CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

The present study is contextualized in the society of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (henceforth BTAD) and is concentrated on the issue of socio-cultural affinities as evident in the two groups of people mentioned in the title. The selection of the two groups from many other groups, castes, communities and ethnicities existing in the BTAD is not arbitrary. Their co-existence in BTAD is a fascinating motivation for a detailed study. These two groups are the majority Bodo people who are the original settlers of the land, and the Nepalese who migrated to the land and have become a part and parcel of its culture for over a period of more than a century.

There are certain obvious elements of socio-cultural affinity among the Bodos and the Nepalese in the sense that some ethnicities in the Nepalese population share a common ancestral link to the Bodos in terms of the greater Kirata fraternity. This ancestral link binds many ethnicities belonging to the Eastern Himalayas starting from Arunachal Pradesh right up to the mid-Himalayas of Western Nepal and even beyond. The historical fact that some tribes belonging to the Bodo-Kachari group of Tibeto-Burman origin belonging to the Sino-Tibetan stock migrated to the Tarai region of Nepal sharply demonstrates that there existed cultural ties among the Bodos and the Nepalese from time immemorial. The present study shall explore these ties along with socio-cultural ties that were forged and are still being forged after the Nepalese settled down in the state of Assam in general and BTAD in particular. As is clear from the above, some ties or affinities are deep-seated and are of the nature of common or shared ancestry. Some other elements of affinity were strategized as the two groups of people chose to fashion a common destiny in the context of a modern nation state. The context is that of sharing of power, equality in terms of opportunities, justice, levels of education and development. These strategies have greatly to do with cultural value of harmony and peaceful socio-cultural co-existence.
Brief Conceptual Background

The term ‘affinities’, in general, refers to closeness. The usual dictionary definition of ‘affinity’ implies ‘a feeling of closeness and understanding that someone has for another person because of their similar qualities, ideas or interests’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012). When it is specifically applied to human culture and used in the context of two or more groups of people living together in a constitutionally guaranteed political arrangement, it assumes larger implications. ‘Affinities’ in such a context is rooted in the concept of cultural pluralism formed with the elements of mutual coexistence based on tolerance, understanding, respect and commonly shared political, cultural and social goals.

It can be argued, in purely theoretical terms, that cultural pluralism also allows space for the play of group assertions in terms of ethnic difference. It has been seen that such articulation of ethnic difference slides towards the public expression of the aspirations of the constituent groups. Recent history of ethnic assertions has proved that such expressions have often given rise to ethnic conflict as well. Ethnic conflicts in this context can be described as the bargain for greater share of the political and cultural arrangement. It is to be noted that such bargains refuse to negotiate the issue of ‘affinities’ or social and cultural closeness between groups living side by side in a constitutionally guaranteed political space within the modern state. Thus, it can be safely presumed that socio-cultural affinity is key to the development of the idea of cultural pluralism in the modern nation state in which its stakeholders are on the path of the developmental agenda.

The formation of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts or BTAD is, in effect, the result of the expression of ethnic assertion of the Bodo people living in the northern bank of the Brahmaputra in the state of Assam within the Republic of India. The ethnic assertion of the Bodos has a history of its own. Successive popular movements in various forms that started in the late Nineteen Eighties culminated in the signing of the BTC Accord in the beginning of the 21st century which gave rise to the formation of the BTAD, a territorial administrative arrangement within the state of Assam, on the basis of the VI Schedule of the Constitution of India.
BTAD was purported to fulfill the political, social and cultural aspirations of the Bodo people with the handing over of the right to govern themselves within constitutional safeguards and limitations. Since the BTAD is not a monolith of the Bodo people alone in terms of the population composition, the safeguard and administration of all the people living within the administrative area also is warranted in the mandate of BTAD.

