Chapter - I

Introduction

----------------------------------------------

Study of Social Movements

One of the very observable phenomena of all contemporary societies, is that of the emergence of innumerable social movements with multitudes of issues, styles and contents. This phenomena finds more expressions in the societies having democratic political structures and processes. Today social movements are intervening increasingly in influencing the direction of society and history. What is important for us to note here is that a social movement is not regarded merely as movement or social or political action of a group or collectivity, or as simple protest or dissent action, but increasingly as an active agent and motivator of social change and transformation. Study of social movements occupies its importance in sociology and social anthropology or even in contemporary political sociology decisively as an agent and motivator of social change and transformation. However, this is not to deny that sometimes a movement aims at resisting or impeding changes. From both ways, social
movement is intrinsically related to the process of change and transformation of society and history.

Social movements are endemical to society. They have been existing throughout the history of mankind. However, with the gradual transformation of the economic and social structure as a result of industrial revolution, particularly contributed significantly towards emergence of various kinds of social movements. The industrial revolution brought about radical qualitative changes in economic, scientific, technological and political institutions, besides changing the culture — the way of life of the people. It tore apart the structure and relations of feudalism and replaced it with capitalism. Development of capitalism and its inherent contradictions gave birth to many social movements in history. It would be important to state that alongwith the emergence and consolidation of capitalism, democracy emerged as a part of its cultural superstructure. Democracy is recognized as the way of life of the civil society. The emergence of democracy and its gradual consolidation, energized the conditions for the growth of social movements. The various social movements helped inturn — very significantly in strengthening and consolidating democratic institutions and culture. To-day, right to protest, right to express, right to
form association, freedom of press etc. are recognized as fundamental rights. These fundamental rights have also played significantly in the emergence of various contemporary social movements.

The history of the present century reveals emergence of innumerable social and political movements. Most significant among them is undoubtedly the Russian revolution of 1917. It changed radically the entire Soviet society, and provided a historically different social system aimed at stopping the exploitation of men by men. The Chinese revolution too, brought about radical transformation of world's most populous society. These two "revolutions could hardly be called just political revolutions for they involved vast transformations of the entire structure of their societies from the state institutions to those of kinship" (Orum 1978 : 342). In this connection, it would be pertinent to point out that it is very difficult to distinguish minutely between 'political' and 'social' movement. However, it would not be improper to argue that most of the historically significant political movements by nature and implications are social movements.
Defining Social Movement

What is a social movement? Many social scientists have attempted to provide definitions of social movement. The earliest definition was perhaps provided by Danish historian Lorenz Von-Stein in 1852. At that time, most of the social thinkers in Europe particularly, were concerned with various emerging issues and implications of the industrial revolution and the French revolution. In his analysis of the French revolution, Stein defined social movement as people coming together to change the conditions of society (Stein 1852 as quoted in Denisoff : 1974 : 2). According to him masses were the volatile element in society that was capable of bringing about social disruption and political change. Wilkinson (1971 : 21) has remarked that Stein’s concept of social movement had distinct influence on the school of German and Austrian historians of socialism throughout the 19th century. Like Stein, they too regarded the movements of working class as constituting the social movement. And, following Stein, they became preoccupied with developing prescriptive theories of methods of peacefully assimilating the proletariat into wider society (Ibid : 20-21). Though sociologists no longer fully agree with Stein, but they use the concept as well as the term.
Other properties have been added to the concept, such as the type of change desired and tactics used, yet nearly all descriptions of social movements include the factors discussed by Stein, a perceived social problem, a proposed solution, some form of collective action and some type of structural change (Denisoff : 1974 : 2).

Earlier in the west, study of social movement was regarded as one of the many concerns of the historians. Therefore, we find innumerable studies of social movements conducted by western historians. Only at a fairly later stage — i.e., in fifties, sociologists started embarking into this field. This observation, by and large, according to Rao (1984 : 1) is applicable to the Indian situation too.

Sociologists have tried to present sociological definitions of social movements. Inspite of significant progress made both in the west as well as in India in social movements studies, one must note that no theory, no definition, no typology is free from criticism and capable of finding universal acceptability. This, however, does not mean that we are in no position to accept my definition or theory because of their apparent and potential limitations. For our purpose, we can accept a "social movement as a clearly structured and identifiable organization, which has
explicit goals of grouping members with a view to the defence or promotion of certain precise objectives, generally with a social connotation" (Rocher 1972 : 441). In addition to what Rocher explains, we would prefer to add that in many cases if not in all cases, besides the explicit goals, social movements may have implicit goals to pursue alongwith the professed or explicit goals. For example, a national liberation movement explicitly aims at liberating a nation or a group of nations from colonial bondage, but at the same time, the national bourgeoisie implicitly aims at capturing political power and eliminating competitions for market from the imperialists. This point of implicit goal in addition to explicit goals, should be taken into consideration in order to understand social movement from its two inseperably contradictory dimensions.

