

**A Brief Note On**  
**The Plains Tribals of Assam**  
**&**  
**The Demand For Udayachal.**

**By**

**THE PLAINS TRIBALS COUNCIL OF ASSAM (P.T.C.A.)**

**April 1986**

**A Brief Note On  
The Plains Tribals of Assam  
&  
The Demand For Udayachal.**

*By*

**THE PLAINS TRIBALS COUNCIL OF ASSAM (P.T.C.A)**

The Plains Tribals of Assam always hope that their problems will be understood by the Governments in the State as well as in the Centre in right perspective and steps will be taken to ensure their security, to preserve their identity and help correct socio-cultural and economic imbalances. The Plains tribals never got a fair deal from the State and the Centre looked at them with blind eyes,

The Bodos or Bodo-Kacharis, the Michings or Miris, the Deoris, the Rabhas, the Tiwas or Lalungs, the Meches, the Sonowals, the Soronias, the Hojais and the Burmans of Cachar constitute the bulk of the Plains Tribals of Assam. Their population, according to the Census of 1971, stood about 15 lakhs and formed 10% of the total population of Assam. Though they are spread throughout the State of Assam, there are areas where their concentration is heavy and they form more than 50% of the population.

The Plains Tribals are the first sons of the soil of Assam. They have distinctive languages, cultures, heritages and traditions of their own. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and are of the Mongoloid stock very different from what is called Assamese. Many of these tribes had glorious past to their credit.

The Bodos ruled the entire plains in Assam, North Bengal, parts of now Bangladesh, and Tripura for centuries before the Ahom advent to the Brahmaputra valley in early thirteenth century. Even after the Ahoms dominated the political scene of Assam, the Bodos had been ruling parts of Assam and North Bengal till the British annexation of these areas.

During the British regime, Assam as a separate province had her first Legislative Council in the year 1912. The Plains Tribals, who were in their worst days by that time did not have their political representation in that Council. So, the Plains Tribals naturally agitated over it and became eager to correct their position. They submitted memoranda before the Indian Statutory Commission which was otherwise known as Simon Commission when it visited the province of Assam in the year 1929. This enabled them to have provisions for reservation of seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly on the basis of separate electorate in the India Act of 1935. In order to consolidate their political efforts the Plains Tribals organised themselves into a political party under the name and style of the Assam Tribal League in the year 1933. They fought under the banner of the Assam Tribal League the elections held under the India Act of 1935 in the years 1937 and 1946. They succeeded in bagging all the four seats reserved for them in 1937 elections and three seats in 1946 elections. The Assam Congress under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi and Bishnuram Medhi entered into a written agreement with the Assam Tribal League in order to enable the Assam Congress to form a government in Assam, in the year 1938. Likewise, Sir Mahammad Sadullah also had to enter into an agreement with the Assam Tribal League to form a coalition ministry under the leadership of the Muslim League.

The Plains Tribals, who were denominated as the Primitive and Backward Tribes in pre-independent days, had been struggling hard to establish their separate identity and forge ahead in the path of progress. After independence when the Constituent Assembly was constituted to draft the Constitution of free India, the Constituent Assembly appointed a sub-committee known as 'the North East Frontier ( Assam ) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee' under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi to study the conditions of that area. The Sub-Committee sidetracked the case of the Plains Tribals with the observation, ..... 'the question of the tribe people in the plains strictly does not concern us. Their case will doubtless be dealt with by the Minorities Sub-Committee. The population of the plains tribes which is being gradually assimilated to the population of the plains, should for all practical purposes be treated as minority.' In spite of the fact that the plains tribals under the stewardship of the Assam Tribal League submitted a memorandum before the Constituent Assembly on 20-3-47 demanding demarcation of the plains tribal areas as the Scheduled Areas for the purpose of constitutional recognition of their areas, Gopinath Bordoloi, who was the chairman of that Sub-Committee, cunningly pushed the plains tribals into the category of minority. Indeed, that was a criminal conspiracy against the Plains Tribals of Assam. As a result of that the Plains Tribals of Assam could not get the benefits of the provisions of both the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution, which were envisaged for administration and protection of the tribal areas and tribal people.