Beyond the political sphere, one can trace elements of cultural pluralism among the various communities and ethnic groups which facilitated a peaceful and organic co-existence in the area now known as BTAD. For centuries together, Bodos and non-Bodos have lived in the region with harmony and peace. At the same time, however, it is also a historical fact that there have been voices of resentment and protestation among many of the castes, ethnicities and groups of people, especially among the Bodos, regarding the perceived oppression and exploitation at the hands of the dominant groups and majoritarian communities in the state of Assam.

In strict socio-cultural terms, it must also be added that there has taken place among the people belonging to the area which is now being called BTAD, a natural process of acculturation and assimilation dating back from prehistoric times. It is only in the post-independence era that the growing ethnic identity consciousness has called into question such a process of acculturation. Rising levels of education among the various ethnic groups, pressure on landholding and employment due to an unnatural growth of population due to the migration of many dispersed communities into Bodo habitation, and the need to safeguard ethnic identity against such pulls and pressures are some of the reasons that have resulted in self-reflexive political consciousness among the Bodo people as well as other ethnic communities, castes and groups of people residing in the area that is now being called BTAD.

The theoretical model envisaged in the formation and sustenance of the BTAD is basically rooted in the socio-cultural and political interdependence of the many castes, communities and ethnicities living within its boundaries. The inherent vision of the political arrangement of BTAD is harmony and peaceful socio-cultural co-existence in terms of political power sharing. So the basic tenets of BTAD idealize socio-cultural affinities among these groups of people. The present study seeks to
look into the dynamics of the affinities by narrowing down its scope to two major groups of people, namely, the Bodos and the Nepalese, in the BTAD, who have lived side by side for over a century now.

The term ‘Bodo’ here refers to the Bodo speaking ethnic group belonging to the Bodo Kachari group of people belonging to the Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan descent. The term ‘Nepalese’ here refers to the group of Indian Nepalese people migrating and living in the BTAD for a considerable period of time having ancestry in the Himalayan country called Nepal. Since the formation of the BTAD is fairly recent, the Nepalis living within it do not differ substantially from Nepalis living elsewhere in Assam, therefore the appellation ‘Assamese Nepalis’ is interchangeably used in this dissertation to describe and analyze their general characteristics. While the Bodos as an ethnic group are characterized by homogeneity, the Nepalis as a community of people are problematized because the term consists of caste hierarchies, ethnicities and groups. This problematic and its dynamics shall be discussed and contextualized in Chapter IV.

**Motivation for Research:**

It may be stated with a certain degree of certitude that the proposed groups of people, namely the Bodo and the Nepalis people residing in the BTAD area, have historically shown remarkable levels of peace, harmony and co-existence with deep respect for each other. As has been stated in the introductory remarks above, the selection of the two groups for the study of cultural affinity has not been arbitrary on the part of the present writer. The aspect of cultural amity between the two groups is particularly relevant in the context of a series of ethnic clashes that the BTAD has witnessed prior to as well as since its inception in 2003. Against the backdrop of racial, communal and ethnic mistrust often leading to violent clashes resulting in loss of lives and property among certain communities in the BTAD, the Bodos and Nepalese have almost always shown great restraint and fellow-feeling between themselves. This is a fascinating motivation for study on the part of the present writer.