Needless to say that a social movement is essentially demanding. It seeks recognition and acceptance of its ideas, demands, interest and values. Every social movement must have a goal or a set of precise goals to reach. It would be important to state here that a social movement may not reach the goal it wanted — it may reach somewhere else depending on interactions of various forces and objective situation. The success of a social movement largely depends on its capacity to reach its explicit goals.
In order to reach its goal, a social movement needs collective action i.e., social mobilization. For social mobilization, a social movement needs to depend on some kind of organization to provide leadership and direction. For this, the leadership needs some kind of ideology to explain a situation convincingly which it wanted to change through mobilization. With the help of ideology, the leadership justifies the existence and continuity (or even death) of a social movement. Social movement cannot exist without some goals, social mobilization, organization and ideology. These are the foundations on which the edifice of the movement stands; stronger the foundations — stronger is the movement and its impact on the society and history.

Is Assam Movement a Social Movement?

As we propose to study the Assam movement which began in 1979 and officially ended on 15th August 1983, it would be worthwhile to begin the study with a question — "Is Assam movement a social movement?" Apparently, the Assam movement looks more like a political movement than social. The issue of immigration of foreign nationals from across the border to Assam, raised by the movement apparently looks more of political — constitutional in nature than social. Inspite of that, we would
prefer to call the Assam movement more a social movement than simply a political movement. The Assam movement had all the fundamental elements of a social movement affecting all aspects of the society. We have also noted earlier that all historically significant political movements are in fact social movements because of their deeper roots in and impact on the society in which such movements emerged. The Assam movement too had its root in society and its impact was felt deeply. In addition to political, constitutional and economic implications, it had significant social implications.

The Assam Movement

As we propose to study the Assam movement, therefore, it would be appropriate at this stage to clarify as to which movement we are referring as the Assam movement. By "Assam movement, we specifically refer to that movement which demanded to (1) stop the illegal immigration of foreign nationals to Assam from the neighbouring countries i.e., Nepal and Bangladesh and (2) their participation in the electoral process in Assam/India, (3) deportation of all foreigners living illegally in Assam so as to (4) enable the people of Assam to protect their distinct identity in their traditional homeland from the threat of foreign nationals. This movement was started in 1979 under
the leadership of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and officially ended on 15th August 1985 — after coming into an understanding with the Government of India which found official expression in the Memorandum of understanding popularly known as Assam Accord 1985.

We are very much aware of the limitation imposed by this labelling of this movement as 'Assam' movement based on its territorial anchorage. In the absence of a better name or label, we are calling the movement as such. Besides, this label has already been imposed on the identity of this movement both at the popular as well as at the academic levels. And, obviously at this stage, we do not want to deviate from existing label/name to avoid confusion.

The Problem

With the collapse of colonial rule in 1947, India entered proudly into post-colonial phase of its history and society. Those who led the national movement for independence became the political leaders of the new nation-state. Sociologically speaking, at the level of ideal culture, India became a secular and democratic republic in 1950. However, at the level of real-culture, India stood far away from the ideal-cultural framework within which it wanted to build-up the post
With the successful culmination of national movement in attaining independence and making India a secular-democratic nation-state, the expectation not only of political leadership but also of masses reached a new height. However, the post-colonial state has failed to meet the rising expectation of the Indian masses. Inspite of tremendous success in number of fields; particularly in science and technology, defence, communications etc. over the years inequality has sharpened between the rich and the poor, and between developed regions and vast underdeveloped regions as an inherent part of development process itself. India has experienced significant growth in many fields, however, apodictically, the growth is not a balanced one to ensure equality or satisfaction among the masses. India, like many other post-colonial societies in the third world which have adopted capitalist path of development to overcome their socio-economic backwardness have obviously created certain inevitable contradictions. In sharp contrast to their expectation, the Indian masses have been experiencing frustration, dissatisfaction, tension, cut-throat competitions, conflicts and violence of different degree in different socio-economic and regional millieu. Such a situation is obviously conducive for the emergence of various kinds social movements wherein the masses
try to seek meaning, alternative, betterment of satisfaction of their expectation.

Post-colonial India has been experiencing growth, decay, demise and institutionalization of innumerable social movements. North Eastern India, one of the most depressed regions of the country, too, has experienced many new social movements. Few significant examples are: (1) the Nage movement for independence immediately after independence, (2) the Mizo movement for independence during mid sixties, (3) Movement for oil refinery in Assam in late fifties, (4) Movement for making Asamiya as the official language of Assam in 1960, (5) Movement for Tribal Hill state, (6) Food movement of 1966, (7) Movement for second oil refinery in Assam during 1969-70, (8) Movement for making Asamiya as medium of instruction up to graduate level in Assam's two universities in 1972, (9) All Assam Students' Union's movement for economic development of Assam in 1974, (10) Bodo movement for Roman script, and (11) movement against the foreign nationals i.e. Assam movement 1979-85. This list is not exhaustive but illustrative. After the end of Assam movement, two movements have emerged very forcefully i.e. (12) Bodo movement for a separate Bodoland/Udaialchol and (13) Karbi-Dimasa tribals movement for an autonomous state within the state of Assam (Hussain 1987). It is very much evident that Assam, since
after independence, has been experiencing unending sequence of social movement one after another with serious social, economic and political implications.

