For a better understanding of the concept, the present study borrows some of the existing definitions of insurgency offered by different scholars. For instance, Fearon & Laitin defined insurgency as “a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas” (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). They argued that the factors that contribute to the onset of insurgency are not due to the grievances of the respected communities who resort to such tactics but rather it is the condition prevalent at that time which favors insurgency. According to them, countries with financially, organizationally and politically weak governments are more likely to witness the onset of insurgencies. Similarly, Lyall defined insurgency as “a violent, often protracted, struggle by non-state actors to obtain political objectives such as independence, greater autonomy, or subversion of the existing political authority” (Lyall, 2010).

O’Neil on the other hand, defined insurgency “as a struggle between a non-ruling group and the ruling authorities in which the non-ruling group consciously uses political resources (e.g. organization expertise, propaganda and demonstrations) and violence to destroy, reformulate or sustain the basis of legitimacy of one or more aspects of politics” (2005). Further, the U.S Government defined insurgency as “a protracted political-military struggle directed toward subverting or displacing the legitimacy of a constituted government or occupying power and completely or partially controlling the resources of a territory through the use of irregular military forces and illegal political organizations” (US Government, 2012). Insurgent groups mostly attempt to gain control of a population/particular/territory including the resources and this differentiates insurgent

groups from the terrorist organizations. This booklet published by the U.S Government also argues that insurgent warfare is characterized by a lack of front lines, sequenced battles or campaigns, a protracted strategy, often lasting more than a decade, and unconventional military tactics, including guerrilla warfare, terrorism or ethnic cleansing (U.S. Government, 2012). There is no clear distinction drawn between the insurgents and the non-combatants which often results in higher civilian casualty than in conventional conflicts.

With the passage of time, the definition of insurgency has also undergone various changes. For instance, Hamilton (1998) argued that in 1962, the official army definition of insurgency was as follows: It is “a condition of subversive political activity, civil rebellion, revolt or insurrection against a duly constituted government or occupying power wherein irregular forces are formed and engage in actions which may include guerrilla warfare that are designed to weaken or overthrow that government or occupying power.” On the other hand, in the early 1980s, the US military merged insurgency with the term “low intensity conflict” and this document defined low intensity conflict as “a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic and psycho-social pressures through terrorism and insurgency” (Hamilton, 1998). Galula (2006) also defined insurgency as “a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.”

Julian Paget forwarded another definition of insurgency in his book ‘Counter-Insurgency Operations’ where he described insurgency as “a kind of armed rebellion against a government where the rebels have the support or acquiescence of a substantial part of the populace; the methods that they adopt to achieve their aim of overthrowing the Government may include guerrilla warfare, but insurgents may equally resort to civil disobedience, sabotage or terrorist tactics” (Paget, 1967). Others like Scott referred insurgency as “an effort to obtain political goals by an organized and primarily indigenous group (or groups) using protracted, irregular warfare and allied political techniques” (1970).

Few others described insurgency as “a strategy adopted by groups who fail to secure their political objectives through conventional means or by a quick seizure of power. Insurgency is characterized by protracted, asymmetric violence, ambiguity, the use of complex terrain (jungles, mountains, urban areas), psychological warfare and political mobilization- all designed to protect the insurgents and eventually alter the balance of power in their favor” (Metz, 2004). Metz further argued that the objectives of the insurgents range from overthrowing the existing government to attaining autonomy, sovereignty or changes of a particular policy.

B. Guerrilla Warfare: Guerrilla warfare is one of the tactics employed by insurgent groups during the course of the insurgency. Insurgent groups have frequently employed guerrilla tactics against the state actors with the objective of inflicting serious setbacks and costs on the state actors. Guerrilla tactics involve use of sudden attacks, hit-and-run tactics, etc. against the state security forces. Studies show that there is a difference between the guerrillas and insurgents. Byman (2014) argued that insurgents are more powerful than guerrillas as they are able to mobilize and recruit a huge number of people for the armed struggle. He further argued that the insurgents engage in guerrilla warfare as well as in propaganda and mobilization.

Huntington defined guerrilla warfare as “a form of warfare by which the strategically weaker side assumes the tactical offensive in selected forms, times and places. Guerrilla warfare is the weapon of the weak. It is never chosen in preference to regular warfare; it is employed only when the possibilities of regular warfare are foreclosed” (Huntington, 1962). Guerrilla’s goal is to impose costs on the adversary in terms of loss of soldiers, supplies, infrastructure and peace of mind and most importantly, time. In other words, guerrilla war is designed ‘to destroy not the capacity but the will’ of the adversary (Arreguin, 2001). Existing studies have also defined guerrilla warfare as “a form of warfare in which small, lightly armed groups use mobile tactics against a stronger opponent. These tactics involve small-scale attacks such as ambushes and raids and their main goal is to harass their enemy rather than to win a decisive victory in battle” (US Government, 2012). Eckley defined guerrilla warfare as “a low-intensity, irregular, disruptive and small-scale engagements which utilize natural hideaways and blur the divisions between the civilian and combatant” (Eckley, 2001).

C. *Non-State Armed Groups*: Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) have engaged in many violent armed movements in different parts of the world which have resulted in numerous deaths of non-combatants, rebels as well as the state actors. These violent mobilizations have also led to instability and lawlessness in many countries. According to some scholars, Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) refer to various organizations including militias, terrorist organizations and insurgents but it conceptually encompassed internationals and domestic criminal groups, armed gangs or vigilantes (Rodgers & Muggah, 2009).

Englehart (2016) argued “NSAGs are diverse but are unified as an analytical category because of their capacity to use organized violence without the official sanction of a public authority.” He further argued that though terrorist organizations and insurgent groups mostly refer to NSAGs, there are other groups too. For instance, sometimes states create NSAGs to attack their enemies (Carey et al. 2012). These groups are essentially criminal organizations or militias who use violence to generate revenue (Rosenthal, 2008). Despite all the organizational and functional differences, the common factor that these groups exercise is the “use of organized violence without being subject to public authorization or accountability which is usually a function of a sovereign state (Englehart, 2016).

Recent studies have defined NSAGs as “armed organizations operating outside the control of the state and willing and able to use force to achieve their objectives (Berti, 2015).” Non-state armed actors increase the potential to disrupt the peace-building and state-building process as the presence of these actors (insurgent groups and other rebel organizations) increases the resurgence of violence time and again.

Existing studies have also defined NSAGs as “distinctive organizations that are willing and capable to use violence to achieve their objectives and which are independent of the state machineries like regular armies, presidential guards, Special Forces and others and at the same time, possesses autonomous organizational operations, functions and infrastructure” (Hofmann & Schneckener, 2011). They however, argued that the NSAGs might receive support from the state actors secretly and sometimes openly as is the case with the mercenaries, private military agencies and other forces and sometimes state officials and state agencies may be directly involved with the NSAGs due to

ideological reasons and sometimes due to vested interests. However, in spite of the direct relationship and support from the state actors, these groups/organizations can be called as the NSAGs as they are not under the full control of the state.

McHugh & Bessler have referred NSAGs as “groups who retain the potential to deploy arms for political, economic and ideological objectives, which in practice are often translated into an open challenge to the authority of the state” (McHugh, & Bessler, 2006). Few others further defined NSAGs as “any armed actor operating outside state control that uses force to achieve its political/quasi-political objectives” (Geneva Call, 2007b). On the other hand, studies argue that NSAGs serve as source of security for the local population and they protect the communities from other NSAGs and pro-government actors (Ball & Lang 2001; Baker 2007; Reno 2007). At the same time, in areas without functional state institutions, NSAGs provide governance (Mampilly, 2011).

D. Negotiation: Negotiation is a very critical factor in conflict situations as it acts as the guiding process to successfully bring an end to the conflict through a negotiated settlement. The term negotiation has been defined as “a communication, usually governed by pre-established procedures between representatives of parties involved in a conflict or dispute” (Miller & King, 2005). They argued that the process of negotiation involves various stages like bargaining, compromises on the part of the participants and offer of concessions, which may eventually result either in formal agreements or the process might continue. This stage of the conflict does not necessarily diminish the violence but reduces it. According to theories of International Relations, the process of negotiation requires that the parties involved in the discussions show willingness to compromise and make concessions so that they can achieve an efficient and fair solution to the core issues of the conflict.² Ikle (1964) further argued that negotiation is “a process in which explicit proposals are put forward ostensibly for the purpose of reaching agreement on an exchange or on the realization of a common interest where conflicting interests are present.” The outcomes of negotiation process might not necessarily be a signing of an agreement but it might also lead to a new understanding between the parties, resolution of the disagreements and others. Others like Brett further defined

² Iklé, F. C. (1964). *How nations negotiate*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

negotiation as “a social process by which interdependent people with conflicting interests determine how they are going to allocate resources or work together in the future”.³ The next section discusses the objectives of the present study and the purpose of the study.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The present study examines the factors that influence NSAGs/insurgent groups to renounce violence and participate in the process of negotiation. NSAGs/insurgent groups plan out their strategy during the course of the insurgency. At one point, they decide to renounce the violence and participate in the negotiation process with the state actors due to varied reasons and conditions. These conditions may vary from change in organizational dynamics, resources and capabilities, incentive structure and stalemated conditions or due to mediation by third party organizations or individuals. The response by the state actors through stringent counterinsurgency measures may also affect the dynamics of the insurgency and the NSAGs/insurgent groups. States resort to different strategies towards these violent mobilizations by different ethnic communities ranging from stringent counterinsurgent operations to accommodative tactics in order to bring an end to such violent mobilizations at different points in time. These varied approaches of the state affect the dynamics of the insurgent groups and the insurgency in general. Thus, strategic choices of the NSAGs/insurgent groups are influenced by many factors including the approaches of the state actors well as the developments within the organization. The present study examines these developments which contribute to the onset of the negotiation process between the state actors and the Non-State Actors/insurgents. The study further examines the bargaining process between the host governments and the insurgents after the renouncement of violence by the NSAGs. The negotiation process, which involves discussions and various stages of bargaining process between the states and the insurgent groups, is a critical factor which may lead to successful negotiation and bring an end to such armed rebellion. The study also examines how engaging insurgents in the negotiation process may contribute to peace-building especially in countries like India.

Thus, the objectives of the study are as follows:

³ Brett, J. M. (2007). *Negotiating globally: How to negotiate deals, resolve disputes, and make decisions across cultural boundaries*. John Wiley & Sons.

- a) *To explore the conditions or the factors, which motivate non-state armed groups to negotiate with the state actors.*
- b) *To examine the interactions and the bargaining process between the non-state armed actors and the state actors.*
- c) *To understand how negotiations to internal armed conflicts can/may contribute to peace making in multiethnic and conflict-ridden polities like India.*

1.4 Research Question

The primary research question formulated for the study is:

Why and under what conditions do non-state armed groups may decide to renounce violence and enter into negotiations with the state?

1.5 Rationale of the study

Insurgencies have been prevalent in many parts of South Asia including India at different points in time with demands ranging from sovereignty, autonomy arrangements to other socio-economic and political inducements. Similarly, India's northeast has also been affected by such violent armed conflicts at various phases in history especially after the independence of the country in 1947. For instance, ethnic communities in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Tripura and most recently Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh witnessed the onset of several insurgencies at different periods in the political history of India. Social, economic, political and cultural grievances played a significant role in the emergence of ethnic aspirations among these communities and formation of the various insurgent groups in the northeastern region. At the same time, the availability of safe havens in neighboring countries like Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh and the accumulation of tangible and intangible resources during the course of the insurgency allowed these groups to sustain the armed conflicts for a long period of time.

Some insurgent groups decided to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India after a certain point in time while others chose to remain in conflict. For instance, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in Mizoram renounced the violence and successfully negotiated with the Government of India in the 1980s. Others like National Socialist Council of Nagaland-IM group (NSCN-IM) renounced the violence in 1997 and are presently

engaged in the final stages of the negotiation process. In the case of Assam, one group within the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) is also presently engaged in the negotiation process. Two Bodo insurgent groups, Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) also decided to renounce violence and they have signed peace agreements in 2003 and 2020 respectively. The present study specifically focuses on the groups that have renounced the violence and explore the factors that motivated them to engage in the negotiation process with the Indian Government. NDFB's decision to engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India also requires an in-depth analysis in order to understand why it decided to participate in the negotiation process after years of violence since the 1980s. The next section deals with the methodology, various research tools and techniques used in the study.

1.6 Research Design and Methodology

Existing studies in social science research employ both quantitative and qualitative methods and both these methodologies has its own advantages and disadvantages. Some studies argue that the best technique to understand the phenomena in social science is through a systematic statistical analysis whereas the advocates of qualitative methodology argue that qualitative method is the best technique to understand the social phenomena better. However, scholars like King, Keohane & Verba argued that the “two differ only in style and specific technique” which is not so significant methodologically (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994). According to King, Keohane & Verba, quantitative studies employ numbers and statistical methods and are specifically based on numerical descriptions of the phenomena under study with focus on huge number of cases (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994). On the other hand, they described qualitative research as one that focuses on one or small number of cases which employs in-depth interviews and deep analysis and does not focus on numerical measurements. Scholars like Merriam (2002) argued that the significance of qualitative research is its focus on “the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world.” Few others describe qualitative research as “a group of approaches for the collection and analysis of data which aims to provide an in-depth, socio-contextual and detailed description and interpretation of the research topic” (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

Existing studies defined quantitative research as “an empirical research into a social phenomenon by testing a theory consisting of variables, which are measured with numbers and

analyzed with statistics in order to determine if the theory explains or predicts phenomena of interest” (Creswell, 1994). On the other hand, Yilmaz defined qualitative research as “an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences to the world” (Yilmaz, 2013).

The present study employs a qualitative method of enquiry and focuses on a single case with an in-depth analysis of the case selected for the study. Primary data/information was collected through in-depth interviews with the members of various Bodo organizations like NDFB, ABSU and others. Existing studies argue that focus on more than one case allows more representation than a single case study and an in-depth and thick analysis of small N case helps to understand the social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningful contrasting cases (Lijphart, 1971). Focus on small “n” also allow the comparisons of cases much better but at the same time the study does not try to generalize the findings of the study. Case study qualitative research is defined as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009). Similarly, Geertz (1973) argued that case study research contributes to thick description of the case under study.

Sampling is one of the most important processes in any research, be it quantitative or qualitative research, as it helps in the collection of efficient data/information for the phenomena under study from the respondents (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). There is no fixed set of rules for the number of samples in qualitative research and it deals with small number of sample size with in-depth analysis of the data collected from the selected sample. The present study employs purposive sampling (also called judgment sampling technique), a non-probability sampling method in order to collect the data for the research under study. It is the most widely used sampling technique used in qualitative research where the researcher selects the most productive sample to address the research question of the study (Marshall, 1996). Bernard (2017) argued that non-probability sampling is relevant when the study requires an in-depth understanding of a small number of cases and when the phenomenon under study is sensitive. In order to collect

cultural data of a particular phenomenon, non-probability sampling is the most relevant sampling technique qualitative researchers need to employ. Bernard further argued that the researcher goes to the field with a purpose in mind and selects the samples according to the nature of information/data required for the study (Bernard, 2017). Purposive sampling provides rich data to the researcher as the “sample is selected according to pre-selected criteria relevant to a particular research question” (Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). It has been defined as “a method in which the researcher selects those populations who have experience or knowledge of the issues being addressed in the study” (Oppong, 2013). Patton (1990) further argued that purposive sampling helps in selecting information-rich cases for in depth study of the phenomenon.

In the case of the present study, members of the NDFB who were directly involved in the formation of the organization, the armed movement and the decision to participate in the negotiation process with the Government of India were interviewed. Interviews were conducted with the founding President of the organization and other founding leaders such as former General Secretaries, Home Secretaries, Finance Secretary and many other senior leaders of the organization in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) as well as in Guwahati. Besides the top leadership of the organization, there were many other lower rank cadres and over-ground workers of the organization who were interviewed during the course of the field work in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). At the same time, members of various socio-cultural organizations such as All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF), All Bodo Peace Forum (ABPF) and another former Bodo insurgent group Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and members from political parties like United People’s Party-Liberal (UPPL) and Bodoland People’s Front (BPF) were selected for the study.

Snowball sampling is another non-probability sampling technique employed in the present study and is used in selecting the respondents to collect relevant data and information. This sampling technique is also considered as one of the types of purposive sampling in which the researcher finds out from selected respondents other subjects that might be relevant to be included in the investigation (Oppong, 2013). Bernard (2017) argued “in snowball technique, key informants and/or documents are used to locate one or two people in a population. These people are then asked by the researcher to list others in the population and accordingly

recommend someone from the list who might be interviewed eventually.” Interviews were also conducted with those respondents who were referred by the primary respondents selected initially for the study. The present study was able to collect relevant information from these respondents as well. This process of sample selection is known as snowball sampling which helps in gathering rich information about the phenomenon under study.

In qualitative research, interview with the respondents is considered as one of the most important tool for data collection. Interviews act as a set of techniques for generating data from the sample selected for the study through structured, semi-structured or unstructured questions (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). They argued that “employment of semi-structured or unstructured, open-ended and informal interview method is preferred in qualitative research as it allows more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and respondent” (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Data collection through interviews provides researchers detailed and rich data about the phenomenon under study (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). They further argued that open-ended and semi-structured interviews conducted with the respondents in qualitative research allow the respondents to share their experiences in detail. Barrett & Twycross (2018) further argued that semi-structured interviews ensure collection of efficient data and at the same time allows flexibility to the respondents to bring their own personality and perspective to the discussion. Whereas structured interviews fails to provide flexibility in order to express their experiences in detail though it becomes easy for the researcher to administer and analyze the interview and data. Thus, in-depth interview method with semi-structured and open-ended questions has established itself as one of the significant data collection methods in qualitative research in social science (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

The present study incorporates data from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary data were collected from former NDFB rebels in their respective residences and also from former NDFB rebels in designated camps. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with the surrendered members and those members of the NDFB who were in ceasefire agreements. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the members of the civil society organizations like the ABPF who had been actively involved in the peace negotiations with the Government of India. Formal as well as informal interviews with members of various socio-cultural and political organizations such as ABSU and UPPL who were involved actively in the negotiation process

were also conducted. Few interviews were also conducted with members of ABWWF and BSS in order to understand their views about the various socio-economic and political developments of the Bodos. Interviews were also conducted with former BLT rebels and over ground workers of BLT and also an interview was conducted with an overground worker of the NDFB. The study also conducted in-depth interviews with the members of Bodoland People's Front (BPF), a political party comprising former BLT rebels led by Hagrama Mohilary who ruled BTR for 15 years. An interview was also conducted with a state official who had prior knowledge about the developments in the Bodo region. The interviews conducted with former NDFB rebels as well as with the civilians/noncombatants, former BLT rebels, ABWWF, ABSU, BSS, UPPL and BPF members as well as with the state official involved semi-structured and open-ended questions which allowed the respondents to share their experiences in detail. Allowing the respondents more space by asking open-ended questions enabled the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study. These interviews with the members of the NDFB as well as various Bodo organizations helped in understanding the basis for the beginning of the insurgency during the 1980s as well as the motivations behind the NDFB's engagement in the negotiation process.

The study also incorporates data/information from secondary sources like newspapers and other available documentary evidences which focuses on the internal armed conflicts in India. Memoirs and books written by British missionaries, administrators and other British authors during the British rule in India was an important source of information for the present study. Firsthand information about Assam and various ethnic groups in these documents especially descriptions about the socio-economic and political history of the Bodos were collected. Old newspaper reports also proved to be another important documentary evidence. These newspaper reports helped in collecting past records mostly about the post-British period history of the Bodos such as the various socio-cultural and statehood movement of the Bodos. The present study also incorporates data from digital newspaper reports. Other documents comprised of Memoranda submitted by the NDFB, Constitution of the NDFB and other organizational reports/magazines, books of the NDFB and ABSU.

The next section discusses the data analysis method employed in the present study. This section describes about the analytic tools and techniques used in the present study in order to

analyze the information collected from the field and interpret the findings of the study. As the study included interview data, historical records, newspaper reports and other available evidences, various techniques have been employed in analyzing these data/information.

1.7 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The information collected from the respondents, historical records and other documentary evidences from the field were analyzed by using qualitative tools like content analysis. Mariano (1995) argued that data collection and data analysis go hand in hand in most of the qualitative research. Content analysis is one of the most widely used methods of text analysis in social science research. Babbie (2001) defined content analysis as “the study of recorded human communications which involves transformation of raw data into a standardized form.” Others like Bryman described qualitative content analysis as “probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents” and he further mentioned that “qualitative content analysis explores underlying themes in the materials being analyzed” (Bryman, 2004). Gray & Densten further argued that content analysis helps in identifying patterns and structures from the textual data which allows the researchers to identify the key features in the data, develops categories and aggregate them into visible constructs in order to seize meaning in the text (Gray & Densten, 1998).

One of the significant debates related to content analysis is whether the researchers should limit their analysis to manifest content or should the researchers also consider the analysis of the latent contents of the data.⁴ Manifest content analysis is defined as “an examination of text for elements which exist on the surface of the text, the meaning of which is taken at face value” (Kleinheksel, Winston, Tawfik & Wyatt, 2020). This method of analysis is associated with data that are “easily observable to both the researchers and the coders without the need to discern intent or identify deeper meaning” (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). On the other hand, latent content analysis involves interpretation of hidden meanings within the data. This process requires the researcher to discover not only the observed data but also to discover the unsaid or the silent meanings within the text described by the respondents. Qualitative content analysis

⁴ Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2001). An introduction to content analysis. *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*, 7, 238-267.

allows the researcher to have a systematic understanding of the meanings of qualitative data (Schreier, 2012). This method helps in reducing the volume of data as it requires that researchers concentrate on those aspects related to the research question (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is a systematic method of analyzing qualitative data as it involves thorough examination of the content which might have relevance with the research question.

Data analysis usually follows a set of procedures and coding before arriving at any definite findings and interpretation of the data. Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued that “typical analytic procedures can be categorized into seven phases: (1) organizing the data, (2) immersion in the data, (3) generating categories, themes and patterns, (4) coding the data⁵, (5) offering interpretations through analytic memos, (6) searching for alternative understandings, and (7) report writing.” They argued that each of the phases involves data reduction and interpretation. Interpretation of the data remains a critical factor in both quantitative and qualitative research as it brings meanings and insights to the data. They further argued that “raw data have no inherent meaning in itself and as such interpretation brings meaning to those data and displays that meaning to the reader through the written report” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). At the very beginning of data analysis, organized the data systematically, revisit the data repeatedly and organize the data according to categories and themes and examine the patterns in the data. After the generation of categories and themes and a consistent coding process, researchers engages in integrative interpretation of his understating from the data. Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued that “interpretation brings meanings and coherence to the themes, patterns and categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to read.” Others like Patton (2002) described interpretation involves understanding the significance of findings and offering explanations, drawing conclusions and making inferences.⁶

In the context of the present study, data collected through in-depth interviews with former NDFB rebels, members of other socio-political and armed organizations as well as with Bodo non-combatants were analyzed using content analysis. During the process of data analysis, the central focus was to examine why the NDFB decided to renounce the violence and engage in a

⁵ Marshall and Rossman (2016) defined coding as a process of “generating names and labels for phenomena identified in the data- themes, categories”

⁶ Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

peaceful discussion with the state actors/Government of India. At the same time, there were also attempts to understand the bargaining process between the negotiating groups during the negotiation process, policies to prevent onset of insurgencies as well as how engaging insurgents in the negotiation process could contribute to peace-making in multi-ethnic and conflict ridden polities like India. In order to understand the conditions that may have triggered the onset of the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India, the data were categorized thematically and patterns were drawn out of them.

Historical books, oral histories and other documents were analyzed using historical analysis in the present study. In order to understand the socio-economic and political developments of the Bodos and the state of Assam in general in the past, which eventually led to the onset of arm struggle by the NDFB, the present study examined some of the historical writings especially written by the British officials during the colonial rule in India. Rowlinson (2005) argued that historical research is “a flowing, dynamic account of past events that involves an interpretation of the events in an attempt to recapture the nuances, personalities and ideas that influenced these events.” Historical analysis is a method to unearth about the past developments/events from historical texts, newspaper reports and other historical evidences in order to acquire information about the phenomena under study.⁷ In the context of the present study, apart from the various accounts about the Bodos, it helped in understanding the conditions that have contributed to various socio-economic and political developments not only in the state of Assam but the entire northeastern part of the country.

The next section provides an insight about my experiences in the field which were conducted mostly in the three districts in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), viz. Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri. It provides details about the nature of the fieldwork, interviews, respondents and the challenges, which I faced during the course of my stay in the field.

1.8 A brief note from the field

A. Interview participants

In-depth interviews were conducted with several members of the NDFB as well as overground workers of the organization at different locations. The interviews with the former

⁷ Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1999). *Designing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage publications.

NDFB rebels were conducted in the present districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and an interview was also conducted in Kamrup (M) district. Interviews with former NDFB rebels were conducted between May 2016 and July 2019. These respondents included senior as well as lower rank cadres of the organization in the designated camps as well as in the residences of the respondents situated in Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts.

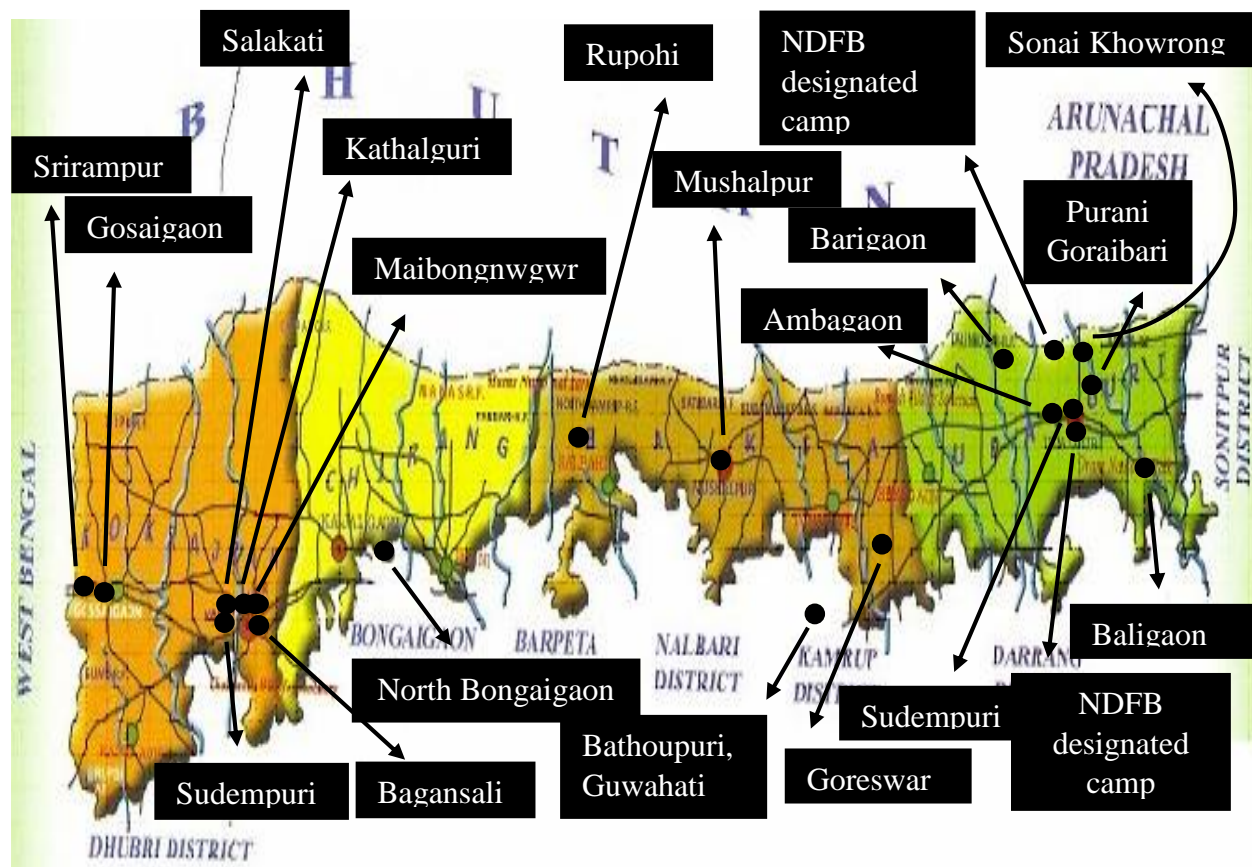


Figure 1.1: Villages and districts where the field study was conducted. The black dots represent the areas where the interviews were conducted during the course of the field study.

Map Source: Office of the Director of Education (BTC).

Interviews were also conducted with members of United People’s Party-Liberal (UPPL) in Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts between November 2018 and July 2019. UPPL is the political party headed by Promod Boro, which was earlier, formed by the former NDFB (Progressive) rebels and ABSU and currently rules BTR in alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Gana Suraksha Party (GSP). Interviews were also conducted with members of the

Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts in the same period. The present study also conducted interviews with former senior members of ABSU and former Members of Parliament in Kokrajhar district in June 2019.

Sl. No.	Organization	District	No. of Interviews
1	National Democratic Front of Boroland	Udalguri, Kokrajhar and Guwahati	17
2	United People's Party-Liberal	Udalguri & Kokrajhar	04
3	All Bodo Students Union	Kokrajhar, Baksa and Bongaigaon	10
4	Bodo Liberation Tigers	Baksa	01
5	All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation /All Bodo Women Welfare Federation/Bodoland People's Front	Udalguri & Kokrajhar	03
6	State Official	Telephonic Interview	01
7	Bodo Sahitya Sabha	Udalguri	02
8	Bodo villages	Udalguri	06
	Total		44

Table 1.2: Affiliations of respondents, districts where the interviews were conducted and total number of interviews conducted during the field study

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) played a significant role in the Bodo political history in the post-British period. Besides the interviews in Kokrajhar, I conducted interviews with present members of the Students Union in Goreswar, Rupohi and Mushalpur located in Baksa district for a detailed understanding of their role in the statehood movement which was renewed in 2010. These interviews were also helpful to understand the motivations behind the joint negotiation. These interviews were conducted in January 2020 in Baksa district. The Bodo region also witnessed another armed movement in the second half of 1990s under the banner of Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) who belonged mostly to hardcore faction within the ABSU during the statehood movement of the 1980s. This organization formed the Bodoland People's Front

(BPF) and ruled the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) after the signing of the BTC Accord in 2003 up to April 2020. They have played a significant role in shaping the Bodo politics since 2003 and their role cannot not be ignored for proper understanding of the dynamics of the negotiation process between the Government of India and the NDFB. Thus, interviews were also conducted with former members of BLT and BPF in June 2019 and January 2020. Forty four interviews were conducted with members of different organizations as well as individuals during the course of the field work. The next section discusses my experiences in the field during the course of study.

B. Experiences from the field

Fieldwork forms an important process in qualitative research as it enables the researcher to understand the phenomenon under study better through in-depth observation and interviews. The main objective of conducting fieldwork is to collect all the necessary information from the selected respondents in order to examine the phenomena under study. Information gathering from the field in the present study involved interviews through semi-structured interviews with the samples selected for the study and examining newspaper reports, historical writings, pamphlets and other documentary evidences. However, fieldwork and the process of information gathering is a challenging task for the researcher. Some of the challenges faced in the field include issues related to language spoken by the researcher and the respondents, establishing contacts, rapport-building, existing transport facilities, communication and the challenges of building trust with the respondents. Similarly, I faced some of the problems mentioned above while conducting interviews with the respondents in the field.

In the context of the present study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the former NDFB rebels and senior Bodo socio-political leaders who had prior experiences about the political history in the region. Prior to visiting the field, I developed semi-structured questions and they were finalized only after series of corrections and modifications. It is very essential to develop the right type of questions so that they address the objective of the phenomenon under study. The questions developed in the present study mostly focused on the dynamics of the NDFB insurgency and they were mostly related to the issue of negotiations between the armed group and the Government of India. Besides these, there were questions on the conditions that may have led to the emergence of ethnic aspirations among the Bodos especially after the end of

the British rule in India. These questions were also arranged chronologically in terms of various developments in the political history of the Bodos.

Prior to visiting the field, the researcher is also required to have sufficient knowledge about the subject under investigation. For instance, in the context of the present study, prior to visiting the field I extensively examined and dealt with the history of the Bodos and the circumstances that led to the onset of the insurgency in 1986.

It is also essential to avoid asking direct questions to the respondents. In the context of the present study, I avoided asking direct questions to the respondents especially questions on violent activities like bomb blasts, extortions, kidnappings and others.

Conducting interviews with the lower rank cadres of the NDFB was all the more difficult. Firstly, they were not ready to participate in the interviews as they feared that doing so would lead them to disciplinary proceedings against them by the leaders of the organization. Secondly, they refused to participate due to the sensitive nature of the study. Thus building trust and rapport with the respondents was the one of the first step that was undertaken during the course of my study in the field.

Another challenge I faced in the field was establishing contacts with the members of the groups selected for the study. For instance, establishing contact with the members of the NDFB, senior ABSU activists and other Bodo leaders was a challenging task. Sometimes it was difficult to secure appointments of the respondents and sometimes, the respondents declined to participate in the interview when they were explained about the subject matter of the study. Despite these challenges, I was able to convince the respondents regarding the significance of the study and their participation in the study.

Transport and communication is one of the serious challenges a researcher faces while conducting the field study. For instance, lack of transportation facilities, proper roads infrastructure and uneven terrain in the interior areas pose challenges to the researcher during the course of the study. However, these challenges were very minimal in the context of the present study. As far as verbal communication and the mode of interaction were concerned, I shared similar language and ethnic background with the respondents. I was familiar with the language spoken by most of the respondents in the Bodoland areas. Being a native of Udalguri district and

fluent in Bodo language, it was easier for me to develop contacts, conduct interviews, informally interact and also to interpret the interviews of the participants. This also enabled me to establish a rapport with the respondents.

Additionally, my personal experiences of the insurgency in the region since its formation in 1986 and my acquaintances with some of the members of the insurgent organizations, enabled me to build trust while conducting the interviews. Some of the respondents especially the senior NDFB leaders shared sensitive information during the course of the interview. Former NDFB rebels especially the senior leaders described about the incidents of kidnappings, robberies, bomb blasts among others which I feel would have been difficult for me to gather if I were considered to be an '*outsider*' by the respondents. Being an insider helped me to gain deeper understanding of the socio-cultural aspects of Bodo insurgency. Having said that while analyzing the interview data, I tried to minimize the inherent subjectivity of being an insider as much as possible.

Besides information concerned with the study, field study allows the researcher to have access to information which may not be connected with the topic under investigation. It helps in understanding social issues which may not necessarily be part of the research under study. The interview narratives collected from the field broadens the understanding about the culture, tradition and other issues of the ethnic communities under study. For instance, though the focus of the present study was to examine the negotiations between the NDFB and the Indian state, it also allowed me to understand the socio-economic and political issues of the Bodo community. As it is evident, there are only a few writings on the political developments in Bodoland. This study allowed me to investigate some of the important developments that led to the emergence of violent mobilization among the Bodos.

The next section provides an outline of the Chapters incorporated in the present study. This section gives a brief introduction to the chapters outlined in the thesis.

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

Chapter one provides an outline of the overall objective of the study. The chapter also discussed the various concepts employed in the study. The chapter specifically discussed why it is necessary to examine the factors that motivate NSAGs/insurgent groups to renounce the violence and participate in the negotiation process. At the same time, the chapter discussed the

research methodology employed in the study in detail. A detailed description had been outlined in the chapter about the data collection methods, sampling methods and the methods used for analyzing the information collected from the field. The chapter further discusses the research question and the objective of the study.

Chapter two discusses the existing studies on insurgent negotiations in detail. This chapter provides the theoretical background of the conditions that may lead to the onset of negotiation process between the NSAGs and the state actors. The chapter describes how different factors like organizational structure, resources and capabilities, incentive structure, stalemate and role of mediators play an important role in motivating the NSAGs/insurgent groups to renounce the violence and engage in the democratic process with the state actors. The chapter further discusses the theoretical framework identified for the study.

Chapter three specifically discusses the history of the Bodos. The chapter locates the history of the Bodo tribes especially since the thirteenth century onwards. The chapter examines the various socio-economic and political developments during the British rule which not only led to the emergence of political consciousness among the Bodos but also solidified the formation of the Bodo identity in the subsequent period. The chapter further describes about different ethnic mobilization process of the Bodos in the post-British period. The role played by various Bodo organizations like the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, All Bodo Students Union, Plains Tribal Council of Assam, All Bodo Women Welfare Federation and others have been discussed in the chapter. The main objective of locating the history of the Bodos and various developments during different periods of the political history of Assam is to highlight how these events formed the basis of the formation of the NDFB in 1980s with demands for sovereignty. The chapter also discusses how the socio-economic and political grievances of the Bodos mobilized the Bodos on many occasions.

Chapter four is the case study chapter and it gives a detailed description about the insurgency led by the NDFB during the 1980s. The chapter specifically discusses the history of the origin of the NDFB and examines the insurgency led by the organization in details. The chapter further discusses the various developments among the Bodos after the onset of the NDFB insurgency.

Chapter five is also a case study chapter and it provides an understanding of the strategic choices of the insurgent groups during the course of the insurgency. The chapter provides an analysis of the NDFB insurgency and specifically examines factors that motivated the NDFB leadership to participate in the democratic discussions with the Government of India. The chapter specifically tries to understand the relationship between existing theoretical narratives on internal conflicts and the case from Bodoland in India's northeast. Additionally, the chapter discusses the various developments that occurred within the NDFB during the peace talks and at the same time, the chapter examines the various political developments among the Bodo community.

Chapter six is the conclusion chapter and it provides a summary of the findings of the study. It also provides an understanding of the strategic choices of the insurgent groups during the course of the insurgency. The chapter specifically tries to understand the relationship between existing theoretical narratives on internal conflicts and the case from Bodoland in India's northeast. The chapter provides an analysis of the NDFB insurgency and specifically on the factors that motivated the NDFB leadership to participate in the democratic discussions with the Government of India. The chapter further discusses the significance and some of the limitations of the study and the future scope of the study.

1.10 Summary

The present chapter described the objective of the study and introduced various concepts employed in the study. This chapter specifically described why it is essential to understand the strategic choices of the insurgents. The chapter also discussed the methodology used in the study as well as the significance of the study. The chapter provided a detailed description on the sampling methods and the methods and techniques used in analyzing the information gathered from the field. The chapter further discussed about the researcher's experiences in the field while interacting with the respondents. In sum, the present chapter provided the introduction and background of the study and introduced the readers to some of the basic concepts and methodologies employed in the study. The next chapter discusses the existing theories on internal conflicts and tries to examine the conditions or the factors that may motivate the NSAGs/ insurgent groups to negotiate with the state actors or may contribute to the onset of the negotiation process between the NSAGs/insurgent groups and the state actors.

Chapter Two

Non-state armed groups, strategic choices and negotiations

2.1 Introduction

Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and state actors involved in internal armed conflicts often engage in negotiations, although only a few cases result in effective negotiations. Earlier studies (Bapat, 2005) suggest that negotiations are likely during the initial years of the formation of non-state armed groups when the NSAGs/insurgent groups are relatively weaker and the state actors/governments have the advantage in terms of capability and resources. Others (Zartman, 1995) suggest that non-state armed actors accept accommodation as a result of 'stalemate' and still few others argued that insurgent groups may decide to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process because of the incentive structure (Kaplow, 2015; Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). Still others (Svensson, 2007; Lake & Rothchild, 1996; Clayton, 2013) examine the role of third party mediators in the process of negotiation and accommodation of non-state armed groups. The dissertation contributes to these debates while exploring why some non-state armed groups accept the offer of negotiation. This chapter examines the existing literature which focuses on the factors that motivate NSAGs/insurgent groups to engage in the negotiation process with the governments.

2.2 Theorizing internal armed conflicts and strategic choices of the non-state armed groups

This section will focus on the scholarly writings, which examine why and when non-state armed groups decide to negotiate with the state actors while others decide to continue with violence. Earlier studies mentioned that the factors/conditions under which the non-state armed groups may decide to renounce the violence and negotiate with the state actors vary from case to case. Negotiations may depend on organizational structure of insurgent groups, relative capabilities, stalemated conditions, political goals and the incentive structure offered by the state actors. Thus, the existing literature has been divided into five subsections, namely, (i) Organizational Structure (ii) Resources and Capabilities (iii) Incentive Structure (iv) Stalemate and (v) Role of Mediators. The first section examines the existing literature on how the organizational structure may contribute to conditions where the non-state armed groups are

motivated either to accept the offer of the state to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors.

(i). Organizational Structure

Scholars have focused on the impact of a strong leadership and the type of the organizational structure on the outcome of the internal armed conflicts. The organizational structure of the non-state armed groups and their strategic choices are related. For instance, Sinno (2011) argued that motivation to engage or not to engage in any negotiation process with the state actors depends on the organizational structure of the non-state armed groups.

The internal armed conflicts led by a strong centralized executive leadership have a higher probability of success for the non-state armed groups (Debray, 1967). Such non-state armed groups are less likely to engage in a negotiation process with the state actors and continue the violence against the state actors. However, negotiations are also less likely if the leadership of the non-state armed groups is fractionalized as the absence of a clear leadership increases the cost of negotiation for the state actors (Kaplow, 2015). Connable & Libicki (2010) focused on the impact of the hierarchical structures on the probability of negotiations between the actors involved in internal armed conflicts. They argued that hierarchical non-state armed groups have a higher probability of achieving victory in their struggle against the state actors than the networked non-state armed groups. Therefore, hierarchical non-state armed groups may decide not to engage in negotiation process with the state actors.⁸

Earlier studies highlighted the significance of the structure of the NSAGs on the likelihood of the onset of negotiations between the insurgents and the state actors. For instance, Connable & Libicki (2010) focused on the impact of the hierarchical structures on the probability of negotiations between the actors involved in internal armed conflicts. They argued that hierarchical non-state armed groups have a higher probability of achieving victory in their struggle against the state actors than the networked non-state armed groups. Therefore, hierarchical non-state armed groups may decide not to engage in the negotiation process with the

⁸ See Connable, B., & Libicki, M. C., (2010), *“How Insurgencies End”*, Virginia: Rand Corporation. Hierarchical insurgencies are organized in accordance with military ‘line and block’ charts, establishing relatively clear, vertical chains of commands, while networked insurgencies adhere to a flat organizational structure with vague leadership roles for peripheral subgroups.

state actors. Networked non-state armed groups, on the other hand, have a higher likelihood of entering into the negotiation process with the state actors (Connable & Libicki, 2010). The networked insurgencies, which are able to sustain the rebellion and avoid defeat, require at least a short period of hierarchical structure. However, many scholars have also argued that most of the non-state armed groups acquire both hierarchical and networked structure during the course of the insurgency. For instance, Oliker cited the example of the Chechen non-state armed groups that rebelled against the state of Russia in 1991 and 1999. They relied both on a centralized military command structure and a distributed network of non-state armed groups.⁹ However scholars have also argued that the non-state armed groups with a strong hierarchical organizational structure are also more likely to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors (Clayton, 2013).

Another stream of scholars argued that non-state armed groups providing services¹⁰ (service-providing rebels) to the noncombatants are more likely to engage in negotiations with the state actors (Heger & Jung, 2015). Such groups enjoy a wider base of popular support and a centralized organization structure, which in turn, avoids potential spoilers to breakaway during the negotiation process. As a result, governments/state actors also become more willing to negotiate/engage with such groups as the threat from spoilers is very minimal (Heger & Jung, 2015). Non-state armed groups providing services to the noncombatants are mostly hierarchical and such groups have a wide base of popular support. Negotiations with such groups have a higher probability of occurrence and stability (Heger & Jung, 2015). Thus the non-state armed groups with coherent organizational structure are more likely to engage in the negotiation process with state actors. Likewise, governments might also have the motivation to negotiate with those insurgent groups with high organizational capacity.

However, organizational structure of the NSAGs in itself does not necessarily have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NSAGs as well as on the dynamics of the insurgency. For instance, scholars like Sinno argued that access to safe havens by non-state armed groups have a significant influence on the strategic decisions of the non- state armed

⁹ Oliker, O. (2001). *Russia's Chechen Wars 1994-2000: Lessons from Urban Combat*. Rand Corporation. P. 39-41

¹⁰ Non-state armed groups sometimes provide services such as welfare, food, medical services, education, literacy programme, cultural services etc. to the noncombatants in the area they operate from.

groups. As such, Sinno argued that safe havens are a critical indicator, which influences the structure of an organization (Sinno, 2011). A safe haven within the contested territory is much more preferable than those that are across the borders. He argued that centralized organizations without a safe haven within the contested territory might be very vulnerable in the face of their opponents/state actors and the state actors might be less likely to initiate any peace talks with such armed organizations (Sinno, 2011). Centralized organizations with access to safe havens and control over a piece of territory allows the organization to gather the support, mobilize noncombatants and extract resources. Insurgent leaders in such cases may avoid direct encounters with the state security forces (Sinno, 2011). Decentralized organizations, on the other hand, might not be able to initiate any dialogue with the state actors, though such groups might be more resilient than centralized ones, due to the inability to enforce discipline among the rank and file of the organization (Sinno, 2011). Hence, as Sinno argues, “when an organization suddenly gains access to a safe haven, it should transform itself into a more centralized structure or else it would risk dissipating its resources” (Sinno, 2011). Further, Sinno states, “Centralized organizations with strong hierarchical control are capable of rapidly adjusting their strategies in response to changes in the environment or the strategies of rivals” (Sinno, 2011). State actors also find it easier to accommodate or initiate the negotiation process with centralized organizations because such groups tend to be more disciplined and well organized than the decentralized ones.

(ii). Resources and Capabilities

Non-state armed groups accumulate tangible as well as intangible resources during the course of the insurgency which in turn increases their relative capabilities and which might eventually affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups. Though organizational structure plays a critical role in motivating the NSAGs either to renounce the violence or continue fighting, the significance of resources which help in strengthening the organization cannot be dismissed. Scholars have argued that during the initial years of the rebellion, non-state armed groups are more vulnerable and are more likely to be defeated by the state actors/state security forces due to relatively lower resources in order to sustain the rebellion (Bapat, 2005). Resources such as finance & recruits, networks with the non-combatants as well as with other non-state armed groups, establishment of bases both within the host country and the neighboring

country, control of a territory, accumulation of arms and ammunitions etc. are some of the essential factors which provide support to the non-state armed groups in order to sustain and continue the insurgency against the state actors (Bapat, 2005; Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Salehyan, 2007; Dukalskis, 2015; Guevara, 1969). These resources contribute to capability building for the non-state armed groups in internal armed conflicts and helps in sustaining the insurgency against the much stronger and capable state security forces. In other words, these scholars maintained that resources and capabilities have an important repercussions/influences on the NSAGs and the conflict in particular.

Bapat (2005) in his quantitative study of timing of negotiations to internal armed conflicts argued that for negotiations to take place, the timing of initiating the negotiation process is very important. The delay in initiating the talks with the non-state armed groups during the initial years of the rebellion motivates them not to engage in the negotiation process as the non-state armed groups become relatively stronger with the passage of time and are able to survive the vulnerabilities. Negotiations are likely during the initial years of the formation of non-state armed groups when state actors have the relative advantage over non-state armed groups in terms of resources and capabilities. However, he argued that during these initial years the Government is also more capable to defeat the insurgents militarily through force and thus negotiations might seem less likely as the insurgents are relatively weaker. Bapat further argued that the possibility of negotiation is most likely to occur during the initial four years of the formation of the non-state armed groups and is at its highest point after about twenty years of the violence (Bapat, 2005). Other scholars have also shown that during the initial years of the formation of the non-state armed groups, the state actors hold a clear advantage in terms of the balance of power relations between the two groups.¹¹ The non-state armed groups might be forced to renounce the violence and enter into peace negotiations with the state actors due to lack of sufficient resources and capabilities to sustain the movement (Bapat, 2005). On the other hand, non-state armed groups may decide not to engage in peace talks with the state actors if they become relatively capable of sustaining the rebellion (*ibid*). Bapat (2005) argued that the probability of insurgent collapse decreases over time as the insurgent groups become relative

¹¹ See Lichbach, M. (1995). “*The Rebel’s Dilemma*.” Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Also see Moore, W. H. (1995). “Rational Rebels: Overcoming the Free Rider Problem.” *Political Research Quarterly* 48(2): 417-454

more capable. But the fear of collapse and uncertainty about their survival might motivate the non-state actors to engage in peace process with the state actors (Bapat, 2005). Insurgent groups are more likely to negotiate when they are not certain about their survival. The government, on the other hand, might negotiate with the non-state armed groups only after the non-state armed actors become strong enough to pose any significant threat to the state. Bapat (2005) also argued that non-state armed groups with relatively lower capabilities might accept the government's offer of negotiations especially during the initial years of the insurgency. At the same time, he argued that weaker Governments are also likely to engage in the negotiation process after about two or three years of fighting. However, scholars have argued that older non-state armed groups are also more likely to enter into negotiations with the state actors. Bapat described why the probability of negotiations between the insurgents and the Governments is more likely in the early years of the insurgency and the reason why it decreases as the insurgency continues. Bapat (2005) argued that it is because of the unwillingness of the governments to engage in discussions with the insurgent groups at the early stages and the unwillingness of the insurgents to negotiate in the later stages of the insurgency. Scholars like Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom argued that the chances of negotiating with the state actors increases if the conflict survive beyond seven years (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom, 2004). Kaplow also argued that non-state armed groups that survive for a longer period and one which enjoys outside political support are more likely to engage in peace talks with the state actors (Kaplow, 2015).

In similar line, scholars like Hultquist argued that the balance of power relations between the conflicting parties affects the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups, whether to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors (Hultquist, 2013). Governments/state actors might decide not to negotiate with weak rebel groups as such groups do not pose a major threat to the stability of the state. However, such weak rebel groups are able to avoid defeat in the face of highly advantageous state security forces due to their ability to hide easily. They can avoid confrontation with the counterinsurgent forces (ibid). Under such situations, conflicts between the two parties have a higher probability of continuing or the rebel group might collapse (Hultquist, 2013). However, in conflicts where the government faces relatively stronger (nearing parity in terms of their capabilities) rebel groups, the government and the non-state armed groups might decide to negotiate in order to avoid the higher costs associated with continuing the conflict or to avoid a stalemate-like situation (Zartman, 1985). Bapat also argued, 'unlike

asymmetry, where governments fear legitimizing the rebels, the condition of parity also allows for negotiation and settlement as viable government options' (Bapat, 2005). However, non-state armed groups might also decide to negotiate with the state actors while relatively strong. Such groups tend not to face the risk of being weakened which might eventually reduce their bargaining power and the expected rewards from the settlement (Hultquist, 2013).

Existing studies have also argued that not only the timing, the duration of the conflict and the organizational structures of the non-state armed groups affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed actors, but also the networks between different non-state armed groups also influence the non-state armed actors' decision whether to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors/government. For instance, Akcinaroglu argued that lack of interdependence and networks between the non-state armed groups might lead to the initiation of the negotiation process between the conflicting parties because under such situations, the relative capabilities of the non-state armed groups involved in conflicts becomes relatively low and such groups can be bought with offer of accommodation (Akcinaroglu, 2012). Akcinaroglu argued that non-state armed groups benefit by maintaining relations with other non-state armed groups through alliance formations (Akcinaroglu, 2012). Such networks increase the resources and the capabilities of the non-state armed groups, which further intensify the fighting and increases the survival chances of the non-state armed groups. As such, networks and alliances between the non-state armed groups might have an impact on the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups. Alliance formation and interdependence among non-state armed groups may also increase the capabilities of weaker and divided groups. In such an arrangement, weaker groups increase their chances of survival as the alliance gives them access to the capabilities of the stronger allies (Akcinaroglu, 2012). The state actors/security forces find it very difficult to end the conflict when it has to face multiple numbers of non-state armed groups simultaneously (Akcinaroglu, 2012). But at the same time, Akcinaroglu maintained that the degree of commitment between the non-state armed groups in such alliances differ from case to case (*ibid*). He argued that durable alliances and formal alliances have diverse implications on the outcome of the conflict (Akcinaroglu, 2012). Durable alliances may not necessarily lead to victory and initiation of negotiations but it definitely provides the means to avoid a government victory. Alliances pose serious threats to the state actors/security forces only when these alliances are made credible by a formal announcement. Akcinaroglu argued that 'formal alliances also

indicate more credible ties among the non-state armed groups, relatively higher capabilities, and hence more expensive demands.’ But at the same time she argued that though enduring alliances among the non-state armed groups might not necessarily end up in negotiation, it is less likely that such groups could be accommodated through cheap concessions (Akcinaroglu, 2012). The presence of a large number of non-states armed groups decreases the probability of success of negotiation and conflict termination because the accommodation of such groups would be accompanied with very high costs. Economically strong state actors might have the resources but they do not have the incentives to accommodate multiple non-state armed groups at the same time. So, alliance formation and networks between the non-state armed groups might have an impact on the choices the non-state armed actors undertake whether to engage in a negotiation process or not (Akcinaroglu, 2012).