Secondly, as a fifth generation representative of a group of Nepali people settled in Assam, the present researcher is motivated enormously to look into some of the dynamics of the issue of migration, settlement, acculturation, assimilation as well
as identity formation of a newly emerging component of a mosaic of culture that Assam is. The family history of the present writer merges with the community history of the Nepalis of Assam whose ancestral roots lie in the hills of Eastern Nepal (the Hills of Ilam which are part of the now ‘Autonomous Region of Limbuwan’ in the Jhapa and Sunsari districts of Nepal). It is fascinating how five generations ago, the present writer’s family fortunes involving a high caste Hill Bahun group who were granted *birta* land (land grant issued to hill Bahuns and Chhetris in order that the two high caste people could pursue their scholastic activity of studying and propagating the Vedas among the Hindus in Nepal by the House of the Gorkhas in the 18th centuries) were inevitably tied with the fortunes of the Tibeto-Burman group of people of Eastern Nepal, namely, the Rais and the Limbus. It is also fascinating how the *kipat* land (community land of the tribal population of Eastern Nepal) was distributed among the high caste Bahuns and Chettris and how this move severely affected the resource mobilization of the Tibeto-Burman groups and how they migrated out of the hills of Nepal to the plains and hills of Eastern India. As an irony of history, both the groups, the *Khasas* and the *Janajatis* (as they are called now in Nepal in the new discourse of identity politics that has swept away the Himalayan country) carved out a common destiny for themselves by contending, cohabiting and co-existing with another large Tibeto-Burman group, the Bodos of the Brahmaputra valley, perhaps the largest in South Asia. The migrants of Nepal who settled in Assam encountered new experiences, devised fresh strategies and coping mechanisms in the new land that they chose to call their motherland. This intertwining of the family history with that of the community as well as the coping strategies with which the Nepalese have formed their unique identity in Assam and the North East is therefore another motivation for the present study.

**Statement of the Research Problem:**

Much of the academic narrative of the Bodo and Nepali people is based on colonial scholarship, (Hodgson:1847; Grierson:1903; Endle:1911, Wadell) mainly ethnography, which followed the anthropological and linguistic models that are prone to treat ethnicities and castes as self-reliant, individual social units. There is also another form of narrative, shaped particularly post-1980s that posits a certain kind of ethnic identity assertion issued forth from an identity consciousness which
accommodates largely the colonial scholarship and juxtaposes it with post-colonial developmental discourse. In this kind of narrative, the focus is on the margins created by a skewed sense of development pursued by the post-colonial central and state governmental agencies. It must be noted that such narrative highlights the fact that the margins left by such developmental agenda is almost invariably filled by the deprived and dispossessed ethnic communities to which the two communities taken under study here also fall. What the colonial grids of knowledge and the consciousness they generated could not fathom is the fact that the exclusionary status that the scholarship helped form and the consciousness that it helped shape does not resonate well in the postcolonial scenario of the Indian republic. This is because in a multi-racial, pluralistic society as the Indian society is, the praxis of exclusionary ethnic identity is bound to militate against the felt experience of day-to-day life. People live in a much more interdependent, interactive and mutually inclusive universe today than they used to live in the times of the pre-colonial, pre-modern, pristine folk experience. The notion of isolated speech communities living apart from other communities with sharp markers of cultural boundaries is no longer viable in modern times.

Now, anthropologists (Appadurai, 1996; Barth, 1983, 1989 &1993; and Anderson, 1983) have sensitized us to the fact that the conditions under which society and culture exist today cannot be adequately understood by the traditional anthropological perspectives based on totalizing philosophies. These perspectives were developed so that the nature of individual social units could be understood properly in the late 19th and early 20th century in the discourse of social science and anthropology. This approach negates the fact of multicultural existence of communities in modern times. The attempt to see societal wholes as discrete, individual and self-sustaining entities is thwarted in the contemporary world in which socio-cultural units are evolving all the time since complex entities are in perpetual flux, redefining their statuses in new negotiations with the ecology of politics and culture.

The present researcher fully subscribes to the view put forward by Barth ‘that each tribe and people has maintained its culture through a bellicose ignorance of its neighbours is no longer entertained’ (Barth, 1969, Introduction, Ethnic Groups and Boundaries). The present study seeks to explore in what ways the cultural boundaries
are maintained and in what other ways do the boundaries blur. The blurring of the boundaries will, in the ultimate analysis, signal the affinities among distinctly ethnic groups of people living side by side in a designated and politically guaranteed territory.

