CHAPTER-II
Ethnicity of Assam
2.1. Introduction of the various ethnic groups:

Assam is a state situated in the north-eastern part of India surrounded by other administrative units of the region, i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, and Meghalaya, and also by foreign countries like Bhutan and Bangladesh. Geographically, Assam contains fertile river valleys surrounded and interspersed by mountains and hills. It is accessible from Tibet in the north (via Bum La, Tse La, Tunga), across the Patkai in the Southeast (via Diphu, Kumjawng, Hpungan, Chaukam, Pangsaup, More-Tamu) and from Myanmar across the Arakan Yoma (via An, Taungup). In the west, both the Brahmaputra valley and the Barak valley open widely to the Gangetic plains. Assam has been populated via all these accessible points in the past. It has been estimated that there were eleven major waves and streams of ethnolinguistic migrations across these points over time. Assam is the homeland of several tribes. B.M. Das stated that the people of Assam migrated to this region in long past, from different directions and at different intervals of time. Several other populations of Assam live in, have come in different times from different parts of India also. (Das B.M., 1987,5)

The people of Assam inhabit a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious society. They speak languages that belong to three
main language groups: Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, and Tibeto-Burman. The large number of ethnic and linguistic groups, the population composition and the peopling process in the state has led to it being called an "India in miniature". Original or earliest inhabitants of India on the basis of information provided by physical anthropologist regarding the ethnic elements, i.e. the racial groups, in the population of India, most authoritative and widely accepted classification done by B.S. Guha. The earliest Pre-historic settlers were the Mon-Khmer speakers currently identified with Khasi, Synteng groups with their origin in Southeast Asia. These people settled in the foothills but were pushed up into the hills (Khasi/Garo Hills, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills) by the second group of people that spoke Tibeto-Burmese of the Eastern Himalayan, North Assam, Bodo and Naga groups of languages. These people are today identified as Monpas and Sherdukpons of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh; Mishings and Deuris of Upper Assam; the Bodo-Kachari groups scattered all over Assam and the karbis of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. After the pre history immigration Proto-historic or third major ingress into Assam are attributed to the Hindu Indo-Aryans from North India into the Brahmaputra valley after 500 BC, and around the same time, from the Gangetic Delta of Bengal into the Barak Valley. This signaled the dawn of the proto-Historic period and the immigration
continued into the Ancient period, at the end of which the first Muslims, captive soldiers of the defeated Bakhtiar Khilji (in 1205), settled in the Hajo area. In the medieval times, the first Muslims, captive soldiers of the defeated Bakhtiar Khilji (in 1205), settled in the Hajo area. This was followed by the Ahoms when Sukaphaa lead his group into Assam via the Pangsau pass in the Patkai from South China. The Ahoms were followed by the same ethnic people, but who were Buddhists, a stream that continued well into the colonial period. They are today the Khamti, Khamyang, Aiton, Phake and Turung peoples settled in Upper Assam. At the end of the medieval period a small contingent of Sikhs gave rise to a minuscule but prominent group. In the beginning of the colonial period in Assam after the First Anglo-Burmese War and the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826), the political instability led to the immigration of Kachin and Kuki-Chin people into the region across the Patkai and Arakan Yoma. They constitute the Singphos in Upper Assam, and the Kuki-Chin tribes in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The beginning of tea plantations in Assam (1835) by the British led to settlements of Mundari speaking people (Munda, Santal, Savara, Oraon, Gond etc. tribes). The beginning of British administration also led to a large influx of service holders and professionals from Bengal, Rajasthan, Nepal, etc. To increase land productivity, the British encouraged Muslim peasants from
Mymensingh district of present-day Bangladesh to settle in Assam that began in 1901. The last major group to immigrate are the Bengali Hindu refugees especially from the Sylhet district of Bangladesh following the Partition of India. Inputs from these and other smaller groups have gone towards the building of a unique multi-ethnic socio-cultural situation. 