Existing literature on negotiation to internal armed conflicts have also stressed on the significance and the influence of the conditions in the neighboring countries on the dynamics of the insurgency. Scholars argued external support to the non-state armed groups to be one of the significant and decisive factors in determining whether non-state armed groups may engage in a negotiation process with the state actors or not (Reider, 2014). Scholars have defined external support as any form of support provided to a non-state armed group from outside the political boundaries of the existing state where the movement originates.¹² Non-state armed groups might receive both active as well as passive external support from the external states. Scholars like Reider described external support to be one of the most critical form of external support provided to the non-state armed groups by the external states (Reider, 2014). However, though external support has been argued to be a very critical element of the outcome of any internal conflict, it does not necessarily guarantee victory for the non-state armed groups. External support to the non-state armed groups can however prolong the internal conflict and increase the lethality of the movement (Reider, 2014). For instance, during the Greek intrastate conflict (1946-49), Yugoslavia provided safe areas and free transit across the border to the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), where the party established training camps, field hospitals, supply depots and also the party received clothing, rations etc. But with the closure of border by Yugoslavia with

¹² Haas, E. H. (2011), “*Operations at the Border: Efforts to disrupt Insurgent Safe-Havens,*” (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press.

Greece in 1949, KKE was defeated by the Greek government due to lack of sanctuary and logistic resources (Laquer, 1998). In similar tone, Cilliers also argued the degree to which the bases established in adjacent states facilitate the movement and security of the non-state armed groups directly influences the impact of external support on the success or the failure of the movement (Cilliers, 1985).

As mentioned in the preceding section, external support provided directly or indirectly to the NSAGs by the neighbouring or foreign states has implications for the NSAGs in the long run. By allowing NSAGs to establish bases in their territory, neighbouring states help the NSAGs in operationalizing its activities efficiently. Thus scholars have argued that relations shared between the neighboring states may allow the non-state armed groups to have access to sanctuary in the neighboring states (Salehyan, 2007). Relations shared between the neighboring states may allow the non-state armed groups to have access to sanctuary in the neighboring states. The establishment of bases in foreign soil allows the non-state armed actors to lower the cost of their movement and increase their bargaining outcomes.¹³ The state actors also find it very difficult to conduct counterinsurgency operations against those non-state armed groups who operate from foreign soil. Such operations also prove to be very costly for the state as well as difficult due to lack of information about the population as well as the terrain in those countries/regions where the non-state armed groups have extraterritorial bases.¹⁴ At the same time, the state actors may be bound by the norms specified by the United Nations of respecting the other country's sovereignty which makes it all the more difficult for the state actors to suppress any movement operating from foreign soil (Salehyan, 2007). Transnational conflicts make negotiations less successful and problematic for the actors involved in the conflict to reach an acceptable settlement. As such, access to external bases in foreign soil plays a very significant role in prolonging the conflict, thereby making negotiations between the non-state armed groups and the state actors less likely (*ibid*).

Along similar lines, other scholars have also argued that “safe havens are essential to the success of any guerilla movement, providing insurgents with sanctuary from government attacks

¹³ See, Buhaug, H., & Gates, S. (2002). The geography of civil war. *Journal of peace research*, 39(4), 417-433.

¹⁴ See Fearon, J. & Laitin, D. (1999). “Weak States, Rough Terrain, and Large-scale Ethnic Violence since 1945.” In *Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA* (pp. 2-5).

and a place in which to arm, train, organize and stage operations as well as to rest and recuperate” (Byman et al., 2001). The establishment of extraterritorial bases/safe havens in neighboring states by the non-state armed groups provides them the strategy to effectively avoid the repressive measures of the host state. Safe havens in neighboring states allow the non-state armed actors/insurgents to sustain the violence for a longer period of time. For instance, Bhutan was one of the states, which had provided safe havens to most of the non-state armed groups from India’s northeast and where the insurgents groups from the region had established their camps. But after Operation all Clear launched by the Royal Bhutan Army in collaboration with the Indian Army in 2003, most of the bases were destroyed and the non-state armed groups operating from Bhutan had to flee their camps which also might have contributed to the groups deciding to come to the negotiation table with the government of India.

If the state is bordered either by weak or rival state, non-state armed groups/insurgent groups have the highest chances of establishing a safe haven and it is to be noted that the passivity of the state has more of an impact on the conflict dynamics than any formal support it may provide to the non-state armed actors (Laitin & Fearon, 2003). When the non-state armed groups enjoy access to safe havens in such states, the likelihood of the non-state armed groups to engage in the negotiation process becomes very unlikely. Non-state armed groups having access to safe havens either in the neighbouring country or within the country enjoy significant success as it allows such groups to operate freely as well as such groups are able to avoid the repressive counterinsurgent measures of the state machineries (Byman et al., 2001). Cross-border sanctuaries have played a significant role especially when the counterinsurgent forces are highly capable. Thus, neighboring states have become the most common providers of external support in the form of providing safe havens to the non-state armed groups which help them avoid the repressive measures of the state actors of their country (Kiras, 2008). Besides providing safe haven, states also provide financial assistance, arms and other tangible as well as intangible support to such non-state actors in armed conflicts. For instance, the Karen National Union (KNU) received financial assistance and military support on a large scale from external state parties (Brouwer & Wijk, 2013). The Karen National Union had permanent bases on both sides bordering Burma and Thailand and the KNU operated as a de facto government in large parts of the Karen State. But during the post-Cold War era, the Karen National Union started to lose most of its remaining safe havens inside Burma, which forced the Karen National Union leadership to

establish new bases outside Burma. In spite of the improved relations between Thailand and Burma, the Karen National Union leadership was able to establish new bases in the border town of Mae Sot in Thailand because of the personal relations between the Karen National Union leaders and the Thai leaderships (Brouwer & Wijk, 2013). By 2001, change in leadership and economic interest led to an increasingly hardline stance towards the KNU in Thailand and pressure on the KNU leadership in Mae Sot subsequently intensified. So, access to external bases which acts as safe havens have allowed the non-state armed groups to avoid state repression which have further allowed the non-state armed groups to continue with the violence. Under such situations, engaging the non-state armed groups in a negotiation process becomes very less likely (*ibid*).

Hence, access to any sanctuary is one of the significant factors for the survival and success of the non-state armed groups in internal armed conflicts (Connable & Libicki, 2010; McCuen, 1966). Denial of sanctuaries by the state actors makes the non-state armed groups more vulnerable from the repressive measures of the state actors. The lack of bases in foreign soil as well as internal bases affects the functioning and the conduct of the movement (O'Neill, 1990). When the non-state armed groups enjoy voluntary sanctuary, both internal as well as external, they have a higher probability of achieving victory. Access to safe havens in neighboring states as well as in the periphery of the state may increase the duration of the conflict and might also have an impact on the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups whether to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors. Scholars like Galula have thus argued that it is very essential for the state actors to destroy guerrilla bases in foreign states because access to safe havens/bases provide the non-state armed groups the freedom to operate freely and is also one of the significant factors in determining the duration of the conflict.¹⁵ So, non-state armed groups, which have strong operational base both outside and within the borders of the state may be less likely to engage in a negotiation process with the state actors.

However, scholars have argued that static bases and sanctuary might not have the desired effect even if the non-state armed groups enjoy access to such resources (Guevara, 1969). He argued that it is always necessary for the non-state armed groups to maintain a strong operational

¹⁵ See David Galula, (1964), "*Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*", New York: Frederick A Praeger. pp. 39-42

base and continue strengthening it during the course of the conflict. Static bases allow the state security forces to exert pressure on the non-state armed groups through counter insurgency operations. As such, static operational bases might affect the functional capabilities of the non-state armed groups which might motivate the non-state armed groups to initiate the negotiation process with the state actors (*ibid*). On the other hand, if the non-state armed groups are able to maintain strong operational bases, then the non-state armed actors may decide not to engage in a negotiation process with the state actors/governments.

However, even if the NSAGs are able to secure support from the neighbouring as well as other foreign states, it does not necessarily have a desired impact on the insurgency. Scholars argued that consistent support is very essential for those non-state armed groups, which receive assistance from external states especially towards the end stages of the conflict (Connable & Libicki, 2010). Non-state armed groups may decide to disarm and enter into the negotiation process with the state actors when an external state offering assistance for the cause of the rebellion withdraws its support (Byman, 2009). External states sometimes allows the non-state armed groups to operate from their soil, provide financial support, sponsor training camps etc. which helps the non-state armed groups in building up their resources and capabilities. For instance, Pakistan allows many non-state armed groups to operate from their soil and also provides various other tangible as well as intangible support to the non-state armed groups (Byman, 2009). As long as the non-state armed groups enjoy such assistance, they may be less likely to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. So the withdrawal of assistance from the external states may motivate the non-state armed groups to initiate the negotiation process with the state actors (Byman, 2009). Thus, Connable & Libicki (2010) emphasized clear-cut and sustained support to be a critical element for the success of the non-state actors. If the non-state armed groups are able to secure consistent support from external states, then there is a high probability that the non-state armed groups may decide not to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. The withdrawal of assistance on the other hand, may motivate the non-state armed actors to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. Galula also argued that the timing of the intervention on behalf of the state actors as well as the non-state actors is very significant for the outcome of the struggle (Galula, 2006). And so he argued that outside assistance is preferable generally in the middle and end stages of the movement. Connable and Libicki further argued that if the state actors are able to resolve the root causes of

the rebellion by initiating economic, social and political reforms, then it is possible for the state actors to end the insurgency without even defeating the non-state actors themselves (Connable & Libicki, 2010). So, the authors argued that in spite of receiving assistance from external states in various forms, if there is a lack of consistency in the assistance being provided to the non-state armed groups, there is high probability that the non-state armed groups may decide to engage in the negotiation process. Whereas if the non-state armed groups receive assistance from external states consistently, non-state armed groups might be less inclined to renounce the violence and accept the state actors' offer of negotiation.

The non-state armed actors' decision to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors may also depend on the "geographic factors such as location, terrain and natural resources when they interact with rebel fighting capacity and together play a crucial role in determining the duration of the conflict" (Fearon & Laitin, 1999; Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). For instance, factors such as rough terrain, mountain pass, sea passage, border areas and natural resource wealth etc. have been very significant and central in most of the conflicts in Myanmar, Northeast India, Ethiopia, Peru and Columbia. Geography affects the resources and capabilities of both the groups involved in the conflict and also affect the strategic positioning of the non-state armed actors (Billon, 2001). Buhaug, Gates & Lujala (2009) argued that the conflicts which occur in the periphery/borders, far away from the state capital are more likely to last for a longer period of time which indicates that there is a less likelihood of negotiation between the actors. The reason behind this might be the inability of the state actors to employ sufficient state security forces in and near the peripheral regions where the rebellions are supported by the local population (Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). Proximity to international boundaries with other countries and the establishment of extraterritorial bases in foreign soil also prolongs the duration of the conflict. For instance, most of non-state armed groups of Northeast India operating from Bhutan have relatively been weakened and factionalized after the Operation all clear in 2003 and most of them have renounced arms and are presently engaged in peace talks with the Indian government. Conflicts involving relatively capable non-state actors and state actors are more likely to end quickly than conflicts which involve strong state actors and weak non-state actors. But there is a negative correlation between difficult terrains like forested area and mountainous region and the duration of the conflict. Inaccessible areas might be very crucial at the early stages of the conflict when the non-state armed groups are relatively weak. But when the non-state armed groups

acquire more resources and capabilities, these factors become less important. Finally, the authors found that natural resource wealth like gemstones and petroleum productions have a very strong correlation with the duration of the conflict, which further affects the strategic choices of the non-state armed actors (Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). The authors have therefore argued that the geographical factors may have an impact on the resources and capability of the non-state armed groups which may affect the choices whether to negotiate or not negotiate with the state actors.

Scholars have also argued that negotiation to internal armed conflicts may also depend on the military capabilities of the non-state armed groups and the state actors (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). The authors argued that the duration of an armed conflict depends on the non-state actors' ability to target the state actors, the capacity to fight back and the ability to resolve the conflict through peaceful mechanisms. The non-state actors and the state actors involved in the conflict will be more willing to settle for a negotiated settlement if both the actors agree finding a political solution to be more attractive than continuing the violence. Conflicts where the non-state actors and the state actors have equal strength or are stronger than the state actors are found to be shorter than conflicts where weak non-state actors are involved (*ibid*). Cunningham, Gleditsch, & Salehyan (2009) described that when the non-state actors are relatively stronger than the state actors then the conflicts have a higher probability of ending in negotiated settlements or in victory for the non-state actors. On the other hand, when both the actors' capabilities involved in the conflict are at parity with each other, then such conflicts are more likely to be terminated through agreements than in victory for the state actors (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). The authors argued that the probability of decisive outcomes are more probable when the non-state actors are relatively stronger or at parity with the state actors. So, the conflicts, where the non-state actors are stronger than or have equal capabilities with the state actors, tend to be shorter and such conflicts are more likely to be terminated either through a victory or negotiated settlements.

Schulze further argued how military capabilities of non-state armed groups and the changes in the domestic political and social scenario might affect the strategic choices of both the non-state armed groups and the state actors (Schulze, 2007). In his study of the conflict between the Indonesian government and the GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), the Free Acehese

Movement founded by Di Tiro in 1976, Schulze argued that the weakening of GAM militarily and the financial crisis as well as the fall of the Suharto regime which in turned weakened the Indonesian military's financial and political might had eventually forced the government to initiate democratic reform processes which motivated both the conflicting parties to engage in the negotiation process (Schulze, 2007). The change in the political leadership also witnessed the adoption of many Laws like Law 22 and Law 25 which dealt with decentralization. Eventually, "under Law 44, Aceh was granted autonomy with respect to culture, religious affairs and education. In August 2001, under Megawati's rule, special autonomy was granted to Aceh under Law 18, which formally changed the province's name to Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam" (ibid). However, though the provision of special autonomy was granted to Aceh in 2002, it became an utter failure. The Indonesian government had also initiated negotiations with the members of GAM in Geneva in 2000. But the talks failed in July 2001 when the members of GAM negotiating groups were arrested and jailed. However, the peace talks restarted in February 2002, whereby the Indonesian government issued an ultimatum for GAM to accept the special autonomy provision. GAM had started negotiating with the government of Indonesia between 2000 and 2003 with demands of independence as the only acceptable solution for Aceh (Schulze, 2007). The failure of the Geneva peace talks in 2003, led to Operasi Terpadu by the Indonesian government in order to inflict defeat on GAM militarily. This operation was a significant factor as it brought about a paradigm shift within GAM. GAM suffered severe military blow due to the Operasi Terpadu as it destroyed the lower and middle ranks of GAM's command structure, which eventually splintered GAM into smaller groups. The civilian support base of GAM collapsed and its governors were arrested (ibid). Moreover, GAM lost most of its field commanders and its logistic support bases situated in areas near the coastline due to the tsunami in 2004, which limited the capacity of GAM to sustain its movement. The other significant factor which motivated both the actors involved in the conflict was the change of government in Indonesia in September 2004, under the Presidentship and Vice-Presidentship of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla respectively who viewed military solution as not the suitable option of dealing with the crisis. Both supported the idea of renewing the negotiation process with GAM (Schulze, 2007). The other factor, which had contributed to the motivation of GAM to engage in the peace talks, might have been the secret back channel talks held between the Indonesian government and the exiled GAM leadership. Through these talks, an alternative

to independence was explored. Vice-President Kalla also granted many economic reforms and incentives to the GAM members and Aceh as a whole. The Indonesian authorities viewed that the conflict could be resolved through economic incentives rather than a political one. But after the tsunami in 2004, the government was forced to resume the political talks with GAM along with initiating economic incentives to GAM. At the same time, GAM was also not able to secure international support from other state actors for the cause of their movement, which might have also motivated the GAM leadership to engage in the negotiation process. Finally, with the talks between the state and the GAM already in the process, the tsunami accelerated the negotiation process between the two conflicting parties. The international community urged the Indonesian government to bring about a speedy solution to the conflict in order to create a suitable atmosphere so that relief and aid could flow to the tsunami-affected state more freely. Eventually, during the second meeting between the two parties in February 2005 held in Helsinki, “GAM became willing to consider offers other than independence as a result of their virtual military defeat and it also decided to establish a political party” (Schulze, 2007). The government of Indonesia and GAM finally signed the MoU on August 15, 2005.

Scholars have also argued that “powerful non-state armed groups who control a portion of a territory and those that can inflict substantial costs on the government if the conflict continues, are more likely to win a seat at the bargaining table” (Kaplow, 2015). Non-state armed actors with strong military as well as organizational capabilities in relation to the capabilities of the state machineries have a higher probability of acquiring concessions through negotiated settlements from the government (Hultquist, 2013). Sobek (2010), on the other hand, argued that capable states are also more likely to initiate negotiation process with the rebels as such states are better able to address the grievances and demands of their citizens as well as the non-state armed actors. Others like Ortiz & Vargas (2013) also argued that capable state actors/governments sometimes decide to engage in the negotiation process with relatively weakened non-state armed groups. The authors described how the government of Columbia under Juan Manuel Santos, in spite of significant military and economic advantages, decided to engage in a dialogue with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC) in 2012. On the other hand, the legitimacy and popular support of FARC had decreased substantially and since 2000 the non-state armed group’s resources and capabilities had slowly drained away due to the effective counterinsurgent strategies as well as due to the organizational crises (Ortiz & Vargas, 2013). The cohesiveness of

the organization weakened which significantly affected the overall dynamics of FARC. Most of the top commanders of the organization were either arrested or killed which severely affected the dynamics of the movement. Defective elements began to appear within the organization leading some units within the group to act independently of the higher organizational leadership (Ortiz & Vargas, 2013). Additionally, the FARC guerrillas were expelled from the urban areas to remote refuge areas. Moreover, some units within the organization were deeply involved in criminal activities like drug trafficking and illegal mining as independent criminal enterprises rather than acting as part of the FARC. In 2012, the new leader of the FARC, Rodrigo Londono Echeverri, decided to engage with the Santos government. FARC also announced that it would release all the exchangeable hostages (state officials captured by the FARC) and give up criminal activities such as kidnapping for ransom etc. (Beittel, 2013). Meanwhile, Santos, the President of Columbia also argued that “the success of the negotiations would open the door to an agreement that would substantially diminish the violence that the country has suffered and that the failure would not imply any major losses for the government” (Ortiz & Vargas, 2013). In spite of the advantageous position, the Santos administration decided to engage in the negotiation process with the FARC. The Columbian government perceived the negotiations with FARC as a less expensive initiative without having to offer any inducements, be it political or economic. At the same time, FARC rebels also risked the continuance of the counterinsurgency operations by the government even if the negotiations failed which would further affect the organization. From the perspective of the rebels, the negotiation process was seen as an opportunity to end the protracted armed conflict and contribute to the overall development of the country. The failure of the peace talks would indicate reluctance of FARC to end the violence, which would diminish the credibility of the organization further.

However, it is difficult to establish the relative strength of the non-state armed groups in many cases of intrastate-armed conflicts. There might be other probable factors that lead to negotiations between the state actors and the non-state armed groups. The next section discusses another significant conditioning factor, which may allow non-state armed actors to enter into negotiation with the state actors.

The other significant factor which influences the strategic choices of the NSAGs is the incentive structure of the NSAGs/insurgent groups. Relative capabilities of the insurgent groups

play a significant role in the outcome and the dynamics of the insurgency. However, the significance of the incentive structure that develops during the course of the insurgency cannot be ignored. The next sub-section examines how incentive structure plays an important role in insurgencies and how it affects the strategic choices of the NSAGs and motivates them either to renounce the violence or continue the insurgency.

(iii). Incentive Structure

In non-state armed conflicts, the conflicting parties sometimes decide to negotiate while in other cases, they decide to continue the conflict because of the incentive structure. Kaplow (2015) argued that the parties in conflict prefer to negotiate only if they can benefit the most from the negotiation process. Parties in conflict always consider the costs and benefits of participation in the negotiation process, which eventually affect the strategic choices of the actors involved in the conflict. Scholars argued that settlement to internal armed conflicts become more likely when both the parties perceive their chances of victory to be relatively low, costs of continued fighting increases, the time required to win increases and if the parties perceive that the benefits/profit from settlement is higher than the expected future benefits of the conflict (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999).

In internal armed conflicts, the non-state armed groups always seek to achieve the most potential benefits and see that their demands are fulfilled at very minimal costs and at the same time, the state actors might want to terminate the conflict either through military victory or through negotiated settlements. The cost-benefit analysis as to whether to continue fighting or to renounce the violence and engage in a negotiation process is dependent on many factors. For instance, the non-state actors as well as the state actors decides to continue fighting till the costs of continued fighting exceeds the benefits expected from victory. The non-state actors and the state actors have a strong incentive to continue the violence if they expect that the future benefits from victory would surpass the benefits from the present settlement. There are two factors, which affect the actors, expected cost of continuing the violence. One is the rate at which the cost increases and the other is the time required to achieve that victory (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). The internal armed conflicts which ended in government victory were much shorter in duration than those which ended either in a negotiated settlement or victory for the non-state actors (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). They argued duration to be the most significant

indicator of the conflicts, which ended in negotiated settlements. By inflicting high casualty rates, the non-state actors can improve their probability of victory whereas the state actors can increase their probability of victory by increasing the size of the army (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). Internal armed conflicts of a long duration improve the probability of a negotiated settlement because as the conflict continues the parties' estimate of probability of winning decreases and the estimate of time required to achieve victory increases. Thus, the strategic choices made by the actors involved in the conflict are highly dependent on the cost-benefit analysis that could be incurred or achieved from the violence. If the actors involved in the conflict perceive that costs from continued fighting would surpass the benefits out of it, if the time required to achieve victory increases and if the actors involved in the conflict perceives that the benefits from negotiation would be much higher than the expected future benefits, then the actors may decide to engage in the negotiation process and vice versa (ibid). However, Ulracher (2013) argued that conflicting parties might also decide to engage in a dialogue even when the costs of continuing the conflict is relatively low.

Phayal, on the other hand, argued "In protracted armed conflicts, raising the costs of violence for the rebels through military, domestic and international pressure, while at the same time, opening a political space in the government influences the non-state armed actors to make a strategic shift from violence to peaceful politics" (Phayal, 2011). Phayal, at the same time, argued that the state actors might also face rising costs of violence in protracted armed conflicts which might eventually lead to the opening of states to accommodating the non-state armed groups politically. Earlier studies have argued that the costs of violence significantly affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups.¹⁶ In his analysis of the armed conflicts led by the Maoists in Nepal and the PIRA referred to as the Provisionals/Provos, Phayal argued that the pressures exerted by the military through counterinsurgent operations, domestic groups/communities as well as the international community raised the costs of continuing the conflict significantly (Phayal, 2011). The seizure of shipments of ammunitions and weapons, the loss of cadres, the decreasing popular support as well as the pressure from the international community to tackle and bring about a resolution to the conflicts led by the PIRA and the

¹⁶ Saideman, S. M., & Zahar, M. J. (2008). Causing security, reducing fear: Deterring intra-state violence and assuring government restraint. In *Intra-State Conflict, Governments and Security* (pp. 21-39). Routledge. Also Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (1998). On economic causes of civil war. *Oxford economic papers*, 50(4), 563-573.

Maoists had a significant impact on the dynamics of both the movement. On the other hand, the state was also pressurized to accommodate these groups politically (Phayal, 2011).

According to the reputation theory, governments in countries with diverse ethnic groups facing self-determination movements are less likely to offer any concessions to the separatist groups, because doing so would prompt other ethnic groups to demand the same status whereas Governments in countries with small number of ethnic groups are more likely to accommodate ethnic separatist groups (Walter, 2006). She argued “In the case of self-determination movements, Governments are influenced more by the risks and costs of future challenges than by the costs of current ones.” Governments calculate the future costs and benefits of offering concessions to such groups and if they are likely to face additional multiple challenges in the future then it is very likely that the Governments decide to adopt coercive tactics instead of offering concessions towards the separatists. She argued that countries, which compose of multi-ethnic communities, respond to separatist/armed conflicts through force in order to deter same demands made by other ethnic groups in the future. Walter further argued that the balance of capabilities between the conflicting groups does not bear any significant impact on the strategic decision of the Governments to accommodate the separatist groups. Walter (2006) argued that “Governments were no more or less likely to accommodate separatist groups that extended into neighboring states or were highly concentrated in a particular region.” At the same time, Walter argued that democratic governments are more likely to offer concessions to separatist groups than less democratic countries. Such countries/governments are more likely to accommodate through various autonomy arrangements and incentives to the rebel groups especially when these rebel groups demand self-determination. Walter argued that democratic countries are likely to accommodate the separatists groups because democratic governments already have provisions to grant regional autonomy or minority groups play a significant role in the formation of Government or because the Governments cannot suppress their movements or give in to the demands of the separatists groups (Walter, 2006). At the same time, Bennet & Stam (1998) also argued that democratic governments are more sensitive to war costs than their authoritarian counterparts. The pressure to avoid mounting war costs may compel democratic leaders to negotiate earlier than their authoritarian counterparts.

Thomas (2012) argued that governments are more likely to engage those insurgents in the negotiation process and offer concessions that are relatively more capable and capable to inflict high costs on the governments. In other words, those insurgent groups are likely to secure concessions from the government who employ extreme violence and they are less likely to renounce the violence any time soon. However, this might also prove counterproductive as it might also motivate the more moderate rebel groups to employ extreme tactics in order to gain concessions from the Government (Toros, 2008).

From a critical perspective, state policies towards separatist movements led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia, as Fujikawa argued, shifted between accommodation and repression and does not support the arguments forwarded by the scholars of cost-benefit calculation model and reputation theory approaches (Fujikawa, 2017). He argued that the preference of the national leaders and the presence of veto players in Indonesia had an impact on the policies of the Indonesian Government towards GAM. The successive Presidents of the country have resorted to repressive as well as accommodative approaches in order to bring an end to the conflicts in the country. Fujikawa (2017) focused on the impact of the preferences of national leaders and the role of veto players in order to understand the different policies employed by the successive Presidents of Indonesia. Presidents Wahid and Yudhoyono who were softliners were in support of offering concessions to the rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Aceh. However, President Megawati was a hardliner and adopted repressive approach towards GAM without offering any significant concessions (Fujikawa, 2017). During 1999 to 2001, President Wahid tried to accommodate the insurgents through various concessions. However, due to the weakening of his power and hardline stance taken by the TNI, Indonesian National Military and its strong influence over the government policies, President Wahid's policy of accommodation failed. On the other hand, during 2001 and 2004, President Megawati tried to repress the uprising in Aceh through the use of force. And then finally, President Yudhoyono's accommodative approach ended the conflict led by the GAM in 2005 through offers of concession to the insurgents in Aceh. The author argued that President Megawati's approach resembles to what the reputation theory approach argued and President Wahid and President Yudhoyono behave the same way as the cost-benefit calculation model predicted. However, as far as the conflict in Indonesia is concerned, the role of the Veto players (TNI) is very crucial in understanding Indonesian policies towards the separatists (Fujikawa,

2017). At the same time, Schulze (2007) argued “GAM became willing to consider offers other than independence as a result of their virtual military defeat.” The government of Indonesia and GAM finally signed the MOU on August 15, 2005.

The incentive structure in non-state armed conflicts is also determined by the power-sharing offers made by the state actors to the non-state armed groups. Power-sharing agreements between the actors involved in an internal conflict are one of the significant conflict resolution mechanisms in highly diverse countries. Power sharing offers by the states involves territorial power-sharing, power sharing at the political level, military power sharing and economic power sharing (Sriram & Zahar, 2009; Mehler, 2009). According to the bargaining theory, state actors in internal conflicts would only be willing to concede to power sharing agreements when they face relatively capable non-state armed groups and the offer may affect the strategic calculations done by the non-state armed actors. Gent argued that the relative capability of the non-state armed groups has a significant effect on the likelihood of power-sharing arrangements which further have an impact on the strategic choices of the non-state armed actors (Gent, 2011). Walter (2002) also argued that territorial and power-sharing agreements increase the likelihood of a peace agreement.¹⁷ The incentives offered to the non-state armed actors by the state actors might be very essential and significant for the negotiation process to be initiated in internal armed conflicts. For instance, Byman argued that incentives such as granting local autonomy to the non-state armed groups might facilitate the onset of negotiations between the non-state armed actors and the state actors (Byman, 2009).

In similar lines, Findley (2013) argued that offers of power sharing to the insurgents may motivate the insurgents to renounce the violence and participate in democratic politics. He emphasized that access to electoral politics, access to cabinet berths and seats in the ministry and offers of autonomy arrangements may have a significant impact on the choices of the insurgents and increases the probability of the onset of discussions with the states. Mitchell (2012) also argued that power sharing has been extensively used as an important tool to manage conflicts in

¹⁷ State actors also calculate the costs and benefits of negotiation. State actors may not have the incentive to negotiate with relatively weaker non-state armed groups as they might not provide sufficient threat to the existence of the state actors. See Mukherjee, B. (2006). “Why Political Power-Sharing Agreements Lead to enduring Peaceful Resolution of Some Civil wars, But not Others?” *International studies Quarterly*, 50(2):479-504.

African countries. Miti, Abatan & Minou (2013) further argued that despite various shortcomings, states have resorted to power-sharing initiatives with various rebel groups in order to bring an end to ethno-nationalist movements especially in African countries.

Gregg (2011) further argued that governments could end insurgencies if the insurgents are allowed to participate in the political process, i.e., either through elections or government posts. However, if the insurgents, the state or the local population believes that continuing the conflict increases the probability of defeating their opponents, then access to political process does not necessarily indicate that the rebels will decide to participate in the negotiation process with the government. The author argued that allowing the insurgents to participate in the political process of the country gives the insurgents incentives and have a stake in the future of the country which may allow the state to bring an end to such insurgencies. In his study of the cases of the IRA in Northern Ireland and Lebanese Hezbollah, he argued that it is very essential for the insurgents, the government and the local population to realize that the conflict cannot be resolved militarily in order to bring an end to the conflict and that the parties concerned should acknowledge the stalemated condition of the conflict and opt for political means for the resolution of the conflict (Gregg, 2011). The government should further recognize the legitimacy of the cause of the insurgents and their leaders in order to accommodate the insurgents into the political process and bring an efficient resolution to the conflict. Thirdly, Governments should not ask the insurgents to disarm themselves before granting access to political process as the arms serve as defensive guarantee to the insurgents. The Governments instead should call on the insurgents to ceasefire and the disarmament should come after the conclusion of the negotiation process. Gregg further argued that States should have strong institutions in order to pave the way for the inclusion of the insurgents in the political process of the country. At the same time, it is very essential for democratic states to grant amnesties to the insurgents to allow the insurgents to participate in the political process legitimately (Gregg, 2011).

However, scholars have argued that the incentives of both the groups involved in internal armed conflicts to misrepresent their power, problem of credible commitment and the indivisibility of the issue at stake might hinder the prospect of negotiations between the actors involved in the conflict (Powell, 2002; Walter, 1997). During the course of an internal armed conflict, the conflicting groups tend to misrepresent their power and their choices (Powell, 2000). Such information becomes public to both the sides only once the conflict starts. The other

problem is the problem of credible commitment, which results out of the security dilemma faced by both non-state actors as well as the state actors (Walter, 1997). The groups involved in the conflict do have tendency to break away from peace deals and also even if both sides feel that they would be better off if they engage in peace talks, the groups continue the violence. Walter also argued that if the issue/goals over which the conflict is being fought is indivisible, bringing an end to such conflicts through negotiations becomes difficult to achieve (Walter, 1997).

(iv). *Stalemate*

Besides the aforementioned conditions under which the non-state armed groups may decide to negotiate with the state actors or decide to continue the violence, scholars have also focused on the significance of stalemated situations in internal armed conflicts which may motivate the non-state actors either to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors. Stalemate has been defined by Zartman as “a condition where both sides involved in the conflict are locked in a situation from which they cannot escalate the conflict with their available means and at an acceptable cost” (Zartman, 1995).¹⁸ Zartman was the pioneer in advocating the concept of ripeness in resolving internal armed conflicts. The ripeness theory focuses on the timing of the conflict resolution rather than on the contents of the proposals for a solution to any internal armed conflict. Scholars like Zartman argued that stalemate produces the conditions necessary for negotiations to succeed in internal armed conflicts (Zartman, 2001). He argued that as the two sides become interlocked in a mutually hurting stalemate where there is no military victory in sight, the two groups involved in the conflict try to find a way out. It is this condition of stalemate when the conflict becomes ripe for resolution. The perception of such a deadlock by both parties creates a condition of “ripe moment” favorable for the termination of the conflict (*ibid*). According to Zartman (2000), “it is impossible to predict when a ripe moment will appear in a given situation, but the theory has a predictive capacity in that it can identify the elements necessary (even if not sufficient) for the productive inauguration of negotiations” (Zartman, 2000). He maintained that internal armed conflicts could be resolved only when it is ripe. As such, attempts to resolved unripe conflicts might eventually fail. Though in such conflicts,

¹⁸Zartman, W. I. (1995). “Dynamics and Constraints in Negotiations in Internal Conflicts”. *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars*. Washington D. C.: Brookings Institution, p. 8.

negotiations might take place, it is bound to fail as the parties involved in the conflict might engage in a dialogue only because of external pressure or groups might use the period of negotiation to regroup and rearm. He argued that the condition of ripeness is not sufficient for the talks to be initiated. The contending parties should be able to make the most of the opportunity. The ripe moment should also be accompanied by the presence of a strong leadership who could represent both the sides involved in the conflict. But in spite of all these, the theory hardly focuses on how the negotiations could be concluded successfully. Zartman (2001) assumed that engaging in negotiation meant that the conflict was/is ripe for resolution.

Ulricher, on the other hand, argued that when the number of casualties is more than 2000, a recent war have a positive correlation with the probability of the initiation of a negotiation process between the conflicting parties (Ulricher, 2013). However, there are instances where the conflict participants decide to negotiate even when the cost of continued fighting is very low. Conflict participants might also decide not to negotiate even if the parties were in a mutually hurting stalemate. Rasler argued that though disruptive events such as leadership changes, economic crisis etc. might have an impact on the overall dynamics of internal conflicts, such changes might not necessarily lead conflicting parties to the negotiation table (Rasler, 2000). But it is rather the changes in perception of the participants of the conflict after such dramatic and violent changes, which might initiate the negotiation process. A very common understanding in protracted armed conflict is that such conflicts become ripe for resolution when the conflicting parties recognize that the conflict is stalemated. However, Ulricher argued that the motivation to resolve such conflicts becomes possible only when the conflicting parties realizes that attaining victory is out of reach and the costs of continued conflict to be very high, especially after recent war between the two sides (Ulricher, 2013; Zartman, 2000). But at the same time, he argued that sometimes leaders might decide to negotiate even if the costs of continued fighting tend to be low. Ulricher further argued that leadership changes or political shocks might have different impacts accordingly with changes in the level of violence (Ulricher, 2013). Zartman (1985) in his argument on the role of ripeness and hurting stalemate in the initiation of negotiations between the non-state armed groups and the state actors also argued that ‘internal political strength is necessary for leaders to make concessions.’ Ulricher further argued that new moderate political leaders might decide to negotiate after a recent political shock/regime change with the non-state armed groups at

relatively low levels of violence, whereas new hardline leaders might decide not to engage in the negotiation process even when the costs of continued fighting is very high (Ulricher, 2013). However, a political shock in any form such as war between the host state and external state would also motivate the hardliners to offer concessions and initiate peace talks with the non-state armed groups.

Rothstein on the other hand, argued that in spite of the absence of all the prerequisites mentioned by Zartman, negotiations could still take place between the non-state armed actors and the state actors while even the presence of all the conditions posited by Zartman might not lead to the initiation of negotiations in internal armed conflicts (Rothstein, 2007). Zartman's ignorance about the presence of many other factors such as domestic politics, pressure from external support groups, intention of an enemy, uncertainties about the future, if not entirely misleading, is not adequate. Rothstein further argued that the leaders involved in the armed conflict must be willing to come to the negotiation table in order to get the negotiations on the political agenda of the groups involved in conflict. According to him, most of the conflicts reach a stage, which can be termed as "mutually bearable stalemate" in contrast to Zartman's idea of mutually hurting stalemate.¹⁹ The probable way to break this stalemate would be potential short run policy changes but not in fundamental beliefs whereby long term goals are likely to remain the same. The leaders involved in negotiations need to understand that "they are in a top/down process that will require public legitimacy reasonably quickly, that decision-making processes within the non-state armed actors or the nationalist groups may be opaque and hard to interpret, that the role of third parties in diminishing some of the problems of pervasive distrust can be critical and that initial offers are likely to be tentative and limited- among other things" (Rothstein, 2007).

Non-state armed groups are more likely to negotiate with the state actors without setting any preconditions if they come to believe that they cannot defeat the state actors and that the conflict cannot be resolved militarily (Byman, 2009). Gregg (2011) argued that unless the

¹⁹ See Rothstein, R. L., (2007), "The Timing of Negotiations: Duelling Metaphors", *Civil Wars*, 262-281. According to Rothstein, Mutually Bearable Stalemate implies that both the elites and the public- if to different degrees and different costs- have become accustomed to the conflict and have even learned to live with it"

NSAGs, state actors as well as the local population believe that the insurgency/conflict cannot be resolved militarily, the probability of bringing the insurgents into the political process is very less likely. And if the conflicting parties and the local population do not believe in military stalemate then bringing the insurgents into political process will not end the insurgency. Scholars have argued that the groups in conflict in internal armed conflicts sometimes decide to engage in a negotiated settlement rather than continue fighting (Mason & Fett, 1996). They argued that longer conflicts are likely to end with a negotiated settlement. The size of the state actors/security forces might not be the deciding factor for the internal armed conflicts to end in negotiated settlements. But at the same time, they argued mutually hurting stalemate to be one of the significant factors to achieve a negotiated settlement to internal armed conflicts (*ibid*). The warring parties prefer to engage in a negotiated settlement when both the non-state armed group and the state actors see no conclusion in sight.

(v). *Role of mediators in internal armed conflicts*

Scholars have described about the significance of mediators as it might create conditions for terminating the conflicts and initiate the negotiation process between the non-state armed groups and the state actors. Mediators can help the non-state armed actors in overcoming bargaining challenges during the negotiation process.²⁰ Clayton argued that third party mediation and final settlement of armed conflicts depend on the unequal distribution of the non-state armed groups (Clayton, 2013). The incentives for both the non-state actors as well as the state actors are strongly and positively related to the relative strength of the non-state actors. The relative strength of the non-state armed groups is positively related to the government's willingness to initiate mediation (Clayton, 2013). In such a situation, the state actors might resist mediation because there is a very high probability that the dialogue process will result in a suboptimal agreement for the state. But in spite of being relatively capable as Lake and Rothchild argued, "Non-state armed groups might engage in mediation process, because doing so would provide both recognition and legitimacy and elevate the status of the non-state actors as a political actor (Lake & Rothchild, 1996)." The introduction of mediators in the peace process is also likely to

²⁰ Beardsley, K. C., Quinn, D. M., Biswas, B & Wilkenfeld, J. (2006). Mediation Style and Crisis Outcomes. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(1): 58–86.

overcome the commitment problem by serving as trustees (Clayton, 2013). The probability of mediation becomes more likely if there is a closer match between the government forces and the non-state actors. Clayton also argued that relative rebel capabilities are positively related to the outcome of the mediation. He further argued that though rebel strength have an impact on the onset of the mediation, the impact is greater on the outcome of mediation. The presence of multiple numbers of conflicts at the same point in time decreases the likelihood of mediation and settlement (Clayton, 2013).

Scholars have also argued that one of the most significant and critical obstacle to negotiated settlements in internal armed conflict is the credibility of commitment of both the state actors as well as the non-state actors involved in the conflict.²¹ But the involvement of biased mediators decreases the commitment problems of both the actors involved in the conflict. Svensson argued that government-biased mediators enhance the degree of credibility of the non-state armed actors' commitment to peace talks (Svensson, 2007). He argued that government-biased mediators are more likely to increase the chances for negotiated settlements of internal armed conflicts. Government-biased mediators have incentives to protect the government after the peace agreement if the non-state actors plan to break away from the peace agreement signed. On the other hand, rebel-biased mediators have the incentives of both taking action and backtracking from the promises made during the peace agreement with the state actors. The non-state actors might have the intentions of increasing their bargaining position through a negotiated settlement. But the presence of government-biased mediators in such a situation would act as an obstacle to such plans. The acceptance of the government-biased mediators in the negotiation process by the non-state actors shows the non-state actors' commitment to the ongoing peace talks and that they would not renege on the peace agreement (Svensson, 2007). On the other hand, the state actors have fewer incentives to backtrack on a peace deal as the non-state actors becomes stronger after the peace agreement by having access to official structures, legitimacy and weapons, cadres and resources (Svensson, 2007).

²¹ See Fearon, J. D. (1995), "Rationalist Explanations for War", *International Organization* 49(3): 303-414.

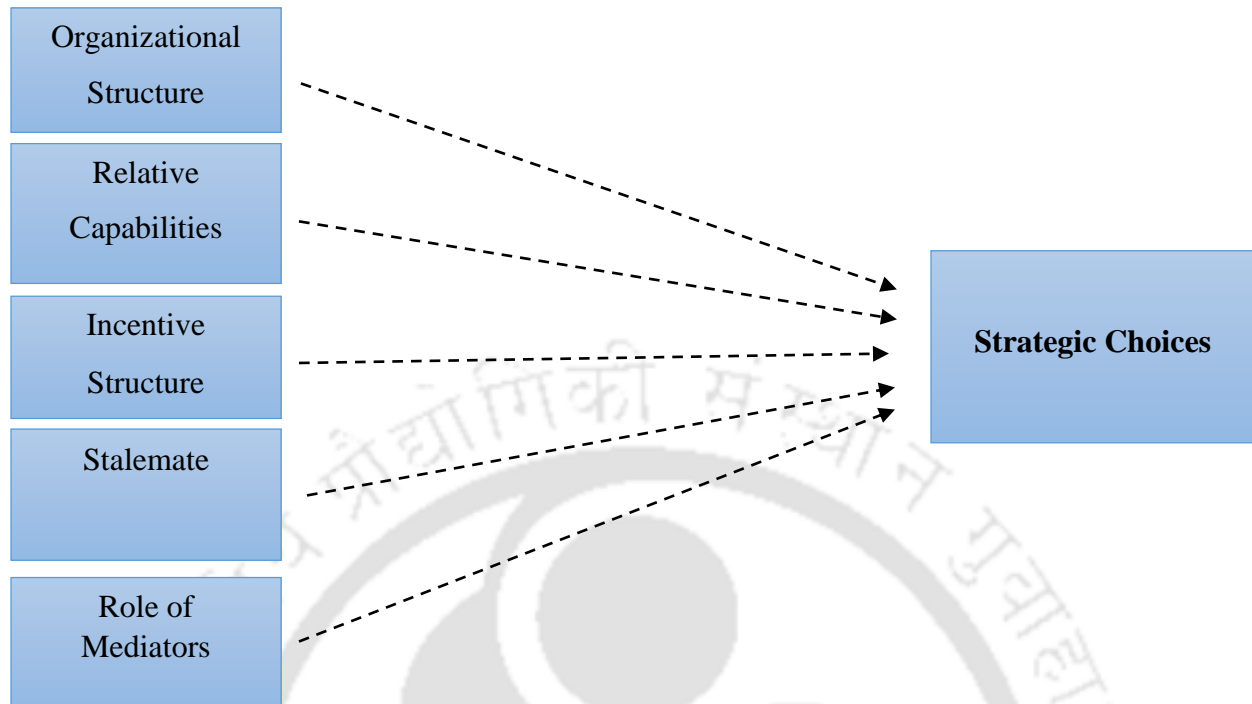


Figure 2.1: Diagrammatic illustration of the explanatory variables between the five variables and the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups

2.3 Critical analysis

The existing literature on the negotiations between conflicting parties have focused on the significance of many factors such as the organizational structure of the non-state armed groups, capabilities and incentive structure of the non-state armed groups as well as the state actors, stalemated situations in the conflict and the role of mediators which might motivate the non-state armed groups as well as the state actors to engage in the negotiation process. These writings showed how these variables/factors affect the dynamics of the non-state armed conflicts/rebellion.

While scholars like Connable & Libicki (2010) have argued that non-state armed groups with hierarchical chain of command structure are less likely to negotiate with the state actors/governments than networked non-state armed groups, others like Clayton (2013) have maintained that relatively capable/stronger and hierarchical non-state armed groups with a developed political wing might also decide to engage in a dialogue with the state actors. However, there is another stream of scholars who focused on the significance of a

strong/fragmented leadership and its impact on the conduct of the movement. For instance, scholars like Kaplow (2015) argued that non-state armed groups with strong leaderships are more likely to be engaged by the state actors than those with fragmented leadership due to the increased costs associated in accommodating such fragmented groups. Still others have argued that the mere organization of non-state armed groups into a centralized or a decentralized structure might not lead to the onset of negotiations between the state actors and the non-state armed actors. Centralized non-state armed groups having access to safe havens within the contested territory are more likely to be called upon by the state actors to engage in the negotiation process than the decentralized ones as the centralized non-state armed groups with access to safe havens within the contested territory poses significant threats to the state actors (Sinno, 2011).

Though these writings have focused on the organizational structure of the non-state armed groups, there are others who still argued that adopting a particular structure would not necessarily affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups as well as the state actors. Studies have also argued on the significance of the resources and relative capabilities the conflicting parties acquire during the course of the conflict, which also impact the decisions undertaken by the conflicting groups.

For instance, scholars argued that negotiations are more likely during the initial years of the formation of the non-state armed groups when they are relatively less capable and less threatening to the state actors (Bapat, 2005; Lichbach, 1995; Moore, 1995). On the other hand, others argued that negotiations between the two parties are more likely if the conflict survives more than seven years (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom, 2004). Similarly, Kaplow (2015) argued that conflicts that have survive for a long time and those that enjoys outside political support are more likely to engage in a dialogue with the state actors. However, many scholars have also argued that alliance formations between non-state armed groups, support from external states, access to safe havens both within and outside the territory etc. might affect the overall dynamics of the conflict and influence the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups (Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Brouwer & Wijk, 2013; Buhaug & Gates; Salehyan, 2007). For example, studies have argued that consistent and clear-cut support from external actors play a very significant role in the conduct of the movement; it motivates the non-state armed groups to

continue the conflict as it can avoid the threats from the more advantageous state security forces (Connable & Libicki, 2010; Byman, 2009; Galula, 2006). However, relatively capable non-state armed groups might also have to gain access to safe havens in order to sustain the movement for a longer period of time or either to force the state actors to engage in the negotiation process. Safe havens allow the non-state armed groups to operate more freely as it allows them to avoid the counterinsurgent strategies of the host state. For example, scholars have maintained that non-state armed groups having access to safe havens in foreign soil allows the non-state armed actors to avoid the counterinsurgent operations which prolongs the duration of the conflict, thereby making negotiations less likely (Salehyan, 2007; Byman et al., 2001). While the significance of safe havens on the dynamics of the non-state armed conflicts have been argued upon by existing scholarships, many others have also argued on the significance of the geographic location of the conflicts. The geographic location where the conflicts occur may affect the strategic choices of conflicting parties. For instance, scholars like Buhaug, Gates & Lujala (2009) argued that the conflicts which occur at the periphery/border of a country, far away from the state capital are more likely to continue for a longer period, making negotiations less likely at any time soon due to the inability of the state machineries to target the non-state actors (Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). But at the same time, studies have maintained that relatively capable non-state armed groups controlling a portion of a territory and at the same time one that can be a severe threat to the state actors are more likely to be engaged by the state actors (Kaplow, 2015; Hultquist, 2013). However, it is also utmost significance for the non-state armed groups to maintain a strong operational base in order to conduct the movement smoothly. The absence of such strong operational bases allows the counterinsurgent forces to target such non-state armed groups. Existing studies have mentioned that the non-state armed groups should always strive to strengthen its operational bases during the course of the movement (Guevara, 1969). However, these factors might not only affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups. The relative capabilities of the non-state armed groups might also motivate the state actors to engage the non-state armed groups in the dialogue process. At the same time, capable state actors might be more willing to settle the conflict through negotiated settlements as such states are better able to address the demands of the non-state armed groups (Sobek, 2010).

However, though much has been mentioned and said about the impact of the organizational structures and the relative capabilities on the strategic choices of the NSAGs,

these factors might not be the only sufficient conditions in order to motivate the insurgent groups to engage in the negotiation process. These factors might play significant roles on the duration and outcome of the non-state armed conflict. But one cannot ignore the roles played by many other factors such as the incentive structure of both the conflicting parties. In spite of being relative strong and capable, both the conflicting parties might have an incentive to either continue the conflict for a longer period of time or to engage in negotiation process. As such existing scholarships have argued that the conflicting groups calculate the costs and benefits of negotiating or not negotiating with one another. For instance, the conflicting parties might decide to continue fighting till the costs of continued fighting exceeds the benefits expected from future victory and if the expected benefits from victory surpasses the benefits from the negotiation at present (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). In a similar note, Phayal (2011) also argued that by raising the costs of violence for the non-state armed actors through military, domestic and international pressure, while at the same time, opening a political space in the government might influence/motivate the non-state armed actors to engage in negotiation process. On the other hand, Thomas (2012) argued that governments are more likely to engage those NSAGs in the negotiation process that are relatively stronger and capable of inflicting high costs on the state actors. Others like Ulracher (2013) argued that the non-state armed groups and the state actors may decide to negotiate even when the costs of continuing the conflict are relatively low.

On the other hand, state actors are more likely to negotiate with non-state armed groups that are much stronger than the state actors or if the balance of power between the two parties is at parity (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009). Not only do the conflicting parties calculate the costs and benefits of engaging or not engaging in the negotiation process, non-state actors are also likely to accept the government's offer of negotiations if they are offered sufficient incentives for their engagement and their gesture for peace. Non-state armed groups might concede to offers such as autonomy agreements, special economic incentives, grant of amnesty, rehabilitation offers, job opportunities to the non-state armed actors and other incentives and engage in the peace process.

However, state actors are likely to bring about an understanding and offer such incentives only to the relatively stronger and capable non-state armed groups (Gent, 2011; Walter, 2002; Byman, 2009). While capable non-state armed groups are likely to secure such offers from the

state actors, weaker non-state armed groups might not be able to secure any such agreements from the state machineries as such groups do not provide sufficient threats to the state actors (Mukherjee, 2006).

Few others have described that offers of power-sharing and other autonomy arrangements may motivate the insurgent groups to participate in the negotiation process (Findley, 2013; Mitchell, 2012; Gregg, 2011). Findley argued that access to electoral politics, seats in the ministry and autonomy arrangements may play important roles in the onset of the negotiation process between the NSAGS and the state actors. At the same time, Gregg argued that allowing the insurgents to participate in the political process through elections and government posts might bring an end to the conflict. However, the conflicting parties and the local population should acknowledge the stalemated condition of the conflict and that it cannot be resolved militarily and motivate them to prefer political means to efficiently resolve the conflict. .

At the same time, Walter (2006) argued that in multi-ethnic countries, state actors are less likely to offer any concessions to the NSAGs because doing so would motivate other ethnic groups to do the same. Under such conditions, the state actors calculate the risks and future costs of accommodating such groups and the balance of power between the conflicting groups does not have much significance on the behaviour of the state. However, Walter maintained that democratic states are more likely to accommodate the NSAGs through offers of autonomy arrangements and other incentives. Bennet & Stam (1998) also argued that democratic states are more likely to accommodate the insurgent groups than the authoritarian states.

While organizational structure, resources and incentive structure have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NSAGs, existing studies have also emphasized the significance of stalemated situations/conditions in conflicts which might provide the environment for the conflicting parties to engage in negotiation process. This set of literature deal with how the conflicting parties react in deadlock situations, which affects the dynamics of the non-state armed conflicts. Zartman (2001) specifically maintained that stalemated conditions, a situation where the conflicting parties are interlocked in a mutually hurting stalemate with no military victory in sight produces the conditions necessary for negotiations to begin between the conflicting actors. Zartman, at the same time, argued that internal political strength is necessary for leaders to make concessions in such stalemated situations (Zartman, 1985). In a similar note,

others like Mason & Fett (1996) have also maintained mutually hurting stalemate to be one of the significant factors to achieve negotiated settlements in internal armed conflicts. Studies have also argue that negotiations to stalemated conflicts is possible only when both the conflicting parties realizes that attaining victory is out of reach and the costs of continued fighting to be very high especially after a recent war between the two sides (Ulricher, 2013; Zartman, 2000). Rothstein (2007), on the other hand, argued that Zartman ignored the presence of many other factors such as domestic politics, external pressure, intention of an enemy, uncertainties about the future in his analysis of the correlation between stalemated conditions and the probability of onset of negotiation between the conflicting parties. While stalemated situations/conditions in civil conflict might be a very significant condition, which might motivate the conflicting parties, there is a possibility of many other variables, which might eventually affect the strategic choices the parties undertake. For instance, as far as the negotiations between the conflicting parties is concerned, studies have also argued on the significance of other factor like the role played by the third party interventions/role of the mediators.