Quite away from the academic discourse and narratives that seek to explore the salient features of groups and ethnicities, there have been considerable social and cultural mobilizations which have taken place in the field of research of the present study, i.e. Bodoland, over the past one hundred years or so. These new cultural experiences have sharply redefined the cultural boundaries of the groups of people living within the territorial entity now labeled as Bodoland. These cultural experiences have their own dynamics. It needs emphasizing here that these new cultural experiences coupled with the politics born out of it have necessitated strategies of new cultural traits, which look towards a broad-based, inclusive and common goal for the people of Bodoland. At the same time, new cultural exclusive traits regarding cultural symbols like language, costumes, cuisine and art, dance and culture have also been sharply promoted and defined. This dissertation shall examine the exclusions, inclusions and overlapping of socio-cultural elements in the ethnic boundaries as exhibited in the day-to-day life as well as in the community life of ethnic groups under discussion with the examples of the two specific groups, namely, the Bodos and the Nepalis.

**Scope of the Research**

The study shall explore the elements of affinity among groups of people living in a politically arranged territorial entity. The territorial entity is the Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts otherwise known as BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council). This field-based study shall confine itself within the limits of the BTAD. References to other parts of the state of Assam may also be included because Bodos and Nepalese live side by side in areas outside BTAD as well. However, the field-based reports, inferences and conclusions will be drawn from the BTAD area.

The ethnic groups will be limited to the Bodo and the Nepalese people living within the BTAD. Again, other groups and ethnicities may also become part of the
discussion during the course of the thesis in order to highlight, compare or emphasize the points that emerge from the field-based study undertaken for this dissertation.

In its short history of existence, the BTAD has witnessed quite a few experiences of conflicts leading to mild to serious law and order problems much to the woe of the common people living within the territory. This research shall not include these elements of conflict within the scope of study because the focus of the study is to explore affinities. However, passing references may be made to the elements of conflict as effective counter-points.

**Objectives of the Research:**

The study shall seek to search the identifiable elements of affinity between the two communities in their social, cultural and politico-economic contacts and interactions. It will be the endeavor of the present researcher to explore the inherent cultural traits in each of these two groups of people that enable them to forge socio-cultural ties with the other group transcending their own cultural boundary. Since such an exploration calls for in-depth contextualization, another objective of this dissertation shall be to construct a coherent narrative of the historical process through which these two groups have emerged from pre-modern times to the complex world of the modern times. Such a projection of the narrative also involves the quest for a discovery of the self and entails the assertion of the consciousness of the self and its attendant in political, cultural and economic imperatives. Therefore, the dissertation shall also set its goal of analyzing the politics of identity of these two groups and of positing the theme of affinity in the context of pluralistic, democratic society.

**Review of Literature:**

A host of colonial writings on the ethnography, language and culture of the Bodo people is available. Hodgson (1847) is believed to have accorded currency to the term ‘Bodo’ in the colonial discourse. However, Hodgson’s is a fairly sketchy output with regards to ethnographic writing. Sydney Endle’s monograph (1911) threw considerable light on the Bodo people in terms of their way of life and culture. In colonial literature cited above, the tendency is to see the Bodo people as part of the great Kachari family of Bodo group of languages spread over the length and breadth
of the North East, West Bengal and Nepal. This Kachari group is also interchangeably referred to as the great Kirata family as elaborated in Chatterji (1950, 1974), although the umbrella term Kirata also includes Mongoloid groups of people in West Bengal and Nepal who, with the exception of the Dhimals and the Mech, do not belong to the Kachari group of people. It is to the credit of colonial scholarship that we now know that the Bodo Kachari group of people comprise of the Bodo, Garo, Hajong, Tiwa, Sonowal, Dimasa, Mech, Moran, Rabha, Chutiya, Thengal, Tipra among many ethnic groups. The study on the Bodo language formally originated with Grierson (1903) and has identified the language group as Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Mongoloid group of languages, thereby setting the Bodo group of language users apart from the Indo-Aryan language groups.

