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# MIDDLE CLASS AND ETHNIC ISSUES IN ASSAM :

A Study of the Attitude of the Lawyers of  
Guwahati City to the Karbi and Bodo  
Demands for Political Autonomy

A REPORT

ON THE PROJECT CARRIED OUT UNDER THE JUNIOR SHORT  
TERM FELLOWSHIP SCHEME OF THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL  
CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT, GUWAHATI.

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*Supervisor*

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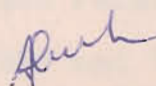
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Department of Political Science.

This is to certify that the enclosed report on Middle Class and Ethnic Issues in Assam : A Study of the attitude of the lawyers of Guwahati city to the Karbi and Bodo demands for political autonomy is the result of a survey undertaken by Ms. Smita Khaund under my supervision. The project was carried out under the JSTF Scheme of the Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dated Shillong  
The 23, March 1994.

  
( A.K. Baruah )  
Professor & Head.

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Finally, I would like to thank Ms. M.Warbah for neatly and carefully typing out my report so that I could submit it in time.

Dated 23<sup>rd</sup> March

*S. Khaund*  
( Smita Khaund )

## CONTENTS

|                                          | <u>Page</u> |
|------------------------------------------|-------------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT                          | (i)         |
| CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION . . . . .       | 1 - 4       |
| CHAPTER II : HISTORICAL BACKGROUND . . . | 5 - 36      |
| GENESIS OF THE BODO                      |             |
| AND KARBI MOVEMENTS                      |             |
| CHAPTER III : PRESENTATION OF DATA . .   | 37 - 62     |
| CHAPTER IV : CONCLUSION . . . . .        | 63 - 67     |
| APPENDIX (i) . . . . .                   | 68 - 70     |
| APPENDIX (ii) . . . . .                  | 71 - 72     |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .                   | 73 - 76     |

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## CHAPTER - I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Statement of the problem :

Recent research in social change and development of Assam, particularly on some contemporary burning issues like emergence of insurgency, regionalism and the movements generated by the ethnic consciousness of various communities inhabiting North-East India have repeatedly drawn the attention of the social scientists and general public to the role of the Assamese middle class. It is to be noted that since the time of the peasant uprisings against the British rule in Assam in the latter part of the 19th century to the demand for the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam in the 1960's and the demand for introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in the 70's and more recently, in the various spheres of political, economic and cultural activities concerning the development of the north-eastern region in general, the Assamese middle class has always been in the forefront of opinion building. Thus, over the decades, this class has emerged as a dominant force and there can be no doubt about its significant influence on the social reality of this region. Scholars like Amalendu Guha, Hiren Gohain, Manorama Sharma, Apurba - K. Baruah, Udayan Misra and many others have discussed the role of this class in the context of several contemporary issues. But there has been very little attempt at conceptualizing this class. The only significant attempt so

far has been of Sharma<sup>1</sup> who defines it as a class comprising traditional and new petty bourgeoisie. We have to be familiar with the socio-economic background of these two sections of the Assamese middle class in order to understand their role in contemporary Assamese society. It is therefore necessary to examine their social background and their political attitude.

But such a project is time-consuming and involves a major research endeavour which is not possible under the JSTF scheme. That is why we have limited our study to a small but prominent and influential section of the new petty bourgeoisie i.e. the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati city. We have tried to investigate their background and their attitude towards the Bodo and Karbi demands for political autonomy. This issue of ethnic assertions for identity in Assam is one of the major issues plaguing the politics of the north-eastern region today.

The attitude of the Assamese middle class to the ethnic problems have been discussed by Baruah<sup>2</sup>, Dutta<sup>3</sup> and in many articles in social science journals on issues related to the Assam movement, the Bodo and the Karbi movements and other such issues. But no effort has so far

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1. Manorama Sharma, Social and Economic Change in Assam : Middle Class Hegemony, (New Delhi, 1990).
  2. A.K. Baruah, Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics (Guwahati, 1991).
  3. P.S. Dutta, Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam, (Delhi, 1990).

been made to examine the attitude of any section of the middle class of contemporary Assamese society on the basis of information derived from interviews. This project is a sincere attempt at beginning research in this direction.

### 1.2. Objectives:

The major research questions which have been asked are :-

- (a) What is the social background of the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati ?
- (b) Does their background influence their attitude to questions like the demands for autonomy by ethnic minorities ?
- (c) How will their attitude to such demands effect the relations of the Assamese, as a major community of the region, with the smaller communities ?

### 1.3. Methodology :

For the purpose of this study, the lists containing the names of the lawyers registered at the Guwahati High - Court and District Courts were consulted and on the basis of simple random sampling, a sample of around fifty Assamese lawyers was drawn from these lists. A questionnaire containing the relevant questions was prepared. The lawyers were personally contacted and their responses to the questionnaire recorded. Later, due to several constraints, mainly the non-availability of many of the responses in time, the number of respondents had to be restricted to the available figure of thirty particularly to enable the project to meet its time needs.

#### 1.4. Data :

Therefore, the data collected for this study was from two major sources, viz., primary and secondary. The primary sources include responses of the lawyers to the questionnaire, official memoranda and resolutions, etc. of the relevant organisations and government records throwing direct light on the issues involved. The secondary sources include articles on the Bodo and Karbi movements in newspapers, journals, etc. and books on tribes of the North-East and on ethnic issues.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND : GENESIS OF THE BODO AND KARBI  
MOVEMENTS

Before we move into the subject of the Bodo and Karbi movements and the findings of the survey (dealing with the attitude of the lawyers of Guwahati city towards these movements), we will first try to form a brief idea about these tribes.

A Summary statement of the Bodos as a tribe :

The Bodos form one of the most numerous and widely spread plains tribes in the north-eastern region. According to E.A. Gait, they are "the aborigines or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley".<sup>1</sup> Their original home is believed to have existed somewhere between the 'Yang-Tse-Kiang' and the 'Hwang-Ho' rivers in China. It is estimated that several hundred years ago, they had migrated to Assam, North-Bengal and to 'Tipperah' in the West.<sup>2</sup> The Bodos are a part of the Kachari race and they are referred to as Bodo or 'Bodo-fisa' in the Brahmaputra valley and Dimasa or 'Dima-fisa' or sons of the great river in the North Cachar Hills.<sup>3</sup> It is known from history that just before the advent of the Ahoms into Assam i.e. in the beginning of the 13th century A.D., the Kacharis reigned over the western part of Sibsagar district of Upper Assam, the present Nagaon district

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1. E.A.Gait, A History of Assam; Reprint, (Calcutta, 1967)
  2. S.Barkataki, Tribes of Assam (Delhi, 1969), p.63.
  3. Gazetteer of India, Assam State, (U.M. & N.C.DISTT) (Dispur, 1979), p.79.

and the northern part of the Cachar district with their capital at Dimapur. Later, unable to resist the Ahom invasions, they shifted their capital to Maibong in North-Cachar hills but even Maibong was not spared by the Ahoms and finally the Kacharis were driven to the plains of Cachar where they established their new capital at Khaspur. That part of the Kachari race which settled in North-Cachar hills are called 'Dimasas' and the other part which settled in the valley of the Brahmaputra are referred to as 'Bodos'.<sup>4</sup> While Fr. Mathias Hermanns includes the Bodos and their allied tribes in the term, 'Indo-Tibetans', Dr.S.K.Chatterjee places them in the 'Indo-Mongoloid' group in his 'Kirata-Jana-Kirti' to connote "at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves as well as their racial affinity".<sup>5</sup>

The Bodos mainly follow a patriarchial family system where the father is the head of the family. The religious philosophy of the Bodos centre around their worship of 'Shiva' or what they call 'Bathau Barai' and several other dieties. Their main festivals are 'Baisagu', 'Domashi' and 'Katrigacha' which are synonymous with Rongali bihu, Bhogali bihu and Kongali bihu of the Assamese community in general. Another religious festival i.e. 'Kherai' is also celebrated with much fervour and it is known to be a significant part of Bodo

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4. S.Barkataki, Op.cit., pp.63-66.

5. B.N.Bordoloi, G.C.Sharmah Thakur, M.C.Saikia, Tribes of Assam, Part I (TR.E, Assam, 1987), p.2.

culture and tradition.<sup>6</sup> Many Bodos have converted to the Hindu sect over the decades. From the 'Census of India, 1891, Assam', we come to know that even as way back as in 1881, the reported rate of conversion of the Bodos to the hindu sect was very high.

As per the 1971 census, total Bodo population constitutes 4.17% of the total population of Assam. The male and female literacy rates are reported to be 19.75% and 11.06% respectively while the total percentage of literacy of the Bodos stands at 23.51%. Amongst all the districts in Assam, it is in Kokrajhar district that the incidence of Bodo population is the highest i.e. around 26.87% of the total population of the district. Nalbari and Darrang districts fall next in line with regard to the percentage of Bodo population. In Nalbari, total Bodo population is 10.87% of the total population of the district and in Darrang, it is 9.55% of the total population of the district.

The table given below will give us an idea of the increase in the Bodo populace over the decades :-

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6. Ibid., pp.6-9.

Table I(a) - Bodo Population :

| YR. OF CENSUS | TOTAL POPL. <sup>N</sup><br>OF THE<br>STATE | TOTAL ST(P)<br>POPL. <sup>N</sup> OF<br>THE STATE | TOTAL BODO<br>POPL. <sup>N</sup> OF<br>THE STATE | % OF BODO<br>POPL. <sup>N</sup> TO<br>ST(P) OF<br>THE STATE |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1951          | 7970998                                     | 696525                                            | 190165                                           | 27.30                                                       |
| 1961          | 10837329                                    | 953310                                            | 345983                                           | 36.29                                                       |
| 1971          | 14625152                                    | 1344026                                           | 610459                                           | 45.41                                                       |

SOURCE - ' Report on plains tribals including Bodo in Assam, their conditions, problems, welfare and development.' - Government of Assam, Dispur, July 1990.

Note: (a) There was no Census in Assam in 1981.  
(b) The tribewise breakdown of ST Population in Assam has since not been published.