(Guha B.S,1935, 11- 13)

A temporal model of Peopling of Assam based on ethnolinguistic groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-historic</td>
<td>Austro-Asiatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mon-Khmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Khasi, Synteng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sino-Tibetan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Himalayan, North Assam, Bodo Kachari, Karbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proto- Historic</td>
<td>Hindu, Mushlims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Medieval</td>
<td>Ahom, Tai, Kuki-Chin, Kachin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial</td>
<td>Munda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post- Independence</td>
<td>Hindu Bengali, Rajasthani Traders, Nepali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bengali Muslim peasants, Bengali Hindu Refugees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B. S. Guha described different characteristics of different racial elements:-

a) Negrito: Negrito characteristics found among the people of south, the kedar, the Irula and the paniyan and in the Andaman Islands and the Onge, Andamaniosese. Some traits of these groups are found among the Angami Nega and the Bagadi of the Rajmahal hills. (Guha B.S,1935, 2-3)

b) Proto Austaloid: This group is numerically more significant as most of the tribes of middle India belong to it. These were the people described by the IndoAryans as Anas,Dasa, Dasya and Nisada—all derogatory terms (Guha,B.S.: 1935,3)

c) Mongoloid → a. Paleo Mongoloid

b. Tibeto Mongoloid

Tribal group in the Himalayan region and those in the north east are of Mongoloid stock. Some Mongoloid features are seen in the non tribal population of Assam. These ethnic groups can be regarded as autochthonous. Mongoloid groups are the kiratas as described in great epic Ramayana &Mahabharata. Guha, B.S, 1935,4)
d) **Mediterraneans:** These people are associated with the Dravidian languages and cultures. (Guha, B.S.:1935,4)

e) **Western Brachycephals:** These groups belong to Alpinoid, Dinaric and Armenoid groups. (Guha B.S.;:1935,5)

f) **Nordic:** These are the last major ethnic element to arrived in India and make a profound impact on culture and society of India. (Guha, B.S:1935, 5)

Assam has the largest number of tribes within their variety in tradition, culture, dresses and exotic way of life. Most of tribes have their own languages. Some of their traditions are also unique and lively. *Boro (kachari) Karbi, koch, Rajbangshi, Missing, Rabha Chutiy, Sonowal kacharis, Dimases, Ahom, Tea – Garden labourers* considered as major ethnic groups of Assam. These groups migrated to Assam in long past from different directions and at different intervals of time, as described by B.M. Das. (Das, B.M, 1987,4)

Ahom ruled Assam for six hundred years, keep the kingdom independent from the Moghals. The Muslim invaders of India attacked Assam for seventeen times before British established colonization in
India. Arun Chandra Bhuyan stated in the political History of Assam, about the sinario of Assamese society during the period. During this era, the Assamese society is exogenous. The British entered Assam in 1824 as tea planters which were the starting point of decline of Ahom who invaded Assam in 1218 from Burma. The koch of North Bengal converted themselves through social movements to Rajbangshis. Besides these we also find the various caste groups. Among them the Brahmins are higher by status. The tribal rulers who converted themselves into Hinduism brought the Brahmins from the west. These migrated Hindus settled in different parts of Assam (Bhuayan; Arun Chandra, vol 1, 1970, 18).

B.M. Das very beautifully described that the major ethnic groups of Assam are generally various in number and have a colorful way of life. The society of Assam is multi communal by nature. The major tribes of Assam are Rabha, Boro, Karbi, Tiwa, Misihins, Dimasa, Garo, Sonowal kacharis, Deori, Hojai, Mech etc (Das, B.M., 1987, 4)

Rabha: Rabha belongs to Boro tribes. The period of Rabha migration to Assam was not found in History. According to a popular talk Rabha entered Assam from Tibet through North-West directions. Dr. Giearson, (55)
Lt.Col.Wadel Edward Gait supported this view and stated that rablas are the kacharis, converted to Hinduism. Rabhas are known as *Tutana* or *Datiyal* Kacharis formally. The language and cultural traits of Rabhas are similar along with the Garos. Rabha tribe have several subdivisions, i.e, *Rangdani, Aitang, Pati, Maituri, Bitoliya, Hana, Chunga, Tutola, Dahuri, Medahi* etc. The home district of Rabhas are South Goalpara, Kamrup, N.C. hills and Darang. Rabha tribe belongs to Tibeto Burman Linguistic family. *Rangdani* and *Maituri* dialect is popular among Rabhas. Now a day *Pati Rabha* uses common Assamese Language in day to day life. The family structure is matriarchal endogamy by nature.( Bhatacharya, Promode ch., 1999,163)

