CHAPTER II

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

The study region comprises the state of Assam which is situated in the north-eastern corner of India. It is surrounded by the Eastern Himalayan Range of Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland on the east and south-east, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram on the south, Bangladesh on the west and south-west and West Bengal on the west. It lies between 24°3' N and 28° N latitudes, and 89°51' E and 96°1' E longitudes. The state has an area of 78,438 km² representing 2.39 per cent of the Indian landmass and a population of 26,638,403 (2001 census) accounting for 2.59 per cent of the total population of the country (Fig. 2.1).

Assam is surrounded by seven Indian states and two foreign countries. There are only a few Indian states which have such a strategic location. The state of Assam occupies a unique position amidst complex geological and physiographic make-up of the north-eastern region of India.

The state of Assam now (2001 census) has 23 administrative districts. For the administrative and revenue purposes the 23 districts of the state are divided into 49 subdivisions and 149 Revenue Circles. The state has two distinct natural regions, viz. the Brahmaputra valley comprising eighteen districts of plain areas and two districts of hill areas with a total area of 71,516 sq km. and the Barak valley comprising three districts with plain areas of 6,962 sq km (Fig. 2.2).

PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

The geologic formation occurring in Assam belong to the Archaean, Pre-Cambrian, Tertiary and Quaternary periods. As revealed by its geologic history, the formation in Assam may be broadly classified in five. These include (i) the Archaean group of rocks, (i) the Pre-Cambrian rocks, (iii) the Lower Tertiary sediments, (iv) the Upper Tertiary sediments, and (v) Quaternary alluvial sediments. Such a diverse geologic and tectonic base of this state has resulted in a complicated form of landscape under equally complicated drainage systems. The present physiographic configuration of Assam
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ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS, 1991

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has taken its shape only during the geologically recent times The degradation and aggradation of the area controlled by altitude and by fluvio-glacial and fluvial processes The low hill ranges with hot and humid climate and heavy rainfall, concentrated to a few months of the year, experience landslides, landslip, sheet erosion, solifluction etc The erosional and depositional processes conspicuously intensified by heavy rainfall and frequent seismic movements play dominant role in shaping various physiographic units of the state.

**Physiography**

On the basis of physiographic characteristics the state of Assam may be broadly divided into four major divisions (Fig.2 3)

1. The Brahmaputra Valley
2. The Barak Plain
3. The Karbi Plateau
4. The North Cachar Hills

1. **The Brahmaputra Valley** : The Brahmaputra valley is the major physiographic unit of Assam. It is a narrow and elongated valley with a length of about 720 km in east-west direction and an average width of about 80 km covering an area of 56,480 sq.km (72 per cent of the total area of Assam) and it is the largest plain of Assam as well as in North-East India. The valley as a whole gently slopes north-east to south-west with an average gradient of 13 cm / km. The entire Brahmaputra Plain is enclosed by hills and mountains from all sides. While the northern margin of the plain is fairly regular, on the other hand the southern boundary is not so, as there are plain embayments created by the larger tributaries entering into the plateaus and hills. This plain built up mainly by the deposits of the materials carried by the Brahmaputra river and its numerous tributaries from the adjoining mountains and hills in the recent geographical periods. Geologically, the Brahmaputra is a very young river and its present configuration took shape only during the Pleistocene and Recent times. The valley developed over the foredeep in between the Peninsular mass (Meghalaya – Karbi Plateau) and the Tethyan geosynclines (Eastern Himalayan). The foredeep believed to be the sea till the sub-Recent period, received deposits during all the periods of Tertiary and Quaternary Ages.
The plain is dotted with scattered hillocks locally known as ‘tila’. The altitude of the Brahmaputra plain never exceeds 150 m. The Brahmaputra valley may be divided into two parts based on physiographic characteristics, the Western lower part and the Eastern upper part. The valley in its east-west direction has four physiographic units, namely, the northern foothills, the north bank and south bank plains, the flood plain and char lands and the southern foothills. On the way from Dibrugarh to Dhubri, numerous river islands locally called char or chapar are found to occur inside the channel Majuli the biggest known riverine island of the world covering the area of 924 sq.km in the middle of the Brahmaputra.

The northern foothills comprises the sub-Himalayan ranges, mainly composed of Tertiary sandstones. This is a narrow zone with elevation ranges between 150-600 m is relatively wider on the western part and tapers eastward. The north and south bank plains lying between the northern and southern foothills and active flood plain is made - up of the new alluvial sediments carried by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. This physiographic unit has immense human significance with high population density, rich agricultural fields and a good network of roads and railways. The north bank plain is comparatively wider than the south bank plain in the western lower part of the Brahmaputra valley. In the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley, the south bank plain is fairly wide. The flood plain of the Brahmaputra including the char lands inside the river lies between the north and south bank plains. The flood plain is irregular in its transverse extension due to occurrence of occasional hillocks (tilas) and natural levees on both the banks of the Brahmaputra. The north bank flood plain contains numerous swamps and ‘heel’ and fairly wide in Dhemaji and Barpeta districts. The floodplain on the south bank is generally narrower. The Brahmaputra is marked by intense braiding in their course and which are responsible for the formation of a large number of sandbars (char and chaparis) and these are the characteristics features of braided river. The foothills bordering the southern fringe of the Brahmaputra valley comprise the foothills of the Patkai-Naga hills, northern foothills of the Meghalaya – Karbi plateau and the Barail range. These foothills with an average elevation 300 – 600 m are composed of Tertiary sediments and characterized by the presence of some active faults.