A summary statement of the Karbis as a tribe :

The Karbis constitute an important ethnic group in the hill areas of Assam and they are mainly concentrated in Karbi - Anglong district. They are also scattered over the Golaghat, Sibsagar, Nagaon, Kamrup and North Cachar Hills districts.<sup>7</sup> They are commonly referred to as 'Mikirs' but they believe that this name has been given to them by the neighbouring people in the plains of Assam.<sup>8</sup> Racially, they are said to belong to the 'Mongoloid' group and linguistically to the

7. S. Barkataki, Op.cit., (Delhi, 1969), p.50.

8. B.N.Bordoloi, G.C.Sharmah Thakur, M.C.Saikia, Op.cit., (Assam, 1987), p.52.

'Tibeto-Burman' group. They call themselves 'Arleng' which means 'man'. It is very difficult to trace their roots but it is believed that their original home existed in south-east or Central Asia. According to their own legends, the Karbis are believed to have originally settled in the North Cachar hills but were driven into Jaintia hills (now in Meghalaya) by the Kacharis. But due to harassment from the Khasi or Synteng Chiefs, they had to migrate to Ahom territory where they were given protection and assigned their hilly territory which was to be their habitat.<sup>9</sup> The Karbis have strong affinities of language with the Kukis and of customs with the Nagas, yet they form a distinctly separate tribe which cannot be grouped with any other Tibeto-Burman races inhabiting the mountaneous region between Burma and Assam.<sup>10</sup>

The Karbis follow a patriarchial system of family where the line of descent is patrilineal. In religious beliefs and practices, they have borrowed much from hindu mythology. The ideas and names of 'Baikuntha' (Vaikuntha i.e. Vishnu's paradise), 'Norok' (Naraka or hell), 'Jom Recho' (Yama Raja or the Lord of Spirits), etc. are some such examples. Their main festivals are 'Rongher', which is celebrated to mark the beginning of cultivation and 'Hacha Kekan' which signifies the harvesting season.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Gazetteer of India, Op.cit., pp.72-74.

10. S.Barkataki, Op.cit., p.52.

11. Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Op.cit., pp.77-78

According to the 1961 census report, 1.30% of the total population of Assam was found to speak Karbi as mothertongue. Moreover, in Karbi Anglong, the percentage of speakers of the Karbi language accounted for 47.73% of the total population of the district.<sup>12</sup> As per the 1971 census, the Karbis constituted 1.21% of the total population of Assam. According to the same census, the literacy rate of the males was 21.09% and that of the females was 4.95% respectively among the Karbis.<sup>13</sup>

The table given below provides some data on the growth of population in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills over the years.

Table I(b)<sup>14</sup> - Karbi Population:

| YEAR  | TOTAL POPL. <sup>N</sup> | % OF TRIBAL POPL. <sup>N</sup> |
|-------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1951  | 1,65,441                 | 65.96                          |
| 1961  | 2,79,726                 | 75.55                          |
| 1971  | 4,55,357                 | 57.6                           |
| *1985 | 7,07,900                 | 58.0                           |

\*No Census was done in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills in 1981.

1985 figures taken from Expert Committee on Populations, Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India.

Source upto 1971 : Census Reports of 1961 & 1971.

12. Ibid., p.72

13. Bordoloi, Sharmah Thakur, Saikia, Op.cit., p.56.  
Source-

14. Cited in a Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India for Creation of an Autonomous State comprising Karbi Anglong & NC Hills-jointly submitted by ASDC & KSA on 18th May 1987, p.15.

Note : Since an overwhelming majority of the tribal population in Karbi Anglong are Karbis, the above figures showing the % of Tribal Population can be presumed to be of Karbis only. Separate Karbi figures are not available.

From these brief accounts of the Bodos and Karbis in Assam, we can form a rough idea about the culture and tradition inherent in these tribes and the similarities that exist between them and the larger Assamese community. Though in recent times, these plains and hills tribals have become very conscious about their distinct identity and language, all of them have contributed significantly towards enriching Assamese culture, language, literature, arts and nationality as a whole. Eminent authors like Medini Mohan Choudhury, who belongs to the Bodo tribe has contributed remarkably to the enriching of modern Assamese literature. Another prominent person, Sitanath Brahma Choudhury, also a Bodo, was once the President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha. Likewise, in case of the Karbis, persons like Chatra Singh Teron, Rong Bong Teron, etc. were closely associated with the Assam Sahitya Sabha. Thus, their active association with the Assam Sahitya Sabha, which is regarded as the epitome of Assamese literature and culture, itself is ample proof of the close ties that existed between the Assamese and the Bodo and Karbi tribes in Assam. Even today these close bonds still prevail to some extent.

The tribals of Assam were regarded as 'part and parcel' of the composite Assamese culture. According to Monirul Hussain - "In the absence of a well developed or a developing language of their own, the tribals of the Brahmaputra valley had to accept Asamiya as the medium of instruction at the school level. This educational process energised the assimilation and formation of a composite Asamiya culture and nationality .....Asamiya as a language of education, market and exchange and as lingua franca of inter tribal communication was well entrenched in the Brahmaputra valley".<sup>15</sup> So it becomes evident from the above observation that a section of scholars believes that the tribals in Assam had voluntarily accepted the Assamese language in school level but later on, the official imposition of Assamese as the medium of instruction, sowed the seeds of doubt and discontentment in the minds of the tribals. According to this perspective therefore, this was one of the main factors which led to the beginning of the movement for autonomous state by the Karbis and likewise also formed a major issue of the Bodo movement.

If however the above explanation is correct, the tribals of Assam should have fought for separate identity and against the imposition of the Assamese language from 1960 onwards. Moreover all tribal communities of Assam should have protested against Assamese chauvinism at the same time. But, the fact that they began asserting themselves at different

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15. Monirul Hussain, 'Tribal Question in Assam', E.P.W., Vol.XXVII (May 16-23, 1992), p.1048.

times should draw our attention to some other reasons for alienation of these tribal communities from Assamese culture. Some scholars like Baruah<sup>16</sup>, have pointed out that that it is only the emergence of the educated elites in these communities which has made them aware of their existence as distinct identities. This has actually led to the emergence of national consciousness and related political aspirations amongst these ethnic tribes in Assam.

The tribals in Assam have faced numerous problems of poverty, economic exploitation, unemployment, land alienation and oppression. The main amongst them is the problem of land alienation which has further aggravated the poverty and unemployment situation in the tribal belts. Moreover, the pace of industrial development in these areas has been too slow to provide the much needed avenues for employment. Monirul Hussain states<sup>17</sup> - "The government admits that the planning and land reform policies adopted under the constitutional provisions to safeguard the tribals socio-economic and cultural life have been either neglected or implemented indifferently due to resistance from vested interests (Government of Assam, 1974 :79). The same has been the case of autonomy provided through the Sixth Schedule".

16. A.K.Baruah, Social Tensions in Assam; Middle Class Politics, (Guwahati, 1991), pp.44-48.

17. Hussain, Op.cit., p.1049.

This assertion about the neglect of the tribal communities may have some truth in it but as we argued, it still does not answer the nagging question as to why this neglect is realised by the tribal populations at particular points of time only. It may be interesting to examine the process of the emergence of this realization. However, this query, despite its importance will remain outside the scope of this project.

History proves that these tribals are the first natives of Assam. But now, these very first inhabitants are facing the problem of identity crises in their own land. This situation can be attributed to some of the facts stated earlier. Any attempt at understanding the role and the attitude of the Assamese middle class to these problems and the grievances of these tribes makes it necessary to take a closer look at their movements.

### Turmoil and strife : The Bodo and the Karbi movements

#### The Bodo movement :

Though the first stirrings of the Bodo agitation can be traced back to the late sixties i.e. when the Plains Tribal Council of Assam was formed in 1967, yet the actual movement can be said to have started only from the mid 1970's, when the matter of script for the Bodo language was taken up.

The announcement of the policy of reorganisation of Assam on a federal basis on the 13th of January, 1967 by the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, was welcomed by the plains tribals in Assam. It was the starting

point for their demand for a separate state. On the 15th of February of the same year, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was formed. The main aims and objectives of the ABSU as given in its constitution<sup>18</sup> (enacted on 2nd March, 1969) are as given below :-

"The Union shall make efforts particularly to find out ways and means to :

- (a) propagate among the masses the need of imparting through the mothertongue,
- (b) improve the Bodo language through magazines and other literary works,
- (c) develop and safeguard the culture of the Bodos by bringing reforms to it through various perspectives,
- (d) develop the Bodo race economically by taking economic programmes from time to time,
- (e) settle the issue relating to the political crises that may arise among the Plains Tribal Bodo people out of the selfish and political diplomacy of the so-called politicians threatening the national existence of their future generation though the ABSU is a non-political socio-economic, literary and cultural organisation,
- (f) struggle to achieve the just and constitutional rights through democratic process,

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18. The Constitution of The All Bodo Students' Union  
(Kokrajhar, 1987).

(g) fight for allround security and if the above goals are denied and ignored, the Union further shall not refrain even from struggling for political self determination within the framework of Indian Constitution,

(h) support the principle of socialism for economic emancipation,

(i) raise voice for the Human Rights and Civil Liberties and to develop socio-cultural relations among the various groups of Bodo nationality living around the world,

(j) struggle for the survival and allround prosperity of the Bodos to the extent of advanced nationalities of the world".

From the above, it becomes quite clear that the ABSU was mainly formed as an organisation whose basic aims were to protect the cultural identity of the Bodo people and to work for its advancement in all spheres.

Then, the 27th of February, 1967 saw the birth of another organisation - 'The Plains Tribal Council of Assam' (PTCA) at Kokrajhar Rongjashali, whose main aim was to secure a particular amount of territory or 'Udayachal' on the North-Bank of the Brahmaputra, for the plains tribal people of Assam. Since its formation, the PTCA worked hand in hand with the ABSU with a view to achieving similar goals. But PTCA being a political party got engrossed in electoral politics and was thus constrained to function in a responsible manner within the framework of parliamentary democracy. In 1977, ABSU withdrew its support to the PTCA on the grounds that it had taken advantage of the common masses and had worked only

for vested interests. There were several attempts at unification since 1979, which were mostly unsuccessful.<sup>19</sup> From the 17th to the 19th of April, 1984, the ABSU convened an All Tribal Organisations Convention at Harisinga in Darrang district of Assam. In this convention, the PTCA was dissolved and yet another new political party, 'The United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front' (UNTFLF) was formed on the 19th of April, 1984. Since then, the ABSU as well as the UNTFLF had been submitting memoranda from time to time to the state and central governments, citing their main problems and grievances and repeatedly pleading for the creation of a separate homeland for the plains tribals of Assam.

In their memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Sri Hiteswar Saikia on the 2nd of January 1984<sup>20</sup>, the ABSU had requested for a settlement and solution to the problems faced by the Bodos. They had stated that the Bodos had been "exploited and oppressed" by the other "advanced communities" in the state. They had also given a detailed account of around forty-six out of the ninety-two point demands put up by them. In their publication - 'Why separate state?'<sup>21</sup>, 10th of January, 1987, the ABSU had tried to focus

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19. Why Separate State ? submitted to the President of India, the Prime Minister of India and the Home Minister of India, New Delhi, by All Bodo Students Union, (Kokrajhar, 1987), p.3.

20. A memorandum to Sri Hiteswar Saikia, Honourable Chief-Minister of Assam, Dispur- Submitted by All Bodo Students' Union, Dispur, 2nd January, 1984.

