Karbi Anglong Autonomous Movement: A Study on Ethnicity and Identity in Assam

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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

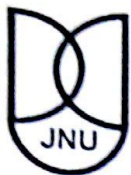## HIMAKSHI CHOUDHURY

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DECLARATION

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This is to certify that the Dissertation titled "**Karbi Anglong Autonomous Movement: A Study on Ethnicity and Identity in Assam**" submitted by me under the guidance of Dr. A. Bimol Akoijam, in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work and has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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While carrying out this study, there have been moments of anxiety, delight, despair, fun as well as great relief and I would like to thank the Almighty for bestowing on me the strength to carry on with this journey of learning, unlearning and relearning.

HIMAKSHI CHOUDHURY

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Every winter, we travelled to Nowgong, home of our grandparents and lazy days of cricket, films, playing with the dogs, cycling and picnics. We would race our dogs and plunge in together into the smooth and gently flowing Kolong river, scrub the animals with soap and brushes, towel them down. Then would come the best part: as all of us wet and happy, would sprint along the sand banks, over the narrow lane home, each trying to outrush the other.

Home here was where my grandfather and his younger brother, a doctor, whom we affectionately called Da, lived. And it was Da's clinic where my brother and I learned of the Kalidoscopic sweep of the ethnic mosaic of that little town: Muslim Mymensinghias, who seemed to complain the loudest, came to him; so did the Lalungs, a major tribe, Kacharis and Assamese and Bengali Hindus. Da is a figure that perhaps exist in every family around the world: selfless, always prepared to attend to a call at any time of the day or night and ever patient with question that all children ask." (Sanjoy Hazarika, 1994, p xix)

"At a fashionable party in New Delhi I was introduced to an officer of Indian army who had served in the northeast. In recent years this has usually meant fighting internal insurgents rather than an external enemy. I was introduced to him as someone who lives in the United States, in Delhi en route to Assam. The gentlemen asked me if I was an ethnic Assamese. Until then I was used to saying that I am an Assamese, just as in India a Bengali, a Gujrati, or a Malayalee would identify him-or herself. But why the odd qualifier "ethnic", I wondered" (Sanjib Baruah, 1999, pxvii)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

It can be clearly interpreted from Hazarika's narrative that, how the demographic composition of the region got defined by the identity categories that classified the populace of the region on the basis of certain socio-cultural and historical factors i.e. the markers of identity. The use of the term 'major' to define a particular tribe explains how such categories got hierarchically structured which is however under constant fluctuations owing to the socio-political conditions of the region. This further reflects the dynamic nature of identity which also gets placed in the second narrative where the author mentions the evolution of new forms of categories of 'identification' and 'differentiation' among which was the category of 'ethnic Assamese'. The determinant 'ethnic' here implies the formation of sub-category of the larger category of Assamese which earlier included the diverse groups and communities of Assam. The author postulates different paradigms of the term that range from addressing 'ethnic Assamese' as distinct from the immigrants and tribal population, identifying 'ethnic Assamese' with the sub-nationalist movement of Assam and the insurgent groups like the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam). "The category therefore manages to distinguish, in terms of stereotypical phenol-types, a particular group of people in a way that seems to be related to the logic of surveillance and social control in Assam" (Baruah, 1999, xvii).

These process of classification and categorization generates the practice of social exclusion of groups and communities where diversity coalesce with complexity, difference, hierarchy, inequality that permeates the transformation of identity as a simple defining factor to identity seethed with power, rights, in accordance with the growth of ethnic assertion, ethnic unrest, ethnic violence, ethnic insurgents which Baruah (1999) narrates had defined the region of

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Northeast in the recent years. The expression of identity and its contestation through the organization of social movement is what defines 'identity politics'.

Politics is all about human relationship and negotiation of the power embodied in the relationships where the underlying dynamics is competition and identity on the other hand can be defined as the fundamental social process that not only defines individuals, groups, communities but also a particular society as such definition develops through a recurrent pattern of interaction between the agencies and the structures where both influences the other. Social conditions hence construct a framework according to which identity gets framed.

One of the important questions in identity politics is how politics transforms as an important need for recognition and how the social status of a group gets defined by the political status of the group: an understanding to which the paper focuses. Identity politics then can be defined as nothing but the struggle for legitimate socio-political status. Such struggle also entails the protection and preservation of one's culture that sets the need to define the historical and cultural identity which would define and strengthen their claims. History has always been the essence in the formation of such identity struggle: an organized endeavor of the ethnic groups and communities to protect and preserve their historicity that determines their continued existence

The expression of such identity markers defines the nature and practice of assertion. The quest to protect the culture of origin of a particular ethnic group that would allow them to retain their identity shaped by such cultural ties is defined by the liberal nationalist as 'poly ethnic rights' and the second type of rights is the 'self-determination right' under which the interest of the groups are not limited only for the protection of 'identity' but also for the freedom to maintain such distinct identity (Gans, 2000). Different strand of arguments emerges among the liberal nationalist on the criteria for justifying the practice of such rights

where the criteria of majority or territorially dominant, immigration, etc defines the legitimacy for the practice of such rights.

This further explains how ethnicity and identity is a socially constructed product that gets defined by the contexts or the situations. Such context gets constituted or evolves under different patterns of interaction followed by the socio-cultural processes. In other words it is the interaction process that serves to the practice of identification and differences providing the ground for self–evaluation and introspection of one's social status in terms of privileges, rights power etc. Such evaluation process in certain cases generates the consciousness of identity crisis, a concern matter of the group that paves the way for cultural revivalism and consequently the birth of a political community. The transformation of the cultural markers into political tool under certain conditions with the efforts of the intelligentsia to fulfill certain objectives or goals constitutes an important area of discussion. Such practices confer to the formation of counter-culture followed by the emergence of civil society accompanied by the emergence of cultural nationalism.

Apart from various other factors that contributes towards the formation of a movement and the growth of civil politics the role of intellectuals have always remained crucial specially for creating revolutionary activities by acquiring mass support. Amongst the diverse works on nationalism Anthony smith (1981) in his work mentions that the intellectuals have been the major agents in reviving the cultural features that defined an ethnic group thereby generating subjective consciousness a requisite factor for mobilization. Smith further argues that the role of intellectuals and the emergence of nationalist movements can be understood under the context of mobility. According to him it is when the upward mobility of the intellectuals in terms of obtaining occupational position in bureaucratic services gets restricted in consequence to state policies, the intellectuals then develops the sense of being excluded from their rights. Such conditions then create a lacuna in the democratic functioning of the

state that motivates the intellectuals for organizing struggle against the governing institution in order to retain their 'indigenous right' that they believe they acquire on the ground of being the 'sons of the soil'.

Such activities clearly reflect the changes that the society experienced following the emergence of organized struggle between the state and the ethnic groups. The growth of intellectuals, formation of civil society that is society's own production becomes the indicator or a reference point for understanding 'social change' in a given society similar to what Foucault in 'history of sexuality' describes how 'sexuality' can be studied as a field to understand the social transformation of a society, formation of new patterns of power relation with the construction of new categories attributed by the change in the sexual practices.

Hence the process of exclusion accompanied by colonial and state policies, the role of intellectuals, formation of cultural organization and mobilization, role of literary and cultural activities in generating subjective consciousness emerges as important point of inquiry in understanding and analyzing the journey of a movement and the shift from identity to identity politics. The present work focuses on such crucial elements that define the underlying forces associated with the formation of such ethnic movement in the region of Assam and how identity, power, and autonomy surfaced as the obsolete conditions for contestation among the ethnic groups and communities: analyzing the diachronic and synchronic patterns of inter-ethnic relations

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The region of North East India had been known for its beauty, sanctity, culture and its diversity. Music, poetry, folklore from ages have remained a salient medium for such expression which is now reinstated with expression of the land that is tainted with the agonies of diverse races, bonded with fear, threat, conflict and violence. Such shift in the lament

expression forms a reflexive point for understanding the changing socio-political climate of the region. Saratchand Thiyam's poem 'The Snowy Wilderness" forms an excellent example in this case where the poet expresses the political situation of the region.

A loud blast, reverberations

gelignite smoke shuts out everything

and the sky rubs vigorously

its two eyes. They become blood-shot.

Under the sky

amidst the smoke

the sound of gunfire rolls

on and on[1]

This work hence focuses on the study of the diverse socio-cultural, historical and political factors or conditions responsible for the manifestation of such macabre situation in the region of Assam. One of the important aspects that the work seeks to reflect is how the subjective consciousness of the groups and communities gets shape by the state practices and how this affinity i.e. between the state and ethnic groups develops as a crucial factor for the growing tension in the region. The lacuna in the state policies for equal distribution, growth, protection subsuming the growth of fissiparous tendency followed by redrawing of territorial borders, growth of ethnic insurgency, violence and conflict is studied in the context of Autonomous movement of Karbi Anglong.

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[1] http://themanipurpage.tripod.com/literature/sthiyam.html [Accessed on 15/7/2015]

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the theme of ethnicity, identity, territoriality, autonomy, in the context of the autonomous movement of Karbi Anglong. The present study aims to develop a holistic perspective to understand the evolution and functioning of such movement that ails the region today. For instance the cultural perspective provide the scope to analyze how culture a defining factor of collective identity forms the foundation for a movement whereby a ethnic community transforms into a political community. Cultural elements in terms of language, symbols, folkways, that gets transformed to an important tool in the performance of the movement explains the psychological attachment that the ethnic group shares with the markers of identification that entails the construction of 'us' and 'them'. The recognition for such distinctiveness and their fear and rejection for the formation of a homogenous identity explains their claim for separate or an autonomous state. These various aspects have been taken into account in the study as this would help to contextualize the conditions that facilitate the growth of the movement analyzing its nature in the present context. Another effort has been made to study the movement of Karbi Anglong in relation to some of the other ethnic movements in the region which would help to locate the fundamental factors associated with the crisis.

I.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study aims to look into the following issues:

- How identities and space gets constructed and contested in a particular society under certain socio-cultural, historical and political conditions.

- How and why recognition becomes a requisite need for the survival of an ethnic group.

- Is ethnic assertion a reflection of incongruous nexus between the state and the ethnic groups?

- Is ethnic assertion a manifestation of the unequal distribution of rights and resources and a product of ineffective state policies?

The present study is purely based on secondary sources which include books, journal, articles, newspapers, memorandums as well as website information providing updated information on particular subjects that help to locate the issues within a given context.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The study is organized into three main chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. Within the three main chapters, the first chapter "Conceptual issues and theoretical perspectives" involves different theoretical and conceptual understanding on the notion of identity, ethnicity, self-determination, autonomy etc. The chapter begins with the understanding of the term 'ethnicity' covering different theoretical approaches to the study of 'ethnicity' along with analyzing how the process of 'identification' and 'differentiation' gets constructed which defines the construction of 'ethnic identity'. The role of different institutions in developing the practice of the collective identification enhancing solidarity and cohesiveness that gets manifested in the form of ethnic movements; where the per-formative aspect of ethnicity gets reflected is also discussed broadly in this chapter. The relationship between state, ethnicity and ethnic assertion and the growth of identity politics constitutes another aspect of discussion.

The second chapter 'Ethnicity in Assam: Markers and Assertion' focuses on how ethnicity emerged as an important criteria of identification in the region of Assam where the process of social exclusion played a salient role in generating the subjective consciousness. Hence the chapter begins with understanding the concept of 'social exclusion', the relation between

social exclusion and ethnicity, tracing the journey of the identity politics and ethnic assertion in the region under the colonial, independence and post-independence period. The construction of different administrative and development policies during the colonial period, and its effect in terms of change in the territorial boundaries, inter-ethnic relation, introduction of new system of productions and the subjective experiences of the indigenous people forms a major part of discussion. Besides the debate between 'indigenous' and the 'others' that got constructed by the process of migration and settlement occupied the central part of discussion in that political period. Some of the underlying phenomena associated with such process was the period of economic (land-alienation, encroachment), cultural crisis (language crisis) that gave rise to sub-nationalism and the growth of different organization and movement that altered the social landscape of the society. The construction of Assamese identity and its manifestation in the form of assertion for separate identity has also been discussed along with the theories of multi-culturalism, recognition theory, redistributive justice theory etc. The constitutions of different policies and acts to protect the interest of the ethnic groups and communities and its failure that had galvanizing outcomes in the form of ethnic movements, ethnic insurgency, violence and conflicts have also been the subject of analysis.

The final chapter 'Karbi Anglong Autonomous Movement' locates the identity question in the autonomous movement of Karbi Anglong, the largest district of Assam. The chapter begins by giving a detail description on the background of the district, the formation of hill district, and a brief introduction on the Karbi's. Tracing the genesis of ethnic identity question among the Karbis occupies the central part of discussion in this chapter. The next part entails, locating the practice of autonomy in terms of the functioning of the district councils in the region: its problem and prospects that is deeply rooted with the ethnic aspiration of its people. The chapter also attempts to understand the growth of ethnic

insurgency, in the region under the context of state-council relationship and inter-ethnic conflict is centered on the issue of 'land-alienation' and 'land- encroachment. Beside this, the transformation of land-identity relationship among the Karbis owing to implementation of different land policies, and the change in the demographic composition of the region along with the introduction of new forms of practices consequently gave more impetus to the identity struggle followed by macabre outcomes.

Chapter 2

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

Chapter 2

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND THEORITICAL PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION:

The concept of ethnicity is an important concept that has not been a context of study for any one discipline rather different discipline has engaged in understanding and studying ethnicity from different perspectives, under different context producing multiple definitions on the concept of ethnicity. Arriving at a single definition and single perspective, rejecting the diverse disciplinary understanding and assumption of the subject of knowledge would mean disregarding the knowledge of the discipline (Yinger, 1985). The growing academic interest in the study of ethnicity followed by its use in legislative and administrative matters is the consecution of the bearing social change that the society have been undergoing, marking the existence and visibility of such phenomena's that gives enough scope of study (Eriksen, 1994). Hence, comprehensive understanding of the concept demands the need for revisiting the theoretical assumptions and perspectives proposed by different disciplinary works. However the quality of ambiguousness that the concept holds, allowing for several interpretations (academic and institutionalized interpretation) allows for misconception and misunderstanding cultivating fallacious understanding of the concept (Malesevic, 2004). Ethnicity hence can also be defined as a vague and conceptually contested phenomenon, symbolizing shared identity.

ETHNICITY:

The term 'ethnicity' is derived from the Greek term 'ethnos' originally used to describe pagans or heatens. However, the term was first coined and used by D Riesman a sociologist

in 1953 which, remained to be an important field of study for many disciplines including sociology (Brass, 1991; Thornton, 1999). The term ethnicity emerged as an important concept in sociology with the work of Max Weber amongst the other classical sociologist like Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim (Kumar, 2006; Malesevic, 2004)Weber defined ethnicity in terms of subjective belief of common origin, shaped by the similar physical and cultural traits and also the collective memories that the members of a group shares which further defines them as ethnic group (Weber,1968). Similar understanding on the concept of ethnicity is reflected in the work of Anthony (Smith, 1999) who, like Weber defined ethnicity in the subjective grounds of collective belonging, memories and sharing a definite boundary or space which they refer as their Homeland that defines their historical origin other than being an important element of their identity differentiating them from others. The cultural traits that embodies language, religion, traditional beliefs and practices, common descent or ancestry, shared memories and a common territory that helps in process of self identification and self differentiation or classification as well as classification by others (Brass, 1991; Eriksen, 1994; Yinger, 1987; Malesevic, 2004; Karner, 2007). The two major approaches to the study of ethnicity are i.e. primordial approach and instrumental or circumstantial approach. The primordial approach considers ethnicity as 'given' and 'fixed' that is based on blood or kinship ties. According to the primordialist formation of ethnicity is based on the cultural attachment that the members of a particular group shares which is primordial in nature. Clifford Geertz (1973) defines the cultural attachment as primordial attachment and he defines

> By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens' of existence, or, more precisely, since culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed 'givens' of social existence, immediate contiguity and live connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into particular religions community, speaking a particular language or even dialect of a language and following particular social practices. These contiguities of blood, speech, custom and so on are seem to have an ineffable, and at times,

overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, ipso facto, as a result not merely of personal moral obligation, but at least in great part, by virtue of some unaccountable import attributed to the very tie of itself (Geertz, 1973, p. 259).

The circumstantial or the instrumentalist on the other hand defines ethnicity as a multi-dimensional and dynamic phenomenon that gets constructed and deconstructed following certain social processes.

Steve Fenton (2010) postulates three models i.e. the circumstantial, situational and instrumental model to define the non-primordial aspect of ethnicity. The circumstantial model explains the non-primordial aspect of ethnicity by stating that the primary importance of ethnic identity gets defined under a particular context i.e. ethnic identity is context depended. Under the situational model-ethnicity acquires the dynamic nature that changes and gets shaped according to the change in a given situation. The instrumental model on the other hand defines the strategic importance of ethnicity where ethnicity functions as an important tool to achieve desired and required material and political needs. Phadnis (1989) views on ethnicity describes such function of ethnicity where he defines ethnicity as "a summation of impulses" and motivation for power and recognition of a group based upon its senses of cultural distinction"(Phadnis, 1989, pp. 1-6).

One of the important aspects of ethnicity that the distinguished approaches defines is the social construction of ethnicity where, under the primordialist approach ethnicity and ethnic identities in particular gets constructed on the basis of certain ascriptive feature that is pre-existing whereas, for the instrumentalist ethnicity gets produced under certain socio-economic and political conditions and in the quest for fulfilling certain goals and objectives. Culture and social context therefore forms two important building blocks of ethnicity and identity.

ETHNICITY AS SOCIALY CONSTRUCTED

Some of the theoretical understandings to the concept of ethnicity define ethnicity and ethnic identity as subjective consciousness of collective identity based on shared beliefs, values and customs. For instance Anthony Smith (1999a) defines ethnicity as "the sense of collective belonging to a named community of common myths or origin and shared memories associated with an historic homeland" (Smith 1999, p. 268). Such understandings create the concerns for analyzing and explaining how the subjective sense, the fundamental element for the formation of collective identity develops. The important function of social institutions in the process of identification forms the initial point of inquiry.

The practice of identification and recognition: important element of identity cultivates the growth of ethnic identity through the construction of 'us' and 'we' conditioned by certain social processes like socialization. Formation of such identity entails the process of internalization of subjective consciousness of commonality or sameness that gets grounded on the basis of the persistence of the ascriptive features that the members belonging to a particular group shares which in turn defines their identity. The concept of ascription was first introduced by anthropologist Ralph Linton in 1936. "The basic, widely accepted position on ascription by Linton, Davis and Parsons is that it is useful for society to ascribe functions in the division of labor so that socialization for various roles can be successfully carried out" (Kemper, 1974, p. 1). Socialization plays a very important role in the formation of the ascribed status that functions towards the generation of subjective consciousness enhancing solidarity and cohesiveness. Linton (1936) mentions that "the earlier… training for a status can begin the more successful it is likely to be" (As cited in Kemper, 1974, p. 854) The internalization of certain socio-cultural element i.e. the defining factors of an ethnic group accompanies the growth of self. Such construction of self through the process of socialization is studied by Mead who argues that socialization trains an individual to be a suitable social

being by inculcating and internalizing the values and norms of the society and group with which the individual identifies. This process in another term contributes to the development of social self which Mead refers as 'Me' (Mead, 1934).

Social institution constituting certain norms and values performs salient function in the crafting the subjective sense of identity among the individuals. B. Malinowski (1960) defines the norms and rule of the institution as "The rules or norms of an institution are the technical acquired skills, habits, legal norms, and ethical commands which are accepted by the members or imposed upon them" (Malinowski, 1960, p. 52). It is through the acceptance that the process of identification begins and the self gets constructed. This sense of self in relation to a particular group or community developed through internalization of certain common traits then becomes the reference point to differentiate the 'others'. One of the important aspects that need to be mention is that as the actions of the actors defines the social organization of the group to which he belong, these actions are further synchronized with the societal norms and values that are introduced through the process of socialization. Pierre Bourdieu (1990) in his concept of 'habitus' state the important role that socialization plays in imbibing the values, norms, of the society to which he belong that, in a way is constructing human action and behavior.

Different cultural elements are employed in the ascription and socialization process like language, traditional beliefs and practices, history and memories etc for generating group cohesiveness through identification. Smith (2009b) while analyzing different approaches to the study on 'nationalism' mentions that the ethno-symbolist regards the use of 'symbolic resources' (culture, language, traditions, culture, and history) as a strong medium for generating subjective consciousness, intensifying collective actions.

Apart from these customary laws plays a pertinent role in protecting the ascriptive identity as well as the unique cultural features that the group possesses. This element that includes laws and sanctions further governs the lives of the members and their actions which define their ethnic membership in a particular group. Amongst such rule and laws the rule of endogamy plays an important role in maintaining or regulating ethnic membership. "Where ethnic groups are regarded as discrete the rules assigning members to a particular group will be rigidly enforced, endogamy will be stressed and primary affiliations between separate discrete groups will be discouraged" (Wilkie, 1977, p. 74).

The important necessity of laws in society for the persistence of solidarity, collective consciousness, societal values, norms, beliefs and practices required for maintaining order and passive social relation between members of society and groups is reflected in the work of Emile Durkheim (1893). Durkheim in his work on 'Division of Labor in society' (1893) defines two types of law i.e. repressive and restitutive law found in two different types of society – primitive and modern society. These laws backed by sanctions prescribes the general code of conduct that the members belonging to a particular society or groups are required to be followed in order to retain their affiliation with the group or society that determined his identity and existence. Michael Foucault defines this process as 'Art of Governance' whereby social order and conformity is performed by disciplining the individual subject whom Foucault refers as 'docile bodies' (Cohen & Foucault, 1978).