The Assam leadership always tried to mislead the Central Government and the Central leadership by presenting false picture of the Plains Tribals of Assam. Their attempt had always been to

create conditions in which the Plains Tribals would be compelled to die away in favour of the Assamese society and that way contribute to its growth.

The problems of the plains tribals are not merely the problems of backwardness. They are essentially that of the plains tribals' ethnic identity. Therefore, they must be solved politically.

The Plains Tribals, inspite of their being denied of the provisions of both the Fifth and the Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution, thought that the new vista opened up by the emergence of independence would help them in every way. So, they decided to handover the political initiative to the national political parties and thus dissolved their own political platform, the Tribal League in the year 1954. They also hoped that the State Government of Assam would be sincere in protecting the tribal interests and help them preserve their identity. They also hoped that their areas, i. e. the plains tribal areas would be adequately protected by the special protective provisions enshrined in the Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act. As per the provisions of this chapter the plains tribal-dominated areas were declared as Tribal Belts and Blocks and prohibited alienation of tribal lands. But the bitter experiences of subsequent years revealed that the protective provisions of the Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act were more honoured in violation than in implementation, by the Government of Assam and its officials. Thus the hopes and trusts of the plains tribals were belied. The money allocated under Article 275 of the Indian Constitution and also under the tribal sub-plan for the tribal development were either diverted to non-tribal areas or squandered away by non-

tribal bureaucrats. Because of this the economic conditions of the Plains Tribals are rapidly deteriorating even after the expiry of the Sixth Five-year Plan period.

The bitter experiences have taught the plains tribals that good law or pious intention alone cannot bring the desired result. To achieve the desired result the people, for whom the law is made, must be involved and associated. The Plains Tribals are convinced that unless they are allowed to handle the implementing agency or machinery themselves neither their areas will be protected nor will the tribal people be developed.

In the light of these experiences and realisation the Plains Tribals decided to reorganise themselves into a political party and formed the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) in the year 1967, after long twenty years of independence and took back their political initiative into their hands. The Plains Tribals have realised that unless they emerge as a political force and press hard for their demand, no one is going to drop into their lap the power to handle their own affairs and allow them to be the master of their destiny.

Eversince the organisation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam, the plains tribals have been demanding autonomy in their areas. They have demanded creation of Udayachal, a Union Territory, to be carved out of the northern tracts of Assam along the foothills of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh. The Plains Tribals also have been demanding extension of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to the plains tribal concentrated areas in the southern bank of the river Brahmaputra.

When a delegation of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam

met the then President of India, Dr, Jakir Hussain, in the year 1967 and apprised him about the political demand of the Plains Tribals of Assam, he advised the delegation with his inspiring words, 'Knock, knock and knock at the door and the door will open.' His noble words still inspire the Plains Tribals. The Late lamented Madam Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi told the Plains Tribals Council of Assam delegation, when the latter met her at Gauhati on 10-3-83 during her visit to Assam immediately after 1983 elections, that she appreciated the stand taken by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam and was convinced of its philosophy and advised the delegation to submit the geographical concept of Udayachal. At the instance of the Madam Prime Minister, the delegation discussed at length with Mr, P. P. Nayar, Special Secretary, Home who was accompanying her, immediately after the delegation's meeting with the Madam Prime Minister.

As a follow up measure of these meetings, the Council submitted papers relating to the geographical concept of Udayachal on 17-5-83 to the Ministry of Home, Affairs. Government of India as well as to the Madam Prime Minister.

The Ministry of Home Affairs took long 16 months to study and examine the papers submitted by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam. In October, 1984, the Government of India intimated the Plains Tribals Council of Assam about its reaction on the matter vide Ministry of Home Affairs' letter No, 11012/-90/83, NE IV dated the 16th October, 1984. The Home Ministry raised two points in its letter. In the first place it stated that the areas indicated by the Plains Tribals Council of Assam are not geographically contiguous. The second point was that the plains tribal population does not constitute a majority in all these areas. Basing on these two points, the Home Ministry inferred the conclusion that a separate political unit does not appear to be in the larger interest of the Plains Tribals or the North-Eastern region as a whole.