**Boro:** Boro tribes belong to Sino-Tibato Mongoloid family. They inhabited in North-West direction of China. Then few of them crossed South East Asia and started to live in Tibbot. This group became familiar as *Tibbot, Bhot* or *Bodo*. The word Bodo indicated as ‘People’ in old Boro dialect. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee said that this tribe entered India through North-East direction and inhabited in North India. These people of Mongoloid stock were familiar as *kirato* in *Kalika Purana*, Yogini Tantra, Mahabharata etc. (Das B.M. : 1987, 37).
Mongoloid people crossed different small rives and established small Kingdoms. The inhabited places of Boro’s are Bramhaputra Valley, Cachar district, Tripura, North Bengal and South Nepal. The male and female have equal status in social structure and Monogamy by nature. (Bhattacharya, Promde ch (ed), 1999, 56)

**Karbi:** Karbi have two sub-divisions, i.e. Plain Karbis & Hill Karbis. Karbi people live North Cachar hill, Golaghat, Nagaon, Darang and Biswanath Chariali of Sonitpur district. Karbi Families maintain both Nuclear & Joint family structure matriarchal by nature. Karbis maintain both Hinduism and Christianity. (Bhattacharya, Promod ch (ed), 1999, 119)

**Tiwa:** The Tiwas are mostly confined to middle Assam. The Tiwa population is very low in number. Tiwas live in South East of Kamrup district, four villages of north Lakhimpur, Nagaon and Titabar. Tiwas are generally Hindu by religion. They establish matrimonial relation outside their own clan. (Bhattacharya, Promode ch (ed), 1999, 173-175)

**Missing:** Missing inhabited in several parts of upper Assam, i.e. Sadia to Jaypur. Missing have eight subdivision—*Saieng, Oayan,*
Mesing, Delo, Tiotaye, Pagar, Dambak, Samuguria and Tamar. They belong to Tibeto Burman Mongoloid stock. (Bhattacharya, Promode ch(ed); 1999, 1555-157)

Dimasa: Dimasa population is very low in number. They inhabited North Cachar hill, Silchar, Karbi Anglang, Nagaon, Dhansiri area of Sonitpur district. Dimasas are Hindu by religion. Dimasa allow to marrying other than their own clan group. Male and female properties are separate. Male Property earned by sons and female property earned by daughters only. The family pattern is patriarchal by nature. Dimasas belongs to Mongoloid stock. (Bhattacharya, Promode ch(ed), 1999, 44)

Garo: They belong to Mongoloid stock. Garo population found in Kamrup and Goalpara district of Assam. Garo families are matriarchal by nature. They preferred cross cousin marriage. They are Hindu by religion. (Bhattacharya, Promode (ed): 1999, 37)

Sonowal Kachari: Sonowal Kacharis inhabited in Lakhimpur and Sibsagar district of Assam. They maintain vaishnavism. They belong to Mongoloid stock. (Bhattacharya, Promode ch, 1999, 71)
**Deuri/ Chutiya:** Deuri population is very low in number. These people live mainly in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur district of Assam. In Gohpur of Sonitpur district few Deuri populations is found. Deuries have three subdivisions, i.e. *Dibangiyaa, Tengapaniya* and *Borganya*. Deuri population is matriarchal by nature. These people are Hindu by religion. Family pattern is nuclear and maintain monogamy marriage. They preferred the marriage outer than their own clan. They belong to Tibeto Burman Mongoloid stock. (Bhattacharya, Promode ch, 1999, 88)

Besides the above mentioned tribes, a large number of other tribes also live in Assam, e.g., The *Ahoms, Morans, Chutiyas*, the small Buddhist population like *Tai Phake, Aiton, Turung* and *Dunia* etc. These groups have scheduled Tribe status in Indian constitution. *Koches* considered as Other Backward Classes. The non tribal population, e.g., Caste Hindus, Schedule Castes. (Das. B.M. 1987, 107)

Indian constitution given schedule caste status to the following groups,e.g., *Basphar, Bhuinmali, Mali, Britial Bania, Bania, Dhupi, Dhobi, Dugla, Dholi, Hira, Jalkeot, Jhalo, Malo, Kaibarta, Jaliya, Lalbegi, Mehara, Mehtar Bhangi, Muchi, Rishi, Namusudra*, (59)
Patni, Sutradhar etc. Hindu caste groups of Assam are Bamun (Brahmin) and Sudir (Non Brahmin). This non Brahmin group includes several other castes of different social hierarchy, e.g., Kalita, Khatriyas, Kayasthas. (Das, B.M., 1987, 110).

During the time period of British rule Assam witnessed a series of immigration. British brought laboures from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc. to work as tea garden laboures. In recent years a large number of people migrated to Assam from other parts of India and settle here permanently. Nepalis have migrated from neighboring country Nepal in 1951. British also brought few Bangali people to Assam to serve and to help them in different matters. Assam also bears the witness of immigration from East Bengal (East Pakistan, Bangladesh) which is going on unabated since, beginning of present century. (Das, B.M., 1987, 13-15).