One of the salient attribute of the ascription principle is the context of 'imagination' that cultivates the feeling of togetherness or belongingness unifying the members, thereby sustaining the group. Louis Althuser in his work on 'ideology' mentions about the notion of imagination that is embedded in social relationships that also defines social existence (Ferretter, 2006). For instance, the ideology of the bourgeoisie is the ruling ideology, which determines their social existence in terms being the dominant group in society that is

expressed in the relationship that they share with the bourgeoisie. Similarly, the subjective imagination (subjective consciousness) of belonging to a particular ethnic group based on certain ideology defines their social existence in terms of the relation that they share with other groups. Ideology hence helps in forming an imaginary relation between individuals and groups or within the members of a group based on certain factors that may be ascriptive in nature, that shapes and defines their true social relation based their social existence. It is however important to note that by social existence Althuser refers to the material conditions. Similarly Eriksen (1994) in defining ethnicity have employed the concept of 'class', defining how 'ethnic identity' forms as an important determinant of 'class identity' and he mentions that

> There may be a high correlation between ethnicity and class, which means that there is a high likelihood that persons belonging to specific ethnic groups also belong to specific social classes. There can be a significant interrelationship between class and ethnicity, both class and ethnicity can be criteria for rank, and ethnic membership can be an important factor in class membership. Both class differences and ethnic differences can be pervasive features of societies, but they are not one and the same thing and must be distinguished from one another analytically (Eriksen, 1994, p. 11).

This further shows how the construction of subjective consciousness takes place on the basis of certain given factors that defines an ethnic group which differs from the instrumentalist approach that defines ethnicity as an entity that has been constructed or created by individuals or groups and is not a given entity (Kumar, 2006). J Nagel (1994) mentions that the ethnic boundaries and identity are not fixed or static it is rather a dynamic entity.

When individual and groups enters into interaction they present their identity on the basis of what the situation demands, which signify that, the process of self-classification and classification by others differ in various situation, thus making ethnic identity susceptible to

change 'situationally'. Constructionist view ethnicity as embodying the feature of multidimensional and dynamic in nature. The development of national identity forms an important aspect in the understanding of social construction of identity. Benedict Anderson's (1991) work on nationalism elaborates the process of social construction where Anderson argues that national identity is the product of diverse socio-cultural and historical factors that collaboratively reproduces the collective imagination of belonging to a particular nation. However Anthony Smith (1996) employs both the primordialist and instrumentalist understanding to define the formation of ethnic and national identity.

PERFORMING ETHNIC IDENTITY: DIFFERENCIATION AND IDENTIFICATION

Ethnicity is both performed-where individual and groups engage in ethnic presentation of self and performative where ethnic boundaries are constituted by day to day affirmations, reinforcements, and enactments of ethnic differences. Ethnicity is thus dramaturgical, situational, changeable and emergent (Joane Nagel, 2000).

In reference to the former understanding on construction of ethnic identities one important question that needs to be dealt is how the process of identification and differentiation enters into practice. Fredrick Barth (1969) identifies the relation between ethnicity and culture as not based solely on shared similar traits that helps in group internalization but rather it is the cultural differences that helps both in the process of self- identification by the members and self differentiation by themselves and other. The process of classification does not occur in isolation rather, it is developed through the process of interaction. The study on classification system and its origin was undertake by Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss (1963) who have studied different forms of social classifications in different societies, in the quest to find out the different basis for classification. They argues that the modes of classification is based on

several factors like social origin, classification in reference to nature, like symbolic classification, classification in relation to the evolutionary social progress etc. however the main argument that they postulates is that all forms and modes of classification is determined by the social organization of a society that gives birth to different cognitive categories of classification(Lehman, Durkheim, Mauss, & Needham, 1964).

As Barth argued that the formation of categories takes place through interaction, it is important to understand how ethnic identity is produced and reproduced in the everyday process of interaction. Joane Nagel (2000) talks about the performative aspect of ethnicity where she argues that ethnicity is defined in terms of performance or enactment (presentation of self) of the individuals and groups ethnic identity in the process of social interaction that represents the distinctiveness of ethnic groups. Eriksen (1994) mentions the importance of mutual recognition between the groups in order to sustain interaction between the groups. He argues that mutual recognition between ethnic groups and communities constitutes a necessary element in the communication process, as it is only through recognition that the cultural differences gets communicated between the groups in integration. Apart from the factor of mutual recognition, language sets to be under perquisite element for communication.

J. Habermas (1985) in his 'Communicative action theory' defines language as one of the most powerful tool for communication that not only helps the actors in interaction to organize their action but also helps in developing mutual understanding between the actors interacting or communicating in a particular setting.

This defines how ethnic identities are created and recreated or constructed and deconstructed through the interaction process that leaves the scope for evaluation of group in relation to the other also facilitating the self evaluation of the members belonging to the particular group.

The construction of self and development of ethnic identity can be understood with the help of two important theories- Identity theory and social identity theory.

Identity theory defines identity as individuals association with the norms; values of the society that shapes and defines his behavior, social identity theory on the other hand focus on the psychological association or relation that an individual shares with the group and also with other groups (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). One of the similarities in both the theory is their analysis of social development or construction of self which according to J. Stets, P. Burke (2000) develops through the act of 'reflexivity'. They argue that "In general, one's identities are composed of the self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization or identification in terms of membership in particular groups or roles" (Stets & Burke, 2000, pp. 225-226).

One of the major challenges that the ethnic group faces is maintaining group identification to avoid the loss of group membership, which takes place when the group fails to protect the identity, falling into negative stereotyping of the group and its constituent members. In order to avoid the experience of being the minority or oppressed group, the individual members in many case decide to opt the status of belonging to deprived or disadvantaged group in terms of their individual position in the society rather than the status or identification of belonging to a lower, minority group in collective sense (Ethier & Deaux, 1994). Ethnic identification and its relation to the socio- economic status of the group act as a catalyst in ethnic mobilization where individual calculates the benefits, advantage from the cost invested in terms of money, labor etc and when individual finds that their association with the group is not benefiting his 'socio-economic status' or position he may leave his ethnic affiliation (Hanah Ayalon, Ben-rafael, & Sharot, 1986).

Individual hence is caught up between his individual identity and his social identity. This shows how the social identity or the identity of belonging to a particular group, sharing and practicing common culture i.e. the process of self- description of ethnic identity is 'context dependent'(Kinket & Verkuyten, 1997).

The process of ethnic identification in terms of belonging to a particular group entails the process of self-evaluation where, the members evaluate their social self with the other social categories or groups. The ethnic self evaluation is basically the evaluation of the self-esteem as the member of a group that is exposed to change in different situation or context. This self evaluation process has two facets where, on the one hand it can act as catalyst in the construction of ethnicity and on the other hand it can hamper the ethnic identification process whereby members would refrain to accept the low self esteem of the group identity that may led to social disorganization which further shows that the inter-ethnic relation between different groups in larger socio political context has strong effect on the in-group relations. Some of the effect of ethnic heterogeneity on social cohesion of ethnic group can be identified as the feeling of anomie, gap in mutual or collective understanding, failure to develop collective action for achieving collective goal, social disorganization etc (Van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014) .

FACTORS OR CONDITIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR AFFECTING SOCIAL COHESION

Belonging to a cultural community, then admits much variation and is not homogenous in nature. Some members might share all its beliefs and others only a few, and the former might differ in their interpretation of or degrees of allegiance to these. Again, some might scrupulously follow all its practices and others only a fewS, and they might do for a social, cultural or religious reasons, or to be over determined by all three. Since reason for following practices are inscrutable to others and sometimes to the agents themselves, we have no means

of knowing how committed others or we are to our culture. Membership of a cultural community thus varies in kind and degree and is sometimes a subject of deep disagreement. Every community lives with this ambiguity and uncertainty (Parekh, 2000: 148).

Similar to the concept of ethnicity, the terms social cohesion embodies multiple definition with the growth of different lines of work on the subject. Friedkin, (2004) defines social cohesion as "[s]ocial cohesion is the causal system that determines individuals membership attitudes and behaviors"(Friedkin, 2004, p. 441). Amongst some of the factors responsible for affecting social cohesion, migration and immigration can be identified as one of the vital factor that creates the problem of integration and assimilation in society. The settlement of the migrant groups in the lands of other ethnic group generates inter ethnic competition over scarce resources which the migrant group strives to occupy for sustaining their livelihood which is resisted by the inhabitants of the region who defines themselves to be indigenous and claim their rights over the land in terms of being the first occupants in that particular territory that provides a basis and to claim their right over the territory (Gans, 2001). The concept of power is rooted in the struggle over resources both material and non material. However in the case of intergroup struggle of conflict the concept of power needs to be understood in collective sense where power becomes an important requisite for the group to function and maintain their rights and identity (Goldman, 1972). The relative seize of the out group impacts the competition where the larger the seize of the group the bigger is the threat factor that, not only affects the inter group relation but also affects the social cohesion within the group (van der Meer & Tolsma, 2014).

This form of competition and conflict over resources, power can be understood as the basis of ethnic stratification. Noel (1968) identifies 'ethnocentrism', 'competition', and 'differential processes between the ethnic group within a particular social setting as factors responsible for ethnic stratification. "Ethnic stratification is a system of stratification wherein some relatively

fixed group membership (e.g., race, religion, or nationality) is utilized as a major criterion for assigning social positions with their attendant differential rewards" (Noel, 1968, p. 157).

Apart from this economic and cultural loss is another factor affecting social cohesion. When the members belonging to a particular ethnic group develops the feeling of being alienated in their own lands in terms of their recognition, rights, etc that creates the feelings of anomie. Parekh (2000) in his discussion of multicultural society mentions

> …since human beings are attached to and shaped by their culture, and their self respect is closely bound up with respect for it, the basic respect we owe our fellow- humans extends to their culture and community as well. Respect of their culture also earns their loyalty, gives them the confidence and courage to interact with other culture and facilitates their interaction into wider society (Parekh, 2000, p. 196).

However it is important to note that these factors affecting the social cohesiveness may also act as driving force in ethnic mobilization sustaining collective action in pursuance of certain common goals of the group. Cartwright (1968) defines

> The term group cohesiveness has come to have a central place in theories of group dynamics. Although different theorists attribute somewhat different conceptual properties to the term, most agree that group cohesiveness refers to the degree to which the members of a group desire to remain in the group. Thus, the members of a highly cohesive group, in contrast to one with a low level of cohesiveness, are more concerned with their membership and are therefore more strongly motivated to contribute to the group's welfare, to advance its objectives, and to participate in its activities (as cited in Friedkin, 2004, p. 412).

ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

Susan OLzak (1983) defined "Ethnic mobilization is the process by which groups organize around some feature of ethnic identity (for example, skin color, language, customs) in pursuit of collective ends" (Susan Olzak, 1983, p. 355). Mobilization of individual on ethnic lines is

a pre-requisite factor for the formation and sustenance of an ethnic movement as the collective actions forms the determining factor in ethnic struggle. Hence, one of the important aspects in ethnic competition is the role and function of the ethnic group in persuading the members of the group to participate in the struggle for sustaining collective action. Klandermans, (1984) identifies 'participation' and 'persuasion' as two important factors that determine the nature of mobilization. Klandermans argues that:

> Individual decisions to participate in a social movement are based on perceived costs and benefits of participation. That perceived reality is capable of being influenced, and both social-movement leaders and adversaries try to do so. Persuasion is an important element in every mobilization campaign. The efficacy of a mobilization campaign in persuading the individual is a key determinant of participation (Klandermans, 1984, p. 584).

Ethnic mobilization speaks of the growing nature of ethnic movements and ethnic conflicts in different parts of the globe, where the members of the ethnic groups demand and fight collectively for issues ranging from identity crisis, resource allocation, political action, security etc. These factors further define the crisis of the social cleavage or stratification that has been widening by the social changes that the society undergoes. Several theories like the relative deprivation theory, social exclusion theory, social stratification theory, development theory discusses on the problem of unequal distribution of resources, uneven growth and development, problem of social recognition, and its relation to the growth of competition and conflict among different groups and communities in the society, fostering ethnic movement in many places. Therefore the relationship that ethnic mobilization shares with the emerging social movements, and the factors associated with it needs to be understood within a particular context or social conditions.

Paul Brass (1991) discusses the salient role that the elites or the native aristocrats play, in mobilizing the members of a particular ethnic group to compete with the other groups by

manipulating its ethnic symbols. Brass identifies language and religion as the most potential tools or symbols in promoting solidarity enhancing mobilization. He further identifies some of the factors that defines and determining the nature and function of an ethnic group.

> Whether or not an ethnic group, mobilized by its disgruntled elites to a growing sense of communal solidarity, goes on to make major political demand and how far it succeeds depends principally in four factors- the persistence or the perception of the persistence of unequal distribution of resources either against the advantage or to the advantage of the group, the degree to which the process of building communal consciousness is involved the creation of the organization resources necessary to build a political movement, the response of the government to the demands and the grievances of the group and the general political context (Paul R Brass, 1991, p. 41).

Some of the theories that explain the factors responsible for ethnic mobilization and ethnic movements are:

- **MODERNISATION AND DEVELOPMENT THEORY**

Anthony Smith in his work on '*Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*' (2009) defines the growth of ethnic communities and ethnic movements as "…hybridization and the fragmentation of national identity…'(Smith, 2009, p. 12). It is in the same context Smith mentions Gellner (1983) theory on modernization in understanding the formation and growth of nation. The pioneering account of Gellner work can further be employed in reflecting on the growth of ethnic movements, ethnic assertion and conflict. Gellner's theory defines the dynamic relation of modernization and the disintegration of traditional societies that develops new patters of identification and differentiation, replacing the older. Besides, with unequal distribution (rights and resources) forming a primary characteristic of modern society, new grounds for differentiation emerged with economy as its base. Economy then, in

its per-formative aspect i.e. growth, development, indicating progress and civilization, classifying and categorizing groups provided new grounds for contestation and conflicts. Gellner further argues that it is under such circumstances that ethnic movements get formed where the leader of a ethnic group mobilizes their what he refers as 'Co-cultural proletariat' to initiate the struggle.

Susan Olzak (1983) talks about how the development and progress, product of modernization plays an instrumental role in ethnic mobilization and rise of ethnicity in contemporary period, that gives an idea about the power or importance of ethnic identity in the time of progress and development. This also reflects how traditions, beliefs, values that gives rise to ethnic consciousness enhancing solidarity have not been eroded in the age of 'reason' and 'rationality' which differ from the views of Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim who argued that with the growth of capitalism, emergence of private property, secularization and rationalization, growth of division of labor, the factors contributing to the growth of consciousness will be taken over or replaced with reason (Kumar, 2006).

Karl Marx in his class theory proposed a model explaining the structure of the society, its institutions where he placed economy as the base of society above which the superstructure rests which contains religion, culture, traditions, kinship etc. Marx argued that it is the economy that comprises of the relations of production and modes of production that defines the superstructure and change in the relations of production eventually brings change in the superstructure. Ethnic consciousness is shaped by the elements present in the superstructure which according to Marx fades away with the growth of class consciousness where members of a group identifies themselves in relation to the production in terms of 'owners' and 'workers' rather than identification on the basis of other socio- cultural factors. D. V Kumar (2006) looks at the relationship between 'modernization' and 'ethnicity' through the work on classical sociologist where he mentions:

Marx did not give much theoretical space to the concept of ethnic group as he was more concerned with class and class consciousness. For him ethnic group was a super structural category whose significance would decline with the increase significance of class. Ethnicity represents a false consciousness. But like other forms, false consciousness will disappear as class consciousness develops inexorably following intension of class consciousness (Kumar, 2006, p. 43-44).

Sinisa Malesevic (2004) provided three conception of Marx notion of ethnicity: "1. the primacy of the economic base over the cultural and thus ethnic superstructure 2. ethnic particularity as an obstacle to the universal progress of humanity as a whole 3. the historical ascendancy of class over ethnic identity" (Malesevic, 2004, p. 14).

Similarly, Emile Durkheim did not provided much theoretical understanding to the concept of ethnic group. "Durkheim too did not define ethnic groups and ethnicity, in precise time anywhere, though he expected the significance of ethnicity to decline in the face of modernization" (Fenton 1999: 100) "Durkheim's theory of ethnic relations is focused mostly on three interrelated sets of topics: the decline of ethnicity with the arrival of modernity; the nature of (ethnic) group solidarity; and the perception of an ethnic group as a form of moral community" (Malesevic, 2004, p. 18)

However, although Weber talked about how "The growing disenchantment of world is a product of modernity" he defined ethnic group in terms of members that share certain shared, common elements and knowledge that defines them as an ethnic group. Weber further mentioned that formation of a political community facilitates ethnic mobilization and collective action. (Weber, 1968, P. 28).

- **RELATIVE DEPRIVATION THEORY**

"The concept of relative deprivation (RD) in the study of social movements is practically as old as sociology itself" (J.Tierney, 1982 pp. , p. 33). Gur (1970), Morrison (1973) have been the early scholars whose works have been prominent in the conceptual and theoretical understanding of the relative deprivation theory who defines deprivation in terms of relative discrepancy between 'achievements' and 'expectations' or desires.

> Relative deprivation is the result of a social comparison which implies that the person making the comparison is not receiving valued resources to which he or she feels entitled. Thus relative deprivation is a perception that an expectation has been violated (the cognitive component) as well as the feeling of injustice, dissatisfaction, discontent and, outrage at this violence (affective component) (Grant & Brown, 1995, p. 195-196).

Relative deprivation can therefore be understood as the conditions that create discrepancy between expectations i.e. the belief and what is given i.e. the reality. Deprivation may occur in both individual and collective level and one of the basic criteria in estimating the level of deprivation is through comparison. The in-group and out-group comparison further cultivates the feeling of deprivation and subordination on the one hand and superiority and gratification on the other hand that classifies people into two groups i.e. the deprived and non-deprived (Davis, 1959). The state of deprivation therefore corresponds to the growth of collective behavior:

> Relative deprivation (RD) theory elaborates the moral outrage explanation for collective behavior. The RD argument contains two essential parts: (1) Some aspect of the distribution of outcomes (such as the magnitude of inequality or a change in prosperity levels) causes feelings of deprivation (such as discontent, outrage, resentment, or perceived injustice), and (2) feelings of deprivation are associated with individual willingness to engage in collective behavior (Martin, Brickman, & Murray, 1984, p. 485)

Various factors can be associated with the state of deprivation. Runciman identifies four factors of relative deprivation:

> We can roughly say that [a person] is relatively deprived of X when (i) he does not have X, (ii) he sees some other person or persons (possibly including himself at some previous or future time) as having X (whether or not that is or will be in fact the case), (iii) he wants X, and (iv) he sees it as feasible that he should have X (Runciman, 1966, p. 10).

This further develops the feeling of unfairness, subordination, superiority, social distance, frustrations (Davis,1959). "Frustration and discontent develop if there is marked discrepancy between an individual's perception of his value expectation and value position" (Majeed, 1979, p. 140). The nature of deprivation can further vary from economic to cultural deprivation or can be analyzed in material and non- material terms. Nancy Frazer (1997) in her theory on 'recognition' and 'redistribution' mentions two types of inequality that i.e. the socio –economic injustice which includes exploitation, economic marginalization, deprivation and cultural or symbolic injustice in terms of unequal pattern of representation, cultural domination and oppression etc. The cultural or symbolic injustice can also be understood in terms of status inconsistency that can be understood in terms of upward or downward status mobility of a group which is analyzed in terms of intergroup comparison. "Relative downward mobility refers to the felt loss of status experienced by a group which observes a previously inferior group closing the gap between them" (Geschwender, 1968, p. 130). It is this inconsistency that triggers anxiety, frustration, which works as the motivation factors where members collectively strive to end the inconsistency.

Lean Festinger (1957) in his 'theory of cognitive dissonance' talks about the issue of 'consistency' that individuals and groups in society strive to achieve to avoid the conflict between ideology that defines that beliefs, values and attitudes that one holds and its place in reality. Festinger further mentions that, the inconsistency or dissonance gets resolved once

people are able to rationalize the gap between their understanding of reality and the existential reality, that act as factors triggering motivation, frustrations, disappointment etc that calls for different actions which gets manifested in the forms of movements, protest , revolutions etc. James C Davis (1959) in his 'theory of revolution' identifies the fear of loss, frustration in terms of anticipated reversal or gap in socio economic development as some of the factors that leads to revolution. He further states that: "It is the dis-satisfied state of mind rather than the tangible provision of "adequate" or "inadequate" supplies of food, equality, or liberty which produces the revolution" (Davis, 1962, p. 6). These forms of dissatisfaction at times are transformed into important tools for mobilizing the members of a group to combat against other groups for their rights, status, power, resources etc that results in competition and conflict among ethnic groups.

Bourdieu's (1979) analysis of 'social capital' can be applied here to understand how social capital in terms of network of relationships helps in sustaining collective actions to achieve desired goals or objectives. The concept of 'social capital' has remained an important subject of enquiry in the discipline of sociology that is reflected in the works of both classical and contemporary scholars. Emile Durkheim mentions about the important role of social capital in maintaining solidarity and cohesiveness that ward off the problem of anomie that perturb the social relations that individual and group shares. Karl Marx analysis of social capital is reflected in his understanding of the development of class consciousness i.e. the transformation of the group from 'class-in-itself' to 'class-for-itself'(Portes, 1998).

ETHNICITY AND RECOGNITION

Charles Taylor in his theory on 'recognition' defines recognition as a fundamental aspect of human identity that shares a symbiotic relation. Taylor defines recognition as a constructed phenomena where, the identity of 'us' as a group gets defined by the way the others i.e. the 'them' recognizes.

This clearly defines how ethnicity and identity gets produced through social processes It is therefore the situation that creates demand for the construction of ethnic identity on different grounds to achieve certain common goals of the group. Some of the forces that set the requirement for the construction of ethnic identity can be identified in terms of both material and non-material aspects.