Scholars argued that the introduction of mediators in the negotiation process is likely to overcome the commitment problem by serving as trustees (Clayton, 2013; Fearon, 1995). However, scholars like Svensson argued that only the involvement of biased mediators decreases the commitment problems of the conflicting parties (Svensson, 2007). He further argued that government-biased mediators enhance the degree of credibility of the non-state armed groups' commitment to peace processes.

While the preceding sections have focused on the effect each variable/factor might have on the probability of negotiation or continuation of the conflict, it is not mandatory that these factors leave its impact on the dynamics of the conflict individually. Most of these conditioning factors might be available to the conflicting parties at the same time during the course of a conflict and groups might eventually make a choice depending on the availability of such a situation. Both the non-state armed groups as well as the state actors always calculate the costs and benefits of negotiating or not negotiating with each other. Earlier scholarships have maintained the conflict-period as a form of bargaining process whereby the conflicting parties always seek to secure maximum benefits (Wagner, 2000). The conflict-duration in itself involves the bargaining strategies whereby the parties put up their demands and tend to settle the issues

and reach their objectives. Drawing from these existing perspectives, the dissertation argues that the relative capabilities of the non-state armed groups and the incentive structure available to these non-state armed groups might motivate the non-state armed groups to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. Therefore, it is necessary that the study explore how these two factors affect the bargaining leverage during the course of the conflict, which might eventually motivate the non-state armed groups to either renounce the violence or continue fighting. As such, the next section shall look at some of the existing scholarships, which focus on the bargaining strategies the conflicting parties employ during the course of the conflict.

2.4 Framework of the study

Relative capabilities and incentive structure have a significant impact on the bargaining strategies, the non-state armed groups employ during internal armed conflicts. Non-state armed groups acquire resources during the course of the rebellion in order to sustain the movement against a more advanced and powerful state actors. Resources helps in capability building which eventually have significant impact on the dynamics of the rebellion. Resources such as acquiring arms and ammunitions, establishment of safe havens both internal as well as external ones, other external support, financial resources, recruits, support base, networks with other non-state armed groups and many others have a significant impact on the choices of the non-state armed groups. Higher relative capabilities increase the bargaining leverage of non-state armed groups whereby the groups tend to advance extreme demands against the state actors. Based on their bargaining leverage, non-state armed groups also readjust their demands from time to time.

On the other hand, incentive structure available to the non-state armed groups also plays a significant role on the group's motivation to engage in the negotiation process. Incentives such as offers of autonomy arrangements, economic incentives, employment opportunities, amnesty and many others might influence such groups to renounce the violence and come for talks with the state actors. Additionally, non-state armed groups always calculate the costs and benefits of both engaging in the negotiations process with the state actors and continuing the conflict against the state actors.

Therefore, it is of utmost significance to examine how the relative capabilities and the incentives available to the non-state armed groups affect the bargaining strategies of the non-

state armed groups which eventually does have an impact on the initiation and the outcome of the negotiation process. The dissertation focuses on the need to unfold how the conflicting parties are continuously involved in the bargaining process during the conflict. There is also a necessity to examine how the non-state armed groups and the state actors engage with one another during the negotiation process. Therefore, the study focuses on the bargaining strategy as a process whereby the non-state armed groups or the ethnic minority groups seek to secure maximum benefits from the state actors.

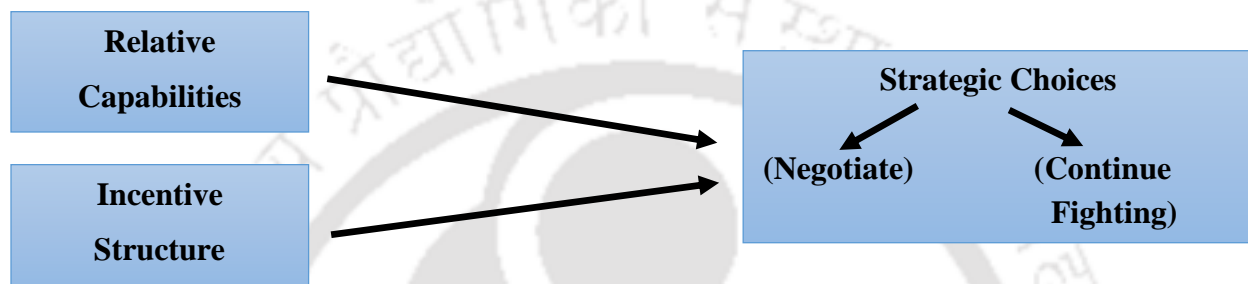


Figure 2.2: Framework of the study

Ethnic minority groups are involved in demands for secession or any form of autonomy arrangements/benefits against the state actors, which “serve as a bargaining tool for extracting concessions such as net transfer payments or power sharing agreements” (Jenne, Saideman & Lowe, 2007). Scholars like Gent (2011) argued that “as the bargaining position of a government weakens, it should be more willing to concede to power sharing” Gent (2011). According to the bargaining theory, state actors in internal conflicts would only be willing to concede to power sharing agreements when they face relatively capable non-state armed groups and the offer may affect the strategic calculations done by the non-state armed actors. Many earlier studies, especially scholarships from international politics perspectives, described the process of war/conflict as a bargaining strategy employed by the conflicting parties. For instance Wagner (2000) argued “during the conflict, conflicting parties continue to bargain over their usual objectives by using military actions to exert pressure on each other to settle” (Wagner, 2000). Ethnic bargaining has been defined as “the modes and practices by which minorities negotiate with the majority over the group’s claimant status to state institutions” (Jenne, 2007).

Scholars argued that when such groups are concentrated in a particular region/area, then there is high probability that such groups might advance extreme claims and launch violent movements (Jenne, Saideman & Lowe, 2007). The study also argued that groups might also

engage in violent rebellion due to ethnic fears and discrimination they suffer politically, socially and economically. Further, the scholars argued that ethnic minority claims share a negative causal relationship with grievance as well as commitment problems. They argued that groups advance such claims due to the relative bargaining power that exist between the two conflicting parties (Jenne, Saideman & Lowe, 2007).

Jenne (2007) argued that claim-making is very significant for the minority ethnic groups to mobilize for further collective action which eventually contributes in communicating bargaining postures as well as helps in securing external support (Jenne, 2007). In spite of the prevailing grievances, security dilemma and arguments made by instrumentalist theory, claim-making is very significant whereby such groups decide to mobilize and challenge the state actors against the discrimination meted out by the state actors.

Ethnic minority groups are therefore more likely to seek extreme demands if they perceive their strategic leverage to be higher (if there are any external lobby actor/ due to weakness of the host government) than the state actors and seek to secure greater benefits from the state actors/governments (Jenne, Saideman & Lowe, 2007; Jenne, 2007). Accordingly, based on their strategic leverage, ethnic minority groups tend to shift the extremity of demands against the state actors. However, groups that do not enjoy strong bargaining leverage are less likely to radicalize even when they are discriminated and face repression by the state actors (Jenne, 2007). Thus “ethnic minority groups who advance extreme demands like secession are less likely to negotiate with the state actors as long as they enjoy significant external backing or cross-border support” (Jenne, 2007).

Wagner (2000) further argued that the engagement in the violence gradually reveals the conflicting parties’ chances of winning which eventually motivates the parties to come to an understanding whereby the objectives of the conflict are revised downward. Fearon argued that the ‘non-state armed groups tend to continue the rebellion with extreme demands that no one expects the other side to concede except after total military defeat- they choose to fight rather than to bargain in the sense of constantly formulating and exchanging serious offers’ (Fearon, 2007). He further argued that though non-state armed conflicts end in negotiated settlements after series of offers at the bargaining table, such bargaining strategies is preceded by significant duration of fighting without any serious offers being advanced by the state actors which might be

accepted by the non-state armed actors. However, Wagner (2000) argued that the conflicting parties also continuously adjust their objectives during the course of the conflict based on their bargaining leverage.

Thus, it is very significant to examine the bargaining strategies employed by the non-state armed actors prior to, during and after the conflict ends in order to understand how the negotiation between the conflicting parties unfold. It is also very essential to look at these strategies in order understand why and when do non-state armed groups decide to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. It is necessary to examine the correlation between abrupt changes in the overall dynamics of the non-state armed groups and the strategic choices made by the non-state armed actors. But at the same time it is of utmost significance to explore how the non-state armed groups interact and indulge in the bargaining tactics during the course of the conflict, prior to engaging in the negotiation process in order to secure benefits and concessions from the state actors.

2.5 Explanatory factors

The study therefore identified two explanatory factors, which might affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups, from the existing scholarships on negotiations between the non-state armed groups and the state actors. The study tries to examine the **strategic choices while identifying** (a) **Relative capabilities** of the non-state armed groups, and (b) **Incentive structure** as the two important explanatory factors.

1. The **strategic choices** made by the non-state armed groups to either negotiate or continue the violence with the state actors is the dependent variable for the study. Non-state armed groups sometimes decide to negotiate with the state actors/governments while at other times they decide to continue fighting against the state actors. Attempts would be made to examine the variation in their motivations.
2. **Relative capabilities:** Non-state armed groups with relatively higher capabilities can be regarded as those groups that are well-equipped with the necessary resources to safeguard their survival and sustain their rebellion against the state forces/actors who are much better equipped than the non-state actors. Resources such as (a) external support, (b) finance, bases/sanctuary/safe havens, recruits, arms, ammunitions, and (c) networks

between the non-state armed groups may allow the non-state armed actors to sustain the violence against the state actors (Bapat, 2005; Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Fearon & Laitin, 1999). As such, the non-state armed groups become more capable to fight the state security forces and inflict heavy losses to the state. So, those non-state armed groups which acquire these resources may become more capable of sustaining the armed conflict for a longer period of time which may eventually play a significant role in the strategic choices the non-state armed groups undertake in terms of engaging in negotiations with the state actors.

3. ***Incentive structure***: The state actors/government may offer some political benefits or economic incentives and others to the non-state actors which may motivate the NSAGs to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process. The incentive structure is determined by power-sharing agreements between the actors involved in the conflict (Gent, 2011). Granting territorial/regional autonomy to the non-state armed groups has been one of the most significant incentives offered by the state actors (Byman, 2009). Other benefits include job opportunities for the non-state armed actors, amnesties and also other economic benefits. The state actors try to lure in the non-state actors to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process by offering such incentives. The offer of various incentives may affect the strategic choices of the non-state armed actors whether to negotiate or not to negotiate with the state actors. The non-state armed groups and the state actors further calculate the costs and benefits of engagement in the negotiation process as well as the costs and benefits of continuing the conflict (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999; Phayal, 2011).

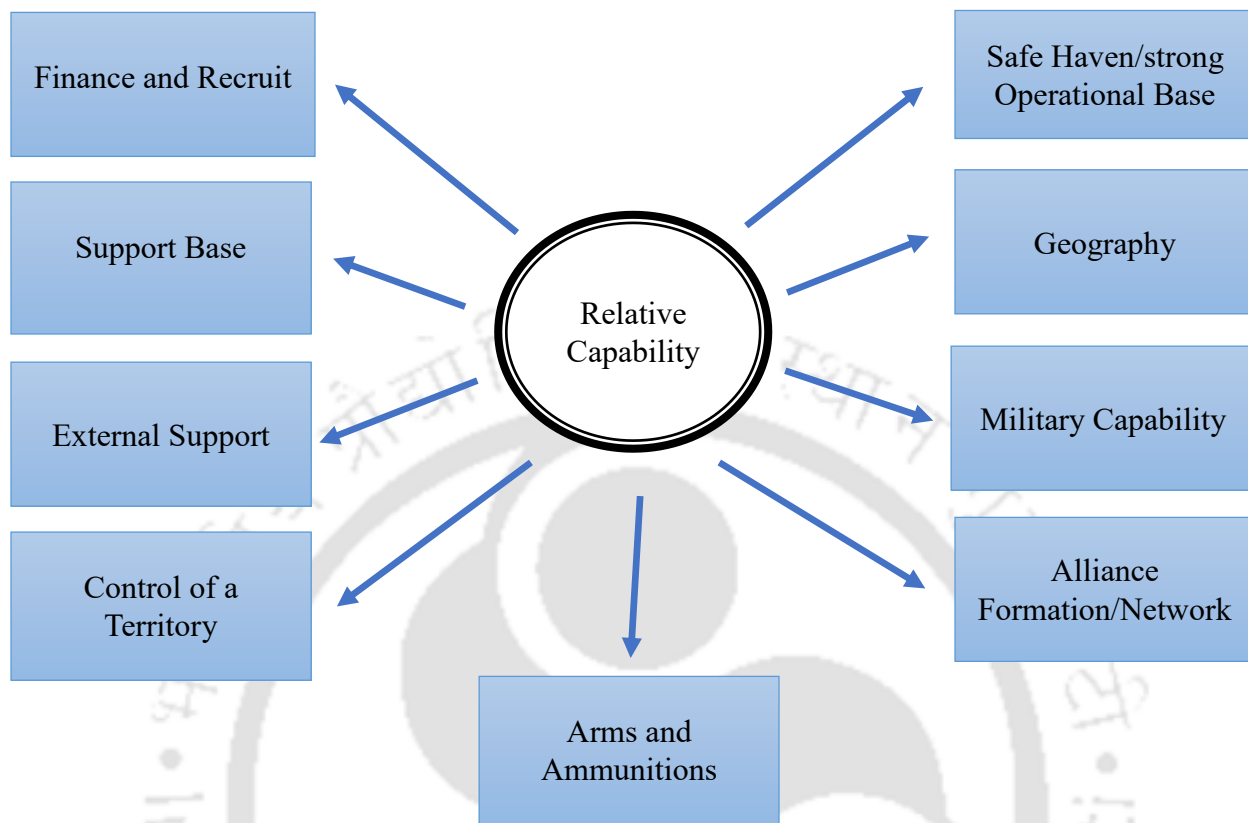


Figure 2.3: Relative capabilities as an explanatory factor

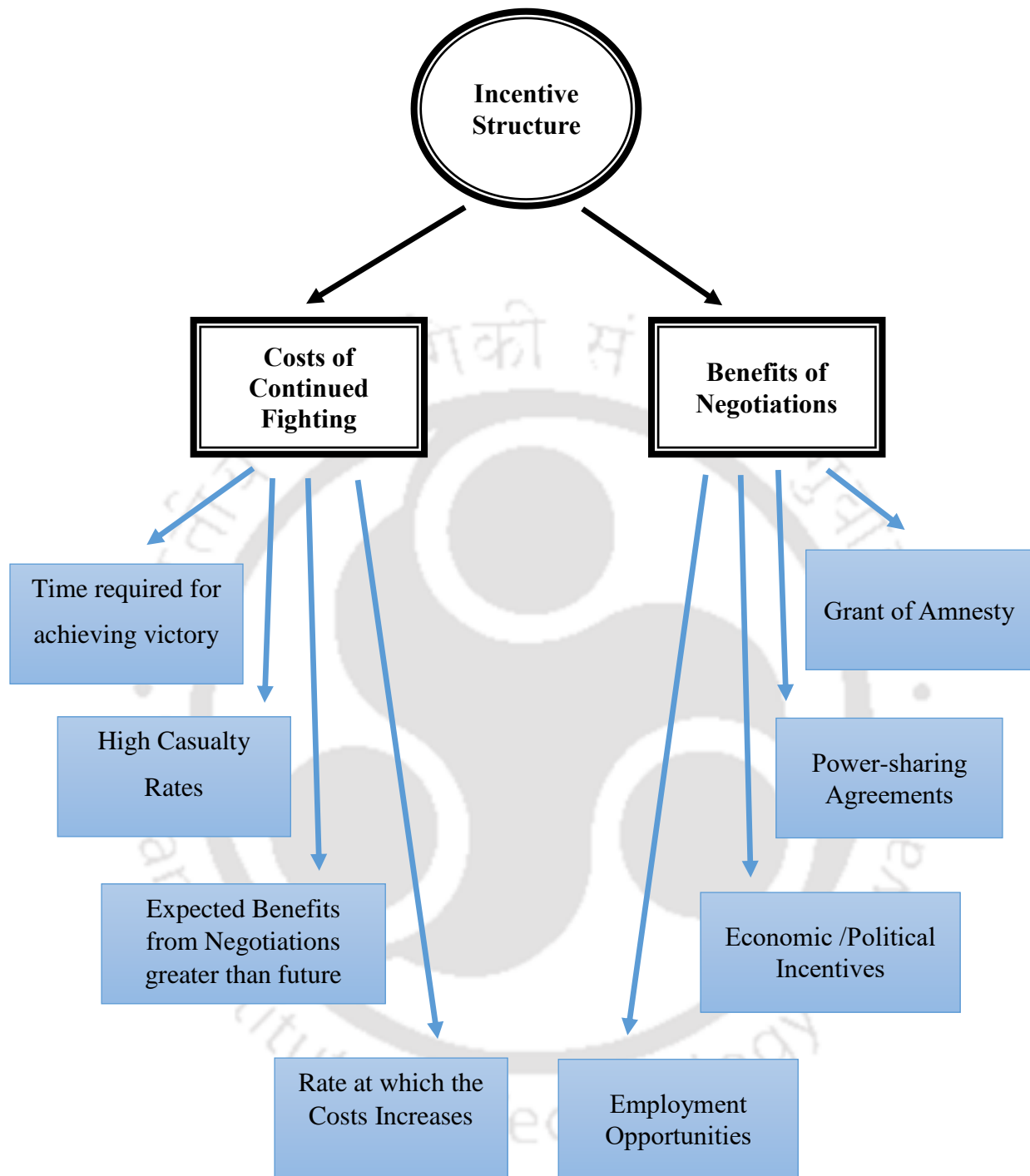


Figure 2.4: Incentive structure as an explanatory factor

2.6 Assumptions

Based on the survey of literature and the research question, the study makes the following assumptions:

- a. Assumption 1: The resources and capabilities of the non-state armed groups may determine strategic choices of the non-state armed groups.*
- b. Assumption 2: Strategic choices of the non-state armed groups may be determined by the incentive structures of the non-state armed groups/insurgent groups.*

2.7 Summary

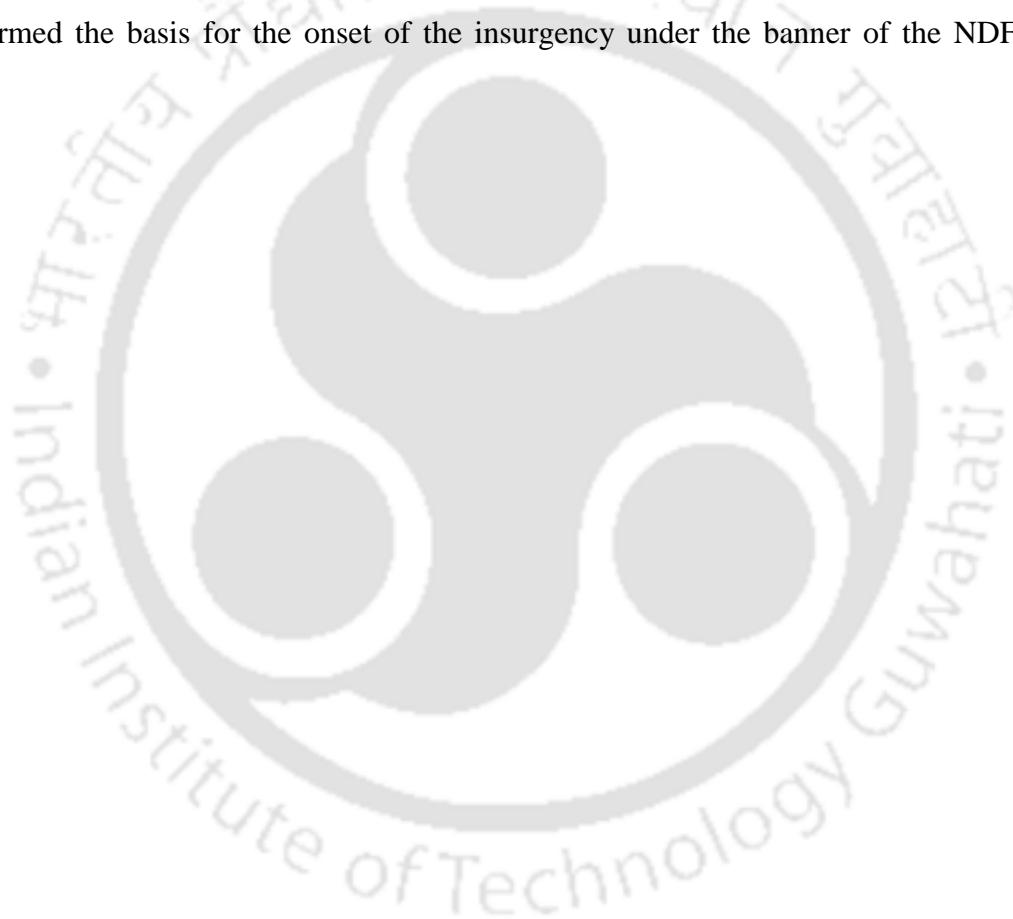
The chapter has focused on the significance and the impact of the various factors which might motivate the non-state armed groups to come to the negotiation table with the state actors. The chapter focuses on how different causal factors like organizational structure and relative capabilities of the non-state armed groups, incentive structure, stalemate and the mediation might affect the overall dynamics of the conflict which might eventually motivate the non-state armed groups to engage in the negotiation process with the state actors or continue the insurgency.

Most of the existing scholarships have focused on the significance of the type of organizational structure and its impact on the strategic choices of the non-state armed groups. On the other hand, studies have also maintained how resources, which contribute to capability building of a non-state armed group, might also affect the dynamics of the movement. Still many others argued on the significance of how the incentive structure, stalemate as well that of the role the mediators or third parties play in the probability of initiation of the negotiation process between the conflicting parties.

However, by discussing the factors which might motivate the non-state armed groups, the chapter also describes how non-state armed groups employ various strategies to secure maximum benefits out of the negotiation process. Thus, focus has also been made on the bargaining strategies the groups use while negotiating with the state actors. Most of the earlier writings have described the conflict duration as a form of bargaining process whereby ethnic minority groups are continuously involved in making claims and demands against the state actors. Such groups tend to advance extreme demands when they enjoy relatively higher bargaining leverage against the state actors. The chapter also argued that in spite of the grievances, security dilemma and arguments made by instrumentalist theory, claim-making by ethnic minority groups is very significant for such groups to mobilize for collective actions. Thus, it is very significant to explore the behaviour of the conflicting parties, especially non-state armed groups, during the

negotiation process where they are involved in bargaining the maximum benefits/concessions from the state actors/government.

The next chapter discusses the historical origins of the Bodos and the growth of political consciousness among the Bodos. The chapter will specifically provide the background of the insurgency led by the NDFB, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The chapter will examine the various developments among the Bodos prior to the British rule, during the British rule and during the post-British period. The chapter will specifically focus on the various socio-economic and political developments in Assam after the independence of the country in 1947, which formed the basis for the onset of the insurgency under the banner of the NDFB in the 1980s.



Chapter Three

Armed conflicts in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR): A historical analysis

3.1 Introduction

India in the post-independent phase has witnessed a number of armed rebellions led by ethnic groups. Relative discrimination has often been cited as one of the reasons for the cause of such armed conflicts. The rebellions have often been led by insurgent groups sometimes covertly supported by student bodies, ethnic leaders, political parties and socio-cultural organizations. Punjab and Kashmir have seen some of the violent armed uprisings led by ethnic groups. Likewise, the northeastern part of the country, including the state of Assam, has also experienced insurgent mobilizations motivated by demands for sovereignty, statehood as well as autonomy. These conflicts caused instability in the region. The chapter examines the historical origins of the Bodos, emergence of consciousness among the Bodos and the conditions that led to the onset of NDFB insurgency in the 1980s.

Since late 1980s, Assam witnessed armed movements led by insurgent groups such as United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) and others. The Bodo dominated regions located in the north bank of the Brahmaputra witnessed violent armed conflicts under the leadership of National Democratic Front Boroland (NDFB) since the 1980s with demand for a sovereign country for the Bodos. NDFB was earlier known as the Boro Security Force (BSF) but was renamed as National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) in 1994. NDFB insurgency created an environment of fear, uncertainty and instability in Assam. On the other hand, the State Government responded with repressive counterinsurgency operations through the state security forces during the 1980s and the 1990s. NDFB mobilized along ethnic lines and claimed to be the vanguard of the rights and opportunities of the Bodos especially after the failure of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord signed in 1993 between All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Government.

Bodos also engaged in various other ethno-political movements under the banner of different organizations such as Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF)/All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in

the post-British period. In the pre-independence period, Bodos organized under the banner of organizations such as Bodo Chatra Sanmelan, Kachari Youth Association, All Assam Tribal League and others. They mobilized for equal representation and protection of the rights of the plains tribal communities including the Bodos.

3.2 Historical background: Tracing the origins of the Bodos

In the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history as Endle argued, the history of the Bodos is “largely a matter of speculation and inference” (Endle, 1911:3). However, many earlier studies have argued that the Bodo race may have been one of the earliest known inhabitants or the aborigines of the Brahmaputra Valley and were once the dominant race in Assam (Gait, 1906:242). Others like Baruah argued “the tribes speaking the Bodo language seemed to have occupied the plains of Assam for a very long time”.²² Chatterji also argued that the Bodos once ruled the whole of undivided Assam and North-East Bengal.²³ They are the largest amongst the plains tribes in Assam. Endle further argued “the Kacharis lived in scattered hamlets along the foothills of the Himalayas in Northern Bengal and Assam, intermixed now with Hindu people who have intruded into what was once their undisputed home (Endle, 1911: XV).” Barua argued that the Bodos once ruled Assam under different names like the Kacharis, Chutiyas, and Koches etc. at different points in time.²⁴ Gait has also shown that from the nature of the wide distribution of the Bodo language, it is very likely that the Bodos ruled the major part of Assam and North-East Bengal (Gait, 1906:243).

The Bodos belong to the Tibeto-Burman speaking Indo-Mongoloid race (Gait, 1906:4-5; Endle, 1911:3; Das, 1994:417). According to earlier studies, the term ‘Bodo’ broadly referred to a group of closely related tribes and was the most numerous plains tribes in Assam (Endle, 1911; Gait, 1906:242-243). Gait further argued that the Kacharis identified themselves as Bodo or Bodo fisa (sons of the Bodo) in the Brahmaputra Valley; the Kacharis called themselves as Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal; and in the North Cachar Hills they regarded themselves as

²² See Baruah, K. L. (1966). *An Early History of Kamarupa, From the Earliest Time to the Sixteenth Century*. Guwahati: Lawyers Book Stall.

²³ See Chatterji, S. K. (1974). *Kirata-jana-krti: The Indo-Mongoloids, Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*. Rev. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

²⁴ Barua, B.K. (1951). *A Cultural History of Assam*. 1st ed. New Delhi: National Book Trust.

Dimasa, which is a corruption of Dima fisa or sons of the great river (Gait, 1906:242). The Ahoms called them Timisa. Gait also mentioned that the Kacharis were 'believed to be closely allied to the Koches and also to the Chutiyas, Lalungs and Morans of the Brahmaputra Valley, and to the Garos and Tipperas of the hills in the south of the Surma Valley in so far as the language was concerned (Gait, 1906:243).' Endle wrote that the languages of the aboriginal members of the Koch caste, Chutiyas, Dimasas, Garos and Tipperahs all belonged to a branch of the ancient Bodo speech which indicated that these groups all belonged to the Bodo race (Endle, 1911:XV-XVI). Chatterji also described the Bodos to be closely associated with the Kiratas of ancient Assam, who took part in the Mahabharata war under king Bhagdatta.²⁵

Earlier studies suggest that the Bodos once inhabited mostly the areas which are now located in the districts of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur in Assam (Das, 1994:418). However, many others have further mentioned that the Bodo race was found beyond the borders of the present day Assam. Gait argued that the Bodos also inhabited the areas of North-east of Bengal, Koch-Bihar and the Hill Tippera (Gait, 1906:243; Endle, 1911:4). Though the exact place and origin of the Bodos is still very unclear, scholars argued that they might have move from Southeast China via Tibet and Burma at various points in time and settled in the foothills of the Himalaya and Arunachal Pradesh especially in the areas located on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra (Endle, 1911:3). This group of migrants might have gradually moved to other places like Nepal, North Bengal, Garo Hills of Meghalaya, North Cachar Hills and the Cachar plains in the southern part of Assam, Tripura and also some adjacent places in Bangladesh.²⁶ Endle (1911:3) also argued that there is a high probability that the original home of the Bodos were in China and Tibet. Still others argued that the Bodos might have migrated to Assam through the northern routes of Assam via Burma and it is likely that they got mixed up with the Mon-Khmer-Mundas in due course of time.²⁷

²⁵ Chatterji, S. K. (1974). *Kirata-jana-krti: The Indo-Mongoloids, Their Contribution to the History and Culture of India*. Rev. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal.

²⁶ Chatterji, S. K. (1970). *The place of Assam in the history and civilization of India*. Dept. of Publication, University of Gauhati.

²⁷ Choudhury, P. C. (1966). *The history of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century AD*. Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

The traces of Bodo history and their expansive presence which as Endle argued is also indicated by the first syllable of the names of the rivers of the Brahmaputra Valley which starts with the Kachari word 'di' or 'doi', which meant water (Endle, 1911). The names of rivers such as Diputa, Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Disang, Diku, Dikrang, Diphu and Digaru all starts with the syllable 'di' which indicates that the Bodos were present in the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley (Endle, 1911:4; Gait, 1906:5). Endle also argued how according to Captain Fischer, the Superintendent of Cachar, the Kacharis considered that they once ruled Kamrupa. However, due to the lack of any sufficient records, any written evidences cannot substantiate such claims made by the community. Reference to the Kacharis has been made in the Ahom Buranjis which mention only about the wars between the Ahoms and the Kacharis (Gait, 1906:243). Earlier studies also mentioned that the Kacharis had established petty kingdoms before the arrival of the Ahoms.²⁸

3.3 Pre-British records on the origin of the Bodos

Earlier studies maintained that 'the Kachari kingdom once extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra Valley from Dikhow to the Kallang, or beyond, and also included the Valley of Dhansiri and the tract which formed the North Cachar subdivision (Barpujari, 1992:268; Gait, 1906:243).' The Dikhow River formed the boundary between the Ahoms and the Kachari kingdoms for a long time. When the Ahoms established their kingdom in the 13th century in the Brahmaputra Valley, the Kacharis (Bodos) already inhabited the Brahmaputra Valley (Gait, 1906:243). Gait (1906:36) argued in these words "when the Ahoms consolidated their rule in the Assam Valley, a line of Chutiya kings ruled the country east of the Subansiri and the Disang, with the exception of a strip to the south and south-east, where several small Bodo tribes enjoyed a precarious independence. Further west, there was a Kachari kingdom, extended at least half-way across the Nowgong district."

The Kacharis were the western neighbours of the Ahoms in the Valley and the latter considered the former as their vassals (Barpujari, 1992:268). The Kachari asserted their independence from time to time, which led to frequent wars between the two kingdoms.

²⁸ Choudhury, P. C. (1966). *The history of civilization of the people of Assam to the twelfth century AD*. Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

Frequent wars however broke out between the Ahoms and the Kacharis towards the end of the thirteenth century when the Kacharis moved towards Dikhow (Gait, 1906:244). In 1490, a war broke out between the Ahoms and the Kacharis where the Kacharis claimed victory over the Ahoms; but very soon the Kacharis were defeated and pushed as far as the Dhansiri River which later formed the boundary between the Ahom kingdom and the Kachari kingdom (Gait, 1906:244). The Kacharis and the Ahoms were again involved in a fierce battle in the sixteenth century. In 1531, the Ahoms again defeated the Kacharis. After the defeat at the hands of the Ahoms and the subsequent invasion of the Brahmaputra valley by the Ahoms in the sixteenth century, the Kacharis deserted Dimapur (the original capital of the Kachari kingdom) and the Valley of Dhansiri and moved towards south of the Brahmaputra Valley and they established their new capital at Maibong (Gait, 1906:244; Endle, 1911:6). Gait noted that 'the physical ruins which still existed in Dimapur indicated that the Kacharis had attained a state of civilization considerably in advance of that of the Ahoms (Gait, 1906:244).' The ruins of the Kachari kingdom also still exist in Maibong in the present day Dima Hasao district of Assam. After the expulsion of the Kachari king from Dimapur, the Ahoms placed Detsung as the Raja of the Kacharis and expected him to remain loyal to the Ahom monarch. However, in 1536, Detsung revolted against the Ahom monarch, which subsequently resulted in the conquest of Dimapur by the Ahoms. Detsung was put to death in 1536 in the battle that followed between the two kingdoms (Gait, 1906:244).

Records also show that the Kacharis migrated from Maibong to Khaspur in the latter period, about 1750 A. D. The migration was however limited only to the ruling dynasty and most of the people stayed back in Maibong during this period (Endle, 1911:6; Gait, 1906:249). In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Kacharis had to face another strong resistance from Chilarai, the General of Koch king, Nar Narayan where the Kacharis were again defeated by the Koches (Gait, 1906:246). However, the reign of the Koch king in the Kachari country was short-lived. The Koch king was very soon defeated by the Sultan of Bengal and the Kachari king asserted his independence and reconsolidated his kingdom in Maibong (Barpujari, 1992:375)." By the middle of the sixteenth century, major part of Nagaon district and the North Cachar Hills were occupied by the Kacharis (Gait, 1906:247). Gradually, they extended their control into the plains of Cachar.

Endle (1911:246-251) further mentions how during the course of their migrations, first from Dimapur to Maibong and then to Khaspur, “there is a high possibility that the Kacharis (Chutiyas) which remained in the rich valley of Assam came to terms with their conquerors (the Ahoms) and gradually became amalgamated with them slowly.” Endle (1911:8) further argued in these words, “the Kacharis (Chutiyas) might have submitted to the Ahoms, the southern section of the race may have settled in the districts known as Garo Hills and North Cachar and the northern section perhaps settled down in a broad belt of the country at the foot of the Bhutan Hills (Kachari Duars).”

Meanwhile, the East India Company established businesses in Assam by the eighteenth century (Barpujari, 1992:301). Initially, the East India Company had no intentions of extending its rule in Assam; the Company was interested only in establishing trade relations between Bengal and Assam after the establishment of the political authority in Bengal. However, by 1792, the prevalence of anarchical situation in Assam marked the interference of the British in the country (Gait, 1906:197; Johnstone, 1877:8-14). The involvement of the Burkandazes (mercenaries) from Bengal thereby creating an anarchical situation compelled the British authority to interfere in the affairs of Assam. At the same time, the rebellion with the Moamarias had weakened the Ahom kingdom, which further contributed to the prevailing chaos in the country. Captain Welsh was deputed to look into the matter but at the same time, he was instructed not to interfere much in the internal affairs of Assam. Captain Welsh was asked to submit detailed information to the Governor General, Lord Cornwallis about the recurring conditions, which led to the instability in Assam.

However, upon his arrival in Assam, Captain Welsh encountered that the situation in Assam was far more serious than had been anticipated. Gaurinath, the Ahom king appealed to Captain Welsh to suppress all his enemies. Besides the rebellion with the Burkandazes, the Ahom kingdom also had to deal with the Darrang Raja, Krishna Narayan and also the Moamarias in Upper Assam (Gait, 1906:197). Krishna Narayan, with the support of the Burkandazes, openly revolted against the Ahom king. These prompted Captain Welsh to initiate expedition against the Darrang Raja in order to bring order in the Assam Valley. Eventually, Krishna Narayan was restored as the Darrang Raja after his oath of allegiance to the Ahom king in May 1793. On the other hand, violent interactions continued between the Ahoms and the Moamarias. In the

meantime, Sir John Shore succeeded Lord Cornwallis as the Governor General in December 1793 (Gait, 1906:207). This was further accompanied by a change in the policy of the British government towards Assam. The new administration in Bengal was determined not to interfere in the internal affairs of any foreign country, including Assam. Eventually Captain Welsh was directed to abstain from any further expedition and return to the British territory by the 1st of July 1794. Upon the withdrawal of troops from Assam, situation became disastrous. Internal dissensions, which had been suppressed, once again threw up in the open between the Ahom king and the Moamarias and once again lawlessness prevailed in Assam (Gait, 1906:208). The Moamarias occupied Rangpur as soon as the British troops left Assam and lawlessness prevailed in the country till the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 between the British and the Burmese.

Meanwhile in 1813, Krishna Chandra, the Kachari king was succeeded by his brother Govinda Chandra (Gait, 1906:251). However, the reign of Govinda Chandra was marked by internal dissensions in the northern hilly tract of Cachar (Gait, 1906:251; Barpujari, 1992:377). There were attempts to establish an independent kingdom by Kohi Dan, who once worked under the late Raja. Kohi Dan had been appointed as an official in the northern hilly tract. However, Govinda Chandra was able to avoid this attempt of Kohi Dan and the latter was eventually assassinated. After Kohi Dan's assassination, his son Tularam with the aid of Ram Singh, the king of Jaintia, made himself practically independent in the northern part of Cachar (Gait, 1906:251-252; Barpujari, 1992:377).

Meanwhile, the Burmese conquered Manipur in 1813. At the same time, the declining Ahom kingdom provided opportunities for the Burmese to extend their occupation over the Brahmaputra Valley (Gait, 1906:222). Marjit Singh of Manipur eventually invaded the Kachari kingdom in 1818. Marjit Singh, with the aid of the Burmese authority, invaded Cachar (Gait, 1906:252). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Ahom kingdom also had to face a threat from the Burmese invasions as the Burmese empire shared borders in the northwestern part with the province of Assam, Manipur and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bengal (Gait, 1906:266-267, 274-283). Govinda Chandra was able to repel the invasion with the help of Chaurjit Singh, the exiled Manipuri king. But Chaurjit Singh eventually decided to establish his own rule in Cachar. Meanwhile, after the defeat at the hands of the Burmese in 1819, Marjit

Singh along with his brother, Gambhir Singh once again sought refuge in Cachar (Gait, 1906:252). The three brothers, Chaurjit Singh, Gambhir Singh and Marjit Singh eventually invaded the whole of the Cachar country and forced the Kachari king to flee to Sylhet. Once again, the Kachari ruler sought the assistance of the British authority. The Kachari king, however, failed to secure the assistance of the British.

Govinda Chandra eventually sought the assistance of the Burmese to reclaim his authority over the Cachar country (Gait, 1906:252). By the year 1823, the invasion of Manipur by the Burmese and the subsequent invasion of the Cachar country by the Manipuri Rajas provided a threat to the British (Barpujari, 1992:379). The British administration found it necessary to deal with the issues in the Cachar country. The British realized the strategic significance and the probable effects of the Burmese invasion of Cachar. The Burmese invasion of Cachar would have paved the way for further opportunities for the Burmese to conquer Sylhet, which was under the British rule. It was at this juncture that the British and the Burmese fought wars in the Cachar region of Assam. After subsequent wars, the Burmese forces were eventually defeated and driven out, and the Cachar country was restored to Govinda Chandra (Gait, 1906:252). The British and the Burmese eventually signed a treaty in Yandaboo on 24 February, 1826 which marked the end of the confrontation between the British and the Burmese (Gait, 1906:282-283).

3.4 Annexation and the British colonial period

Assam was annexed into British India after the Treaty of Yandaboo (Gait, 1906:284; Lahiri, 1954:24-27). Gait argued that ‘the condition of the Brahmaputra Valley at the time of the expulsion of the Burmese was very deplorable (Gait, 1906:284).’ After the signing of the treaty, Manipur was restored to Gambhir Singh. Similarly, Jaintia was restored to Ram Singh and Govinda Chandra was restored to the possession of Cachar. Govinda Chandra, the king of Cachar had already “acknowledged his allegiance to the East India Company on 6th March 1824 (Gait, 1906:284-285).” Eventually, Cachar, the last kingdom of the Kacharis was brought under the British dominion in 1832 after the death of King Govinda Chandra and thus the Kachari rule in Assam came to an end. The hill tract was later brought under North Cachar subdivision in 1854 by the British administration (Gait, 1906:300-307). After the annexation of Assam, the province was placed under the direct administration of the East India Company.

However, at the time of annexation, the condition in the Brahmaputra Valley was very disastrous. The barbarous and inhuman act of the Burmese had left thousands dead (Gait, 1906:284). The Burmese had taken away thousands of Assamese population as slaves. At the same time, the prevailing internal conflicts between different chiefs and nobles had also contributed to the deplorable situation in Assam. The British authority found it difficult to restore the Valley to its rightful heir, as the occupation of the Valley by the Burmese for a long time had broken up the old administrative set up (Gait, 1906:285). There was a high probability of resurgence of internal conflicts as soon as the British troops were withdrawn. The economic and the political situation in Assam rendered lawlessness and instability. Thus the British administration decided to rule the Brahmaputra Valley as part of the British province with the exception of Sadiya and Matak in Upper Assam. However in 1833, the whole of Upper Assam, except Sadiya and Matak, was restored to Purandar Singh, the last Ahom king in Assam (Gait, 1906:291). This tract was further divided into two districts, viz., Sibsagar and Lakhimpur. Eventually, both Sadiya and Matak tracts were brought under the rule of the British and they were added to the Lakhimpur district. In 1834, the area controlled by the British was divided into four districts, viz., Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, including Bishnath, and Nowgong.

Soon after the annexation of Assam by the British, Assamese language continued to be the language of the Courts in the Brahmaputra Valley for more than ten years. However, in due course, Bengali replaced Assamese as the language of the courts and the medium of instruction in schools, which was highly resented by the natives but without any success (Gait, 1906:328-329). It was only after the succession of Sir George Campbell as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal when Assamese language was restored as the language of the Courts (Gait, 1906:328).

At the same time, there were several attempts by the British administration not to interfere directly in the internal affairs of the indigenous communities. After the annexation of the whole of Assam, the British administration categorized the aboriginal tribes of the region by introducing the Inner Line Regulation Act of 1873 (Gait, 1906:331).” These communities were categorized as ‘backward tribes’, ‘forests tribes’ or ‘aboriginal tribes.’ Earlier there were many violent raids and invasions between the British subjects in Assam and the frontier tribes of the hills. In order to prevent such violent interactions, “autonomy was given to the local authorities by the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 to prohibit British subjects generally, or those of specific

classes, from going beyond a certain line, laid down for the purpose, without a pass or license issued by the Deputy Commissioner and containing such conditions as might seem necessary (Gait, 1906:331).”

The British administration also passed the Scheduled Districts Act, XIV in 1874 which empowered the government ‘to declare by notification in the gazette what laws were in force in such districts, and to extend to them any enactments in force elsewhere where it might seem desirable to bring into operation (Gait, 1906:329).’ The Schedule Districts Act also classed the whole of Assam including Sylhet as ‘a scheduled district.’ The British government, on 6th February 1874, separated the districts of the province of Assam under a new Commissioner (Gait, 1906:332). Eventually, Sylhet, which was earlier club with Bengal, was also incorporated in Assam on 12 September, 1874 (Gait, 1906:332). The British Government further passed the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act of 1886. Accordingly, the Revenue Department of the Government of Assam divided the areas mostly inhabited by the hill tribes as Excluded Areas and those mostly inhabited by the plain tribes as Partially Excluded Areas.²⁹ The British Government governed these areas indirectly and the tribal communities of these areas were allowed to manage their internal affairs. The British administrators deemed it essential for these areas to be categorized as Excluded and Partially Excluded as they felt that the tribal communities of those areas required civilizing influence and paternalism of the British administrative system. The British Government devised these policies in order to safeguard the interests of the hill tribes as well as the plains tribes of the region. Such policies initiated by the British Government contributed to the ‘solidification of ethnic identification amongst the Bodos as a distinct community, separate and different from the non-tribal communities of Assam which could be observed with the growth of political consciousness in the early decades of the twentieth century (Saikia, 2011:56).’

During the initial decades of the British rule in Assam, the tribal communities including the Bodos were educationally, socially, economically and politically backward. During this period and up to the time of the independence of the country, Bengalis dominated most of the significant positions in the educational system, government offices and other important

²⁹ Datta, P. S. (1993). *Autonomy movements in Assam: documents*. pp. 175. Omsons Publications.

administrative positions.³⁰ Thus, the Bodos and other tribal communities, besides the Assamese-speaking communities, gradually became conscious of the fact that they were being marginalized and being deprived of their rights and opportunities. The gradual fear of marginalization and threats to the identity of the tribal communities led to the emergence of consciousness among the educated and middle class of these communities. The beginning of the twentieth century, thus, witnessed the emergence of educated middle class among the Bodos who played a very significant role in culminating a feeling of belongingness among the Bodos. At the beginning, this group of educated Bodo youths was engaged in various socio-cultural activities in order to preserve and safeguard the culture and the rights of the Bodos, which later on, contributed to the development of political consciousness among the community.

For instance, Kalicharan Brahma was one of the first Bodo personalities who realized the need to reform the Bodo society and bring about a change among the Bodo community through the propagation of the Brahma religion (Daimary, 2013:115; Bhattacharjee, 1996:72-73; Brahma, 2001:6-36). Earlier, the Bodos were all followers of Bathou religion whereby rice beers were consumed during the time of worship, which according to Kalicharan Brahma deteriorated the culture of the Bodo society. Kalicharan Brahma argued that the use of rice beers in social functions, the tradition of forceful marriage of girls, illiteracy, lack of insight into religion, superstitious beliefs etc. contributed to the backwardness of the Bodo community (Brahma, 2001:39). This motivated Kalicharan Brahma to look out for alternatives in order to bring about a change in the attitude and the minds of the Bodos during the beginning of the twentieth century. He argued that due to the prevalence of such evil practices among the Bodos, people from other advanced societies called the Bodos 'Mlechch', meaning uncivilized (Brahma, 2001:7). Moreover, the process of conversion of the Bodos to Christianity, Islam and Vaishnavism had instilled a sense of fear that the Bodos would eventually lose their identity (Brahma, 2001:8-9). Thus, Kalicharan Brahma realized the significance of preserving the identity of the Bodos as early as the beginning of twentieth century. He was convinced that the main reason for the social degradation (underdevelopment) of the Bodos was due to some practices within the Bathou

³⁰ Weiner, M. (1981). 'Seeking Ethnic Equality in Assam', in Myron Weiner and Mary Fainsod Katzenstein with K.V. Narayana Rao, *India's Preferential Policies: Migrants, the Middle Classes, and Ethnic Equality*, pp. 91-119. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

religion. However, it is to be mentioned here that Kalicharan Brahma was not against the philosophy of any religion; he had contradiction only with the practices these religions had. He realized “the need of reforming the Bodo society on the basis of western ideas of rationalism and human values (Daimary, 2013:116).” He also realized that the spread of western education among the Bodos would help in doing away with the prevalent evil social practices which was deteriorating the Bodo society. With this objective in mind, Kalicharan Brahma founded the Brahma-Dharma (Brahmaism) in 1907 in order to bring about socio-economic reformation in the Bodo society (Bhattacharjee, 1996:72). Within no time, he was able to convince most of the Bodos “to adopt Brahmaism as their religion and Brahma as their tile as a sign of their belief in Brahma’s spiritual teachings (Saikia, 2011:57).”

Kalicharan Brahma, eventually “professed a religion based on Eastern Philosophy and at the same time advocated for the spread of western science and rationalism for the reformation of the society (Daimary, 2013:117).” In order to uplift the Bodos politically, economically and socially, Kalicharan Brahma believed western education to be one of the most significant factor for which he undertook various initiatives during the early decades of the twentieth century (Brahma, 2001:47-58; Daimary, 2013:118; Bhattacharjee, 1996:72-74). Subsequently, Kalicharan Brahma, the leader of the Brahma movement established three English medium schools in 1913 with a government grant of 13000 rupees in order to bring about social, political and economic awareness among the Bodos.³¹ There were also efforts to make education mandatory for the children by Kalicharan and his associates (Bhattacharjee, 1996:73). A driving school and a carpentry school were opened in order to make the students self-earning members.

Two hostels, viz., Brahma Boarding and Mech Boarding were founded in the early years of the second decade of the twentieth century for students studying in Dhubri Government High School (Bhattacharjee, 1996). These two Boardings were later on merged together and named as Brahma Boarding, which became the main centre of Bodo intellectuals and their activities in the latter years.³² The educated Bodo youths published the first Bodo journal ‘Bibar’ from this Boarding in 1924 (Daimary, 2013). The educated Bodo middle class also formed various socio-

³¹ See Saikia, M. C. (1982). *The Brahma Movement Among the Bodo-Kacharis of Goalpara District*, in K.S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Movements in India*, Vol. I, Delhi, p.241

³² See *Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma*. (1983). Jorhat: Asom Sahitya Sabha, p. 20

religious organizations like Habraghat Bodo Sanmiloni in 1912 in Goalpara district and Dakhinkul Bodo Sahitya Sanmiloni in 1918 at Dudhnoi, Goalpara (Saikia, 2011; Bhattacharjee, 1996). In 1919, some of the members of the Brahma Boarding and few Bodo students formed the Bodo Chatra Sanmelan (Bhattacharjee, 1996). Bodo Chatra Sanmelan played a significant role when the Simon Commission visited Assam. The organization played a significant role in laying down the ideological foundation for the formation of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) in the post-British period (Daimary, 2013). Conferences were held with special focus on the eradication of social evils in the Bodo society. Most of the members of this organization were the product of Brahma Boarding (Bhattacharjee, 1996). The Bodo intelligentsia also formed the Bodo Mahasanmelani, which soon became the most significant platform for intellectual activities among the educated Bodo youths. This period witnessed the growth of ethnonationalist consciousness among the educated Bodo youths. The educated Bodo youths asserted the historical past, racial origin, language and the rich culture of the Bodos. These further motivated the educated Bodo youths to identify the Bodos as a separate nation, which was very different from the Assamese (Daimary, 2013). This period also witnessed the direct involvement of the Bodos (Brahma Company) in trades and businesses with the aid of the Company's shareholders in different places (Bhattacharjee, 1996).

The end of the 1920s, thus, witnessed the growth of political consciousness among the Bodos. The Kachari Youth Association (Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni) formed in the 1920s submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1929 with demands for separate electorates for the plains tribal communities including the Bodos and for proper representation of the communities in the provincial assembly (Saikia, 2011:58; Narzary, 2011:21-24). Accordingly, four seats were reserved for the plains tribal communities, including the Bodos in the provincial assembly.³³ The emergence of distinct political thought among the Bodos and the urged to identify the Bodos as a separate nation was reflected in the memoranda submitted to the Simon Commission (Bhattacharjee, 1996:75). The plains tribal communities including the Bodos also opposed the clubbing together of Goalpara with Bengal through the memorandum by arguing that doing so would shatter the interests of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of Assam. Studies have argued that though the Bodos emphasized on many demands in the

³³ See Datta, P. S. (1993). *Autonomy movements in Assam: documents*. pp. 175. Omsons Publications.

memorandum, the main concern was ‘to have a share in political power through representatives to the Council as well as in the local boards (Bhattacharjee, 1996:75).’ This showed the urge of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities to identify themselves as a separate ethnic group through proper representation in the political processes of the state. Thus, the early decades of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of educated middle-class among the Bodos who presented themselves as the “vanguard of the interests of the Bodo society (Saikia, 2011:58).”

Meanwhile the British Government decided to reorganize its administrative structure in India on the basis of local self-government and provincial autonomy which eventually motivated the plains tribal communities of Assam, including the Bodos, to form their first political organization- the All Assam Tribal League (AATL) - in 1933 under the leadership of Bhimbor Deuri and Jadav Khakhlary (Bhattacharjee, 1996:76). Most of the members of the Tribal League belonged to the Bodo community. Though the Tribal League demanded separate electorates for all the plains tribal communities, there was no specific demand for any autonomy arrangements and urged only for the safeguard of interests of the plains tribal communities (Bhattacharjee, 1996:77). Upto to this period, the All Assam Tribal League demanded the Assam Government “to address the grievances of the plains tribal communities, including the Bodos, through direct participation in the political process (Bhattacharjee, 1996:77).” The Tribal League also demanded the preservation of the Line System in order to safeguard the socio-economic and cultural interests of the plains tribal communities including the Bodos. Eventually, the Tribal League participated in the Assam provincial assembly elections held in 1935 and formed a coalition government with the Congress party led by Gopinath Bordoloi (Saikia, 2011:59).