The folklore study of the Bodo and Nepali traditional societies presented in the present dissertation is based on Richard M. Dorson’s pioneering work ‘Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction’ (1972). Two chapters devoted to Bodo and Nepali folklore (Chapter II and Chapter III) follow Dorson’s model and present an overview of the folkloristic aspects of these two traditional societies in terms of their oral literature, belief systems, ways of life and material culture. Besides, the study also draws on Anil Kumar Boro’s seminal essay on folklore as discourse (The Oral Poetry of the Bodos: Ethnic Voices and Discourses Anil Kumar Boro: 2007), Folk Literature of Bodos: 2001 and seeks to relate the Bodo struggle for identity assertion with the texts of Bodo folklore which contribute to the construction of the idea of the self and the other. ‘History and Culture of the Assamese Nepali’ by Jamadagni Upadhyay (ed.):2009, works as an excellent basis for the present writer to look for secondary material in collating the folklore material collected from the field. As far as Bodo historiography is concerned, the present work has benefitted from Sujit Choudhury's work ‘The Bodos: Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority’; 2007 :IIAS. R.N. Mosahary’s two leading articles, namely, ‘Brahma Religion and Social Change among the Bodos (1986), and ‘Bodo Student Movement’, Editor: A.K. Baruah, Student Power in North-East India, Regency Publications, New Delhi, Pp. 149–171. 2002 have been of immense value to the present study.

basis of contextualization of the migration of the Nepalis into Assam in that Burghart’s work provides the background of the evolution of the nation state in Nepal in the 18th century with the powerful Thakuri clan in the throne of Nepal and their relationship to the land and its people. David Gellner, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and John Whelpton’s work (ed.), ‘Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom’ (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997) provides important insights into the issues of the formation of the Nepalese caste Hindu-dominated nationality. Mahesh Chandra Regmi’s classic ‘Land Ownership in Nepal’ (Berkeley: University of California, 1976) offers valuable insight into the relevant land revenue system of the Nepalese society and how the issues of caste and ethnicity are inextricably linked to the issue of landholding that ultimately led to the formation of a power elite in Nepal.

As far as the search for the identity of the self among the Assamese Nepalis, Upadhyay (ed.)’s collection of essays referred to above provides some valuable information but the pioneering work that offers insightful reading is the work by A. C. Sinha and T. B. Subba (edited) study entitled ‘The Nepalis in North East India: A Community in Search of an Indian Identity’ 2007: Indus Publishing Company. From the history of the Nepali migration to the North East the book covers various issues related to the cultural, political and artistic articulations of the Assamese Nepalis in a series of essays put forward by academics from the Assamese Nepali community. Last but not the least in terms of the Assamese Nepali identity formation is the most valuable work by the eminent historian Amalendu Guha who has offered the context to the formation of political consciousness among the Assamese Nepalis in ‘Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1847 – 1947, ICHR New Delhi, 1997.

Research Design:

The research has utilized both primary and secondary data. The primary data set is prepared from an extensive field-based study conducted in all the four districts of the BTAD, namely, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Baksa and Udalguri. Areas of concentration of Bodo people have been carefully identified which include a considerable number of Bodo villages. In selecting and identifying the villages, a number of informants, cultural experts, leading intellectuals of the Bodo people have
been consulted. Attempts have also been made to identify villages where the two groups of people are found living in close proximity with Nepalese.

Similarly, the field study involving the Nepalis group of people has been conducted in consultation with Nepali cultural activists, informants and leading intellectuals from the area of research. The identification of villages and population concentrations has been done in the same manner as with the Bodo people.

The primary data collection has been done on a semi-structured, open-ended interview basis. Since the research methodology adopted for the field-study necessitated the involvement of the researcher as participant-observer, the present study incorporates prolonged field-notes as part of the semi-structured interviews and observations conducted during field trips.

Quite a large body of journals, souvenirs and magazines abound in the cultural practice of both the groups of people. The present researcher has tried to incorporate as much relevant data as possible from these literary sources. There are a number of secondary sources other than the ones mentioned above. These include academic papers, books and records. These also form part of the inference-building data during the writing of the dissertation.