The situation of identity crisis that the group faces in terms of external forces like migration, birth of modern society that has a tremendous effect on the loss of traditional beliefs and practices , culture etc. forces the group to construct and maintain their separate or distinct identity. "But people(s) may be deprived of their culture, and thence there is a need for 'cultural conservationism', a mode of thinking (often present in multiculturalism), in which cultural authenticity must be protected like a rare species"(Grillo, 2003, p. 160).

In such cases ethnicity also enters the realm of performance, whereby the members of an ethnic group, forms different organizations to retain their ethnic identity. Apart from this the ethnic or cultural festivals that are celebrated across the goal, defines the actions of the individuals and the groups as the act of engendering their identity in the diverse social setting by performance or presentation of their cultural distinctiveness. These celebrations also provide the platform for the members of a particular group or community to come together and participate, enhancing solidarity. For instance, the 'karbi youth festival' a ethnic festival of the karbis, an ethnic group of Assam is regarded as the largest and oldest festival of the

North east that celebrate its heritage and cultural distinctiveness. Apart from the celebration part, the main agenda is reclaiming, reviving, and recognizing their culture and identity. Another important aspect of this festival is the role and contribution of youth towards the festival in organizing and participating events where the 'karbi cultural society' (karbi organization) believes that it is the youth who need to take forward the legacy or heritage of the Karbis preventing it from fading or eroding. D. Gass (2000) identifies such cultural performances as the process of cultural production. Gass defines cultural production

…as sites of social action where identities and relations are continually being reconfigured. Often this process is imperceptible, with the event appearing as a mere affirmation of the relations that already exist. At other moments, however, groups will use a festive form to shift the way in which history is told, to rethink the boundaries of a community, or to reconsider issues of race and ethnicity (Guss, 2000, p. 12).

This kind of cultural practices not only helps in growing cultural consciousness which further enhance group identification, but also an expression of a group or community's history, its validity, that defines the claims and rights for which they contest. Miller refers "For cultural consciousness, insofar as it entails an insistence upon the validity of the history, art, literature, and world view of a particular people, translates directly or indirectly into an insistence upon that validity in the inter- and intra-cultural arenas of power" (Miller, 1981: 32).

One significant aspect that needs to be identified in regard to the celebration of ethnic festival is the representation of the idea of 'dominant group' and the 'minority group'. In many of the ethnic festival the dominant group in terms of being majority in population, early inhabitants, etc make use of such festival to assert their power and dominance over other minority ethnic groups in a symbolic manner. Eric Kaufmann (2004) defines 'indigenousness' and 'power' as two important element of ethnic dominance. The expression of dominance can be further

understand in the context of rights, privileges, identity, status of ethnic groups that are been contested. However every ethnic group chooses different medium for expressing their ethnicity. Leo Dridger (1976) mentions that every ethnic group uses different way for expressing their ethnic identity among its members in terms of self identification and to others in the process of communicating the cultural distinctiveness at different social settings. The difference in expression according to Dridger is "…because each is influenced by a particular history and culture, each has a unique sense of group identity and a specific way of expressing its ethnicity" (Dridger, 1976, p. 131).

The claim for cultural rights and the need for protecting the distinctive identity of ethnic groups take place, when external forces posses threat to the internal constituents, the determinants of identity of an ethnic group. "An Ethnic community might lose its traditional culture as when it migrates or abandons that culture in favor of another. And a culture might lose its ethnic rootedness, as when it is freely adopted by or imposed on outsiders" (Parekh, 2000, p. 154).

Industrialization, capitalism, growth of market forces, demand for labor power followed by the advent of migration can be identified as some of the potent forces of social change that the ethnic group witnesses with the growth of pluralistic or diverse ethnic group. Categories such as 'outsider' and 'insider', 'inhabitants' and 'settlers', 'minority', 'majority' etc are then developed or formulated for the classification of the ethnic groups. 'Indignity' acts as one of the major criteria in the process of classification whereby many a times the original or early inhabitants within a particular territory are identified as the majority or the dominant group who shares a strong bond or attachment with the territory which they refer as their homeland referring to the other ethnic group as minority. Eriksen (1994) defines ethnic minority as

An ethnic minority can be defined as a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population in a society, which is politically non-dominant and which is being reproduced as an ethnic category or group. Like other concepts used in the analysis of ethnicity, the twin concepts minority and majority are relative and relational. A minority exists only in relation to a majority and vice versa, and their relationship is contingent on the relevant system boundaries (Eriksen, 1994, p. 148).

It is only when the dominant ethnic group develops the fear of becoming minority in their own territory, in terms of loss of rights and claims of the group for their own lands that forms a part and parcel of their identity and livelihood, loss of access and control over the resources etc generates a situation of competition and conflict among the ethnic groups , where the group strive to achieve power in order to retain or to become the dominant group that in a way also makes them the beneficial group in the society over the other groups. Doane Jr (1997) defines " ...[D]ominant ethnic group as the ethnic group in a society that exercises power to create and maintain a pattern of economic, political, and institutional advantage, which in turn results in the unequal (disproportionately beneficial o the dominant group) distribution of resources"

This further sets the need for constructing ethnic identities on the cultural and historic lines that would provide ground for claiming their rights over their own territories in regard to different issues. Eriksen (1994) argues that the new forces give birth to new forms of ethnicity. He argues that "The spread of capitalism has also played an important part in creating conditions for new forms of ethnicity – both through local economic and cultural change and through migration" (Eriksen, 1994, p. 148). Such change or transformation calls for the need to strengthen the group identity, solidarity, which would help in formulating collective action in maintaining ethnic identity.

Identity and identification are closely related. One identifies with a body of men and women because one shares a common identity with them, and one's identification with them gives that identity a social basis, emotional energy and a measure of stability and objectivity (Parekh, 2000, p. 156).

STATE, ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC MOVEMENTS

State and its policies regarding growth and development, policies for administrative mechanism, integration and assimilation, policies aimed towards protection or safeguarding different groups and communities from exploitation or marginalization, safeguarding their traditional customs and practices enhances the process of ethnification. The failure of the policies, non-implementation, improper implementation give rise to unequal growth and development, regional disparity, internal colonialism, domination and subordination etc that gives birth to ethnic movements.(Susan Olzak: 1983). This defines ethnicity as the expression of needs, rights to equal access, equal opportunity, participation etc to end the state of deprivation and social exclusion (Bijukumar, 2013). Paul Brass identifies the process that gives rise to such ethnic movements and contribute to the growth of ethnic identity formation:

> Firstly, "within the ethnic group itself for control over its material and symbolic resources", secondly, "between ethnic groups as a competition for rights, privileges, and available resources", and thirdly, "between the state and the groups that dominate it, on the one hand, and the populations that inhabit its territory on the other" (Brass, 1991, p. 247).

Identity politics hence can be defined as the kind of politics that evolves due to incongruous relation shared between the rulers and the ruled fused with political claims for recognition. Such politics began in the 1960's, and manifested in the form of socio-political movements that gets constituted or emerges due to identity crisis sharing its roots in socio-political process of a given society. Identity crisis is therefore an experiential factor govern by both

internal and external conditions. Identity crisis at individual level was studied by Eric Erikson (1968) who mentions that such crisis is accompanied by the stages of human transition or development. Such crisis in identity politics is a matter of collective crisis that members belonging to a particular social category experiences accompanied by their historical, territorial and socio-cultural reality. These factors are hence intrinsically connected with group identity and manipulation of such defining factors under certain socio-political conditions creates the situation of identity crisis. Social movements with claims for rights, equality, justice, recognition are the aftermath of such crisis. Identity that have remained as a private aspect then gets contested in the political sphere where state plays an important role in the construction and de-construction of ethnic identity. The state practices and its relation to identity politics can be understood in the context of objectives of the identity movements as defined by Langlois (2001):

> First, they denounce injustice towards minorities. Second, they convey the idea that specific cultures must be taken into consideration when public policies are elaborated so that they meet the specific needs of minorities. Third, they demand greater control of their institutions- a demand that sometimes goes as far as self-government (Langois, 2001, p. 1)

The growth of ethnic movement which also expresses the commonality of subjected experiences of ethnic groups and communities on certain grounds can be understood in the context of 'identity crises' that gets constituted owing to the dynamic processes of society. Identity crisis is therefore an experiential factor govern by both internal and external conditions. Identity crisis at individual level is studied by Eric Erikson (1968) who mentions that such crisis is accompanied by the stages of human transition or development. Identity crises in collective form are also accompanied by social transformation that produces new categories of identities that gets hierarchically

constituted. These categories further define the social identity of groups and communities in relation to their cultural, economic, political and geographical conditions. It is when such recognition gets challenged by the ethnic groups and communities through assertion identity politics enters into the stage. Identity politics hence can be defined as the kind of politics that evolves due to incongruous relation shared between the rulers and the ruled fused with political claims for recognition. Such politics began in the 1960's, which defines the discourse of groups and communities for recognition that gets manifested through the organization of movements.

The ethnic dimension of identity politics can be understood in the context of the claim to protect and preserve the distinctive identity of a particular group that gets defined by its socio-cultural elements which includes language, traditions, customs, norms, territorial space etc. The subject of autonomy then subsumes a significant importance in such claims which also defines autonomy as a collective expression of groups and communities. Jane Wright (1999) defines autonomy with group right as

> If a 'right' to autonomy is to exist, it must exist in favor of the group: it will be the group which seeks to assert control over, for example, religious, linguistic or educational institutions and budgets. Individuals may seek to enjoy the cultural dimension brought to their lives by the flourishing of such institutions, but they do not seek to control them: that is a group matter (Wright, 1999, p. 607).

This relation between 'autonomy' and 'institution' gets reflected in the context of 'institutional autonomy'. The theory of institutional autonomy got constituted during the middle ages in Europe, which defines the legal institutions as a basis for autonomy following the competition between church, aristocracy, and middle class. "The autonomous legal institution emerged out of the fact that law became a service available and desired by people

other than the upper strata; it became the legitimate "weapon" used in kinship conflicts, economic exchanges, and political battles" (Abrutyn, 2009, p. 457)

The functioning of autonomous legal institutions reflects the practice of 'institutional differentiations' and hence the contestation for 'institutional autonomy' is basically the contestation for uneven distribution of autonomy produced by the institutions. This places the groups in uneven positions that further creates uneven power relations in terms of rights and access, where certain groups remains a beneficiary group that places the others in a disadvantage position. This creates what Abrutyn (2009) argues "monopolization of the material and symbolic resources" by a particular group on the ground of legitimacy that gives rise to the practice of inequality, dominance and dependence which according to Abrutyn generates competition, struggle between the groups.

Taylor (1994) further argues that when institutions with the purposive role of serving the needs of the public takes into account the identities of certain groups and communities in the process of distribution of rights and resources the very idea of equal recognition of every citizens gets diluted: generating the politics for recognition.

The role of institutions in producing such differentiation giving rise to identity movements also defined as identity struggle is hence the fight for protection through autonomy, promotion through recognition and equality through redistribution. Such movements can also be identified as practice of negotiation of constructed identity in public sphere with the use of different form of identity markers which forms the subject of discussion in the succeeding chapter following which the idea of institutional autonomy gets placed in the Karbi Anglong movement.

Chapter 3

Ethnicity in Assam: Markers and Assertion

But a caged BIRD stands on the grave of dreams

His shadow shouts on a nightmare screams

His wings are clipped and his feet are tied

So he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings with

A fearful trill of things unknown

But longed for still and his

Tune is heard on the distant hill

For the caged bird sings of freedom

Maya Angelou (1983)

Chapter 3

ETHNICITY IN ASSAM: MARKERS AND ASSERTIONS

INTRODUCTION

One of the primary aspects of ethnicity is the process of 'identification', where the markers of identity subsume a symbolic and functional role. Similarly, lack of identification or recognition forms a central element in the growth of ethnic movements and ethnic assertion. The functional role of such element needs to be understood in relation to the practice of social exclusion; an important variable in defining and constructing the social identity of groups and communities. "An additional relative feature is that social exclusion depends on the extent to which an individual is able to associate and identify with others." (Walter Bossert, 2007, p. 778). The following chapter focuses on how the process of social exclusion began in the region that produced compartmentalized identities, creating new grounds for the practice of ethnicity that gets manifested in the form of ethnic movements and ethnic assertions; generating disharmonic resonance. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses on how the process of social exclusion began in the region with the consolidation of colonial power that introduced different elements of social change in the region and how ethnicity emerged as an important aspect of identification. Under this context the colonial policies and is effects will be discussed as the formulation of different administrative and developmental policies played the crucial role of acquainting the region and its people with such changes. The second section discusses on how the policies resulted in the growth of cultural sub-nationalism in the region that altered the interethnic relation among the ethnic groups and communities. "Cultural sub-nationalism like territorial nationalism, is determined by the structure of colonial state which it both opposes and seeks to posses" (Breuilly, 1993, 216). The politics of Assamese sub-nationalism, growth of civil society, use of identity markers for ethnic mobilization; main-streaming Assamese identity, interrelationship

between ethnicity and language and the creation of ethnic identities on the basis of language, performing shifting identity forms the central aspect of discussion in this section. This section also endeavors to show how the production of Assamese as the official language of Assam cut across all the heterogeneous practices in the region, accompanied by identity crisis that impeded the growth of ethnic assertion.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Similar to the concept of 'ethnicity' the term social exclusion pertains to different notions of social reality and under different contexts. The academic literature is fused with multiple theoretical understanding and perspective of this concept that defines the complexity of this term. Apart from its significance as an important field of study in academics, social exclusion have also been an important tool of inquiry on the nature and functioning of different institutional mechanisms of society and its simultaneous effect on its constituents. The use of social exclusion by the policy makers as an indicator to classify and categorize societies on the basis of the existential condition of a society explains its functional usage beyond a particular field. However much of the general understanding to this concept do not form in vacuum but in relation to some other concepts such as 'inequality', 'deprivation', 'marginalization' etc. that emphasizes on the disparate or incongruous relationship that individual, groups and institutions shares.

> …[S]ocial exclusion is not only about material poverty and lack of material resources, but also about the processes by which some individuals and groups become marginalized in society. They are excluded not only from the goods and standards of living available to the majority but also from their opportunities, choices and life chances(Christian, Gordon, & Abrams, 2007, p. 2).

This fabricates a canvas which portraits the social conditions of individuals and groups in a particular society that is determined by the rights they are entitled to. Social exclusion also entails the denial or deprivation of social recognition of individuals and groups who are devoid of receiving the self-respect that identifies their social status in the society based on social ranking. Talcott Parson(1940) in his 'theory of stratification' mentioned about the system of ranking creating stratification. "Social stratification is regarded here as the differential ranking of the human individuals who compose a given social system and their treatment as superior and inferior relative to one another in certain socially important respects" (Parson, 1940, p. 841). Noel's (1968) theory of ethnic stratification differentiates between 'ethnic stratification' and 'social stratification'

> Ethnic stratification is, of course, only one type of stratification. Social stratification as a generic form of social organization is a structure of social inequality manifested via difference in 'prestige', 'power', and / or economic rewards. Ethnic stratification is a system of stratification wherein some relatively fixed group membership (e.g., race, religion, or nationality) is used as a major criteria for assigning social position with their attendant differential rewards (Noel, 1968, p. 157).

The conditions of social exclusion can be both 'constructed' or 'given' that determines and defines the socio-cultural and political scenario of a particular region and its people.

Hence the issue of social exclusion does not exist in vacuum but is connected with some obscure issues such as 'inequality', 'injustice', 'institutional failure' that cultivates the subjective sense of 'identity crisis' and "In most cases, both subjective consciousness and actual inequalities lead to ethnic assertions and extremist activities" (Bijukumar, 2013, p. 19). Further, the very sense of being 'deprived' and 'ostracized', experienced by certain groups and communities within a particular society under certain given conditions, develops the prerogative need for protection and recognition that gets organized in the form of movements.

The practice of social exclusion experienced by the diverse groups and communities in North East India convoy's with the transformation and change that the region and its inhabitants encountered during different epoch of time, that ranges from, drawing and redrawing of boundaries , administrative and economic changes, variance in inter-ethnic relations etc. The process of social exclusion in North East cannot be understood ignoring the phenomenon of 'inclusion' that shares a binary relation, altering the social setting of the region. The practice of 'inclusion' in terms of the migration patterns encouraged by the colonial rulers functioned mainly in favor of two parties i.e. the colonials and the migrant groups which extended in creating a situation of 'deprivation', 'marginalization' and 'exclusion' for the indigenous population in their own lands. However, Sheetal Thakur (2012) argues that the generally accepted notion of 'exclusion' with deprivation, disadvantage status and 'inclusion' with benefit, advantage position in practice may not always fall in its place. For instance the coercive inclusion process in itself generates the feeling of alienation when the individual actions gets constrained by sets of codes and norms whereas, in certain cases exclusion provides opportunities to create self rule of living, with the liberty to form own institutional ideologies and principles, although that might place them in a disadvantage position than the other groups and communities.

> Such disadvantage reflects the cultural devaluation of groups and categories of people in a society. The identity in question may relate to a distinct and bounded group of people who are defined by their distinct cultural practices and shared way of life Caste, ethnicity and religion are examples of such group identities. In practice, the dominant sections of society construct and re-construct the members of these groups or categories as persons of lesser worth through beliefs, values, attitudes and behavior which disparage, stigmatize, stereotype and discriminate (Sheetal Thakur, 2012: 15).

EXCLUSION AND ETHNICITY

Social identity develops as a crucial element in establishing the relation between exclusion and ethnicity that gets reflected in the performance of ethnic movements which constitutes on the ground of identity crisis in relatively diverse forms. "Social exclusion leads to crisis at individual level, societal level, national level and international level. Individual self cannot be located within the community which is facing some level of identity crisis. Identity crisis, in turn, problematize political boundary and national imagination of the nation state" (Thakur, 2013, p. 22). The following section strives to understand the issue of identity crisis in the lands of North East Assam and the nascent ethnic assertion in the region that is rooted with the issue of 'social exclusion' (material and non-material) that hitherto different groups and communities in the region have been facing. The change in the nature of defining or identifying North East as the 'land of cultural diversity' to 'land of conflict and violence' speaks of the vying relation that the ethnic groups and communities shares. Various factors like development, administrative policies have been responsible for such variation and exclusion that the region has witnessed since pre-colonial period till date.

SECTION- I

COLONIAL PERIOD:

…[T]he colonial days have served to create the basis of exclusion of groups, resulting in various forms of rifts, often envisaged in binary terms: majority-minority; sons of the soil'-immigrants; local-outsiders; tribal-non-tribal; hills-plains; inter-tribal; and intra-tribal. Given the strategic and sensitive border areas, low level of development, immense cultural diversity, and participatory democratic processes, social exclusion has resulted in perceptions of marginalization, deprivation, and identity losses, all adding to the strong basis of brands of separatist movements in the garb of regionalism, sub-nationalism, and ethnic politics, most often verging on extremism and secession (Das, 2009, p. 1).

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The consolidation of colonial power in Assam began in 1826 after the treaty of Yandaboo[2]. It is during the phase of colonial regime, that the region went through tremendous social change ranging from territorial landscape, inter-ethnic relations, and economic, cultural, demographic transformation, development etc followed by long term consequences. This epoch thus marked the beginning of rapid irreversible alteration of the society and its people that have also affected the process of 'identification' both between and within the groups and communities. One such example is the religious transformation among certain indigenous ethnic groups of the region that began with the coming of colonials and the establishment of Christian missionaries, introducing the practice of assimilation and transformation. T. K Oommen (2009) identifies 'state', 'civil society' as the major forces behind such transformation in North East. Oommen however considers 'Church' as the fundamental agent associated with the process of transformation and change. Another important aspect that defines and determines the nature of change is the assimilation process that entails the practice of 'shifting identities' whereby new category of 'identification' and 'differentiation' gets constituted. The course of religious transformation however had its share during the pre-colonial period largely under 'Vaishnavism' during 17th and 18th century when many of the tribes who were assimilated within the Hindu fold refrained their former religious, cultural and traditional practices and adopted a new set of identity.

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[2] Peace treaty between the Burmese and colonial rulers according to which the Burmese who intended to annex Assam to the Burmese domination renounced their rights on Assam as well as the neighboring Kingdoms. http://online.assam.gov.in/web/guest/historyofassam?webContentId=109386 Accessed on 15/82015

COLONIAL POLICIES:

- ## SEGREGATION POLICY

    The extension of colonial rule significantly altered the political geography of the region. While British annexation brought the region within the economic and political framework of colonialism, it also sealed its people within rigid territorial boundaries hitherto unknown in their history (Tiplut Nongbri, 1999, p. 3).

Colonial practice began with the assessment of land for economic and political interest that accompanied the framing and introduction of different land policies in the region encouraging substantial change, creating new challenges for the indigenous population. The creation of territorial boundaries symbolizing space for particular ethnic groups marked the beginning of the process of social exclusion for some ethnic groups both 'within' and 'outside' the demarcated space. The initial difficulty that the colonials faced from some of the hill tribes who refused to comply with the governing and developmental policies was responded through the creation of policies that regulated the geographical and setting restricting cultural interaction. "…[T]he colonial officials came to believe that the hills and plains were different entities and adopted policies severely restricting contact between them. This new perception led to a policy of strict boundary maintenance that was superimposed on a complex world of interrelationships" (Baruah, 1999, p. 29).

This marked the beginning of the phenomena of ethnic identity and the growth of identity consciousness. Although this is not a new phenomena in the region, the consolidation of British power and its policies had provided new grounds for the growth of ethnic awareness followed by ethnic mobilization. Different administrative policies that led to territorial organization aimed for political control generated the idea of ethnic homelands with the consolidation of boundaries that confined ethnic groups within particular territory restricting mobility.