21. Why Separate State ?, Op.cit., pp.31-39.

the centres' attention on the legitimacy of their demands. They had alleged therein that the Assam official language Act which was imposed in 1960 and consequently, the imposition of the Assamese language on the, "indigenous non-Assamese tribal people of the then Assam", had caused great resentment amongst the plains as well as the hill tribes. Further, they had also accused the AGP (Assam Gana Parishad) government of being 'anti-tribal' and a "chauvinist Assamese Government". They believed that the indifferent attitude of the state government towards them was the sole reason for the almost near stagnant growth in the tribal areas ( in spite of various development works proposed and funds allocated). Another accusation levelled against the AGP government was that, it had by a SEBA (Secondary Education Board of Assam) circular passed on 28th February, 1986, imposed Assamese as the compulsory third language upon the non-Assamese medium students in the secondary schools. This was later suspended following vehement opposition from the ABSU. They had also pointed out that the dearth of job opportunities was another major factor which had influenced their demand for a separate state. They claimed that in Assam, there were only 10% job reservations for the plains tribals and that it had become very difficult for the Bodo medium students to get state government jobs because of their lack of fluency and proper knowledge of the Assamese language. In the same publication, 'Why Separate State?', their 92 points demands had been given in detailed manner. Some of the major demands out their 92-point list have been

classified below :-

## <sup>22</sup>EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Some of the major demands in this section were :-

- (a) A central University at Kokrajhar
- (b) Introduction of Bodo M.I.L in colleges as well as in M.A. degree in universities
- (c) Appointment of Bodo medium teachers in schools and colleges and regular payment of their salary
- (d) Publication and regular distribution of Bodo text-books
- (e) Retention of English as a medium of instruction in colleges and universities of Assam
- (f) Enhancement of ST Scholarships and increment of ST reservation seats for admission into educational institutions and government jobs.
- (g) Free and compulsory education for children upto 14 years of age
- (h) Interviews to be conducted in Bodo medium for various jobs
- (i) Opposition to Clause 4.6(11) of the new national policy of education, etc.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES

- (a) Food for work programme for the rural masses and control of rise in prices
- (b) Loans and grants to the unemployed tribal youths

- (c) Drinking water supply and electrification of all villages within 1990.
- (d) Construction of all village roads and bridges
- (e) Irrigation system covering all agricultural lands
- (f) Free distribution of fertilizers to poor tribal peasants
- (f) Primary health care for the villages and housing grants to poor tribal people
- (h) Installation of jute mill at Serfanguri and establishment of Fishery training centre at Kokrajhar
- (i) Launching of massive industrialisation
- (j) Eradication of poverty.

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL ISSUES

- (a) Immediate implementation of Bodo as associate official language in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub-division,
- (b) Extension of Bodo as associate official language in other districts of Assam
- (c) Installation of A.I.R. station and a central museum at Kokrajhar
- (d) Transmission of Bodo programmes and Bodo news from Guwahati Doordarshan Kendra
- (e) Broadcasting of Bodo programmes from AIR, Siliguri Centre
- (f) Introduction of Roman Script for Bodo language
- (g) Revocation of pre-condition of Assamese in State services
- (h) Production of documentary films in Bodo
- (i) proper census of Bodo population
- (j) Detection and deportation of foreign nationals, etc.

### POLITICAL ISSUES

- (a) Inclusion of Bodo in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution
- (b) Inclusion of Boro-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong and North-Cachar Hills autonomous districts into the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution
- (c) Re-organisation of the boundaries of the new districts of Assam
- (d) Merger of tribal areas to Kokrajhar district from Dhubri district.
- (e) Opposition to Clause number 6 and Clause number 10 (i.e. eviction of tribals from forest areas) of the Assam Accord
- (f) Opposition to AASU's demand for amendments of Article 3, 30 & 347 of the Indian Constitution
- (g) A stop to the political extremism and brutal police atrocities on Bodo students and public in Assam
- (h) Creation of a regional council for non-Karbi tribes in Karbi Anglong Autonomous district council.
- (i) Creation of district councils in the tribal compact areas of the southern valley of the Brahmaputra in Assam
- (j) Creation of a separate state with the status of Union Territory on the North bank of the Brahmaputra for the plains tribals of Assam.

<sup>23</sup> Then, towards the end of 1988, Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) was formed. The formation of BPAC in 1988 by the ABSU (similar to AGP formed by the AASU) had led to

the intensification of the Bodo agitation. The ABSU then had decided to suspend 89 "non-political" demands out of its 92 point list and had decided to concentrate on only 3 major political demands, viz., -

(1) Separation of areas on the North bank of the Brahmaputra claimed to form a contiguous territory and inhabited by the Bodo people.

(2) Creation of district Councils in the tribal compact areas on the South bank and

(3) Inclusion of the Boro-Kacharis in Karbi Anglong district in the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Later, the first demand was upgraded to a demand for a full-fledged state to be called 'Bodoland'. In the beginning the Bodo agitation centred mainly around organising meetings, hunger strikes, rallies and peaceful demonstrations outside the offices of the DC, SDO, SDC, etc. in the concerned areas. But with the passage of time and mainly from the latter half of 1987, the agitation was seen to take a different trend whatsoever. The difference was marked with the organisation of bandhs and rail-roko programmes. Some of their major agitational programmes in the 42 phases of the movement have been cited in the booklet - 'Bodoland movement - An Analysis of Events'.<sup>24</sup> Another aspect of the movement

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24. Bodoland Movement - An Analysis of Events, Dispur, 1989, p.3.

was the eight rounds of tripartite talks held in Delhi between August 1989 to September 1990, without leading to any fruitful solution to the problem.<sup>25</sup> Later by a Union Government notification on February 25, 1991 a 3 member "expert Committee" was constituted to study the Bodoland demand, its feasibility, the extent of "legislative, administrative and financial powers that could be delegated to the Bodos as well as identify the geographical areas within which such powers could be delegated".<sup>26</sup> The Report submitted by this committee had ruled out the possibility of a separate state of 'Bodoland' and had recommended a rather complex 'three-tier politico-administrative structure' at the village, region and apex levels, ensuring a decentralised administration and devolution of financial powers in the areas claimed for 'Bodoland' and at the state level, an upper chamber in the form of a legislative council, with adequate representation for Bodos and other plains tribal people and vested with virtual veto powers of decisions of the state assembly on issues affecting the interests of the Bodos. This report with its recommendations was completely rejected by the Bodo agitationists who had again reiterated their demand for Bodoland.<sup>27</sup> Towards the end of 1992 there were indications of a 'pragmatic solution' to the 'Bodoland' issue.<sup>28</sup> Finally on February 20, 1993, an

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25. The Hindu, August 9, 1991.

26. The Hindu, June 8, 1992.

27. The Hindu, August 31, 1992.

28. The Hindu, February 21, 1993.

"MOS" (Memorandum of Settlement) was signed between the 'Bodoland' agitation leaders and the Assam Government, formally bringing an end to the 6 year old agitation. This MOS envisages -

- (1) Creation of BAC (Bodoland Autonomous Council)
- (2) Legislative power is to vest in the 40 member council (corresponding to the Legislative Assembly of a state), 35 of whom are to be elected on the basis of adult franchise, the remaining five being nominated by the Governor of Assam.
- (3) Executive power is to vest in a smaller Bodoland executive council (BEC) (Corresponding to the council of ministers). The Territory of BAC is yet to be finalised. There have been several controversies regarding it. So, even though a settlement has been brought about, the problem of proper demarcation of the boundary for the Bodoland Autonomous Council still persists.

A similar movement for ethnic assertion was also started by the Karbis. Most of their problems and grievances can be compared to those of the Bodos. The main difference however is evident in their main demand. While the Bodos are agitating for a separate state of 'Bodoland', the Karbis on the other hand are demanding an autonomous state within Assam and not a separate state.

#### The Karbi movement :

<sup>29</sup>The beginning of the Karbi movement can be traced back to about thirty years but in 1946 itself, a demand for a

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29. P.S.Dutta, Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam (Guwahati, 1990), p.112.

separate district with functional autonomy had been put up by the Karbi leaders. The root of the Karbi demand for political autonomy can be linked to some of the events of 1960. In that very year, the Assam official language bill was moved by the Chief Minister in the Assam legislative assembly, which was met with great opposition from the MLA's of Mikir-Hills, Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Lushai Hills, Garo Hills, Cachar-Hills and N.C.Hills.<sup>30</sup> The year 1969 was marked with the process of re-organisation of Assam on a federal basis. A new autonomous state within Assam comprising of the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia hills was to be created. The Mikir and N.C.Hills had been given the option to join the proposed new state or to remain in Assam but the Karbis were unhappy with these options given to them. They had believed that because they were much backward both economically and educationally in relation to the other tribes, their problems would intensify eitherway and so only an independent autonomous state for themselves would bring a solution to their numerous problems. Then as P.S.Dutta states that on the 2nd February, 1970, when the new district of N.C.Hills was inaugurated, an informal meeting had taken place between the then acting Chief Minister of Assam, Sri M.M.Choudhury, B.C.Bhagawati (the President, APCC) and all the MLA's and leaders of Mikir-Hills district. In that meeting, these MLA's and leaders had reiterated their stand of not joining the proposed autonomous state within Assam (comprising of the Garo and the Khasi-

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30. Ibid., pp.112-114.

Jaintia Hills) and had also demanded that if they were to remain in Assam, to be given more facilities for developing their own areas. The then acting Chief Minister and also the President of APCC had assured them that their wishes would be fulfilled. So, the Karbis had refrained from joining the Meghalaya sub-state. P.S.Dutta says that then in 1972, Assamese was imposed as the sole medium of instruction in university and secondary levels of education. This was greatly opposed by the leaders of N.C.Hills and Mikir Hills. A joint conference of the leaders of Mikir and N.C.Hills was held at Diphu on the 18th of February, 1973, which resulted in the submission of a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, in which they had poured out their grievances and had explained how the state authorities had backed out of their promise. Moreover, with regard to the imposition of the Assamese language upon them, they had stated that its forceful imposition, could not be tolerated and that they were not to lose their distinct identity as a tribe. Therefore, they had insisted that the solution to their problems could be brought about only by their separation from Assam. <sup>31</sup> This memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister of India on June 9, 1973. The Central Government had considered the whole problem to be more economic than political and so had entrusted the Planning Commission to increase the allotment of funds for development of these two hill districts. The Action Committee which had submitted the report, had decided to accept the proposals of

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31. Ibid., pp.115-116.

the Central Government but later on were not satisfied with the measures undertaken. So on November 24, 1980, they had submitted another memorandum to the Prime Minister of India, in which they had urged for the immediate creation of an autonomous state. <sup>32</sup> The memorandum had stated - "In spite of more fund made available to us, we could not make any further progress in the economic front, not to speak of social and cultural development. The main reason of our failure is the step motherly treatment of the Assam administration. They have no goodwill towards other communities and ethnic groups. We have to mention painfully that high assurances were given by the then state leaders at the time of creation of Meghalaya ..... But instead, the government of Assam has curtailed the autonomy of our district councils and the power of the Minister i/c Hill areas". They had also alleged therein that the agitation for expulsion of illegal foreigners in Assam taken up by the AASU and AAGSP had another aspect to it i.e. of doing away with the culture and tradition of the minorities. This was regarded by the Karbis as a threat to their existence. The Karbis were also openly critical of the state government and the administrative officials posted in the two hill districts. They were of the opinion that these officials, with their anti-tribal attitude were the main impediments in their path of development. Regarding the matter of imposition of Assamese as the medium of instruction, the

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32. Ibid., pp.116-117

memorandum had stated - <sup>33</sup>"This has added to the injury in the tribal minds. Specially, the tribal people of these two hill districts do not like to be confined within the sphere of Assamese language. They want to educate their children in English and Hindi medium to maintain the precious link with the rest of India and outside world. And for this purpose, the two autonomous district councils have chosen English as their official language, until it is replaced by Hindi. So they wanted to join NEHU, established in Shillong which was meant primarily for the benefit of all hill people of N.E. region. Most unfortunately, the government of Assam did not allow us to join there".