For effective manageability, the data, inferences, observations and conclusions have been chapterised so that a coherent thesis can be constructed out of the research experience. The chapters have been divided as follows:

Chapter I

This chapter begins with the introductory comments on the study. It posits the thesis of the dissertation and contextualizes the major issues concerning the theme of affinity contained in the title of the thesis. The constituent elements of the thesis statement shall be given detailed explanation in the subsequent lines. The mechanics of the study are discussed thread bare in this chapter including statement of the research problem, a review of literature related to the research work, the scope of the research, the methodology adopted to conduct the research, the motivation for the research and the design of the research work.
Chapter II

The chapter seeks to look into the complex phenomenon of Bodo identity formation based on colonial ethnography, anthropology, report writing and scholarship. Inferences about the racial features of the Bodo people were deduced from quasi-historical, linguistic and mythological data that were put to construct a somewhat presentable narrative of the Bodos as a race or a group of people. Based on these narratives, scholars like Chatterji (1972) put forward a kind of meta-narrative in which the Bodos were associated with a greater fraternity, i.e., the Kirata group of heroic people whose ancestry went back to King Bhagadutta, the son of Narakasura of the times of the Mahabharata. The last description of the Bodos as part of the Kirata fraternity extended their outreach as far as the Himalayan country of Nepal. On the other hand, linguistic evidence led colonial philologists and grammarians to the conclusions that the Bodos belonged to a language group called the Indo-Mongoloid branch of the Sino-Tibetan group of languages which was also described as the Tibeto-Burman group of people. The linguistic evidence further linked them to a language sub-group which came to be known as the Bodo group of language which comprised of ethnic groups like the Bodos, Garos, Tiwas, Rabhas, Dimasas, Chutiyas, Morans, Mataks, Sonowals, Tipras among others in the North East of India and Rais, Limbus and Dhimals in Nepal.

When in the 20th century, the Bodos themselves sought to construct their identity around these terms and descriptions; they were confronted with the peculiar problems inherent in historiography. Because, as opposed to the seamless narrative structure of the oriental mythology which wove tale after tale without so much as paying regard to logical sequencing of historical events, historiography as a discipline of western epistemology demanded that a coherent and chronological narrative be told. Consequently, the construction of Bodo historiography was faced with the issues of ruptures in the historical narrative as a discourse. It is here that the Bodo endeavor to put forward a narrative had to fall back on the discipline of folklore as a marker of identity. This chapter both analyzes Bodo folklore as a marker of Bodo identity and gives a narrative account of the various aspects and forms of Bodo folklore in order to understand Bodo traditional way of life, worldview and its belief systems.
Chapter III

This chapter discusses the various strands of the Nepali folklore and folk life through their expressive forms, verbal art and material culture. Unlike the monolithic composition of the Bodo society in terms of race, as all Bodos belong to the Mongoloid stock, the Nepalis as a group of people comprise of numerous castes, creeds, faiths and ethnicities. It took centuries for the Nepalis to come into being as a nationality. This chapter identifies numerous folk forms, ideas and belief systems of the constituent groups among the Nepalis and how these elements of folklore coalesce to present an identifiably convergent and pluralistic form of folk behavior in the Nepali worldview.

While the forms of Vedic rituals and myths are one of the constant sources of Nepali folklore among the caste Hindus, the Puranic narratives of epic heroes like Rama and Krishna are the fountain-head of many of the folk forms and fairs and festivals which have transcended the barrier of caste and encompassed the ethnic groups as well. On the other hand, the Buddhists among the Nepalis have also influenced many of the folk experiences of the lay Nepali people. In other words, a syncretism is clearly visible in the Nepali folklore and folklife which shall be the focus of this chapter.

The Nepali folk experience also happens to be diasporic in nature, as large number of lay Nepali populace has over the centuries dispersed from their niches and habitats and made new frontiers their homesteads. This chapter studies the Assamese Nepalis as a case in point. The experiences in the new frontiers of Assam for the early settlers among the Assamese Nepalis have also been transmuted into folk expressions by the ingenuous and creative folk minds. The chapter also delineates some of the new experiences and offers graphic illustrations of the folk forms born out of such experiences.