One such was the inner line policy. The inner line policy that divided some parts of the region into 'excluded' and 'partially excluded area' not only altered the geographical setting but also the identity of ethnic groups as they were categorized into certain groups like 'backward', 'primitive', 'hill', 'plain' based on the geographical spaces that they occupied creating 'differences' and 'hierarchies'. James (2014) argues that "…categorizations about identity, even when codified and hardened into clear typologies by processes of colonization, state formation or general modernizing processes, are always full of tensions and contradictions" (James, 2014, p. 175). The relation of identity and territory that the ethnic groups shares is what defines the ethnic movements and conflict in the region which can also be understood in terms of practice of maintaining the differences that evolved with the construction of categories. The disciplining of space through the implementation of settlement policy transformed the indigenous relation among the ethnic groups that evolved and sustained through trade relations.

The social relation between the groups and communities clustered around the trading system which involved the exchange of goods and services that also served as a common ground for meeting and interaction were restricted with the introduction and implementation of such policies. During the pre-colonial period the Ahoms who had its kingdom in the upper Assam shared trade relation with the hill communities like the Nagas[3], where salt manufactured from the salt mines located in the area inhabited by the Nagas were appropriated by the Ahoms[4]

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[3] The **Naga people** (pronounced [naˈɡaː]) are a conglomeration of several tribes inhabiting the North Eastern part of India and north-western Burma. The tribes have similar cultures and traditions, and form the majority ethnic group in Indian state of Nagaland, with significant presence in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and some small population in Assam. (SOURCE-Wikipedia) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_people Accessed on 18/3/2015

[4] The Ahoms are the offshoot of the great Tai or Shan races that entered Assam in 1228 AD and ruled for 600 years.The original home of the Ahoms was somewhere in the Ancient kingdom of Pong. They

without any resistance from the ethnic group who in return were given military protection (Robinne, (ed.), Sadan, & (ed.), 2007). Further, the presence or existence of weekly market in the foothills of Assam Nagaland Border explains the trade relation that the hill and plain communities shares. Such interaction have also led to the growth of 'Nagamese' language (Naga and Assamese) that, explains the historical relation between the Nagas and the Assamese that began during the Ahom regime.

> Perhaps the most powerful reminder of the historical connection is the dialect called Nagamese that is alive and well. Nagamese is pidginized and subsequently creolized form of Assamese, and the Nagas use it as a lingua franca among various Naga groups that speak different languages as well as in their interaction with the people from the plains (Baruah, 1999, p. 31)

However with the objective of the colonial rulers to establish effective political and economic control, the functional and traditional hill – plain relation were plunging. The restrictive policies which for the colonials aimed at preserving and protecting the unique socio-cultural identity and practices of the hill people from the waves of transformation, turned out to be the virtual victory for the colonials that helped them to follow their agenda by restricting mobility that totally complied with their political and economic interest.

- **LAND POLICIES**

Apart from the administrative policies that segregated the ethnic groups and communities in the region by creating pockets of ethnic concentration, the land policies opened up new arenas of accommodation and diversification. Formulation of land policies emerged in association with the development of plantation economy in the region. The introduction of tea

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are genuine Shans,both in their physical type and in their tribal language and written character .(Edwart Gait, 2008, p. 78)

plantation economy not only altered the landscape of the region but also the demographic composition disrupting the traditional livelihood patterns of the indigenous people. The requirement of huge arrays of lands and its effective management set out the requirement to formulate new land policies. One such policiy was the 'Waste land Grant Rule' (1838) that gave rise to the problem of land alienation followed by land encroachment in the later period. This marked the beginning of capitalist economy in the region that introduced a new 'mode of production' replacing the older system or process of production following which large acres of land came under tea plantation.

By 1901, about one fourth of the total settled area of Assam Proper, i.e. about 6, 42,418 acres came under the tea gardens. Though the Assam land and Revenue Regulation of 1868 were introduced in Assam with their best intention of regularizing the land rights to the Assam peasantry who practiced shifting cultivation, the British became the absolute land owner. The dearth of paying land revenue on long term land leases forced many Assamese landless. The pre-colonial system of cultivating anywhere was stopped. The Assamese peasantry was totally confused with the sudden change of the land rights and the mode of cultivation[5].

Apart from the feudal land policy, British introduced the land revenue policy that emerged as another process of accumulation, appropriation and exploitation of the inhabitants. Mishra (2000) mentions among the varied interest of the British rule in Assam, the British were driven with the motive to generate revenue from the transparent lands that required the need to abolish the traditional organized labor system developed by the Ahoms. The initial implementation of revenue policy was in the lower Assam, the regions of Upper Assam experienced such change after 1838. The shift from the traditional economic institution to the

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[5] https://www.timesofassam.com/headlines/global-investment-impact-on-pre-and-post-colonial-assam/
Accessed on 19/3 2015

monetized economy created difficulties among the indigenous population followed by the initial dissatisfaction with the administrative mechanisms adopted by the British that enormously affected the livelihood of the native people.

> The British laid the basis of private property and created feudal interest on land including land and forests belonging to the tribals through the grant of 'zamindari' to landlords. The latter, known as zamindars, were to collect land revenue from the peasantry on behalf of the colonial administration. Many zamindars also indulged in importing a large number of non-tribal peasants to the tribal areas to work on their land with the intention of generating more revenue. Thus, the British paved the way for commercialization of the resources that the tribal societies had and known to be their community holdings. Each and every item of their daily use like bamboo, thatch, reed and wood in the forest, fish in the rivers and 'beels' – everything was brought under taxation (Sharma C K, 2001, P. 4792).

Such revenue administration brought notable changes such as land as a product attached with saleable value, shift from communal land ownership to private land ownership, emergence of class categories, transition in the mode of production etc. This transition can be regarded as the important factor that generated identity consciousness among the indigenous population who were experiencing a phase of economic crisis due to land alienation as they were mainly dependent on agriculture and also cultural crisis. Such transformation marked the process of exploitation and marginalization.

> The process of marginalisation goes beyond the loss of livelihood in the process of impoverishment because the marginalisation involves the deterioration of their social and cultural status. They are marginalised because along with their alienation, there is a disruption of their traditional lifestyle, social system and the cultural practices (Borah, 2014, P. 82).

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However history mentions how some indigenous tribal people resisted against such colonial policy of revenue collection in the form of imposition of taxes.

In 1860 and 1862 entire Jaintia tribe and the Garos (1852-57, 1872) rose against imposition of taxes. The Lushai-Kuki, Manipuri and many plains - Assam tribes raided British posts in 1860-90, 1891 and 1892 - 1894 respectively. There are records of Aka / Khamti resistances - 1835-1839; Naga resistances -1835-1852, and even an agrarian movement in 1893-94.The Sonaram (1902), Kuki (1917) and Jadonang- Gaidinliu movements (Singh 1982, Das, 1989) symbolized early ethnic struggles (N. K. Das, 2009, P. 2).

LAND, POLICIES AND MIGRATION

The land- identity relation was further challenged with the step undertaken by the colonials to meet the labor demands i.e. employing of cheap labor forces from different parts of the country which was a vital 'means of production'

''Assam's immense economic potential, coupled with the reluctance of the indigenous people to do toilsome and hard work, and absence of capital and entrepreneurship made such immigration imperative''(Das, 1980, P. 850). Sanjib Baruah (1999) also provide accounts of how the economic transformation developed as a major gateway encouraging immigration as the demand of labor power was not fulfilled by the local peasantry who refused to invest their labor as wage workers for the colonials. Baruah further identifies some other factors of development such as discovery of coal and oil fields, construction of railways favored demographic growth in the region. Similar instance took place in the region of Kerala where migration of the local workers from the region to the Gulf, created shortage of labor force that was meet with the migration of workers from different parts of the countries.

Such economic factors attracted migrants to come and work in the region that had its effect in the demographic composition which eventually gave rise to political turmoil. The land which was already diverse in terms of cultural, linguistic and religious population had included new categories with the advent of migration and their assimilation within the larger society. Such processes had further widened the land- identity issue which was already taking its toll.

As recorded in the 1901 Census Report of India, as many as 5.97 lakh people were brought to Assam during the preceding decade alone to meet the requirements of the tea industry (Goswami, 2001, p. 126).

The forces of migration contributed in adding pressure to the problem of land alienation that the indigenous groups of the region were facing, however benefiting towards the growth and development of the industrial sector that fulfilled the main requirement of the colonial agenda. As extensive amount of land already came under tea-plantation, cultivable land felt short for agricultural production and it was the peasant community who had to bear the short coming in lieu of fulfilling their survival needs. The 'direct consumption' pattern thus got affected in the process of generating 'indirect consumption' whereby the natural resources works as the means to conduce in the production of consumable goods.

Marx idea of 'Metabolic Rift' as the agenda of the migrant group to work and settle in the region by occupying land, functioned against the interest of the inhabitants who started developing the fear of being alienated from their own land, a central source of their economic and cultural identity can be applied for the understanding of the particular social context. Sharma (2001) argues that the traditional practice of shifting cultivation furnished enough ground for settlement that was consequently occupied by the migrants and "Secondly and indirectly, due to the tendency of the tribal's to abandon their land and shift to a different

place at the drop of a hat also contributed to their displacement" (Sharma, 2001, p. 4793). Similar observation on the impact of migration on the indigenous tribal population was drawn by Bordoloi (1991) who explains that

> The tribals in Assam generally did not like the presence of unknown people near their habitation and when they found that vacant lands adjacent to their villages were occupied by the people which differed from them ethnically, linguistically and religiously, they abandoned their villages and went more deeper towards the sub-montane areas (Bordoloi N.K, 1991, p. 77).

The assimilation of the migrants brought about several economic, social and cultural changes expanding their control over the lands and other economic activities. Eriksen (1994) explains the relation of migration, settlement and change by providing example of migration in Northern Rhodesia, employed to work in the cooper mines located in Cooperbelt region.

> There were several important changes to the social situation of these workers. They had until recently been subsistence farmers in rural villages; now they had become wage laborers in towns with a predominantly monetary economy. In most cases, their social organization had formerly been based on kinship; now they were tied to the mining enterprise through individual labor contracts. Most of the workers lived alone in the barracks. If they were married, their families were left behind in the village, at least at the early stages. Finally, they were taking part in a social system of a much larger scale and greater complexity than formerly (Eriksen, 1994, pp. 26-27).

The penetration of the migrant groups into the region defined the process of land encroachment, appropriation and accumulation that progressed into a central issue of conflict between the migrants who are identified as 'outsiders' and the inhabitants who identifies

themselves as the indigenous group bearing its right over the land. These new forms of land accumulation had produced new socio economic dynamics establishing composite power relations. The land issue thus comprehends multitude of other problems such as inter ethnic conflict, displacement issue, land use conflict, traditional land occupancy claim in clash with the settlement claim of the migrant group etc. Hence it can be seen that there is a reciprocal or mutual relation between demographic change owing to migration and change in land relation. Foster (1999) mentions how economist like Mathus and Ricado observed the relation of land exhaustion and its decreasing agricultural productivity that gets affected with the demographic pressure.

> These thinkers argued—with the presumed backing of natural law—that lands that were naturally the most fertile were the first to be brought into production and that rising rent on these lands and decreasing agricultural productivity overall were the result of lands of more and more marginal fertility being brought into cultivation, in response to increasing demographic pressure (Foster, 1999: 374).

MIGRATION AND LAND ALIENATION

The problem of land alienation began with the migration from the region of East Bengal, where the rough economic constraints created major trouble for sustaining livelihood, forcing them to search for suitable conditions for sustenance. Economist identifies growth of market, industries, available resources, sparse population as some of the factors that triggers the migration process. Similarly, the colonial 'wasteland policy' that formed the expression for the abundant availability of land for commercial or settlement purpose unimpeded new avenues for migration.

However it is important to note that prior to colonial ruling period i.e. during the Ahom regime land for settled agricultural practice was in abundance which "encourage peasant

settlement, including of those from outside the Valley, in the large areas of fallow lands"
(Sharma, 2012, p. 289).

During the colonial period the region of Goalpara in the Western frontier of Assam
experienced heavy waves of migration from the region of East Bengal. Guha (2000) identifies
the accessible wasteland and the zamindari system to extract revenues in the district as some
of the major factors facilitating the migration patterns. Baruah (1999) mentions how such
migration had made the land alienation and encroachment problem more acute. Not only the
indigenous people were disposed from their own land and identity they share with the land
like the tribes practicing shifting cultivation that defines a part of their identity and culture,
the most vulnerable were the peasant communities. "In the early parts of the new commercial
agriculture through colonization of land by immigrant, agriculturalists became the principal
way of supplying food grains and other agricultural products to the growing "modern"
sectors" (Baruah, 1999, p. 47). As the colonials were benefitted from such agricultural
practices, the settlement of migrants particularly from East Bengal were encouraged which
further resulted in the colonization of land which remained an ongoing phenomenon and a
major source of conflict in the region.

Migration however remained a continuous process in the region that began to affect the
local inhabitants as the land which was in abundance has become scarce, with the
settlement of the migrants from different district of East Bengal like Mymensingh.

> Alarming rise in the population adversely affected the rural economy of colonial Assam.
> Mass immigration and occupation of wastelands, grazing and forest reserves posed a serious
> problem. Not only by offering tempting prices the immigrants were able to purchase lands
> from the local inhabitants, but also forcible occupation of lands by the immigrants were also
> reported which seemed to threaten the survival of the indigenous inhabitants (Bodhi
> SattwaKar, 2009, p. 1).

The demographic and economic shift created new conditions that developed as a threat to the indigenous people. The immediate step undertaken by the colonial authorities to prevent the organized settlement of the migrants was the line system in the Nagaon and Barpeta region which faced heavy waves of migration and forced land settlement. The system divided the villages into three major categories i.e. 'Open village', 'Mixed village' and 'Closed village' that set the rules for settlement of the migrants where in open villages the migrants did not faced any sort of restriction in the matter of their settlement, which is however applied in closed village where their restriction is curbed. In the case of mixed village that entails the settlement of both the local and the migrants, land accessibility of the migrants was restricted within a demarcated area.

Although the line system worked on the first place which could be seen to some extent in the Nagaon district, some other parts of the region was experiencing intense migration pressure which forced to amend new ways to tackle the pertaining issue that has created a situation of crisis which required immediate action.

> The introduction of line system as a means of segregating the immigrants from the indigenous proved effective initially but its efficacy was lost for lack of seriousness on the part of officials concerned. The bureaucracy did not bother to make a survey of all cultivable waste land or take a census of all landless and make a plan for reserving adequate portion of lands for future needs (DK Lahiri, 1985, p. 138).

Hence a committee was formed that was known as Line System Committee headed F. W. Hockenhulla. The report that the committee submitted after prolonged discourse ended with two disagreeing and conflicting view where "Some members of the Committee preferred for the abolition of Line System and some favor to retain in its present form" (Bodhi SattwaKar, 2009, p. 3). The main recommendations made by the line system were:

It was then decided that the number of lines should be reduced, as far as possible. That line should be simplified and straightened with the object of allotting considerable blocks of lands to each community. It was also decided that the pattas should be annual in case of Assamese and other indigenous races so as to prevent them from transferring their land (Kar, 2013: 195).

Later a resolution was adoptedfbof were the necessity for creation of tribal belts and blocks to protect the displacement and alienation of indigenous community from their lands. The resolution included:

A. The resolution constituting the so-called Line system which have in existence in the province for over 10 years past were primarily intended against the unending flow of Bengal immigrant cultivators and took the form of constituting certain areas in which settlement of land with such immigrants were prohibited. Government agree with the committee that in future the unit for such restriction of prohibition should, where possible, be larger. They considered in the sub-montane areas it should be possible to constitute whole Mouzas or compact parts of Mouzas inhabited predominately by backward and tribal classes into "prohibited areas". Elsewhere where the whole village or a larger compact area is predominately peopled by backward or tribal classes, such village or areas may be constituted prohibited areas as constituted, immigrant cultivators shall not be allowed land either by settlement or by transfer of annual pattas, and any immigrant as taking up land or by squatting shall be evicted (Bordoloi B. N, 1991, p. 79).

LAND POLITICS

Following the resignation of Bordoloi's ministry, coalition ministry under Sir Muhammad Saadaulla came to power in 1939 that marked the beginning of land politics which actually began since the inclusion of the Surma valley districts of Sylhel and Cachar under Chief Commissioner province of Assam further intensified the migration issue that brought drastic demographic change. The inclusion was however opposed by the people of the districts who

wanted to be part of Bengal for which they started the Sylhet- Bengal reunion movement. Claiming racial, linguistic and cultural difference with the Assamese, the Bangla-speakers of Sylhet and Cachar—the Surma Valley division—protested against the administrative move which in effect meant their formal separation from Bengal.

The movement was initially supported by both the Muslims and the Hindus of the Sylhet district which later fragmented where the Muslims withheld their conjoining support on the ground of communal consciousness. "The move to unite with the East Bengal Muslims was supported by Muslims of Dacca on emotional ground. But very soon on political consideration the Muslims of Sylhet as well as Dacca gave up their demands" (Bose, 1989: 93)

The growing Muslim population in the region served by various factors gradually transformed the identity of the community from 'minority' to dominant group in terms of their numerical strength in certain parts of the region which formed a distinct identity that gave rise to communal and political consciousness. The formation of Muslim league of Assam was the fundamental step organized by the immigrant group which however was initially restricted to the Surma Valley region.

> The party gained truly provincial character when Sir Muhammad Saadulla - the most prominent Muslim leader of the Brahmaputra Valley joined the League after the Lucknow Session of the All India Muslim League in 1937 and its organization in the Brahmaputra Valley came into being in 1938 in the district of Nowgong with Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani as its President, and the Muslim League politics in Assam actually began after that (Kar, 1990, p. 37).

Apart from Saadulla, Maulana Bhasani's fight for the cause of the immigrant Muslim community protested against the removal of Line System.

On behalf of the immigrants in Assam Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasini called upon the cultivators of all communities to unite for the attainment of *Swaraj* and made a fervent appeal to the Hindu and Muslim brethren of Assam to show sympathy to the landless cultivators of Bengal taking into consideration their role in increasing agricultural productivity of Assam (DK Lahiri, 1985, p. 32)

The 'grow more food' campaign was another mechanism adopted Saadula's ministry to protect the immigrants from eviction which however was vested with the interest of maintaining the political existence of the party which required the support of the immigrants. Lord Wavell (1943), the then viceroy of India, wrote: "The chief political problem is the desire of Muslim ministers of Assam to increase the immigrations into uncultivated government lands in Assam under the slogan of 'Grow more food', but what really is to 'Grow more Muslims'."[6]

Sanoy Hazarika (1994) mentions one of the major clash between Saadulla and Gopinath Bordoloi was the conflicting political interest.

Gopinath Bardoloi knew that Saadulla's Land Settlement policy would be Disastrous for the Assamese, especially the caste Hindus who comprised the political base for congress. Uppermost in his mind as the unspoken fear that these migrations were laying the foundation for a demand by Jinnah for Assam's inclusion in a future Pakistan, by emphasizing the seize of the Muslim population and its close link with East Bengal (Hazarika, 1994, p. 64).

Bardoloi then offered Saadula to form a stable ministry which was accepted by Saadual's league ministries following the formation of a new coalition. Two main things demanded by Bardoloi was "whittling down the land settlement policy/…/and release of all political prisoners and an end to the official ban on political meeting and processions (Hazarika, 1994, p. 66).

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[6] As cited in
file:///D:/Study%20M/chap%203%20materials/Land%20of%20discord%20%20%20Down%20To%20Earth.html

The new land settlement policy under Saadaula's regime notified that only those immigrants who came to Assam before January 1st, 1938 were allowed to settled and both the landless immigrants and the indigenous people were allowed to hold less than 20 bighas of land. However, Saadula's failure to cater the issue of immigration and forced settlement under the new policy was accused by Bardoloi who demanded withdrawing of any kind of support from the Congress to this government. "Saadulla struggled on until February 1946, when elections to the province gave Congress a resounding majority in Assam" (Hazarika,1994, p. 67)

Following the absolute win of the Congress and formation of Bordoloi's ministry aggrandizement of creating blocks and belts plundered as the major concern for the ministry. New strategies to ameliorate the former situation were undertaken for which a special officer was appointed, to conduct surveys of the villages that were predominately occupied by the Tribals and backward populace.

The survey conducted by Hem Boruah, Special officer appointed for this purpose revealed that the identified villages did not everywhere form a compact area. In order to keep the compactness and continuity of the proposed belts and blocks even non-tribal majority village has to be included. As such non-tribals living in the proposed belts and blocks on the date of their creation were to be treated on the same footing with the tribals in regard to their future settlement of waste-land and transfer of patta land. But after the creation of belts and blocks only the tribal and other specified classes could get settlement within tribal belts and blocks (Bordoloi N.K, 1991, p. 82).

Such political contestation gave new categories of identification in association with 'land' that is developed through the policies of settlement. Here it is important to note how such policies constituted in order to protect certain communities based on certain historical, cultural or political factors constructed new categories within a given society limiting the

practice of assimilation and integration which later is regarded as a major cause for ethnic strife between the groups.

<div align="center">**SECTION- II**</div>

SHIFTING IDENTITIES: IDENTITY MARKERS AND ETHNIC ASSERTION

Apart from the migration of laborers during the initial phase of economic transformation that the region witnessed accompanied by myriad socio-cultural and geographical transformation, the reification of new developmental and administrative policies also created much complexities. In order to maintain 'effective' and 'inexpensive' way of administrating the region the colonials decided to coalesce the boundaries of the colonial province of Assam and the East Bengal that would facilitate the trade and commercial activities as that would ease the transportation cost enduring additional proceeds. In addition to this, another policy of assimilation was adopted whereby people from East Bengal who were exposed to the British administrative and educational institutional system in an earlier phase then the region of Assam, were encouraged to migrate, assimilate and hold certain official positions favoring colonial governance. "The Bengali officers thus came to occupy the petty clerical and supervisory positions (referred to as babus) in the government offices, courts, and later on in the emerging tea plantations" (Sharma, 2012, p. 290)

The Bengalis who occupied the official positions were identified as 'Bengali Hindus' or 'Bengali Hindu Babus' who were the recipients of the occupational opportunities that enhanced their socio-economic status than the present native population. This generated the sense of deprivation among the native people who identifies themselves as 'sons of the soil' and the rightful holder of such duties and position that had been occupied by some 'outside'. Another major cause of discontent and insecurity experienced by the indigenous population is rooted to the issue of 'language crises' that surfaced with the imposition of Bengali language

as the official language and medium of instruction in educational institutions in 1836. Soon the employment issue was taken over by the language issue that challenged the Assamese nationality. This implementation encouraged the people of the region to make strenuous effort to protect and preserve their cultural roots and identity that was withering away. This reflects how a cultural resource becomes a prerequisite factor for asserting identity claims. Will kymlicka (1995) in his study on '*minority rights and culture*' mentions that "Language issues are arguably central to both individual freedom and political community, and questions about language policy are at the heart of ethno-cultural conflict in many parts of the world" (Kymlicka Will, 1995, p. 2).