<sup>34</sup>On January 18, 1982, another memorandum was submitted to the Prime Minister of India on behalf of the Central Executive Committee of Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills State Demand Committee. This memorandum had again urged upon the government to take immediate action for the creation of a separate autonomous state for them.

<sup>35</sup>The year 1985 saw to the emergence of a youth-based mass organisation, the 'People's Democratic Front' (PDF). This party had contested in the Assam Assembly election of 1985. Under the aegis of the PDF was born the 'Autonomous State Demand Committee' (ASDC) on the 17th of May, 1986, which was based at Diphu (the Headquarter of the Karbi Anglong

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33. Ibid., pp.117-118.

34. Ibid., p.118.

35. Ibid., p.120.

Hill district of Assam). Just after its formation, the ASDC had submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on the 3rd of June, 1986 asking for an autonomous state within Assam. Another aspect of the Karbi agitation was the emergence of another organisation called the 'Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee' (KANCHASDCOM) on September 7, 1986. Its basic aim i.e. to secure an autonomous state within Assam comprising of the two hill districts, had been similar to that of the ASDC, yet, they were political foes. There were several attempts at amalgamation with the ASDC, which were mostly unsuccessful.

From the beginning of 1987, the otherwise peaceful Karbi agitation took a different turn with the organisation of bandhs in the hill districts from time to time, as a form of protest against the state and central government's indifference towards their demands. <sup>36</sup>On January 16, 1987, a hundred hour Karbi Anglong bandh was called by the ASDC and the KSA (Karbi Students Association). Then on 18th May, 1987, a memorandum was given to the Prime Minister of India, for the creation of an Autonomous State comprising Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills, jointly by the ASDC and KSA. In that report, they had poured out their grievances thus -

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36. The Hindu, January 19, 1987.

37 "The people of the Assam plain have always felt and acted superior to the hillmen and the hillmen having been looked down upon are obliged to feel neglected, distant and inferior". The language policy of the Assam government had also been criticized. Another significant point noted therein was that the hillmen were discriminated in all areas of employment. Moreover, they had alleged - "The God-gifted natural resources of Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills have been incessantly and indiscriminately exploited which have brought untold miseries to the hillmen. Exploitation of bamboos, timbers, coal, limestone, etc. coupled with unplanned and anti-native oriented tea industry have deprived many tribal families of their livelihood and have brought about a new dimension of influx disturbing demographic balance in the hill". These are, to quote a few of their numerous problems as cited in the memorandum. 38 Then on 26th June, 1987, a 36 hours Karbi Anglong district bandh was called by the ASDC and KSA in protest against the non-fulfilment of their demands. 39 As a result, the state government, disturbed by the growing mass movement of the Karbi people had decided to hold tripartite talks with the representatives of the ASDC and KSA on 28th August, 1987. In the discussions which

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37. A Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India for the creation of an autonomous state comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills - jointly submitted by ASDC and KSA on 18th May, 1987.

38. The Hindu, June 26, 1987

39. See Appendix (i)

followed, apart from other points taken up, a decision was taken to form a sub-committee to "go into the details of the Autonomous State issue" and to find a possible solution.

<sup>40</sup>On 9th September, 1987, another memorandum was submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam, regarding the problems of the district council by the Chief Executive member of Karbi Anglong district. <sup>41</sup>On 10th March, 1989, a memorandum was submitted to the Governor of Assam by the Executive Committee, Karbi-Anglong district council, in which they had tried to focus attention on certain important issues. They had explained how Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills had been kept out of the arena of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 and were hence denied certain economic and political opportunities due to them. The discontent amongst the hill people they claimed was manifested in the peaceful democratic movement led by the ASDC and the KSA which had "culminated in the massive political mandate" as was evident from the Karbi - Anglong District Council elections of 7th January, 1989. In these elections, 22 out of the 26 elective seats were in favour of the creation of an autonomous state within Assam. This political desire of the Karbi people had not received any attention from the State and the Central governments.

40. A Memorandum to the Chief Minister, Assam  
- submitted by the Chief Executive Members of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills District Councils, 9th September, 1987.

41. Memorandum to the his excellency, The Governor of Assam  
- by the Executive Committee, Karbi Anglong District Council, 10th March, Dispur, 1989.

Some other charges levelled against the state government were - "State governments arbitrary preparation of the budget for the hills, the dictatorial nomination of District Council members and the high-handed control of administration".

Subsequently, on April 7 of the same year, a 24 hour Karbi Anglong district bandh was jointly called by the ASDC and the KSA. <sup>42</sup> This bandh was held in protest against "the dictatorial political subordination perpetrated by the state government against the people of Karbi Anglong". Again on 24th November, 1989, a memorandum was submitted by the members of the Karbi Anglong District Council to the Governor of Assam. It was a six-point reminder of their problems, with a sincere request to the Governor, asking for his help and co-operation towards finding a practical solution to their problems under the provisions of Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution. <sup>43</sup> Then, on January 26, 1990, a 12 hour Karbi - Anglong bandh was observed to protest against the failure of the state and union governments to concede the demand for an autonomous state.

On the 5th of March, 1990, an <sup>44</sup> 'Ultimatum' was submitted by the ASDC and KSA to the Chief Minister of Assam. On the grounds that the central and state governments were paying a deaf ear to their demands, they had stated thus - "Mortally aggrieved as we are at the premeditated disregard

42. The Hindu, April 7, 1989.

43. The Hindu, February 2, 1990

44. See Appendix (i).

and apathy of both the Union and the state governments, exhibited towards the genuinely democratic and constitutional right of the hill people to an autonomous state, guaranteed by Article 244(A) of the Indian Constitution, which does not necessitate the bifurcation of Assam but only a natural and obvious upgradation process of Autonomous District Councils in the North-East region, which again is in absolute conformity with the concept of the decentralisation of power". They had also threatened to launch <sup>45</sup>"a higher form of struggle". if their demands were not met within the stipulated period of one month from the date of submission of the 'ultimatum'. <sup>46</sup>On 4th May, 1990, a 100 hour bandh was called in both the hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong. Moreover the Karbi agitationists had also threatened to take up an armed struggle if their demands were not met in time. <sup>47</sup>Again on May 17, 1990, a 144 hour Karbi Anglong and N.C.Hills districts bandh was called by the ASDC and KSA, as part of their intensified agitational programme. <sup>48</sup>On the 3rd of August, 1991, yet another 'ultimatum' was submitted to the Chief Minister of Assam by the ASDC and the KSA, in which they had expressed their dissatisfaction at the non-response of the state government to their earlier requests. They believe that the indifferent attitude to their

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45. The Hindu, April 21, 1990.

46. The Hindu, May 1, 1990.

47. The Hindu, May 14, 1990.

48. See Appendix (ii).

struggle was because of its peaceful and democratic nature and so if further steps were not taken up to redeem their difficulties, they had threatened to take up an agitational programme of bandhs and strikes. <sup>49</sup> Then on the 4th of January, 1992, an official talk on the Autonomous State issue was held in which the representatives of the ASDC, KSA and the elected representatives of the ASDC had submitted a note to the Chief Minister of Assam wherein they had expressed their happiness at the state government's willingness to solve their problems. They had also requested the state government to hold tripartite talks involving the central government in order to find a speedy solution to the political problem of the hill people.

<sup>50</sup> After these discussions, the leaders of the movement for the constitution of the two autonomous hill districts into an autonomous state within Assam, had decided to accept the state government's proposals to accord a 'higher status' to the existing district councils and consequently had called off their agitation. But those proposals were not formally endorsed and so the ASDC along with the KSA (leading the 6 year old agitation) had decided to intensify its agitational programme towards the end of 1992. <sup>51</sup> The first phase of the intensified stir starting from September, 1992, was to be marked with a 'massive

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49. A Note submitted by the representatives of the ASDC, KSA and the elected representatives belonging to the ASDC on the occasion of an official talk on Autonomous State Issue on the 4th January, 1992.

50. The Hindu, July 9, 1992.

51. The Hindu, September 3, 1992.

campaign' of writing on walls, pasting of posters, distribution of leaflets, organisation of public meetings, etc. in the two hill districts. <sup>52</sup>Then, suddenly on November 12, 1992, the Karbi Anglong District Council was dissolved and the reigns of administrative power were transferred to the hands of the state government. A petition was filed against this action by the ASDC leaders in the Guwahati High Court. <sup>53</sup>Then, the 12 hour Assam bandh call which was given by the ABSU-BPAC was also supported by the ASDC as an act of defiance against the state government's supersession of the Autonomous District Council of Karbi Anglong. <sup>54</sup>Following this, on the 22nd of May, 1993, a 7 day bandh in the two hill districts of North-Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong was jointly called by the ASDC, the KSA and the North Cachar Hills Students Federation (NCHSF). <sup>55</sup>Finally in the first week of July, 1993, the Guwahati High Court had issued a verdict ordering the restoration of the Karbi Anglong District Council which was dissolved by the state government in the middle of November, 1992.

Till date, the ardent desire of the Karbi people to seek more autonomy for themselves remains a distant dream, yet to be realised. Though the Karbis are demanding an autonomous state at the moment, they definitely reflect an urge for a separate political identity. In this context, the

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52. The Hindu, November 14, 1992.

53. The Hindu, November 17, 1992.

54. The Hindu, May 20, 1993.

55. The Hindu, July 15, 1993.

case of Meghalaya should be kept in mind which began as an autonomous state and matured into a full fledged separate state.