In this dissertation, we propose to study the Assam movement sociologically. Assam movement, in addition to general features, has certain specific features which made the movement very distinct and significant among the social movements that post-colonial India has seen. First, the issue of the movement—'foreign national's participation in the electoral process of Assam/India' which the movement wanted to stop at any cost. Simultaneously, it wanted to protect the distinct socio-cultural, economic and political identity of the Assamiya nationality which according to the leadership of the movement was facing an identity crisis in the wake of continuous immigration of foreign nationals from Bangladesh and Nepal. The issue found acceptance from both, the masses and the government. It was officially recognized as a national problem. Secondly, the movement took place largely outside the traditional party leadership. It was largely led by a state wide student organization known as All Assam Students' Union (A.A.S.U.) which was not affiliated to any political party. Thirdly, in addition to old organizational network of AASU, Assam Sahitya Sabha, a state wide literary organization and other
constituents of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (A.A.G.S.P.), the Assam movement successfully built-up organizational network and method of co-ordination from its headquarters at the Gauhati University down deep into rural areas of the Brahmaputra valley. Through their vast organizational network, the leadership mobilized the masses for a relatively durable support base for various protest actions and resistance. Assam movement's tremendous capacity to mobilize masses has given it a very distinct status among the contemporary social movements in India. Even the critics of Assam movement, have admitted that the movement attained mass character by the later part of 1979. Some members of the older generation belonging mostly to the Congress party who had seen the mass participation of the Asamiyas in the national movement 1942, have compared the magnitude of participation with that phase of national movement. Some even felt, higher participation in Assam movement. We too, have seen during the active period of the movement, the participation of masses in lakhs in offering satyagraha, blocking-roads, resistance to flow of crude oil to outside Assam, gheraoing of candidates for Lok-Sabha election 1980, coming out-to street to violate curfew and other prohibitory orders, innumerable processions, mass rallies etc. Mass participation and backing made Assam
movement historically as well as sociologically very significant among the well-known social movements that India has experienced during the post-colonial period. Though, there are other examples of historically significant movements like Telengana movement of early fifties, Naxalbari movement based on the Maoist ideology of rural insurrection of late sixties and early seventies, Navnirman movement of Gujarat and Bihar movement of pre-emergency days, and Panjab movement in eighties; but admittedly, all these movements stand nowhere near the Assam movement in terms of success it attained in mass mobilization and participation. Assam movement created strong and relatively durable base of support among the masses. It also created a base for opposition which was manifested in a counter movement.

Along with the movement, the leadership of the movement continued their negotiations with the central government to find out a solution from early 1980 till early hours of 15 August 1985. Ultimately, a solution was found through negotiations which was culminated in the acceptance of Assam Accord 1985.

Assam movement had obviously drawn serious attention of mass-media in India. It was very much in the views throughout the world in the wake of famous Nellie massacre of February 18, 1983 in which over 1200 people mostly women and children were
butchered to death within a few hours. The Nellie massacre has only few parallels in the post-world war II history. Entire Brahmaputra valley was rocked by severe political violence several times repeatedly which includes large scale riotings, killings of civilians by civilians, kidnapping of election candidates and their supporters, blasting of ordinary to very sophisticated and powerful bombs, destruction of roads and bridges and killings in police firing etc. It has been very conservatively estimated that more than 7000 people lost their lives and 2 millions have lost their homes as a result of violence during 1979-85.

From our brief discussion, we can very safely say that Assam movement is a very complex social movement. It would be interesting as well as challenging for the students of social movements to study Assam movement objectively in its totality.

Review of Literature:

It is not possible to prepare a comprehensive review of literature on Assam movement as such. This is because, first we do not have much academically oriented sociological or historical literature which deserve serious scrutiny. Of course, there were thousands of literature in the form of
hand-bills, pamphlets issued by the organizations which led and opposed the movement. Most of these pamphlets, carried more emotions than reasons. Some of them carried extremely explosive materials containing anti-democratic, anti-secular, non-tolerent attitudes towards those who did not belonged to their movement constituency. Even, some of the distinguished Asamiya intellectual, and artists fell into the trap of deeper emotions generated by the movement. Nevertheless, these literature reflect the intense emotional involvement, sharpening of differences among various groups, ideological polarization both politically and culturally. A serious psychological research on these non-academic literature on Assam movement, if treated critically and without fear, can help us to understand the ideological background, communication structure and network and their role in the Assam movement. Needless to say, these emotive literature played an important role in shaping, moulding and provoking the direction, development and nature of the movement, more particularly at the critical stages.

The organized Asamiya press owned by the Asamiya bourgeoisie and dominated by Asamiya high-caste and class combine played a very significant role in mobilizing and continuing support to the movement. Though, officially the
Asamiya bourgeois press is not part of the leadership apparently; it would be wrong to assume that they had no leadership role. However, in reality, from ideological and psychological point of view of class, the press played a significant leadership role in creating and building charismatic image for some of the formal leaders. On the other hand, the formal leadership relied heavily upon the Asamiya bourgeois press in order to mobilize the supporters and influence the decision makers. We propose to take up their role in the Assam movement in more detail at a later stage, i.e., in chapter V.