Udayan Mishra (1999) identifies two fundamental factors responsible in strengthening Assamese identity and developing national consciousness:

(a) "the struggle to regain the status of the Assamese language, and (b) the increasing pressure on cultivable land as a result of continued immigration of land-hungry peasants from neighboring East Bengal which intensified from the early part of the 20th century. While the first was a struggle led primarily by the emerging Assamese middle class which would, in the succeeding decades play an increasing hegemonic role in Assamese society, the second factor affected both the tribal and non tribal Assamese peasant who were being faced with growing land alienation" (Mishra, 1999, p. 1265)

It was the Assamese public intellectuals who initially organized the efforts to generate consciousness among the indigenous people to fight for protecting their culture and identity. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan is recognized as the first intellectual who expressed his objection against Bengali language being the medium of instruction in "Vernacular schools" (Baruah, 1999, p. 71). The emergence of Axomia Bahxa Unnati Xadini Xabha, an organization formed with the motto of standardizing Assamese language was one of the sincere effort of the Assamese intellectuals that played a major role in Assam politics in the later period.

During the initial phase different literary activities which include the task of writing and publishing in newspaper magazines were undertaken with the intended effort to strengthen Assamese identity. Different literary work in the form of magazines, newspaper, short books emerged like 'Orunodoi', 'Jonaki' which paved the way for cultural nationalism. Literature became the lament source narrating the experiences, the complex relationship of groups and society which symbolically presented the fundamental reality that formed an instrumental tool in revoking cultural consciousness. "According to cultural nationalism, members of groups sharing a common history and societal culture have a fundamental, morally significant interest in adhering to their culture and in sustaining it for generations" (Gans, 2000, p. 441). The salient function of literature in evoking cultural consciousness among specific group in defined in Miller's (1981) study on how literature as a tool is responsible in evoking 'cultural consciousnesses' in American society. Miller mentions how the 'White Europeans' made use of literature coded with their history to establish and retain their strong cultural identity in the dynamic social setting.

> Literature becomes an element in the creation of that consciousness, both insofar as it is an end in itself as art and also as a means to the further development of cultural consciousness for a specific group of people- national, regional, or ethnic. For all literature contains within it a political- social-cultural component-a general and/or specific "usefulness" in the societal arena outside itself (Wanes Charles Miller, 1981, p. 30)

Sanjib Baruah (1999) mentions that the Effort and concern for language and identity of the Assamese people was guided with the notion "that a 'developed' language is a sign of 'developed' people; so the 'development' of the language could be the road to the 'development' of the people speaking that language" (Baruah, 1999: 72).

This further contributed to the growth and emergence of several other organizations among which the birth of Axaom Xahitya Xhoba in 1917 played a dynamic role in political and

cultural reorganization of Assamese language and its people. The need for recognition is fused with the politics of assimilation and hegemony creating new cultural context and establishing that the groups occupies in the society. One of the important functions of the groups and communities in the society is then to work for 'cultural maintenance' (Berry, 1997)

> Strategies with respect to two major issues are usually worked out by groups and individuals in their daily encounters with each other. These issues are: cultural maintenance (to what extent are cultural identity and characteristics considered to be important, and their maintenance strived for); and contact and participation (to what extent should they become involved in other cultural groups, or remain primarily among themselves (Berry, 1997, p. 9)

In the case of Assam, where the region witnessed different patterns of migration in different epoch of time, those migrant groups that assimilated with the indigenous population especially the Assamese community by adopting their socio- cultural practices where never regarded as threat to the indigenous identity.

> While the tea garden labourers did not add to the pressure on land in rural Assam because they more or less confined themselves to the tea plantations, the Nepalis settled down in villages and thus there was every possibility of their coming into conflict with the Assamese peasants. But what saved the situation was that the Nepalis slowly got assimilated with the Assamese. So did the tea garden labourers so much so that a new dimension was added to the Assamese culture by the tea garden labourers …The conflict that exists between the indigenous Assamese population and the immigrant Bengali in Assam is generated because of the resistance of the latter to the process of assimilation (Sengupta, 2006, p. 124).

The identity problem that includes the linguistic, economic and cultural crisis in the region had been between immigrant Bengali Hindus and the indigenous Assamese. The conflicting relation between the two groups and the emergence of identity consciousness altered the social

structure of the region. The recognition of Assamese identity in the land of Assam which was in the verge of being overtaken by Bengali identity became the immediate prerequisite of the Assamese community who were engaged with the conscious need to protect their identity and culture. This further set the need for articulation of public opinion and support that cultivated the growth of consciousness among the masses cemented with the bond of solidarity. Eriksen (1994) argues that during the process of cultural change in the society, the cultural groups need to maintain "…[T]he continuity of that very cultural content as a justification for the continued existence and cohesion of the group" (Eriksen, 1994; 86-87)

The birth of organizations like *Axom Xahitya Xobha* and the movement for standardization and recognition of Assamese as an official language with the slogan "My mother language- my eternal love" marked the evolution of public sphere that gave larger platform to reflect at the crisis. The formations of such Sabha an public sphere advocating Assamese nationality shares similarity to some extent with the Hindutva movement or hindu nationalist movement and the creation of public sphere as discussed by Amir ali (2001) where he mentions that their major goal "seeks to firmly entrench and institutionalize the symbols, cultural norms, values and beliefs cherished by it as the only legitimate ones capable of defining the Indian state" (Ali, 2001, p. 2419)

Similarly, in Assam the movement got formatted on a regional ground and on the common ideology of making Assamese language, its culture, as the defining factor of the region. However the public sphere advocating the cultural identity of a particular group failed to take into account the interest of the diverse populations who had been the inhabitants of the region, identifying themselves with the region and its people consequently became alienated from the Assamese community who in course of time became the dominant group in the region. Even after declaring Assamese as the court language in 1873 and "replacing Bengali which had been introduced by the British in 1836" (Mishra, 1999; 1266) the language issue

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took precedence after independence with the effort of making Assamese as the official language.

INDEPENDENCE AND POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

After independence, the breakdown of the colonial Assam is marked by territorial reorganization that began with the separation of Sylhet (comprising Bengali- Muslim poluolation of East Bengal) from Assam and its transfer to Pakistan which led to decline of Bengali speaking population in the region. However with partition the region had to face the consequence of the large scale migration of Hindu and Muslims followed by the massive partition riots. Mishra (1999) mentions that even after the independence the leaders and members of different organization were occupied with the agenda of making Assamese as the official language ignoring other pertaining issues like land alienation and displacement. The failure of the leaders to take necessary interest in solving the land pressure crisis led to fragmentation in the common fight joined by different groups and communities against immigration and land encroachment. "The struggle to ensure the linguistic status of the Assamese took precedence over all other issues and the all-important question of tribal land alienation was put aside" (Mishra, 1999, p. 1265). The post independence period hence is identified with successive movements that brought new dimensions in Assam's political and cultural setting.

> The language movement that played a fundamental role in stimulating Assamese sub nationalism in the pre-independence period accelerated its demand of making Assamese as the official language in the early independence period. "In 1950 the Axom Xahitya Xobha began a campaign for recognition of Assamese as the state language and the language of education. To focus attention on these demands the Xahitya Xobha celebrate july 16 as 'state language day (Baruah, 1999; 100-101).

Subsequently, in 1959 the organization demanded the State legislative assembly to formulate the official language bill, declaring Assamese as the official language following which the official language bill was passed on 1960 creating dissatisfaction and disappointment among other communities which in practice took the form of conflict and violence creating turmoil in society. The most notorious "language riots" in assam were in 1960 and 1961, before and after the passing of the Official language bill by the state assembly" (Baruah 1999; 105). Apart from this the declaration of Assamese language as a medium of instruction and compulsory subject in educational institutions triggered violence throughout the region of Assam. Amartya Sen (2008) in account of violence, conflict and identity mentions "that reductionist cultivation of singular identities has indeed been responsible for a good deal of what we can be call 'engineered bloodshed' across the world" (Sen, 2008; 6).

Although the major resistance against the bill came from the Bengali Hindu immigrants, the Missing who belong to the Indo- mongoloid category forming the second largest tribal group after the Bodos, formed a literary organization aimed at protecting and preserving missing culture, language and their heritage. "Mising Agom Kebang, a literary organisation of the community launched cultural revivalism process to fight against the implementation of Assam Official Language Act 1960, alleging it as a means of majoritarian dominance" (Boro, 2014, p. 64). The new cultural politics of the region that made Assamese the dominant community altered the cultural diversity in the region where on the one hand, different other groups and communities specially the hill tribes started distancing and isolating themselves with the fear of losing their cultural identity and on the other hand the Muslim immigrants who came to the region during the colonial period started assimilating with the Assamese society adopting their cultural practices.

Kucher (2006) provides Robert Park account who worked on the immigrant communities in U.S to define the fundamental features of assimilation process-

> Park (1928) believed that every society was to some degree a successful melting pot, where diverse populations merge, acculturate, and eventually assimilate, albeit at different ranges and in different ways. However, Park also maintained that immigrants were often "marginal" men and women, in that they found themselves between two cultures. On the one hand, Park believed that such marginal individuals were mired in "inner turmoil and self consciousness" On the other hand, marginality was an indication of social innovation and cultural sophistication (Kucher, 2006, p. 3)

In case of Assam's immigrants, who can be broadly divided into the Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslim it was the educated Bengali Hindus who initially occupied a dominant position holding administrative and official jobs, realized the necessity of maintaining their position and identity thereby refusing the policy of assimilation in the fear of becoming marginal. The other immigrant group who were in search of better livelihood, comprising the landless laborers and cultivators founded suitable conditions of livelihood in the region for which they did not turn down the choice of assimilating with the Assamese community

Such practices resulted in the construction of anti- Assamese feeling among the other ethnic communities who developed the sense of being minority, with the emerging power and domination of the larger Assamese community, transforming into fear and insecurity of being excluded and alienated from their culture and identity. Anand k. Singh (2008) mentions that when a particular group in the society acquires the identity of being the dominant group that further fosters the growth of cultural difference whereby the other existing groups are identified as being the minority. Cultural perspective refers to this process as cultural pluralism which in turn gives rise to the process of social exclusion.

Gurpreet Mahajan's study on multiculturalism and ethnic conflicts defines two forms of membership that ethnic communities shares in a multicultural setting where "they were members of the political community and at the same time also members of particular community" where groups shares the feeling of 'sameness' at the political setting which is drifted to some extend by the 'cultural membership' (Mahajan, 2010: 3). Similarly in case of Assam the indigenous ethnic community shared the common identification, fermented with the development of a political community that provided a common platform of expression for the groups, binding them together as what Anderson (1983) defines "Imagined community". The participation of diverse ethnic groups in Assam Movement that initially fought for the cause of the indigenous communities of the region defines the political membership that the groups and its members shared. However when the same political community drifted their action in taking up the cause of a single linguistic community, the cultural differences ostensibly emerged to be the force for the voluntary detachment of membership from the larger political community by the ethnic groups, who later formed their own distinct political communities advocating their own issues, demands and rights.

Hence, some other indigenous ethnic groups in the region adopted the isolationist policy in order to maintain, protect and preserve their culture, traditions i.e. the roots of their distinctive identity which is shared with the territorial landmass they occupies. This gave birth to fissiparous tendencies among other ethnic groups like the Nagas, Bodos, Karbis, etc followed by the demands for separate homeland manifested in the form of secessionist movements govern with the principle of recognition.

Frazer mentions two crucial forms of injustice that gave birth to the politics of redistribution and recognition:

- Frazer mentions socio- economic injustice which includes exploitation, economic marginalization, deprivation as some of the central factors that adds fuel to the burning flames that ignites the struggle for equal distribution of resources and power.

- Frazer talks of cultural or symbolic injustice in reference to identity of particular groups and communities that are been not recognized or acknowledged due to the dominant cultural practice.

Such forces generates the sense of injustice that are been practiced which creates hierarchies between the groups that further leads to different forms of exclusion and differentiation that shares a binary relation with identity.

> The binary logic of self identification suggest that identity construction seems predicated upon, yet again, the presumption of the autonomous free standing subject. Identities are marked and recognized through their exclusion of difference, through the creation of difference between "me" and "them. (LeCourt, 2012, p. 108).

"Economic or class or intellectual disaffection threatens revolution, but disaffection based on race, language or culture threatens partition, , irredentism, or merger, a redrawing of the very limits of the state, a new definition of its domain" (Geetrz, 1973, p. 261). The series of movements in the region that brought myriad change ranging from demographic, economic, territorial and inter- ethnic relation facilitated the growth of ethnic problems in not only Assam but the whole of North-East.

Apart from the language movement that created drift among the larger Assamese community and other ethnic groups the Assam movement one of the most powerful movement in the independence formed with the ideology of protecting the indigenous population and their land from the clutches illegal immigrants disappointed the hopes and aspiration of different ethnic groups and communities who extended their complete support and participation in the

movement. The demand for eviction of people (both the immigrants and native) occupying the government reserved forest, consequently led to displacement of many tribal people who developed the sense of betrayal by the leaders of the movement.

Beside this, one of the clauses of Assam Accord for 'Safeguard and Economic development' emphasizes on the measures taken to protect Assamese identity and culture alone, ignoring the need to protect the culture, traditions and identity of other ethnic groups of the region. The clause 6 of the Accord mentions that

"Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguard as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promoted the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people"[7]

This gave rise to the question on who is an Assamese. Does it refer to the territorial identity of the heterogeneous groups existing in the region? Or is the term used to define the linguistic identity of the Assamese community? Such clause was hence opposed by different ethnic group and communities like the Bodos. Sanjib Baruah (1999) describes the major concern, opposition and objection of the Bodo community where he mentions that " …given the concern of the Bodos about differentiating themselves from the ethnic Assamese, Bodo leaders have been apprehensive that the clause might give legitimacy to the imposition of Assamese language and culture on Bodos" (Baruah, 1999: 174). The fear that the numerous ethnic groups and communities particularly the bodos developed immediately after the signing of accord shaped their desire to separate from the Assamese community in order to protect and preserve their distinct culture, and traditions that under the guise of assimilation would get lost was also studied by Basumatary (2014).

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[7] www.online.**assam**.gov.in/documents/10156/42773/2.+**Assam**+**accord**1.pdf Accessed on 4/6/2015

The inapprehensive act on the part of the leaders to take into account the issues and interest of the other communities ended with firm resistance for assimilation in forms of violence and conflict. The clash between the Assamese and the Bodos in 1980 explains how the factors of exclusion, alienation and deprivation creating unequal power relation is responsible for generating ethnic problems in the region concentrated with the issue of identity crisis.

> It is this crystallization of direct conflict between primordial and civic sentiments – this "longing not to belong to any other group"- that gives to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other, also very serious and intractable problem that the new nation-state face (Geertz, 1973, p. 261).

Apart from this the failure of the accord to solve the issue of illegal immigration and encroachment of tribal lands, the immigrants were brought into play during the elections to garner votes by different political party reflected their main agendas and interests. Land alienation of tribal's in Tripura with the influx of Bengalis from East Pakistan after partition and the incompetent role on the part of the state government to adequately deal with the issue of land alienation showcase the plight of the tribal's in their own homeland. Ranabir Samadar (2005) mentions how land alienation has always been a central element in the politics of autonomy and the growth of tribal militancy. The failure of the central and the state government in ensuring security to the tribal communities to a very large extend is responsible in the growth of ethnocentrism for which the values of multiculturalism are fading away. Such was the case of Tripura where the large scale migration of the Bengalis and their settlement, resulted in loss of indigenous lands i.e. the indigenous population were deprived of their own land leading to impoverishment and marginalization of the native population which since the colonial period have remained a major source of conflict between the two ethnic groups. Although different schemes and policies were initiated to tackle the

problem of land alienation but such policy failed in practice as it the one who framed such policies encouraged the settlement of migrants at the cost of the livelihood of the indigenous group in lieu of political interests.

> In order to consolidate its refugee vote bank, the Congress government continued to encourage the settlement of migrants from East Pakistan. In some areas of Tripura, the refugees formed co-operatives like the Swasti Samity and took to extensive land grabbing in tribal compact areas, undermining and ensuring the failure of the Dhebar Commission's own proposal. Before Tripura became a state, the Communists had won both Parliament seats in the state. They advocated limited autonomy and the creation of a tribal reserve to protect tribal lands.[8]

The failure of sate in ensuring security to the ethnic groups, consequently resulted in the formation of ethnic insurgent groups, a mechanism adopted by the ethnic groups to mobilize their demands and interests leading to violence and conflict. It is under such factors that the region of Assam have emerged as a site of ethnic movements, conflict, ethnic insurgency, violence etc. The influx of migration and its effects in terms of the overarching change in the geographical and socio-cultural setting coupled with state inefficiency in catering to the problems faced by the indigenous communities aggrandized the identity consciousness of ethnic groups and communities. This was followed by the urge to maintain and protect the distinct identities that the communities shares that led to the organization of ethnic movements. The Assamese sub-national formation can be identified as one such example that redefines the inter-ethnic relations; developing new categories of identification. The emergence of ULFA (United liberation front of Assam) that seek to have a sovereign state of Assam added a new dimension to the identification. The category of 'ethnic Assamese' got

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[8] Accessed at http://www.tripurainfo.com/Login/Archives/433.htm

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introduced following which ethnic-Assamese were identified as those who supported ULFA which however remains an abstract category.

The history of Assam accompanied with the process of socioeconomic changes, gave rise to new forms of ethnic identity in the multiethnic region. Some of the main issues that the region was caught begin with the colonial administrative policy of 'divide and rule', creation of frontiers; territorial rearrangement that led to the emergence of what Sanjib Baruah (1999) defines "Cultural- territorial identities". Besides, the immigration and development policy adopted by the colonial rulers gave new grounds for contesting ethnicity where ethnicity developed into an important variable in defining one's right over the resources which had been a major factor for conflict between the immigrants who are referred to as the 'outsiders' and the native people who are identified as the 'indigenous'.

The nascent growth of ethnic conflicts in practice of ostracizing, explains the antagonistic relation between the immigrants and the native people. However the transformations during the colonial regime such as the change in the agrarian economy that altered the geographical and economic relation among different ethnic communities cannot be ignored. Arupjyoti Saikia (2012) defines how the transformation in the economic practice of the Bodos from forest dependents to agrarian economy practicing permanent cultivation ended the hill-valley economic relation. Saikia mentions :

 Most neighbourhood communities like Khasi, Garo and Bhutia interacted with each other and the Bodos for exchange of forest products. The interdependence of these communities is of a very complex nature, evolving continuously. These exchanges defined the economic relations of the communities before the 20th century – relations that changed as the Bodos slowly took to permanent cultivation with paddy production emerging as an important feature of their economic life (Saikia, 2012, p. 15).

The migration of the landless peasants and their settlement in the fertile river belts started cash crop production introducing the practice of permanent cultivation. This practice supported by the colonials affected the communities practicing shifting cultivation who had to leave their traditional economic practices and settle down permanently that later created the problem of land holding and land ownership between the indigenous and the migrants. This problem, associated with the issue of identity and underdevelopment is one of the fundamental factors in igniting identity conflicts in the region that shares its existence from colonial to contemporary period. Such process of inclusion and settlement that widened the multi-ethnic social base of the region with the incorporation of migrants in distinct practices was further responsible in diluting the meaning of Assamese identity where ethnic Assamese that earlier referred to diverse indigenous ethnic groups of Assam later referred to the single linguistic Assamese community. The growth of Assamese nationalism and the emergence of 'dominant' or 'majoritarian' politics played by the different ethnic Assamese civil society organizations created much structural cleavages whereby the ethnic groups not only the indigenous but also migrants sensed the need to protect and maintain their distinct identity by organizing themselves as a political community which was regarded by Max Weber (1922) as one of the important characteristic of an ethnic group. Weber mentioned "It is the political community, however, when it is organized which appeals to a shared ethnicity and brings it into action" (as cited in d. v kumar, 2006, p. 44). The birth of civil society advocating the cultural identity of the Assamese community and the formation of different organizations and movements in that period also highlighted the intrinsic relation that ethnicity shares with the socio-political structure of a society.

Two different situations emerged in this period where on the one hand the formation of public sphere consolidated the growth of Assamese identity making them the dominant community on the other hand which turned out to be a major threat among the ethnic groups

of becoming minority who were already living in this fear with the migrants. This further created new grounds of diversification. The formations of ethnic Assamese civil society and movements like the Assam Movement that fought extensively for retaining Assamese identity, and for the rights of the 'sons of the soils' i.e. the Assamese intensified the formation of composite identity structures.

The need for maintaining a distinct identity gave birth to the politics of recognition intensifying different movement formed by the ethnic groups against the state addressing their demands in lieu of protecting their identity. This formation of ethnic identity among the groups defines one of the most important characteristic of ethnicity as advocated by the instrumentalist i.e. ethnic identity is not given and fixed in nature rather it gets produced in due course of interaction with the socio- cultural and historical setting of a society.