At the same time, the Tribal League protested against immigration from East Bengal, local non-tribal traders, businessmen and money-lenders as encroachment of tribal lands had become very rampant since the beginning of the twentieth century (Bhattacharjee, 1996:78). Eventually, in 1938, Bordoloi ‘proposed a protective system of tribal belts to safeguard the interests of the tribals from the immigrants which earned him the cooperation of the Tribal League in his successful bid at toppling the Sadullah Ministry (Bhattacharjee, 1996:78).’ The Bordoloi Ministry, however, resigned in November 1939 and again the Sadullah Ministry came to power with the support of the Muslim League (Misra, 2014:242). The Sadullah Ministry, as demanded by the Muslim League made attempts to scrap the Line System so that land could be

made available to the illegal immigrants from East Bengal.³⁴ The Sadullah Ministry time and again tried to accommodate the immigrants from East Bengal by allowing them to have access to land. For instance, in 1943, the Sadullah Ministry called for the “distribution of the wastelands and the de-reservation of some of the grazing reserves in the Nowgong district (Misra, 2014:242).” The Ministry also made attempts to de-reserve the professional grazing land in Kamrup and Darrang and at the same time, the Sadullah Ministry tried to open up the ‘surplus reserves in all the submontane area’ in order to settle the landless people, of which the overwhelming majority were Muslim immigrants (Misra, 2014:242-243). This new policy opened up vast areas to the immigrants, especially in western and central Assam, which had serious implications for the tribal communities and other indigenous communities who lacked proper land documents and who were habituated to shifting cultivation on unclaimed plot of land. Gopinath Bordoloi opposed such moves by the Sadullah Government and argued that such policies would result in tribal land alienation. Eventually, after assuming power in 1946, the Congress under the leadership of Bordoloi attempted to clear the illegal encroachers from the grazing and forest reserves. The immigrants resisted and the fear of attacks on the Assamese villages forced the Bordoloi ministry to go slow with this initiative. In the meantime, tribal land alienation continued unabated in the tribal dominated areas as well as in other areas.

As mentioned in the preceding sections, the Bodos developed a sense of belongingness during the British rule, which further contributed to the growth of political consciousness among the community. Several attempts were made by the Bodo intellectuals/organizations to preserve the Bodo identity and culture through submissions of memoranda and demands to the Assam State Government. However, in spite of the various protective measures introduced by the government to safeguard the interests of the tribal population including the Bodos, failure to implement the same led to land alienation. Though, there were attempts to address the issues of the Bodos at various points in time, the post-British era witnessed the resurgence of many violent as well as non-violent campaigns led by different Bodo organizations. These campaigns and the movements since 1947 also marked the beginning of a more rigorous campaign, which eventually led to full-blown separatist aspirations among the Bodos. The following section

³⁴ Guha, A. (2013). *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research.

examines the various ethnonationalist assertions of the Bodos after the independence of the country in 1947.

3.5 Post-independence period: Ethno-nationalist campaigns of the Bodos (1947 and after)

After the independence of the country, Assam Government initiated many changes and developmental policies, but it failed to prevent occupation of land by the immigrants, which further led to land alienation among the tribal communities including the Bodos. There were efforts by the Bordoloi Ministry to prevent alienation of tribal land within a year of the independence of the country when it amended the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 and created several tribal belts and blocks to protect the plains tribal communities from being alienated from their lands (Misra, 2014:244; Saikia, 2011:59). The area designated for the newly created Tribal Belts and Blocks spread over the tribal areas in the then Darrang, Lakhimpur, Kamrup, Nowgong, and Goalpara districts (Daimary, 2013:98). Accordingly, the areas inhabited by the Bodos were classified as tribal belts and blocks in an attempt to restrict tribal lands of being penetrated by outsiders. The transfer, exchange or lease of land in the tribal belts and blocks could take place only among the people belonging to the protected categories. Through these legislations, 10 tribal belts and 23 tribal blocks were created with a hope to end the land alienation among the Bodos and other tribal communities (Misra' 2014: 244). The government also attempted to provide safeguard to the traditional customs and practices of the tribal communities as well as to preserve the 'distinct culture and identity of the tribals through the amendment (Saikia, 2011:60).' However, these provisions could not prevent land alienation among the plains tribal communities and encroachment of tribal land continued as the provisions of the said policy were left unaddressed and unimplemented. Misra argued that the tribal land alienation could have been avoided if the tribal communities such as the Bodos were granted the Sixth Scheduled status, which would have granted protection against the land alienation (Misra, 2014:245). The inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution could have further helped the tribal communities to protect their distinct culture and identity.

During the course of time, the formulation/adoption of many policies in favour of the Assamese-speaking communities by the educated Assamese middle class and the Assam Government mostly dominated by non-tribal communities was also highly resented by the tribal communities as well as by the Bengali-speaking inhabitants of Assam (Misra, 2013:179-188;

Saikia, 2011:60-76). The Bodos, at various points in time, protested through various peaceful and violent ways against these policies. At the same time, the subsequent failure to prevent tribal land alienation in spite of the creation of several tribal belts and blocks mostly because of the inactivity on the part of the government was highly resented by the Bodos (Daimary, 2013:100). This created a sense of insecurity and deprivation among the Bodos.

Additionally, the dominance of Assamese-speaking communities in various administrative positions, educational system and many other significant decision-making positions further instilled fears of marginalization and suppression among the Bodos. For instance, during the post-British period, attempts were made by the urban educated Assamese-speaking community to consolidate and dominate in almost all the significant administrative as well as educational system of the state. The growth of Bodo nationalism during the post-British era could be attributed to “issues based on institutional and social exclusion based on language policies (Saikia, 2011:60).” The post-British era, thus, witnessed the emergence of many socio-cultural as well as political and student organizations with the objective of safeguarding the interests of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. For instance, organizations such as Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) all cropped up during the post-independence period with objectives of protecting the socio-cultural, economic and political interests of the Bodos. These organizations were involved in many peaceful as well as violent interactions with the state machineries especially during and after 1960. The following sections focus on the role played by these Bodo organizations, which eventually paved way for the violent armed struggle during the 1980s.

The early period after the independence of the country witnessed the formation of various socio-cultural organizations by the Bodos. On 16 November 1952, a section of educated people among the Bodos formed the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, a Bodo Literary Society with an objective of safeguarding the socio-cultural interests of the Bodos (Bhattacharjee, 1996:95; Hazarika, 2005:58; Saikia, 2011:63). Meanwhile, the tribal leaders dismantled the Tribal League in 1953 and transformed it into a socio-cultural organization under the banner of Tribal Sangha with an expectation that the country’s independence would resolve the grievances of the plains tribal communities including the Bodos; however it eventually affected the course of the Bodo politics (Bhattacharjee, 1996:95). Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), which has its roots in the literary and intellectual pursuits of the early twentieth century, became the vanguard of the Bodo language

movement during the initial decades of the post-British period. Bodo Sahitya Sabha submitted a memorandum to the Assam Government in 1953, and demanded that Bodo be made the medium of instruction at the primary and the secondary level of education (Saikia, 2011). The State Government, however, refused to give in to the demands of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. But, by the end of the 1960, Bodo Sahitya Sabha intensified its demands for proper representation of the Bodo language at the educational institutions and others, which shall be discussed in the following sections.

3.6 Language movement of the Bodos

The occupation and the domination of most of the lucrative positions in the administration, the education sector as well as other government services by the Bengali-speaking community instilled fear of marginalization among the educated Assamese middle class. The Assamese-speaking community demanded that Assamese language be made the official language of Assam (Saikia, 2011:60-61). Attempts were made by this section of the Assamese-speaking people to assert their dominance in the social, economic, cultural and political spheres. There was a need to increase the employment opportunities for the Assamese-speaking people. Thus, during the late 1950s, this group of educated Assamese majority demanded that Assamese be made the sole official language of the state (Saikia, 2011:61). However, this demand was strongly opposed by the tribal communities including the Bodos and the Bengalis. This period, thus, witnessed the onset of anti-Bengali riots (Saikia, 2011:61). Protest demonstrations against the Bengali-speaking community turned violent resulting in the deaths of both the Bengali population and the Assamese nationalists (Saikia, 2011:61). The violent interactions also witnessed the displacement of a large number of Bengali populations who eventually resettled in West Bengal, Tripura and the areas in and around Barak Valley of Assam in the subsequent period.³⁵

Despite strong opposition from the tribal communities and other non-Assamese population, the Congress Government led by B. P. Chaliha gave in to the demand of the Assamese-speaking majority and passed the Official Language Act in 1960, whereby Assamese was made the sole official language of instruction in the educational institutions and a mandatory

³⁵ Basu, S. P. (Ed.). (2009). *The Fleeing People of South Asia: Selections from Refugee Watch*. Anthem Press.

requirement to secure an employment in the government offices of the state.³⁶ The adoption of this policy further widened the already existing gap between the Assamese-speaking communities and the plains tribal communities like the Bodos. This language policy of the State Government created a feeling of marginalization and fear among the tribal communities and increased the tension between the Assamese-speaking population and the tribal communities like the Bodos (Saikia, 2011:62-64; Misra, 2013:129). Though this language policy was intended to target the Bengali-speaking populations, it also affected the non-Assamese speaking indigenous communities like the Bodos and other tribal communities (Saikia, 2011:62). A sense of insecurity and marginalization prevailed among the Bodos, which further widened the rift between the tribal communities and the non-tribal communities. The non-Assamese speaking communities like the Bodos and others, who earlier were least hesitant to use Assamese as a language of communication became more apprehensive and insecure of the attempts of domination and assimilation by the Assamese-speaking majority. Bodo Sahitya Sabha strongly protested against this policy of the Assam Government. Access to education and employment opportunities became more difficult for the Bodos as most of the Bodo population lacked Assamese education at that time (Saikia, 2011:62).

As argued earlier, Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) was mainly engaged in preserving the socio-cultural rights of Bodos, and had no inclination towards any political initiatives. Since its formation, Bodo Sahitya Sabha demanded the official recognition of the Bodo language in the educational institutions. However, the Assam State Government's indifference towards the demands of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha increased the tensions between the Bodos and the Assamese-speaking communities. As such, the adoption of the Official language Act of the 1960s further widened the rift between the Bodos and the Assamese speaking communities. Thus, Bodo Sahitya Sabha launched a movement on 16 November 1960 in Kokrajhar district in protest against the Assam Government's non-committal attitude to resolve the demands of the BSS and the Bodos in general (Saikia, 2011:64). The Assam Government, eventually, constituted a committee to look into the demands and the socio-cultural grievances of the Bodos. Rupnath Brahma, a renowned Bodo youth, politician and an active worker of the "Bodo Chatra Sanmilen" formed in 1919 headed the Committee. Eventually, the committee suggested "Bodo language be

³⁶ See Datta, P. S. (1990). *Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam*. pp. 202. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications

allowed to be used as a medium of instruction at the primary level of school education (Saikia, 2011:64).” Accordingly, the State Government agreed to allow the Bodo language to be used as the medium of instruction at the primary level of education. However, the State Government refused to allow the use of Bodo language as a medium of instruction at the secondary level of education. The issue of the use of Roman script for the Bodo language was also left unresolved (Saikia, 2011:64).

In yet another attempt to impose Assamese as the dominant language of the state, the Government of Assam declared Assamese as the sole medium of instruction at the university level on 11 November 1972.³⁷ Though English continued to remain as the alternative medium of instruction, Assamese language was made compulsory in areas where majority of the communities were non-Assamese speakers. This language policy relegated the “Bodo language and other minority languages to a secondary position (Saikia, 2011:64).” This policy of the State Government was strongly resented and objected by Bodo organizations like Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the All Bodo Students Union (ABUS) and Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). These organizations protested against the policies of the State Government through various disruptive activities like public demonstrations, boycott of educational institutions, blockades and closure of government offices and private institutions etc. (Daimary, 2013:137; Saikia, 2011:64). Thus, the emergence of the political aspirations and the cultural activism during the post-British period, especially during the 1960s, laid the foundation for a more rigorous and violent Bodo nationalism. Since then, Bodo language became the “fundamental component of ascriptive identity and coherence in the Bodo society (Saikia, 2011:65).”

Meanwhile, in 1974, Bodo Sahitya Sabha introduced a Bodo elementary book, called ‘Bithorai’ in Roman script in class 1 of the Bodo medium schools (Bhattacharjee, 1996:102). The Bodo literary organization introduced this primer irrespective of the policies introduced by the State Government. The introduction of the book in Roman Script by Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) was strongly opposed by the State Government. In response to such initiatives of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the State Government decided to stop providing grants to those schools, which adopted and recognized the said textbook in their schools or any other books introduced in

³⁷ See Deb, B. J. (2006). *Ethnic Issues, Secularism, and Conflict Resolution in North East Asia*. p. 168. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company Ltd.

Roman Script (Bhattacharjee, 1996:102). Eventually, Bodo Sahitya Sabha launched a mass campaign during 1974-75 for the adoption of the Roman script as the official script of the Bodo language (Bhattacharjee, 1996:103; Baruah, 1999:185). The State Government eventually responded to these demands of Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 1988. Thereafter, Roman script was used in the officially sponsored publications. In yet another attempt to homogenize and impose the Assamese language, Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) Government in 1986 introduced Assamese language as the “Compulsory Third Language” in all educational institutions and at the same time, there were further notifications whereby Assamese language became compulsory to secure government and semi-government jobs (Daimary, 2013:137-138).

The Roman script movement, which was started by Bodo Sahitya Sabha, was soon joined by PTCA and ABSU, the other two prominent organizations. This movement eventually became more rigorous and prompted the State Government to consult with the Central Government to bring a solution to the issue (Bhattacharjee, 1996:103). In response to the demand for Roman Script as the script for the Bodo language, then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi offered Devanagiri script as the alternative script for the Bodo language. The Bodo organizations refused to accept the government’s alternative solution to the recognition of Roman Script as the script for the Bodo language. However, eventually, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and other Bodo organizations accepted the government’s offer to make Devanagiri as the script for the Bodo language in 1975 (Bhattacharjee, 1996:103). The various attempts at introducing Assamese as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges and the subsequent attempts of homogenization proved counterproductive which further strengthened the ethnic aspirations of the Bodos.

Thus, language became one of the most significant factors, which mobilized the Bodos and contributed to the emergence of political consciousness among the educated Bodo youths as well as the Bodos in general (Das, 2009:419:421). Language became the most ‘significant symbol of differentiation and also became the most significant battlegrounds of Bodo cultural politics in the post-British period (Baruah, 1999:185).’ The Bodo leaders were successful in effectively using the issue of language to strengthen their support base (Saikia, 2011:60-65). Whereas, the indifferent attitude of the Assam Government, mostly dominated by the caste-Hindu Assamese, further strengthened and solidified the ethnic consciousness among the Bodos. Thus, the second half of the 1960s witnessed the emergence of Plains Tribal Council of Assam

(PTCA) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) who unlike the BSS demanded the creation of autonomous units for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of Assam.

3.7 The Udayachal Movement

The failure of the Assam Government to address the tribal land alienation, education and language policies contributed to the growth of ethnonationalist campaigns among the Bodos during the 1960s. The 1960s witnessed the demands for territorial unit for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. The process of reorganization of the state of Assam after 1960 also provided an interest and hope among the Bodo leaders for securing a separate unit for the Bodos and other tribal communities. As such, the educated Bodo youths formed the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) on 15 February 1967 and the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was formed on 27 February 1967.³⁸ In the second half of 1960s, Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) launched a movement with demand for the formation of a Union Territory called 'Udayachal' for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of the region (Narzary, 2011:95). The aim was to ensure greater autonomy and relative independence for the Bodos in terms of political decision-making (George, 1994:879; Hazarika, 2005:58-61). PTCA included members from different plains tribal communities, but the majority of them were Bodos. This movement was also supported by All Bodo Students Union and the Students Union played a supportive role in various initiatives of the PTCA.

In 1967, immediately after its formation, PTCA submitted a memorandum to the President of India with a demand for an autonomous region for the plains tribal communities including the Bodos. In 1968, PTCA decided to boycott the general elections of the Kokrajhar Constituency, which was the only reserved seat for the tribal communities out of the 14 Parliamentary seats in the state (Dash, 1989:337). PTCA aimed at securing the demands for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of Assam and eventually decided to participate in the electoral politics of the state. In 1972, PTCA fought the national general elections where Charan Narzary came out victorious from the party (Daimary, 2013:183). PTCA's electoral success in the assembly elections as well as the parliamentary elections was seen as a major boost to

³⁸ Interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, former senior member of ABSU and former Member of Parliament conducted on 11 June 2019 at Kathalguri, Kokrajhar.

address the grievances of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities and to secure equal representation and opportunities for the plains tribal communities of Assam including the Bodos. However, very soon, PTCA failed to live up to the expectations of the Bodos/tribal communities. PTCA failed to lead the struggle in the desired direction as it gradually succumbed to power politics of the state (Saikia, 2011:66; Daimary, 2013). PTCA, which was formed with a goal to secure a separate autonomous unit for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities lost its significance towards the end of 1970s (Saikia, 2011:65-66; Daimary, 2013:185). Apart from the electoral politics, the lack of strong leadership within PTCA also contributed to the failure of the organization to secure the objectives for which it was formed in 1967. PTCA leaders also gradually failed to secure the popular support of the people, which further proved to be one of the significant factors for its failure to lead a rigorous movement and to resolve the grievances of the Bodos and other plains trial communities.

Towards late 1970s, there were serious disagreements between the senior members and the younger members of PTCA, which eventually led to the split within PTCA on 22 May 1979 (Daimary, 2013:185-186). Disagreements arose between the two sections of the organization on the issue of the preference of the script for the Bodo language. Some members of PTCA gave preference for the Assamese script and wanted to give up the demands for Udayachal and Roman script. Younger members of the organization opposed this move. Eventually, PTCA broke into PTCA and PTCA (Progressive) on 22 May 1979 (Daimary, 2013:189). PTCA (Progressive) comprised the younger members of the organization. The split within PTCA hampered the movement of the plains tribal communities including the Bodos for a separate administrative set up. Due to the disagreements, the support base of PTCA also began to splinter, which could be witnessed from the disastrous performance of both PTCA and PTCA (Progressive) in the 1983 assembly elections (Saikia, 2011; Daimary, 2013:194). At the same time, divisions had already cropped up between the undivided PTCA and ABSU due to former's decision to give up the demand for Udayachal.³⁹

However, PTCA (Progressive) tried to portray itself as a new organization with a different spirit and determinations and together with ABSU had demanded a Union Territory

³⁹ Interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, 11 June 2019, Kathalguri, Kokrajhar.

called Mishing-Bodoland (Daimary, 2002).⁴⁰ In the meantime, ABSU, which had kept distance from the political developments of the time, and PTCA (Progressive) decided to maintain a neutral stand during the Assam movement which was an agitation against the foreign nationals in the state (Daimary, 2013:192). ABSU and PTCA also strongly resented the statement of the All Assam Students' Union that the "tribal belts and blocks served as a safe havens for the foreign nationals/illegal immigrants" and the 'idea of Assamisation of Assam' (Daimary, 2013:190). The Assam Movement, which started in 1979, also witnessed the upsurge of many violent interactions between the Assamese and the Bodos during the course of the movement. For instance, there was violence between the Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities and the Bodos in 1983 in a place called Gohpur, presently located in Biswanath district of Assam. The factors that led to the violent interaction between the two communities could be attributed to the Central Government's decision to conduct the state assembly elections and 12 unfilled parliamentary seats from 14 to 21 February 1983 (Weiner, 1983). This decision of the Government was opposed by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and the two organizations announced that they would boycott the elections. The two organizations argued that the electoral list consisted names of large numbers of illegal immigrants, i.e., Bengali Hindus and Bengali Muslims, and thus allowing them to vote in the elections would legitimize their demand for citizenship. This decision was also opposed by some of the tribal communities like the Lalung community. However, PTCA, which comprised mostly Bodos, supported the decision of the Government of India and were in favor of the elections as the Bodos had long been resisting the homogenization efforts of the Assam State Government mostly dominated by Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities. Violence erupted in many places and the region witnessed destruction of bridges, state infrastructures and police stations by the Assamese community especially the supporters of AASU and AAGSP. The state police retaliated through force and many AASU, AAGSP leaders and supporters were arrested. Amidst violence, the Bodos, especially the supporters of PTCA who were in favor of elections

⁴⁰ Prodeep Kumar Daimary was the Vice-President of ABSU during the ABSU movement in the 1980s. He is also the Second Deputy Chief of Bodoland Autonomous Council, which was formed in 1993 after the signing of the BAC accord between the ABSU-BPAC and the government. He was one of the active workers of the ABSU during the ABSU movement. During the interviews, he mentioned about the demand for a Union Territory called Mishing-Bodoland by the ABSU and the PTCA (Progressive).

attacked Assamese villages at Gohpur on 14 February 1983. The supporters of AASU and AAGSP immediately retaliated and attacked the Bodo villages in Gohpur (Weiner, 1983). Similarly, there were attacks by the anti-election groups against the Muslims immigrants in Nellie especially by Lalung community. These incidents in Gohpur, Nellie and other places during the period left over 4000 deaths and huge number of displacements of the affected people. The violence in Gohpur forced several thousand Bodos to flee from Gohpur to Arunachal Pradesh. Several hundred Bodos were massacred, killed and their properties were destroyed during the violence.⁴¹

Meanwhile, in 1985, PTCA won one seat in the general elections and three seats in the assembly elections respectively. In those elections, PTCA fought the elections with an agenda for securing Udayachal for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities, which the party used for electoral gains (Bhattacharjee, 1996:104). Charan Narzary was elected to the Legislative Assembly and Samar Brahma was once again elected to the Parliament. However, the two leaders very soon voiced their preference for an autonomous region instead of demanding for a separate Union Territory for the Bodos as well as other plains tribal communities of Assam. This was strongly opposed and criticized by the All Bodo Students Union. In 1984, ABSU made attempts to unify the two factions of PTCA but failed to do so (Bhattacharjee, 1996:106; Daimary, 2013:195). A Convention of tribal organizations was called by ABSU from 17 to 19 April 1984 at Harisinga, located in Udalguri which the PTCA (Progressive) members attended. The meeting was also attended by Binoy Khungur Basumatary, a Member of Legislative Assembly, who was later expelled from PTCA for criticizing his party members.”⁴² The Convention also witnessed the formation of an Action Committee called United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) under the leadership of Binoy Khungur Basumatary and Kanakeshwar Narzary as the Chairman and the Convener of the organization respectively (George, 1994:879; Misra, 2014:236; Daimary, 2013:195-196; Bhattacharjee, 1996:106; Hazarika, 2005:63). Basically, PTCA (Progressive) was renamed as UTNLF. The members of this organization were mostly young and aggressive Bodos who were dissatisfied with the

⁴¹ Interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, 11 June 2019, Kathalguri, Kokrajhar.

⁴² Choudhury, S.B. (1989). “On Udayachal movement” in Bhuyan, B.C. (ed.), *Political Developments in the North-East*. (New Delhi: Omsons), p. 115.

democratic and the constitutional methods pursued by the PTCA (Bhattacharjee (1996)). These moves had become essential for the Bodos as well as other tribal communities as the PTCA had completely lost its vigour and the spirit to fight for the ethnic aspirations of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities (Bhattacharjee, 1996:106). However, UTNLF, later, splintered into UTNLF and UBNLF (United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front).

UTNLF eventually worked in tandem with ABSU and they accused the PTCA of indulging in their vested interests and thus sacrificing the interests and the aspirations of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of Assam (George, 1994:879). Eventually, ABSU submitted a memorandum with a demand for a separate state for the Bodos and the basis of these demands made by the ABSU leaderships could be attributed to the socio-economic and cultural grievances of the Bodos during the British rule as well as during the post-British era (George, 1994:879). PTCA's active involvement in the state politics cleared the way for ABSU to spearhead the Bodo stir and to push for more radical goals. Thus, the 1980s witnessed rigorous mass agitations and demonstrations for the protection of political, economic and social rights of the Bodos especially under the leadership of ABSU. This period witnessed the withering away of other Bodo political organizations such as PTCA, United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) and United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front (UBNLF) and the rise of ABSU in the mainstream Bodo politics (Daimary, 2013:196).

Meanwhile, the Assam Movement led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) was underway since 1979. This movement emerged out of long-standing grievances of the Assamese-speaking community including non-Assamese-speaking communities against the continuous illegal settlement of foreigners especially from the neighbouring East Bengal into the state (Baruah, 1986:1184-1206). The continuous inflow of the foreign nationals instilled fears of marginalization and insecurity of being reduced to a minority among the Assamese community (Shekhawat, 2007:91-92). The urge to safeguard the identity and the culture of the Assamese eventually took violent forms between 1979 and 1985 with the onset of the Assam movement. During the years since 1979 upto the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, Assam witnessed violent ethnic clashes, political instability and violent protests and demonstrations. The movement found popular support as people from rural areas joined the movement and voiced their concerns against the continuous

inflow of the illegal migrants from the neighbouring country (Misra, 2013:144). Though the Assamese middle class played an active role, the movement's success could mainly be attributed to the active participation of the rural masses, who belonged to the Assamese-speaking community as well as the tribal communities. However, the Central Government gave deaf ears to the demands of the movement leaders and the people and instead the government used repressive measures through the state security forces (Shekhawat, 2007).

Eventually, after a long and continuous six years of struggle, the 'Assam Accord' was signed between the movement leaders and the Rajiv Gandhi Government on 15 August 1985 and the Assam Movement came to an end (Baruah, 1986:2; Hazarika, 2005:63). In the fresh elections held after the signing of the Accord, the Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) comprising mainly of the agitating students union members formed the government in Assam (George, 1994:880). The new Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) Government backed by AASU brought new hopes among the people of the state (Verghese, 1996:54). It is also essential to mention that besides AASU and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) formed in 1979 also supported the anti-foreign national movement but at the same time maintained that in order to address the crisis prevalent in Assam at that time, 'a war of national liberation' had to be the objective of the agitation (Verghese, 1996:57). After the signing of the accord, the first president of ULFA joined the AGP Government and was elected as the Deputy Speaker of the Assam Assembly (Misra, 2000). However, the signing of the Assam Accord failed to change the status quo in Assam. The post accord era witnessed ULFA's loosening stand against the foreign nationals from the erstwhile East Bengal, now Bangladesh, as the organization was reportedly able to get sanctuary and other assistance from Bangladesh (Verghese, 1996:54). Moreover, the government failed to successfully implement the provisions content in the accord. The signing of the accord also witnessed the formation of the United Minorities Front (UMF) by the East Bengali Hindu population and the Muslim politicians who were earlier members of the Congress (I) (Baruah, 1986:22) In the meantime, influx of foreign nationals continued. AASU continuously demanded that the electoral rolls be revised which was strongly opposed by All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) (Verghese, 1996:55). While there were strong oppositions against the provisions of the accord by the foreign nationals, the Bodos and other plains tribal communities also objected to some of the clauses content in the

accord. In general, the Assam Accord failed to fulfill the ethnic aspirations of the Assamese masses, including the Bodos.

The fallout and the resurgence of a violent and more intensified Bodo agitation of 1987 under the leadership of ABSU could be traced back to the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 and the subsequent failure of the AGP Government to address the grievances of the Bodos. The Bodos, especially the educated youths, participated actively in the Assam Movement. However, the Bodos felt that the provisions of the Assam Accord failed to address the grievances of the Bodos, which created a rift between the Bodos and the Assamese-speaking community. For instance, Upendra Nath Brahma and Premsing Brahma, participated in the Assam Movement. These leaders felt betrayed by the movement leaders after the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 (George, 1994:880; Goswami, 2014:8). Premsing Brahma was also “an active member of the Gana Sangram Parishad, an umbrella association of various organizations leading the Assam Movement. Later, he was sidelined from the political scene and further persecuted under various charges after the signing of the Assam Accord (Goswami, 2014).” This was highly resented by ABSU as well as the Bodos in general and further widened the inter-ethnic divide, which was already prevalent between the Assamese-speaking communities and the Bodos.

The Assam Accord specifically mentioned about the protection of the Assamese identity and made no mention about the grievances of the Bodos, which eventually sparked off the already growing resentment among the Bodos.⁴³ Bodos objected to two clauses contained in the Assam Accord. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord mentioned that special safeguards would be granted in order to protect the cultural identity of the ‘Assamese people’; the use of the term ‘Assamese people’ threatened the Bodo leaders as the Bodos assumed that it would “legitimize the imposition of the Assamese language and culture on the Bodos (Baruah, 1999:174-175).” The other Clause, which the Bodos objected to, was the one, which dealt with the eviction of illegal settlers from the protected public lands. In the process of evicting the illegal settlers from the protected public lands, many Bodos who had settled in those lands were also evicted which fuelled the tension between the two communities. Thus, scholars like Misra argued that one of the significant issues which motivated the Bodos to launch the statehood movement in 1987 was

⁴³ Bhupinder Singh: Singh, K.S. and Gokhale, A.M. (1992). Report of the Expert Committee on the Plains Tribes of Assam, Government of India, New Delhi.

the issue of land (Misra, 2014:241-246; Misra, 2013:179-181). In spite of the creation of several tribal belts and blocks for the tribal communities with an aim to prevent tribal land alienation, continuous immigration into the tribal lands threatened the tribal communities (Das, 1994:418). Misra further maintained that the denial of the Sixth Schedule for the Bodos which otherwise would have guaranteed the Bodos Constitutional protection to protect their land and identity could be regarded as one of the primary reasons leading to the alienation of tribal land in the post-independence years (Misra, 2014:245). The All Bodo Students Union also resented the AGP Government's "violation of the Assam Official Language (Amendment) Act, 1985 whereby Bodo was recognized as an associate official language of Assam especially in Udalguri subdivision and Kokrajhar district (Hazarika, 2005:198)." The Bodo leadership accused the newly formed AGP Government in the state for its unwillingness to address and resolve the grievances of the Bodos (George, 1994:880; Daimary, 2002).⁴⁴

Under such conditions, the Bodos under the leadership of ABSU decided to launch a massive campaign for a separate state of Bodoland in order to address the various socio-economic, political and cultural grievances of the Bodos. The post Assam Accord period witnessed radicalization among the Bodo youths and the period marked the onset of violence in the Bodo-dominated areas. The continuous discrimination of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities motivated the Bodos to launch the statehood movement in 1987.

3.8 Bodoland movement: Demand for a separate state of Bodoland

The subsequent failures of PTCA to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos and their constant engagement in the electoral politics for their vested interest as well as the ignorance of the State Government and the Central Government to the demands of the Bodos led to the resurgence of a new campaign by ABSU after the election of Mr. Upendra Nath Brahma as the president of ABSU in 1986 (Bhattacharjee, 1996:111; Saikia, 2011:66-67). The students' union arrived at a decision that it would no longer depend on any political party and that a movement for a separate state would be launched in order to address the grievances of the Bodos.⁴⁵ Under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, ABSU assumed the central role in the

⁴⁴ The former Vice-President of ABSU, Prodeep Kumar Daimary, also mentioned about how the state government used force on the agitators and created an environment of fear and insecurity in the Bodo villages.

⁴⁵ Interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, 11 June 2019, Kathalguri, Kokrajhar.

Bodo politics and the struggle for a separate Bodo homeland started with a renewed vigor. Meanwhile, prior to the onset of the movement, ABSU split into two factions, one led by Gangadhar Ramchiary and the other faction led by Upendra Nath Brahma.⁴⁶ The faction led by Upendra Nath Brahma, assumed the central role in the Bodoland Movement, which started in March 1987. The faction led by Gangadhar Ramchiary worked in tandem with PTCA and did not support the statehood movement. Upendra Nath Brahma also later came to be known as “Bodofa” meaning “Father of the Bodos” for his charismatic leadership and immense contribution and sacrifices for the development of the Bodos.⁴⁷

The State Government, on the other hand, refused to give in to the demands of ABSU, which eventually sparked off the tensions between the Bodo leaders and the State Government, dominated by the Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities. Having failed to convince the government to address their demands, ABSU launched a mass movement on 2 March, 1987 under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma for a separate state of Bodoland for the Bodos.⁴⁸ A total of about 50 thousand ABSU activists and supporters gathered at the Judges Field in Guwahati.⁴⁹ This movement led by ABSU came to be popularly known as the ‘Bodoland Movement’ and “Bodo Andolan” and the popular slogan of the movement was ‘Divide Assam 50-50’.⁵⁰ Slogans like ‘No Bodoland No Rest’ and ‘Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty’ became a common slogan and writings on the walls of government buildings and other government infrastructures during the course of the Bodoland Movement. However, prior to the formal onset of the movement, the mobilization programmes for the movement had already started since 1986. In the Annual Conference of ABSU held at Rowta Chariali in June 1986, the students’ union first declared the demand for a separate state of Bodoland and during this conference, the

⁴⁶ See The Assam Tribune, 6 May, 1988. Also reference to interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwiswmuthiary, 11 June 2019, Kathalguri, Kokrajhar.

⁴⁷ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, former senior member of ABSU conducted on 13 June 2019 at Maibongnwgr, Kokrajhar. After his death on 1 May 1990, ABSU declared that UN Brahma would henceforth be known as ‘Bodofa’ which meant the “Father of the Bodos.”

⁴⁸ See Brahma, Y. Z., Narzihary, R. R., Brahma, U. G., & Khungur, U. (2001). *Bodoland Movement: A Dream and Reality 1986-2001*. Saraighat Offset press, Guwahati. Also see The Times of India. 5 March, 1987. New Delhi. pp. 4

⁴⁹ Interview with Suddho Basumatary, former Press Spokesman of ABSU, conducted on 20 June 2019 at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon.

⁵⁰ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, 13 June 2019, Maibongnwgr, Kokrajhar.

students' organization also decided to intensify its demands through mass demonstrations and protest rallies.⁵¹

During 1985 and 1987, ABSU submitted several memorandums to the Central and the State Governments to address the demands made by the ABSU and the Bodos in general. ABSU submitted a 92-point memorandum, which was later reduced to three main political demands, to the Central Government which sought (a) the creation of a separate state of Bodoland on the north bank of the Brahmaputra for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities of Assam, (b) the creation of two autonomous districts of Neelachal and Lalung (Tiwa) on the south bank which would spread from Sankosh to Sadiya and (c) the inclusion of Boro-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong district in the sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution (Verghese, 1996:62; George, 1994:4).⁵² However, the indifferent attitude of the Government to these demands motivated the ABSU and its supporters to launch a movement for a separate state of Bodoland on 2 March 1987.

ABSU also formed the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) in 1988 and it was responsible for conducting the activities of the movement and to mobilize the Bodos irrespective of age and profession (Daimary, 2002).⁵³ The students' union also formed the All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF) during the Annual Conference of ABSU which was

⁵¹ As narrated by Prodeep Kumar Daimary, 21 January 2019. In the ABSU Conference held in June 1986 at Rowta Chariali, Upendra Nath Brahma was elected as the President of the ABSU and under his leadership the ABSU started mobilizing the Bodos. He argued that prior to the ABSU movement, the Bodos under the banner of many organizations such as the Tribal League, Tribal Sangha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, PTCA, UTNLF and UBNLF had approached the government to resolve the problems of the Bodos. However, the government was non-committal and ignored the demands of the Bodos. This is why the ABSU decided that until and unless the Bodos fought rigorously with a do-or-die attitude, the government will continue to ignore the grievances and the demands of the Bodos.

⁵² *Why Separate State*. (1987). ABSU Publication, Kokrajhar, pp. 22-29. Also see *The Sentinel*, 28 December, 1988.

⁵³ The main reason behind forming the BPAC was also mentioned during interaction with Prodeep Kumar Daimary, who was also the former Deputy Chief of the BAC on 21 January 2019. He mentioned that the BPAC was a wing of the ABSU. Since the ABSU was a student organization, the students' union felt it problematic to involve the larger Bodo population in the Bodoland movement. And also besides the students, the other section of the Bodos felt the same. Hence, in order to involve the non-student Bodo youths, adults, old people, service holders, businessmen etc. in the movement, ABSU formed the BPAC so that all section of the Bodos could engage themselves in the Bodoland movement under the banner of ABSU.

held at Rowta Chariali on 14 July 1986.⁵⁴ Pramila Rani Brahma and Kamali Basumatary became the President and General Secretary of the organization respectively.⁵⁵ AATWWF was an independent organization and was not a wing of ABSU. AATWWF was formed in order to mobilize the Bodo women under one forum for the statehood movement, which was to be launched in March 1987. AATWWF was formed in order to mobilize the Bodo women and to create awareness and build up the leadership skill among the women for the movement. AATWWF comprised of members from other plains tribal communities but the majority were Bodos. Till 1989, AATWWF had rendered only moral support to the statehood movement and had stayed away from the movement. However in 1989, in its Convention, which was held in Dudhnoi, the organization passed a resolution to actively participate in the statehood movement led by ABSU.⁵⁶ Hereafter, most of the non-Bodo tribal women associated with AATWWF distanced itself from the organization. Eventually in 1993, AATWWF was renamed as All Bodo Women Welfare Federation (ABWWF).

During the course of the Bodoland Movement, Bodo women played a significant role since the beginning of the movement under the banner of All Assam Tribal Women Welfare Federation (AATWWF).⁵⁷ They protested and fought for justice against the police atrocities such as in the case of the Bhumka rape incident.⁵⁸ The Deputy Commissioner of Kokrajhar and the police refused to register any case after the incident. However, due to the protests of AATWWF and other Bodo organizations, the Gauhati High Court took up the case and directed the state

⁵⁴ The interviews conducted on 21 January 2019 with the former Vice-President of the ABSU and former Deputy Chief of the BAC revealed that the AATWWF held several meetings in remote Bodo villages with the help of the ABSU and brought awareness among the women as well as the Bodos in general about the Bodoland movement which was soon to be launched in 1987. The organization lacked financial resources, manpower and it was also difficult for the women to visit the remote Bodo villages and mobilize the people especially the Bodo women. The AATWWF also during the course of the movement protested against the injustice done by the Assam police personnel towards the Bodo women and the ABSU activists.

⁵⁵ Interview with Malati Rani Narzary, former member of AATWWF/All Bodo Women Welfare Federation and present member of women wing of Bodoland Peoples Front conducted in Kokrajhar on 14 June 2019.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Daimary, P.K. (2002). *Pilgrimage to Bodoland*. The National Voice Publications. Udalguri, Darrang. p. 42

⁵⁸ See The Sentinel, 27 June, 1988.

government to hand over the investigation to the CBI.⁵⁹ Besides AATWWF, ABSU also played a major role in seeking justice in the Bhumka incident, which took place in January 1988. AATWWF was also involved in filing several petitions against the Sonaigaon, Gohpur, Sengahali, Bagmara rape cases in the Gauhati High Court Daimary (2002). Bodo women were actively involved during the mobilization stages and also defended the men from police excesses, arrest and harassment.

The students' union also formed a separate organization in order to engage the Bodo employees in the Bodoland Movement. Accordingly, ABSU formed the All Bodos Employees Federation (ABEF) so that the service holders could convey their support through ABEF. ABEF also allowed the Bodo employees to voice their concerns whenever they were subjected to any injustice in their workplace or any issues concerned with their jobs.⁶⁰ The students' union further formed the Volunteer Force, which was headed by Dr. Phukan Boro who hailed from Guwahati.⁶¹ The task of the Volunteer Force was to instill discipline, mobilize the Bodos and to continue the statehood movement in the desired direction.⁶² ABSU also received a major boost when Premising Brahma decided to join the Bodoland movement with his supporters. Premising Brahma had formed a militant organization called the Bodo Militant Force (BMF).⁶³ However in the 1988 Bashbari conference of ABSU, the students' union leadership appealed to the BMF to dissolve the organization and join ABSU in the statehood movement. Eventually, BMF was dissolved and the members of the BMF were incorporated into the Volunteer Force. Premising Brahma became one of the influential leaders of the Bodoland Movement and also went on to become the Deputy Chief and Chief of BAC after the signing of the BAC accord in 1993.

Eventually, ABSU organized a peace rally at Judges Field in Guwahati on June 12, 1987 in support of their demand for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland (Daimary, 2002; Saikia, 2011:67; Bhattacharjee, 1996:113). Through this gathering, ABSU reiterated their demands as well as it vowed to fight for equal political, social and economic rights for the

⁵⁹ Prodeep Kumar Daimary, mentioned about it during the interviews conducted on 21 January 2019.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Interview with Urkhao Gwra Brahma, former senior member of ABSU and former Member of Parliament conducted on 12 June 2019 at Central ABSU Office, Kokrajhar.

⁶³ Interview with Prodeep Kumar Daimary, 21 January 2019.

Bodos. The huge gathering of supporters gave a boost to the morale of ABSU who demanded that Assam be divided into two halves. ABSU and its supporters shouted divide Assam 50-50, which eventually became the popular slogan of the movement (Daimary, 2002; Saikia, 2011:67).⁶⁴ However, in spite of its peaceful nature, Sujit Narzary, a class 10 student of Kokrajhar Government Higher Secondary School, lost his life during a tussle which occurred between the movement supporters and some people belonging to the Assamese community while returning after the peace rally held at Judges Field in Guwahati on 12 June 1987 (Daimary, 2002; Saikia, 2011:67; Bhattacharjee, 1996:113; Hazarika, 2005:211). Since then, Sujit Narzary is regarded as the first Bodo martyr who sacrificed his life for the cause of Bodoland and for the Bodos in general. During the tussle, many ABSU supporters who were returning after the rally were also attacked near Barama (Daimary, 2002; Bhattacharjee, 1996:113; Saikia, 2011:67).⁶⁵ This incident also witnessed the arrest of many ABSU supporters by the Patacharkuchi police. ABSU organized protest rallies against the State Government for such anti-tribal policies. However, the State as well as the Central Government never showed any interests or urged to address the demands of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities (Bhattacharjee, 1996:113-114).

Initially, the Bodoland Movement was relatively peaceful with frequent submission of memoranda and peaceful demonstrations/ rallies/ hunger strikes.⁶⁶ In the initial stage, the movement started in two districts, viz. Kokrajhar and erstwhile Darrang (mostly Udalguri district in the present day). However, gradually, the Bodoland Movement gained momentum in the whole of Kamrup district, Goalpara, Dhubri, Nalbari, Barpeta, Sonitpur, Karbi Anglong, Lakhimpur, Morigaon districts and parts of Nagaon district.⁶⁷ The movement also spread to parts of West Bengal (Alipurduar, Koch Bihar, and Jalpaiguri etc.), parts of Nagaland (bordering Assam-Nagaland), Golaghat district, Tinsukia district, Arunachal Pradesh, Silchar and Haflong in Barak Valley.

⁶⁴ See The Statesman, 5 July 1988.

⁶⁵ Interview with Prodeep Kumar Daimary on 21 January 2019 in Udalguri.

⁶⁶ See The Assam Tribune, 1 July, 1987.

⁶⁷ From interviews conducted with the former Vice-President of ABSU, Prodeep Kumar Daimary on 21 January 2019.

The movement gradually turned violent when the AGP Government in the state refused to give in to the demands of ABSU for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland (Bhattacharjee, 1996:111-134; Saikia, 2011:67-70). For instance, during the 72-hour bandh called by ABSU from 5 A.M on 27 April, 1988, ABSU activists attacked government officials, disrupted the movement of vehicles, offices and markets were shut down.⁶⁸ The movement led by ABSU was gradually marked by prolonged periods of bandhs, blockades and disruption of rail services.⁶⁹ This period of the movement also witnessed bomb explosions, destruction of public properties and immense loss of lives (George, 1994:883). The movement also witnessed extortion from and harassment of non-tribals, non-Bodo school teachers, clerks, foresters posted in tribal areas, tea plantation managers and workers and at the same time, the Bodo agitators also targeted those Bodos who disagreed with the principles of ABSU, especially the PTCA members (Saikia, 2011:68; George, 1994:883). For instance, there were reports that ABSU issued quit-notices to the non-Bodo population residing in the Bodo dominated areas in order to secure the region as the Bodo-majority area.⁷⁰ The quit notices were attempts made by the Bodos “to create a more or less homogenous Bodo areas where the Bodos were a minority (Misra, 2014:251).” The Bodo region was gradually engulfed in violence and the State Government used repressive tactics to suppress the movement. However, there were also incidents of Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities living in the violence-affected region burning their own houses/destruction of properties in order to put the blame on the Bodos and to fuel violence between the Bodos and the Assamese-speaking communities.⁷¹ Young Bodo boys/men could not stay in the villages and had to hide in the forested areas as they became easy targets of the state security forces (Daimary, 2002). During the raids conducted by the state police force, huge properties of the Bodo villagers were destroyed, Bodo youths were arrested and were killed in fake encounters.⁷²

⁶⁸ See The Assam Tribune, 6 May, 1988

⁶⁹ See The Assam Tribune, 1 May, 1988. Also see, The Assam Tribune, 21 May, 1988

⁷⁰ See The Assam Tribune, 6 May, 1988.

⁷¹ Interview with Malati Rani Narzary, former member of AATWWF/All Bodo Women Welfare Federation and present member of women wing of Bodoland Peoples Front conducted in Kokrajhar, 14 June 2019.

⁷² The Statesman, 18 February, 1989.

Many Assamese-speaking government employees lost their lives and many were forced to leave the Bodo-dominated areas during the course of the Bodoland Movement (Goswami, 2014:8-9; Saikia, 2011:68; Bhattacharjee, 1996:111-134). There were also incidents of killings of the tea-garden workers by the Bodo extremists in many places and vice versa. This period also witnessed large-scale displacement due to the violence between the Bodos and the non-Bodos (Saikia, 2011:68). The movement also witnessed violence and phases of negotiations between the movement leaders and the State and Central Governments. ABSU continuously engaged in violence to pressurize the government to address their demands of a creation of separate state for the Bodos.

The State Government however, tried to downplay the Bodo crisis through repressive tactics. Instead of attempting to resolve the Bodo crisis, the AGP Government dealt with the Bodo agitators through repressive tactics by deploying paramilitary forces and army in the violence-hit Bodo areas in order to crush the agitation (Daimary, 2002; Saikia, 2011:68; Goswami, 2014:9). The AGP Government was very hostile towards the Bodo agitators. The State Government, instead of trying to resolve the core issues and the grievances of the Bodos, continued to treat the situation as a law and order problem. Thus, ABSU issued warnings to the State Government against the police atrocities and violence inflicted on its activists and supporters.⁷³ In order to contain the agitation, the State Government deployed army and the paramilitary forces in the violence-hit Bodo dominated areas. The State Government also enforced anti-terrorist legislations in the Bodo areas towards the end of the 1980s (Saikia, 2011:68). For instance, legislations like the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 (TADA), Assam Disturbed Areas Act and Prohibitory orders were also enforced in 1989. The State Government arrested and imprisoned suspected agitators in order to curb and suppress the Bodo agitation and to maintain the law and order in the region without any attempts at resolving the core issues of the agitation.⁷⁴ Combing operations and raids in Bodo villages were accompanied by the arrests and detention of many ABSU activists under the Terrorists and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 (TADA). On the other hand, the ABSU activists and its supporters indulge in various violent activities during the course of the movement. There

⁷³ See The Assam Tribune, 14 May, 1988.

⁷⁴ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, 13 June 2019, Maibongnwgwr, Kokrajhar

were also reports of ABSU activists' involvement of making bombs and other explosives for the agitation. For instance, many ABSU activists and sympathizers were caught red handed with arms and explosives.⁷⁵ In the same year, many incidents of violence involving use of arms and explosives by the Bodo agitators have been reported.⁷⁶

As the movement became intense, the state security forces resorted to unwarranted violence in order to curb the violence. As a response to violence against civilians, ABSU demanded judicial interventions and called for bandhs in 1988. AATWWF also condemned the police excesses on the Bodos and criticized the State Government for fuelling the tensions further.⁷⁷ There were also reports of unprovoked firing by the police on 12 May, 1988 which led to the death of two Bodo women, viz., Helena Basumatary and Gaide Basumatary from Mothombil and Kusumbil villages of Saraibil police outpost areas respectively.⁷⁸ This incident also led to serious injuries to at least three women, viz., Leoashri Basumatary, Dabari Basumatary and Koulon Narzary. In spite of all the violence, the movement leaders and the supporters became more committed towards the movement. The movement supporters retaliated to the violence inflicted on the Bodos by targeting those who opposed the statehood movement and the state security forces. The agitators used hand-made arms and ammunitions and weapons snatched from the security forces.⁷⁹ During the course of the movement, illegal local gun factories came up reportedly set up by ABSU supporters, which were used to supply arms to the movement supporters.⁸⁰

Besides the above atrocities committed by the state police personnel on ABSU activists and supporters during operations and raids, they also committed grave atrocities against the Bodo women. In this regard, AATWWF had submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister on 3 February 1988 against the brutalities towards women including gang rape of Bodo women by the state police forces (Bhattacharjee, 1996). There are instances of gang rape of women by the

⁷⁵ See The Assam Tribune, 31 May, 1988.

⁷⁶ See The Assam Tribune, 31 May, 1988.

⁷⁷ See The Assam Tribune, 14 May, 1988.

⁷⁸ See The Assam Tribune, 24 May, 1988

⁷⁹ Interview with Urkhao Gwra Brahma, 12 June 2019, Central ABSU Office, Kokrajhar.

⁸⁰ See The Assam Tribune, 16 June, 1988

state police personnel in Bodo villages, which further fuelled the tension, and this period also witnessed the onset of inter-ethnic tensions (Bhattacharjee, 1996:116; Saikia, 2011:69).

In protest against the police atrocities committed against ABSU activists and the Bodos in general, ABSU called for a 100-hour Rail-cum-Rasta Roko protest from June 14 to June 18, 1988.⁸¹ ABSU asked its supporters to maintain peace during the bandh and at the same time urged the Government and District Administrations to allow the protest to be peaceful and not to use any repressive measures. The leaders of the Bodo movement also made it clear that it would come to the negotiation table only in the presence of the Chief Minister of the state. Meanwhile, PTCA led by its President Samar Brahma Choudhury accused ABSU of indulging in criminal activities in the name of a democratic and peaceful movement.⁸² He also denounced the activities of ABSU and its supporters in creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in the region. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, then Chief Minister of Assam, also held a discussion with ABSU delegation led by its President, Upendra Nath Brahma, during his first visit to Kokrajhar.⁸³ The Chief Minister expressed his satisfaction with the results of the preliminary talks held with the ABSU delegation. He, however, maintained that clear message has been sent to the delegation that there would be no further bifurcation/division of the state of Assam.

ABSU again called for a 12-hour tribal area bandh on 1 July, 1988 to pressurize the demand for a separate state for the Bodos.⁸⁴ The organization also announced a five-day bandh from August 5 in order to intensify its agitation for a separate state of Bodoland. At the same time, ABSU also protested against the imposition of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987. Eventually, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, then Assam Chief Minister, invited the movement leaders for talks on June 27, 1988. Subsequently, the first official discussion held between the Assam Government and the Bodo agitators took place on 27 June 1988 in the State Guest House No.1 at Jawaharnagar.⁸⁵ The discussions between the two groups lasted for almost three hours; however the Chief Minister attended the meeting only for a brief period of about ten minutes. Though the talks were inconclusive, Upendra Nath Brahma, the

⁸¹ See The Assam Tribune, 10 June, 1988.

⁸² See The Assam Tribune, 11 June, 1988.

⁸³ See The Assam Tribune, 22 June, 1988.

⁸⁴ See The Assam Tribune, 23 June, 1988.

⁸⁵ See The Assam Tribune, 28 June, 1988.

ABSU President expressed satisfaction at the progress of the talks. During the talks, the ABSU delegation reiterated their demands content in the 92-point memorandum submitted nearly two years back. However, the government refused to discuss on the demands made by the ABSU in the memorandum. During the discussions, ABSU also demanded the adoption of Bodo as the associate official language in Kokrajhar district.⁸⁶

ABSU additionally demanded that Bodo language be extended to all parts of the state, a central university should be set up in Kokrajhar district. There was no conclusive solutions to these demands made by ABSU.⁸⁷ During the discussions, the Chief Minister once again strongly maintained that there would be no further division of the state and out rightly rejected ABSU's demand for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland.⁸⁸ The Government however agreed to include the Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and also assured that the Government will not apply the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 against the ABSU activists and its sympathizers. However, the Chief Minister maintained that the aforementioned Act shall continue to be in force and that it would not be withdrawn immediately from Kokrajhar district. Besides these, issues related to tribal belts and blocks, appointment of Bodo language teachers in tribal areas, compilation of Bodo textbooks and many others were taken up during the discussions between the Bodo leaders and the Assam State Government.⁸⁹ However, the Bodo delegation accused the government of its non-commitment to resolve these issues concerned with the Bodos. In the light of these developments, ABSU resolved to continue the agitation until the demands of the Bodos were addressed. Accordingly, the Students Union intensified the movement through violent activities in order to pressurize the government to give in to the demands of the Bodos.

⁸⁶ See The Assam Tribune, 28 June, 1988.

⁸⁷ See The Assam Tribune, 28 June, 1988

⁸⁸ See The Assam Tribune, 29 June, 1988.

⁸⁹ See The Assam Tribune, 29 June, 1988.