Contrast to thousands of pamphlets and continuous supporting role of the press, serious books on Assam movement however, are very few. Few books came out in Asamiya language. Unfortunately, most of them lacked scholarly explanation and not free from communal, linguistic and ethnic biases. However, the book 'Svadesh Svamat' written by Sibnath Barman (1980) tried seriously to explain the problem of migration and its impact on the society in Assam. We consider this a serious and honest attempt to comprehend the problem academically. Homen Burgohain's (1979) book 'Bahiragator Samasya' tried to explain the reasons behind the transformation of Assam's demographic structure and its social implications for the society in Assam.
It seems at that stage, he was highly influenced by Myron Weiner's (1978) *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India*. Though at times critical about many aspects of negative development in the emerging society in Assam, he was not entirely free from subjective judgements. Inspite of these limitations, these two books though directly were not involved in the analysis of the Assam movement, dealt with the issues raised by the Assam movement, i.e., migration and its impact on the society in Assam.

In English, however, there are a large number of article in newspaper and magazines. Most of these articles can be categorized as an analysis of current affairs. Needless to say, relatively longer duration of the movement, high level of mass-mobilization and participation, eruption of large-scale violence both state and civil, political competition for attaining power, successful boycott of 1980 Parliamentary elections, bloody election 1983 and famous Nellie massacre, many rounds of talks between the Central Government and the leadership of the movement — made the Assam movement a burning issue before the local and the national press for a long time. One of the journalists tried to analyse the movement through his book (Gupta, 1984). This book though attempted a
serious analysis, however, it failed to overcome the serious constraints of journalistic analysis. Another attempt was made by an experienced bureaucrat under the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship (Murthy 1983) in order to understand the political development of the state during 1979-1983. Murty had compiled substantial informations from newspapers and official sources and presented them in the form of a book. He deserves appreciation for presenting useful informations and chronology of the period involved, however, his analysis lacked analytical vigour and depth expected of a prestigious national fellowship holder. Another active bureaucrat was awarded the same fellowship to study social change in the north-east (Singh 1986). He was not directly involved in the study of Assam movement, he tried seriously to understand the process and problem of change in north-east what may be described as typical administrator's approach aiming at solution of some perennial administrative problem in north east. Though he is not free from colonial bureaucratic hangover and ignored the totality of the issues involved, however, it would be pertinent to note that he has emphasized on two major planks of ethnicity in north-east, i.e., land and language.
A well-informed contribution came from Abdur Rob Khan (1984) a social scientist from Bangladesh in the form of a book. He tried to comprehend the problem as a 'crisis' (not as a movement) in a neighbouring country of the same subcontinent. To him, Assam crisis is the result of rising expectations of the Asamiya vis-a-vis years of neglect toward the legitimate needs of the Asamiyas (Ibid: 44). Though his study suffered from the limitations imposed by secondary source materials, it must be admitted that it was a sincere attempt on the part of a scholar to understand the crisis from across the border.

We are still required to wait for a comprehensive study of the Assam movement. So many issues and dimensions are involved in this movement, therefore, it would take a long time to understand Assam movement both sociologically and historically. However, there was a very interesting debate in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1980. At that stage, Assame movement did not attain many of its later characteristics. Even then, that debate and discussion carried the signals of its future stages, was academically interesting and stimulating. Hiren Gohain (1980A) characterized the Assam movement as cudgel of Asamiya chauvinism. However, a Chicago based Asamiya scholar who was
in the field at that time refused to accept the manifested chauvinism and the middle class character of the Assam movement. To him Assam movement inspite of its certain contradictions, is a legitimate and peaceful movement of the Assamese civil society (Baruah, 1980:A). K.M.Sharma has argued that in order to protect their class interest the ruling classes in Assam have been trying to exploit certain historically determined weaknesses that have blocked the process of a distinct and well-defined Assamese nationality formation (1980: 1321-24). The Assam movement basically represents this historical weakness (Ibid). Gail Omvedt (1980: ) argues that the Assam movement has resulted not because of "the basic Assamese fear is" not so much of losing jobs to Bengalis(out-siders) but losing their land. Tilottama Misra (1980) tried to provide economic issues as the motivating factors behind the movement. According to her Assam movement is reflection of common peoples awareness against the extra-regional big-business strong hold (Ibid 1980). She characterized the status of Assam as colonial hinterland of India(Ibid). Similarly, Ghanashyam Pardesi too characterized Assam as an internal colony within a national exploitative system (1980). Omvedt, Misra and Pardesi by and large, agreed that the Assam movement represents the desire for self-
determination of an oppressed and backward nationality in India. This is an extreme over simplification of the situation in general and movement in particular.