The growth of identity consciousness among the numerous ethnic groups can also be understood in the realm of progressive civilization where apart from recognition; redistribution has also emerged as an important factor in the struggle for identity associated with the secessionist movements that reflect the failure of state and its policies in addressing the needs of the ethnic communities. Virginious Xaxa (2008) talks the dysfunctional role of the state in solving the problems that the tribes of Northeast as a whole are facing from the colonial period which, despite the adoption of different provision has failed to function. This Xaxa argues is because in reality, the formation of different provision in terms of policies and laws, their implementation, and their practice all works disjunctively that makes such efforts futile. The growing ethnic assertion for autonomy and power then forms the response of such communities against the state's failure to deal with the unabated issues of deprivation, exploitation, discrimination etc that the people are living with. Further, in certain cases the failure of the ethnic communities to influence the state administrative machinery consequently led to the adoption of violence as a means to express their discontent and

grievances. This further galvanizes the growth of ethnic insurgency followed by macabre consequences. The burgeoning ethnic movement can be identified as what James manor (1996) regards 'political awakening within all section of Indian society' and 'decay of political institution' as the two major factor that cultivated the political awareness among ethnic communities consequently leading to ethnic conflicts.

Chapter 4

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Movement

Chapter 4

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The region of Assam have been subjected to experience diverse range of socio-cultural and historical transformation corresponding to different facet of social process where assimilation practice had been a central aspect of social change which remains a protracted phenomenon. The inter-ethnic relation among the diverse groups and communities gets defined through such practices. Hence, adaption – harmony and dissipation-conflict constitutes the defining feature of the assimilation process. This also reflects the social setting of the groups in terms of majority and minority based on socio-cultural, economic and political factors that the groups share.

Assimilation practices studied outside the context of culture would be a futile effort that clearly states the significant role of culture. In the context of Assam, language as a cultural element determined the functional role of assimilation (language shift and language acceptance) where the organization of language movement contributed towards the growth of hegemonic rule of the Assamese community that marked the beginning of identity politics in the region. The ideology of 'one nation one language' has always been a debatable subject that can be understood in the context of Indian nationalism where the nationalization of Sanskrit language in India as an effort to unify the diversity, in reality backfired further creating new avenues for cultural alienation. The development of Hindu nationalism consolidated the politics of majority channeling the practices of domination, subjugation, and marginalization, procuring new arrangement of exclusion and inequality.

Such similar regional power structures evolved in Assam with the language movement that fortified the ethnic movements followed by galvanizing activities in the region that contributed towards territorial divergence, accompanied by the classification of territories as 'disturbed areas'. The following chapter focuses on the formation of Karbi Anglong movement for separate state analyzing the factors associated with the cultivation of fissiparous tendencies among the karbis. One of the central aspect that the chapter focuses is how the process of 'forced assimilation' generates subjective experiences of identity crisis that gives rise to the conscious need for constructing separate identity; followed by the organization of movements. Such cause-effect relation between 'assimilation' and 'self-determination' is also a reflection of the inter-relation between groups and communities that gets defined in terms of domination and subjugation, majority and minority, etc. These identifiers then later form a crucial impetus in the formation of such movement where the contestation and negotiation of identity entails a dynamic aspect of the movement. Besides this, the chapter also attempts to understand the notion of 'autonomy' located in the political orientation of the autonomous movement.

THE KARBIS

The Karbi community is one of the principal tribes of Assam, constituting the third largest tribal community after the Bodos and the Mishings. Large numbers of them reside in the present district of Karbi Anglong located in central part of the state bordering Nagaland, Meghalaya and other regional districts. The Karbis are divided into four spatial groups- Amri, Ronghang, Chintong and Dumurali. The Karbis have five principal clan as follows: Enghee, Ingti, Teron, Terang, Timung. The Karbis practice clan exogamy. Monogamy is the prevailing practice, however there is no apparent bar to polygamy. The Karbi language falls under the Tibeto- Burman family of Indo-Chinese languages. Charles Lyall in his work "*The Mikirs*" (1908) shows Affinity of the Karbi language to the major Tibeto Burman language

such as the Bodo (or Bodo including Dimasa and Garo) .Kuki-chin (including Meitei,Thado,Lushei), and Naga (including Tangkhul,Angami, Rengma, Lotha).

> The Karbis follow the patriarchal system of family structure. All the children belongs to the father and assumes his surname. The line of descent is traced through male members only. At the death of their father, the son inherits the property. If the deceased leaves no male, his property is inherited by the nearest male relative belonging to the same clan, but never by daughters. (Bordoloi N. K, 1991, p. 67).

BACKGROUND OF THE DISTRICT

The present Karbi Anglong district, from time immemorial was ruled by Karbi chiefs; and the North Cachar Hills and the adjoining areas were ruled by the Kachari kings.

(Rongpi, 2001, p. 103). Before the advent of the British this area was a part of Kachari kingdom which the British annexed in the year 1854 after the death of Tularam Senapati. During the days of British rule, North Cachar was a sub-division under the plain district of Cachar and Mikir Hills of the present was part of Nowgong, Jowai, and Sibsagar district. Both the areas were administered as the so called Excluded and Partially Excludes Areas (Rongpi, 2001, p.13).

Karbi Anglong with a geographical area of 10,434-sq km territory is a miniature of Assam in terms of composition of ethnic groups. The Karbi Hills, politically known as Karbi Anglong is one of the two hill districts of present Assam, the other being the NC Hills(Presently known as Dima Hasao).The two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar (NC) hills have worked in close cooperation for two decades. The Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong had lived in peace with the dimasa tribe of NC hills. In Fact the two were a single district till 1950s (Mangattuthazhe, 2008, p.7). The people of Assam saw the birth of a new district i.e. the united Mikir and North Cachar Hills District on 17th Novemeber' 1951. The new district was formally created on the aforesaid date vide Govt . notification No.

TAD/R.31/50/201Dtd.the 3rd November'1951 with some parts of the district of Sivsagar (now Golaghat), Nagaon, Cachar and United Khasi and Jayantia Hills district of present Meghalaya for all round development of the tribal folk of the Central Assam[9]. In 1970, the single district was split up into two Mikir hills district and North Cachar hills district and later in 1976 the Mikir hill district was rechristened as "Karbi Anglong District" (Mangattuhazhe, 2008). Karbi Anglong remains the largest district of Assam with its head quarter at Diphu, that shares the distinction of being a melting pot of different cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. It is bounded by Nagaon and Golaghat districts in the North and by NC hill district in the south. In the West it is bound by the state of Meghalaya and in the East by the state of Nagaland (Mangattuthazhe, 2008, p.7).

The region comprises both tribal and non-tribal population; however the population in the region is predominantly identified as the tribals. The major ethnic group in this region includes the Karbis, Dimasas. Kukis, Rengma Nagas, Tiwas, Garos, and Hmars.

GENESIS OF IDENTITY CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG THE KARBIS

"It is in the interplay between spaces and peoples that ethnicity becomes an important factor in defining subjects" (Barbora, 2005, p. 4).

The ethnic identity question was present among the Karbis from the colonial period when the region was classified as "partially excluded area" that included the areas of Nowgong (now Nagaon), and Sibsagar district. The categorization of territories as "excluded" and "partially excluded" was employed by the colonials for effective administration of the region. S. P. Agarwal (1996) in his study on Karbi Anglong politics mention that "the political aspiration of the Karbis were largely mooted and developed especially in the 'partially excluded areas'

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[9] Retrived from www.https://wkamri.wordpress.com/karbi-anglong/about-the-district/ on 29/5/2015

where the Karbis could assemble freely for political activity and discussion"(Agarwal, 1996, p. 210). Such activities initiated by some of the educated Karbis who are also referred as the 'leaders of the time' decided to claim the status of separate hill district for Karbi Anglong in order to maintain their distinct identity for which they submitted a memorandum to Sir Robert Neil Reid, the then governor of Assam in 1973 demanding a separate hill district for the Karbis. This followed by the fervent effort of the leaders in organizing public conventions, mobilizing the community people to participate and support the demand which cultivated in the formation of the first political organization in the region named 'Karbi-A-Darbar'. "The prime motto of the Karbi Adarbar was to unite the hithertho scattered Karbi inhabited areas into a single political unity to preserve the separate ethnic identity (culture, linguistic and political) of the tribe" (Rahman, 2014, p 209). This matter was however taken up by the Government in the post Independence period when many other ethnic communities from the hill areas started organizing movement intensifying their aspiration for autonomy and separation.

The government then appointed an advisory committee to examine the crisis that ruled the political climate, which would help to frame the required action to mitigate the critical situation. A sub-committee was then formed headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam and the chairman of the committee. The foremost action taken by the committee was the extensive study on the conditions pertaining in some of the hill areas and its association with the autonomy aspiration. On July 28, 1949 the committee submitted its report to the chairman, Advisory committee of the fundamental rights Sri Ballabhai Patel, briefing their study, providing the necessary recommendation.

The report described how the people in the hill areas have been caught up with the fear and concern of losing their   identity, which is reflected in their sensitive attitude to any interference with their land, customs, traditions, economy etc explaining the issues of

immigration, land encroachment, etc that the people in these areas were living with. The committee than suggested the need for granting the required autonomy for self-administration in these areas which would meet one of the demands raised by the hill communities and also safeguard their identity rooted in their cultural and traditional practices. The question of autonomy however raised much debate among some of the members of the committee as some felt that granting of autonomy might create 'isolation' and 'separation' rather than 'assimilation' and 'integration' which would aggravate the present situation. The main argument proposed by Bordoloi was:

> He mentioned that these areas have been remained isolated and the tribal's have great mistrust of the people from the plains. He also mentioned that over the recent years the administrators had created a sense of separation and isolation among the people and given them the assurances that they would have their independent States when the British were gone. Thus, the people of the region were already living with the mindset of separation[10].

The recommendation made by the Bordoloi's committee was than incorporated in the draft of 'sixth schedule' that provided the administrative autonomy to the tribal peoples of certain areas i.e. allowing them to practice their own traditional institutional administrative mechanism. Apart from the implementation of sixth schedule, district council was also constituted and was given certain legislative, executive and judicial powers under the provision of sixth schedule. The district council in Karbi Anglong was set up on 23rd June 1952.

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[10] Retrived from https://socialissuesindia.wordpress.com/2012/10/26/birth-and-spirit-of-the-sixth-schedule/ on 30/5/2015

FORMATION OF THE MOVEMENT

There are no alternatives for the people as well as the politicians of Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong but to seek separate hill state status for the two districts. The time has come to get maximum political identity by sacrificing individual political identity and the political group of the two hill district must unite to achieve maximum political identity. [11]

Although the provision of sixth schedule got introduced in the region the outmost need for protection and development of the indigenous people and the region failed in practice as much of the initiatives developed for the requisite purpose surfaced as dormant in the long run. Limited functioning of the sixth schedule and district council's incompetence marred with state's failure in ensuring protection to the ethnic group safeguarding their interests that renewed the spirit for autonomy among the karbis. The formation of hill state movement by a section of hill tribes on the issue of separate hill state in 1954, surfaced new grounds for autonomy aspirations among the Karbis. Although the Karbis initially joined the movement, they however were not active participant in the movement. Agarwal (1996) in his study on the 'reorganization of the states in North East' mentions some of the factors associated with the attitude of the Karbis towards the movement:

First there was an apprehension of the Christian domination in the hill state. Secondly, the Karbis felt that they have relatively greater alignment and closer ties with the larger Assamese society and they consider themselves basically to be a part of it. Thirdly, the Karbis had an inferiority complex in prospect of a self-government in the shape of the hill state which they thought might not be intellectually feasible and economically viable (Agarwal, 1996, p. 212).

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[11] Retrived from https://wkamri.wordpress.com/tag/politics/?blogsub=confirming#blog_subscription-2 on 30/5/2015

The growth of fissiparous tendency was further intensified with the Assam Language Act in 1960, where for the first time recommendations were made to declare Assamese as the official language of the state. With the passing of the official bill on 10 October, 1960, resistance from diverse ethnic group and communities including seethed the lands of Assam. "The Karbis, have been conscious about their minority status vis-à-vis the majority; Assamese. Notwithstanding the gradual incorporation of the Karbis into the Assamese society, culturally and linguistically, the cultural incorporation was never conceded" (Das, 2009, p. 553).

Such action cultivated the strong sense of need for separate identity among the hill tribes of the then Assam who lost their faith on state government's intention and its assurances to safeguard their interests. The language issue then intensified the hill state movement, providing a common ground of unification for the hill leaders leading to the formation of 'All Party Hill Leaders Conference' (APHLC) under the leadership of Captain Wiliamson Sangma. "The APHLC was the first and only all- hills organization- a platform rather than a party" (Chaube, 1999, p. 133). The initial demand made by the party was on the dropping of the language bills stating their disagreement and fear on the imposition of Assamese as the official language. The central concern and fear of the leaders wa that, the passing of such act would establish hierarchical relationships among the ethnic groups and communities whereby the Assamese will emerge as the dominant community which would aid the practice of oppression and discrimination on the ground of 'dominant' and 'subordinate'. "The substance of the movement was the hill's people desire for the equal status with the Assamese plains peoples. The hill people did not fight for their language but choose the continuation of English" (Chaube, 1999, p. 133). Following such disagreement the language act then incorporated the language of English for hills and Bengali in Cachar. The party then

demanded and launched a movement for the creation of a 'North East Frontier State' "comprising all the six autonomous districts (including Mikir Hills) of Assam" (Rahman, 2014, p. 210). This marked the beginning of separate state politics in North East where social exclusion in context of language identity gave rise to regional and identity consciousness among the diverse ethnic communities. The Karbi leaders under the Karbi Adarbar organization formed the district unit of APHLC in 1965 in the then Mikir Hills in order to intensify the movement once organized before the formation of APHLC. "As in the other hill areas of the then undivided Assam, in Karbi Anglong , then known as the Mikir Hills also the demand for separate hill state under the banner of the APHLC began to get momentum" (Rahman, 2014, p. 210).

In response to the demands for the separate state spearheaded by the APHLC, the autonomous state of Meghalaya was formed within the state of Assam constituting the United Khasi, Jaintiya, and the Garo Hills. In 1970 the autonomous State of Meghalaya within the State of Assam was constituted under section 3 of the Assam Reorganisation Act, 1969, and the APHLC secured 34 seats in the Legislative Assembly. In 1972 the State of Meghalaya came into being as the 21st State of the Indian Union under section 5 of the North- Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971[12]. The Mikir and the North Cachar hills were then given the option of joining the autonomous state; however both the districts rejected the proposal for inclusion within the state of Meghalaya.

> It may be mentioned that Meghalaya is a tribal Christian state while the united Mikir and North Cachar hills is a Hindu tribal area. This fundamental difference in religious faith and sentiment was perhaps the root cause of this district not joining the Christian state of

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[12] Retrived from http://indiankanoon.org/doc/1681078/ on 2/6/2015

Meghalaya. Here, we find another instance of Karbi people's crucial decision on the question of religion and socio-cultural identity (Deb, 2006, p. 205).

Apart from this factor, the Karbi leaders were also persuaded to remain in Assam by the Assamese leaders who assured the granting of adequate power for the overall development of the districts along with the protection of their traditional customs and practices. "The Assamese leaders assured the hill leaders of the two hill districts the powers both legislative and executive along with special financial provision for the rapid development of the two hills will be given to the District Council if they remained with Assam"13. Following this the Government of Assam transferred some additional power to the district council of Mikir Hills. "On 1st June, 1970, the state government of Assam transferred the administrative powers of some development departments of the Karbi Anglong district to the district council vide Government notification No. AAP /95/ 70/36 dated 1.6.1970" (Agarwal, 1996, p. 213). Although the state government followed its assurance policy by vesting additional power, the failure to grant complete autonomy on the transferred departments to the district council created differences among the Karbi and Assamese leaders. The Karbi leaders felt that the limited autonomy would make the autonomous council dependable on the state government for its functioning, leaving it incompetent in dealing with the concern affairs of the ethnic group.

Beside this, the introduction of Assamese as the compulsory subject in educational institutions and mandatory of Assamese knowledge for government services in the state of Assam including the two hill districts i.e. Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills by the AGP (Assam Gana Parishad) garnered discontentment, frustration, anger among distinct ethnic groups and communities. "The two hill districts considered the above policies of the

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[13] Retrived from http://karbianglong.in/index.php/11-articles/55-why-separation-of-karbi-anglong-from-assam-is-not-a-mere-political-ambition-but-a-historical-necessity on 11/6/199

government as the violation of Bimola Prasad Chaliha's commitment of not making the knowledge of Assamese compulsory for recruitment to government service" (Rahman, 2014, p. 212).

The imposition of Assamese language emerged as a clear threat to the distinct identities of the ethnic groups and the attempt of the Assam Government to Assamise the Hills under the banner of assimilation. This further intensified the autonomous movement whereby the leaders of both the district formed a new organization called 'Central Autonomous State Demand Committee' (CSDC) on 6th March 1986. A delegation of the organization then met the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi submitted a memorandum demanding the creation of separate states for the Hill districts on 9th May 1986 (Rahman, 2014). A similar memorandum was submitted by the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hill leaders conference to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 1973 after receiving the approval of the memorandum by the Action Committee in the meeting held on 1.6.73 at Haflong (Rongpi, 2001, pp. 11-12).

The memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister on the demand for separate state comprising the Mikir and the North Cachar hills by the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hill leaders mentioned some of the issue that the district and its people were facing; stating their dissatisfaction with the role of the state government. Among such was the false assurance by the Assamese leaders during the state reorganization process; stating their regret for not joining the political option, language issue, limited autonomy power of the district council, and backwardness of its people etc.

> The second memorandum was submitted to Sri Lalan Prasad Singh the then Governor Of Assam on 14th Jhuly, 1979, to place their demands, issues and grievances to the Government of India. Some of the major concerns placed in the memorandum was the issue of influx of migrants and increase in the percentage on non-Karbis, inadequate funding, Boundary disputes, impact of state governments industrial policy etc (Rongpi, 2001, pp. 37-39).

The next memorandum was followed by resubmission in 1981 in pursuance to 126th session resolution held on 11.11.1981 and 29.11.1981 at Diphu (Rongpi, 2001, pp. 44-45). It is important to note that the enclosing statement of each memorandum narrates the practice of inequality, injustice, oppression and domination that the Karbi people were experiencing from Assam government and the Assamese who are also referred as the 'plains'. On the question of safeguarding the identity of the Karbis which was in crisis the leaders states in the memorandum that

> Not only development, but the basic question is survival, preservation and growth of ethnic identity of the tribals and these are the most genuine factors demanding for creation of A NEW STATE. The idea of Assamese movement of foreign national issue was also the same, the crisis of identity. The Karbi, Dimasa, Rengma Naga, Khasi, Garo, Kuki, Hamar, Boro etc. etc. and other ethnic non-tribals like Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Adivashi, Hindustani etc.etc who has got a distinct identity with an enrich cultural custom and heritage are afraid of losing their identity at the apathetic administration of Assam Government, who has no sincere efforts and intensions to safeguard the rights and priveledge of the people of hill areas (Rongpi, 2001, p. 146).

The political climate of Karbi Anglong then contributed to the emergence of some powerful organizations like Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Karbi National Volunteer (KNV), Karbi Student Union (KSU), that played a fundamental role in the movement. The ASDS also known as 'Hemprek Kangthim' in Karbi language, in particular played a pertinent role in mobilizing the demands for autonomy under the article 244(A) of the constitution.

> Following a period of lull in political activities the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed in 1986. Since its inception it was poised as an anti-congress formation

led mainly by students who had participated in the Assam agitation and felt sidelined by the caste –Hindu student leaders from the valley (Samaddar, 2005, p. 205).

The demand culminated in the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the leaders of ASDC and Assam Government on April 1, 1995. "The signing of the MoU led to an upgradation of the councils of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills with enhanced powers under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule (Mangattuthazhe, 2008, p. 11).

Thirty new departments were transferred to both the district councils, for the management of which certain administrative changes and modalities were adopted both by both the State government and the district council. Some of the important clause that ensured development of the region by allotting the required resources and power are:

- Adequate funding to the district councils for maintaining financial expenditure of the transferred departments. The administrative departments of the Assam Government will be duly charge in releasing the funds or six monthly basis in April and October of each financial year.
- The council will have the jurisdiction or authority on the subject of sanctioning re-appropriation of fund from one scheme to another within the same major head of account.[14]

Such provisions however failed to fulfill the aspirations of the leaders associated with the movement as they allege that the provisions amended in the memorandum never came out in practice i.e. there remained a hiatus between the constitution or framing and implementation

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[14]Retrived from http://artassam.nic.in/Hills%20Areas%20**Dept**t/Office%20**Memorandum**.pdf.org.in Accessed on 17/6/2015.

of the provisions which reflects the administrative lacunae in the functioning of sixth schedule.

> The signing of the MoU led to upgradation of both councils of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills with enhanced powers under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, the district councils have failed to fulfill the aspirations of the people because of the lack of funds, lack of administrative and legislative powers. The State government continues to pull all the strings. The funds allocated for the District Councils by the Central government are often allegedly diverted elsewhere or not released in time (Asian center for Human Rights, 2007, p 7)

AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL:

> It is argued that local people's anxiety of preservation of culture and language, often appearing as "narcissist self- awareness", and their demand of autonomy cannot be seen unilaterally as dysfunction for a healthy civil society. Their aspiration should be seen rather as prerequisite for distributive justice, to which no nation-state can neglect (Das, 2009, p. 549).

The subject of autonomy in terms of its nature and dimension can also be studied in the realm of institutional practices that facilitates, governs and constrains social actions. In the context of Karbi Anglong autonomous movement the issue of 'institutional autonomy' occupies a central concern that gets located in the functioning of district council in the region. "In terms of institutional autonomy, it is proposed that the greater the degree to which an institution is autonomous, the greater is the degree to which certain material and symbolic resources will be institutionally distinct" (Abrutyn, 2009, p. 454).