2.2 Roots of Ethnicity:

The concept of ethnicity is a recent development. Most of the communities, groups have become conscious about their ethnic
identities which confined to their clans and villages. The ethnic identity of Assam also related with the cultural identity of the people of region, which is of greater significance in the context of nation building. (Pakem B, 1990, 36).

Ethnic identity has arisen within sociology and social psychology, it is impossible to ignore the considerable impact (especially on the empirical level) of social anthropology. Despite the wide use of the term 'ethnic identity' in anthropological literature it is very difficult to distinguish it in this context from other related concepts, and often it is simply used as a synonym for 'ethnicity'. Indeed, identity is often taken for granted as a term which does not need to be defined, and is itself used to define ethnicity, as in Schildkrout's definition: "Ethnicity is a set of conscious or unconscious beliefs or assumption about one's own or another's identity, as derived from membership in a particular type of group or category" (Schildkrout 1978, 88).

Ethnic identity is treated as a conceptualisation of one's membership of an ethnic group. One of the evident advantages of the social anthropological approach, which needs to be emphasised, is its cultural, regional and historical focus. The function and expression of ethnicity is scrutinised in a definite cultural context. Thus, though it can
find some parallels between the two disciplinary approaches, generally while anthropologists describe precisely the mosaic of different ethnic identities, sociologists try to locate them within a broader social structure. So in sociological analyses ethnic identity is often used synonymously with ethnicity. Discussing the role of ethnicity in the contemporary world, based on great changes in the ethnic mix (connected with differential rates of natural increase in a societies and incoming streams of migrants and refugees), sociologists are agreed on the importance of ethnic divisions in most societies. The fact that, since the second World War, 20 million have died in ethnic conflicts, strengthens this conviction (McKay 1982, 392-420).

Many sociologists, however, confuse ethnicity with cultural behaviour or cultural awareness, and this reduces the understanding of ethnicity to the general study of culture (Patterson 1983, 77).

Explanations of ethnic phenomena within sociology can be divided into two categories, which we might call primordialism and structuralism (Liebkind 1989, 234).

The former views ethnicity as irrational, deep-seated allegiances and attachments to kin, territory or religion (McKay 1982)
Ethnicity is seen as a primordial tie which connotes unity and solidarity above and beyond internal division. The latter, on the other hand, considers ethnicty more or less as 'false consciousness', or 'ideology', which is rationally manipulated or consciously adopted as a strategy for pursuing the political and economic goals of ethnic groups (Okamura 1981, 452-465).

The instrumental, pragmatic and changeable aspects of ethnicty are emphasised, and ethnic identity is viewed as a rational reaction to social pressure (Lange 1981, 103).

Researchers are now moving beyond both of these positions, which stress the importance of ethnic groups in a social structure but explaining it in different ways, towards the discovery of general features and specific functional characteristics of ethnicity. In confronting ethnic phenomena from a social-psychological perspective they treat ethnic identity as a specific conceptual model through which a group and its members understand the role of ethnicity, whereas ethnicity relates to the structural relationships between ethnic groups. The advantage of a psychological approach to identity is that it opens up the intimate ties and relationships between the individual and society to investigation. However, a study of the different elements and aspects of identity should
be supplemented by the consideration of a wider spectrum of social phenomena and factors which sociology provides. Although there are a number of different approaches, which consider ethnic identity from the psychological point of view (psychoanalytical, interactionist, cognitive and so on) it is possible to distinguish some general features. The main feature that we can also find in the anthropological and sociological approaches discussed above is the dualistic character of ethnic identity, identity can be seen as a complex balance between components of generality and components of individuality (Liebkind 1989, 52).

That means there are two levels of consideration: from the point of view of the ethnic group as a whole (group ethnic identity) and from the point of view of individual actors (individual ethnic identity). These levels do not exist in isolation one from another but they influence each other and overlap. The formation of individual and collective consciousness is always interwoven and provides another dynamic underlying the process of ethnic consciousness (Saifullah-Kahn 1983, 265).

Individuals differ in the extent to which they behave in terms of group memberships. In reality, however, it is impossible to act in terms
of group membership only, just as social identities always play a role even in the most personal relationships (Tajfel 1978, 79).