We feel the most significant contribution towards understanding of Assam movement came from Amalendu Guha (1980: 1639-1720). He admits that movement is national in form and not free from strong chauvinistic and undemocratic tendencies. He also provided criticism of Omvedt, Misra, Baruah and Pardesi. The Economic and Political Weekly debate and discussion were dominated by Marxist scholars and their opinion about the Assam movement has been extremely varied and polemical in nature. All these demonstrate that the opinion about and characterization of Assam movement varied substantially not only between Marxists and non-Marxists but also among the Marxists themselves. This shows a healthy trend in academic discussion and debate. We would prefer to refrain from characterizing the movement at this stage. This we can do at a later stage of our study.

Theoretical approach:

Good research begins and ends with the theory (Kenkol 1980: 33). Theory is an inseparable part of any serious research. A theory enables the researcher to conduct empirical studies in
an organized and logical fashion. It is obviously an attempt to situate patterns and consistences in seemingly idiosyncratic and inconsistent events. In order to analyze the Assam movement, we too need to depend on a theoretical approach which would enable us to scrutinize facts and empirical realities logically.

Most of the studies of social movement based their theoretical perspective on the structural-functional approach. The inherent limitations of the structural functional approach found their expressions in such studies. The emphasis of such studies mainly focussed on social solidarity, cohesion, functional unity, equilibrium and imitative process of change and mobility. Some scholars overemphasized the importance of reference group and its relative deprivation syndrome. Significantly, the most common feature of such studies has been the failure to look at the class dimension as the reflector of contradiction and conflict in the society as an inevitable historical process. Even a very prominent non-Marxist Indian sociologist (Rao 1981: 1-3) while expressing his dissatisfaction of structural functional approach, had to admit the relevance of class approach in understanding social movement; though he advocated mixing class approach with relative deprivation and
other related concepts. However, we would like to point out that the question of relative deprivation is always there in societies divided by antagonistic or competing classes. There is nothing new in adding relative deprivation with class dimension—it is very much a part of class dimension.

We are adopting "class approach" to understand the Assam movement. Like in many social movements, if not all, the class dimension is definitely hidden behind the apparent causes of the Assam movement, like excessive migration and demographic transformation, national/ethnic identity of the Asamiyas, participation of foreign nationals in the electoral processes in Assam/India etc. We would also like to explicitly express that our approach is not simply confined to the inter-class competitions and conflicts but it also encompasses the intra-class competitions and conflicts within the ruling classes. Like the exploited classes, the exploiter class too is not a homogeneous class. There are uneveness, problem of inequality of economic as well as political power, conflict of interest, competition for market and political power and strong regional dimensions. Many scholars have ignored the intra-class dimensions in understanding social change and movement. At the present stage of development, it is necessary to understand the implications involved in the intra-class conflict and
competitions for meaningful understanding of social movement. The Assam movement in no exception to it.

The Assam movement represents the unresolved nationality question in multi-national Indian nation-state. Therefore, the question of nationality formation process in Assam and its level of development is to be comprehended from class approach. Besides, we want to focus on the capitalist path of development in addition to colonial past of the Indian sub-continent and its resultant uneveness among various nations/nationalities and regions in India.

Scope

A social movement is embedded in the society and history. Though we propose to study the Assam movement socio-logically — it would be naive to ignore the specific historical context in which the movement has emerged. Sociologist A.R. Desai (1954) and historian Bipan Chandra (1979) have rightly pointed out that adequate perception of the importance of historical context is required to understand a movement. We do believe that sociology cannot go alone without history to understand a social movement. A meaningful study of social movement required to depend on both sociology and history. We too are, in addition to sociology, depending on history very
significantly to understand the Assam movement.

We propose to study the Assam movement from a wider socio-historical perspective, rather than concentrating on the chronology of the active period of the movement, i.e., 1979-1985. Though the movement specifically began in 1979, its roots can be traced back from second half of the 19th century with the beginning of migration of various social groups to hitherto isolated land abundant, semi-tribal and semi-feudal Assam under the British rule.

The Assam movement has its roots in major socio-economic, demographic and political changes and corelations of class forces in Assam during the colonial as well as post-colonial period. Therefore, it would be necessary to look back seriously at the colonial period besides scrutinizing the development of post-colonial period prior to the emergence of Assam movement.

Series of talks between the Government of India and the leadership of the movement on the issue of foreign nationals particularly in regard to its legal-constitutional aspects from early 1980 to August 1985, shows that it has very strong legal dimensions and implications. We are not going into all intricacies of legal aspects involved in the movement. Rather, we have emphasized more on societal and historical context in which movement
is embedded than on legal issues like citizenship. Though we are leaving intricacies of legal aspects to the legal constitutional experts, we have at certain point of our study later would take up some legal issues, however, our emphasis remains mainly sociological.

Scheme of Chapters

In order to study the Assam movement systematically step by step, we have divided our study into 8 interdependent chapters. In the first chapter, we are briefly introducing social movement studies, defining a social movement, identifying the Assam movement as a social movement. We are also reviewing existing literature on the Assam movement both in Assamiya and English language. For us, Assam movement represents fundamentally the unresolved nationality question in India. We have explicitly expressed our theoretical approach as a class approach to an essentially empirical phenomena. We have also stated the scope, methodology, sources of data and limitations of our study. Additionally, we have also clarified some conceptual issues involved in this study.