The chapter also discusses the material culture of the Assamese Nepali people in detail to illustrate the essentially agro-pastoralist economic mode of production which shaped their folk culture. The house types, costumes, food habits, ornaments, weaponry, farm implements, utensils and items of household utility – all point towards a distinctly identifiable folk culture with assured markers of cultural
boundary. The essentially inclusive and pluralistic nature of Nepali folklore and folk life is illustrated in this chapter with detailed examples gathered from extensive field research.

Chapter IV

This chapter looks into the issues of the identity formation of the Assamese Nepalis as a constituent entity of Assamese nationalism. In order to contextualize the Nepalis in the politics and culture of Assam, the researcher traces the origins of the Nepalis as a people and takes recourse to historical background of the Nepalese as a nation in Nepal. There are three distinct identifiable group formations that went into the making of the Nepalese nationhood – i) the caste Hindu migrants who entered into Nepal from the southern borders of India into the Himalayan kingdom since time immemorial, ii) the Tibeto-Burman group of Mongoloid people who entered from the Northern borders into Nepal, and iii) the autochthonous group of people who were the aborigines of the landlocked country. The subjugation of the Himalayan country by the powerful caste Hindu groups led by the Thakuri-Brahmin-Chhetri combine marked the beginning of a new era of nation building. As the country came under more and more centrist rule, the nation-formation became an inevitable process in a climate of politico-cultural dynamics. The language of the rulers, that is Khas Kura (now known as the Nepali language) became the link language of the entire country and it is this linguistic paradigm that bound the people of Nepal in one strand. The unification of the Nepali principalities into one entity known as the realm of the Gorkhas in the eighteenth century further cemented the nationalistic fervor. The change in political fortunes of the country in the mid19th century resulted in extraordinary hardship to the common people as the new regime proved to be regressive in nature. Lay people especially from the eastern Nepal region fled the country and looked for settlement in the bordering areas of Bengal and Assam. Another factor that led to the settlement of the Nepalese in India happened to be the recruitment of Gorkha soldiers in the British army which began as early as the 1820s. This chapter offers a detailed background of the advent of the Nepalese into Assam and the process of their settlement. It also discusses the assimilation of the Nepalese into the Assamese society and the coming into being of the Assamese Nepalis as a distinctly identifiable group of people in the culture and society of Assam. Finally, the
Chapter also highlights the slow process of political consciousness that grew among the Assamese Nepalis and how this consciousness has shaped their worldview in the last few decades.

Chapter V

This chapter looks into the issue of Bodo identity consciousness that began to manifest itself in the beginning of the 20th century. The Bodo identity politics is a complex phenomenon and needs to be posited in the context of Assam’s social, political and economic history. As the major tribe among the numerous tribes of Assam, the Bodos were the worst affected as a people in the transitional phase between the pre-modern semi-feudal history of Assam and the colonial history with the advent of the British in the 19th century. It must also be born in mind that the nascent formation of the Assamese nationalism in the 19th century created margins and pushed the Bodo subnational entity into historical obscurity and oblivion. The chapter analyzes the currents and cross-currents of Assam’s economic and social history of the times to contextualize the Bodo issue. It is clear from the discussion included in this chapter that an aggressive unilingual nationalism championed by the Assamese intelligentsia and the power elite was in many ways responsible for the triggering off of the Bodo sense of identity based on a sense of deprivation and subjugation. The chapter also analyzes the rise of Bodo identity consciousness under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma in the 1920s and 1930s and the forms and manifestations of this consciousness in the coming decades of the 20th century. The chapter also recounts the process of political mobilization of the Bodo middle class in the post Independence decades for equal rights and how this mobilization militated against the mainstream brand of politics of culture aggressively pursued by the Assamese intellectuals, power elite and the middle class as a whole. The chapter seeks to contextualize the volatile expression of the right to self determination articulated by the Bodo people in the 1980s and the consequent political turmoil in the closing years of the 20th century in Assam. The political arrangement of the BAC, its failure to satisfy the Bodo cause and the subsequent formation of the BTC accord and its ramifications are all part of the discussion of this chapter.
Chapter VI