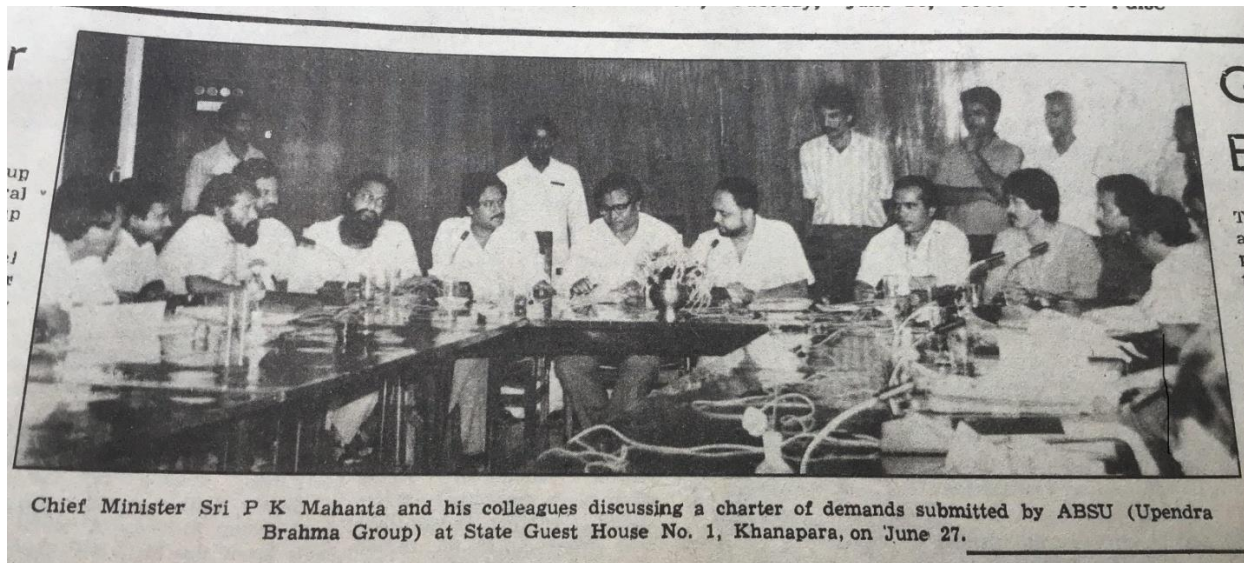


Photo 3.1: The first round of the negotiations between the Bodo agitators and the Assam Government which was held on 27 June 1988.

Source: The Assam Tribune, June 28, 1988

Eventually, the State Government invited ABSU for an informal talk on 11 January 1989, which, however, failed to produce any positive outcome between the two sides (Daimary, 2002; Bhattacharjee, 1996:124). The students' union accused the State Government for the failure and the unwillingness on their part to invite the Bodo leaderships for a formal negotiation between the two groups. The ABSU leadership also accused the State Government for the lack of commitment to resolve the Bodo issue. ABSU eventually intensified their movement for the demand of a separate state for the Bodos and declared a 120-hour Assam Bandh from 16 February 1989 and 175-hour Assam bandh from 2 March 1989 respectively in order to put more pressure on the State as well as on the Central Governments (Bhattacharjee, 1996:124). The year 1989 witnessed the significant rise of violence in Kokrajhar district, which was dealt by the State Government through repressive measures by the state security forces as well as the army in order to maintain the law and order in the region (Bhattacharjee, 1996:124).

ABSU was again invited for negotiations by the State Home Minister, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan on 28 February 1989 and urged the Bodo agitators to call off the 175-hour Assam bandh called from 2 March in order to create a suitable environment for the negotiations to take place (Bhattacharjee, 1996:125). The State Government as well as the Central Government accused the

ABSU activists for creating an insecure environment and instability in the region. ABSU, on the other hand, threatened to intensify its movement and the movement leaders further argued that it would also seek external support if necessary for their demands to be fulfilled. The state Government urged the ABSU leadership to stop targeting the civilians, PTCA members and its supporters, AGP supporters and other public offices and also to refrain from engagement in any violent activities, which affected the peace, and harmony in the region (Bhattacharjee, 1996:125).⁹⁰ The engagement of ABSU activists in such disruptive and violent activities also forced the State Government to deploy more armed forces in Bodo-dominated areas. However, ABSU rejected the Government's offer for talks on 28 February 1989 and warned the State Government that unless the grievances of the Bodos are addressed, ABSU and the supporters of the Bodoland Movement would engage in more violence through various extremist campaigns. The Students Union further rejected the State Government's invitation for talks on 17 April 1989 and demanded that any such talks between the two groups should be held in the presence of a representative from the Central Government (Bhattacharjee, 1996:128). In response to the hard stand of the ABSU-BPAC leadership, the State Home Minister stated that any future talks between the students union and the State Government would be held without any pre-conditions.

This phase of the movement also witnessed killing, loot, extortions and arson by alleged Bodo militants in Nalbari district.⁹¹ The 340-hour bandh called by ABSU and its supporters during the end of June 1989 was marked by bomb blast on the eight-day of the bandh in Kokrajhar district where two persons including a policeman were killed.⁹² This phase of the Bodo movement, i.e., the year 1989, was the most violent phase of the agitation where many lost their lives, and displacement of people, destruction of properties as well as bandhs became a day-to-day instrument for the Bodo agitators to pressurize the State as well as the Central Governments.⁹³ Besides the Kokrajhar district, violence continued in Nalbari, Barpeta, Dhubri districts and the Udalguri sub-division in the then Darrang district as the 340-hour Assam bandh affected the life and the normal functioning of the daily activities in the Bodo dominated

⁹⁰ Also see The Assam Tribune, 4 July, 1989

⁹¹ See The Assam Tribune, 4 July, 1989. Also see The Assam Tribune 6 July, 1989.

⁹² See The Assam Tribune, 5 July, 1989.

⁹³ See The Assam Tribune, 23 July 1989. There were reports that in six months, a total of 242 people were killed due to Bodo agitation. Also see The Assam Tribune, 2 August 1989.

regions.⁹⁴ During this 340-hour Assam bandh called by ABSU in June 1989, a total of 37 people including 14 policemen were killed and many others suffered severe injuries.⁹⁵ There were also reports that during this bandh declared by the students' union led by Upendra Nath Brahma, there were 211 arson cases, 18 attacks on the police forces and 14 bomb explosions.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, the students' union led by Upendra Nath Brahma called for the evacuation of the non-tribals from the tribal areas of the state from August 15, 1989 in order safeguard the Bodo identity in the proposed Bodoland.⁹⁷ However, Samar Brahma Choudhury and Charan Narzary, the President and the General Secretary of PTCA condemned this threat issued by ABSU and argued that the students' union was trying to communalize the issue by targeting the non-tribals from the tribal areas. The PTCA leaders argued that ABSU and its supporters were communalizing the situation as they were gradually losing out in garnering the support of the people, both Bodos as well as the non-Bodos.

In the meantime, the adoption of repressive measures and policies by the State Government and the involvement of ABSU in more violent activities made negotiations between the Bodo agitators and the government almost impossible. Repressive policies of the State Government also indicated that no negotiations could take place on the issue of Bodoland and at one point it seemed that the doors to negotiations had almost been closed (Saikia, 2011:71). Thus, the violent activities of the Bodo activists were dealt with repressive measures and counter-insurgent operations continued till the beginning of the 1990s. In order to curb out the violence, which was most prevalent in Kokrajhar, the Assam Government enforced the Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955 on 6 July 1989.⁹⁸ According to this law, a police officer could shoot any person who was found to be violating the law. ABSU leadership opposed the enforcement of such a draconian law and called for a 36-hour bandh on 13 July 1989. This period witnessed the hard stand taken by the State Government and the agitators as both sides set out the pre-conditions under which the talks between the movement leaders and the government could be held.

⁹⁴ See The Assam Tribune, 5 July 1989.

⁹⁵ See The Assam Tribune 11 July 1989.

⁹⁶ See The Assam Tribune 11 July 1989.

⁹⁷ See The Assam Tribune 4 July, 1989.

⁹⁸ See The Assam Tribune 7 July, 1989

Meanwhile, seven literary bodies of the state, viz., Assam Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Mishing Sahitya Sabha, Deuri Sahitya Sabha, Tiwa Sahitya Sabha, Nikhil Rabha Sahitya Sabha and Karbi Sahitya Sabha, appealed and urged the ABSU led by Upendra Nath Brahma to suspend the agitation and bring about peace and normalcy in the region.⁹⁹ The state unit of the CPI also urged the students' union to call off the agitation and join the negotiation process. The party also urged the Central Government to adopt positive attitude towards the demands of the Bodos and to find a solution to their grievances so that peace and harmony could prevail in the region. The CPI (ML) also called for a negotiated settlement of the Bodo agitation, which would ensure safeguard of ethnic rights and interests of all the ethnic groups of the state.¹⁰⁰ The party further accused the State and the Central Governments for their unwillingness to settle the Bodo problem. The Congress (I) Government had also requested then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to find a solution to the Bodo agitation.¹⁰¹

Eventually, the Central Government deputed a Central Minister to participate in the negotiation process with the Bodo leaders. Accordingly, in the first week of July 1989, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, then Chief Minister of Assam, sent out an invitation to the ABSU leadership to hold discussions without any preconditions.¹⁰² The discussion was scheduled to be held on 21 July 1989.¹⁰³ However, the Bodo leaders did not respond to the invitations sent by the Assam Government.¹⁰⁴ Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, then Chief Minister of Assam, argued that ABSU and its supporters are welcome for discussions whenever they are ready. However the Bodo leaders maintained that they would participate in the negotiation process only if the proposed tripartite talks are held outside Assam, preferably in Shillong or Calcutta.¹⁰⁵ The Bodo agitators also urged the Prime Minister to invite the ABSU leadership for talks in order to resolve the Bodo issue. At the same time, the students' union condemned the AGP government for invoking the

⁹⁹ See The Assam Tribune 9 July 1989.

¹⁰⁰ See The Assam Tribune 17 July 1989.

¹⁰¹ See The Assam Tribune 13 July 1989.

¹⁰² See The Assam Tribune 13 July 1989.

¹⁰³ See The Assam Tribune 13 July 1989.

¹⁰⁴ See The Assam Tribune 22 July 1989.

¹⁰⁵ See The Assam Tribune 22 July 1989. Also see The Times of India, 12 July 1989.

Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955 and Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 and demanded its immediate withdrawal from Kokrajhar district.¹⁰⁶

The worsening situation in the Bodo dominated areas, especially in Kokrajhar, affected the normal life in the state. In order to maintain the law and order and to curb out the violence arising due to the Bodo agitation and other extremist elements, once again the Assam Government invoked the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 for a period of three months in Kokrajhar district on July 15 1989.¹⁰⁷ Meanwhile, on 20 July 1989, Union Home Minister, Buta Singh sent out a strong message to the Bodo agitators that there would be no further division of Assam.¹⁰⁸ In response to this message sent out by the Union Government, ABSU and the BPAC called for a 360-hour Assam bandh from July 24 in demand for the Central Government's immediate intervention to resolve the Bodo issue.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, the students' union also called for a 1001-hour Assam bandh from August 15, 1989 in demands for a permanent settlement to the demands of the Bodos.¹¹⁰ Frequent clashes occurred during the 360-hour bandh between the ABSU supporters and the PTCA supporters resulting in deaths, injuries and loss of properties etc. In one such clash between the two groups in Barpeta district, the police had to resort to firing, which resulted in the death of six alleged ABSU supporters on 29 July 1989.¹¹¹ In another clash between the PTCA and the ABSU supporters near Jalah in Barpeta district, many houses of the PTCA supporters were burnt down and also the ABSU supporters attacked the police force. The subsequent police firing resulted in the death of three ABSU supporters. ABSU supporters, on the other hand, retaliated by inflicting violence on the other non-Bodo population residing in the Bodo dominated areas. Violence by the extremist factions of the Bodo agitators continued till the end of the 1989 putting more pressure on the State as well as the Central Governments to maintain peace in the region.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ See The Assam Tribune 22 July 1989.

¹⁰⁷ See The Assam Tribune 16 July 1989.

¹⁰⁸ See The Assam Tribune 21 July 1989.

¹⁰⁹ See The Assam Tribune 25 July 1989.

¹¹⁰ See The Assam Tribune 26 July 1989.

¹¹¹ See The Assam Tribune 30 July 1989.

¹¹² See The Assam Tribune 4 August 1989. Also see The Assam Tribune 5 August 1989.

Meanwhile, UTNLF demanded Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's resignation for his reported statement at Delhi that 'Assam is reserved for Assamese. We do not want the Bodos, the Chakmas and the Bengali Babus.'¹¹³ In the meantime, the Central Government appointed Union Minister of State for Welfare, Dr. Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, as its representative for the tripartite talks to be held with the Assam Government and the Bodo agitators.¹¹⁴ The Central Government maintained that the responsibility of resolving the Bodo problem lie with the State Government as the Central Government and the Bodo leaders were ready to hold talks in order to find efficient solution to the demands of the Bodos; the Central Government hinted at the controversy regarding the talks being held outside Assam to which the State Government had opposed to.¹¹⁵ The State Chief Minister also opposed the Central Government's idea of setting up a Development Council in order to resolve the Bodo issue.¹¹⁶ He argued that the Central Government cannot impose any unilateral agreement with the ABSU leaders without consulting the State Government.¹¹⁷ The Chief Minister further maintained that the State Government is yet to be intimidated about the deputation of Dr. Rajendra Kumari Bajpai as the representative of the Central Government for the tripartite talks to be held with the Bodo agitators. He also argued that since the Central Government had already mentioned that there would be no further division of Assam, the talks between the State Government and ABSU could be held within the state in order to find out alternative solutions to the other demands of the Bodos.¹¹⁸ However, there was also huge pressure on the State Government to resolve the Bodo issue as the agitation had affected the socio-economic as well as the normal functioning of life in the region. But a solution to the Bodo problem at that moment seemed far from sight as the State Government as well as the agitators took hard stands making negotiations less probability.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ See The Assam Tribune 26 July 1989.

¹¹⁴ See The Assam Tribune 28 July 1989.

¹¹⁵ See The Assam Tribune 28 July 1989.

¹¹⁶ See The Assam Tribune 5 August 1989.

¹¹⁷ See The Assam Tribune 5 August 1989.

¹¹⁸ See The Assam Tribune 5 August 1989.

¹¹⁹ See The Assam Tribune 5 August 1989. The Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva-Chatra Parishad had urged the central as well as the state governments and the Bodo agitators not to be adamant on the pre-conditions of the talks which might worsen the situation in the state.

The late 1980s also witnessed violent ethnic clashes between the Bodos and the non-Bodos, which further deteriorated the law and order situation in the Bodo dominated regions. For instance, a violent intergroup clash occurred in the first week of August in Gohpur, which resulted in the death of almost 100 people, which included both Bodos as well as the non-Bodos.¹²⁰ In response to the incident, on 13 August 1989, ABSU and the BPAC threatened to launch a “do-or-die” agitation if the demand for a separate state of Bodoland was not granted to the Bodos.¹²¹ Many political parties condemned the Gohpur incident and at the same time urged the State Government and the Bodo leaders to resolve the issue through negotiations. The Speaker of the Assam Assembly also mentioned that the law enforcement bodies in the state have lost their grip over the situations, which emerged from the Bodo agitation.¹²² The speaker specifically mentioned that the mishandling of the Bodo issue had threatened the very existence of the composite society of Assam; Sri Tarun Gogoi, then President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (I) also argued that the State Government have failed miserably in maintaining the law and order in those areas.¹²³

Meanwhile, on 15 August 1989, Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta appealed to the ABSU-BPAC and its supporters to give up the violence and to create a favorable atmosphere to resolve the Bodo problem through negotiations.¹²⁴ He urged the Bodo agitators to come forward and participate in the negotiation process to resolve the issues under the framework of the Indian Constitution. But the violence continued and normal life in the Bodo dominated regions remained paralyzed. Incidents of group clashes were reported again on the night of 15 August 1989 between the Bodos and the non-Bodos at Kapurpura village in Udalguri.¹²⁵ Large scale ethnic clashes continued during the month of August between the Bodos and the non-Bodos resulting in huge displacement of people belonging to both the parties.

Meanwhile, the 1001-hour bandh called by ABSU, which started from 15 August 1989, was called off from 21 August 1989 by the Students Union and its supporters as the student

¹²⁰ See The Assam Tribune 12 August 1989.

¹²¹ See The Assam Tribune 14 August 1989.

¹²² See The Assam Tribune 14 August 1989.

¹²³ See The Assam Tribune 14 August 1989.

¹²⁴ See The Assam Tribune 17 August 1989.

¹²⁵ See The Assam Tribune 17 August 1989.

agitators had decided to participate in the proposed tripartite talks to be held in New Delhi on 28 August 1989 (Daimary, 2002).¹²⁶ The students' union also demanded that police atrocities, killings and arrests should be stopped before the onset of the discussions in New Delhi. However, violence in the Bodo regions did not die down soon as there were instances of violence in some parts of the Bodo regions.¹²⁷ The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) appealed to the Bodo agitators to stop the violent activities and at the same time blamed the Central Government and the Congress (I) Government for the ethnic clashes that occurred in Gohpur, Khoirabari and other areas.¹²⁸

The other breakaway faction of the students' union, ABSU (Ramchiary) group, condemned the violent clashes that took place in Gohpur, Mangaldai and other areas between the Bodos and the non-Bodos in the first few days of August 1989.¹²⁹ Meanwhile, the Assam Government accused the RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) for helping the Bodo agitators with various logistic supports to continue the agitation.¹³⁰ The State Government argued that the main objective of the RAW in helping the Bodo agitation was to topple down the AGP Government in the state and to create chaos and confusion in the region. Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, thus, urged the Prime Minister to stop RAW from providing any support to the Bodo agitators so that the Bodo agitation could be resolve very soon peacefully.

¹²⁶ See The Assam Tribune 18 August 1989.

¹²⁷ See The Assam Tribune 19 August 1989. The supports of the Bodoland movement killed 1 in Dekhijuli in Sonitpur district and another in Kokrajhar district respectively.

¹²⁸ See The Assam Tribune 20 August 1989. Also see The Assam Tribune 12 August, 17 August and 18 August 1989.

¹²⁹ See The Assam Tribune 20 August 1989.

¹³⁰ See The Assam Tribune 19 August 1989.



Photo 3.2: One of the houses, which was burnt during the clashes between the Bodos and the non-Bodos in Gohpur.

Source: The Assam Tribune, 18 August 1989.

Accordingly, after its decision to participate in the tripartite talks to be held in New Delhi on 28 August 1989, ABSU selected 40-member delegation headed by its President Upendra Nath Brahma.¹³¹ The State Government delegation included Chief Minister, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and three other ministers viz. Bhriгу Kumar Phukan, Bharat Narah and S N Medhi. The 40-member delegates of the ABSU were strictly instructed not to accept any hospitality from the AGP Government in protests against the genocide on the Bodos in Gohpur in Assam. At the same time, various plains tribal organizations demanded that solutions to the Bodo problem would not be possible without consulting the other representatives of the tribal groups.¹³² The State Government appealed to the Bodo agitators to eschew violence in the region and to create a viable atmosphere for the proposed tripartite talks to be held on 28 August.

The Chief Minister also held a meeting with all the political parties of the state regarding the proposed tripartite meeting to be held with the ABSU and the Central Government in New Delhi on 28 August 1989. The parties called on both the State Government and the Bodo agitators to find out a solution to the Bodo problem and restore peace and harmony in the

¹³¹ See The Assam Tribune 20 August 1989.

¹³² See The Assam Tribune 25 August 1989.

region.¹³³ However, prior to the start of the talks, the ABSU delegation had made it very clear that they would not change their demand and that they would not accept anything less than a separate state of Bodoland for the Bodos, inspite of the Centre's repeated declaration that there would be no further division of the state of Assam.¹³⁴



Photo 3.3: Discussion between all the political parties of the state in regard to the proposed tripartite talks to be held with the Bodo leaders on 28 August 1989.

Source: The Assam Tribune 27 August 1989.

¹³³ See The Assam Tribune 27 August 1989.

¹³⁴ See The Assam Tribune 28 August 1989.



Photo 3.4: Tripartite discussions between the State, Central Government and UN Brahma, the President of All Bodo Students Union.

Source: The Assam Tribune 29 August 1989

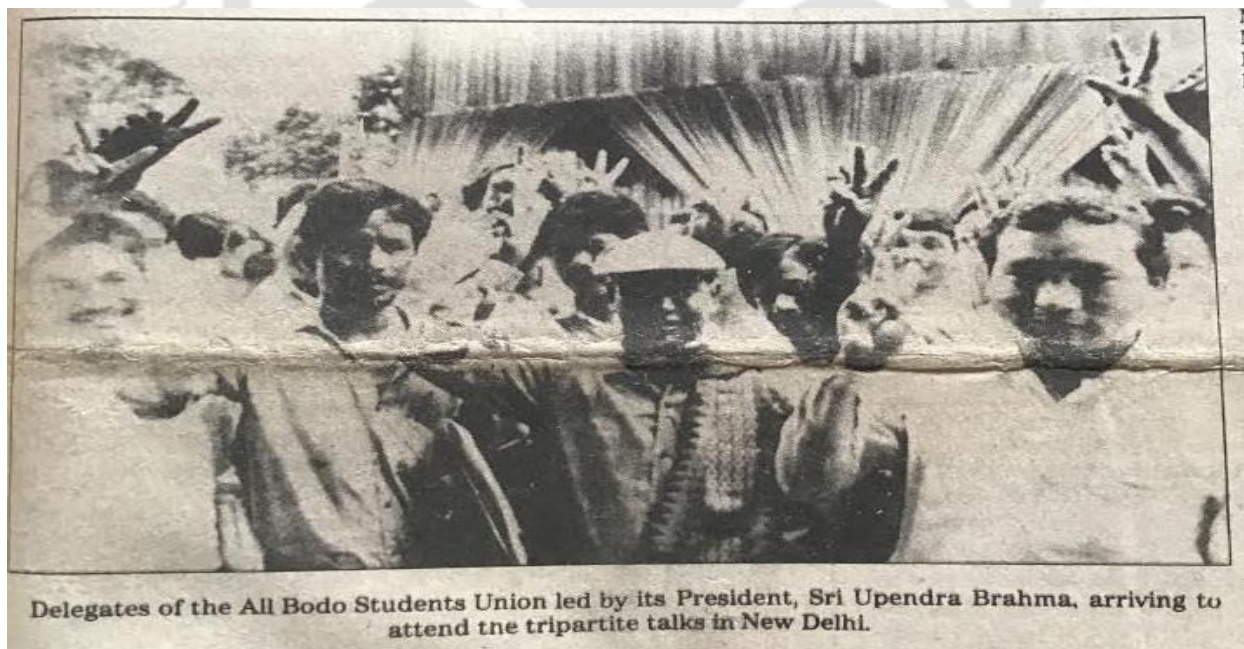


Photo 3.5: Delegates of All Bodo Students Union in New Delhi.

Source: The Assam Tribune 29 August 1989

3.9 Negotiations between ABSU-BPAC, State Government and the Central Government

During the first round of negotiations between ABSU, Government of Assam and the Central Government representatives, which was held on 28 August 1989, ABSU as expected stuck to their demand of a separate state of Bodoland.¹³⁵ During this round of discussions, it was also decided that the negotiations to the Bodo issue would henceforth be held in New Delhi in the presence of a Central Government representative. The ABSU delegation further demanded that if the special laws like the Disturbed Areas Act, TADA etc. were not withdrawn from the Bodo dominated areas, they would resume the agitation with further intensifications. Eventually, ABSU agreed to suspend their agitation while the Assam Government also agreed to suspend the preventive measures in suspension of the agitation and violence.¹³⁶ However, violence continued unabated in spite of students' union agreeing to suspend their agitation and the State Government's decision to suspend the preventive measures in force in the affected areas.¹³⁷ Meanwhile, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, then Chief Minister of the state reiterated that the demand for a separate state of Bodoland by ABSU is not practical and that there would be no further division of the state. Refuting the ABSU President Upendra Nath Brahma's statement that the Bodos would go to any extent if the demand for a separate state was not addressed, the Chief Minister argued that there could be many solutions to the Bodo issue without further bifurcation of the state.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, violence continued in the Bodo dominated regions resulting to loss of lives and properties, which was followed up by the State Home Minister, Bhriгу Phukan arguing that if violence continued, preventive measures such as TADA, Disturbed Areas Act etc. would not be withdrawn from the affected areas.¹³⁹

By 1990, seven rounds of negotiations had taken place between the ABSU-BPAC leaderships and the government. During the negotiations, the State Government proposed 'the formation of an autonomous three-tier Panchayati Raj (local government) structure for the Bodo areas with considerable devolution of administrative and financial powers (George, 1994:884; Hazarika, 2005:65; Bhattacharjee, 1996:131-132).' This proposal of the State Government was

¹³⁵ See The Assam Tribune 29 August 1989.

¹³⁶ See The Assam Tribune 29 August 1989.

¹³⁷ See The Assam Tribune 30 August 1989.

¹³⁸ See The Assam Tribune 30 August 1989.

¹³⁹ See The Assam Tribune 31 August 1989.

rejected by the ABSU delegation in the tripartite talks, which was held in New Delhi in August and September 1990. The Central Government also did not favor the idea proposed by the State Government but at the same time, the Central Government ruled out the formation of a separate state of Bodoland (George, 1994). The ABSU-BPAC activists once again reiterated their demands and warned the government of the resumption of violence if their demand for a separate state was not addressed before the end of February 1991 (Bhattacharjee, 1996).

Meanwhile, in November 1990, the AGP Government was toppled down and the Congress came to power in Assam. This change in the ruling party in the state witnessed a change of attitude towards the Bodo issue by the newly elected Congress Government (Saikia, 2011:71). Series of talks were held between the ABSU-BPAC leaders and the State and the Central Governments throughout the early 1990s. However, the talks failed to arrive at any solution to the demands made by ABSU-BPAC who were also supported by other Bodo organizations. Meanwhile, Upendra Nath Brahma, the president of ABSU passed away on 1 May 1990 due to illness, which affected the course of the Bodoland movement (Hazarika, 2005:65). Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatory succeeded Upendra Nath Brahma as the President of ABSU. His death left a huge void among the Bodos as he was a charismatic leader who had excellent leadership skills.¹⁴⁰

After his death, Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatory assumed the Presidentship of the students' union and the movement continued. Eventually, during the eighth rounds of the dialogue between the Bodo agitators and the government, the Central Government constituted a three-member Expert Committee on 25 February 1991, headed by Bhupinder Singh (IAS) to look into the matters related to granting autonomy to the Bodos (George, 1994:885; Bhattacharjee, 1996:133). The Expert Committee was entrusted by the government to identify the areas mostly inhabited by the Bodos and other plains tribal communities in the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The three-member Expert Committee visited Kokrajhar district from 7 April 1991 in order to collect information about the Bodoland issue.¹⁴¹ ABSU, BPAC, All Mishing Students' Union (TMPK) and Mishing Mimak Kebang (MMK) all jointly welcomed the setting

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, former senior member of ABSU conducted on 13 June 2019 at Maibongnwgwr, Kokrajhar.

¹⁴¹ See The Assam Tribune 27 March 1991.

up of the three-member Expert Committee to resolve the Bodo issue.¹⁴² However, there were oppositions to the formation of the three-member Expert Committee from some sections of the non-tribal organizations like the Asom Sanghati Rakshya Parishad. The organization filed a petition in the High Court saying since the Assam Cabinet did not accept the formation of the Expert Committee, it had no legitimacy to operate in the state.¹⁴³ The Gauhati High Court suspended the proceedings of the three-member Expert Committee. Organizations such as PTCA and the Bodo People's Union for Human Rights and Civil Liberties express shock over the attempts made by the Assamese chauvinists to derail the negotiation process between the government and the agitators.¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, PTCA urged ABSU and the Boro Security Force (NDFB), a Bodo insurgent group formed in 1986, to shun the violence to create a conducive environment for the resolution of the Bodo problem.¹⁴⁵ At the same time, PTCA headed by Samar Brahma Choudhury condemned the harassment of the innocent Bodo villagers by the state police force. The PTCA leadership accused ABSU of indulging in violent activities just like the reactionary forces and the Boro Security Force (BSF).¹⁴⁶ PTCA further accused the student organization for their involvement in fratricidal activities. However, ABSU refuted these allegations and argued that the Bodo agitation was a non-violent movement for the safeguard of the Bodo identity. ABSU also denied their involvement in the killing of Bihu Ram Boro, General Secretary of Bodo Sahitya Sabha and other 300 persons during the Bodo agitation.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² See The Assam Tribune 5 April 1991.

¹⁴³ See The Assam Tribune 11 April 1991.

¹⁴⁴ See The Assam Tribune 19 April 1991.

¹⁴⁵ See The Assam Tribune 8 April 1991.

¹⁴⁶ See The Assam Tribune 22 April 1991.

¹⁴⁷ See The Assam Tribune 22 April 1991.



Photo 3.6: The Three-member Expert committee in discussion with the state officials about the Bodo problem.

Source: The Assam Tribune 7 April 1991.

The ninth round of the tripartite talks between ABSU-BPAC, State Government and the Central Government was held on 7 January 1992.¹⁴⁸ However, this round of the negotiations also could not yield any solution to the Bodo issue due to inability of the Expert Committee to submit its report within the stipulated time to the government. Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatary, the President of ABSU, expressed unhappiness over the failure of the talks and above all the failure of the Expert Committee to submit its report before the stipulated time on which the outcome of the talks depended.¹⁴⁹ He further asserted that a solution to the demand for a separate state should be arrived at before 31 January 1992. The movement leaders further argued that the Indian Government could have resolved the demands of the Bodos without waiting for the report of the Expert committee. The Bodoland Legislature Party (BLP) expressed their concern on the failure of the Expert Committee to submit its report and suggest recommendations to resolve the

¹⁴⁸ See The Assam Tribune 9 January and 11 January 1992.

¹⁴⁹ See The Assam Tribune 11 January 1992.

Bodo problem before the commencement of the ninth round of the tripartite talks.¹⁵⁰ The BLP also accused the Hiteswar Saikia Government of trying to suppress the Bodo movement through repressive measures and described that the atrocities committed by the army and the police were increasing day-by-day.

During the ninth round of the negotiations between the government and the Bodo agitators, the government had agreed to involve the Prime Minister's office in the next round of the talks, which was to be held very soon.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile, ABSU-BPAC agreed to suspend the agitation on assurance from P.V. Narasimha Rao, then Prime Minister of India that the Bodo issue would be resolved at an earliest possible time.¹⁵² Earlier, the Bodo agitators had threatened to launch a more intensified agitation from February 1992 if their demands were not resolved by the end of January 1992.

The Expert Committee eventually submitted its report in March 1992 wherein the Committee proposed the formation of an autonomous unit for the Bodos instead of the creation of a separate state of Bodoland (Bhattacharjee, 1996:134). The Expert Committee recommended "legislative, financial and administrative powers that could be accorded to the Bodo dominated areas (George, 1994; Bhattacharjee, 1996)." ABSU-BPAC leaders, however, rejected the proposal of the Expert Committee. Meanwhile, violence continued and there were reports of deaths of Bodos as well as non-Bodos from various places. For instance, suspected ABSU activists kidnapped Phani Daimary on 4 January, whose dead body was recovered after few days near Kokrajhar town on 5 January.¹⁵³ The agitators, especially the members of Volunteer Force, were engaged in many violent activities in 1992 which affected the peace and stability in the region. The Government very soon understood that repressive tactics would worsen the situation in the region and became compelled to bring about a solution to the Bodo issue through negotiations (George, 1994:887; Saikia, 2011:71). In the meantime, the ABSU-BPAC leadership urged the Assam Government to withdraw the Army from the Bodo areas as there were many

¹⁵⁰ The Assam Tribune 9 January 1992.

¹⁵¹ See The Assam Tribune 14 January 1992.

¹⁵² See the Assam Tribune 31 January 1992.

¹⁵³ See The Assam Tribune 7 January 1992.

instances of harassment of ABSU activists and the Bodos in general in the name of maintaining law and order in the region by the security forces.¹⁵⁴

In spite of the probability of bringing about a solution to the Bodo agitation, the failure of the Government to negotiate led to intensification of violence by ABSU activists as well as by the armed groups like Boro Security Force (BSF) (George, 1994:886). In October 1992, the Union Home Minister invited the ABSU-BPAC leadership for talks in an effort to resolve the Bodoland issue. The talks however remained inconclusive and eventually led to the intensification of the movement by the Bodo agitators. A 12-hour bandh was called on 17 October 1992 and at point in time, ABSU-BPAC were able to garner the support of many organizations such as Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) as well as the AASU which put more pressure on the Government to resolve the Bodo issue (George, 1994:886). Efforts to resolve the Bodo issue continued into 1993, which eventually paid off on 20 February 1993, and the stage was set to bring an end to the Bodoland Movement and to resolve and address the demands and grievances of the Bodos through the democratic process.

The next section examines the first Bodo Accord that was signed in 1993 between the Government and the Bodos under the leadership of ABSU and BPAC. This section will discuss the provisions of the Accord in details and its implications in the Bodo areas. It will further discuss the conditions, which led to the resurgence of violence in the Bodo areas.

3.10 First Bodo Accord and the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (1993)

In an effort to bring an end to the Bodo agitation and to bring normalcy and peace in the state of Assam especially in the Bodo region, an understanding was reached and an agreement was signed between ABSU, BPAC and the Government which resulted in the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) on 20 February 1993 (Daimary, 2002; George, 1994:887; Saikia, 2011:71; Bhattacharjee, 1996:140; Hazarika, 2005:66). The Accord came to be known as the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) Accord. The agreement was signed between the ABSU-BPAC leaders and the State Government in the presence of Rajesh Pilot, a representative

¹⁵⁴ See The Assam Tribune 8 January 1992.

of the Central Government.¹⁵⁵ BAC¹⁵⁶ Accord provided maximum autonomy for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Bodos within the ambit of the Indian Union (Bhattacharjee, 1996:888; Hazarika, 2005:66). The Council was granted with the right to have “control and administer the local affairs of certain specified areas in the northern part of the Brahmaputra Valley with a fairly large number of tribal communities (Saikia, 2011:71).” BAC would include contiguous areas between the Sankosh River and Mazbat Pasnoi River and those villages with 50 per cent or more tribal population would be included within the BAC and at the same time to maintain contiguity, villages with less than 50 per cent tribal population would also be clubbed in the proposed Council (Saikia, 2011:72; George, 1994:888; Bhattacharjee, 1996:140). BAC was also “empowered to control, use and manage the natural and productive resources such as forests land and a wide range of issues like cottage industry, animal husbandry, agriculture, public works, primary and secondary education, cultural affairs and many more” (Saikia, 2011:71; Bhattacharjee, 1996:140). The Council would also receive funds from the Central Government which would be routed through the State treasury and at the same time, a certain amount of funds was also allocated in the State budget for the proper functioning of BAC (Saikia, 2011:71-72; Bhattacharjee, 1996:141-142).

According to the provisions of the Accord, BAC would comprise of a 40-member Council, out of which 35 would be elected on the basis of adult franchise and the remaining 5 members would be nominated by the Governor of Assam (George, 1994:887; Bhattacharjee, 1996:140; Hazarika, 2005:66). The executive powers of BAC were entrusted on an executive council, the Bodoland Executive Council (BEC) and the term of office for both BAC and BEC was fixed at five years. Initially, the executive powers were placed on an interim BEC led by S. K. Bwisumatory, the president of ABSU and 16 other noted activists of the Bodoland movement,

¹⁵⁵ Prodeep Kumar Daimary mentioned during interviews that the BAC was passed under the State Act. He further mentioned that the state assembly and not the parliament approved the BAC accord. The former movement leader also mentioned that the Central Government was signatory to the Accord as a witness. Basically, the accord was a bipartite agreement but since representative of the Central Government was present as a witness, it came to be known as the tripartite agreement. Rajesh Pilot who was the Home Minister at that time and the Home Secretary represented the Central Government during the signing of the BAC accord.

¹⁵⁶ The BAC Secretariat was set up in the DRDA building in Kokrajhar after the DRDA office was set up elsewhere on the request of the Bodo leaders like Premising Brahma, Prodeep Kumar Daimary and other Bodo leaders.

till the elections were held (George, 1994:887-888). After the signing of the accord, Bodo Militant Force (BMF) members led by Premising Brahma, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the organization surrendered ceremoniously in a massive gathering in Debargaon in the presence of Rajesh pilot, the Union State Home Minister (Daimary, 2002).¹⁵⁷

BAC Accord, however, failed short of the demand for a separate state for the Bodos. The Accord had many shortcomings, which had severe implications in the implementation of the Accord. BAC was an administrative unit, which would provide maximum autonomy to the Bodos only in matters relating to education, economy, social issues and their ethnic and cultural aspirations (George, 1994:888; Bhattacharjee, 1996:140). The Accord did not have any Constitutional protection, which was a major setback for the Bodo leaders and the Bodos in general.¹⁵⁸ The agreement signed between the movement leadership and the Government has been termed as the least political of all the accords signed, as nowhere there was mention of the term 'politics' in the document. According to the Accord, BAC would not have the powers to make laws and even if certain modifications had to be incorporated concerning the Bodos, the State Government would have the say and the Council would only be consulted especially in matters relating to religious, social, customary laws, ownership and transfer of land of the Bodos within the BAC. The area designated for the Council was also reduced to 2570 villages compared to what the Bodo agitators had demanded (George, 1994). The attempt to secure any deal with the government and at the same time, the immense pressure exerted by the government on the Bodo leaders might have forced the movement leaders to come to an understanding with the government (George, 1994). The increasing grievances of the Bodos and long period of violence, perhaps, also motivated the ABSU-BPAC leaders to wrap up any deal, which was very much short of their demand for a separate state of Bodoland.

After the signing of the Accord, stability and peace was expected in the Bodo region. But the non-inclusion of an additional 515 villages within the ambit of BAC by the State Government led to a deadlock among the signatories of the accord and the Bodos in general (Saikia, 2011:72). This became the critical factor which led to huge opposition from the Bodo

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Prodeep Kumar Daimary, conducted on 21 January 2019.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Suddho Basumatary, 20 June 2019 at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon. This was also narrated by Hemendra Nath Brahma, former senior member of ABSU during interviews conducted on 18 June 2019.

leaders as those villages comprised of many Bodo people. The BAC accord of 1993 failed to be implemented and an uncertain and a tense environment once again prevailed in the Bodo regions. The lack of sufficient financial powers and at the same time, the overwhelming domination of the State Government over most of the transferred subjects hindered the functioning of the newly created autonomous unit (Nath, 2003:538). Most of the ABSU leaders like Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatory objected the BAC accord and accused the state leadership of caste and linguistic chauvinism. Insurgent organization like the Boro Security Force (NDFB) strongly opposed the Bodo Accord (though the organization maintained a neutral position) and the subsequent creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council as it failed to fulfill the ethnic aspirations of the Bodos. Thus the post Accord period witnessed the surged in violent activities by the organization.

The Assam Government refused to include the additional 515 villages within the BAC as the population of non-Bodos in those areas was much higher than that of the Bodos and argued that under such situation, it was the responsibility of the State Government to protect the interest of the non-tribals living in those villages (Saikia, 2011:72; George, 1994:890). At the same time, the non-Bodos residing in those villages also opposed the inclusion of their villages within the BAC as the Accord did not include sufficient guarantee for the non-Bodos. The Government of India justified the non-inclusion of these villages within the Council by saying that they shared borders with another country.¹⁵⁹ The 10 km stretch from the international boundary to the border of the newly formed BAC was kept as no man's land. The non-inclusion of the 10 km stretch along the Indo-Bhutan border and many other villages gave a strong ground for the hardcore faction within ABSU especially members of Volunteer Force to reject the accord.¹⁶⁰ An environment of fear prevailed among the non-Bodos living in the newly created autonomous unit. However, the State Government under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia maintained that the rights of the non-Bodos inhabiting the BAC area would be protected and that special safeguards have been incorporated in the Bodo Accord for the same.¹⁶¹ There were also reports of resentment arising due to the inclusion of non-Bodo villages (within the 2570 villages which were already included within the BAC) within the new Council. For instance, the non-Bodo villagers of Betna Mouza in Goreswar appealed to the State Government to withdraw the already

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Urkhao Gwra Brahma, 12 June 2019 at Central ABSU Office, Kokrajhar.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Prodeep Kumar Daimary, 21 January 2019.

¹⁶¹ See The Assam Tribune 4 July 1993.

included non-Bodo villages from the BAC area at any cost.¹⁶² They formed an organization called Asom non-Bodo People Suraksha Sangram Committee in order to safeguard the rights of the non-Bodos of their area and urged the government to withdraw the non-Bodo villages from the BAC immediately. Many former ABSU members argued that had the Bodo leaders refused to sign the accord in 1993, the State Government would have resorted to extreme violence against the leaders of the movement.¹⁶³ At that time, the leaders of the movement felt that the Assamese-speaking majority group in power would have inflicted violence on the Bodos and crush the movement through force. There was also fears among the movement leaders at that point in time that the failure to sign the agreement would lead to further frustration among the Bodos, harassments and violence against the Bodos.¹⁶⁴ He further argued that the failure of the BAC Accord could also be attributed to the weakness of the Bodo leaders of that time.

On the other hand, there were reports of incidents of violence involving the Boro Security Force (BSF) in many places of Udalguri sub-division in July 1993.¹⁶⁵ In spite of the accord signed between the Bodo agitators and the government, the situation in the Bodo region failed to improve due to the intensification of violent activities by the Boro Security Force and later on by the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The State Government also maintained that the final assault on the insurgent groups like the BSF and the ULFA were delayed due to lack of sufficient number of security forces as the forces required for operation were engaged in another states.¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, there were reports of ABSU deciding to settle the dispute regarding the inclusion of 515 more additional villages within the newly created Bodoland Autonomous Council through discussions with the Government of Assam.¹⁶⁷ The Bodo leaders also accused the State Government for not including the additional 515 villages within the BAC. The dispute regarding the boundary demarcation of BAC had led to a deadlock between the Bodoland Movement supporters and the government. However, on 3 November 1994, ABSU-BPAC

¹⁶² See The Assam Tribune 5 July 1994.

¹⁶³ Interview with Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatary, 11 June 2019 at Kathalguri, Kokrajhar

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, 13 June 2019 at Maibongnwgwr, Kokrajhar.

¹⁶⁵ See The Assam Tribune 20 July 1993. The insurgent group indulged in violent activities in Bhalukhmari area and Amjulgaoon both situated under Udalguri police station.

¹⁶⁶ See The Assam Tribune 14 August 1993.

¹⁶⁷ See The Assam Tribune 1 November 1993.

leaderships agreed to come for negotiation with the government in order to resolve the boundary dispute of the BAC.¹⁶⁸

However, the resolution of the dispute regarding the demarcation of the boundary of the BAC could not reach any definite solution, as there were disagreements between the government and the Bodo leadership as well as the opposition by the non-Bodos residing in the proposed additional 515 villages contributed to the non-resolution of the boundary dispute of the BAC. The Bodoland Movement leaders accused the State Government headed by Hiteswar Saikia that even after repeated assurances given by the government, the Saikia Government refused to resolve the boundary issue of the BAC as demanded by ABSU-BPAC.¹⁶⁹ Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatory, the Chief of BAC, eventually resigned on 16 November 1993 in protest against the government's indifferent attitude towards the resolution of the dispute and the implementation of the Bodo Accord.¹⁷⁰ The Bodo leaders further alleged that necessary steps were not taken to withdraw cases on people associated with the agitation, rehabilitation of victims of the Bodo agitation, compensation to the martyrs of the Bodoland movement etc.¹⁷¹ Premising Brahma, who was the deputy chief of BAC then, was appointed as the Chief of BAC on 20 November 1993.¹⁷² And Prodeep Kumar Daimary was appointed as the Deputy Chief of the BAC.¹⁷³ Meanwhile, Sri Hiteswar Saikia, then Chief Minister of Assam reiterated that there would be no further addition of the 515 more villages within the BAC.¹⁷⁴

On the other hand, there were demands of resignation of Premising Brahma as the chief of the BAC from four executive members of the interim BEC alleging Brahma as incompetent to hold the highest post of the BAC.¹⁷⁵ A leadership crisis surfaced after the resignation of Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatory as the chief of BAC. The leadership crisis within the Bodoland Executive

¹⁶⁸ See The Assam Tribune 4 November 1993.

¹⁶⁹ See The Assam Tribune 17 November 1993.

¹⁷⁰ See The Assam Tribune 17 November 1993.

¹⁷¹ See The Assam Tribune 17 November 1993.

¹⁷² See The Assam Tribune 21 November 1993.

¹⁷³ As narrated by Prodeep Kumar Daimary, the former Vice-President of the ABSU and former Deputy Chief of BAC.

¹⁷⁴ See The Assam Tribune 24 November 1993.

¹⁷⁵ See The Assam Tribune 27 November 1993.

Council after the appointment of Premising Brahma clearly indicated the divisions among the members of the council. Meanwhile, the State Government nominated five new members in the interim Bodoland Executive Council.¹⁷⁶ ABSU opposed the appointment of Premising Brahma as the Chief of BAC calling it undemocratic and at the same time, the students' union opposed the nomination of the five new members to the BEC.¹⁷⁷ ABSU and its supporters further warned the newly nominated members not to join the BEC against the wishes of the people. There were demands for reinstatement of Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatary as the Chief of BAC. The Bodo leaders accused the State Government of trying to bring about a state of confusion and division among the Bodos. Meanwhile, Rajesh Pilot, Union Minister of State for Home (Internal Security) invited the Bodo leaders for discussion on 10 December 1993 in order to resolve the boundary dispute of the BAC.¹⁷⁸

The State Government, on the other hand, formally announced the boundary of BAC on 10 December 1993 by government notification, inspite of the proposed talks to be held in New Delhi between the Bodo leaders and the Central Government.¹⁷⁹ According to the notification, the BAC would have 2570 villages with a population of over eight lakh. The government notification had nothing new to add to its earlier announcement, which provoked strong reactions from the Bodo leaders and the Bodos in general. The 515 villages as demanded by the movement leaders were excluded from BAC; the government argued that the tribal populations in these villages were less than 50 per cent.¹⁸⁰ At the same time, the areas within 10 km from the international boundary with Bhutan were excluded from the Council.

In response to the State Government's notification regarding the boundary of BAC, ABSU called for an Assam bandh on 13 December 1993.¹⁸¹ ABSU General Secretary, Maheswar Basumatary argued that the State Government's announcement was against the spirit of the Bodo Accord and called for immediate withdrawal of the notification. ABSU leadership also accused

¹⁷⁶ See The Assam Tribune 8 December 1993. The five new members were Subhas Basumatary, Binoy Kr Basumatary, Bonendra Mushahary, Komission Roy and Bokhter Ali Ahmed.

¹⁷⁷ See The Assam Tribune 9 December 1993.

¹⁷⁸ See The Assam Tribune 9 December 1993.

¹⁷⁹ See The Assam Tribune 11 December 1993.

¹⁸⁰ See The Assam Tribune 11 December 1993.

¹⁸¹ See The Assam Tribune 12 December 1993.

Premising Brahma for his anti-Bodoland Accord policies and anti-party activities. There were calls on Premising Brahma from Bali Ram Boro, executive member of BEC to dissolve the interim BEC in protest against the decision of the State Government. Meanwhile, Sansuma Khungur Bwisumatary resigned from the interim council in protest against the government's decision.¹⁸² ABSU urged for a mass resign of the BEC members if the ongoing talks between the Centre and the Bodo leaders in New Delhi failed to resolve the problem.¹⁸³ ABSU further threatened to launch a mass movement for a separate state of Bodoland once again. In spite of the repeated appeals from various sections of the society to resolve the boundary issue, the resolution to the demand for the inclusion of an additional 515 villages within the BAC could not be reached.

Meanwhile, Boro Security Force (NDFB), which was formed in 1986, intensified its activities with demand for a sovereign country for the Bodos. NDFB intensified its activities and started the mobilization process in a renewed vigor and became the vanguard of the protection of the interests of the Bodos as the students' union (ABSU) had lost its credibility after the BAC accord (Bhattacharjee, 1996:150). One of the significant reasons for the opposition from the NDFB was the inability of the Bodo Accord to fulfill the objectives for which the movement was launched during the 1980s. There were also reports of NDFB rebels' involvement in an attack on the Superintendent of Police and Additional SP of Darrang district on 26 December 1993.¹⁸⁴ During the month of November and December 1993, there were reports of deaths of about 20 persons inflicted by the suspected NDFB rebels.¹⁸⁵ In the meantime, counter-insurgent operations continued against the Bodo militants; there were also reports of police atrocities against the Bodo villagers during the operations.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, the State Government reconstituted the 21-member interim Bodoland Executive Council on 27 December 1993.¹⁸⁷ However, the elections to the BAC could not be held because of the failure to agree on the territorial jurisdiction of the Council. Thus, the post

¹⁸² See The Assam Tribune 12 December 1993.

¹⁸³ See The Assam Tribune 15 December 1993.

¹⁸⁴ See The Assam Tribune 28 December 1993.

¹⁸⁵ See The Assam Tribune 30 December 1993.

¹⁸⁶ See The Assam Tribune 29 December 1993.

¹⁸⁷ See The Assam Tribune 28 December 1993.

1993 period witnessed the resumption of violence by armed organizations like NDFB (erstwhile BSF), and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) towards the mid and later part of the 1990s (Saikia, 2011:73). The army also launched counterinsurgency operation “Operation Kranti” to get rid of the NDFB rebels from the Manas Wild Life Sanctuary who had been very active in that area since its formation in 1986 (George, 1994).

Eventually, on 22 December 1995, a meeting was held under the leadership of Premising Brahma in Bodoland House in Guwahati where for the first time, the Bodo leaders formally rejected the BAC accord.¹⁸⁸ ABSU also formally rejected the accord in the Annual Conference of the organization, which was held in Langhin Tiniali in Karbi Anglong on 15 January 1996.¹⁸⁹ And immediately after the end of the Annual Conference, ABSU launched the second phase of the Bodoland movement. In spite of all these developments, BAC remained functional and at the same time, the movement leaders kept on pressurizing the government for a separate state for Bodoland. Meanwhile, the Congress Government led by Hiteswar Saikia was defeated and the AGP Government once again formed the new government in the state in June 1996. The new AGP Government took oath on 1 June 1996 and officially dismantled the BEC on 15 June 1996.¹⁹⁰ After that, Peoples Democratic Front under Kanak Sen Narzary run the BAC and the party had 7 MLA.

A former Vice-President of ABSU who also later went on to become the second Deputy Chief of BAC argued that one faction within the ABSU and its supporters had not accepted the accord.¹⁹¹ This hardcore group within the students’ union, especially the members of Volunteer Force, had threatened to target those who supported the accord. The decision to sign or reject the provisions of the accord had splitted ABSU and its supporters into two factions, i.e., moderate and the extremist factions. The members of the moderate faction who had decided to sign the

¹⁸⁸ Prodeep Kumar Daimary, narrated this during interview, conducted on 21 January 2019.

¹⁸⁹ In his interview, Prodeep Kumar Daimary, narrated about the ABSU’s decision to reject the accord during the interview held on 21 January 2019.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Prodeep Kumar Daimary, 21 January 2019 at Udalguri.

¹⁹¹ This was narrated by the ABSU leader during the interviews, which was conducted on 21 January 2019. The moderate faction was scared of the radical faction within the ABSU. Since day 1 of the decision to sign the BAC accord, the moderate faction was scared to announce to the supporters about the decision to accept the BAC accord which was very less than what the agitators had demanded.

agreement were also fully aware of the drawbacks of the Accord.¹⁹² The radical group led by leaders like Premising Brahma and Silangang Basumatary pressurized the BAC authorities tremendously.¹⁹³ ABSU had also decided to relaunch the democratic movement for a separate state of Bodoland. This radical faction was in no way to be convinced with the provisions of the BAC and became more determined to fight for Bodoland through an armed rebellion. Hence, this hardcore group led by Premising Brahma and others started mobilizing the people secretly to form an armed organization soon after the signing of the BAC Accord.¹⁹⁴ This faction eventually formed the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) on 18 June 1996.

Premising Brahma became the President and Silangang Basumatary, became the Vice-President of the organization.¹⁹⁵ Horkhab Narzary from Rangia was appointed as the General Secretary of the newly formed BLT. Hagrama Mohilary (Thebla Basumatary his original name) was appointed as the Military Secretary of the organization. However, Premising Brahma could not devote sufficient time towards the organizational activities and at the same time, Silangang Basumatary also succumbed to illness. Eventually, Hagrama was appointed as the President of the organization as advised by Urkhao Gwra Brahma and remained in the post till the signing of the peace agreement in 2003. At that time, ABSU and BLT shared good relationship and worked in tandem. In spite of all the drawbacks in the BAC Accord, the Bodo leaders were hopeful that proper implementation of the provisions of the accord would bring change and development for the Bodos. However, divisions cropped up among the Bodo leaders soon after the signing of the accord in 1993 which worked in favor of the State Government. It is argued that the Hiteswar Saikia led Congress Government in the state conspired the division in order to avoid further escalation of the statehood movement.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² As narrated by the former ABSU leader during the interviews conducted on 21 January 2019. He lamented on the fact that after all the struggles for a separate state of Bodoland, finally they had to settle for an autonomous council created through an Act passed in the state assembly with limited powers.