As Assam movement is deeply embedded in the society and history of Assam, in the second chapter, we are attempting
to introduce precisely the history and society from pre-colonial period to colonial period in order to understand the social transformation. We also propose to study the problem of nationality and class formation in semi-tribal and semi-feudal society under the colonial aegis. This chapter will also deal with the demographic transformation of Assam and its perpetual economic backwardness during the colonial period. Besides, in this chapter, we also propose to focus on the middle class formation in Assam, their position vis-a-vis the strong Bengali middle class, conflict and competition for jobs, market and power at the state level and the role of all imposing British colonialism. All these issues, it is hoped, would help us to look at Assam movement from a larger perspective rooted deeply in its society and history.

In the third chapter, we propose to comprehend the nature of socio-economic and political developments that took place during the post-independence period upto the beginning of Assam movement. However, our emphasis will be more on economic issues like Assam's perpetual economic backwardness and continuity of overall colonial pattern of economy even during the post-colonial period. Here, we are also trying to locate the response of the political leadership to the popular expectation of the masses. Needless to say the leadership failed to meet the
popular expectation. We are also trying to see the role played by the Indian as well as Asamiya ruling classes in keeping Assam economically and politically backward.

In the fourth chapter, we propose to study emergence, growth and decay i.e. various stages of the development of Assam movement. Here, we are mainly concerned with how the movement started, how the issue was transformed from Bohiragatos to Videshis (outsiders to foreigners). Besides transformation of issue, we are also interested to comprehend to process of transformation of organization that led the movement and transformation of goals as a part of the growth and decline of the Assam movement. This chapter, it is hoped, would enable us to understand the life-cycle or career of the movement particularly its incipiency, growth, maturity and gradual decline of Assam movement.

In the fifth chapter, we are trying to situate the support base of the movement, geographic, social and class background; methods used to reach the goals of the movement, role played by the press. Besides, we are also looking into the opponents of the movement. Social scientist Alian Touraine has rightly pointed out that in the analysis of a movement, it equally important to identify the opponents which the movement attacks, as it is to
recognize those whose interests a movement aim to defend (as quoted in Rocher 1972: 443). According to h.m, in addition, the group whose interests the movement represents and the group of opponents complement each other in various ways (Ibid 443). In this chapter, we also plan to identify the major opponent groups which are obviously not homogeneous, and their rationality behind the opposition to Assam movement. This would enable us to look into various points and counter points for and against Assam movement. This would help us to look into the movement from a larger perspective. It is important to recall that the leadership of the Assam movement failed to appreciate some of the fundamental issues raised by the opponents; similarly, some of the opponents too, failed to appreciate certain vital issues raised by the leadership of the movement. Needless to say, the failure to appreciate each others' point of view had sharpened the movement, its resultant political competition and conflict.

It would be pertinent to point out that the decision of Government of India to go ahead with election in early 1983 in the face of vehement opposition from the leadership of the movement created an unprecedented impasse in Assam. In continuation to fourth chapter, this chapter would deal with the impasse and ultimate resolution of the impasse. Herein, we are also attempting to situate the conditions and compulsions for an accord between the leadership of the Assam movement and the Government of India. Lastly, in this chapter, we are discussing as to how the movement was
ultimately institutionalized through a new regional party which was voted to power to lead the state government in Assam.

The fundamental ideological plank of the Assam movement was that — the Asamiya as a nationality was facing a crisis of socio-economic, cultural and political identity in their own homeland in face of continuous immigration to Assam from outside. Therefore, it is necessary to examine empirically the extent of this identity crisis. Keeping in view the vastness and complexities of the issues and groups involved, we propose to examine this issue of ideology and empirical reality in two chapters i.e., sixth and seventh chapters. In the sixth chapter, we propose to take up the Asamiya nationality from within vis-a-vis three major groups — i.e., the black-tribals, autochthon tribals and the Muslims. All these three groups are inseparable part of the Asamiya nationality. However, it must be admitted that these groups are largely Asamiya or a mixture of Asamiyas and neo-Asamiyas. We are analysing their status in the class structure of Assam and position in the emerging Asamiya nationality — and alleged threat of identity from these three large social groups mainly composed of the oppressed classes. In the seventh chapter, we are comprehending the Asamiya identity crisis vis-a-vis the Bengalis, Nepalis, and other outsiders living in Assam. In this
chapter, we have also taken-up for scrutiny the long drawn Asamiya-Bengali conflict, Asamiya-Marwari conflict etc. In addition to that, we are also attempting to examine the alleged crisis faced by Asamiya language in Assam. It is hoped that the chapter six and chapter seven would help us to see the congruity (or incongruity) between ideology of the Assam movement i.e., the identity crisis of the Asamiya nationality and empirical reality.