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One of the central issue that the movement addressed is the inefficient functioning of the district council which the leaders believes is bending the region to backwardness rather than building the path for progress and development. The revival of the statehood demand after signing the MOU and up-gradation of the council was basically because of lack of internal autonomy followed by council's dependence on the state government that dissolves the true meaning and nature of autonomy as expressed in the MOU. This also reflects the ineffective function of sixth schedule. Some of the major issues delineated by the movement are inadequate funding, misuse of funds, migration and land alienation issues, failure in implementation of government schemes etc.

> FUNDING is one of the basic problems of the Sixth Schedule, an issue which the leaders of the statehood movement and militant outfits agree. They argue that even under the Sixth Schedule the two tribal councils do not enjoy financial autonomy, and for development projects they remained at the mercy of Dispur. Moreover, since the Assam government is burdened with overdrafts, the fund released by the Centre do not reach the council authorities and are often diverted elsewhere.[15]

The transfers of additional departments as a political and colligation strategy of the government, in practice functioned as coercive system of dependency of the councils on the state government that clearly had no ground for self-governance. The functioning of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council has been stated in a study on the nature and functioning of the councils which states that:

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[15] Retrived from http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2223/stories/20051118004103800.htm Accessed on 18/6/2015

- Lack of effective functioning of the KAAC. The nexus between the political leaders and the contractors was seen as a contributory factor for the non-performance.

- Visible lack of coordination between Dispur (the Assam state capital) and Diphu (the council headquarter) over a lot of matters (administrative and budgetary allocation an implementation.

Another study by Abhijit Baruah (1997) on the functioning of district council in Karbi Anglong and the state council relationship mentions inadequate funding as one of the reason for such dependence.

> In normal times, the District Council receives the fund at the flag end of its financial year. As the money is to be utilized during the same financial year and as there are only a few month left, it is usually spend haphazardly without any proper plan and programme. Moreover, as the budget is prepared by State Finance Department, whose officials are ignorant of the problems and priorities of the district. Very often big amounts are fixed under certain heads which are totally irrelevant to the economy of the Karbis, while important sectors are deprived of requisite funds[16] (Baruah, 1997, pp. 144-145).

The problems of the council then required much attention and enquiry for which the Prime Minister's office then constituted a committee in August 2014, to look into the problems associated with the functioning of Autonomous council with Virgininous Xaxa as its chairman. The committee then proposed few amendments to ensure effective functioning of the autonomous councils that may have far reaching effects in the autonous regions, particularly Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao autonomous councils.

Virginius Xaxa committee in more than one instance has pointed out that financial autonomy of the autonomous councils does not make tally or synchronize with its legislation and

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[16] Abhijit Baruah (1997).State Government – District Council Relationship in the Karbi Anglong District. In L.S Gassah(Ed.), *Autonomous District Council* (140-147). New Delhi: Omsons Publications.

growth agenda. The committee has stated the reason as the root cause for its dependency on Central Government and state government. It may be mentioned that both Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao autonomous councils received fund from Central government under plan like 'Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resource', 'Backward Region Development Fund', and other scheme oriented funds. In fact about 90% fund for growth comes from Centre, but paucity in financial autonomy of the two council's maximum central subsidized funds goes to the coffer of Assam Government and released after much deliberation which has seriously hampered the natural growth rate of the autonomous hill districts. [17]

The committee then proposes some important recommendations like, the inclusion of councils under state finance commission and that both the state government and council should enter into dialogue in financial matters, one third reservation of women's and for numerically those numerically categorized as "underseized tribes" in both councils and other political establishments. Another important recommendation included the proper reorganization of political setups from the grass root levels enhancing effective administrative system.

Beside this the practice of corruption in recent years emerged as a major resistance in the functioning of the councils delimiting the administrative powers of the council. Several student and youth organizations like Karbi students association, Karbi unemployed youth association, Karbi farmers association etc have organized mass protest on the misappropriation of funds sanction by the centre for the development of the region and its people. Such organization alleges the involvement of the executive members of the council and the ruling Congress party officials in such activity that nullifies the very objective and purpose of the council which have further intensified the statehood movement. The hill state

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[17]Retrived from
http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA3Mzc5Ng%3D%3D on 20/6/2015

democratic party (HSDP) organized several rallies and mass movement protesting against the large scale corruption warning the Congress government to withdraw the activities of misuse of funds of the region. HSDP leader Arvin Teron argues that

> There is hatred in the minds of everyone in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao as since Independence, during its rule, the Congress has only paved the way for corruption. Drainage of natural resources of the two hill districts, failure to bring a ray of development and above all its divide and rule policy has stood as a hurdle before the unity and integrity of the region.[18]

The issue concerning the drainage of natural resources is reflected in the ongoing illegal coal business in Karbi Anglong that had quite remained in the news. Even after continuous media exposes on huge scale smuggling of coal from unlicensed coal blocks in Karbi Anglong that infringe upon all established rules and regulation, large scale unscientific and overcast mining operations are going on unchecked and unabated. Each passing day, huge quantities of illegally excavated coal from the unlicensed mines, are going on with increased intensity each passing day19. The easy operation and passage of such activities which creates negative impact on the district economy and the autonomous councils and the state government inability to tackle such ongoing activities describes the silent nexus between the politicians, the officials and the smugglers.

As the autonomous councils failed to serve the conditions of autonomy in socio-political matter of the Karbi Anglong region they hence believed that separate state of their own is the only way to transform the present situation into a favorable condition for welfare and development of the region and the community. Both endogenous and exogenous factors

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[18]Retrieved from http://www.telegraphindia.com/1131202/jsp/northeast/story_17632215.jsp#.VWOuqU8irIU on 20/6/1991

Retrieved from
[19]http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA3MjQ5NQ%3D%3D on 21/6/ 1991

therefore are responsible in producing the truculent sequence of events in the form of insurgency for which the region is identified as one of the most volatile zone.

ETHNIC INSURGENCY:

> In the last 27 years political and social groups in Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong fought for their demand for autonomous state through peaceful means. But Dispur paid no heed to our demand. So, we have put our stress this time on a separate hills state comprising these two districts[20]

In order to sustain their dream for separate homeland – 'Hemprek' without any further compromises, the Karbis resorted to armed struggle for agitating their autonomy demand that gave rise to armed ethnic militant groups representing different ethnic group in the region disrupting the peaceful constitutional means of contesting their protest and negotiations of their demands. The United People Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), one of the most powerful insurgent group in Karbi Anglong was formed in March 1999. It was a merger of two other terrorist outfits of the district, the Karbi National Volunteers (KNV), and Karbi People's Front (KPF) with Kiri Rongphar as its chairman[21]. The insurgent group got constituted with the agenda of forming a separate state for the district that will accentuate the development of the region and up-liftmen of its people thereby preserving and protecting their distinct historical and cultural identity.

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[20] Retrived from https://wkamri.wordpress.com/tag/politics/?blogsub=confirming#blog_subscription on 22/6/2015

[21] Retrived from http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/upds.htm on 22/6/2015

> Its demands include the creation of a political institution for self-determination for the Karbi people of Karbi Anglong and contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Assam and Meghalya. They demanded this state under Article 3 of the constitution with additional powers under Article 371. KLNLF also demands the eviction of all non-indigenous people who have settled in the area after 1951 (Mangattuthazhe, 2008, p. 9).

This defines another pattern of ethnicity in practice i.e. through collective action expressed in the form of violence and conflicts. Such actions of the armed group's further forms a determinant factor in creating a social base for an ethnic group. The UPDS entered into talk with the government only in 2002 with the Congress coming to power which fragmented the group into two divisions on the question of negotiation with the Central Government. One faction (UPDS) decided to hold talks with the government and the other faction headed by Mr H.E Kathar decided to continue with their seditious activities for which it is also identified as the anti-talk group. (Mangattuthazhe, 2008). The negation between the UPDS and the Government on separate state gradually entered into "peace agreement" which led to the formation of PAPA (People's Alliance For Peace Agreement).

> 'Peace' is the focal theme of the current accord, and it clearly stipulates that the UPDS will not only 'abjure violence in any manner' but even dissolve itself as an organization within a reasonable time (six months) upon the signing of this … MoS as a precursor to the Government initiating further process to implement the agreed decisions of this agreement.[22]

Some key points which they have agreed on are: the present Karbi Anglong district to be replaced with a new territorial entity to be known as Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territory (KAAT) under the amended provisions of Sixth Schedule. The proposed territory shall have three revenue and administrative districts — East Karbi Anglong, Central Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong with headquarters at Koilamati, Singhason and Hamren respectively.

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[22] Retrieved from http://www.cpiml.org/liberation/year_2012/jan_2012/commentary_1.html on 23/6/2015

The proposed territory will be governed by Karbi Anglong Territorial Authority (KATA). The KATA shall have 50 seats of which 45 will be reserved for Scheduled Tribes, five will be open, and five seats will be filled through nominations. [23]

It was since 2002 that the UPDS entered into negation with the government holding cease fire agreement. Later the Karbi Longbri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front entered into peace talks with the government and lays down their arms on 11th February 2010[24]. However, the peace talks and negotiations failed to counter the ethnic militancy problem in the region as after KLNLF surrendered another breakaway anti talk faction emerged, the Karbi People's Liberation Tiger (KPLT) on January 8th 2011 with its prime objective of securing an autonomous Karbi state (AKS) out of Assam[25]. Sanjay Borbora in his study on the autonomy arrangement in Assam mentions how the autonomy movement of Karbi Anglong which was once peaceful transformed into armed movement as a deleterious consequence of the failure of the autonomy arrangement and its inability to address the aspiration of the ethnic group. He then describes that

> The agitation, once peaceful and led by a faction of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), soon gave way to an armed struggle, which predictably underwent "splits" in the late 1980s. Political issues aside, these splits though couched in the political language of factionalism, have resulted in numerous incidents of ethnic clashes between the Karbi and those perceived to be "encroachers" into their territory. The armed ethnic militia, as well as the more mainstream autonomy demanding bodies is however united in their desire to recreate a more pristine homeland that not only challenges the limits of the autonomous

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[23] Retrieved from http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/upds-centre-assam-government-inching-towards-peace-accord/article962481.ece on 23/6/2015

[24] Retrieved from http://www.timesnow.tv/Karbi-group-KLNLF-lays-down-arms/articleshow/4338302.cms 25/6/2015

[25] Retrieved from http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/KPLT.HTM 25/6/2015

arrangement currently in place, but also seeks to find radical solutions beyond the purview of constitutional means.[26]

The peace accords between the militant groups and the government centered around the resolution of a central problem i.e. development which is manifested in some of the questions that the leaders addresses to the government in response to their demands on separate state such as-

> what has the Assam government done? There are villages in the district where the condition of the people are still not different from pre-Independence era. The funding for Karbi Anglong is even less than one-fourth of that of small states like Mizoram or Sikkim. But the population of Sikkim, Mizoram and Karbi Anglong is comparable in size. Why is it that the majority of the Karbis are still unemployed? If the Jagiraod Paper Mill was to be fed by bamboos from Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao why couldn't they bring the paper mill to either Karbi Anglong or Dima Hasao? Out of 100MW of electricity produced at Karbi Langpi Hydel Project what has the government given to Karbi Anglong? About 10 percent of the power produced at the hydel project would have been adequate, if not sufficient, to Karbi Anglong.[27]

The tripartite peace talks between the KLNLF, the Center and Assam government which entered into ceasefire agreement was on the term of granting adequate developmental funds for the region which clearly reflect how development of a region that is further associated with the upliftment and welfare of the people inhabiting that particular territory is a potent factor in forming ethnic militant groups that organize deliberate actions as a measure to make

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[26] Retrived from http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/NESRC/Sanjay.html on 20/7/2015

[27] Retrived from http://www.karbianglong.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34 on 28/6/2015

their demands considered. It is in this regard that the state government sanctioned a development package of 50 lakhs for Karbi Anglong.

Some other militant groups belonging to different ethnic groups includes Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) a militant group of Dimasa tribe which later got split into Dima Halam Daogah, Jewel (DHD-J) which is also known as 'Black Widow', and Dima Halam Daogah, Dilip (DHD-D) that demand the creation of a separate Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nagaon district and of Dimapur district of Nagaland (Mangattuthazhe, 2008, p. 4). Beside this, the militant group representing the Kukis i.e. Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland is quite active in terms of its rebellious activities in the region owing to violence and conflict disrupting the social fabric of the district. The groups here enter into competition for power, resources, security on ethnic lines where the conditions are largely determined by arm struggle. Sanjay Borbora (2006) argues that:

> The emergence of ethnic militia therefore could be seen as an outcome of a dual process of impoverishment and militarization, where small (in relative terms) communities have to arm themselves to prevent a complete assimilation of life styles, culture and resources (Borbora, 2006, p. 3808).

Similarly, Srikanth (2000) explains the growth of insurgency with the politics of hegemony, inequality and injustice where he argues that

"As long as identity politics dominates, with the material base reproducing the ideology of the 'other', society continues to breed insurgents of one or the other kind. Even if one group of militants gives up arms and surrenders to the government, there will always be others taking to arms in the name of protecting their community interests" (H.Srikanth, 2000, p. 4124).

The formation of different ethnic movements demanding separate or autonomous state which in the long run cultivates the problem of ethnic insurgency have its roots in the implementation and execution of the accords, memorandums and peace agreements etc signed between the ethnic groups and the government. Firstly, such measures as a means of negotiation and peace building has failed to meet the aspiration of the dominant ethnic group (in terms of majority in population and the original inhabitants) of a particular territory that creates dissatisfaction and distrust and consequently they resort to form armed opposition groups which adopts different means for negotiating their demands. Secondly, although the accords mentions about protection and representation of other ethnic groups within the given territory, in reality the involvement of the other ethnic groups and communities is absent. It is for such conditions that ethnic groups later develop their militant organization which in itself is macabre.

In most of the cases, the non tribes who are always recognized as the outsiders despite being the early if not the original settlers have always been prey to violence. While addressing the emerging conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal people in hill and the growing state of parochialism Patricia Mukhim mentions that in the All Party Hill's leader Conference (APHLC) that led to the formation of Hill State Movement also included the Non- Tribals as its members.[28] While explaining the conditions that gave birth to the problem of insurgency in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, Holiram Terang, President of the ASDC and a signatory to the 1995 MoU, mentions that

> …had the Centre not ignored the warning that Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills have
> become a fertile ground for insurgency due to a combination of neglect and apathy of the

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[28] Retrived from http://www.sacw.net/article6272.html on 29/6/2015

rulers of Assam and the failure of the Sixth Schedule to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people (cited in Mangattuthazhe, 2008: 12).

The major issues that the sixth schedule failed to address that have been identified as crucial factor in the growth of ethnic conflict and violence in the region is the issue of 'illegal immigration' and 'land alienation'.

LAND, IDENTITY AND CONFLICT

The socio-economic identity of the tribal people to a very large extent gets constructed around the relation they share with 'land', which besides having a material value are plunged with cultural, historical and also spiritual significance that defines their identity. However the corresponding feature of dynamism shared by identity and society creates the process of renunciation of such relation or ties as well the symbolic and cultural meanings that reconstruct their identities; in the process of which their socio-historical identity, traditional practices and rights as defined by their customary laws gets dissolved. Different socio-economic and political factors are associated with the function of such process whereby the hallmark of a society that determines the existence and identity of its people gets distorted which forms a central factor in the burgeoning of ethnic movements.

"Land in Karbi Anglong can be divided into State Reserved Forests, the District Council Reserved Forest, Unclassified Forests and Land Suitable for wet-paddy cultivation".(Bordoloi B.N, 1991, P. 207). In karbi Anglong district the notion of land was initially limited to the common property that was communally owned where every community men invested their labor in the production process which was later shared equally. "So far as the hills are concerned the tribal people think themselves to be common owners and the district council Authority does not interfere with the common ownership" (Bordoloi B.N, 1991, p. 207). The practice of land ownership among the karbis that defines

their cultural and traditional identity was challenged by introducing land and revenue settlement in the whole region of Assam. Although the hill areas in Karbi Anglong did not get affected by this policy as they fall under the "partially excluded" area but the karbis residing in the lower geographical areas that shares its parts with the district were affected by such policies.

> By the new administration system the individual Karbi families became land owners- earlier land was owned by the entire village under the headmanship of the village headmen, Sarthe (or *gaonbura*). As a result of this the community system of cultivation locally known as *Jirkedam*[29] began to erode, and gradually it spread to the hilly areas where non-cadastral lands were (still today are) freely cultivated under the method of shifting cultivation (locally known as *rit*) by the individual families (Deb, 2006, p. 203).

Such change pertaining to land holding system and the production practices was experienced by the ethnic community in the later period of independence when the autonomous district councils got set up in the hill district. The state and the district council effort and concern to ensure development and growth in this region led to the amendment of certain policies, schemes and regulations on land and forest resources like regulation on jhumming and shifting of village. T.B Subba and G.C Gosh (2003) mention that as the Karbis practiced the shifting mode of production and hence, their settlement were not permanent and land utilization seemed restricted to one system or pattern of production.

> With the district council coming to power regulation on land use pattern was introduced and permanent cultivation was encouraged in the Karbi Anglong district. Some of the major acts and regulation were Mikir Hill District (*Jhumming*) regulation, 1954, scheme of model village 1964, and coffee and rubber plantation scheme in 1975 (Deb, 2006: p. 204).

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[29] *Jirkedam* which is also known as *farla* refers to bachelors dormitory and youth club of Karbis confined to the young boys of the village who collectively participate in cultivation and also learns and develops the techniques of cultivation.

The introduction of new land policies encouraged substantial growth and development in the region.

> As a result of the development process under the modern administrations, urbanization at some point is the eventuality. This has opened opportunities for the outsiders to come over here for permanent settlement. In due course of time some urban centres have become the growth points/ centres causing a great impact on the socio-economic and socio-cultural life (Deb, 2006, p. 204).

The opening up of urban centers brought myriad socio-economic and cultural change in the region, providing opportunities for the ethnic group to participate and contribute towards the economic development. "These centers have opened up opportunities to Non-Karbis for employment and business and even for permanent settlement in due course of time. The karbis also have opportunities to sell their handicrafts and various agricultural products at such centres" (T.B Subba, 2003, p. 322).

MIGRATION AND LAND ALIENATION

Migration pattern in the region of karbi Anglong remains a continuing phenomena since the colonial period where history narrates the cordial relations that the Karbis once shared with the migrant groups like the Pnars, the khasis, etc that transformed grotesquely owing to encroachment and forceful settlement of the migrants resulting to land alienation. Much of the conflicts among the ethnic groups in the district weighted around the issue of land alienation which was and is, much caused due to the factor of migration that plays a salient role in trending the aspect of transformation in any given society, in myriad and incessant forms. On the question of settlement of migrants group, inducing the significant problem of land alienation N.K Bordoloi (1991) argues that

Even in Assam also during their early days of migration they did not settle in one place for too long a period. At a stage when the migration had to be curbed by the communities themselves because of geo-political reason they settled more or less permanently in some specified areas of state of Assam which had embraced almost the entire areas of North East in those days (Bordoloi, 1991, p. 15).

The region of Karbi Anglong witnessed steady migration of non-karbis and non tribals during the colonial period with the advent of migration from Bangladesh in the region of Assam. The growth of population during 1951–61 and 1961–71 in Karbi Anglong was 79.21 and 68.28% respectively which was far more than the state average of 34.98 and 34.95% (census report 1901, cited in Lyall, 1908: 1). A large number of Hindi speakers from North India, and immigrants from Bangladesh and from parts of Nepal came in the district and started attracting more and more land towards privatization.

During 1950s, the immigration of Hindus from Bangladesh was on the peak during communal riots in Bangladesh. During anti-Hindu movement in Bangladesh in the areas which were nearer to the Assam border, most of the Hindus preferred to immigrate to Assam. Due to high migration of Hindus across the border led to high growth of Hindu population in Karbi Anglong" (Chauhan, 2014, p. 38).

Bordoloi (1991) in his study on 'land alienation' in the district of Karbi Anglong; analyzing the role of district council and the effectiveness of the fabricated land policies, mentions some of the land settlement policies contrived by the district council in order to safeguard the land lights of the indigenous peoples which includes

(I) In the matter of settlement of land in Karbi Anglong preference is given to the *bonafide* scheduled tribes such as the Karbis, Dimasa, Kachari, Rengma Nagas, etc. (The plain tribes are not scheduled in the Autonomous districts)

(II)   Second preference in respect of land settlement is given to the scheduled tribes coming from other autonomous district.

(III)   Resolution No, 9 of Executive Committee held on 25th October 1954 runs as follows :- "No settlement of land shall be made with any non-tribal who has come into this district after the 15th August, 1947 and all such person s coming after that are found to occupy land in Mikir Hills without any authority shall be evicted forthwith".

(IV)   The District Council may, in special cases relating to the victims of unusual natural calamities such as floods, earthquake, etc, who are already in occupation of land in the district, order settlement of land with the affected non-tribal people on recommendations after due enquiry from the Deputy Commissioner (Bordoloi B.N, 1991, pp. 213-214)

The major conspicuous change was the transition of 'land' as a communal property to 'land' as an individual property accompanied by the onset of permanent cultivation that marked the variation from shifting to wet cultivation introduced by the migrants. Initially such new process of cultivation entered into practice in the plain areas of the district which later proliferated in the hill areas which affected the role of traditional chieftainship and the formal customary laws that began to lose its original importance that defined its civilization[30]. The change in the nature and pattern of land practices shaped the identity of the people where the valley people were identified as the practitioners of permanent cultivation whereas in the hill "…many continue to practice jhum cultivation without shifting villages. Some families have taken to terrace cultivation and a few others to horticulture. A few influential families have extended their ownership over a vast area of land for cash crops" (Fernandes, 2009, p. 152).