The short history of the Bodo and Karbi movements narrated above clearly indicates that both the movements are characterized by separatist tendencies and the basic issue appears to revolve round the question of the expansionist tendencies of the Assamese middle class and Assamese society and politics. The statement above did not try to examine the validity or otherwise of the charges of the Bodo and the Karbi organizations. That may be taken up in another study. In view of their charges it is important to examine the attitude of the Assamese middle class vis-a-vis these movements. In the following chapter, a true picture of the attitude of a section of this middle class, viz., the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati city, has been presented, based on the results of a survey conducted.

### CHAPTER - III

#### Presentation of the Data

This chapter deals with the findings of the survey regarding the attitude of the Assamese lawyers towards the ethnic issue in Assam. Tables dealing with the response to several queries asked have been presented and the implications explicit in the responses have been analysed. In this context, it would be relevant to state that the questionnaire intended to examine the attitude of the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati city to the Bodo and Karbi movements. The attitude here is sought to be measured in terms of their appreciation of the justifiability of the demands related to the movements. Further, it is sought to examine if the lawyers have any familiarity with the social and political life of the Bodo and the Karbi population. It is presumed that familiarity often leads to sympathy and thus may help form an appreciative attitude in terms of justifiability mentioned above. The questionnaire also intends to examine whether there is any co-relation between the literacy generation status of the respondents with their attitudes to the movements under study. The concept of literacy generation is being defined in terms of the status of acquiring literacy in the family of the respondent i.e. if a respondent's parents and grandparents were illiterate and his own generation was the first one in the family to acquire literacy, he would be classified as 1st generation literate. If a respondent's father was literate but the grandparents were illiterate, he would be classified as a second generation literate. If another

respondent had literate parents and also literate grandparents, he would be identified as a 3rd generation literate. Since literacy exposes people to contemporary and even modern ideas, it is further assumed that liberal and progressive ideas may penetrate the respondents through literacy. This appears particularly plausible in view of the fact that lawyers are a group of population belonging to high literate culture.

Keeping the above in mind, we have categorized the queries in the following manner :-

(1) Justification and Sympathy : The question asked in this section :-

Q.a. Do you think that the demands for political autonomy raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam are justified ones ?

(2) Familiarity : The questions asked in this section are:-

Q.a. Are the words 'Hacha Kekan' and 'Rongker' familiar to you ?

Q.b. Are the words 'Kherai', 'Baisagu' and 'Katri-Gacha' familiar to you ?

Q.c. Can you name at least one important Bodo and one important Karbi litterateur ?

Q.d. Can you name at least one Bodo and one Karbi artist ?

Q.e. Do you know what is the main religion among the Bodos ?

Q.f. Do you know what is the main religion among the Karbis ?

(3) Assimilation : The questions asked in this section are :-

Q.a. Will the Bodos eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture ?

Q.b. Will the Karbis eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture ?

(4) Language issue and tolerance : The questions asked in this section are :-

Q.a. Do you support the introduction of Assamese as a medium of instruction in higher education ?

Q.b. Do you support the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam ?

Q.c. Should the Bodo and Karbi languages be recognised as official languages in Assam ?

(5) Economic Backwardness and Autonomy : The questions asked in this section are :-

Q.a. Do you think the Bodo and Karbi dominated areas are backward ?

Q.b. Do you think the Bodos and the Karbis are being deprived in matters of employment ?

Q.c. If the Government of Assam grants full autonomy to the Bodos and the Karbis, will they be able to develop their own areas ?

Therefore, the responses of the Assamese lawyers have been analysed on the basis of the categorisation done above.

### I - Justification and Sympathy :

To the question - Do you think that the demands for political autonomy raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam are justified ones ?, the responses received have been presented in Table (2) below :-

Table - 2 -Justification of autonomy

| Sl.No. | Literacy Generation.     | Total No. of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                           | YES (%)           | NO (%)    | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                         | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                         | - -               | 1(100%)   | - -             |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                         | - -               | 6 (100%)  | - -             |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                        | 13 (52.13%)       | 9 (39.1%) | 1 (4.3%)        |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                        | 13 (43.3%)        | 16(53.3%) | 1 (3.3%)        |

From the above table, it is evident that overall 43.3% of the Assamese lawyers feel that the demands for political autonomy raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam are justified whereas 53.3% do not think that the demands are justified and 3.3% have not commented on the issue.

Amongst the 1st generation literate lawyers, none seem to be sympathetic to these demands. The case is the same with the 2nd generation literate lawyers who are totally unsympathetic to the issue. On the other hand, 52.13% of the 3rd generation literate lawyers feel that these demands are justified, whereas, 39.1% are not sympathetic to this demand

and 4.3% of the lawyers have not responded at all. The interpretation of the above data indicates that there is an overwhelming opposition to the question of political autonomy of the Bodos and the Karbis among the Assamese lawyers. However, a significant section of the lawyers who come from traditionally literate and therefore more conscious families are sympathetic to such demands of autonomy. The 1st and the 2nd generation literates are placed at a relatively lower social stratum and thus they themselves and the generations which may immediately follow them would be interested in competing for opportunities in the same sectors like the newly emerging educated elites of the Bodos and Karbis. Small jobs in organised sectors like the Railways, Posts and Telegraph, other government offices and also in petty trade, are the areas in which the educated elites of the Bodos and Karbis and the lower section of the Assamese middle class would be interested. It is mainly due to this factor that there is obvious disaffection towards the Bodo and Karbi demands from this section of the Assamese middle class.

As a result of educational and other related opportunities available over generations, the Assamese lawyers who have been educated for three generations now have climbed to a higher social stratum and thus would be interested in competing for opportunities which are beyond the reach of the newly emerging tribal educated elite. It is a well-known fact that the upper sections of the Assamese middle class are acquiring regional bourgeoisie tendencies which is above the petty bourgeoisie. It is only due to the influence of liberal

education through the generations that the formation of liberal views amongst the 3rd generation literate Assamese lawyers has taken place, who are therefore more tolerant on the ethnic issue and as denoted in Table (2), we see that a majority (52.13%) of these lawyers think that the demands for political autonomy raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam are justified ones.

## 2 - Familiarity :

The 6 tables presented below depict to what extent the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati city are familiar or unfamiliar with the Bodo and Karbi festivals, religion, art and culture. These tables have also been stratified on literacy generation basis.

Regarding familiarity with the Karbi festivals, when the question - Are the words 'Hacha Kekan' and 'Rongker' familiar to you ? was asked, the responses received from the lawyers have been presented below in Table (3)(A). Hacha Kekan and Rongker are two most important festivals of the Karbis.

Table 3(a) - Familiarity -I

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |            |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)      | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5          | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | -                 | 1(100%)    | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | -                 | 6(100%)    | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 1(4.35%)          | 22(95.65%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 1 (3.3%)          | 29(96.6%)  | -               |

The above table points to the fact that overall only 3.3% of the Assamese lawyers are familiar with the Karbi festivals and 96.6% are unfamiliar with these festivals. Of the 1st generation and 2nd generation literates, none seem to be familiar with these Karbi festivals. It is only amongst the 3rd generation literate lawyers that a few (only 4.35%) seem to be familiar with these festivals.

To the question dealing with Bodo festivals - Are the words 'Kherai', 'Baisagu' and 'Katri Gacha' familiar to you? the responses have been presented in Table 3(b). 'Kherai', 'Baisagu' and 'Katri Gacha' are three important festivals of the Bodos.

Table 3(b) - Familiarity -2

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | -                 | 1(100%)   | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 3(50%)            | 3(50%)    | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 6(26.1%)          | 17(73.9%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 9(30%)            | 21(70%)   | -               |

The overall percentage of lawyers who are familiar with the Bodo festivals is only 30% while 70% are not familiar with these festivals. The above table also shows that amongst the 1st generation literate lawyers, none are familiar with these festivals. 50% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers are familiar and 50% are unfamiliar with these festivals. Amongst the 3rd generation literates, 26.1% are familiar and a large percentage i.e. 73.9% are unfamiliar with these Bodo festivals.

Regarding the question, Can you name at least one important Bodo and one important Karbi litterateur ?, the responses received have been classified as given below :-

Table 3(c) - Familiarity -3

| Sl.No | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |           |                |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
|       |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response(%) |
| 1     | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5         | 6              |
| 1.    | 1st generation literates | 1                           | 1 (100%)          | -         | -              |
| 2.    | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 4(66.6%)          | 2(33.3%)  | -              |
| 3.    | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 11(47.8%)         | 12(52.1%) | -              |
| 4.    | Total                    | 30                          | 16(53.3%)         | 14(46.6%) | -              |

Table 3(c) indicates that while 53.3% of the Assamese lawyers have some knowledge regarding Bodo and Karbi litterateurs, 46.6% seem to be totally unaware of the same. 100% of the 1st generation literate lawyers are familiar with Bodo and Karbi litterateurs. Of the 2nd generation literates, 66.6% of the lawyers are familiar while 33.3% are unfamiliar with Bodo and Karbi literary figures. Then, amongst the 3rd generation literates, 47.8% are familiar and 52.1% are unfamiliar with Bodo and Karbi litterateurs.

Again, when the question - Can you name at least one Bodo and one Karbi Artist ?, was put forward, the responses of the lawyers recorded were as follows :-

Table 3(d) - Familiarity -4

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total Number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |           |                |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response(%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5         | 6              |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | 1 (100%)          | -         | -              |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 4 (66.6%)         | 2 (33.3%) | -              |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 16 (69.6%)        | 7 (30.4%) | -              |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 21 (70%)          | 9 (30%)   | -              |

The above table shows that 70% of the Assamese lawyers are familiar with Bodo and Karbi Artists whereas 30% are unfamiliar with the same.

100% of the 1st generation literate lawyers could name the Bodo and Karbi artists. Of the 2nd generation literates, 66.6% of the lawyers are familiar whereas 33.3% are unfamiliar with Bodo and Karbi artists. Amongst the 3rd generation literate lawyers, 69.6% are familiar and 30.4% are unfamiliar with Bodo and Karbi artists.

When the question - Do you know what is the main religion among the Bodos ? was put forward , the responses of the lawyers recorded were as follows :

Table 3(e) - Familiarity-5

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total Number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |         |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)   | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5       | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | 1(100%)           | -       | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 6(100%)           | -       | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 21(91.3%)         | 2(8.7%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 28(93.3%)         | 2(6.6%) | -               |

The above table shows that 93.3% of the Assamese lawyers claim to be familiar with the Bodo religion while 6.6% admit unfamiliarity. All (100%) of the 1st generation literate lawyers and also the 2nd generation literate lawyers claim to be familiar with the Bodo religion. Amongst the 3rd generation literates, 91.3% claim to be familiar whereas 8.7% admit unfamiliarity.