In the eighth chapter, we propose to draw conclusion and make our comments and assessment on the Assam movement. The summary of all chapters are likely to enable us to understand the dialectics of the movement; connections, congruity or incongruity between ideology and empirical reality, role and roots of ruling class ideology, intra class conflict between the Indian ruling classes and the Asamiya ruling classes in Assam, the question of expulsion and assimilation and integration in an economically backward society. It is hoped that this study would enable us to explore the largely unexplored Assam movement, and its class and nationality dimension in addition to its crisis, distortion and strength. In the process, it is hoped that this study of Assam movement would help us in understanding the nature of social transformation that Assam is undergoing as an integral part of colonial and post-colonial India.
Method of Study

In this dissertation, we propose to analyse the Assam movement as simply as possible so as to bridge the gap between ivory tower of academics and popular level. We would like to express honestly at the outset that we are not using any sophisticated methodology in order to understand the Assam movement. We do not think that it is needed either at this stage. We consider our work as an attempt to begin with and we have miles to go before we apply sophisticated or hi-tech methodology. We have seen how lightly imposed and mechanically applied methodology affect the analytical rigour in many sociological studies of social movement.

Though formally, we have started our research work only in August 1987, we have been observing the movement since its beginning in 1979. We were in the field and witnessed many of its important and crucial events. We have seen lakhs of people participating at various protest actions particularly in late 1979 and 1980, and tried to understand their rationality behind such massive participation. In addition to the supporters, we have also talked to the opponents of the movement and tried to understand their rationality against the Assam movement. Massive participation of masses provoked us to study the Assam movement much earlier than its formal beginning in 1987.
We feel, we are privileged enough, because one can not go to his field to see for himself now, the massive participation of the people in various protest actions, thousands of dead bodies awaiting burial and cremation who were killed in civil or police violence, nor one can feel the fear psychosis of the Asamiyas and the non-Asamiyas, supporters and opponents now. We have observed these happenings during the most crucial days of movements as we were in the field at that time.

We have collected our data both from primary as well as secondary sources depending on the nature of emphasis of our study. However, we are aware of the fact that our data is not very much up-to-date. Wherever, we have used the Census data, our latest data is only upto 1971. This is because Census was not conducted in Assam in 1981 due to the opposition from the leadership of the movement and disturbed political situation in Assam. This has blocked data of a very significant period of Assam's history. It would also be important to recall that at the time when the leadership started their movement in 1979, they too had no latest data, obviously they were dependent on 1971 Census data. Therefore, it would be relevant for us to use 1971 Census data to study the Assam movement. In Census data when we refer to Assam, we refer to the areas of present Assam, i.e., post 1972 territory. However, in using non-Census data
we have tried to provide data up to the time when the Assam movement began. It must be admitted had there been 1981 Census operated in Assam, our data would have been much more up-to-date and helpful in providing more insights. Inspite of these data limitations, we hope to make our study meaningful with the help of existing data, our understanding of Assam's society and history in which the Assam movement is deeply embedded.

Some Conceptual Clarifications:

I. Asamiya and Assamese

We have deliberately used the term 'Asamiya' throughout our study instead of the commonly and loosely used term 'Assamese'. By the term Asamiya, we very specifically mean those people who have accepted Asamiya as their mother tongue. This distinction, we have made because sometimes all inhabitants who have their domicile in Assam are called 'Assamese'. The way the Marathis and Maharastrians are not the same and each term is to be distinguished carefully for analytical purpose. It is also necessary to distinguish between the Asamiya and the Assamese. However, almost all scholars with conspicuous exception to Guha (1980: 1699) have not made the distinction between the Asamiya and the Assamese for analytical purpose. For instance, very often like the press, they used the term Assamese to loosely mean the Asamiyas. The use
of term Asamiya would help us to avoid terminological confusion and in becoming more specific and precise in making distinction with thenon-Assamiyas. Needless to say that the term Asamiya also includes the neo-Asamiyas such as Na-Asamiya Muslims, autochthonous tribals and black-tribals who have accepted Asamiya language. However, in citing references we have kept the original term 'Assamese' as used by most of the scholars. However, when we use the term Assamese, we mean all inhabitant of the state of Assam.

II. Nationality Question

We have observed that the Assam movement involves the nationality question more, than merely the question of foreign nationals in Assam. It would be pertinent to state that by nationality question, we refer the totality of political, ideological, cultural, territorial, economic and legal relations between/among the national communities. Therefore, the Asamiya nationality question involves its political, ideological, cultural, territorial, economic and legal relations between/among the national communities. Therefore, the Assamiya nationality question involves its political, ideological, cultural, territorial, economic and legal relations with the multi-national Indian state on one hand; and other nations/nationalities on the other.
III. Asamiya Nationality

For us again a nation is a distinct and stable historical community of people characterized by a common territory, language, culture, economic life and psychological make-up. By Asamiya nationality, we mean the historically evolved and distinct community of people commonly speaking Asamiya language, having a composite Asamiya culture, certain specific commonness in psychological make-up, living in a common geographic area and economic zone, i.e. the Brahmaputra valley. It should also be noted that the Asamiya nationality is, however, a multi-caste, multi-racial, multi-religious and a multi-class community. The Asamiya nationality too has its own small minority of exploiters to exploit the vast majority of Asamiya masses and other national minorities like various tribal groups in Assam. The Brahmaputra valley is their traditional homeland which they have been sharing with the autochthon tribals.