¹⁹³ The radical faction did not allow the normal functioning of the BAC especially during the initial period. They threatened to destroy the office with arms, ammunitions and explosions.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Binod Narzary, former Arms and Ammunitions Secretary of the BLT conducted on 11 January 2020 at Goreswar, Baksa.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Binod Narzary, 11 January 2020 at Goreswar, Baksa.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Daorao Dekhreb Narzary, 13 June 2019 at Maibongnwgr, Kokrajhar.

After the signing of the BAC accord in 1993, the state authorities as well as the noncombatants expected that a solution had been reached to the Bodo issue. However, when peace was expected to prevail in the Bodo-dominated areas, Bodo insurgent groups like the NDFB and the BLT intensified their violent activities in the Bodo region and sought to achieve their demands through an armed struggle (George, 1994:890; Misra, 2013:188). Under such circumstances, the mid and the latter half of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s witnessed intense violence in the heart of Bodo region under the leadership of insurgent organizations like the NDFB and the BLT. Many studies have argued that the emergence of violence in the Bodo region could be attributed to the failure as well as the unwillingness of the State Government to prevent tribal land alienation in the post-independence period which eventually hugely contributed to the resurgence of violent developments and the growth of Bodo insurgency in the Bodo region in the 1980s (Misra, 2014:245). As will be seen in the next chapter, prior to the onset of the statehood movement in 1987, the Bodo region witnessed the emergence of the NDFB in 1986. The intensification of the insurgency by the NDFB after the signing of the BAC Accord further created instability and chaos in the Bodo region which shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

3.11 Summary

This chapter focused on the historical origins of Bodos and the subsequent socio-political movements in the Bodo-dominated region. The chapter examined the pre-British as well as developments during the British rule and social and political movements of the Bodos for preservation of their identity and their culture during the post-British period. The intense struggle in the Bodo heartland has its genesis on the socio-economic and cultural aspirations of the Bodos during the British and the post-British period. The Bodo organizations have always based their ethno-nationalist claims and campaigns on the glorious past of the Bodos they enjoyed before the advent of the Ahoms and the British. Though, there are no sufficient evidences, Bodos are regarded as one of the aborigines of the Brahmaputra Valley and the largest amongst the plains tribal communities in Assam. However, in due course of time, the Bodos were subjugated and dominated by the other dominant groups.

There were demands for equal political representation of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities during the British rule. The Bodos and other plains tribal communities suffered

large-scale land alienation due to encroachments by illegal settlers especially the immigrant Muslims and other non-Bodo communities during the British rule, which continued unabated after the independence of the country. In spite of several protective provisions and policies initiated by the government, tribal land alienation continued unabated. The land alienation further strengthened the ethno-consciousness of the Bodos, which could be witnessed in the various cultural and political campaigns launched by the Bodo organizations in the post-British period. In spite of the large-scale land alienation and socio-cultural grievances, the Bodos and other plains tribal communities never engaged in any demands for autonomy or separatist arrangements during the British rule.

However, in the post-British period, attempts were made by the Assamese-speaking communities to enforce their domination over the Bodos and other plains tribal communities through various discriminative policies, which were highly resented by the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. For instance, the introduction of the Official Language Act of 1960 which made Assamese language as the sole medium of instruction in educational institutions and a mandatory requirement to secure Government jobs created a huge tension between the Assamese-speaking communities and the Bodos and other non-Assamese speaking groups. The educated Assamese middle class introduced various language policies with the intention of making Assamese language as the dominant language, which however marginalized the other minority communities including the Bodos. The subsequent demand for Union Territory of Udayachal by PTCA and ABSU was motivated by such language policies together with the continued land alienation. The educated Bodo youths realized that only securing a separate territory for the Bodos and other plain tribal communities would address the grievances of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. The failure and the unwillingness of the State Government to address the grievances/issues of the plains tribal communities including the Bodos were hugely resented by ABSU and PTCA.

However, PTCA failed in its efforts as it succumbed to power politics in the state. The involvement of PTCA in vested interest brought the ABSU to the forefront of the Bodo politics in the 1980s. The subsequent failure of the Assam Accord and the AGP Government to address and resolve the demands of the Bodos ultimately paved the way for the mass agitation led by ABSU in 1987. ABSU specifically demanded for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland for

the Bodos. The Bodoland Movement also created huge divide between the Bodos and the non-Bodos due to the continuous violent targeting of the non-Bodos by the Bodos and vice versa and at the same time, the atrocities committed on the Bodos by the state security forces who were mostly non-Bodos, during combing operations and raids in the Bodo villages sparked off the tensions between the Bodos and the non-Bodos. The State Government and the Central Government however, ruled out the possibility of the creation of Bodoland and urged the Bodo agitators to shun down the violence in order to sort out other autonomy arrangements for the Bodos. Many attempts were made by the state machineries to discredit the Bodoland Movement by various political leaders, media houses and others by arguing that Christian missionaries and other external actors inspired the movement.¹⁹⁷

ABSU also held joint meetings with various political and non-political organizations and urged these organizations to support their demand for a separate state of Bodoland. The students union also held meetings with “AASU, All Assam Tribal Student’s Union, Karbi Student’s Union, All Mishing Student’s Union, All Cachar-Karimganj Student’s Association, Tai Ahom Yuva Chatra Parishad and many others seeking their support” (Daimary, 2002). Most of these organizations supported the Bodos’ demand for a separate state of Bodoland. However, there were also organizations like the Assam Council for Defence of integration (ACFDI), Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Ajanajati Surakhsha Parishad and many others who strongly opposed the Bodoland Movement (Daimary, 2002). The ACFDI strongly opposed the Bodoland Movement and had filed a petition against the Central Government’s authority to constitute the Three Member Expert Committee.¹⁹⁸

After the failure of successive series of talks between the government and the Bodo leadership, finally an agreement was signed between the Bodo agitators and the Government, which resulted in the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council in February 1993. However, the Accord failed to subdue the aspirations of the Bodos and the Bodo region witnessed resurgence of violence under the banner of NDFB and BLT. Serious disagreements arose over the jurisdiction of the additional areas to be included within the area, which eventually made the BAC Accord a failure. Most of the Bodo leaders, including the NDFB and others

¹⁹⁷ This was mentioned by Prodeep Kumar Daimary, 21 January 2019.

¹⁹⁸ See The Sentinel, 3 August 1991.

rejected the Accord as it proved to be way short of their demand for a separate state of Bodoland as well as the Accord failed to fulfill the aspirations of the Bodos. The opposition of the non-Bodos also contributed to the failure of the Accord as the non-Bodo communities argued that the new arrangements did not provide any safeguards to their interests. The Accord could not be implemented due to these disagreements between the Government and the Bodo leadership and the non-Bodos to be included within the proposed Council.

The attempts at homogenization by the dominant Assamese middle class at various points in time made the Bodos politically more conscious which eventually mushroomed into various ethno-nationalist claims and campaigns in the post-British era. The fear of marginalization by the dominant Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities created an atmosphere of apprehensions and insecurity among the Bodos. As one of the respondents narrated, *“we could not openly speak in Bodo whenever we went outside the Bodo region for work as we became easy target of the Assamese-speaking communities. We could not wear our traditional dresses, dokhona and other Bodo attires as we were looked down upon and targeted. The chauvinistic attitude of the Assamese-speaking non-tribal communities never considered us as one of them and continuously tried to force their culture on us. The separatist aspirations among the Bodos grew due to these dominations and discriminations.”*¹⁹⁹

The fear of Assamisation and the fear of identity crisis all contributed to ABSU taking a strong stance during the course of their movement. However, the post BAC Accord period witnessed the intensification of violence by the NDFB. NDFB had maintained distance from the statehood movement led by ABSU since its formation in 1986 as the organization believed that armed struggle was the only way to pressurize the State and the Central government to give in to their demands of sovereign Bodoland. Besides the prevalent grievances, NDFB drew their motivations from these failed developments and thus renewed their movement with a new vigour and determination after the failure of the BAC Accord.

The next chapter will thus examine insurgency led by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB). The study will also examine the organizational dynamics of the NDFB. The chapter will also describe the mobilizing activities of the NDFB and the different stages of the

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Suddho Basumatary, 20 June 2019 at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon.

insurgency since its inset in 1986. The chapter will also examine the various socio-economic and political developments that prevailed during the course of the NDFB insurgency in the Bodo region.



Chapter Four

National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB): Genesis of the insurgency

4.1 Introduction

The present chapter examines the genesis of the armed movement of the NDFB. After the signing of the BAC Accord in 1993, the Government and the people of the state especially the people living in the Bodo areas expected that peace would prevail after prolonged violence and instability caused by the statehood movement led by ABSU as well as the insurgency led by the NDFB. However, the post 1993 period witnessed intense violence as the NDFB intensified the armed struggle for a sovereign country for the Bodos. Earlier, the attempts at homogenization and suppression of the rights and opportunities of the Bodo community by the majority Assamese-speaking groups motivated a section of the Bodo youths to launch the armed struggle in the 1980s. Unlike ABSU, the organization believed that the grievances of the Bodos could be resolved only through an armed struggle and only if the Bodos had a separate country of their own. NDFB mobilized along ethnic lines and claimed to be the vanguard of the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos. The historical past and the rich culture of the Bodos and the continuous suppression of the rights and opportunities by the dominant Assamese-speaking communities served as the basis for the NDFB to launch the insurgency.

4.2 Formation of National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB)

The National Democratic Front of Boroland, erstwhile Boro Security Force (BSF), was formed on 3rd October 1986 in Odlā Kachibari, Harisinga which is located in the present district of Udalguri, Assam. Ranjan Daimary alias D R Nabla was the President of the organization.²⁰⁰ Boro Security Force was renamed as National Democratic Front of Boroland on 25th November, 1994.²⁰¹ The organization adopted a constitution, which contained the core principles and

²⁰⁰ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, the founding President of NDFB, conducted on 29 May 2016 and 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri. This was also narrated by Gobinda Basumatary, the former General Secretary of the NDFB during interviews, which was conducted on 5 October 2017 and 13 November 2018 in Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁰¹ As narrated by Gobinda Basumatary during interviews, which was conducted on 13 November 2018 in Sudempuri, Udalguri. This was also narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

ideologies of the organization.²⁰² As mentioned in the Constitution, the core principles and ideologies of the organization were to:

- a) *“Liberate Boroland from the Indian expansionism and occupation;*
- b) *Free the Boro nation from the colonialist exploitation, oppression and domination;*
- c) *Establish a democratic socialist society to promote liberty, equality and fraternity;*
- d) *Uphold the integrity and sovereignty of Boroland;*
- e) *Strive for socio-economic reformation and*
- f) *Protect and safeguard the natural resources of the Land.”*

The organization also adopted a motto in order to motivate the members of the organization to sustain the struggle for a sovereign nation which states as follow: *“Let us die for Boro Nation but let not Boro Nation die for us”* This motto played a significant role in motivating the NDFB rebels to keep fighting until the Bodos secured a sovereign country of Bodoland.

The genesis of the formation of NDFB, can be traced to the formation of another Bodo organization called Young Boro Nationalists Association (YBNA) which was formed in January 1983 in Udalguri under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary and other educated Bodo youths especially from Udalguri region.²⁰³ The members of YBNA included young Bodo students who were and had studied in Shillong, especially in North-Eastern Hill University and other educated Bodo youths. Ranjan Daimary and other Bodo youths studying in Shillong at that time were influenced by the ongoing-armed movements in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur. They had regular interactions with Naga, Mizo, Khasi and Garo student colleagues and friends in Shillong. The membership of YBNA was open to all the Bodos irrespective of age, religion and education. Ranjan Daimary stated in these words *“When I was studying in Shillong, my education helped me to know more about the Boro people and the world. So during those days, AASU movement was*

²⁰² See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (1998), pp. 3-4.

²⁰³ From the interview narratives of Ranjan Daimary and Gobinda Basumatary, 11 November and 13 November 2018 respectively in Udalguri. While studying in Shillong, the President of the NDFB met many Naga, Mizo, Khasi and Garo friends through whom he came to know about the various ethno-nationalist assertions of the respective groups. Eventually, inspired by radicalized ideas about bringing about a revolution in the Bodo society, he along with some of his educated Bodo friends formed the YBNA in 1983.

going on and there were bandhs everywhere in Assam. And the movements led by the PLA in Manipur and the NSCN in Nagaland were also going on. So ultimately we were influenced by all these developments in the region.”²⁰⁴ This section of the Bodo youths felt the need to protect the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos from the chauvinistic approach of the Assam State Government, which was dominated mostly by non-tribal Assamese-speaking communities.

The main objective of YBNA was to secure equal rights and opportunities for the Bodos and also to instill a sense of belongingness towards the community and to eradicate social evils like alcoholism, polygamy etc. from the Bodo society which was very prevalent during those days.²⁰⁵ Through the YBNA, attempts were also made to reform the Bodo society as well as to fight for the socio-economic problems of the Bodos. Issues such as encroachment of tribal land, language issues and political rights of the Bodos were focused on by YBNA in order to mobilize the Bodos. However, the most significant objective for the formation of YBNA was to mobilize the Bodo youths for an armed struggle.²⁰⁶ The idea to form an armed organization for the protection of the rights and identity of the Bodos was already sown in the minds of the YBNA leadership especially Ranjan Daimary.²⁰⁷ While in Shillong, he had already been motivated with radical ideas and had realized that the grievances of the Bodos could be resolved only through an arm struggle. The leaders of YBNA soon realized that the grievances of the Bodos could be addressed only through rigorous armed struggle against the Indian state.²⁰⁸ As argued by the founding President of the NDFB, in spite of the continuous demands made by PTCA for separate territorial set-up for the Bodos and other plains tribal communities during the 1960s and 1970s, the government repeatedly neglected their demands. By early 1980s, organizations like PTCA, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Tribal Sangha and others had failed to address the grievances of the Bodos and thus this group of Bodos realized that non-violent movements would not be able to address

²⁰⁴ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November, 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁰⁵ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁰⁶ This was narrated by Gobinda Basumatary, 13 November 2018, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁰⁷ Amarendra Brahma narrated this during an interview, which was conducted on 8th July, 2019 at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

²⁰⁸ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

the problems of the Bodos.²⁰⁹ Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “*However, we soon realized that without an arm struggle there will be no change and we will achieve nothing because the PTCA also have been demanding Udayachal since 1967, but it was totally neglected by the Government of India and Assam. So we realized that the arm struggle is the last resort for the Boro people.*”²¹⁰

So the members of YBNA realized that in order to address the grievances of the Bodos, a revolution was necessary and thus they decided to launch the armed movement. YBNA played a major role in mobilizing the Bodo youths for the armed struggle, which lasted for more than three decades. Besides the youths, YBNA members were also successful in securing the support of the Bodo intellectuals, which further strengthened and motivated them to give a final push for the armed revolution.²¹¹ YBNA leadership also mobilized the Bodo villagers and moved from one village to another in order to legitimize the support of the Bodos for the armed struggle. Prior to the formation of NDFB, the leaders of YBNA held rigorous discussions with the Bodo intellectuals and other Bodo leaders about the possible consequences and the future of the Bodo society if such an armed organization was formed. During such consultations, many Bodo leaders urged Ranjan Daimary and his associates not to form such an organization as it was not favorable to do so. They argued that the lack of favorable geographical advantages like mountainous regions, forest areas, financial resources and other logistical supports like arms and ammunitions and bases which are some of the critical factors that contribute to the sustenance of the rebellion especially during the initial phases of the struggle would enable the state security forces to suppress the armed rebellion very quickly.²¹² And this would also affect the peace and security in the region. At the same time, the Bodo leaders also argued that such steps initiated by YBNA would bring sufferings and difficulties for the Bodos in general as the subsequent rebellion and the counterinsurgent operations would create an environment of fear and violence in the region. Thus, many Bodo intellectuals of the time advised against the formation of the

²⁰⁹ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary, one of the founding members and a former Finance and Political Secretary as well as former Home Secretary of the NDFB which was conducted on 5th July, 2019 at Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

²¹⁰ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²¹¹ Interview with Amarendra Brahma, 8th July, 2019, Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

²¹² As narrated by Gobinda Basumatary on 13 November 2018, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

NDFB, then BSF, as they felt that it would not be able to sustain for a long time and at the same time due to fears that it would affect the stability in the region, especially the Bodo-dominated areas.

Eventually, in a meeting of YBNA held on 3 October 1986, Boro Security Force (BSF) was formed under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary as the President of the organization.²¹³ A section of middle class Bodos attended the meeting.²¹⁴ About 75-77 Bodo intellectuals and youths of that time attended the meeting. Amarendra Brahma, who presently works as a teacher in a Boro medium school in Guwahati, was appointed as the first General Secretary of the NDFB.²¹⁵ Hadungra was appointed as the Military Secretary; however at a later stage, he was discharged from the organization on charges of violation of the ethics and the principles of the organization. As narrated by the founding General Secretary, the activities of such members affected the dynamics of the movement. Therefore, he was discharged from the organization. And subsequently, Dhiren Boro was elected as the Military Secretary. B. Irakdao was appointed as the Publicity Secretary of the organization and also decisions were taken to form People's Revolutionary Government known as the Government of the People's Republic of Boroland during the course of the struggle.²¹⁶ There were also decisions to form a Boroland Army to carry out the armed movement for the liberation of the Bodos and the creation of a sovereign nation for the Bodos.

Prior to the formation of NDFB, the members of YBNA under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary tried to communicate with the NSCN leadership for assistance in training and other logistical help. The YBNA wrote letters to the chairman of the NSCN in 1984 in this regard and

²¹³ From excerpts of the interview conducted in Udalguri with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²¹⁴ This was narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²¹⁵ However, later on Amarendra Brahma had to be relieved from the organization on medical ground. He was badly beaten up by the ABSU supporters in a place called Abongjhar in Rowta located in the present Udalguri district. He had to be immediately relieved from the organization as he had suffered severe physical injuries. During this incident, one Bangbur Gwra succumbed to injuries and is the first martyr of NDFB. This was mentioned by the founding President of the NDFB during the interviews which was conducted on 11 November 2018, at Ambagaon, Udalguri. Amarendra Brahma also mentioned this incident during interview which was conducted on 8 July, 2019 at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

²¹⁶ See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front of Boroland. (1998). p.9

eventually the NSCN leadership replied back in 1985.²¹⁷ After receiving a positive response from the NSCN leadership, Ranjan Daimary and other members of the NDFB tried to cross over to Myanmar in order to meet the leaders of the armed Naga organization. However, they failed to cross over to Myanmar in 1986 and were unable to meet the NSCN leadership. Eventually, they managed to meet the NSCN leadership in 1987 after the formation of the NDFB in 1986 and discussed how to lead the rebellion and other significant organizational dynamics of leading an armed movement.²¹⁸

Soon after forming the NDFB in 1986, the organizational leadership was indulged in various activities such as mobilizing recruits, finances and other logistical supports, which are necessary for sustaining the armed movement. Initially, the people/noncombatants did not know much about the organization. NDFB came into focus among the Bodos and others only when it published its first bulletin called “Voice of the Boro Security Force” which was distributed among the Bodo population.²¹⁹ Ranga Ram Boro, a senior surrendered member of NDFB argued in these words “*After the formation of BSF, we published the first bulletin of the organization called “The Voice of the Boro Security force”. We circulated this bulletin among the Bodos to make our objectives known to the Bodo people. After the circulation of the leaflet among the public, we came to be known to the people as well as the state agencies. This was our first activity as an armed organization. Though we had secretly carried out small activities prior to this, they were never that big and influential. NDFB came to focus immediately after the distribution of the leaflet.*”²²⁰

4.3 National Democratic Front of Boroland: The organizational Structure

NDFB adopted its Constitution in the General Assembly²²¹ in March 1998. Article 18 of the Constitution of the organization, mentions that in order to “carry out the armed struggle for

²¹⁷ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ As narrated by Ranga Ram Boro, former Second Lieutenant and Executive Member (National Council) of the NDFB during interview which was conducted on 5 July 2019 at Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ The members of the NDFB who completed three years of service after military training constituted the General Assembly. See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front Boroland. (1998). p. 5

the national liberation of the Bodos, the NDFB shall have its own army which would be known as the Boroland Army.”²²² The Boroland Army had its own Chief of Army and Deputy Chief.²²³ The entire Boroland Army was divided into three commands: Western Command, Eastern Command and the Southern Command. The Western Command included present day districts of Chirang, Kokrajhar and beyond while the Eastern Command included districts like Baksa, Udalguri, Sonitpur and beyond. The Southern Command included the southern regions of the Brahmaputra like Karbi Anglong, Dimapur, NC Hills, and Goalpara up to the border areas with Bangladesh and across. These Commands were placed under Commanding Officers, Deputy Commanding Officers and other Staff Officers similar in line with the military. However, after the split within the organization in 2008, some changes were made in this regard.

The General Assembly was entrusted with the responsibility of electing the National Council of the organization which was the highest legislative and the executive body of the organization after every 3 years, scrutinize and approve the financial activities of the organization, amend any provision in the Constitution as and when required.²²⁴ The National Council was the highest decision-making body in the organization. On 28 March 1998, the Standing Council of the NDFB formed in 1994 was dissolved and the National Council was constituted by the organization. The National Council consisted of 15 members and they were entrusted to elect the President, Vice-President, General Secretary and also the President in consultation with the Vice-President and the General Secretary was authorized to appoint other secretaries and office bearers of the organization.²²⁵ The National Council was also responsible for the general administration, financial management and planning out activities of the organization. The decisions and the policies arrived at during the General Assembly sessions were executed by the National Council. The National Council also had the power to call a special session of the General Assembly as and when required.²²⁶ The National Council was elected for a period of three years and for another additional year in case of any special circumstances. The

²²² See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front of Boroland. (1998). p. 9. At the same time, this was narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²²³ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November, 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²²⁴ See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front of Boroland. (1998). p. 5

²²⁵ Ibid (1998). p.6

²²⁶ Ibid. (1998). p.5

members of the National Council would be prosecuted for any violations of the provisions incorporated in the Constitution of the organization and other violations, which went against the rules, regulations, and interest of the organization.²²⁷

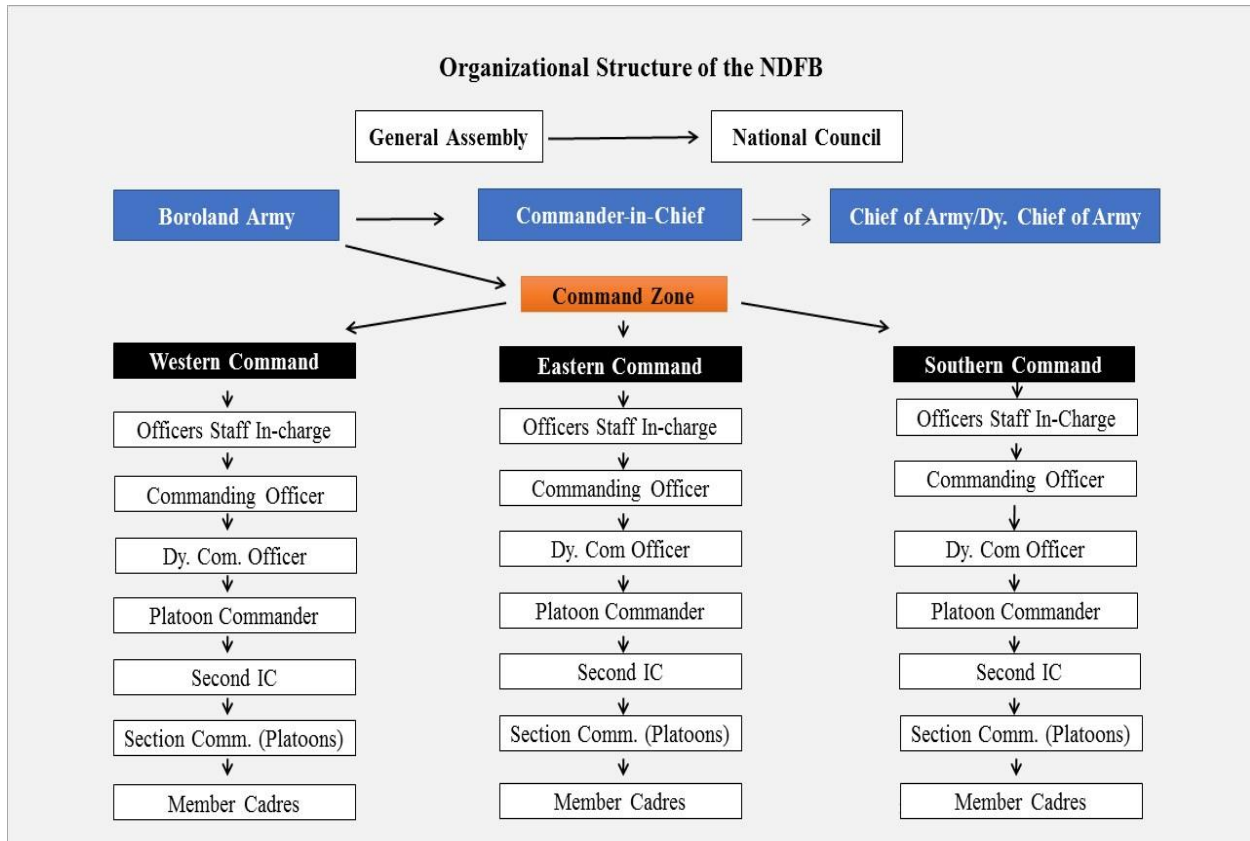


Figure 4.1: Organizational structure of the NDFB

The sessions of the National Council was presided over by the President of the organization who held the topmost position within the organization and who was also the supreme commander of the Boroland Army.²²⁸ Ranjan Daimary was elected as the first President and commander-in-chief of the organization. His approvals were required for any resolutions, amendments or in any decision making process. The Vice-President assisted the President in the official activities and in the absence/illness of the President, the Vice-President assumed all the powers and the functions of the President. In case of death of the President of the organization or in case of resignation of the President, the Vice-President succeeded the President till a new

²²⁷ Ibid. (1998). p.8

²²⁸ Ibid. (1998). p.6

President was elected.²²⁹ On the other hand, the General Secretary of the organization was entrusted to execute the functions of the National Council. He was the main executive office bearer of the NDFB. He was entrusted to see that that the decisions and the resolutions passed by the National Council were executed and at the same time he had to note down the minutes of the sessions/sittings of the General Assembly as well as the National Council and submit the report of overall activities of the organization.²³⁰ The General Secretary of the party was also authorized to suggest and distribute his functions to other secretaries in consultation with the President and Vice-President of the organization. The General Secretary also convened both the General Assembly and the National Council.

NDFB also had a flag, which was green in colour with a red circle at the top left corner and a star, yellow in colour within the red circle. The green colour of the flag symbolized the Sovereign Existence of Boroland and its Continuity whereas the red colour symbolized Dynamism and Revolution.²³¹ The Star within the circle stood for Truth, Peace and the Guiding Light of the Boro nation. The organization also had an emblem of its own with a Sijou²³² branch and a Flaming Fire within a green circle. The Constitution also adopted Boro and English as the official language of the organization and either English/Roman Script as its official script. The Constitution also laid out the rules and regulations to be followed while recruiting fresh members for the organization; there is also a mention about the specific duration a respective rebel had to serve in the NDFB. The male rebel members were required to serve for a minimum of 12 years whereas the minimum duration for the female rebel members was fixed at 8 years after which the rebels could opt for retirements or continue its association with the organization.²³³ The new recruits had to undergo rigorous three years training after which they were inducted into the General Assembly of the organization, which met once in a year.²³⁴

²²⁹ Ibid. (1998). p.7

²³⁰ Ibid. (1998). p.7

²³¹ Ibid. (1998). p. 3

²³² The Sijou tree is regarded as the living embodiment/incarnation/epitome of Bathou Bwrai who is worshipped by the followers of Bathouism.

²³³ See the Constitution of the National Democratic Front of Boroland. (1998). p. 5.

²³⁴ Ibid. (1998). p. 5.

The scrutiny and the approval of any financial policies as well as the appointment of auditors was vested on the General Assembly and in the case of any amendments in the constitution, the General Assembly was authorized to do so through the support of two-third majority of the members of the organization present in the Assembly.²³⁵ The General Assembly was also responsible for the omission and the commission of the formation of the Boroland Army through the support of a two-third majority of the members present in the Assembly. The National Council was further empowered to call a special General Assembly session whenever it felt necessary. The General Assembly would also be summoned by 50 or more members of the NDFB.²³⁶ The Assembly sessions were presided over by the speaker who was appointed by the members of the General Assembly; the speaker was responsible for maintaining law and decorum in the Assembly sessions.²³⁷ The speaker was also authorized to fix the agendas to be taken up in the Assembly sessions and he/she was also entrusted to grant permission to the members to speak about the selected agendas. Like the speaker of any other legislative assembly, the speaker of the NDFB also carried the same responsibilities.

Strict disciplinary actions against the members of the organization were put in place in order to make the organization disciplined and more cohesive. The organization put up rules and regulations for the general rebel members and failure to abide those would lead to conviction by the special court put in place. According to article 15, the members of the organization were required to obey orders of the superiors, rebels were prohibited from drinking/smoking or use any other intoxicating drugs, members were also expected to be polite and gentle in their behaviour, rules were also put in place to not take liberty with men or women and finally there were regulations which mentioned that unmarried member shall marry after minimum 5 years of service but he/she must complete 28 and 25 years of his/her age respectively.²³⁸ If any member of the organization failed to abide by the rules and regulations laid out in article 15, then such rebel members would be prosecuted through trial. A special judiciary known as the Peoples'

²³⁵ Ibid. (1998). p. 5.

²³⁶ Ibid (1998). p. 5.

²³⁷ Ibid. (1998). p. 6.

²³⁸ Ibid. (1998). pp. 8-9.

Revolutionary Court was formed for free and fair trial of the members of the organization who were convicted for any violations of the rules and regulations of the organization.²³⁹

Thus the NDFB, like many other armed groups, acquired a military-style structure, which contributed to the group's cohesiveness and efficient functioning. In due course of time, NDFB became more resolute and determined to achieve the goals of sovereignty. The organization actively engaged in violent activities since 1989.²⁴⁰ After 1993, NDFB intensified the armed struggle. The next section discusses the various mobilizing activities of the NDFB which had a significant impact on the organization and the insurgency in particular.

4.4 Mobilizing resources: Early phases of armed activities

The initial stages of the insurgency are considered very critical for the insurgent groups as this stage involves building up the capabilities of the organization. Mobilization of resources involves acquiring finances, recruits, establishment of bases/safe havens and networks, arms and ammunitions, imparting training to the new recruits and others. Resources include both tangible and intangible logistics and these resources contribute directly to the capability building of the armed organizations. These resources help the armed organizations to sustain the rebellion against the relatively stronger state security forces especially during the early stages of the insurgency when the organization tends to be very weak. Resources such as finance, support base, recruits, arms and ammunitions, network with other armed organizations, internal as well as external bases and others play an important role in an armed rebellion. Similarly, NDFB was engaged in mobilizing resources during the initial years of the rebellion

A. Finance

Financial resources are very crucial for an armed organization as it enables the organization to maintain the cost of the insurgency especially for acquiring arms and ammunitions, organizational activities, training and other logistics for the organization. Likewise during the initial years, NDFB was also involved in mobilizing funds for the organizational activities. The founding President of the organization stated that during the initial days, the

²³⁹ Ibid. (1998). p. 9.

²⁴⁰ This was mentioned by Ranjan Daimary during interview conducted on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

organization held secret meetings in the Bodo villages especially at nights with the villagers.²⁴¹ Appeals were made by the organization during these meetings to help the organization financially and support the organization for the interests of the community. During those days, NDFB had a huge support base among the Bodos especially in Udalguri region. The supporters donated voluntarily to the organization.²⁴² Ranjan Daimary stated that the NDFB accepted donations only from the Bodo people. The donations from the Bodos were purely voluntary and did not involve any coercion. A former General Secretary of the NDFB stated that they did not target the common villagers, either from the Bodo or the non-Bodo communities for financial assistance. The organization sought financial assistance only from those individuals or organizations that had enough money to donate to the organization. The organization also sought donations only during serious financial stress and did not trouble the common people for financial assistance.²⁴³ Few others claimed that with the donations received from the people, the organization also helped poor Bodo students who could not afford money for their studies.²⁴⁴

The organization also depended on the involuntary donations from the non-Bodos living in the Bodo areas.²⁴⁵ The organization issued extortion notes/letters/notices to the non-Bodo people to contribute financially to the organization.²⁴⁶ The organizational leadership argued that they specifically issued these notices to the non-Bodo businessmen and contractors mostly from

²⁴¹ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri. During the interview, he mentioned that the NDFB could not buy enough arms and ammunitions initially due to lack of money. Thus the organization sought for donations from the Bodo people. The organization accepted whatever amount people donated.

²⁴² Narrated by Ranjan Daimary and a former General Secretary of the NDFB during interviews conducted on 11 November 2018 and 13 November 2018 respectively. Many Bodo villagers also mentioned this during the interviews conducted from 15-19 April 2019. They mentioned that the supporters donated voluntarily to the organization. Bhraman Baglary, one of the founding members of the former All Bodo Peace Forum, a civil society organization responsible for facilitating the negotiation process between the Government of India and the NDFB also supported this view in conducted on 4th July, 2019 at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

²⁴³ Interview narratives with one of the members of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, conducted on 19 April 2019 at Sapkhaiti, Udalguri.

²⁴⁴ This was narrated by Bhraman Baglary, a former General Secretary of the All Bodo Peace Forum formed in 2004 during interview held at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

²⁴⁵ Narrated by Gobinda Basumatary, 5 October 2017, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁴⁶ Ranjan Daimary, narrated this during interview conducted on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

the Marwari, Bengali, Nepali and Bihari communities working in the Bodo areas.²⁴⁷ The organization sought donations from these businessmen as a tax for doing business in the Bodo areas. Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words “*NDFB demanded money from the non-Bodos especially the businessmen, contractors etc. and sometimes indulged in kidnappings of the non-Bodos and asked for ransom. However, we did not demand anything from the common villagers including both Bodos and non-Bodos. We targeted only those non-Bodos who had enough money to give to the organization. Among the non-Bodos too, generally, the NDFB did not demand money from the Assamese community besides the businessmen, contractors and others who were well to do. We mostly demanded money from the Marwaris, Biharis, Nepalis and Bengalis. Since they were outsiders, they were demanded money by the organization whether they take it as a tax for doing business in our land or other. They were told to pay something once in a year. On this ground, we took money from the outsiders who were from out of Assam, but had settled here. So besides the businessmen, the organization did not take or demand money from the general Assamese community.*”²⁴⁸ As argued by one of the senior member of the NDFB, the organization also resorted to kidnappings of non-Bodo businessmen, contractors and other rich people for ransom in order to secure funding for the organization.²⁴⁹

The organization also sought donations from the tea garden owners especially located in the Bodo dominated areas during the course of the insurgency.²⁵⁰ Tea estates became a significant source of finance for NDFB. Initially, the organization issued notices to the tea garden owners to donate money to the organization. However, if the owners of the tea gardens refused to pay the organization, the rebels kidnapped the managers/owners or other senior officials of many tea gardens for ransom. For instance, the managers of Borangajuli tea garden, Williamson Magor, Paneri tea garden, Panbari tea garden in Dekhijuli and also the owner of Bhergaon tea garden were reportedly kidnapped for ransom at different points in time.²⁵¹ Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words “*Initially the organization approached the tea garden owners by writing letters to them, asking them to donate money to the organization. But*

²⁴⁷ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary conducted on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid

²⁵⁰ Narrated by Gobinda Basumatary on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

they were not ready to give any financial assistance to the organization. So we kidnapped the managers of many tea gardens.” After the kidnapping of the manager of Williamson Magor, the Company decided to donate something once a year and they continued to do the same for many years. It was only after the ceasefire agreement in 2005, the donation from the company towards the NDFB stopped.²⁵² The rebels of the NDFB had also kidnapped an executive officer of the Tata Tea Company.

Reportedly, NDFB was also involved in the looting of a State Bank in Rangapara in 1990 in order to secure more financial resources for the sustenance of the rebellion.²⁵³ They were able to rob huge amount of money from the bank but while they were on their way back, their car broke down and as a result they had to abandon most of the money and could carry with them only about 6 lakhs rupees. Besides these sources, most of the funds came in the form of voluntary donations from their supporters and sympathizers. The donations/money enabled the organization to acquire logistics which contributed in building the capabilities of the organization. The next section examines the recruitment process of the organization and the availability of recruits during the course of the movement.

B. Recruitment

Recruitment of new members into the NSAGs/insurgent groups is one of the significant factors, which contribute to sustenance of the insurgency. It becomes necessary for armed organizations to identify credible and committed individuals who would be prepared to join the organization. Thus, NDFB mobilized and recruited young Bodos into the organization. The fear of suppression of rights of the Bodos and marginalization by the Assamese-speaking non-tribal groups was used to mobilize the Bodos.²⁵⁴

Initially, NDFB composed of a small number of members. At the time of the formation of the organization, there were only 33 official members.²⁵⁵ Gradually many Bodo youths and

²⁵² Ibid

²⁵³ Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri. Also narrated by M. Fwilao, former NDFB rebel during the interview conducted on 03 July 2019 at the designated camp of NDFB located in Sapkhaiti, Udalguri.

²⁵⁴ Interview with M. Fwilao, 03 July 2019, designated camp of the NDFB located in Sapkhaiti, Udalguri.

²⁵⁵ Interview with Amarendra Brahma, conducted on 8th July, 2019 at Bathoupuri high School, Guwahati.

people from other communities too joined the organization. By the beginning of 1987, senior and founding members of the organization went from village to village and held meetings with the Bodo villagers.²⁵⁶ These meetings were held secretly at nights and appeals were made in these meetings to the Bodo youths to join the organization for the greater cause of the community.²⁵⁷ Sometimes, these meetings were held openly whenever the situation permitted. During such meetings, the leaders explained about the purpose and the necessity of such an armed movement. The organizational leadership also motivated the people by emphasizing on the failure of the past democratic movements launched by the Bodos at various points in time especially under the leadership of the PTCA. Motivational speeches were made on how the grievances of the Bodo have been continuously neglected by the State Government, which was mostly dominated by non-tribal Assamese-speaking communities. Following these meetings, many young Bodos especially from Udalguri and later on from different Bodo-dominated places joined the organization.

The formation of NDFB provided platform for many young Bodos to voice their concerns against the policies of the State Government, which were deemed discriminatory by the members of the organization as well as by the Bodos in general. At the same time, it also provided an opportunity for non-committed youths to take advantage of the situation. As one of the respondents argued that *“many young men enlisted themselves in the NDFB being genuinely motivated by their true and intense love for the Bodo nation, to totally dedicate themselves in serving it, whereas others joined the organization by just following the trend without any true realization of their action and still some others joined the organization with evil motives and pressure from enemies with a spying intention”*.²⁵⁸ In terms of recruitment of rebels, NDFB followed a voluntary recruitment process with a one-person recruitment policy from each family, though there were some exceptions.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri and Ranjan Daimary, conducted on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri. This was also narrated by Hectorson Mushahary, former Home Secretary of NDFB during interviews which was conducted on 5 July 2019.

²⁵⁷ Narrated by Amarendra Brahma, interview conducted on 8th July, 2019 at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

²⁵⁸ See Boro, D. (2015). *The Lockup is my Home*. Words n Words. p. 11. Kokrajhar.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary conducted on 5 October 2017 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

As opposed to the general notion that NDFB is a Christian-oriented organization and that it had its own Christianity-centric agendas, the organization recruited rebel members belonging to Christian and non-Christian communities. The founding President of the organization argued that the majority of the recruits belonged to Brahma and Bathou religion.²⁶⁰ He further argued that since the organization was formed in Udalguri, most of the top ranking members was Christians as the district has a large section of Bodos following Christianity. The founding General Secretary and the Vice-President of the organization practiced Brahma religion.

The organizational leadership argued that the organization had a clear objective of securing a sovereign nation for the Bodos and thus the composition of the members from different religious background within the organization did not hamper the dynamics of the insurgency.²⁶¹ The organization identified itself to be a secular organization without any division based on religion, caste or region within the organization. The founding President of the organization also argued that the Indian State always tried to portray NDFB as a Christian organization and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) as a pro-India Hindu organization thereby creating misunderstandings among the community.

Besides the Bodos, there were also recruits belonging to communities like Hajong, Koch, Garo, Rabha, Mech, Lalung, Deori, Saraniya, Sonowal and Karbi.²⁶² The organization gradually recruited members from all the Bodo-dominated areas during the course of the movement though initially most of the rebels were from Udalguri. The organization could recruit members from Kokrajhar only by 1993-94 after the failure of the BAC Accord as the insurgency gradually spreaded to other areas. NDFB also recruited members from districts like Sonitpur, Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong. During the course of the movement, many young Bodos from Dhubri joined the organization. The number of rebel members went up to 4000 when the movement was at its peak.²⁶³ After the split, which started in 2008, NDFB (Progressive) had around 1200 rebels,

²⁶⁰ Interview with Ranjan Daimary conducted on 11 November 2018. He argued that during the course of the movement more than 80 per cent of the members were non-Christians.

²⁶¹ Narrated by the founding President of the NDFB during the interview conducted on 11 November 2018.

²⁶² Narrated by Ranjan Daimary as well as the former General Secretary of the NDFB. Interview conducted on 11 November and 13 November 2018 respectively.

²⁶³ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 13 November 2018, Sudempuri, Udalguri. Also narrated by Amarendra Brahma, on 8th July, 2019 at Bathoupuri high School, Guwahati.

NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) had around 400-500 and the NDFB (Saoraigra) had about 150-200 rebel members.²⁶⁴

During the course of the insurgency, NDFB had a very negligible number of female rebel members. In 1993, 12 female members were recruited into the organization.²⁶⁵ The organization did not have a clear count of the number of female rebel members who joined the armed movement. Throughout the movement, the total number of female rebel members is estimated to be about 30-35 members. Many of them had to be discharged especially after their marriage. However, many Bodo women worked as overground activists and members of the organization providing covert support. Some female members were later arrested and two female rebel members of the NDFB were lodged in jail.²⁶⁶

C. Arms and Ammunitions

At the initial stages of the movement, the organization faced difficulties in procuring arms and ammunitions in order to sustain and lead the movement forward. Lack of funds and resources to acquire arms and ammunitions became a key point for the organization as the lack of arms and ammunitions hampered the dynamics of the rebellion initially. NDFB rebels attacked security forces' camps in many places and snatched arms and ammunitions from the security forces. For instance, NDFB rebels snatched weapons and ammunitions from the forest department forces in Rangapara in 1989 after the completion of the first formal training. The rebels also attacked Assam Police Task Force (APTF) camp in Swapangaon and snatched weapons from the security forces.²⁶⁷ NDFB rebels also reportedly attacked the Assam Police Battalion (APBN) headquarter in Charaikhola in Kokrajhar district in 1992. At the later phase of the insurgency, they were able to purchase smuggled arms and ammunitions from different middlemen and at the same time, they were also able to secure arms and ammunitions from the NSCN-IM.²⁶⁸ In the early stages of the rebellion, NSCN-IM also helped the NDFB by supplying

²⁶⁴ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary and Ranjan Daimary on 13 November 2018 and 11 November 2018 respectively.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, on 13 November 2018.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁶⁷ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary during the interview conducted on 11 November 2018 and a former General Secretary of the NDFB during interview on 13 November 2018.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

arms and ammunitions.²⁶⁹ Besides NSCN (IM), NDFB also maintained a very close relationship with United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). These organizations jointly bought arms and ammunitions from the smugglers during the course of the movement. Most of these arms and ammunitions were smuggled through the ports in Bangladesh. NDFB also acquired Chinese-made arms and ammunitions through some middlemen who used to organize arm consignments supplied to them by the Chinese side.²⁷⁰ However, at the same time, the organization was unsure of any active involvement of any Chinese officials in supplying these consignments. The consignments included AK47, snipers, rocket launchers and ammunitions and so on. In 2004, the government forces seized a huge consignment of arms and ammunitions. Besides the arms and ammunition consignments, the organization also acquired electronic devices especially communication devices from countries like Thailand and Singapore.²⁷¹ Ranjan Daimary argued in these words "*I have visited Singapore and Thailand. I had visited these countries in order acquire some electronic items especially communication devices. I visited Thailand whenever we had to procure any logistics or whenever we had some talks. I even had a rented house in Bangkok. We used to be in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Bangkok and Singapore.*"

D. Bases and safe havens

Safe havens/bases, both internal as well as external are critical requirements for an armed organization for continuing the insurgency against the more advantageous state security forces. Establishment of bases especially safe havens in a foreign territory allow the rebels to operate actively. Insurgent organizations from the northeast like ULFA, KLO, NSCN-IM and others had active operational bases in Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar during the course of the rebellion. Likewise, NDFB was also able to establish bases especially in Bhutan since the late 1980s. From the very beginning of the rebellion, NDFB had set its eyes on the mountainous and forested territory of Bhutan to establish bases. The founding President of the organization revealed that NDFB was the first insurgent organization to establish a base/camp in Bhutan in

²⁶⁹ Narrated by Gobinda Basumatary during the interview conducted on 5 October 2017 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁷⁰ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁷¹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

1989.²⁷² Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “BSF was the first to establish its camp in Bhutan in 1989. We set up the camp in Bhutan in a place called Daifam situated adjacent to Udalguri district in Assam along the Indo-Bhutan border. The Bhutan government/army did not oppose the building of the camp on its soil.” Other insurgent organizations like the ULFA established their bases in Bhutan only after 1991. The organization organized training for the new recruits in these bases located in Bhutan at various points in time during the course of the insurgency.²⁷³ NDFB also organized training for the new recruits in Barpeta, especially in the forested areas situated along the Indo-Bhutan border.²⁷⁴

As mentioned earlier, NDFB established its first camp in Bhutan in a place called Daifam situated adjacent to the Udalguri district in Assam.²⁷⁵ By 1994, NDFB established many camps in Bhutan starting from Sankosh River to Daifam in Bhutan. NDFB had four major operational bases in Bhutan.²⁷⁶ One of the bases was located in Kawaipani, near Samrang in Baksa district of Assam. NDFB also had camps in Namlang located north of Barpeta. The organization also established bases in Zomduar in a place called Kalikhola along the Gosaigaon-Bhutan border and Teentala along the Bengal- Bhutan border. NDFB also had bases/camps near Bhairabkhunda in Udalguri district. Besides these major camps, the organization had 4-5 additional smaller bases in Bhutan. The organization also established camps in and around the Manas Reserve Forest located in Barpeta district during the course of the movement.²⁷⁷

Besides Bhutan, NDFB started establishing bases in Bangladesh since 1993 and these bases were concentrated especially in Khagrachari areas in Chittagong Hill Tracts where it shared bases with the NSCN-IM.²⁷⁸ Besides the bases in Bhutan and Bangladesh, the

²⁷² Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁷³ Interview with D. Rwjab, former member of NDFB conducted on 27 June 2019 at the NDFB designated camp located in Sapkhaiti, Udalguri.

²⁷⁴ Interview with B. Runai, former member of NDFB conducted on 27 June 2019 at the NDFB designated camp located in Sapkhaiti, Udalguri

²⁷⁵ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁷⁶ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 29 June, 2019 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁷⁷ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary, on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁷⁸ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary conducted on 5th July, 2019 at Purani Goraibari, Udalguri. This was also narrated by Ranjan Daimary, on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

organization established small offices in Nepal for two years.²⁷⁹ Main operational bases of the NDFB were based in Bhutan especially till Operation All Clear was launched in 2003. The third faction, NDFB (Saoraigra) used these bases in Bhutan as a mobile camp/base after NDFB (Progressive) and NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) renounced violence and engaged in the negotiation process.²⁸⁰ Since late 1980s and 1990s, most of the bases of NDFB were based in Bhutan.

Safe havens in Bangladesh also enabled insurgent groups like NDFB, ULFA and others from the northeast to continue the insurgency and avoid the operations conducted by the Indian security forces (Datta, 2003). However, the assumption of the Pro-India Awami League to power in Bangladesh in 1996, witnessed intensification of counter-insurgent operations against the NSCN-IM, NDFB and the ULFA in Bangladesh (Priesner, 1998). Intensification of operations by the new Bangladeshi Government eventually forced the rebels to look out for alternatives in the neighboring countries to establish bases/safe havens from where they could carry out their activities.

NDFB did not have any established bases in Myanmar initially. Only in 2008, after the split of the organization into NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) and NDFB (Progressive), NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) felt the need to establish bases in Myanmar.²⁸¹ Due to the change in Government in Bangladesh, where the rebels were still based, NDFB leadership became apprehensive that the pro-India Awami League would launch counter insurgency operations against the rebel organizations. NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) communicated with SS Khaplang, the leader of NSCN (K) in 2008 and sought his permission to establish camps in Myanmar.²⁸² NSCN (K) permitted NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) to establish camps in Myanmar. Eventually, NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) moved some of its rebels to Myanmar and established the first base in Myanmar in 2009. Besides these bases, the organization also had operational bases within the Indian Territory especially in districts like Karbi Anglong, Sonitpur, Meghalaya and others within the Indian Territory throughout the insurgency.

²⁷⁹ Narrated by Gobinda Basumatary, on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁸² Ibid

E. Network

Network/maintaining a close relationship with other insurgent groups is very essential for insurgent groups in order to sustain the organization and the insurgency for a longer period of time. Networks with other insurgent organizations allow the armed groups to have access to logistics such as finance, arms and ammunitions and at the same time allow the insurgents to share logistics, information and other critical logistical support with each other. NDFB had a close relationship with National Socialist Council of Nagaland-IM (NSCN-IM) and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).²⁸³ NDFB conducted the first formal training in Rangapara under three instructors of NSCN-IM in 1989 which reveals the close relationship between the two groups.²⁸⁴ The close relationship shared between NDFB and NSCN-IM was also revealed when NSCN General Secretary T. Muivah and Foreign Secretary, Angelo Simreh along with their families took shelter in the NDFB camps located in the Bhutanese Territory in December 1989 after the NSCN split into two groups. Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “*So when the BSF established the camp in Bhutan, we were very lucky that NSCN General Secretary T Muivah and his wife and Angelo Simreh, the Foreign Secretary and his wife came in our land in December 1989 after the Christmas after the split of the NSCN to take shelter in our camps. So they stayed with us in our Bhutan camps for more than 3 months and others stayed for more than 1 year. So they were very expert and experienced and we learnt a lot from them about the revolutionary politics and issues related to the ethno-nationalist assertions.*”²⁸⁵ At the same time, the Southern Command (3rd battalion) of the NDFB, which was based in Bangladesh under the leadership of Daimary, shared bases with the NSCN-IM in Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

Besides the NSCN-IM, NDFB also had a very close relationship with United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), People’s Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA), National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), United People’s Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and others. Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “*We also shared a very good relation with ULFA. We were living like a family in Bangladesh. For instance, during Christmas, they would come and join us. And since they were living as a Muslim in Bangladesh, during Eid they invited us. Also whenever, Arabinda*

²⁸³ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

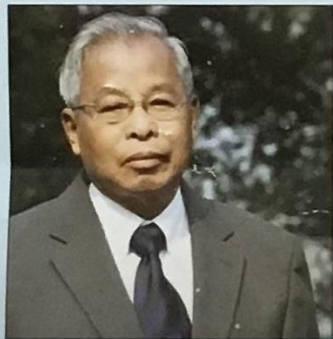
²⁸⁴ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, conducted on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri

²⁸⁵ Ibid

Rajkhowa wanted to eat pork, he informed me to prepare the dish he wanted to have by speaking in Bengali. He used to consume almost 1 kg alone. He, especially, liked a Boro dish called 'Pork with Narzi' which is pork with dry jute leaves. So we had a very good relation with ULFA also. Paresh Baruah and myself had even jointly procured weapons in 2000 from other countries through Bangladesh using their ports and ships and then transported them to Bhutan. That was also a huge consignment. So we had very good relations with ULFA too. NDFB was not a small organization; it was a very important and dreaded organization of the region. We also had good relation with PLA, NLFT, ATTF and UPDS also. We had very good relations with all the rebel organizations of the northeast including ANVC, HNLC.”²⁸⁶ These close networks allowed the NDFB to carry out its organizational activities efficiently.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

NDFB MOURNS THE LOSS OF A GREAT FRIEND



Isak Chishi Swu, the Chairman of NSCN, the best friend of NDFB and Boro people died in a hospital in Delhi on the 28th June, 2016 at the age of 87.