The social psychological interpretation of ethnic identity more often than not distinguishes it from other approaches to social identity especially on the group level. This approach is very close to the sociological interactionist tradition, one of whose variants *processual interactionism* (the Chicago school) put at the centre the social situation in which identities are established and maintained, while another variant, *structural interactionism* emphasises the concept of role and identities and views identity mainly as internalised roles (Gecas 1982, 1-33).

One of the most popular and sophisticated psychological theories of social identity developed by Tajfel, holds that the purpose of ingroup identification is the achievement of a positive social identity (i.e. of a group-based positive distinctiveness in a relation to an out group). So in this theory it is stated that one of the most important dimensions of social identity, the coexistence of 'we' and 'they' components (or in another words *sameness* and *distinctiveness*) is a parameter varying in regard to membership of individual groups (Zavalloni, 1983, 298).

Since at the centre of psychological analyses is the individual, the conceptualisation of ethnic identity here includes the
motivation side both cognitive and evaluative, which means considering in a study such terms as value system, and self esteem. Following traditions which claim a positive self-concept as one of the basic human needs, many contemporary theories maintain that a positive self-concept functions as the motivating force behind the development of social identity (Tajfel 1978, 211).

This position does work as an explanatory model in some instances, but tends to ignore facts which contradicting its propositions. It ignores cases where subordinate minorities may develop a negative self-concept together with positive attitudes towards the dominant group. These images are considered to be based on the definitions and values of the majority group and can thus be compared to false consciousness (Billig, 1976, 37).

It can say about the motivationally oriented tradition, that it resulted in a number of highly important and valuable studies based on the evaluative connotations of social identities. Transformation into ethnic self-esteem reveals a syndrome of theoretical and methodological problems that signalised the need for a deeper treatment of the identity concept. It closely corresponds with the tradition started by Erikson (1968), where the socio-psychological process of reflexivity called the ‘I
was placed at the centre of enquiry and where there were attempts to find some correlation between the partly subconsciousness aspects of selfhood, namely ego-identity and individual actions. The main problem here was that on the one hand they worked efficiently on the theoretical level, but that, on the other hand, they encountered some difficulties at the concrete empirical level of analysis (Lange 1981,76).

The mosaic description of the different approaches shows us that there is no general theory of ethnic identity in the social sciences and each theorising scheme emphasises and takes into consideration only some aspects of the problem. They need not be evaluated as 'right' or 'wrong' because of the variable nature and variety of forms of ethnic identity, which differ not only from group to group, but also from one historical and social context to another. The world is full of a variety of images of ethnic identity which differ with social context and historical circumstances, and even a sophisticated theory will be only an abstraction which will not be able to take into consideration all of the variety. One of the ways of solving this problem, namely its operationalisation for practical investigation, always exists in parallel with attempts to define ethnic identity. The method of analysis, the usage of terms, the logic of enquiry are always consciously or unconsciously under both practical and
theoretical constraints. So it is the task of investigators to find and define their position within the different approaches available.

The other way to minimise the lag between theory and empirical research into ethnic identity is to consider its main elements and key characteristics. This gives us a broader picture of identity than that proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1971) who saw is as a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society. Theories about identity are always embedded in a more general interpretation of reality: they are 'built into' the symbolic universe and its theoretical legitimations, and vary within the character of the latter. Any theorising about identity - and about specific identity types - must therefore occur within the framework of the theoretical interpretation within which it and they are located. The model presented in Figure 1 takes into consideration each level of the analysis of ethnic identity defined earlier. Each of these components can be viewed as a potential problem for an investigation. In the light of the preceding discussion it seems clear that there is a wide and complex set of phenomena subsumed under the terms of ethnic identity which have led to the conclusion by many writers (Liebkind 1989; Weinreich 1989) that the notion of the creation of a universal grand theory of ethnic identity should be abandoned. A more appropriate approach to theorising about ethnic identity...
identity may be developed from generating theoretical propositions tied into specific socio-historical contexts. The socio-historical context becomes the major component of the ethnic identity of a particular ethnic group or subgroup. It is important to be aware that ethnic identity is not an entity, but a series of complex processes in time in which people construct from 'historical' facts biographical continuities between ancestors and their descendants as a group, generally in a wider social context of other ethnic groups and other social phenomena (Weinreich 1989).