The Asamiyas as a nationality obviously included the non-caste Asamiya Hindus like Ahoms, Koch - Rajbonshis, Morans, Motaks, Chautiyas, Deuris, Kocharis; Muslims, comprising of Syeds, Shaikhs, Morias and Julahas; caste Hindu Asamiyas composed of Brahmins, Gonaks, Kayasthas, and Kalitas etc.; and other lowly placed castes. In addition to them, the black-tribals of Assam's
tea-plantation and Na-Asamiya Muslims are two other major groups that entered the Asamiya nationality during the first half of the present century. Their identification with the Asamiya nationality is solid and their assimilation process is still going on gradually. In addition to them, some of the earlier migrants from Nepal, too, have identified themselves with the Asamiya nationality. Significantly, Asamiya nationality also includes two small groups of Asamiya Sikhs and Asamiya Buddhists. Even quite a few Bengali and Marwari families have become a part and parcel of the Asamiya nationality. Though, the Asamiyas are a small nationality, its components are numerous, uneven and complex. Many scholars have missed these very fundamental features.

The Asamiya nationality is still growing. Its various groups are standing at uneven levels in terms of assimilation. However, in terms of identification all these groups are standing at the even level. Significantly, most of the oppressed migrant groups who came during the colonial period have become a part of the Asamiya nationality.

Relatively speaking, the Asamiya nationality formation process started very late in the Indian sub-continental context. Assam's peripheral position and its weak link with the medieval India, relatively late penetration of the British colonialism (1826)
and its politico-economic annexation with India delayed the process of nationality formation in Assam. However, it would be improper to isolate the Assamiya nationality from the operative trends of Indian nationalism. In India, since the beginning of the early 19th century, Guha (1980: 1701) observed:

"... nationalism has been developing at two levels — one all-India, on the basis of pan-Indian homogenities and anti-imperialism shared in common; and another regional (Bengali, Marathi, Assamiya etc), on the basis of regional cultural homogenities. From the very outset, the two nationalisms are found intertwined and dovetailed. Traditionally, an average Indian identifies himself with both the nationalisms except in some peripheral areas (e.g. Nagaland and Mizoram) left untouched by the railways and by the Indian national movement. Assam is, however, fairly integrated with the rest of India both economically, culturally and politically. Like an average Indian, an Assamiya too, is simultaneously aware of both his regional and Indian identities".

We should also clarify as to why are we calling the Assamiya a nationality not a nation in our study. Though, it is very difficult to strictly separate nationality from a nation,
even then, we have preferred to call Asamiya a nationality mainly because it has not grown fully; --- its growth is still incomplete. Besides, it is relatively small in size among the major nations of multi-national Indian state.

IV. **Ruling Class: Asamiya and Indian**

In addition to nationality, we are also using extensively the term ruling class in the chapters to follow. For us "A ruling class is one such that the policies pursued by the State, objectively and in the long-run, serve to further the interest of that class at the cost of the interests of other non-ruling classes. There may be more than one ruling class and in that case we talk of a coalition of ruling classes..." (Rudra 1989: 143). It should also be noted that "a ruling class does not rule, at least not directly. The task of ruling, that is, running the apparatus of the State (ibid : 143) ... in a country like India with federal structure, there are also state level depositories of power (ibid : 143). The ruling class in India obviously operate at two levels; at the apex of all-India level and at the regional/state level. Though the state/regional level ruling class is a part and parcel of the Indian ruling class, however, at times, it tries to assert its limited autonomy at the state/regional level in order to wrest some concession to ensure
its survival, power and growth. Assam too, has its own state level ruling class or classes. Obviously, the Asamiya ruling class includes a very small and weak Asamiya bourgeoisie composed of a few tea-planters, rural gentry, owner of powerful regional press, professionals and middle class, contractors, transport operators etc. In other words, the Asamiyas who run the state of Assam with limited autonomy and plunder it in their interest are the members of the Asamiya ruling class. Of course, it would be wrong to describe the Asamiya ruling class without situating its position vis-a-vis the Indian ruling class.

The Indian ruling class is composed of bourgeoisie and landlords. Obviously, the big industrial bourgeoisie plays the most dominant role in the coalition of these two classes i.e. bourgeoisie and landlords. Rudra has argued very forcefully very recently that the intelligentsia too has become a partner of the Indian ruling class (Rudra : 1989 : 142).

At times, these ruling class at all India level and at the state level work harmoniously; but at times, because of intra-class contradictions arising out of competition for control over regional/state market, ownership of means of production and political power, they fight against one another. However, both of them are always conscious about their antithesis — the vast
majority of common non-ruling masses whom they together exploit. The benefits of exploitation are shared unevenly by them on the basis of each group's position in the power structure within the coalition of ruling classes.

We propose to look into competition and conflict experienced by the ruling classes from within and from without; and their role in history and society in Assam so as to enable us to understand the Assam movement from larger perspectives.