Although, from the above findings, it seems as if the majority of the Assamese lawyers are familiar with the Bodo religion, actually, it is not so. These lawyers (56.7%) have stated that the majority of the Bodos are Hindus but in reality a large majority of the Bodos worship their own dieties like

<sup>1</sup> 'Bathau Borai', 'Mainao', etc. and though there has been considerable hindu influence over the decades, the Bodos have not done away with their ancient religious practice. Hence the responses of the lawyers reflects their inability to recognise the clearly distinguishable tribal identity reflected in their religious ceremonies.

Regarding the question - Do you know what is the main religion among the Karbis ?, the responses of the lawyers have been classified as in Table 3(f) below :-

Table 3(f) - Familiarity -6

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation       | Total number of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |          |                |
|--------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------|----------------|
|        |                           |                              | YES (%)           | NO(%)    | No response(%) |
| 1      | 2                         | 3                            | 4                 | 5        | 6              |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates. | 1                            | 1(100%)           | -        | -              |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates  | 6                            | 4(66.6%)          | 2(33.3%) | -              |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates. | 23                           | 17(74%)           | 6(26%)   | -              |
| 4.     | Total                     | 30                           | 22(73.3%)         | 8(26.6%) | -              |

1. G.C.Basumatary - Aryanisation and Hinduisation in Assam Souvenier of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 1985. Cited in Bijoy Kr.Daimary - Boro Politics in Assam since Independence (Unpublished M.Phil thesis of North-Eastern Hill University), 1986) p.14.

Table 3(f) indicates that overall 73\*3% of the Assamese lawyers claim to be familiar with the religion of the Karbis while 26\*6% admit unfamiliarity. It can be seen that 100% of the 1st generation literates and 66\*6% of the 2nd generation literates claim familiarity while 33\*3% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers admit unfamiliarity with the religion of the Karbis. While 74% of the 3rd generation literates claim to be familiar, 26\*6% admit unfamiliarity with the religion of the Karbis.

Though the figures in the above table show that the majority of the Assamese lawyers claim to be familiar with Karbi religion, in reality, it is not so. From this majority which has responded positively, we found that 53\*3% have stated that a large number of the Karbis are Hindus. But actual facts reveal that though Hinduism has had its influence on their worship of several Gods and Goddesses, yet their own religious beliefs and practices which centre around their worship of dieties like 'Arnam Samsar Recho', 'Hemphu', 'Mukrang', 'Chomangkan' etc. are mainly dominant among the Karbis.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the responses of the lawyers shows their inability to identify the distinguishable tribal identity reflected in their religious practices.

From the above 6 tables which deal with the responses of the lawyers on the issue of familiarity with Bodo and Karbi art and culture, we find that though a majority (53\*3%

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2. B.N.Bordoloi, Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam (Guwahati, 1991), p.67.

and 70% respectively) could name the important Bodo and Karbi litterateurs and artists and were also familiar with Bodo and Karbi religion, yet, on the other hand, 96.7% were not familiar with Karbi festivals and 70% of the lawyers were unfamiliar with the Bodo festivals. From this, we can infer that the Assamese lawyers are not really familiar with Bodo and Karbi culture. Names like Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, Sitanath - Brahma Choudhury, Rong Bong Teron, Sobha Brahma, etc. are well known in the fields not only of Bodo and Karbi art and literature but also the social and political life of Assam. Hence, it was not difficult for the lawyers to write down a few such names when they were asked to do so. But when it came to identifying some major Bodo and Karbi festivals and religion, they failed miserably. From this it is evident that the majority of the lawyers, barring a few, pretend to be familiar with Bodo and Karbi culture to show that they are progressive which presumably they are not.

### 3 - Assimilation:

To the question - will the Bodos eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture?, the responses of the lawyers are as given in Table (4) below :-

Table 4(a) - Assimilation -1

| Sl.No | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|       |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response (%) |
| 1     | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.    | 1st generation literates | 1                           | 1(100%)           | -         | -               |
| 2.    | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 2(33.3%)          | 3(50%)    | 1(16.6%)        |
| 3.    | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 12(52.2%)         | 11(47.8%) | -               |
| 4.    | Total                    | 30                          | 15(50%)           | 14(46.6%) | 1(3.3%)         |

From Table 4(a), it becomes quite clear that overall 50% of the Assamese lawyers believe that the Bodos will eventually assimilate with the larger Assamese community while 46.6% do not think so. 100% of the 1st generation literates and 33.3% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers favour Bodo assimilation while 50% of the 2nd generation literates do not favour Bodo assimilation and 16.6% have not responded at all. Amongst the 3rd generation literates, 52.2% are in favour and 47.8% are not in favour regarding the issue of Bodo assimilation.

To the question - Will the Karbis eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture ?, the responses recorded are as follows :-

Table 4(b) - Assimilation-2

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | 1(100%)           | -         | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 3(50%)            | 2(33.3%)  | 1(16.6%)        |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 10(43.5%)         | 12(52.1%) | 1(4.3%)         |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 14(46.6%)         | 14(46.6%) | 2(6.6%)         |

From the above table, it is quite apparent that while 46.6% of the Assamese lawyer feel that the Karbis will eventually assimilate with the larger Assamese community, another 46.6% feel that it will be otherwise 6.6% of the lawyers have not responded at all. All the 1st generation literate lawyers are in favour of Karbi assimilation. 50% of the 2nd generation literates are in favour, 33.3% are not in favour of the issue of Karbi assimilation while 16.6% have not responded at all. 43.5% of the 3rd generation literates are in favour, 52.1% are not in favour of the Karbi assimilation while 4.3% have not responded.

From Table 4(a) and (b) associated with the question of Bodo and Karbi assimilation into the larger Assamese community, we can derive the following interpretation that amongst the majority of the Assamese lawyers, there is total unfamiliarity and lack of sympathy towards the political

autonomy demands raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam. It is seen that the majority have favoured Bodo and Karbi assimilation which indirectly reveals their intolerance towards the desire of Bodos and Karbis to retain their separate identities.

Again, here we also see from the responses that it is only amongst a few of the 2nd generation literates and a large number of the 3rd generation literate Assamese lawyers that there exists some sympathy towards these ethnic assertions for identity. This is evident from the fact that most of them have not responded in favour of Bodo and Karbi assimilation. The reasons are the same as noted earlier in the interpretation of Table (2) - Justification of autonomy. Hence, it is because of the influence of education and liberal views cultivated through the generation that these sections of the Assamese middle class are slightly more tolerant on these issues.

#### 4. - Language issue and tolerance :-

When the question - Do you support the introduction of Assamese as a medium of instruction in higher education ?, was asked, the responses of the lawyers were as given in table 5(a) :-

Table 5(a) - Language issue and tolerance(1)

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                              | YES(%)            | NO(%)     | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                            | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                            | 1(100%)           | -         | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                            | 1(16.7%)          | 5(83.3%)  | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                           | 6(26%)            | 17(73.9%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                           | 8(26.6%)          | 22(73.3%) | -               |

From the above table, we find that while only 26.6% of the Assamese lawyers support the introduction of Assamese as a medium of instruction in higher education, 73.3% do not support it. Of the 1st generation literate lawyers, 100% are in favour of this decision. Amongst the 2nd generation literates, 16.7% support it while 83.3% do not support it. 26% of the 3rd generation literates support it while 73.9% do not support it.

To the question - Do you support the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam ?, the answers given by the lawyers are specified in Table 5(b) below:-

Table 5(b) - Language issue and tolerance(2)

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |          |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                              | YES(%)            | NO(%)    | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                            | 4                 | 5        | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                            | 1(100%)           | -        | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                            | 3(50%)            | 3(50%)   | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                           | 19(82.6%)         | 4(17.4%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                           | 23(76.7%)         | 7(23.3%) | -               |

Table 5(b) points out that 76.7% of the Assamese lawyers support the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam while 23.3% do not support it. 100% of the 1st generation literate lawyers support it. 50% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers support it while the other 50% do not support it. 82.6% of the 3rd generation literate lawyers support it while 17.4% do not support it.

Regarding the question - Should the Bodo and Karbi language be recognised as official languages in Assam?, the responses of the lawyers were as follows :-

Table 5(c) - Language issue and tolerance(3)

| Sl.No | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |            |                 |
|-------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|------------|-----------------|
|       |                          |                              | YES(%)            | NO(%)      | No response (%) |
| 1     | 2                        | 3                            | 4                 | 5          | 6               |
| 1.    | 1st generation literates | 1                            | -                 | 1 (100%)   | -               |
| 2.    | 2nd generation literates | 6                            | -                 | 5 (83.3%)  | 1 (16.7%)       |
| 3.    | 3rd generation literates | 23                           | 8 (34.6%)         | 15 (65.2%) | -               |
| 4.    | Total                    | 30                           | 8 (26.6%)         | 21 (70%)   | 1 (3.3%)        |

In table 5(c) it can be seen that only 26% of the Assamese lawyers think that the Bodo and Karbi languages should be recognised as official languages in Assam while the majority i.e. 70% do not think so. None of the 1st generation literate lawyers support it, while 83.3% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers do not support it, 16.7% have not responded at all regarding this issue. Amongst the 3rd generation literates, 34.6% support it while 65.2% do not support it.

Tables 5(a), (b) & (c) deal with the language question in Assam. Table 5(a) indicates that only 26.6% of the Assamese lawyers support the introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction in Assam while 73.3% do not support it. This is mainly because of the fall in the present educational standard brought about by the introduction of Assamese as the

medium of instruction. The real attitude however, of the Assamese lawyers regarding the language question is reflected only in Tables 5(b) and (c), where an overwhelming majority (76.7%) of the Assamese lawyers have supported the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam and 70% of the lawyers are seen to be opposed to the idea of introduction of Bodo and Karbi languages as official languages in Assam. This goes to prove that the Assamese middle class does have a big brotherly or patronizing attitude towards these smaller communities. It is also interesting to note that only the 3rd generation literate Assamese lawyers seem to be more liberal and tolerant in their outlook as 34.6% of them have supported the idea of introduction of Bodo and Karbi as official languages in Assam. It should be worth noting here that one of the main grievances of both these ethnic movements has been against the imposition of Assamese language as the medium of instruction and also as official language on the tribals in Assam. This has acted as a threat to the preservation of the language and culture of these ethnic communities.

##### 5 - Economic Backwardness and Autonomy :

On the question of backwardness of the Bodo and Karbi areas i.e. - Do you think the Bodo and Karbi dominated areas are backward ?, the responses of the lawyers were as given below in Table 6 :-

Table 6 - Economic Backwardness and Autonomy(1)

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S |          |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                             | YES(%)            | NO(%)    | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                 | 5        | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | -                 | 1(100%)  | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | 5(83.3%)          | 1(16.7%) | -               |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 18(78.2%)         | 5(21.8%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 23(76.7%)         | 7(23.3%) | -               |

From Table 6, it is evident that a large number i.e. 76.7% of the Assamese lawyers feel that the Bodo and Karbi dominated areas are backward while 23.3% do not think so. None of the 1st generation literate lawyers think that the Bodo and Karbi areas are backward. 83.3% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers think that these areas are backward while 16.7% do not think so. Amongst the 3rd generation literates, 78.2% think that the Bodo and Karbi areas are backward while 21.8% think otherwise.