A delegation of NDFB and BWJF attended the State Funeral Service of Late Isak Chishi Swu held at Hebron, CHQ on the 1st July, 2016 and paid rich tribute and homage to the great revolutionary leader who committed his entire life not only for Nagas and Nagalim but also for the oppressed people of the region. NDFB and BWJF also extended deepest condolences to the family members, leaders and cadres and to the people of Nagalim on his demise.

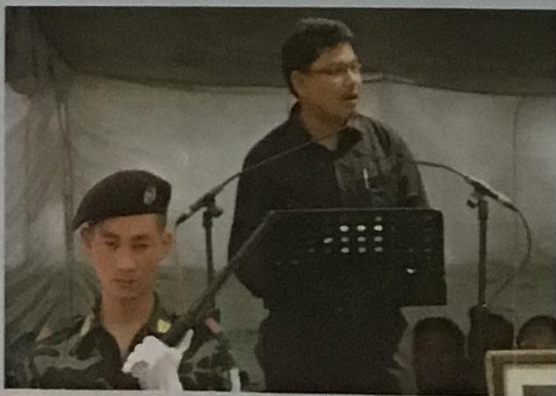


Photo 4.2: NDFB offered condolences on the death of Isak Chishi Swu, the Chairman of NSCN-IM in Camp Hebron, Nagaland

Source: News Bulletin published by NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) on 3 October 2018

The first formal training of the NDFB cadres was conducted in October-November, 1989 under the guidance of the NSCN (IM). The first batch was imparted training in a village called Gwringjuli in Rangapara located in Sonitpur district bordering Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.²⁸⁷ Besides the physical and weapons training, NDFB rebels were imparted sessions on the overall objectives of the movement, political, social as well as psychological training sessions.²⁸⁸ These sessions also enabled the organization to instill discipline among the rebels as well within the organization. Jabrang, one self-styled Commander of the organization had also gone to Pakistan for training.²⁸⁹

Resources such as finance, arms and ammunitions, recruits, support base, safe havens/bases, organizational structure and the networks with other insurgent organizations of the region strengthened the capabilities of the NDFB. NDFB was able to counter the state security forces and continued to engage in the guerilla warfare against the state actors for almost two decades due to availability of resources which strengthened the organization in due course of time. The next section discusses the different phases of the insurgency led by NDFB.

4.5 The armed insurgency (1986-2005)

NDFB gradually intensified its activities with an objective of a sovereign homeland for the Bodos. NDFB had clear ideological differences with the statehood movement led by ABSU, which started in 1987, and thus the organization did not participate in the movement led by the student body. NDFB leadership argued that the problems faced by the Bodos could not be resolved through the creation of a separate state of Bodoland within India and that armed struggle was the only way to address the problems of the Bodos.

Initial phases of the armed rebellion were relatively less violent as the organization was mostly involved in mobilizing resources. The organization decided to maintain distance from the statehood movement. U.N. Brahma, the President of ABSU was not completely against the armed movement of the NDFB. Thus, he offered his moral support to the NDFB.²⁹⁰ However,

²⁸⁷ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary.

²⁸⁸ This was narrated by Gobinda Basumatary, 5 October 2017 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 11 November 2018, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

²⁹⁰ Interview with Amarendra Brahma, on 08 July 2019 at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

the onset of two parallel movements of the same community affected the dynamics of the two movements in the later stages. NDFB faced stiff opposition from the ABSU leaders and supporters right from the beginning.²⁹¹ Nileswar Basumatary argued that *“there was a misunderstanding between the two organizations during the statehood movement and after, which was followed by violence between the two organizations. When we started our struggle with demand for a sovereign country of Bodoland, there was objection from ABSU. While we were mobilizing in the villages, they had opposed our ideology. They had also opposed our entry in the villages and argued that the Bodos wanted only a separate state of Bodoland and not sovereignty. However, in spite of the stiff opposition from ABSU, NDFB was welcomed everywhere. And eventually we could make our presence felt in almost every Bodo villages. Our support base also increased many folds in due course of time. The State Government conspired and instigated ABSU and the Volunteer Force against the BSF (NDFB). Due to these instigations, ABSU and the Volunteer Force targeted the BSF rebels and its supporters.”*²⁹² There are many instances of violence between the two organizations where members and supporters of both the organizations lost their lives and many were left injured.²⁹³

At the same time, there were instances where the NDFB leadership tried to resolve the core issues of the differences with the students’ union leadership. However, all these efforts failed at that time. Violence between the two organizations started on 14 September 1988 in a place called Abongjhar near Rowta Chariali presently located in Udalguri district.²⁹⁴ This period witnessed targeted killings of several PTCA workers by the ABSU activists and vice-versa. The clashes between ABSU and PTCA workers worsened day-by-day. Tangla and Dimakuchi in Udalguri, Bismuri near Ramphalbil in Kokrajhar, Rupohi and Simla in Baksa district and many areas in Nalbari district witnessed targeted killings between the PTCA and ABSU activists.²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, in an effort to diffuse this tension between the PTCA and ABSU, NDFB leadership was asked by the PTCA leaders to step in to stop the violence and bring normalcy in the region.

²⁹¹ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary, 05 July, 2019, Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Narrated by Amarendra Brahma, on 8 July, 2019 at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary, on 5 July, 2019, Purani Goraibari, Udalguri and Amarendra Brahma, on 8 July, 2019.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

Accordingly, Amarendra Brahma, the General Secretary of NDFB and Bangbur Gwra Basumatary, the Army Chief of NDFB visited Rowta in order to resolve the core issues of the conflict between ABSU and PTCA. However, Amarendra Brahma and Bangbur Gwra Basumatary were attacked by ABSU activists in their attempt to diffuse the tensions between students' union and PTCA. In that incident, Bangbur Gwra Basumatary succumbed to his injuries and Amarendra Brahma also suffered severe injuries, which eventually forced him to quit the organization on physical ground in 1991. Hereafter, the organization regarded Bangbur Gwra Basumatary as the first martyr of the NDFB and observes 14 September as the Martyr's Day every year. This is how the violence between the two organizations started in 1988. Hereafter, NDFB also started targeting the ABSU and the Volunteer Force members and supporters, which led to the deaths of many ABSU workers. Due to such violent activities of ABSU, NDFB also conducted "Operation Khrangkhrang" against ABSU and its supporters in order to stop the killings of NDFB and its supporters.²⁹⁶ This operation was launched in villages like Hagramari, Belguri, Bhurachuburi, Dhalkata and other areas located in Udalguri district and also in and around Dimakuchi and Udalguri town. Nileswar Basumatary also argued in these words *"In 1991, we had also conducted "Operation Khrangkhrang" against the ABSU members and their supporters. At that time, the ABSU/NF was targeting our members and our supporters. Many were killed in the process. Such incidents were mainly being initiated in Dimakuchi area now located in Udalguri district. So in retaliation against such targeted killings of our members and supporters by the ABSU activists, we conducted Operation Khrangkhrang against the ABSU workers."*²⁹⁷ In this operation, several ABSU activists were injured and many lost their lives. Eventually, ABSU activists stopped targeting the NDFB workers and supporters after this operation. Besides the fierce encounter with the student union workers, NDFB rebels were also involved in a face-off with the Muslim population.

The organization, gradually, started targeting the security forces after the first formal training was concluded in 1989, mostly to procure arms and ammunitions. Immediately after the completion of training in Rangapara, NDFB rebels snatched 7 rifles and about 2000 ammunitions

²⁹⁶ Interviews with Amarendra Brahma, Nileswar Basumatary and Gobinda Basumatary.

²⁹⁷ Narrated by Nileswar Basumatary

from the forest protection forces in Rangapara in December 1989.²⁹⁸ During this attack, there were no casualties on either side and the weapons were seized at gunpoint. NDFB rebels were involved in many ‘hit and run’ encounters with the security forces. By 1989, NDFB had also established bases in the Bhutanese Territory.

In 1990-91, NDFB rebels attacked the Swapangaon APTF camp which is located near the Indo-Bhutan border and is about 16 km from Udalguri town under the leadership of Military Secretary, Khowla.²⁹⁹ The President of the organization recalled that this incident might have been one of the deadliest and dangerous attacks carried out by the organization, which sent a very shocking signal to the Assamese community and to the people of Assam at that time. In the attack, 7 APTF personnel were killed and Khowla himself was also killed.³⁰⁰ The founding President of the NDFB stated that prior to this attack, the Bodos were unable to move about freely and were unable to visit the Udalguri town freely for any work. The bitter relationship between the Bodos and the Assamese community at that time made the environment in the area very uncertain. However, the attack on the APTF camp changed the situation and the Bodos were able to visit the nearby areas without any fear. Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “*In those days you know, the Bodos and the Assamese shared a bitter relationship. Even we could not go to Udalguri town. Then our boys including our Military Secretary Khowla went and attacked the APTF camp. 7 APTF personnel were killed and our Commander Khowla was also killed there. So, that was a very shock signal for the entire Assamese community and for the entire Assam. Then only, our Bodo people were able to go to Udalguri town as the Assamese people became scared of us now.*” The organization maintained that till then the Bodo organization was never involved in any attacks against the Assamese community and termed the attack on the APTF camp as the biggest achievement of NDFB as the NDFB and the Bodos in general were able to make their presence felt in the region.³⁰¹ As argued by Ranjan Daimary, this incident solidified the identity and the interests of the Bodos. Thus, since the late 1980s, NDFB

²⁹⁸ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary on 29 May 2016 and 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri. Also narrated by a former General Secretary of the NDFB during the interviews on 5 October 2017 and 13 November 2018.

²⁹⁹ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary and Amarendra Brahma.

³⁰⁰ Interview with Ranjan Daimary.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

began to engage directly with the state machineries through various violent campaigns and activities.

In yet another major attack on the state institution, the organization attacked the 7 APBN headquarter situated in Charaikhola in Kokrajhar district on 22nd December 1992, where 7 police personnel were killed and at the same time, the organization snatched 42 SLRs and few LMGs from the security personnel.³⁰² The organization, through these attacks not only acquired arms and ammunitions, but was also able to engage directly with the state actors and created pressures on the Government through violent attacks. Although the organization was engaged in mobilizing resources during early stages of the movement, it also carried out attacks against the state security forces in the process of the acquiring resources for the organization.³⁰³

Meanwhile, in 1992, Ranjan Daimary, the chairman of NDFB had a meeting with Premising Brahma, one of the leaders of statehood movement, whereby the leaders discussed the possibilities of fighting side by side for the greater cause of the Bodos.³⁰⁴ The meeting was held in the NDFB camp located in Khowrong along the Indo-Bhutan border. However, NDFB stuck to their objectives and decided to work independently for a sovereign country for the Bodos.

In the meantime, NDFB was engaged in various violent activities against the state security establishments. In 1996, Jabrang, a self-styled Commander of the NDFB, after successful completion of his training in Pakistan, ambushed and killed 6 CRPF personnel.³⁰⁵ Jabrang was also involved in blowing up a vehicle of Madhya Pradesh Police posted in Assam, which resulted in the deaths of 21-23 police personnel. At that time, due to the shortage of police force in Assam, additional police forces were brought from Madhya Pradesh. In the incident, Jabrang was also injured in cross-firings and ultimately he succumbed to the injuries. The organization was again involved in the 1994 communal riots between the Bodos and the Muslims and in the 1996 Bodo-Adivasi riots.³⁰⁶ Ranjan Daimary again argued that “*the NDFB was also*

³⁰² Interview with Ranjan Daimary.

³⁰³ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³⁰⁴ Interview with Ranjan Daimary.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

involved in the Bodo-Muslim and Bodo-Adivasi communal conflict during 1994-1996. Otherwise without NDFB, the Bangladeshis would been in Bhutan by now.”

In the meantime, the BAC Accord was signed on 20 February 1993 between the ABSU-BPAC and the government, which resulted in the formation of a new administrative setup called BAC. NDFB maintained a neutral position towards the accord. The organization neither rejected the accord outwardly nor welcomed the accord openly. However, the NDFB leaderships argued that the BAC Accord had nothing which would safeguard the aspirations of the Bodos.³⁰⁷ As argued by Ranjan Daimary, BAC was like “a man without blood, without any territory.”³⁰⁸ A senior founding member of the organization argued that the ABSU leaders were forced to sign the BAC Accord by the State Government at that time.³⁰⁹ The Accord failed to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos. But at the same time, this accord provided the foundation for further demands. Thus, NDFB issued a statement that it will continue its armed struggle and fight for the protection of the hopes and aspirations of the Bodos.³¹⁰ Post-BAC accord disagreements and division between the ABSU and NDFB became intense.

Meanwhile, Ranjan Daimary, left for Bangladesh in June 1993 and operated through other members of the organization. The number of recruits in the organization increased as the NDFB managed to penetrate into other Bodo areas like Kokrajhar where they had less presence prior to 1993.³¹¹ Earlier, the NDFB’s presence was mainly confined to Udalguri region. Most of the members were from Udalguri and only by 1991, many young Bodos from Baksa and former PTCA members from Kokrajhar joined the organization.³¹² These PTCA workers had to flee their homes because of the constant violence by the ABSU and the Volunteer Force activists. However, after the failure of the BAC Accord, Bodos from other areas besides Udalguri joined the organization. There was no strong opposition from organizations like ABSU as most of their

³⁰⁷ This was narrated by Ranga Ram Boro, former Second Lieutenant and Executive Member (National Council) of the NDFB during interview conducted on 5 July 2019 at Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

³⁰⁸ Narrated by Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Amarendra Brahma.

³¹⁰ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

members had surrendered during that period. BAC accord thus provided the basis and consolidated the position of the NDFB.³¹³

Meanwhile, the organization faced stiff opposition from the members of the Volunteer Force of ABSU in areas like Serampore, Ramfalbil and Gosaigaon areas in Kokrajhar district where several clashes occurred between the NDFB and the Volunteer Force.³¹⁴ This section of ABSU did not support the signing of the BAC Accord in 1993 by the ABSU-BPAC with the Government. The fear of losing their power and influence in the Bodo region motivated a section within the Volunteer Force of ABSU to oppose the armed movement of the NDFB and this is why in 1995-96 there were reports of several clashes between this section of the ABSU workers and the NDFB especially in Serampore, Ramfalbil and Gosaigaon areas located in present day Kokrajhar district. Differences cropped up between NDFB and this section of the Volunteer Force due to the ideological differences. The members of the Volunteer Force had already planned secretly to form an armed organization since 1993 after the failure of the BAC Accord as they were not satisfied with the provisions of the Accord.³¹⁵ And eventually, they formed another armed organization called Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) in June 1996. There was a clear ideological difference between the two organizations, which became the factor for frequent clashes.³¹⁶ The two organizations clashed with each other, which resulted in the deaths of many members and supporters from both the camps. In one such incident, BLT rebels kidnapped 22 supporters of NDFB in 1996 most of who were killed and the rest were freed. At the same time, a division cropped up between the Bodos of Kokrajhar/Bongaigaon region and those from Udalguri/Sonitpur region.³¹⁷ The Bodos from Udalguri and Sonitpur regions were assumed to be a NDFB rebel or NDFB supporter whereas youths from Kokrajhar/Bongaigaon region were presumed to be a BLT rebel or a BLT supporter. Under such circumstances, many Bodo youths

³¹³ Interview with Amarendra Brahma.

³¹⁴ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³¹⁵ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary.

³¹⁶ Interview with Suddho Basumatary, former Press Spokesman of ABSU and a well-wisher of the BLT conducted on 20 June 2019 at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon.

³¹⁷ Interview with Binod Narzary, former Arms and Ammunitions Secretary of the BLT conducted on 11 January 2020 at Goreswar, Baksa.

lost their lives or underwent huge troubles from both the rebel organizations as well as from the security forces.

There were efforts to resolve the differences and prevent the clashes between the two organizations and one such meeting was held in Shillong between the two organizations in 1999.³¹⁸ However, the conflict between the two organizations continued which eventually increased after the BLT declared ceasefire in 1999. A former General Secretary of the NDFB argued that the Special Branch and the Intelligence Bureau of Assam created the BLT just to crush down the movement led by the NDFB.³¹⁹ Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words *“BLT was created by the Special Branch and the Intelligence Bureau of Assam just to crush down the movement led by the NDFB. Majority of the leaders of the BLT were the members of the Volunteer Force of ABSU. The Special Branch of the Assam police supplied arms (not sophisticated ones, it included carbines etc.) and ammunitions and also imparted training to the BLT rebels in order to crush the movement led by the NDFB.”* The NDFB leadership further accused the State Government and the security agencies of working together with the BLT rebels after the organization declared ceasefire in 1999. The security forces targeted only the NDFB rebels and its supporters and did not conduct any such operations against the BLT rebels and their supporters. However, NDFB still managed to organize and withstand the government pressure.

In the meantime, the NDFB received offers of negotiation from the Government of India on many occasions through various government agencies especially since 1995-96.³²⁰ The organization was also approached by Government agencies in 1988. Ranjan Daimary argued in these words *“Actually, we have been approached by the Government of India on many occasions. Even in 1988, the Joint Director of the IB (NE) wrote a letter to me to stop the revolutionary movement. He asked me to meet him and offered anything I want.”*³²¹ However, the organization declined these offers and instead decided to continue the armed struggle. The

³¹⁸ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary and Suddho Basumatary on 20 June 2019 at Chapaguri, Bongaigaon.

³¹⁹ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³²⁰ Interview with Ranga Ram Boro, 5 July 2019, Purani Goraibari, Udalguri. This was also narrated by Nileswar Basumatary and Bhraman Baglary, founder member of All Bodo Peace Forum who played a critical role in laying down the ground works for the negotiations between the NDFB and the Government of India.

³²¹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary conducted on 11 November 2018.

main factor, which prompted the organization not to engage in the negotiation process, was the lack of trust on the government. And moreover all these offers had come through informal channels and never did the Government make any formal offers directly. The organizational leadership feared and suspected the motives of the government and thought that the state agencies might use this opportunity to crush the armed rebellion. Meanwhile, BLT grabbed this opportunity and eventually declared ceasefire in 1999. In 1999, when the BLT declared ceasefire, many NDFB rebels including the leaders and cadres were disappointed with the organization's decision to not negotiate with the government inspite of several offers of negotiation though they were informal in nature.³²² There were also immense pressures from the Bodos especially Bodo intellectuals to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India at that time.³²³ However, the organization was not ready to enter into the negotiation process then and continued the armed movement up to early 2000s.

The preceding sections described the historical origins of the NDFB, its mobilizing activities and the different phases of the insurgency in detail. By early 2000s, NDFB decided to renounce the violence and engage in negotiation process with the Government of India. NDFB's decision to engage in the negotiation process was motivated by different factors which shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

4.6 Summary

The chapter examined the genesis of the Bodo insurgency led by the NDFB. Relative deprivation among the Bodos motivated a section of urban educated Bodo youths in the early 1980s. This section of the Bodos initially formed an organization called YBNA and later on went on to form the NDFB 1986. YBNA played a major role in mobilizing the Bodo youths for the armed struggle, which lasted for more than three decades. The failure of the PTCA, Bodo Sahitya Sabha and others to address the grievances of the Bodos motivated this section of the Bodos to form the NDFB in 1986. After the formation of the NDFB in 1986, the organization was initially engaged in various mobilization activities such as recruitment, securing funding,

³²² Interview with Ranga Ram Boro.

³²³ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

securing arms and ammunitions and other logistics. The NDFB had a well-setup and militarily structured organization.

Though the initial phase of the rebellion was peaceful, it gradually turned violent as many clashes were reported between the NDFB and the ABSU supporters. At the same time, the post-BAC period also witnessed violence between the NDFB rebels and a hardcore faction within the ABSU. This hardcore faction eventually formed another Bodo insurgent group which came to be known as BLT in June 1996. Several clashes were reported between the two organizations. The NDFB leadership has accused the state security agencies of working in tandem with the BLT. The state security agencies received support from the BLT rebels during the counterinsurgency operations after the organization declared ceasefire in 1999. Meanwhile, NDFB rejected many offers of negotiations from the Government due to lack of trust on the part of the NDFB towards the Government and the insurgency continued. The next chapter shall examine the conditions that led to the onset of the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India. The chapter shall also focus on the bargaining process, the third Bodo accord and its implications in the Bodo region in the long run.

Chapter Five

Negotiating peace deals: Strategic choices of the NDFB

5.1 Introduction

After years of engaging in the armed struggle, NDFB decided to renounce violence and participate in the negotiation process in 2004-05. This decision of the NDFB to engage in the peace process has been motivated by various factors. While examining the probable factors that contributed to the onset of the negotiation process, the chapter argues that the relative capabilities and the incentive structure were significant which motivated the organization to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process.

5.2 Counterinsurgent operations, bargaining and the process of negotiation

NDFB suffered setbacks when most of their senior members were either killed or arrested during counterinsurgency operations conducted by the state security forces, especially during the late 1990s and early 2000s. At the same time, the number of BLT rebels increased after the ceasefire in 1999 as many young Bodos joined the organization and BLT was able to establish its presence in other Bodo areas besides Kokrajhar.³²⁴ Further, the organization received a positive response from the Indian Government in terms of their decision to renounce the violence as their demands were within the ambit of the Indian Union.³²⁵ BLT also came to an understanding with the security forces that the security forces would not target the BLT rebels. BLT rebels helped the state security forces during the counterinsurgency operations against the NDFB rebels.³²⁶ Gobinda Basumatary, a former General Secretary of the NDFB argued in these words “*After the ceasefire in 1999, BLT rebels became very close with the government security forces. The Special Branch of the Assam police gave them training, arms and ammunition in order to crush our movement. These agencies used the BLT against us. And this is why in many operations, the security forces killed our members and did not target the BLT members.*” In many occasions BLT rebels served as informants for the security forces. Information on the supporters of the NDFB was passed on to the security forces by the BLT rebels and in the process many NDFB

³²⁴ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 13 November 2018, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³²⁵ Interview with Binod Narzary, 11 January 2020, Goreswar, Baksa.

³²⁶ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, Marjit Basumatary and Binod Narzary during the interviews.

sympathizers were targeted during the counterinsurgency operations by the state security forces. For instance, information on the supporters providing food and shelter to the NDFB rebels was shared with the state security forces from time to time.³²⁷ It was revealed that the BLT rebels also accompanied the security forces during the counterinsurgency operations and assisted them in identifying the supporters of the NDFB. As a result, the supporters of the NDFB had to bear the brunt of the security forces and on many occasions they were arrested and beaten up by the security forces during interrogation and raids conducted in the villages. This affected the NDFB and added to fear among its supporters. At the same time, BLT's support to the security forces helped the latter in the counterinsurgency operations. Information about the hideouts of the NDFB rebels were also passed on to the security forces by the BLT rebels, which helped the security forces in targeting the insurgents.

NDFB continued the insurgency until the first half of 2000 with several offers of negotiation from the State as well by the Central Government to the NDFB leadership. Though the NDFB leadership rejected these offers, they were aware that at some point in time, they would have to engage in the negotiation process in order to resolve the core issues of the Bodos. NDFB leadership was fully aware that in order to bring an efficient resolution to the Bodo problem, the two parties needed to engage in the democratic process.

As mentioned earlier, the NDFB had strong operational bases in Bhutan since the late 1980s. Initially, the Bhutanese Government ignored the presence of NDFB rebels and others as long as they had not threatened the Bhutanese people (Mazumdar, 2005).³²⁸ There were also reports of Bhutanese officials aiding the insurgents in terms of information and other logistics, prior to 'Operation All Clear', which was conducted in 2003 (Prakash, 2008). The Indian army had also tried to sneak into the Bhutanese Territory to attack the bases of the NDFB and other insurgent groups since the 1990s but with little success.³²⁹ Meanwhile, the presence of the insurgent groups in the Bhutanese Territory gradually became a matter of concern for the Bhutanese Government.

³²⁷ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³²⁸ Interview with Ranjan Daimary conducted on 11 November 2018.

³²⁹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary, 29 May 2016, Ambagaon, Udalguri.

In 2001-2002, the King of Bhutan held a one-on-one meeting with Ranjan Daimary and requested them to leave the Bhutanese Territory as the Indian Government was putting tremendous pressure on the Bhutanese Government to flush out the Indian insurgents operating from the Bhutanese Territory.³³⁰ The Prime Minister and the Home Minister of Bhutan also held meetings with Ranjan Daimary regarding the camps and hideouts. Ranjan Daimary argued in these words “*Actually, I was requested by the King of Bhutan to talk to him regarding the bases in Bhutan. So in 2001, we talked to the PM and the Home Minister and next, we talked to the King. I talked face to face and one to one with the King for almost 4 hours. So he requested us to give some respite and to leave his land. He was sensing that we Indians might never leave his land and thus said that ‘Nabla³³¹ you must understand, you have to leave.’ Moreover, the Indian Government was also putting lots of pressure on Bhutan to flush out the rebel groups from their land.*” It has to be mentioned here that since the very beginning, the Bodos shared a very close relationship with the people of Bhutan. Thus, the organization shared a cordial relation with the Royal Bhutan Army and the people of Bhutan. There were no instances of any resistance or mistrust on the part of the Royal Bhutan Army towards the NDFB rebels.³³² However, the King of Bhutan gradually felt that the Indian rebels would never leave the Bhutanese Territory and so the King had a fear that in the process, the presence of Indian rebels in their territory would affect the peace and prosperity of the kingdom. During the meeting, the King argued that the Indian Government was pressurizing the Bhutanese Government to flush out the Indian rebel groups operating out of the kingdom. The King further argued that the Royal Bhutan Army might also be forced to accompany the Indian security forces if any operations were conducted, as the Kingdom was dependent on the Indian Government.

At the same time, the King offered to mediate between the organization and the Government of India if the organization was ready to negotiate with the Government of India. The King even offered to bear the expenses that would be incurred on the shifting of their bases from the Bhutanese soil.³³³ However, there was no progress on this offer made by the King of Bhutan. And soon after this meeting, the NDFB formed the 3rd battalion, which was based in

³³⁰ Interview with Ranjan Daimary. This was also narrated by Nileswar Basumatary on 5 July 2019.

³³¹ Ranjan Daimary is also known as D.R. Nabla within the organization.

³³² Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 29 June 2019 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³³³ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary.

Bangladesh. The Bhutanese King had even informed the rebels about Operation All Clear, two months prior to the operation.³³⁴ This message was passed on to the other rebel groups like ULFA by the NDFB leadership about the operation being planned by the Royal Bhutan Army and the Indian Army. In 2002, the King of Bhutan held another round of discussions with senior NDFB leaders like Nileswar Basumatary, Irakdao Basumatary and others and urged the NDFB leadership to leave their country. The King mentioned that the Government of India was putting tremendous pressures on the Bhutanese Government for providing shelter to the Indian insurgents in their territory.³³⁵ Prior to the launch of Operation All Clear by the RBA, the King informed the NDFB leadership that the Indian Government was planning to attack the insurgent camps operating out from the Bhutanese Territory.³³⁶ However, the insurgent group decided to continue its operations from the Bhutanese Territory.

In the meantime, NDFB suffered serious setbacks as several senior leaders were arrested in 2002, prior to Operation All Clear.³³⁷ For instance, Gobinda Basumatary, the General Secretary of the organization was arrested in November 2002. The Vice-President of the organization, Dhiren Boro was also arrested from Sikkim along with his family in December 2002. In May 2002, the Finance and Home Secretary, along with another cadre of the organization were arrested in West Bengal. Other NDFB rebels were also arrested as the state security forces increased the counterinsurgency operations in the Bodo region.³³⁸ Popular support of the organization also gradually decreased as compared to the 1980s and 1990s. Continuous violence in the Bodo areas created a situation of fear and uncertainty among the non-combatants. Mundane lives were affected and Bodo people sought for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Due to the pressures from the security forces, NDFB also suffered some setback in procuring financial assistance to run the organization. Meanwhile, Bodo intellectuals and civil society organizations urged the organization to renounce violence and work towards improving education, job opportunities and development in the region.³³⁹

³³⁴ Interview with Ranjan Daimary conducted on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

³³⁵ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary.

³³⁶ Interview with Ranjan Daimary.

³³⁷ Interview with Amarendra Brahma, 8 July 2019, Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati and Gobinda Basumatary.

³³⁸ Interview with Amarendra Brahma.

³³⁹ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 29 June 2019, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

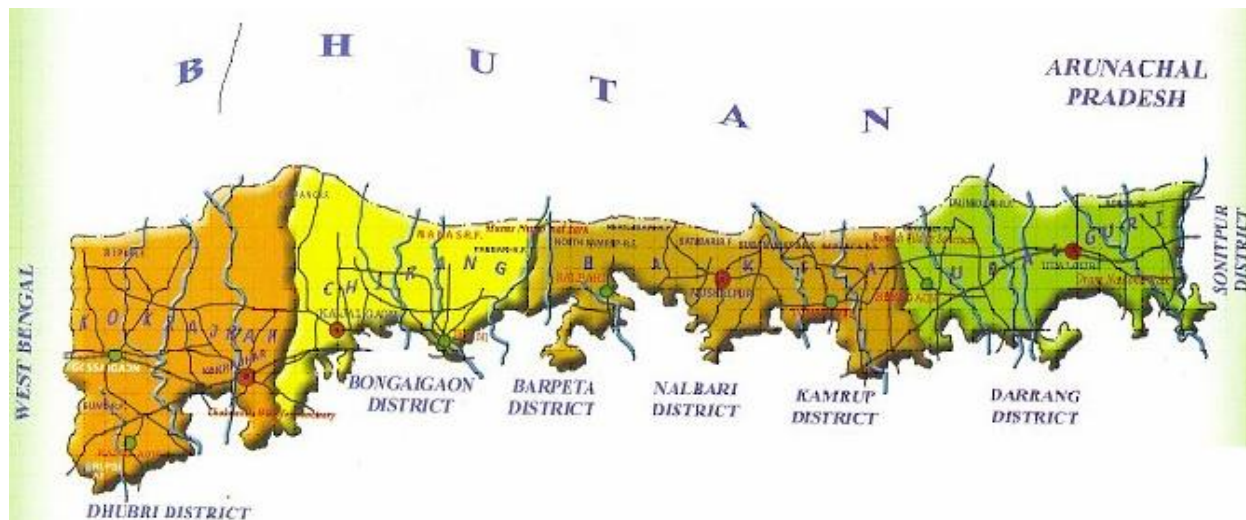


Figure: 5.1: Map of erstwhile BTAD comprising Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri districts
Source: Office of the Director of Education (BTC)

Meanwhile, BLT signed the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Accord with the Government of India on 10 February 2003, which resulted in the creation of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) comprising of four new districts, viz., Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. This accord came into force through an amendment in the Constitution of India and was included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. NDFB leadership argued that the accord failed to address the long-standing issues of the Bodos such as the demarcation of boundary in BTAD and the distribution of power and functions of the newly formed administrative setup.³⁴⁰ Failure to address these issues among other core issues like land rights of the Bodos motivated the NDFB to participate in the negotiation process.

BLT had the support of the ABSU during the signing the BTC Accord. However, the relation between ABSU and the former-BLT rebels worsened since 2005 due to the struggle for power between the two organizations.³⁴¹ Due to emerging tensions over leadership and power, two political parties, the Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front (BPPF) supported by ABSU and the Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) formed by former BLT rebels, led by Hagrama Mohilyary were formed. This period was also marked by polarization among the Bodo community. The violence and inter-ethnic divisions had a significant impact on everyday lives in Bodoland.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 29 June 2019 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁴¹ Interview with Binod Narzary, 11 January 2020 at Goreswar, Baksa.

NDFB's decision to come to negotiations was also a result of these conditions within the Bodo society.

Apart from the internal dynamics within the organization, negotiations happened due to state responses. On 15 December 2003, the Royal Bhutan Army in coordination with the Indian Army, launched "Operation All Clear" in order to stop the insurgent activities operating from the Bhutanese Territory. Reports suggest that the Indian army did not participate in the operation. However, some NDFB leaders claimed that the Indian army participated in the counterinsurgent operation in Bhutan.³⁴² The operation mostly targeted the bases of the insurgent groups in the Bhutanese Territory. Many cadres and top leaders of other insurgent organizations such as ULFA were either arrested, killed or had surrendered during Operation All Clear. Most of the NDFB rebels, however, managed to flee the camps prior to the operation and during the operation.³⁴³ A former General Secretary of the organization mentioned that about ten NDFB rebel members were killed and three leaders disappeared during the Operation All Clear.³⁴⁴ Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words *"In all, about ten NDFB members were killed in the Operation All Clear, while three others went missing and are still untraceable till today. When the NDFB members tried to find these three missing leaders, the government informed us that they had no clue. We suspect that the Indian Army might have caught hold of these members and killed them as the Bhutan Army informed us that all the arrested leaders both from ULFA and the NDFB and others have been handed over to the Indian Army. In May 2004, four other members disappeared and are untraceable till today."* Nevertheless, the operation destroyed all the NDFB bases in Bhutan. This was a serious setback for the organization. The camps in Kawaipani near Samrang, Namlang, Kalikhola in Zomduar, Teentala along the Bengal-Bhutan border and all the remaining smaller camps were destroyed during Operation All Clear.³⁴⁵

On 14 December 2003, one day before the Operation All Clear was launched, the Royal Bhutan Army visited the ULFA camp located in Kawaipani and informed the ULFA leadership that the King of Bhutan would visit them the next day. The NDFB camp in Namlang was also

³⁴² Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary which was conducted on 29 June 2019 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁴⁵ Narrated by Gobinda Basumatary during interview on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri village, Udalguri.

informed that a Brigadier of the Army would visit them on 15 December 2003.³⁴⁶ Accordingly, the ULFA and the NDFB rebels in Kawaipani and Namlang camps made preparations to welcome the King and the Brigadier respectively. However, the next day at 4 am, the RBA and the Indian Army attacked these camps. Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words, “*However, the next day at 4 am, ULFA camp in Kawaipani and our camp in Namlang were attacked by the RBA and the Indian Army. They surrounded and attacked both the camps suddenly. At that time, the inmates of both these camps were getting ready for the arrival of the guests. Though the security forces did not shoot directly to kill, it greatly affected the inmates. In our camp, they firstly opened blank fire. Though, there were very few casualties, many rebels were caught during this operation. They did this in all the camps.*”

In the NDFB camp near Gelephu, eight NDFB rebels were killed during the operations, one rebel was killed in Teentala camp and in Kawaipani camp there were one to two casualties. NDFB suffered nearly ten-twelve casualties during the operations.³⁴⁷ At that time, besides the bases in Bhutan, NDFB had operational bases in places like Karbi Anglong, Sonitpur, and Meghalaya.

After the Operation All Clear, many NDFB cadres surrendered due to lack of material support and safe havens.³⁴⁸ Amarendra Brahma argued in these words “*They came down from the hills and eventually one after the other most of the rebel members were arrested. Some even courted arrest. And thus, the NDFB rebels surrendered and the first step to declare ceasefire and negotiate with the Government of India was laid down.*”³⁴⁹

Many senior leaders were also arrested prior to Operation All Clear and many cadres were further killed in the counterinsurgency operations conducted by the Indian security forces.³⁵⁰ This caused great difficulties for the members of NDFB to reorganize and regroup in the Bodo region. Counterinsurgent operations became more intense. Senior NDFB leaders

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary.

³⁴⁹ Interview with Amarendra Brahma.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary. This was also mentioned by a high ranking official of the government during an interview conducted on 27 August 2021.

informed Ranjan Daimary, who was still based in Bangladesh with the 3rd battalion, about these developments. The President was also informed about the continuous pressures from the Bodos especially, Bodo intellectuals and the disappointment of the Bodo people in general for the failure of the organization to engage in the negotiation process. There were tremendous pressures on the NDFB to renounce the violence and resolve the core issues of the conflict through a political dialogue. Nileswar Basumatary argued in these words, *“So after the operation, Sunil Brahma and I went to Shillong from Dimapur. At that time, we used to stay in Dimapur. Then we contacted Nabla and told him that many of our rebels including senior leaders have been arrested and many have been killed in counterinsurgency operations (prior to Bhutan operations). We also told him that due to Bhutan operations many have surrendered. So we informed him about the developments here. So, at that time, one rebel leader sent a message to us saying that ‘they were together in a group of about 10-13 rebels and that if the NDFB do not decide quickly and negotiate with the Government of India, then we will not be able to be with the organization furthermore.’ So they threatened us like this. So this is why we had gone to Shillong and contacted Nabla. We informed Nabla that our workers have nowhere to go now and that the public is also angry with us for not negotiating with the Government of India. We told him that everyone is in favor of the talks so it is better for us to initiate the peace talks.”* In the face of stiff opposition and resistance from the state security forces and pressures from civil society, eventually, NDFB declared a unilateral ceasefire for six month on 8 October 2004.

However, it is important to note that the National Council of the NDFB had also expressed its willingness to participate in the negotiation process in 2001.³⁵¹ In 2001, there was a change in the Government in the state of Assam. The Indian National Congress under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi had formed the new government in the state after defeating Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Soon after forming the new government, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi had repeatedly urged the insurgent groups of the region, especially from the state to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process with the Government and find a way to resolve their respective demands through the democratic process.³⁵² The NDFB leadership further argued that the attitude of the new Congress

³⁵¹ Interview with Nileswar Basumatary, 5 July 2019, Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

³⁵² Interview with Bhraman Baglary, 12 November 2018, Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

Government of Assam in 2001 had changed towards the insurgents. The new government under Tarun Gogoi showed its willingness to politically negotiate on the core demands of NDFB and thereby showing signs to do away with the coercive tactics employed by the previous AGP Government. The NDFB leadership further argued that the change and the repeated appeals made by the new Congress Government had instilled a sense of trust among the NDFB leadership on the State Government. The organizational leadership also argued that the changed in government in the state is the only reason why they are alive today.³⁵³ Gobinda Basumatary argued that senior leaders like Sunil Basumatary, Dhiren Boro, Buthong, Ruju and others who were arrested at that time would have been encountered if the AGP was still in power in the state. During the rule of the previous Asom Gana Parishad Government, secret killings and fake encounters of insurgents and supporters of the rebel organizations were very rampant.

Prior to the signing of the formal ceasefire agreement with the Government of India, NDFB held several rounds of discussions with the government officials since February 2005 in order to lay out the framework for the ceasefire agreement.

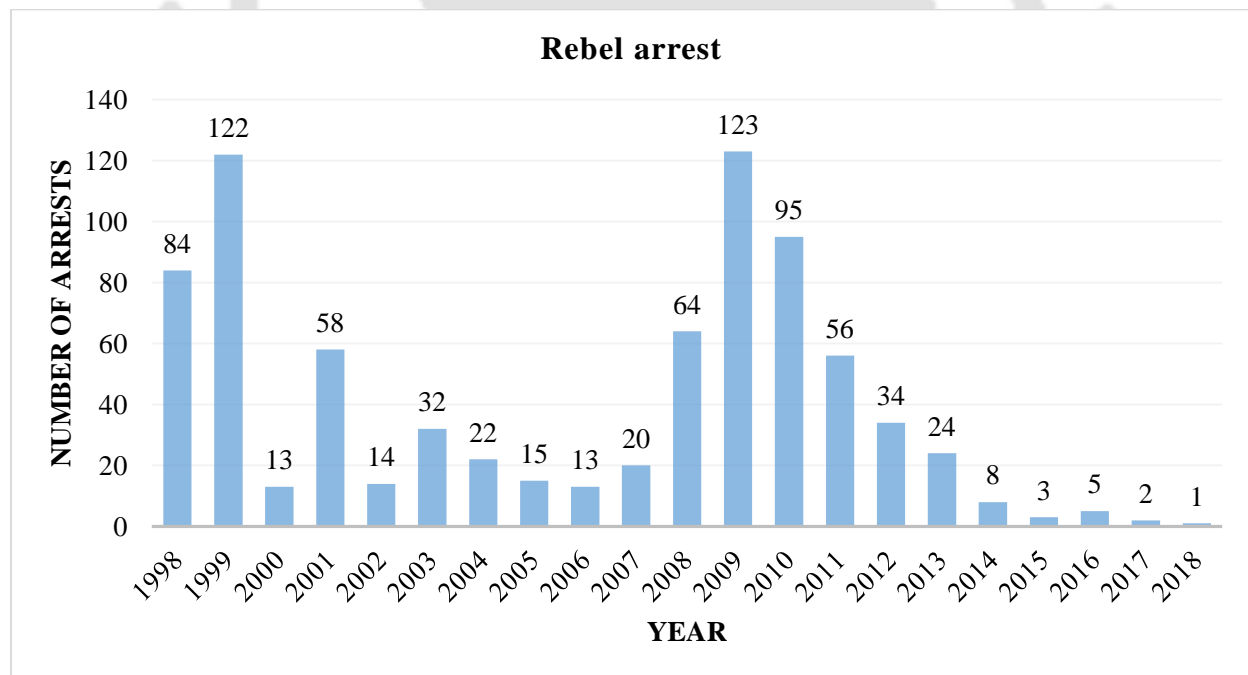


Figure 5.2: Year-wise number of arrest of NDFB rebels

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

³⁵³ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 29 June 2019, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

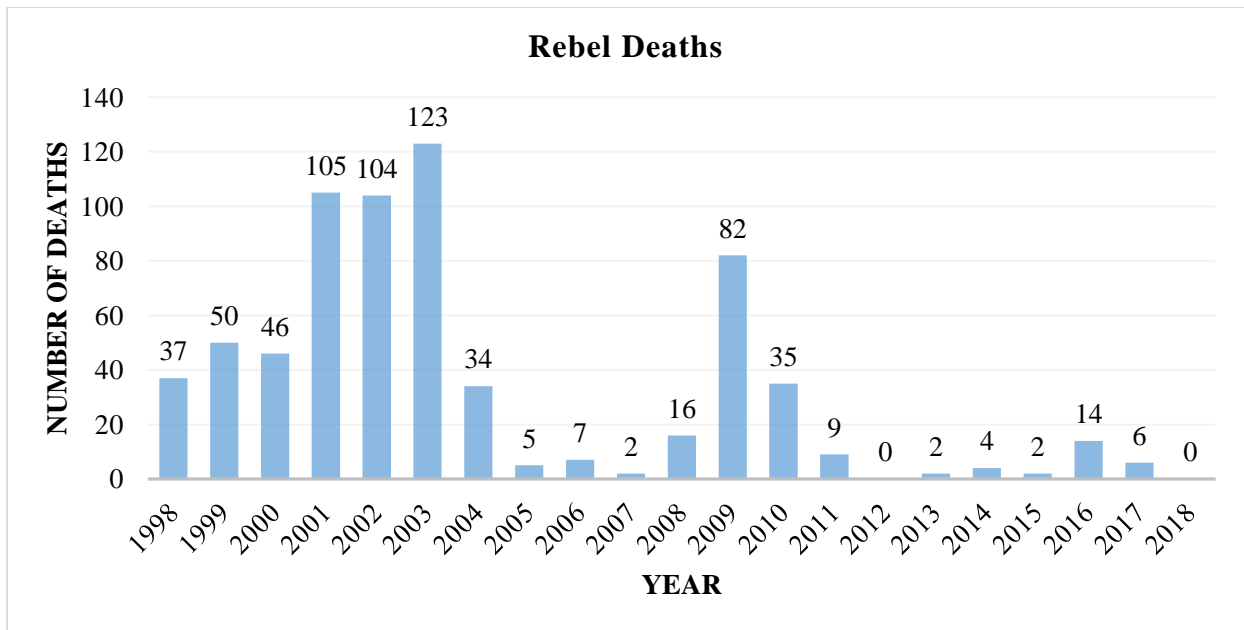


Figure 5.3: Year-wise number of deaths of rebels of the NDFB

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

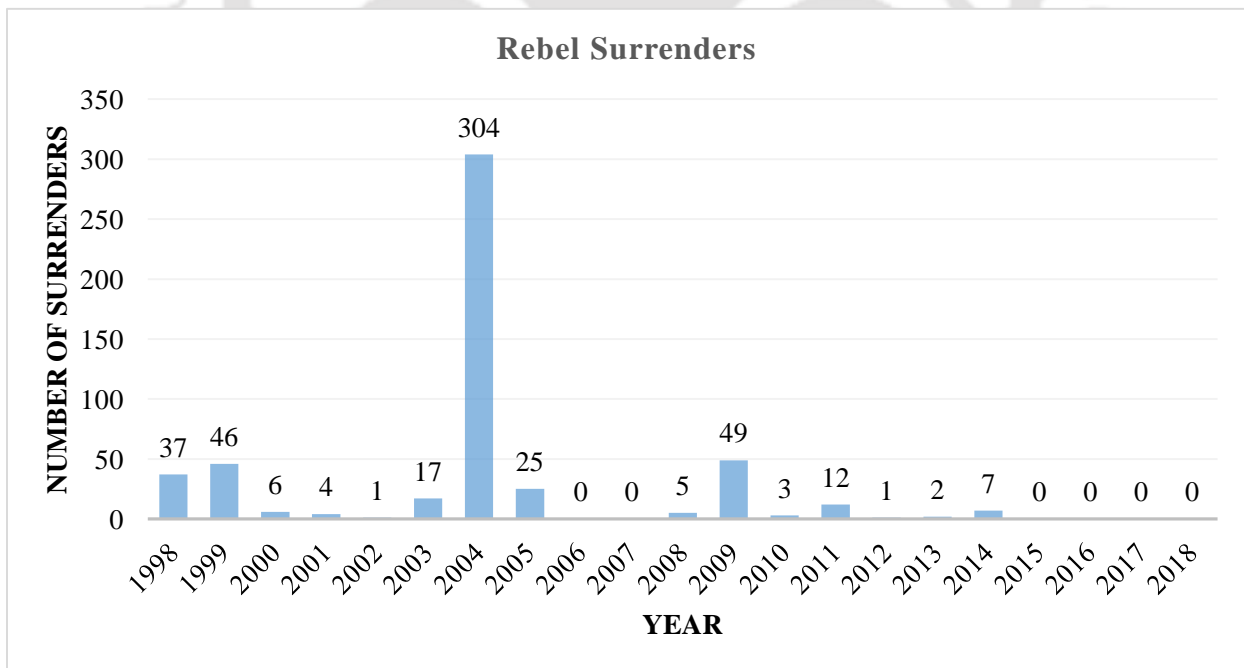


Figure 5.4: Year-wise number of surrenders of rebels belonging to NDFB

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP)

5.3 Setting up the stage for negotiations

In order to facilitate the negotiation process, a civil society organization called the All Bodo Peace Forum (ABPF) was formed under the instruction of NDFB in 2004, prior to the declaration of ceasefire. ABPF was later renamed as the Bodo People's Forum for Peace and Rights on the insistence of Ranjan Daimary.³⁵⁴ This organization was entrusted with the task of mediation with the Government. ABPF was formed in a meeting attended by many Bodo intellectuals from Udalguri and other Bodo regions held in Harimu Bhawan (Cultural Complex), Udalguri. Some of the prominent members of the organization were Bhraman Baglary (General Secretary), Moniram Mushahary (President, he was the ex-President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha), Nileswar Basumatary (surrendered NDFB), Jacob Mushahary (ex-Principal, UHSS), Ripen Daimary and many other Bodo civil society members.³⁵⁵ Accordingly, the ABPF communicated to the government as well as the Bodo people about the decision of the NDFB to renounce the violence and find a way out to address the core demands of the organization through a peaceful process.

The All Bodo Peace Forum continuously pressurized the Government of Assam as well as the Government of India to initiate the negotiation process immediately, so that the insurgency and the core demands of the NDFB could be resolved through a political dialogue and not through repression.³⁵⁶ In the process, the ABPF members met many government officials in order to facilitate the negotiation process. The ABPF approached Government officials including Tarun Gogoi, then Chief Minister of Assam and officials of the Government of India in order to express the organization's willingness to participate in the negotiation process. The State Government and the Government of India welcomed this move of the insurgent organization. Soon differences emerged between ABPF and Ranjan Daimary.³⁵⁷ Finally, ABPF's views were kept aside prior to the declaration of unilateral ceasefire by the NDFB on 8 October 2004.

³⁵⁴ Interview with Bhraman Baglary on 12 November 2018 at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. Also narrated by Nileswar Basumatary, 5 July 2019.

³⁵⁶ Interview with Bhraman Baglary on 12 November 2018 at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. Interview with Nileswar Basumatary.

In order to facilitate the signing of the formal ceasefire agreement, government representatives met Ranjan Daimary in Dhaka.³⁵⁸ During the declaration of the unilateral ceasefire on 8 October 2004, Gobinda Basumatary, the then General Secretary of the NDFB was still lodged in jail in Guwahati.³⁵⁹ Later, after the declaration of the unilateral ceasefire, he was released from jail so that the framework for the negotiation process could be laid down. After his release, Gobinda Basumatary met with Home Minister Shivraj Patil and eventually a formal ceasefire agreement was signed on 25 May 2005 between the NDFB and the Government of India.³⁶⁰ Senior leaders like Gobinda Basumatary and Dhiren Boro on behalf of the organization signed the ceasefire agreement and this whole process had the support of Ranjan Daimary, the President of the organization who was still based in Bangladesh then. However, soon after the signing of the ceasefire, there were divisions in the NDFB.

In the wake of counterinsurgency operations and pressures from the civil society, NDFB experienced divisions within the leadership of the organization. Though there were no leadership crisis, there were disagreements whether to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process or to continue the insurgency.³⁶¹ Ranjan Daimary was not in favor of renouncing violence. Other senior members like Gobinda Basumatary and Dhiren Boro felt that the time was ripe to find an efficient solution to the Bodo problem through a political dialogue with the Government of India. The same was the case within the rank and file of the organization. Ranga Ram Boro argued in these words *“I think either we should have negotiated earlier or we should have waited for some time, instead of participating in the negotiation process at that time. The Operation conducted in Bhutan also affected our organization at that time. The situation forced us to negotiate with the GOI.”*³⁶² The following section discusses these developments in detail.

³⁵⁸ Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

³⁵⁹ Interview with Bhraman Baglary.

³⁶⁰ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary which was conducted on 29 June 2019 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁶¹ Interview with Ranga Ram Boro, 5 July 2019, Purani Goraibari, Udalguri.

³⁶² Interview with Ranga Ram Boro.

5.4 Negotiation and factionalism in the NDFB

On 17 June 2005, a welcome ceremony was organized in Udalguri Football Stadium situated near Udalguri College in order to celebrate the ceasefire declaration.³⁶³ The decision to renounce the violence by NDFB and participate in peace talks with the Government of India marked the beginning of the formal negotiation process. The NDFB leaders who signed the agreement had the approval and support of the President and were asked to initiate the negotiation process with the Government.³⁶⁴ Immediately, after the ceasefire agreement, Government of India asked the NDFB leadership to submit their charter of demands. However, Ranjan Daimary, who was still in Bangladesh, refused to submit any charter of demands as he felt that this was an insult to the organization.³⁶⁵ The Government even offered to hold discussions with Ranjan Daimary in any part of the world except Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan as he had decided against coming back to India due to lack of trust on the government.³⁶⁶

Soon there were disagreements about submission of charter of demands to the Government as well as about the contents that would be incorporated in the memorandum. Eventually, an environment of mistrust developed among the rebels based in India and those especially from the 3rd battalion under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary based in Bangladesh. At the same time, NDFB leadership argued that the attitude of the Government of India towards the negotiation process was not satisfactory. The Government failed to show any commitment to resolve the core issues of the rebellion and instead delayed the start of the negotiation process.³⁶⁷ Bhraman Baglary argued in these words “*Meanwhile disagreements/ loggerheads started among the ranks and files of the organization, questioning the reason of why the negotiations have not taken place seriously. The question was raised especially by those leaders who were in foreign lands (example: The President and his cadres in Bangladesh). So they started doubting the*

³⁶³ Interview with Bhraman Baglary.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Amarendra Brahma.

³⁶⁵ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary, 5 October 2017, Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Marjit Basumatary, a former overground member and supporter of NDFB conducted on 18 June 2019.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Bhraman Baglary on 12 November 2018 at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri.

attitude of the Indian government.”³⁶⁸ The ceasefire agreement was extended repeatedly without any significant progress in the negotiation process and formal discussions could not take place until 2008.

The process of negotiation was also affected due to strong oppositions from the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Government led by Hagrama Mohilary.³⁶⁹ Hagrama Mohilary, then Chief Executive of BTAD, was totally against the NDFB’s negotiations with the Government of India and also Hagrama and his party (BPF) were against the members of the All Bodo Peace Forum. There were reports of violence by the supporters of BPF on the All Bodo Peace Forum members. For instance, after the signing of the ceasefire agreement in May 2005, the Vice-President of ABPF, Babul Swargiary from Mushalpur, Baksa was killed by the BPF supporters. During this period, ex-BLT rebels also attacked many designated camps of the NDFB.³⁷⁰ The NDFB camps located in Ghoskata in Dotoma, Kokrajhar district and the camp in Baksa were attacked by the ex-BLT members. A former member of ABPF argued that instead of opposing the negotiation process of the NDFB, the Hagrama-led BTC Government in BTAD should have supported the negotiation process in order to establish peace and stability in the Bodo region. But the supporters of BPF tried to push the NDFB back to the jungles by instigating them through violence. The Hagrama-led BPF also protested in Dispur Last Gate in 2006 in front of the State Assembly in Guwahati against the negotiation process.³⁷¹ BPF protested against NDFB and its negotiation process saying that they should go back to the jungles and at the same time argued that the Bodos did not need another accord as peace had already been established after the signing of the BTC Accord in 2003. Such strong oppositions from the BPF and the divisive politics further delayed the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India.