The plains Tribals Council of Assam discussed the letter of the Ministry of Home Affairs referred to above in its Fifth General Session held on 1,2,3 and 4 March, 1985 at Simla-Kokhlabari in the district of Barpeta, Assam, In a resolution the Council has very clearly showed that the areas sought to be included in the proposed territory of Udayachal are contiguous and running at a stress. The Plains tribals do form majority because these areas are all covered by Tribal Belts and Blocks,

It will be in the fitness of things to mention that the tracts along the foothills of Bhutan sought to be included in the proposed Udayachal were known as Bhutan Dooars before they were tagged with the province of Assam by the British. They were Gooma Dooar, Reepoo Dooar, Cheerang or Sidli Dooar and Bagh or Bijni Dooar in the present Kokrajhar district ; Bijni Dooar, Chapakhmar Dooar in present Borpeta District : Chapagoori Dooar, Bakhsa or Baska Dooar and Ghurkhola Dooar in present Nalbari District ; Kulling Dooar, and Buree Gooma Dooar in the present Darrang District, The tracts along the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh that are sought to be included in Udayachal were known as excluded areas and partially excluded areas during the British regime and even after the independence. They are Balipara Frontier Tract comprising Kooreah Parrah Dooar, Char Dooar, Chhoy Dooar and Now Dooar in present Sonitpur district and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract in present Lakhimpur district and Sadiya Frontier Tract in present Dibrugarh district of Assam. These regions have history of their own very different from the rest of Assam. By and large, these areas are covered by the Tribal Belts and Blocks declared under the Chapter X of The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act. They are Santhal Colony Tribal Block, Ripu-Parbatjowar Tribal Belt, Balaghat Nayekgaon Tribal Block, Dotma Tribal Block, Sidli Tribal Belt and Bijni Tribal Block. in Dhubri and Kokrajhar district ; Kharija Tribal Block, Bajegaon Pathar Tribal Block. Gobardhana Tribal Block, Chapaguri Tribal Belt in Barpeta district ; Baska Tribal Belt and Tamalpur Tribal Block in Nalbari district ; Kalaigaon Tribal Belt, Teteli-Bhanguria Tribal Block, Bhuyakhat Tribal Block.

Dolgaon Tribal Block, Kocharipara Tribal Block, Tezpal Tribal Block in Darrang district ; Balipara Tribal Belt, Gohpur Tribal Block in Sonitpur district ; Lakhimpur Riverine Tribal Belt, North Lakhimpur Submountain Tribal Belt and Abor-Mishm-Tirap Tribal Belt in Lakhimpur district ; and Sadiya Tribal Belt in Dibrugarh district. These Tribal Belts and Blocks form a continuous stretch without any break.

The bitter experiences of the last 39 years of independence have given rise to the firm conviction in the minds of the plains tribals of Assam that autonomy in tribal areas is the only way to protect tribal areas as well as the various interests of the plains tribals.

It has been the experience of the plains tribals that the administrative machinery of the State Government of Assam has always been used to oppress and exploit the Plains Tribals of Assam. Even the much talked Assam Accord to which the Plains Tribals Council of Assam ( PTCA ) was not a party is being used to harass the Plains Tribals. While not a single unauthorised illegal encroacher in tribal belts and blocks has been evicted, a large number of the plains tribal people are ruthlessly evicted from forest areas where they settled before 1979 against the Assam Government's declared policy that pre-1980 encroachers would not be evicted from forest land and also the Central Government's instruction to Assam Government not to evict any tribal wherever they may be. Another peculiar point is that the foreign national encroachers in forest land were not touched while the indigenous plains tribals were singled out for eviction.

The Plains Tribals, specially the younger generation, have become very restive and we are afraid that unless Udayachal is created to meet the political aspirations of the plains tribals, the situation in the plains tribal areas of Assam will fast worsen in near future. To demonstrate their determination to achieve their political goal the Plains Tribals under the stewardship of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam observed Udayachal Demand Week from the 27th February to 5th March, 1986.