When the question - Do you think the Bodos and the Karbis are being deprived in matters of employment ?, was asked, the lawyers have answered in the following manner as shown in Table 7 :-

Table 7 - Economic Backwardness and Autonomy-2

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total Number of respondents. | R E S P O N S E S |           |                 |
|--------|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------------|
|        |                          |                              | YES (%)           | NO (%)    | No response (%) |
| 1      | 2                        | 3                            | 4                 | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                            | -                 | 1(100%)   | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                            | 1(16.7%)          | 4(66.6%)  | 1(16.7%)        |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                           | 9(39.1%)          | 14(60.9%) | -               |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                           | 10(33.3%)         | 19(63.3%) | 1(3.3%)         |

From Table 7, it can be seen that overall 33.3% of the Assamese lawyers think that the Bodos and the Karbis are being deprived in matters of employment while 63.3% do not think so and 3.3% have not expressed their opinion at all. None of the 1st generation literates think that the Bodos and the Karbis are being deprived in this matter. 66.6% of of the 2nd generation literates also do not think so while 16.7% think they are being deprived in matters of employment and another 16.7% of the 2nd generation literates have not commented at all. 39.1% of the 3rd generation literate lawyers feel that the Bodos and Karbis have been deprived while 60.9% do not think so.

Regarding the question - If the Government of Assam grants full autonomy to the Bodos and the Karbis, will they be able to develop their own areas ?, the responses of the

lawyers have been classified in Table 8 below :-

Table 8 - Economic Backwardness and Autonomy-3

| Sl.No. | Literacy generation      | Total Number of respondents | R E S P O N S E S<br>YES(%) | NO(%)     | No response (%) |
|--------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1      | 2                        | 3                           | 4                           | 5         | 6               |
| 1.     | 1st generation literates | 1                           | -                           | 1(100%)   | -               |
| 2.     | 2nd generation literates | 6                           | -                           | 5(83.3%)  | 1(16.6%)        |
| 3.     | 3rd generation literates | 23                          | 10(43.5%)                   | 12(52.1%) | 1(4.3%)         |
| 4.     | Total                    | 30                          | 10(33.3%)                   | 18(60%)   | 2(6.6%)         |

Overall 33.3% of the Assamese lawyers feel that the Bodos and Karbis will be able to develop their own areas if granted full autonomy by the Government of Assam while 60% do not think so and 6.6% have remained silent on this issue, as seen from Table (8) above. None of the 1st generation as well as 83.3% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers think that the Bodos and Karbis will be able to develop their own areas. 16.6% of the 2nd generation literate lawyers have not responded at all. Amongst the 3rd generation literate lawyers, 43.5% feel that the Bodos and Karbis will be able to develop their own areas themselves while 60% do not think so and the rest i.e. 6.6% have not commented on this topic.

While interpreting the data in Table '6) and (7), we find that in response to the question of backwardness of <sup>areas</sup> Bodo and Karbi/an overwhelming majority (76·7%) of the Assamese lawyers feel that these areas are backward. (If an area is backward then its a well known fact that its inhabitants are inevitably deprived in most spheres) . But in Table (7), we see that to the question of the Bodos and Karbis being deprived in matters of employment, a large number of the lawyers (63·3%) feel that these communities have not been deprived in this sphere. Both these opinions are contradictory. This proves that this section of the Assamese middle class is not even aware of the exact situation facing these tribes.

Again in Table (8), we see that while only 33·3% of the Assamese lawyers feel that these tribes can develop by themselves if granted full autonomy, the majority (60%) think otherwise. This reflects the complete lack of confidence on these tribal sections. So far as their capacity to look after themselves is concerned, such an attitude obviously once again reveals the big-brotherly attitude of the Assamese middle class. It is only amongst the 3rd generation literate Assamese lawyers that some (43·5%) genuinely believe that these ethnic tribes can develop by themselves if given the opportunity, without requiring guidance from the larger Assamese community.

The above interpretations of the data collected from the survey has thus helped us to form a proper idea of the attitude of this small but influential section of the Assamese middle class vis-a-vis two important ethnic issues dominating the politics of the north-eastern region today.

CONCLUSION :

From this study on the attitude of the Assamese middle class towards the ethnic assertions for identity by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam, some interesting formulations can be derived. This project, being a short term one deals with only a section of the Assamese middle class i.e. the Assamese lawyers of Guwahati city. The nature of the respondents and their extremely busy life/<sup>style</sup>forced us to restrict the sample to a small number of thirty. This restriction was brought upon the study also by the time limit fixed by the sponsors at six months. Therefore, the conclusion drawn here should be accepted only with the qualification that they be weighed against other evidences. But even these tentative findings based on a small sample seem to suggest that some of the currently dominant ideas about the attitude of the Assamese middle class need to be carefully reexamined because though in the course of this study, it was found that some of the charges levelled against the Assamese middle class as being big-brotherly in its treatment of the other smaller communities within Assam are not altogether untrue, yet, it shows significant differences of opinions among various sections of this class.

In the course of this survey it was found that most of the respondents, lawyers of Guwahati city, came from similar social backgrounds of educated small land owning families, or families of government servants and small businessmen. The only significant difference in social background was found in what we called literacy generation. This fact was kept in mind while analysing the data.

The survey reveals that the majority of the Assamese lawyers are intolerant towards the political autonomy demands put up by the Bodos and the Karbis. But when the responses were analysed on the basis of literacy generation, it was found that the 1st generation and 2nd generation literate Assamese lawyers were more intolerant on this issue. This obvious disaffection to the assertion for identity put up by these smaller communities has come mainly from these two sections of the Assamese middle class because they are placed in the same arena of competition as the newly emerging educated elites of the Bodos and Karbis. With educational qualifications, that too often of the general type, and investment abilities of the lowest order, the newly emerging tribal educated elites and the lower sections of the Assamese middle class compete for unspecialised jobs in business and lower rungs of bureaucracy. They also depend on small trade for their livelihood. The tribal elite and the lower sections of the Assamese middle class therefore look upon each other as adversaries. This in turn, develops into an intolerant attitude. This has been adequately proved from the findings of Table (2) - Justification of Autonomy in Chapter III of this report. A survey among the Bodo and Karbi educated elites may confirm this. From the data analysed in the same table, it was found that the 3rd generation literate Assamese lawyers, on the other hand, are slightly more tolerant and this may be because this section of the Assamese middle class does not have serious conflict

of interests with the newly emerging Bodo and Karbi educated elites. Having been exposed to the advantages of education for generations, this section of the Assamese lawyers must have fully utilized the opportunities of mobilizing resources through jobs, etc. and thus must have moved to a higher social position where they could aspire to compete in fields which are out of the reach of the other two sections of the Assamese middle class and the educated Bodo and Karbi elites. Moreover, the culmination of a liberal outlook brought about by education and other related opportunities through the generations has probably softened and broadened the views of this section of the Assamese middle class. Liberal values and progressive outlook would naturally be more influential in a group which has been exposed to liberal education for generations than among those who have been recently initiated to such education. Therefore, we can make a generalisation that there exists a high degree of co-relation between higher literacy generation and higher sympathetic attitude. It should be noted here that because the respondents surveyed did not form a very large number due to several constraints mentioned earlier, there was only one respondent who was identified as 1st generation literate. Hence the generalisations made about the 1st generation literate Assamese lawyers in this study cannot be fully justified. But the conclusions drawn on the basis of the responses of both the

1st and 2nd generations literates should be taken seriously.

In several cases, it has also been found that the lawyers have tried to cover up their ignorance or lack of familiarity with the customs, religions and traditions of these tribes but the queries were placed in such a manner that their real attitude was properly reflected. Their unfamiliarity was adequately reflected in the findings of Table 3(a) - 3(f), Familiarity 1 - 6 in Chapter III of this report. Again Tables 4(a) & 4(b) - Assimilation 1 and Assimilation 2 of the same chapter reveal that the majority of the Assamese lawyers are in favour of Bodo and Karbi assimilation into the larger Assamese community. This reinforces the conclusion that the Assamese middle class is big-brotherly in its attitude towards these smaller communities. Further, Tables 5(a), (b) and (c), which deal with the Language Issue and tolerance, clearly reflect that the majority of the Assamese lawyers are not willing to accept the Bodo and Karbi languages on an equal footing with the Assamese language. Moreover, Tables (6), (7) & (8) which deal with Economic Backwardness and Autonomy in the same chapter shows that the majority of the Assamese lawyers are also unfamiliar with the real economic situation of these tribal people. This lack of familiarity would obviously create conditions for lack of sympathy and one should not therefore be surprised by the intolerance shown by the respondents.

Thus, it has been revealed through this survey that the Assamese lawyers regard these smaller communities in a big-brotherly and patronizing manner and demonstrate considerable amount of intolerance while considering some of the demands raised by these communities. This intolerant and big-brotherly attitude of this section of the Assamese middle class may be attributed also to the weak position of the Assamese middle class vis-a-vis the rest of India. Though this survey did not investigate this aspect, it can be presumed from the existing literature<sup>1</sup> that though the Assamese middle class is the hegemonic class in Assam, it occupies a relatively weak position when compared to the far more advanced middle classes of many other Indian communities. Because of the culturally, politically and economically weak position of the Assamese middle class<sup>they</sup> tend to view these ethnic assertions as political threats to their power base in the Assamese society. It is necessary to remember that, it has been pointed out that the Assamese community has been constantly feeling the weight of the dominant Bengali culture<sup>2</sup> over the decades and with the problems of illegal Bangladeshi immigration into Assam, the Assamese middle class suffers from a sense of insecurity. It is therefore natural that they view such ethnic movements as dangerous threats to the political and cultural identity of the Assamese society.

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1. A.K.Baruah, Social Tensions in Assam : Middle Class Politics (Guwahati, 1991)

&

Manorama Sharma, Social and Economic Change in Assam : Middle Class Hegemony (New Delhi, 1990).

3. Omvedt Gail, Aspects of the Assamese Problem, Frontier, Vol.12, No.41, pp.4-6.

Appendix (i)U L T I M A T U M

Submitted By

The Autonomous State Demand Committee

and

The Karbi Students' Association

To

The Hon'ble Chief Minister, Assam.Date 5th March, 1990

Sir,

Being fully convinced of the deliberate and contemptuous disregard displayed by the State government for democratic values and constitutional sanctity while dealing with the peaceful, democratic and constitutional demand of the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills for an Autonomous State as guaranteed by Article-244(A) of the Constitution, the Autonomous State Demand Committee(ASDC) and the Karbi Students' Association(KSA), left with no other sensible alternatives, are constrained but to submit before you this ultimatum.