The chapter returns to the basic question of affinity between the Bodo and Nepali people and problematizes the issue of pluralism in times of conflict. It also highlights the inherent capacity of the Nepali people to evolve coping mechanisms in times of conflict, a mechanism which this group of people have internalized into their culture through their history of interacting in an inherently multi-cultural and pluralistic society since time immemorial. The present researcher identifies three defining elements of affinity between the Bodos and the Nepalis of BTAD and these three elements have to do with the shared ancestry of Kirati brotherhood between the Bodos and the certain ethnic groups within the Nepalis, the shared tradition of magico-religious belief systems prevalent in Bodo and Nepali culture and the physical/geographical/environmental as well as socio-cultural and socio-political adaptation of the Nepalis in the Bodo habitat.

Chapter VII

This concluding chapter summarizes the key issues of folklore forms discussed and analyzes in the dissertation in chapters preceding it. The theme of affinity between the Bodos and the Assamese Nepalis in the BTAD area is ingrained in the folk traditions of the two groups of people as there is a shared common heritage between them from the point of view of traditional cultural constructs. The Bodos and some of the constituent ethnicities among the Nepalis belong to the greater Kirati fraternity. So from that level, there is obvious affinity. As the Nepali settlers began eking out their livelihood at the beginning of their advent into the Bodo habitat, they came in contact with the geographical and cultural ecology of BTAD and developed a sense of bonhomie and conviviality that has stood the test of time. As modernity swept away the Bodo habitat along with the rest of Assam, traditional mode of economic production and exploitation of natural resources gave way to modern means of economic activities. This affected all traditional societies including the Bodos and the Nepalis. The Bodos began to assert their political right through social mobilization, democratic means of expressing frustration and anger at the perceived sense of economic and social deprivation. This was an inevitable historical process because pressure on land resources consequent upon the increased volume of people
exploiting these resources created a sense of competition. Only through political assertion of their indigenous rights could the Bodos hope for a redressal of their problems of economic deprivation and degradation and social marginalization. After decades of struggle in the political front, the Bodos now realize that they have achieved a semblance of justice in the form of a new political arrangement although its efficacy is still debatable. Meanwhile, the competition for survival in the neo-liberal economic reality in modern times has shifted from land resources to human resources. And here, in the fields of education and jobs, in political representation and economic activities, the Bodos have to brace themselves up to fashion their own aspirational middle class with skills and abilities to face up the new challenges for leading a meaningful life. The realization has slowly dawned on the new generation among the Bodos, as among all other constituent groups of people living in the BTAD area, that no one ethnic group, tribe, caste or religion can live in isolation and still live a meaningful life in modern democracy. For a pluralistic society like the one we have in the BTAD and in a larger context in Assam, there has to be trust among the stakeholders. This trust is something that the Assamese Nepalis have displayed in their cultural and political behavior during the strife-torn decades in the Bodoland. The basis of that trust has been affinity, which, as the study shows, manifests itself at multiple levels.

**Conclusion:**

The present study looks into the dynamics of interrelationship amongst various ethnicities and communities within a socio-politically arranged territory forming a part of a larger political entity of the nation-state. The search for the study of the interrelationship is confined to the two leading groups of people, namely the Bodos and the Nepalese, in order that a thorough understanding of inter-ethnic relationship could be attained. This understanding is sought to be gained through the prism of cultural affinity which itself as a theoretical concept forms part of the whole called cultural pluralism. In the chapters to follow, the major themes introduced in this chapter shall be discussed in detail based on the field experience from the designated area of study.