The final conclusion is that in spite of difficulties with universal theories of ethnic identity, caused not by the weaknesses of contemporary approaches in social sciences but by the complex and multi-dimensional nature of ethnic identity itself, the empirically grounded theoretical proposition that ethnic identity exists is not questioned. The Assamese society is an integral part of the great Indian civilization and nationality. After the Yandaboo treaty, Assam becomes a part of India. In the revolt of 1857 against the British the Assamese people also took part with the same force of unity with other parts of the country. We found in the Political History of Assam edited by Arun Chandra Bhuyan we found that last king of Ahom dynasty, Kandarpeswar Singha and patriots like Moniram Dewan, Piyalee Baruah and others (69)
joined hands with the rebels of other parts of India for a common cause, i.e., drive away the British, common enemy. This rebel is the link that bound all the people of apparently different culture, language or religion with a feeling of oneness. In the freedom struggle of 1921, 1930, 1942 and later, the people of Assam fought against the British as Indians. The experience earned in the freedom movement inspired the people of the region to stand unitedly to brought against injustice and gradually risen the feeling of oneness, nationality which show the pathway of identity question, or ethnicity. (Bhuyan Arun Chandan 1978, 12-17)

Moving from one place to another place inside the country and settle down, earn property is the constitutional right to every Indian people. The problem of influx to Assam form the other places of India and outside the country has increased during past few decades. This influx passed a threat to the indigenous tribes of Assam as they become minority group. This inter-state influx apart, large scale infiltration from our neighboring countries also adds magnitude to the problem in ancient time. According to Edward Gait lower Assam was dominant by Hindu population and upper Assam was by Ahom population. Ahom invaded Assam in 1218 from the Bruma. Before the Ahoms, chutiyas ruled Assam for 100 years. Chutiyas gradually absorbed with the culture of Ahoms.

(70)
Few of them converted themselves to Hinduism and earned a higher caste status. Kacharis also ruled some part of Cachar and adjacent areas. They influenced local society and culture. They ruled for 300 years. Koch was also very important community entered from North Bengal, established their kingdom in the region. This community converted themselves through social movements to Rajbanshis. Besides these we also find the Brahmin people of west who spared Hindu culture in Assam. (Gait, Edward, Assamese Translated, 1991, 24)

The whole region is scattered with number of tribes, social groups. All the major ethnic group e.g. Bodo, Missing, Karbi, Rabha, Dimasa have started to become conscious about on ethnic identities, protection of own culture, language and have demanded separate political units. Tiwa a minority group have demanded a separate Tiwa territory to protect their own identity. (Dutta, Roy, 1991,40).

The Bodo population concentrated in Kokrajhar district of Assam and secondarily in Udalguri, Barama, Tamulpur, Kokilabari, Sorbhog, Dudhnoi, Boko and Marioni region. Thus it is seen that the Bodos do not actually have a distinct geographical territory a separate political unit. The settlement of Missing is concentrating on the banks of
Subansiri River, Majuli, Jonai and Dhemaji area. They also do not occupy a distinct geographical territory. (Dutta, Roy, 1991,47)

Karbi Anglang district is a homeland of the Karbi. They about more than fifty percent of the total population only on the Hamren subdivision, where as their percentage is below fifty in the Diphu subdivision. So Karbis have a distinct geographical territory to justify their claim for a separate political unit. However constitutional safe gourd has been given to the Karbis under sixth schedule of the constitution creating an autonomous district council. (Hajarika N., 1995,225)

Similarly the North Cachar hill district is the homeland of the Dimasa and so they are also brought under the autonomous district council. Dudhnoi and Boko are the main settlement areas of Rabhas. Besides they are scattered in Chaygaon, Paneri, Kalaigaon and Mongoldoi areas without having a district territory of their own, a separate administrative set up known as Rabha Hasang (Rabha land council) has carved out in Dudhnoi and Boko region to provide them ethnic protection (ibid,48-68).
The Tiwa tribe which is numerically a small tribal group settled at Morigaon, Mikerbheta and Rabha Thanas of Morigaon and Nagaon districts. Tiwa tribe is very conscious about the preservation of its ethnic identity and agitation has been started for their separate administrative setup. Like the Bodos, the Rabhas and the Missings, this tribe was also brought under Autonomous Tiwa council. (Dutta P.S., 1993, 114).

Among all the tribal groups, the ethnic consciousness takes a most vigorous form in the case of Bodos. The Bodo activists are divided into many groups on the basis of their different kinds of demand state and some other who are hard care extremists adopting terrorism and Violence of different forms are found to be restless till they achieve a sovereign Bodoland sending from India. (Bhattarcharya, Chandana,(ed),1993,21).

The plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley after independence organised themselves under the banner of Plain tribal council of Assam (PTCA) to fight for equitable social order free from exploitations and injustice. They started the Udayachal movement in 1967. This movement was not revolution as it was never aimed at bringing about structural changes. It was rather aimed at achieving an
autonomous region within the existing political setup, through the redistribution of power and the system of different allocation of resources, rights and privileges. (Hazarika, N, 1995, 188).

In 1974, PTCA shed a lot of blood and achieved the recognition of Bodo language as a medium of instruction in the schools within the tribal belts and blocks. They developed an ideology based on relative deprived in various fields and involved themselves in conflicting relations with the upper caste Hindu privileged ruling groups to bring about a change in traditional distribution of power. So, the conflict is based more on ethnic tribal and non-tribal groups, not on class struggle in terms of privileged and deprived classes, the exploiters and the exploited. During the time of historic Assam agitation of six years, against foreign immigrants, formed the All Bodo Student Union which took an active step in organizing the Bodo people for a separate Bodoland to be erased out of Assam, within the constitution of India. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha was found to raise voice for the realization of Bodoland. In the mean time PTCA, as the recognized political party had been weakened among the Bodo people and a breakaway group led by B.K. Basumatary called United Tribal Nationalists Liberation Front (UNTNLF) become stronger as if adopted an extreme method of agitation and started mobilizing the
tribal youths for the creation of a Bodoland state, ABSU and Bodo Sahitya Sabha resorted to peaceful, democratic movement for the creation of a separate Bodoland. Government and the leaders of the different groups of Bodo movement except the NDFB; BTC was formed in the month of February 2004, within the state of Assam and the formation of four districts- Kokrajhar, Chiranga, Baksas and Udalguri within the BTC which is included 3058 villages with a total population of 30 lakhs .(ibid,182-188).

The ethnic identity of Assam also can be considered as cultural identity of the people of the region. This is of greater significance in the context of nation building. In North Cachar hill districts is presently engulfed in mutual distrust and hostilities between two ethnic groups namely Dimasas and Hamars. Dimasas through their sheer numbers are grabbing most of the opportunities whether in government jobs or legal contracts in the N C Hills. The zemas and Hmars always allege that the Dimasas threaten them to declare complete loyalty or face dire consequences. Thus an unaware, better current of ethnic rivalry got a foot hood. Political unrest and interest give fillip to enlisting contradictions. There are clearly two sides of the conflict in N.C. Hills.

(75)
One is socio-economic and other is egoistic and basically psychological cultural divide. (Hazarika N, 1995, 104)

The Volatile situation could be served from further deterioration only if the right avenues are explored and if appropriate steps are taken by authorities concerned. (ibid 108)

Choudangs are one of the backward classes of Assam. These classes generally concentrated in the Jorhat district of Assam. The official enumerated figures of chaudangs are not available as they were not enumerated separately in any of the population census. They present a microscopic minority in regard the Ahom community of Assam. Later

Ahoms give them socio-political, affinity and they merged with Ahoms. (B. Pakem, 1990, 173).

This community were originally one of the khel (section) of Ahoms. They were entrusted as the responsibility of punishing the offenders by Ahoms Kings. They acted as soldiers in every foreign invasion, e.g., Burmease, Mughalis and had lost most of their population. During the time of Ahom King Kamaleswar Singha a new arm force had (76)
constituted among Chaodangs whom now living in Jorhat district of Assam. These community people assimilated to the greater Assamese society and have lose their traditional natural characteristic. Now their main occupation is agriculture they are backward both economically. There are hardly be difference of opinion and a multipoint attack by various developments departments will definitely meet the aspirations of Chaodangs. At the same time efforts should be made to preserve their traditional traits while bringing them towards the mainstream. Mata and Maran are one of more other backward communities of Assam. The people of this group entwined by a common religion and language yet there is an undertone of social divisions based on traditional ethnic identity. In recent years the Maran, a major constituent of Mata community is trying to re establish their independent tribal identity. These communities have growing an ethnic awareness among them. They started a movement to re establish a separate ethnic identity to revive their traditional customs, cultural heritage as a follower of Mayamora Vanishnarism. Before independence they suggested by establishing an organization Mayamore Heet Sadhini Sabha. In 1948 this organization was renamed as Sadau Assam Matak Sanmilani. Maran Mata are constantly trying to established their own separate ethnic identity. Hmar was notified schedule tribe in Assam and Manipur as per scheduled Caste

(77)
and Scheduled tribe modification order 1956. The same statutory position has been maintained in the current list of SC and ST order (Amendment) Act 1976. As mentioned earlier, the Hamar were enumerated as Kuki or Tushei-Kuki in Manipur and Assam respectively in the earlier census before ST status was accorded to them in 1956. These community people observes common pattern of social behaviour and customs with Kuki-Lushei are observed. Now a days this Hmars of Assam along with Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya stressed upon the independence ethnic identity and opposed any alien with the Kukies and emerging distinct tribal identity. The Koch are one of the oldest inhabitants of North East and Eastern India who are proud of their past origin and cultural heritage. They belongs to Mongoloid people and to Tibeto- Burman language family, (ibid,174-205).