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[30] The term civilization used here refers to the distinct societies where the specific customs, traditions, cultures makes the society unique in nature and functioning. For more information see - http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Civilization Accessed on 3/7/2015

Here the homogeneous feature of the society undergoes substantial changes with the shift from communal to individual ownership that creates new class composition where communal access to resources gets restricted. It is in this process that internal stratification on economic lines gets constituted. The district council's policy of banning *jhum* cultivation, and fixing of village boundaries, settlement of land by introducing land documents have also encouraged the new practice of cultivation at the cost of the traditional practices. Bordoloi (1991) mentions some of the measures adopted by the district council to promote permanent cultivation which includes the establishment of model villages.

> In a model village each family is provided with a newly constructed well ventilated spacious house on a plot of land measuring about one *bigha* and 5 to 10 *bighas* of land suitable for permanent cultivation. The land provided to each family is well irrigated. The village is also provided with other basic amenities like communication, education, drinking water, etc. the families settled in a model village are exempted from paying house tax. (Bordoloi B.N, 1991, p. 215).

With the new settlement much of the available land (both governments and indigenous) began to be occupied and used for cultivation process that simultaneously resulted in scarcity of land which remains one of the important factor for ethnic conflict. Walter Fernandes study on 'land alienation' and 'conflicts' in relation to laws, its transformation and implication explains the interface 'identity', 'land' and immigration. Fernandes argues that

> Though the complex phenomenon of the conflicts has often been oversimplified as secessionist or terrorist, in reality an identity search is central to it. Their land and customary laws are closely linked to their identity which is in fact built around them. Today land

relations are being modified by immigration, encroachment and the changes that the modern legal system introduces in their tradition.[31]

Bordoloi (1991) further mentions that the lands in the plain areas of the district are more susceptible to alienation with the settlement of immigrants and the practice of permanent cultivation which aided certain traditional land holding practices that subsequently gave way to alienation of tribal lands. Such traditional practices includes, the *Paika System*, the *Bandhak system* which is further categorized into *Sukti Bandhak* and *Khoi Bandhak* and the *Mena* and *Adhiar or Adhi system*.

Under the Paika system a tribal owner lends his piece of land for cultivation to a cultivator who is basically a non-tribal for a given period of one or two year in return for which the owner receives advance money for the stipulated period following which the cultivator need to vacant the land once the specified period ends. However Bordoloi (1991) argues that

> But in practice it does not happen since the tribal settlement holders takes another advance from the non-tribal cultivator even before the stipulated period comes to an end. Once a tribal enters into this vicious circle he can hardly get out of it and the alienation of cultivable lands becomes perpetual (Bordoloi B.N, 1991, p. 216).

Under such system the ownership of land gets contested where the actual owner receives only minimum value of his land while the non-owners or the cultivators enjoys the maximum value. Such land used practices not only fortifies the process of land alienation but also marginalization of the indigenous community. Another extensive land practice system is the *bandhak system*

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[31] Retrieved from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDIA/.../**walter_fernandes_paper**.**doc.org.in** on 5/7/2015

Under the *bandhak* system the non-Karbi cultivators enjoyed the benefit of land owned by the Karbis by paying a negligible amount of cash as rent for the mortgaged land for a period of five years. The lands were to reverted to the owners after the stipulated period of contract. But the economic conditions of the Karbis is so poor that they are compelled to renew such contract over and over again and thus be deprived of the production from the own land (Tanka Bahadur Subba, 2003, p. 329).

In order to mitigate such practices that leads to temporary or permanent alienation of land the district council endowed with legislative power to amend laws, policies for management, settlement or allotment of land in the district, established certain measures like the The Karbi Anglong District (Land Reforms) Act, 1979. Under this act "All kinds of encumbrances of land existing by way of *Paikas* or mortgage shall be void upon coming into force of this act." (Bordoloi, 1991, p.218). This act ensured the release of land to the original owner on repayment of the advance provided by the cultivator after the stipulated time period following which if the cultivator continues his cultivation, he will be immediately evicted from the land. However, in certain cases where the owner fails to repay the advanced money "… the latter shall be allowed to cultivate the land under the *Adhi* system at the rate of 3 to 5 maunds of paddy per *bigha* according to the yield of the land as may be assessed by the Assistant revenue officer" (Bordoloi, 1991, p. 219).

The Mikir Hills District (Transfer Of Land) Act, 1959 is another policy developed by the District Council as a resolute action in securing the ownership rights of the indigenous groups over their land by deterring the practice of land transfer in any forms.

The transfer of land in the autonomous District of Karbi Anglong is subject to the approval of the Executive Committee under The Mikir Hills District (Transfer of Land) Act,1959. The object of passing the Act is to check the transfer of tribal land and to protect the interests of the tribal people by looking into the circumstances and merits of each case. It is provided in

the Section 3 of the said Act that no land under the District Council shall be sold, mortgaged , leased, bartered, gifted or otherwise transferred by a tribal to a non-tribal or by a non-tribal to another non-tribal except with the previous permission of the Executive Committee ; provided that no permission will be necessary in the case of a lease of a building on rent[32].

N. Bordoloi (1999) argues that, even though the law declares such practices illegal, they continue to be practiced which also reflects how policies framed since independence which has been discussed briefly in second chapter, failed in ensuring the legitimate security in the matter of land alienation. For instance, although the paikas system was declared illegal by the Mikir Hills District (Transfer of land) Act, 1959, but it continued to be practiced till the late 1980s in the region. Following the persistence of such practice that deprived the land rights to the indigenous people, new initiative was undertaken by the centre that led to the formation of, land settlement advisory board .

> The permanent purpose for which the advisory board was set up to advise the executive committee in the matter of settlement of land and determine the revenue policy, nevertheless, this board may be empowered to examine threadbare the provision of the existing land laws prohibiting transfer and alienation of tribal lands to non-tribals to identify the loopholes and also suggest measures for plugging the loopholes (Bordoloi, 2009, p. 286).

However despite the adoption and implementation of such strategies the problem remains pertinent and unsolved in the region that gets contextualized in Walter Fernandes study on 'land alienation'. Fernandes study basically focuses on the persistence of land alienation despite the establishment of legal system where he provides the example practice of land alienation Karbi anglong.

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[32] www.online.assam.gov.in/.../10156/338bb139-3543-448a-a514-4cca320ba26 Accessed on 8/7/2015

For example, the law bans tribal land alienation to non-tribals in the tribal-majority Karbi Anglong district of Assam, which comes under the Sixth Schedule. But a study shows that many Bihari immigrants have pattas in the Lanka sub-division of the neighbouring non-tribal Nagaon district although their land is in Karbi Anglong[33]

The subject matter of 'settlement', 'territorial claim' and 'land rights' entails contestation among the scholars over the evaluation of rights and claims of ethnic groups and communities under different contexts (Anthony Smith 1991, David Miller 1995, Margaret Moore 2001). Tamar Meisels (2005) work on *'Territorial Rights'* provides 'the Lockean' account of land rights and settlement. Locke (1952) on the issue of 'rights' and 'claims' over land argues that the economic element embedded in land and its efficacy developed through the investment of labor by the settler is what justifies the 'right' of ownership or 'right' for settlement. Such postulation of 'claims' evince the transformation of land as a 'property' where ownership, following Locke's constructed idea is defined in terms of its 'utility'. The central argument of Locke follows

Whatsoever then he [man] removes out of state that nature has provided and left it in, he has mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that it is his own, and thereby, makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature has placed it in; it has by this labor something annexed to it that excludes the common right of the other men. (as cited by Tamar Meisels, 2005: pg 80).

The cultural element that land posits other than the natural and economic aspect is not incorporated in Locke's idea which differs from the claims made by the ethnic groups on cultural and historical account. The indigenous group within a particular territory claims their

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[33] http://infochangeindia.org/agenda/battles-over-land/land-as-livelihood-vs-land-as-commodity.html Accessed on 8/7/2015

right over the territory and its land in terms of being the earlier and original settler which Chaim Gans defined as the 'First occupancy right'. Such conflicting claims over rights get manifested in terms of ethnic conflicts on the issue of resource extraction and appropriation, between the indigenous and the settlers who are identified as 'outsiders'.

Hence, such movements fighting for the creation of a separate homeland, seeking fragmentation of the existing territorial boundaries from the state can be understood and analyzed as a consequence of the exclusionary policies, and failure of the state in ensuring protection and equality that constructed the imagination of a separate or alternate homeland. Besides, the effort to create a composite identity of 'Assamese' failed to take into account the defining feature of indigenous people of Assam, generating the fear of losing the status of being the 'indigenous' or the 'aboriginal' populace of the region. The dissatisfaction and opposition to such actions gets manifested in the form of self-determination movement, which contributes towards the growth of sub-nationalism.

Migration forms another crucial factor in identity conflict driven by the consequence of change in the demographic composition and increasing participation in socio-economic and political process that challenges the identity of the ethnic groups of a particular region. It is then the indigenous groups resort to identity struggle through the organization of movements that remains the salient truth. Such movement then forms an important tool for the ethnic group for availing empowerment from the exploitative conditions. Factors of unequal growth and development, unequal distribution of rights and resources, constitute the heart of matter that gets contested through the movements. Sociological enquiry into the subject of 'ethnic movement' provides the scope to understand the nature and dynamics of society and how the symbolic existence of ethnic groups and communities gets performed through the movements. Besides this, the formation of movements under particular contexts reflects how social action gets informed by a given situation that corresponds to the construction and re-

construction of identity. The different socio-cultural and historical variable associated with social acts defines how reality gets socially created, which further determines the social identity that groups and communities share. However, only few groups and communities could identify themselves with the existential reality of a particular society where the rest strives to create their own by excluding and maintaining their distinct identity. Separate homeland then forms the pre-requisite element for maintaining such distinctiveness that gives birth to homeland politics and the growth of ethnic movements.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

CONCLUSION:

Diversity, heterogeneity have always remained a central feature in almost all societies and in disguise forms. Diversity shares a close association with complexity that gets produced through the process of 'identification' and 'differentiation', sharing its roots in the practice of 'distribution' and 'recognition'. The 'external processes' then creates 'internal complexities' among the groups and communities through the construction of intricate categories, that gets established by the very act of classification. Such symbolic representation embodies socio-cultural contents of the groups that cultivate the subjective consciousness, the requisite condition for the formation and existence of a group. The development of ethnic identity on this line constitutes the main argument of the 'primordialist', contesting the situational approach that explains the rational construction of ethnic identity under different situational context, lacking ascriptive attributes.

The evolution and functioning of the categories in 'unifying' and 'diversifying' the ethnic groups are governed by the subjected experiences of the groups, following the process of 'development'. The dissonant patterns of experiences encountered by the diverse communities are configured by the patterns of 'growth' and 'accumulation', key products of development, which are unevenly distributed and inappropriately accumulated as the access and rights gets restricted with the former practice. The economic elements in terms of 'production', 'distribution' and 'accumulation' conjoins the existing socio cultural differences with 'hierarchy' causing grievances amidst the existing groups and communities of a particular society that gets manifested in the form of conflict and violence. Due to the establishment and functioning of such processes, transformation of identity inclusive to a particular group takes place in terms of being the dominant, minority, or the oppressed group etc that creates the ground for 'self-identification' and 'self-reflexivity'. It is in the self-identification and reflexivity process that the 'collective actions' of groups gets formed for

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negotiation with the external complexities through competition and contestation for power and resources. Such action that develops through the patterns of interaction between the groups and institutions reflects the practice of ethnicity.

Hence, the social condition that emerges with the activities of development created new challenges for livelihood in terms of change in their traditional socio-cultural and economic practices, which frames the group's identity. In the region of Assam such changes emerged with the progress of civilization, made possible by the colonial rulers and the creation of geographical space for ethnic groups by constructing territorial boundaries. The settlement of ethnic groups within the constructed space explains the intersection of ethnicity and territory where the identity of the inhabitants gets recognized by the territorial landmass they occupy which they refer as their homeland. Such homelands got defined in terms of 'excluded' and 'partially excluded areas' according to the administrative policies of colonials based on the principle of 'exclusion' and 'assimilation' designed to draw profit through 'accumulation'. Following this, the backward tracts were excluded from administrative functions i.e. they were placed under the unadministered areas, with the provision for autonomy to maintain their internal affairs. The backward tracts mainly constituted the hill areas of the region where its inhabitants were referred as the 'Hill's people' or the 'Hill tribes', rooted in their traditional customs and belief system that plays a salient role in governing their lives, defining their distinct identity that gets established through their habitats. Such elements of identification constructed the colonial understanding of the hill people as relatively isolated and backward than the plain people. This binary opposition reflects the in-egalitarian nature of the society which got aggrandized with the construction of frontiers.

Social change forming an integral aspect of such practices became the salient reality for the groups and communities where such classification plunged with the elements of hierarchy composed their social identity. However for some such reality remained partial in nature,

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which can be observed in the cases where members belonging to a particular ethnic group settled in different territory were provided a distinct status, that vary from their original identity following which they lose the status of being identified as the 'indigenous'. For instance in case of the Karbi's, those Karbis who are settled in the hills are identified as the Hill Karbis and those inhabiting the plains are known as the plain Karbis. Although both shares the same socio-historical identity, but the colonial practice of forced inclusion and exclusion altered their identity in relation to their livelihood patterns and other socio-cultural institutions. Consequently the ethnic group flounders between the paradigm of 'continuity' and 'change'.

Beside this, the porous nature of the boundaries opened up other avenues for introducing greater changes that can be understood in the context of migration which remains a protracted phenomenon. The process of migration that adheres to the practice of forced settlement challenged the identity- territory relation established by the colonials and accepted by the natives. Further, new categories of classification emerged in terms of differentiating the ethnic composition of a particular region, and accordingly the migrants were placed under the category of 'outsiders' and the native populace were referred as the 'indigenous'. Consequently, a new binary opposite category of 'outsider' and 'indigenous' got constituted with the existing 'hill', 'plain' dimension, establishing new set of relationships, affecting the former inter ethnic relationship within a given space. Such change is accompanied by the competition for power, resources which turned limited following the growth in the demographic composition. Ethnic conflict, land conflict, ethnic mobilization demanding right over land and its resources etc screened out as the after effect of the migration process, stimulated by the activities of development.

The sense of loss and marginalization among the native or the indigenous population emerged after the introduction of new forms of land use system for agricultural activities that encouraged the practice of permanent settlement whereby the scarce land became limited with increasing land occupancy. However the effect of these practices varied among the hill and plain areas, where in the hills the emerging trend for permanent cultivation restricted the traditional shifting cultivation, and accordingly the ownership patterns shifted from common or community ownership to individual ownership of land. Owing to the shifting trends the functions of customary laws and the role of the tribal chiefs got limited, which reflects the process of transformation among the tribes. Apart from this the loss of lands to the non-tribal or the outsiders under certain land holding system allowing land transfer had been common in both the hill and plain regions that lead to land alienation, creating a state of deprivation and marginalization that the indigenous groups had to struggle with.

The consequences of such practices can be understood by analyzing one of the salient and distinctive features of what defines a backward tribe i.e. the relative degree of isolation or social exclusion from the main stream society that places them in a disadvantage position under various contexts from the others, who enjoys the position of being the privilege group. Such exclusion process was followed by the tribal communities when they gradually shifted their site of settlement, moving towards the isolated or interior areas in order to protect themselves from being exploited by the outsiders at the cost of losing their land holding that forms a vital means for sustenance.

Following the land struggle another major struggle against the immigrants or the outsiders was the 'language struggle', a resistance against the inclusion of external cultural element (language) in defining the identity of the region and its occupants. Such conflict emerged with the inclusion of another category of immigrants from East Bengal, employed by the

colonials to provide official and administrative services. The colonial's decision in the later period to declare Bengali as the official language faced stiff resistance from the indigenous communities especially the Assamese who feared the consequences of such declaration. The indigenous people were already agitated over the recruitment of outsiders for the official position as they believed such action functioned against the rights of the sons-of-soil which got expressed during the language struggle. This phase can be identified as the early Renaissance period, defined by the activities developed or formed in terms of birth of civil society, establishment of different literary organizations, organization of movements through ethnic mobilization etc that cultivated towards the growth of ethnic consciousness among the Assamese and the other ethnic communities.

The central importance and effort to declare Assamese as the official and regional language created much discontent among the other ethnic groups and communities who feared that such actions would result in Assamese being the dominant community that would contribute towards the practice of oppression and domination on the minority communities leading to a state of marginalization and deprivation. The emerging threat retaliated in the form of voluntary withdrawing of support of the diverse ethnic communities towards the movement organized by the Assamese leaders against the growing spirit of the immigrants in establishing their dominant identity under the guise of different set of policies and activities. Such disassociated actions contributed towards the formulation of new categories of identities compartmentalizing the indigenous communities of the region into 'Assamese' and the 'others'.

The determining effect of the process to reduce the identity of the region in affiliation with the identity of a particular ethnic group disintegrated and disconnected the diverse groups and communities, furnishing new patterns of interethnic relations. However the category of

Assamese community still remains a grotesque category with no definite criteria or features for identification. Language, settlement process, socio-cultural practices etc have always remained as the contested elements in determining and defining the Assamese identity or who constitutes the Assamese community. Hence the process of inclusion and exclusion in the matter of identification and differentiation in this case is subjected to endless fluctuations.

Identity hence can be defined as a social process that subsumes the inclined properties or nature of dynamic force that is non-stative. It is the discourse of identification and differentiation that functions through social practices confers to such dynamism where identity gets constructed and deconstructed owing to the interplay between the external and internal forces of identification. Identification further gets constituted through the development of homogeneous consciousness where the socio-cultural element in the form of language, religion, tradition and customs transcends the process. Such cultural elements conflate the characteristics of being external and coercive in nature. The language movement in Assam following the demand for Assamese being the official language reflects the coercive function of language as a cultural element which superimposed the pressure of assimilation for other ethnic group and communities which in its practice highlighted the heterogeneous features that the groups shared, giving rise to the politics of recognition. The fear of marginalization and domination experienced by the diverse communities following the homogenization of Assamese community created the requisite need for protecting and preserving the distinct identity of the ethnic groups and communities that commenced the process of identity struggle in the region by communities such as the bodos, kachari, dimasas, Koch-Rajbongshi, karbis etc.

The identity struggle of the Karbis began during the colonial period with the construction of frontiers that classified the region into 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas. Such construction can be identified as an external force that functioned towards the exclusion of the ethnic groups thereby maintaining its distinct identity that gets defined by their socio-cultural practices. Group identification enhancing solidarity and cohesiveness appears to be a requisite factor for maintain such practice and accordingly the karbis formed different organizations to consolidate the Karbi inhabited areas into a single political unity thereby protecting and preserving their distinct identity and practices. Such aspiration got intensified with the language bill of 1960, which allowed the incorporation of Assamese language in office and educational institutions. Such actions contributed towards mainstreaming of Assamese identity that was vehemently opposed by different indigenous communities including the Karbis who recognized such actions as a threat to their identity. Consequently, the ethnic groups began to assert their distinct identity presented by using history, memories and myths that defined them as the indigenous groups similar to the Assamese and to justify their demands for autonomy in order to maintain such distinctiveness. One of the primary aspirations of such struggle involves the desire of the ethnic groups to be recognized as a separate ethnic group practicing distinct identity and accordingly they seek for an independent state, challenging the territorial arrangement of the region. Ethnicity then transforms from a distinctive feature of identification to a political tool for advocating and asserting identity and it is then ethnicity enters the realm of practice.

 Hence the construction of a separate identity is a silent refusal to the process of assimilation and rejection of participation towards the cultivation of a singular identity. Such actions of ethnic groups can be regarded as a factor that contributes for the disintegration of 'nation' as the common united future based on shared history and common will of the people gets aberrant. This also reflects the dormant nature of nationalist ideology that further gets

manifested in the forms of self-determination movement or in sovereignty demands of the ethnic groups.

The protracted practice of colonial arrangement of geo-political space by the state that functioned for the creation of constructed territorial identity facilitating internal colonialism can be identified as a significant factor in the growth of fissiparous propensity among the ethnic groups and communities in the region of Assam. This further sharpens the growing regional and national disparity exploring the possible need for the use of coercive apparatus by the state. Violence then is used by the state authority to maintain the nation-building process.

Ethnic violence in North East India has become a living system, emerging and sustaining through the pattern of interaction between the social agents and the socio-cultural, economic and political phenomenon of the society. Such dynamic process develops the aspect of similarities and differentiation which unifies groups and communities on the basis of certain common traits that the members of groups share enhancing solidarity and cohesiveness that further distinguishes themselves from the other groups. This also reflects the functional and salient role of ascribed identity constituting subjective properties in the formation and sustenance of a group maintained through collective action.

A closer look on the conflicting relation between the state and the militant group give us an understanding that when the constitution and the laws advocating human right and justice itself violates the very human right making their existence difficult with the formulation and implementation of certain laws that brings forth deleterious consequences. The implementation of the repressive law like AFSPA in such area which is regarded as panacea for the existing security issues goes dormant in ensuring security and protection to the citizen as the governing or enforcing agencies themselves in many cases turns out to be the

propagators of such violence in diverse forms with their deviant actions. Besides, the law making and executing bodies fails to grasp the existential reality of the functioning of such laws and the atrocities committed on the very people whose security and protection remains the major concern. What therefore seems in reality is the operators of such laws are occupied with the resolute purpose of solving the current crisis prevailing in the society by any means thereby failing to addresses the required security to people.

Understanding to the question of the emergence of ethnic movement can be analysed through Paul Friere (1970) '*theory of cultural action'* where he mentions about the dialectical relation between the subject and his concrete historical and cultural reality. Friere argues that culture plays a significant role in the growth of human consciousness and in understanding of their position in a given society. According to him in certain cases where the members of the alienated culture of particular groups and communities prevent the growth of consciousness where the members acquire the understanding of their society, their positions as given. However, once they develop the awareness that the alienated world is constructed rather than given following structural and historical transformation they begins to evaluate their self in relation to the constructed others. The knowledge developed through observation transforms their understanding of the oppressive reality where the power rest in the hands of other. It is then such groups resort to fight for the representation and justice that the process of civilization failed to cater.

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