Sir,

Called upon by the overwhelming urge of the hill people, seeking a distinct political identity and a socio-economic advancement at par with the rest of the nation, the ASDC and KSA pleaded the unavoidable necessity for creation of an Autonomous State and duly submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, on the 3rd June, 1986, beseeching his government's initiatives which however fell upon deaf ears. Thereupon, a delegation of the ASDC and KSA visited New Delhi and handed over a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India again on the 18th May 1987. The delegation was verbally assured by the Prime Minister that the matter will be looked into. At this stage, the State government, pressurised by the ever growing mass upsurge of the hill people, convened a tripartite talk on the Autonomous State issue with the representatives of the ASDC and KSA and entered into an agreement at Dispur on the 28th August, 1987 which recognised that "there are genuine social/economic and political problems in the two hill districts" and that the movement was "democratic" "mass movement", further a sub-committee was formed to "go into the details of the Autonomous State" issue, thereafter to jointly move to the Central government if the ways and means to the solution were agreed upon. Far from making even a semblance of progress, the State government used the sub-committee as a deliberate ploy to derive political advantages, gain time to gradually weaken and crush the movement. Having considerably waited long enough, the ASDC and KSA delegation, yet again, on the 18th May, 1988

submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister so that a formal dialogue could be initiated towards solving the issue. The delegation was also given a patient audience by the then Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr P.Chidambaram who suggested that the move could be effectively represented through the elected representatives. Accordingly, the ASDC contested the general election to the Karbi Anglong District Council which was held on the 7th January, 1989 and clearly demonstrated the massive mandate for creation of an Autonomous State by winning 22 out of the 26 elective seats. To further speed up the matter, the new Executive Committee, in its very first sitting on the 7th March, 1989 adopted a resolution to spearhead the demand for an Autonomous State and its immediate implementation. But this time too, the State government dismissed the democratically elected representatives with arrogance and humiliation by blatantly refusing to honour the democratic aspirations of the people.

Behind all these political machinations and delaying tactics, the State government always had a convenient excuse by passing the buck on the persistent interference of the successive governments at the Centre. It, therefore, became imperative on the part of the ASDC and KSA to ally with the broad democratic organisations of Assam, represented by the Janata Dal, IPF, CPI, SLP and other struggling forces to form the "Campaign Committee" on the 1st October, 1989 which has strongly advocated the granting of an Autonomous State to the hill people. With the assumption of the government at the centre by the National Front, the ASDC and KSA, the Karbi Anglong District Council and the Campaign Committee, met the new Prime Minister, Sri Viswanath Pratap Singh, accompanied by the Home Minister, Mufti Muhammad Sayeed, on his maiden visit to the state on the 2nd January, 1990 and submitted memoranda on the Autonomous issue. The Honourable Prime Minister assured a positive initiative. Well said than done, nothing as yet came of this meeting too, further increasing insecurities and frustrations in the minds of the hill people who had been routinely subjected to political persecutions, social degradations and economic deprivations by the successive rulers in both the Centres and the State. As our recent history very amply testifies, socio-economic and political subordination can generate but more and more frustrations and frustrations can only lead to anarchism and violence which our country has unfortunately too much in abundance.

Mortally aggrieved as we are, at the premeditated disregard and apathy of both the Union and the State governments, exhibited towards the genuinely democratic and constitutional right of the hill people to an Autonomous State, guaranteed by Article-244(A) of the Indian Constitution, which does not necessitate the bifurcation of Assam but only a natural and obvious upgradation process of Autonomous District Councils in the North-East region, which again is in absolute conformity with the concept of the decentralisation of power.

The ASDC and KSA, therefore, on behalf of the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, disillusioned at the indecisions and betrayals of both the Centre and the State Governments, are compelled to implore upon your kind initiatives to recommend the implementation of Article - 244(A) to the Union government within the stipulated period of one month from today. The undersigned most sincerely hope that political wisdom will prevail upon your goodself to salvage the hill people from further sufferings and misfortune by restoring them their democratic and constitutional right within the time-frame which otherwise will only give rise to disastrous consequences and there will be none other to blame but only yourself.

Sd/-  
( Robindra Rongpi )  
President,

Sd/-  
(Babu Rongpi)  
Convenor,

Sd/-  
( Borsing Rongphar )  
General Secretary,  
On behalf of  
Karbi Students' Association,  
DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG.

Sd/-  
(Dr. Jayanta Rongpi)  
Chief Spokesman,  
On behalf of  
Autonomous State Demand  
Committee,  
DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG.

Appendix (ii)

OFFICE OF THE  
AUTONOMOUS STATE DEMAND COMMITTEE  
H.Q. DIPHU :: KARBI ANGLONG

Ref.No.....

Date 3-8-91

To,

The Chief Minister, Assam

(Through the Deputy Commissioner, Karbi Anglong, Diphu)

Sub:- ULTIMATUM

Sir,

While inviting your attention to the ongoing agitation demanding the unconditional release of Shri Rajendra Rongpi, Executive Member, Karbi Anglong District Council and Central Committee Member of ASDC, the ASDC/KSA express grave resentment at the non-response of the govt. even after several representations are made to the Deputy Commissioner, Diphu, to the Governor of Assam and also to you not only by the ASDC/KSA but also by the MLAs of CPI, CPI(M), SUCI, Bodoland - Legislature Party group and ASDC. Moreover, the people of Karbi Anglong have demonstrated their support to this cause through a successful 24 hrs. bandh on 31st July, 1991.

The ASDC and KSA in particular and the people of Karbi Anglong in general have taken the arrest of Shri Rajendra Rongpi as an act of naked-aggression and gross violation of all civilised norms. The people of Karbi Anglong further have taken the issue as an act of insult to the dignity of the people of Karbi Anglong in general and the Autonomous District Council in particular.

We believe in, democratic methods of struggle, but unfortunately the successive governments have taken it as our weakness and have been trying to delay the creation of Autonomous State inspite of repeated clear cut people's mandate for it. It is unbelievable that the govts. have responded to our peaceful democratic struggle by resorting to unprecedented state terrorism.

So once again we reiterate your goodself to unconditionally release Shri Rajendra Rongpi and impress upon the Central govt. to take steps for creation of Autonomous State on or before 8-8-91 failing which we shall be compelled to launch the following agitational programmes as the first phase :

- 1) Relay hunger strike by MDCs on 9 and 10 August 1991 in front of Deputy Commissioner's office, Diphu.
- 2) Mass hunger strike on 9 and 10, August 1991 in front of APO offices, SDO(C) offices and BDO offices of Karbi Anglong.
- 3) 100 hrs. Karbi Anglong bandh from 5 a.m. of 18th August 1991 to 9 a.m. of 17th August 1991.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

(ROBINDRA RONGPI)  
President  
Karbi Students'  
Association.

Sd/-

(HOLIRAM TERANG)  
Chairman  
Autonomous State Demand Committee.

Diphu, Karbi Anglong.

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**A SURVEY OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE LAWYERS OF GUWAHATI CITY  
TO KARBI AND BODO DEMANDS FOR POLITICAL AUTONOMY**

*Investigator - Smika Khound*

**SCHEDULE—A**

**BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENT**

- (1) Name of the Respondent —
- (2) Father's Name —
- (3) Occupation —
- (4) Age (In years) —
- (5) Place of Birth — (i) Home Town/Village—  
(ii) District—
- (6) Mother Tongue —
- (7) Educational Qualifications —
- (8) Father's Occupation —
- (9) Father's Educational Qualifications —
- (10) Grandfather's Occupation —
- (11) Grandfather's Educational Qualifications —
- (12) Do you have any Bodo or Karbi among your very close friends ? — (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐
- (13) Are the words 'Hacha Kekan' and 'Rongker' familiar to you ? — (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐
- If Yes, specify.....
- .....
- (14) Are the words 'Kheji', 'Baisagu' and 'Katri Gacha' familiar to you ? — (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(15) Can you name at least one important

Bodo and one important Karbi litterateur ? — (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(16) Can you Name at least one Bodo and one Karbi Artist ?

— (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(17) Do you know what is the main religion among the Bodos ?

— (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(18) Do you know what is the main religion among the Karbis ?

— (i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

### SCHEDULE - B

(1) Do you think that the demands for political autonomy raised by the Bodos and Karbis in Assam are justified ones ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(2) a) Who do you think are the Assamese ?

b) In your opinion, the Bodos and the Karbis are :— (Please ✓)

(i) A distinct ethnic group with a seperate Cultural Identity.

(ii) A branch of the Assamese Nationality.

(iii) An ethnic group in the process of assimilation with the Assamese Culture.

c) Culturally speaking, do you think that the Bodos can develop as a cultural group Independent of the Assamese ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(3) a) Will the Bodos eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

b) Will the Karbis eventually assimilate in the melting pot of Assamese culture ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(4) Are you aware of the period in which the Bodo movement started ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(5) Are you aware of the period in which the Karbi movement started ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, specify.....

(6) Are you aware of the major demands of the Bodos and Karbis ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, state at least two each :-

#### BODOS :

(i)

(ii)

#### KARBIS :

(i)

(ii)

(7) Do you think the Bodo and the Karbi movements are generated by :- (Please ✓)

(i) A genuine feeling of being neglected economically.

(ii) A perceived sense of deprivation.

(iii) A fear of losing cultural identity.

(iv) Political manipulation by their opportunist elites.

(v) Engineered by the forces of disintegration.

(vi) The expansionist designs of the Assamese middle class.

(8) a) Do you support the introduction of Assamese as a medium of instruction in higher education ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

b) Do you support the introduction of Assamese as the official language in Assam ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

c) Should the Bodo and Karbi languages be recognised as official languages in Assam.

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(9) a) Do you think the Bodo and Karbi dominated areas are backward ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

If Yes, give reasons—

b) What measures should the Government of Assam take in this regard ? (Please ✓)

- (i) Grant full economic autonomy to the Bodos and Karbis.
- (ii) Grant autonomy for Panchayat and District level planning.
- (iii) Sincerely implement the existing provision for Development of Tribal areas.
- (iv) Create autonomous political system of Administration for Bodos and Karbis.
- (v) Create separate states for them.

(10) Do you think the Bodos and the Karbis are being deprived in matters of employment ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(11) Which political forces do you think are active behind the Bodo and Karbi autonomy movements ?

.....

(12) Do you support the agreement between the Government of Assam and the ABSU ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(13) Do you anticipate tension in the 'BODOLAND AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL' area because of the inclusion of Tea Garden areas under the Council ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐

(14) If the Government of Assam grants full autonomy to the Bodos and the Karbis, will they be able to develop their own areas ?

(i) Yes ☐ (ii) No ☐