Meanwhile, the Government of India again asked the NDFB leadership to submit the charter of demands so that the negotiation process could be resumed. As a result of these pressures, the National Council of NDFB held a meeting in 2007 in Bangladesh in order to discuss the charter of demands. The NDFB leadership finally submitted the first memorandum to

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

the Government of India on 1 May, 2008 with demand for a sovereign country for the Bodos.³⁷² A week later, Naveen Verma, the Joint Secretary (NE), Ministry of Home Affairs, made it clear to the NDFB leadership that the Government of India would proceed with the peace talks only if the demands were made within the ambit of the Indian Constitution. It was communicated to the NDFB leadership that the government was not in favor of any discussion on the issue of sovereignty. The government asked the organization to modify the charter of demands. However, Ranjan Daimary refused to make any changes in the contents of the memorandum and argued that NDFB will not accept anything short of a sovereign country for the Bodos. On the other hand, other leaders of the organization like Dhiren Boro, Gobinda Basumatary and others opposed Daimary's views. Ensuing discord within the organization further strained the relations.

Finally, the overground leaders made the necessary changes in the memorandum and sent it to the President for approval. Daimary refused to accept it.³⁷³ However, at the same time, he told Gobinda Basumatary and other overground leaders that they could continue with the negotiation process if they felt that they would be able to secure some benefits for the Bodo society. NDFB revised the charter of demands from the demand for a separate country to a separate state within the Indian Union and resubmitted the draft to the Government of India. Daimary and his group based in Bangladesh continued to support violence. The differences became stronger within the leadership when Ranjan Daimary was allegedly involved in the 30 October 2008 serial bomb blast in Guwahati. The blast killed many innocent civilians and injured many more.³⁷⁴ Gobinda Basumatary, Dhiren Boro and other leaders of the 1st and 2nd battalion decided to part ways with the 3rd battalion led by Ranjan Daimary and the former strongly denied their involvement in the incident. Eventually, in December 2008, the General Assembly of the NDFB expelled Ranjan Daimary from the organization.

The pro-negotiation rebels renamed their group as the National Democratic Front of Boroland (Progressive). Daimary's faction remained as the National Democratic Front of

³⁷² Interview with Gobinda Basumatary. This was also narrated by Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary conducted on 5 October 2017 at Sudempuri, Udalguri

Boroland.³⁷⁵ NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) had about 500 cadres after the split within the organization while the NDFB (Progressive) had about 1200 rebel members.³⁷⁶ NDFB led by Ranjan Daimary continued the armed movement. After the split within the organization, there were frequent clashes between the rebels belonging to NDFB (Progressive) and NDFB (Ranjan Daimary), which resulted in the deaths of a number of rebels and supporters of both these groups.³⁷⁷ Gobinda Basumatary argued in these words “*After the split, there were clashes between the two groups and many rebels and supporters belonging to both the groups died. So I do not see any chances of reunion between the two groups.*”

5.5 Continuing factions and formal talks: 2009 onwards

The first formal discussions between NDFB (Progressive) and the Government of India started in September 2009.³⁷⁸ NDFB (Progressive) held a series of talks with the Government of India through P.C. Halder and later on with A.B. Mathur, who served as the interlocutors. However, even after a series of discussions, there was no significant progress in the negotiation process. Both the parties failed to arrive at any definite understanding.

Meanwhile, the change of the government in Bangladesh in 2009 under Sheikh Hasina’s leadership marked a new beginning. In 2010, Ranjan Daimary was arrested in Bangladesh by the Bangladesh Intelligence agency. Eventually, Daimary was handed over to the Border Security Force by the Border Guards Bangladesh through Dawki, Meghalaya on 30 April 2010.³⁷⁹ The officials of the Government of India specifically informed Daimary that the negotiation process of the NDFB would not progress and that the grievances of the Bodos will not be resolved without his involvement in the negotiation process.³⁸⁰ He was also asked to communicate with the rebels of the 3rd battalion who were still engaged in the violence to renounce the violence and

³⁷⁵ In the present study, the group led by Ranjan Daimary will be referred as NDFB (Ranjan Daimary)

³⁷⁶ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary on 5 October 2017 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

engage in the democratic discussions with the Government of India. Eventually, NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) also declared a unilateral ceasefire on 1 August 2011.³⁸¹

Several meetings were held between Ranjan Daimary and P.C. Halder in order to lay down the framework for the proposed negotiation process.³⁸² When asked why Daimary agreed for the negotiations, he argued that negotiations had become necessary as the problems/grievances of the Bodos could be settled only through the democratic process. Despite ongoing discussions, NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) further factionalized into another group which, initially, came to be known as NDFB (Songbhijit) and later as NDFB (Saoraigra) after Songbhijit was expelled from the organization. This group continued the violence. The third group had joined the United National Liberation Front of Western South-East Asia (UNLFW) formed on 17 April 2015, which is a conglomerate of the anti-talk factions of several insurgent groups, viz. NSCN-K, United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA-I), NDFB (Songbhijit) and Kamatapur Liberation Organization.³⁸³

Meanwhile, Daimary was released from jail and a formal ceasefire agreement was signed between the NDFB (Ranjan Daimary), State Government and the Central Government on 29 November 2013. The organization submitted the first memorandum on 27 September 2014.³⁸⁴ In the memorandum submitted by NDFB (Ranjan Daimary), the organization did not mention any specific demands; but this memorandum specifically detailed the socio-economic and political deprivation of the Bodos. P.C. Halder asked the leaders to incorporate specific demands and make changes to the draft of the memorandum. Accordingly, another memorandum was submitted to the Government of India on 2 September 2015 with a demand for a separate state of Bodoland.³⁸⁵

5.6 Continuous bargaining and the third Bodo accord

NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) leadership argued that the pace of the negotiation process was slow and that the Government of India was not serious in its efforts to resolve the Bodo

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 29 May 2016 at Ambagaon, Udalguri.

³⁸³ See the Times of India, June 5 2015.

³⁸⁴ See the first memorandum submitted to the Government of India by the NDFB (R) on 27 September 2014.

³⁸⁵ See the memorandum submitted by the NDFB (R) on 2 September 2015 to the Government of India.

problem.³⁸⁶ At the same, NDFB (Progressive) also maintained that the negotiation process failed to produce the desired outcome due to lack of commitment of the Government.³⁸⁷ NDFB (Progressive) even had to submit a “Reminder Memorandum” to the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi on 8 April 2017.³⁸⁸ At the same time, organizational failures, divisions and disagreements among the Bodo leaders further delayed the signing of any peace agreement.

It needs to be mentioned that NDFB leadership had covertly supported some of the elected representatives in the Parliament and the State Legislative Assembly.³⁸⁹ It was revealed that NDFB (Progressive) supported the Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front (BPPF) candidates since 2006 after the formation of the BTAD. Likewise, in the 2010 parliamentary elections and 2010 BTC elections, the organization supported UPDF (United Peoples Democratic Front) leaders like Urkhao Gwra Brahma and fielded Prodeep Kumar Daimary as its candidate respectively. The leaders of the NDFB (Progressive) further argued that since the demand for a separate state is a political demand, it could be resolved only through the political process. Moreover, besides the demand for a separate state, there were many political demands, which needed to be examined politically. Hence the organization felt the need to have the support of the elected representatives who could speak about the demands of the NDFB and the Bodos in general in the parliament. The UPDF formed by the NDFB (Progressive) also acted as a pressure group in the negotiation process between the NDFB (Progressive) and the Government of India. The UPDF was specifically formed to participate in the electoral politics against the BPF in the Bodo region as well as in the state.

The NDFB (Progressive) also formed a civil society organization called People’s Joint Action Committee for Boroland Movement (PJACBM) on 31 March 2012.³⁹⁰ Initially, PJACBM comprised of about 55 organizations including Bodo and non-Bodo organizations. The PJACBM was formed to unite the Bodos and also to bring the non-Bodo people living in BTAD and

³⁸⁶ Interview with Ranjan Daimary and Nileswar Basumatary.

³⁸⁷ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary.

³⁸⁸ See Reminder Memorandum submitted jointly by All Bodo Students Union, National Democratic Front of Boroland (P) and People’s Joint Action Committee for Boroland Movement on 17 April 2017.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary conducted on 29 June 2019.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Bhraman Baglary conducted on 12 November 2018.

beyond. The idea behind the formation of PJACBM was to bridge the gap between different communities living in BTAD.

Meanwhile, in 2010, the All Bodo Students Union restarted another phase of movement for a separate state of Bodoland.³⁹¹ This phase of the statehood movement by the students' union was a democratic and peaceful one as compared to the statehood movement of the 1980s. After a series of negotiations, ABSU also finally decided to join hands with the PJACBM in 2013. ABSU and PJACBM together started acting as a pressure group for the NDFB (Progressive). Meanwhile, the NDFB (Progressive), ABSU and the BPPF formed another organization called People's Coordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR) on 20 August 2014 in Kokrajhar which included political as well as non-political organizations belonging to different communities in opposition to the BTC government under Hagrama Mohilary.³⁹² Rwngrwa Narzary, former senior leader of ABSU was made the Chief Coordinator of PCDR. PCDR contested the BTC elections in 2015 but failed to defeat the BPF. On 5 August 2015, BPPF and UPDF were dismantled and the leaders formed a political party called the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). Hereafter, ABSU and the NDFB (Progressive) started contesting the elections both at the regional, state and the national level under the banner of the UPPL since its formation. NDFB (Progressive) thus indirectly and directly engaged in the electoral politics of BTC, state and also at the parliamentary elections.

Meanwhile, NDFB (Progressive) and the NDFB led by Ranjan Daimary decided to jointly participate in the negotiation process as there were no signs of any positive progress in the negotiation process of the two groups with the Government of India. The two organizations felt the need to pressurize the Government in order to address the demands and the grievances of the Bodos. The two organizations held a joint discussion for the first time after its split with the Government of India on 25 June 2018.³⁹³ In the meeting, the NDFB (Progressive) submitted a 20-point memorandum to the Government of India. Likewise, NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) also

³⁹¹ Interview with Bhraman Baglary, founding member of ABPF, conducted on 12 November 2018 at Sonai Khowrong, Udalguri. This was also mentioned by Gobinda Basumatary, former General Secretary of the NDFB during interviews which was conducted on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri.

³⁹² Interview with Brahman Baglary.

³⁹³ Interview with Ranjan Daimary on 11 November 2018 at Ambagaon, Udalguri and Gobinda Basumatary on 13 November 2018 at Sudempuri, Udalguri

submitted an 18-points memorandum to the Government of India.³⁹⁴ Eventually, the two groups jointly submitted a memorandum to the Home Minister of India and AB Mathur on 28 August 2018 with demands for a separate state of Bodoland. The state was demanded under the provisions of Article 2 & 3 of the Constitution of India comprising of 31 Tribal Belts and Blocks and some Tribal Sub-Plan areas in the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra from Sankosh to Sadiya.³⁹⁵ Besides the demand for the creation of a separate state, issues such as protection of tribal land, safeguard to Bodos living outside the proposed Bodoland, reorganization of new districts and other socio-economic and political issues were laid out in the memorandum.

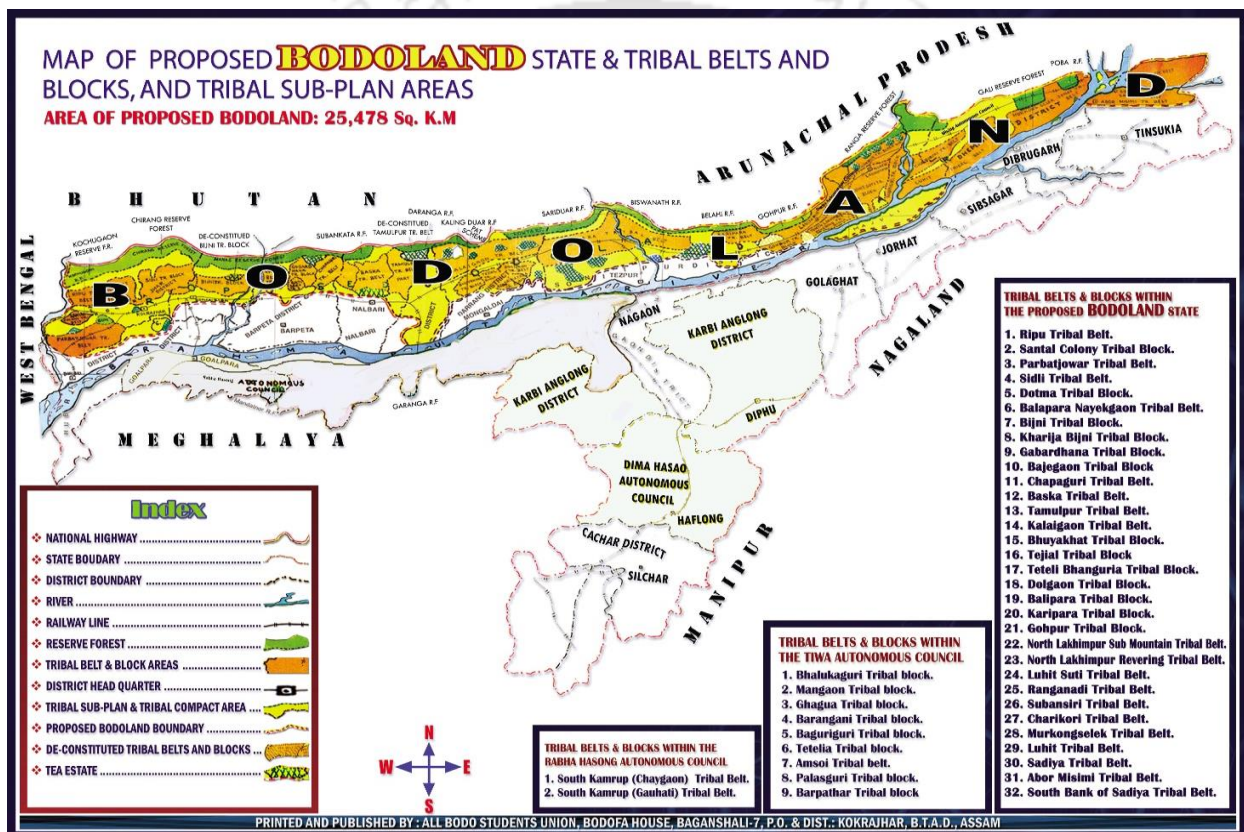


Figure 5.5: Map of proposed state of Bodoland which was being demanded by NDFB and ABSU

Source: All Bodo Students Union Office, Bagansali, Kokrajhar

³⁹⁴ Interview with Ranjan Daimary.

³⁹⁵ See the Joint Memorandum submitted to the government of India by the National Democratic Front of Boroland (Ranjan Group) and National Democratic Front of Boroland (Progressive) on 28 August 2018.

On 2 November 2018, the two groups held a joint discussion with the Government of India. The two organizations held another round of discussion with the Government of India in February 2019.³⁹⁶ In the discussions, which took place in February 2019, the Government agreed to all the socio-economic demands of the NDFB (Progressive), NDFB (Ranjan Daimary), ABSU and Bodo people in general.³⁹⁷ However, the negotiating groups could not reach at any solution on the political demands, especially the demand for the creation of a separate state of Bodoland, due to which the negotiation process was stalled. The Government reiterated its stand against further bifurcation of Assam. At the same time, the government offered concessions in the form of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. NDFB leadership opposed the offers. NDFB leadership also argued that the Government of Assam was ignorant about the grievances of the tribal people of the state. They raised the issue of large-scale tribal land alienation in spite of the protective measures for Bodos. Discussions between the NDFB and the Government of India in February 2019, thus ended in a situation of deadlock.

In the meantime, Ranjan Daimary, the founding President of NDFB was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on 30 January 2019 in the October 30 2008 serial bomb blast case in Assam which killed several innocent lives.³⁹⁸ Along with him, 14 other NDFB rebels were also convicted in the bomb blast case. However, inspite of his arrest, the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India continued.

Meanwhile in January 2020, NDFB (Saoraigra), the third group which had continued the violence after its split from NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) group, expressed its willingness to renounce the violence and join the peace process.³⁹⁹ The organization was based in Myanmar after its split from NDFB (Ranjan Daimary). Most of the rebels of the NDFB (Saoraigra) led by B Saoraigra, the President and BR Ferenga, the General Secretary of the group were brought back to India in order to include them in the ongoing peace talks with the Government of India.

³⁹⁶ Interview with Gobinda Basumatary on 29 June 2019 in Udalguri.

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ See The Hindu, 30 January 2019. Also see NDTV 30 January 2019

³⁹⁹ See The Assam Tribune, 17 January 2020.

The group signed a ‘Suspension of Operations’ agreement with the Government of India and Government of Assam on 16 January 2020.⁴⁰⁰

It is important to note that the Government of India had been trying to bring the NDFB (Saoraigra) group into the negotiation process and include all factions of the NDFB into the negotiation process to sign a comprehensive peace agreement with all the stakeholders including ABSU. Meanwhile, NDFB (Progressive) leadership accused Dhiren Boro, then President of NDFB (Progressive) and M. Fwilao, former Commanding Officer of the Eastern Zone of working against the interests of the organization. Eventually, they were expelled from the organization on 21 August 2019. This further led to the splintering of the NDFB (Progressive) into another group led by Dhiren Boro which came to be known as NDFB (Dhiren Boro).

Eventually, all the four groups of the NDFB, ABSU and United Bodo People’s Organization (UBPO) signed a peace agreement on 27 January 2020 with the Government of India and Government of Assam.⁴⁰¹ The agreement came to be known as the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Accord and according to the provisions of the accord, BTAD was to be renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). Ranjan Daimary, Gobinda Basumatary, Dhiren Boro and B. Saoraigra represented the four groups of the NDFB and ABSU was represented by its President, Promod Boro and General Secretary, Lawrence Islary during the signing of the accord.⁴⁰² Ranjan Daimary was granted interim bail on 25 January 2020 for four weeks in order to facilitate his participation in the final stage of the negotiation process with the Government of India.⁴⁰³ Mihineswar Basumatary, the President of UBPO represented the organization during the signing of the accord. Satyendra Garg, Joint Secretary (NE), MHA represented the Government of India and the State Government was represented by Kumar Sanjay Krishna, Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam. Sarbananda Sonowal, then Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma, then Cabinet Minister of Assam and Hagrama Mohilary, then Chief of BTC were also present during the signing of the accord.⁴⁰⁴ The third Bodo accord is an

⁴⁰⁰ See, Pratidin Time, 17 January 2020.

⁴⁰¹ UBPO (organization of the Bodos living outside Bodoland Territorial Region) is a non-political democratic socio-economic organization and was formed on 18 July, 2014 at Simen Sapori in Dhemaji district of Assam.

⁴⁰² See The Memorandum of Settlement, BTR Accord signed on 27 January 2020.

⁴⁰³ See The Indian Express 25 January 2020.

⁴⁰⁴ See The Memorandum of Settlement, BTR Accord signed on 27 January 2020.

attempt to establish durable and sustainable peace in the Bodo region and hence it was necessary to involve all the stakeholders.⁴⁰⁵

5.7 BTR Accord, provisions for demobilization and formation of BTR

According to the BTR Accord, there were provisions to increase the existing powers and functions of the BTC. One of the significant provisions of the new accord was to increase the area, powers and functions of the existing Council, which would be renamed as BTR in the subsequent period.⁴⁰⁶ Those villages, which were contiguous to existing boundary of the then BTAD and comprise of tribal population would be included in BTR. And those villages contiguous to non-Sixth Schedule areas with majority non-tribal population would be excluded from BTR. There were also provisions to increase the number of constituencies of the existing Council from 40 to 60. In order to address these two issues, a Committee comprising representatives of State Government, BTC, ABSU and other stakeholders was to be formed. According to the provisions of the new agreement, the Committee had to submit the recommendation within six months from the date of notification.

The new administrative setup would also have more legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers in some selected subjects. A provision was also included in the new accord for the Bodos who reside outside the existing BTAD. Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council was to be set up for the development of the Bodo villages outside the BTR.⁴⁰⁷ The accord also aimed at promoting and protecting the social, cultural, linguistic and ethnic identities of Bodos. The Memorandum of Settlement also had provisions for enacting special legislations to provide adequate safeguards to the land rights of tribal communities living outside the tribal belts and blocks in areas outside the existing Council.

One of the significant provisions of the BTR Accord was the demobilization and the reintegration process of the NDFB rebels. NDFB rebels had to surrender their arms and ammunitions and disband their organizations within one month of the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement. The member of the four groups of the NDFB had to be rehabilitated either through ex-gratia payment, funds for economic activities through existing Government

⁴⁰⁵ Interview with a state official on 27 August 2021.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

schemes, trade/vocational training or recruitment in Government jobs.⁴⁰⁸ At the same time, there were provisions for granting general amnesty to non-heinous crimes committed by the rebels of the NDFB during the course of the insurgency. However, as far as heinous crimes were concerned, they were to be reviewed individually as per existing policy on the subject.

However, the implementation of the provisions of the new accord was delayed due to the pandemic situation caused by Covid-19. Accordingly, Governor's rule was imposed in BTC for 6 months on 27 April 2020 which came into effect from 28 April 2020 (as the elections for the Council could not be held due to Covid-19).⁴⁰⁹ Meanwhile, the Assam Government informed on 25 September 2020 that the Governor of Assam, Jagdish Mukhi gave his approval for renaming the BTAD as BTR and eventually, BTAD was formally renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region through an Assam Government order dated September 28, 2020.⁴¹⁰

Meanwhile, a Commission was formed by the Assam Government to look into the inclusion and exclusion of villages from and into the BTR, which was another important provisions of the newly signed BTR Accord.⁴¹¹ P.P Verma, former Chief Secretary of Assam, headed the Commission. Apart from P.P. Verma, the Commission also included Rajesh Prasad, the BTC administrator, Jayanta Basumatary, then Vice-President of ABSU and Dalim Bayan, a social activist as representative of non-Bodo communities. Those villages bordering the four districts of BTR with more than 50 percent Bodo population could apply to the Commission to be included in the newly formed BTR. And those villages within the BTR, which are contiguous to its boundary and have a non-Bodo population of over 50% could apply to be excluded from the newly formed BTR. The Commission was entrusted to initiate appropriate measures after reviewing the applications submitted by these villages. Accordingly, the Commission would also advise the State Government on increasing the existing 40 seats in the erstwhile BTC to 60 in the newly formed BTR and at the same time, the Commission would also accordingly advise the State Government to reorganize the constituencies.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ See The Hindu, 27 April 2020 and The Assam Tribune, 27 April 2020.

⁴¹⁰ See Pratidin Time, 25 September 2020. Also See The Sentinel, 28 September 2020.

⁴¹¹ See The Hindu 25 September 2020. Also see, Hindustan Times 25 September 2020; Pratidin Time 25 September 2020.

Meanwhile, the State Government passed an ordinance to make Bodo as the associate official language of the state on 7 October 2020 and also passed an ordinance to create the Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council (BKWAC) for the welfare of the Bodo community living outside the Sixth Schedule area.⁴¹² And eventually, the State Assembly passed the Assam Official Language (Amendment) Bill, 2020 on 30 December 2020 whereby Bodo became the ‘Associate Official Language’ of the state.⁴¹³ At the same time, the State Assembly also passed the ‘Bodo-Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council Bill 2020 which paved the way for the creation of an Autonomous Council for the Bodo tribes residing outside the existing BTR region.⁴¹⁴ These were two of the important provisions of the BTR accord signed on 27 January 2020. Thus the Government initiated measures to implement the provisions of the BTR accord. However, there is skepticism among a section of the Bodos especially the members of the BPF and its supporters, former NDFB rebels as well as the non-Bodo population of the BTR on the impact of the new accord in the long run.

The signing of the BTR accord in January 2020 marked the end of long years of violence in the Bodo region. After the surrendering of arms by the former NDFB rebels on 30 January 2020, expectations are high among all the stakeholders as well as among the people of the Bodo areas that peace will prevail in the Bodo region. However, with widening polarization between the Bodos and the non-Bodos as well as differences within the Bodos, it is unclear how the provisions of the new accord will contribute to durable peace in the Bodo region.

The preceding sections provided a descriptive account of the onset of the negotiation process between NDFB and the Government of India. As can be seen from the previous sections, the NDFB leadership’s decision to renounce the violence and engage in democratic discussions has been motivated by varying conditions and socio-political developments in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The armed struggle for a sovereign country for the Bodos, which was started in 1986, took a different turn in 2004-05 when NDFB decided to renounce the violence and participate in the negotiation process with the Government of India. The decision to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process was conditioned by various factors. The

⁴¹² See The Assam Tribune 8 October 2020.

⁴¹³ See The Sentinel 31 December 2020. Also see NDTV, 30 December 2020.

⁴¹⁴ See The Sentinel 31 December 2020.

following section critically examine the conditions that motivated the NDFB leadership to renounce the violence which, eventually, led to the onset of the negotiation process in 2005.

5.8 Strategic choices and the dynamics of the NDFB insurgency

The strategic choices of the NSAGs/insurgent groups depend on varying conditions that develops during the course of the insurgency. As discussed in Chapter 2, studies show that relative capabilities and incentive structure of the NSAGs play an important role in the onset of the negotiations between the NSAGs and the state actors. According to these studies, insurgent groups' strategic choices are influenced by the balance of power between the NSAGs and the state actors as well as due to the incentive structure that develops during the course of the insurgency.

Relative capabilities of the NSAGs depends on the accumulation of tangible and intangible resources such as finance, recruits, support base, accumulation of arms and ammunitions, alliance formations, geography, safe havens/bases, external support and military capability and others. These resources help in strengthening the capabilities of the insurgent groups, which further allows them to avoid the state security forces and sustain the insurgency for a longer period of time. Bapat, Schulze, Hultquist, Akcinaroglu, Reider, Salehyan, Byman and many others have argued that resources which makes the NSAGs relatively capable have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the insurgent groups (Bapat, 2005; Schulze, 2007; Hultquist, 2013; Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Salehyan, 2007; Byman, 2001; Connable & Libicki, 2010; Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009).

Strategic choices of the NSAGs also depend on the incentive structure of the NSAGs that develops during the course of the insurgency. NSAGs may calculate the costs of continuing the insurgency and at the same time, they may further calculate the benefits of engaging in the negotiation process with the state actors. Thus, the cost and benefit analysis of engaging in the negotiation process or continuing the conflict is a critical factor for the insurgents while deciding whether to renounce the violence or continue the insurgency. Incentive structure also include power-sharing agreements, grant of amnesty, other economic and political concessions, employment opportunities for the former rebels, high casualty rates, support base, rate at which the costs increases, expected benefits of negotiation greater than future benefits and time required for achieving victory. Kaplow, Phayal, Ulracher, Thomas, Fujikawa, Findley, Gregg,

Mitchell and many others highlighted the significance of the incentive structure on the strategic choices of the insurgent groups (Kaplow, 2015; Phayal, 2011; Ulracher, 2013; Thomas, 2012; Fujikawa, 2017; Findley, 2013; Gregg, 2011; Mitchell, 2012). In the case of the NDFB, these factors and others may have influenced the onset of the negotiation process as well.

A. Relative capabilities and the strategic choices of the NDFB

Relative capabilities of the insurgent groups have a significant influence on the strategic choices of the insurgent groups throughout the armed conflict. Earlier studies argue that counterinsurgency operations against the insurgents conducted by the state actors affect the dynamics of insurgent groups and the outcome of the insurgency. For instance, safe havens/bases are one of the significant resources, which contribute to capability building for the insurgents during the course of the insurgency. Safe havens in neighbouring countries and within the country allow insurgents to avoid the counterinsurgency operations as it becomes difficult for the security forces to target them due to lack of knowledge about the terrains and at the same time the host states are bound to respect the other country's sovereignty (Salehyan, 2007). Neighbouring states have become the most common provider of safe havens to insurgent groups (Kiras, 2008). Further, safe havens or bases in foreign countries and at the same time within the country allow the insurgents to avoid the repressive tactics of the state security forces which allows the insurgents to sustain the insurgency for a longer period of time (Byman et. al., 2001). Cross border sanctuaries have played a significant role especially when the counterinsurgent forces are highly capable.

Buhaug Gates and Lujala (2009) argue that the conflicts, which occur in the periphery/borders, far away from the state capital, are more likely to last longer due to inability of the state to employ sufficient state security forces in the region. However, denial of sanctuaries to the insurgents by the state actors makes the insurgents more vulnerable from the repressive tactics of the security forces (Connable & Libicki, 2010). The destruction of safe havens or sanctuaries through counterinsurgency operations affects the dynamics of the insurgent groups and the likelihood of collapse and uncertainty about their survival increases (Byman et. al., 2001; Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). With uncertainty about their survival, insurgents may rethink their strategy about continuing the insurgency. Bapat further argued that non-state armed groups might be forced to renounce the violence and enter into peace negotiations with the state

actors due to lack of sufficient resources and capabilities to sustain the movement (Bapat, 2005). He argued that the fear of collapse and uncertainty about their survival might motivate the non-state actors to engage in peace process with the state actors. Insurgent groups are more likely to negotiate when they are not certain about their survival.

One of the significant factors which contributed to the onset of negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India was the destruction of bases/safe havens in Bhutan after the “Operation All Clear” conducted by the Royal Bhutan Army in collaboration with the Indian Army on 15 December 2003. Since the late 1980s, NDFB had established bases/safe havens in the Bhutanese Territory, which allowed the organization to successfully continue the insurgency as it enabled the rebels to avoid the stringent counterinsurgency operations conducted by the Indian Army and other state security forces. The 1st and the 2nd battalion of the organization were based in these bases in Bhutan whereas the 3rd battalion under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary was based in Bangladesh. Initially, when the NDFB established bases in Bhutan, the organization did not face any resistance from the Bhutanese Government. NDFB rebels also shared very close relation with the Royal Bhutan Army. However, gradually the King of Bhutan felt that the presence of the NDFB rebels and other insurgents in their territory would affect their relations with the Government of India and also the peace and prosperity of the Kingdom. At the same time, there were tremendous pressures on the Bhutanese Government from the Indian Government to flush out the Indian insurgents from its territory. Thus, the Royal Bhutan Army in coordination with the Indian Army launched the Operation All Clear in December 2003 which destroyed the bases of the NDFB in the Bhutanese Territory. As discussed, many rebels were also arrested and others surrendered. The Government urged the insurgents to find a political solution through peaceful means. Eventually, NDFB declared unilateral ceasefire and expressed its willingness to participate in the negotiation process in 2004. Counterinsurgency, subsequent arrests and deaths of many rebels of the organization prior to the Operation All Clear also had a significant impact on the relative capability of NDFB. Due to these developments, there were fears of collapse and uncertainty about their survival within the NDFB especially those belonging to 1st and 2nd battalion based in India. People’s support also decreased substantially which paved the way for NDFB’s choice of renouncing arms and sit for the talks. NDFB faced pressure from the Bodo intellectuals and Bodos in general to renounce the violence and negotiate with the Government.

B. Incentive Structure and the Strategic Choices of the NDFB

Studies have shown that insurgent groups calculate the costs and benefits of both, continuing the insurgency and engaging in negotiations. Kaplow (2015) argued that conflicting groups prefer to engage in peaceful discussions only if they can benefit the most from the negotiation process. Phayal (2011) argued that insurgent groups may decide to renounce the violence and engage in peaceful politics if the state actors are able to raise the cost of engaging in the insurgency through military, domestic and international pressure and at the same time, by opening a political space in the government. He further argued that rising costs of the violence on the part of the states might also result in offers of accommodation to the insurgent groups. The NSAGs as well as the state actors calculate the costs and benefits of the negotiation process and at the same time they calculate the cost and benefits of continuing the insurgency (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). NSAGs as well as the state actors may decide to engage in negotiations when they perceive their chances of victory to be relatively low, costs of continued violence increases and if the time required for victory increases (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). High cost of insurgencies may also motivate the state actors to offer concessions to the NSAGs (Thomas, 2012). Thomas (2012) argued that state actors are more likely to engage those NSAGs in the negotiation process capable of inflicting high costs on the state actors through violence. Walter (2006) showed that democratic states/countries are more likely to accommodate the NSAGs as democratic states have an established provision to grant concessions to the insurgents through various power-sharing offers. Others have also shown that state actors can bring an end to insurgencies through power-sharing offers like access to electoral politics, autonomy arrangements or positions in the government (Findley, 2013; Gregg, 2011).

After the destruction of bases in Bhutan in December 2003, continuing the insurgency became difficult for the NDFB. The incentive to continue the insurgency significantly decreased due to the destruction of bases in Bhutan and also due to the arrest and surrender of many rebels especially for the members of the 1st and 2nd battalion of the organization who were based in Bhutan during Operation All Clear. Regrouping and continuing the insurgency became difficult for those rebels based within the Indian Territory. Therefore, the costs of continuing the insurgency became high for NDFB.

Another critical explanation to the onset of the negotiation process was the change in the Government in Assam in 2001. The approach of the Assam Government in 2001 towards the insurgent groups changed. The Congress Government led by Tarun Gogoi appealed to the NDFB leadership and other insurgent organizations like the ULFA to renounce violence and engage in peace discussions. Mutual trust developed between the new Congress Government and the NDFB leadership. This was absent during the rule of the previous AGP and Congress Governments in the state under the leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Hiteswar Saikia respectively. The role of the leadership both in the State as well as the Central Government played a significant role in bringing the NDFB within the democratic fold. At the same time, the attitude of the NDFB leadership during the early 2000s cannot be ignored. The NDFB leadership had also expressed its willingness to participate in the democratic process since 2001. Thus, the attitude of the both the Assam government and the NDFB leadership played a critical role in the onset of the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India.

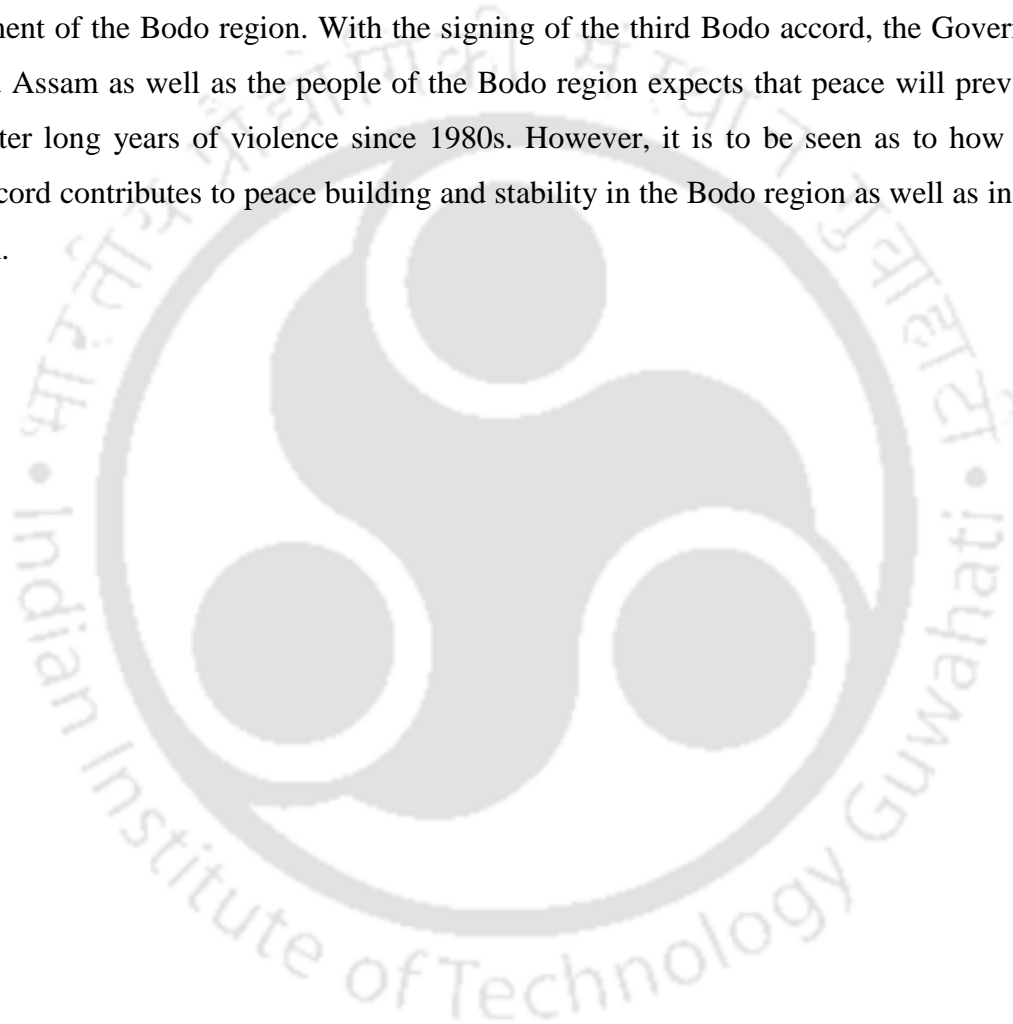
5.9 Summary

The chapter discussed the insurgency led by the National Democratic Front of Boroland and the factors that motivated the insurgent group to renounce violence and engage in the negotiation process after nearly three decades of armed insurgency. NDFB demanded a sovereign country for the Bodos. Feeling of socio-economic and political deprivation largely motivated a section of Bodos to launch the armed insurgency on 3rd October 1986 under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary. The subsequent BAC Accord signed in 1993 between ABSU and the State Government further created conditions for resentment among the NDFB leaders. They continued with the violent insurgency. The post-Accord period witnessed intensification of violence by the NDFB. Meanwhile, another Bodo armed organization called BLT, which comprised of mainly a hardcore section of the ABSU, was formed. BLT signed the second Bodo Accord called BTC Accord in 2003 whereby, a new autonomous administrative unit called BTAD was formed under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

NDFB, eventually, decided to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process in 2004-05. Eventually, the organization signed a formal ceasefire agreement on 25 May 2005 and thereafter engaged in series of discussions with the Government of India. The

organization soon splintered into four groups, viz. NDFB (Progressive), NDFB (Ranjan Daimary), NDFB (Saoraigra) and NDFB (Dhiren Boro).

After almost fifteen years of negotiations, NDFB along with ABSU and UBPO signed a comprehensive peace agreement on 27 January 2020 with the Government of India, which came to be known as BTR Accord. After the signing of the Accord, the existing BTAD was renamed as BTR and also the new accord contained provisions, which mostly focused on overall development of the Bodo region. With the signing of the third Bodo accord, the Government of India and Assam as well as the people of the Bodo region expects that peace will prevail in the region after long years of violence since 1980s. However, it is to be seen as to how the third Bodo Accord contributes to peace building and stability in the Bodo region as well as in the state of Assam.



Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The present study was carried out with the objective of analyzing the factors that motivate NSAGs/insurgent groups to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process with the state actors. The emergence of varied conditions within the NSAGs and the insurgency in particular may affect the strategic choices of the organization. At the same time, the responses of the state also affect the strategic choices of the NSAGs. The present study conducted an in-depth and microlevel case study analysis of the case of NDFB in India's northeast. The present study employed a qualitative method of enquiry and collected data through in-depth interviews by interacting with former NDFB rebels, ABSU members, government officials and others. Though a number of studies have been conducted on the ethnic mobilization and different phases of statehood and separatist movements of the Bodos, there is a dearth of literature on in-depth examination of the insurgency led by the NDFB.

One of the main objectives of the study was to examine the bargaining process of the NSAGs with the state actors. Interactions and bargaining stages of the discussions form an important part of the negotiation process as it determines the outcome of the negotiation process. The study further examined how engaging NSAGs in the negotiation process could contribute to establishment of peace in conflict-ridden regions.

Violent insurgency of the Bodos affected peace and stability in Assam. The state responded with stringent counter-insurgency operations against the NDFB since the 1990s. The decision of NDFB to renounce violence and engage in peaceful discussions with the Government was dependent on several factors as discussed in the study.

Existing studies on internal conflicts argue that insurgent groups may decide to renounce the violence and engage in peaceful negotiations due to varied factors. The second chapter discusses how the organizational structure, resources and capabilities, incentive structure, stalemate and mediation play an important role in the onset of the negotiation process. The chapter argued that some NSAGs may be motivated by these factors to renounce the rebellion while others may still continue fighting. Organizational dynamics such as leadership issues and

the way the organization has been structured have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NSAGs (Debray, 1967; Connable & Libicki, 2010). At the same time, many studies argued that resources such as safe havens, strong operational bases, arms and ammunitions, finance, military strength, network, external support and geographic factors such as location of the conflict and terrain play an important role in the dynamics of the insurgency (Bapat, 2005; Schulze, 2007; Akcinaroglu, 2012; Reider, 2014; Buhaug & Gates, 2002; Buhaug, Gates & Lujala, 2009). However, Kaplow (2015) argued that relatively powerful NSAGs who control a portion of a territory and those that have the capability of inflicting heavy costs on the state actors are also likely to be invited for peace talks by the state actors.

The third set of literature further argued that incentive structure has a significant impact on the onset of the negotiation process. Offers of power-sharing agreements, cost-benefit analysis and others motivate the NSAGs to renounce the violence and engage in the democratic process (Kaplow, 2015; Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999; Phayal, 2011; Thomas, 2012; Walter, 2002). NSAGs may also decide to engage in negotiations with the state actors because of the stalemated conditions in the conflict and also because of mediation by third parties (Zartman, 1995; Clayton, 2013).

Taking cue from this set of literature, the present study argued that relative capabilities and incentive structure have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NSAGs/insurgent groups. The first set of literature argued that relative capabilities of the NSAGs play a significant role in the strategic choices of the insurgent groups. Resources, both tangible and intangible, determine the capabilities of NSAGs. The onset of negotiation or continued violence depends on the resources the organization accumulates during the course of the insurgency. NSAGs with relatively high capabilities and resources sometimes receive offers of negotiations from the state actors. Negotiations are more likely during the early stages of the insurgency when the NSAGs are weak in terms of resources and capabilities (Bapat, 2005). NSAGs continue fighting if they do not face any risk of collapse and the probability of bringing the insurgents within the democratic fold diminishes as they acquire more and more resources. Resources such as safe havens in neighbouring countries allow the NSAGs to sustain the insurgency for a longer period of time (Salehyan, 2007; Fearon & Laitin, 1999; Byman et al., 2001). Access to safe havens both within the country as well as in foreign countries allows the NSAGs to avoid the

counterinsurgency operations of the host states and enables the NSAGs to efficiently conduct the movement (Connable & Libicki, 2010; O'Neill, 1990). Some studies maintain that strong operational bases have an impact on the dynamics of the insurgency (Guevara, 1969). NSAGs may receive consistent support from neighboring states, but the withdrawal of such support affects the sustenance of the insurgency (Byman, 2009). Earlier studies have also argued that networks among insurgent groups may affect the strategic choices of the NSAGs. For instance, Akcinaroglu (2012) argued that networks and interdependence among the NSAGs makes them relatively more capable as it increases the resources of the NSAGs and the fighting capacity. Alliance formations between the NSAGs not only increase the capabilities of the NSAGs but also increase the survival chances of relative weaker insurgent groups. On the other hand, military capabilities may also have a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NSAGs (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2009; Hultquist, 2013). Schulze (2007) argued that military capabilities of the NSAGs and change in domestic political and social conditions also affect the strategic choices of the conflicting groups.

Existing literature also highlighted the significance of the incentive structure on the strategic choices of the NSAGs as well as the state actors. NSAGs are motivated to accept the state actors' offer of power sharing arrangements such as autonomy arrangements, access to electoral politics and other economic and political incentives and participate in the negotiation process (Walter, 2002; Findley, 2013; Sriram & Zahar, 2009; Mitchell, 2012; Gregg, 2011). Others still continue fighting in spite of such offers made by the state actors. Those NSAGs who are capable of inflicting high costs on the state actors receive such offers from the state actors (Thomas, 2012). Incentive structures of the NSAGs are also determined by the cost-benefit analysis of continuing the insurgency and participation in the negotiation process. The NSAGs as well as the state actors calculate the costs and benefits of engagement in negotiation process and at the same time they calculate the costs and benefits of continuing the insurgency. NSAGs as well as the state actors may decide to engage in negotiations when they perceive their chances of victory to be relatively low, costs of continued violence increases and if the time required for victory increases (Mason, Weingarten & Fett, 1999). At the same time, increased costs of violence for the NSAGs through military, domestic and international pressure while allowing the insurgents to participate in the politics may influence them to participate in the democratic

process (Phayal, 2011). High cost of insurgencies may also motivate the state actors to offer concessions to the NSAGs (Thomas, 2012).

The third chapter discusses the history of the Bodos and the emergence of the ethnic aspirations among the Bodos, which formed the basis for the Bodo insurgency under the NDFB in the 1980s. The chapter discusses the fear of marginalization and threats to Bodo identity which led to the emergence of political consciousness among the Bodos especially the educated and middle class section of the community during the British rule. Twentieth century thus witnessed the formation of various organizations such as Habraghat Bodo Sanmiloni, Bodo Chatra Sanmelaan and others like Kachari Youth Association and All Assam Tribal League. Land alienation, lack of proper representation and safeguard of the interests of the Bodos and other plains tribal communities laid the background for mobilization among the Bodos in the post-British period.

The chapter further analyzes the developments in the post-British period in the state of Assam, which eventually culminated into separatist aspirations among the Bodos. One of the most significant demands of the Bodos during and after the British rule was to protect the Bodos and other plains tribal communities from land alienation. In spite of several protective measures, encroachment of tribal land continued unabated. The State Government failed to efficiently implement the laws in place. For instance, the creation of Tribal Belts and Blocks by the Bordoloi Ministry through the amendment of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 failed to address the issue of encroachment of tribal land due to the lack of efficient implementation. Eventually, the Bodos became apprehensive and these led to further consolidation of ethnic aspirations among the community. Secondly, the dominance in the administrative positions, educational institutions and other decision-making positions by the Assamese-speaking groups created uncertainty and fear in the minds of the Bodos. The post-British period also witnessed introduction of language policies, which were deemed discriminatory by the Bodos and other plains tribal communities. Thus, various Bodo socio-cultural organizations, political organization and student organization emerged during the period. Organizations such as the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Plains Tribal Council of Assam, All Bodo Students Union, AATWWF (ABWWF), United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front and United Bodo Nationalist Liberation Front resisted these policies of the Assam Government. There were

demands for the creation of a separate administrative unit called “Udayachal” for the plains tribal communities of Assam including the Bodos in the post-British period. Bodos under the banner of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the ABSU engaged in various socio-cultural movements in order to safeguard the interests of the Bodos. The chapter further analyzed the language movement of the 1960s, Roman Script movement and the statehood movement of the Bodos as these events proved to be critical factors for the violent mobilization in the 1980s and 1990s. This chapter provides the background of the NDFB insurgency.

Chapter Four discusses the insurgency led by the NDFB. The chapter describes the history of the formation of the organization and the motivations behind NDFB’s engagement in an armed struggle. The chapter also discusses the different stages of the NDFB insurgency. The insurgency led by the NDFB for a sovereign Bodoland reinforced the idea of a Bodo nation and violence was intense in the Bodo areas. Stability and peace in the state of Assam was highly disrupted. The relative socio-economic, cultural and political deprivations were some of the issues, which led to the emergence of the NDFB in the 1980s.

Chapter Five analyzes the factors that motivated the NDFB leadership to renounce the violence and engage in the negotiation process with the Government of India. The chapter specifically describes the various developments that cropped up within the organization and the insurgency which, eventually, had an impact on the dynamics of the insurgency. The chapter further analyzed the bargaining process and the new Bodo accord and its implications in the region.

NDFB showed its willingness to engage in peaceful discussions with the Government of India in early 2000s and eventually renounced the violence in 2005. The chapter highlights the factors, which motivated the NDFB leadership to participate in the peace process. While NSAGs are influenced by many factors to renounce the violence, the chapter argues that relative capabilities and incentive structure had a significant impact on the strategic choices of the NDFB leadership. Counterinsurgent measures of the state actors further caused impediments on the regrouping of NDFB rebels. The cost of continuing the insurgency significantly increased after the Operation All Clear conducted in Bhutan. NDFB also showed its willingness to renounce violence after the Congress came to power in Assam in 2001 as the organization developed a sense of trust on the approach of the new Government. The new Congress Government showed

its intent of addressing the armed struggles in the region through peaceful process unlike the previous AGP Government who tried to tackle the insurgency problem through stringent tactics.

The chapter further discusses the negotiation process between the NDFB and the Government of India. NDFB insurgency came to an end with the signing of the BTR Accord on 27 January 2020. It is yet to be seen how the third Bodo accord will address the long-standing demands of the Bodos and how it will contribute to peace building, prevention of further conflict and the overall development in the Bodo region.

6.2 Significance of the study

Northeast India witnessed many insurgencies in the post-British period which affected the peace, stability and the overall development of the region. The present study analyzes the armed movements of the Bodos. Studies on the movements of the Bodos including the insurgency led by the NDFB have been conducted but very few focused on the motivations behind the organization's decision to renounce the violence and its impact on the establishment of peace in the Bodo region. The present study is significant in this regard. Understanding the factors that motivate NSAGs is significant for the state actors as it enables the latter to devise and initiate policies to shun the violence and establish peace in conflict-ridden places in northeast India. It is important to understand why and how negotiations take place.

6.3 Future scope of research

There is a future scope of analysis of two or more cases. The case of the NSCN-IM and Mizo National Front (MNF) could be considered. The latter is an example of successful negotiation and accommodation in the state of Mizoram. MNF ruled the state. The NSCN-IM has been observing ceasefire since 1997. The organization has been engaged in negotiations with the Government of India. The Governor of Nagaland, RN Ravi who is also the interlocutor for the peace talks claimed that the negotiation process between the NSCN-IM and the Government of India has been concluded and the final settlements only remain.⁴¹⁵ The factors that motivated the NSCN-IM and MNF leadership may vary but it could contribute to existing studies on conflict management. In the case of NDFB, relative capabilities and incentive structure played a

⁴¹⁵ See Hindustan Times, 13 February 2021

significant role in the negotiation process. It remains to be examined whether these factors are applicable in the case of NSCN-IM and MNF leadership.

The other significant scope for research in the future is to conduct a mixed method of enquiry. The use of qualitative and quantitative research of two or more cases could help in interpreting the findings of the study systematically. The present study also described about the bargaining process between the NSAGs and the Government and how engaging insurgents in the negotiation process could contribute to peace building in conflict-ridden countries like India. It is to be seen how the third Bodo accord contribute to peace building and prevent the occurrence of violence in the Bodo areas. After the signing of the BTR Accord, a new Bodo insurgent group called National Liberation Front of Boroland (NLFB) was formed by former NDFB rebels, especially those loyal to Ranjan Daimary. This group of rebels led by M. Batha were dissatisfied with the implementations of the BTR Accord. One of the key demands of the NLFB was the release of Ranjan Daimary, the founding President of NDFB and several others who were still lodged in jail.⁴¹⁶ However, many former NDFB rebels who had joined NLFB has surrendered in recent times and the organization has remained inactive for now. It to be seen as to how the provisions of the third Bodo accord prevents the resurgence of violence in the Bodo region and contribute towards establishment of peace and stability in the Bodo region.

⁴¹⁶ See Outlook 8 August 2021.

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Appendix

Visuals from the Field



Photo 1: Designated camp of NDFB (Progressive) located in Sapkhaiti, Udalguri, Assam



Photo 2: A still after the interview with Gobinda Basumatary, former General Secretary of NDFB at Sudempuri, Udalguri, Assam



Photo 3: A still with Ranjan Daimary, founding President of NDFB at Ambagaon, Udalguri, Assam



Photo 4: With Amarendra Brahma, the founding General Secretary of the NDFB at Bathoupuri High School, Guwahati



Photo 5: During interaction with Binod Narzary, former Arms and Ammunitions Secretary of BLT



Photo 6: During interviews with Elen Mushahary, Lakheswar Boro, Millionaire Baro and Sadananda Boro, the present ABSU Office Bearers of Goreswar unit ABSU, Baksa.



Photo 7: A still from the interview with former Second Lieutenant of NDFB at Purani Goraibari, Udalguri, Assam



Photo 8: Memorial Tomb of Sujit Narzary, the first Martyr during statehood movement of the 1980s located in Bhatipara, Kokrajhar, Assam



Photo 9: Bodoland Martyrs Cemetery situated in Debargaon, Kokrajhar, Assam