Koch Rajbangshis now become conscious, restive for some time and more particularly since the Chapter session of Assam Sahitya Sabha (March 16-19,2007) when agitation call by Koch Rajbangshis forum marred the session. The koch community people demanded to give them Scheduled Tribe status. This demand is not a recent event and has started in 1967 when Koch Rajbansi Sanmiloni fomed. The sixties and partly the seventies saw the emergence of OBC Politics with combination (78)
of Koch- Rajbanshis, Ahoms, Chutias, Jogis and some other backward castes and sub castes with exclusion of ST, SC communities and the caste Hindu- Brahmins, Kalitas and Kayasthas. Along the OBC formation excluded the upper castes and the ST and SC, in the behaviour, it was explicit that, same groups from the OBC wanted to cross into the ST Stream, but was resisted by the later. The logic was simple. The numerical growth of ST population, if the process was allowed, would not necessarily enlarge the benefit quota, rather the same would push the underdeveloped ST group to be emasculated by the educationally and economically developed formation. But no matter what the reaction was of the ST population; Koch Rajbanshis, Ahoms, Chutia who ruled Assam in the past, made demand for ST status, not under a unified banner of OBC, but under the banner of their caste identity. Along with the demand for recognition of ST and language, there is a third dimension of the creation of Kamatapur. The proposed state includes eleven district of Assam and five separate state of Kochs also raised during sixties also with late Ajit Narayan Deb as the president of the state hood demand came from a combination of all people, which is not so in the present case. The demand was dropped as it was not possible. The activists who are popularly known as tea tribes ion Assam have long been demanding.
scheduled tribes status. A few more ethnic communities have also been demanding ST status. (Hazarika. N., 1995, 103)

The motive behind such a demand is also not very difficult to understand since their ST recognition would enable them to fall under the preview of reservation and other advantages that are accorded to ST population. These community people are not indigenous group. They have migrated into Assam to work in the tea plantations since the last 200 years. The people of this community lay claims to a separate language for them. But composed as they are of people of diverse origins, though forcibly united within the boundaries of plantation, there could not have been an original common language, common patterns of livelihood, proximity and cultural exchange has helped developed common linguistic traits. The Advasis of lower and middle Assam understood the Saadri language of Jharkhand easily but the Adivasis of upper Assam use Assamese as common language at home. They have to depend upon on Assamese language in educational and official purpose. But unfortunately, the communist argues that the Assamese are forcing their language down the throats of Adivasis. It is a clear misinterpretation. Today, after centuries of evolution of greater Assamese society, people of different groups of the region being forced to confront
their own sense of identity of who they are and where from they came. As the grip of colonial power loosened ethnic kinship, regional and religious ties, both old and new, thrilled to demolish the fragile social order left in the wake of colonialism. It led to the fragmentation of the state. Inter groups conflicts erupted with population who shared elaborate and long establish tie. (Agarwal. M.M.,1991,81)

After six years of Assam agitation against the deportation of illegal immigration from East Bengal, the historic Assam accord was designed in 1985, to provide constitutional safeguards under the provisions of clause 6 of the Assam Accord, the state Government has been entrusted with the task of coming up with a comprehensive definition of the term Assamese people on sober reflection. Then question aroused on the homogeneity, unique identity of Assamese race.(Deka,Meeta,1989,34).

Assam Sahitya Sabha is involving to come out with a precise definition of Assamese, Assamese is one of the word includes all who reside in Assam and speak Assamese for years. The ethnic groups like Bodo, Tiwa, Rabha, Karbi etc. opposed to be clubbed as Assamese, because they have own language. This is really an unfortunate part in the
history of Assam. If it is going back only probably fifteen years back, we found that all ethnic groups considered themselves as Assamese for all purposes although they had their own identity. After the Assam accord, ethnic groups would assent their right to promote their individual identity (Documents in Assam1995, 2003).