2 The Barak Plain. The Barak plain or the Cachar plain with an area of 6,962 sq.km is bounded by the North Cachar Hills and Meghalaya plateau on the north, the Mizo hills
on the south, the Manipur hills on the east and the Sylhet plain of Bangladesh on the west. The Barak plain is the product of the fluvio-geomorphic processes of the river Barak and its tributaries. The plain is horse-shoe shaped with 85 km of east-west extension and 70 km north-south extension near Bangladesh border. The plain is low-lying, its height being on 75 m near its apex near Jiribam which slopes down slowly to 73 m near Silchar and further to 51 m near Karimganj. The Barak River flows sluggishly in an extremely meandering course through the middle of the plain and their courses forming series of ox-bow lakes and swamps. Occurrence of isolated low hillocks in the plain indicates the erosional activities of the Barak and its tributaries.

3. The Karbi Plateau: The Karbi plateau, which is the eastern part of the north-eastward projection of the Gondwanaland, lies almost detached from the Patkai range and Meghalaya plateau due to headward erosion of Dhansiri river and Kapili river. The Karbi plateau consists of two hilly lobes of unequal size, separated by the Kapili valley.

The eastern lobe covered by the Rangma hills spans over the entire Diphu and Bokajan sub-divisions of the Karbi-Anglong district. It is approximately double the size of its western counterpart and is dome shaped with altitudes ranging from 192 m to the 1357 m. The Rangma hills in the north-eastern corner of the plateau project northward up to the proximity of the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Numerous streams flowing radially from this plateau to Dhansiri, Kalang, Kapili and Jamuna river have made its surface roundish. The western lobe of the Karbi plateau continuous to the Meghalaya plateau and covers the Hamreng sub-division of the district. It presents a rugged topography and slopes from south-west to north-east. This part with an average elevation of 900 m dissected by the headstreams of the Kapili and its main tributary Barapani.

4. The North-Cachar Hills: The Barail hills of Assam covering the North-Cachar hills district. The hills of Nagaland including the Barail Range continue stretching from Tuensang district of Nagaland up to the westernmost part of N.C hills. The Barail range retains its height within the districts of N.C. Hills with an average altitude above 1600 m and reaching a maximum of 1953 m in a peak, east of Mahadeo peak to the east of Haflong. The Barail range divides North Cachar Hills into two parts: a northern part falling under the Brahmaputra catchments basin and a southern part falling under the Barak catchments basin. The southern range of the Barail range is steeper than the northern face due to faulting. The north flowing rivers like Kapili and Dhansiri and their
headstreams have dissected the Barail range by their headward erosion and thus have subdued the northern face to lower elevations with gentle slopes.

From the above description it is clear that the overall topography of Assam is dominated by plains, plateaus and hills. The terrain is rugged all along the hilly and plateau margin. While land-slides and landslips are the frequent events in the hilly regions, the plain are often inundated by devastating floods particularly during summer season.

Climate

The state of Assam falls under the region of monsoon climate of the sub-tropical belt. The climate of the state is characterized by heavy summer rainfall accompanied by high percentage of relative humidity, winter drought and relatively low temperature during a year. The state experiences a significant spatial variations in the climatic conditions because of its location and varied nature of terrain, the seasonal change in the pressure condition over the Bay of Bengal and the north-western Indian landmass, the tropical oceanic (south-west monsoon) air masses that blow over this state, flow of local mountain and valley winds and presence of numerous vast water bodies and rivers; and development of local cyclones.

Location in the sub-tropical belt, with protective relief and higher altitude towards north, south and east, having diversified physiographic makeup, the weather and climatic condition of the state assume regional characters which can not be compared with areas lying in the same latitude in the west of the Indian subcontinent. The Arunachal Himalayan mountain ranges standing as a wall not only protect the state from the invasion of severe cold air masses of the central Asia in winter, but also obstruct the moisture laden south-west monsoon air masses in summer. The cloud brought by the south-west monsoon over the southern hills including Meghalaya plateau precipitates in the Brahmaputra valley. The climate of the Brahmaputra and the Barak plain is normally characterized by orographic laws. The precipitation decreases on the leeward side of the hills and ranges, especially the eastern portions of the Karbi plateau and N.C Hills and increases towards the foothills of the Himalayas. Rainfall in Assam usually heavy due to its peculiar geographical position The annual rainfall ranges from 70 inches in the plains to 200 inches or more in the North-Eastern Hills. The Kapili valley lying between the Meghalaya and Karbi plateau in Nagaon district is the only area where the average rainfall
is 43 inches and, therefore may be called the driest area of the state. So far the spatial
distribution of rainfall is concerned there is a marked variation within state. The unique
physiographic feature of the state and its surrounding mountain and hill-ranges affect the
areal distribution of rainfall. Due to significant variation in elevation, the summer
maximum temperature in the state also varies from very high in plains (above 35°C) to
very low in the hills (below 20°C).

On the basis of distinctive characteristics of temperature, rainfall, rainy days, fogs
etc. four climatic seasons may be identified in Assam: (1) Pre-Monsoon, (2) Monsoon, (3)
Retreating Monsoon and (4) Dry Winter.

(1) Pre-Monsoon: The pre-monsoon begins in the early part of March and continues up
to the end of May. The pre-monsoon period is a transitional season between the dry, cool
winter and warm, rainy monsoon season. The important characteristics of this season
are the rapidly increasing temperature, disappearance of fog and infrequent occurrences
thundershowers and hail storms. Rainfall increases both in amount and frequency as the
season advances. The average temperature in this season rises to 25°C over the plains and
20°C over the hills. The diurnal range of temperature during this period is very high, while
the late nights are pretty cool, the afternoons are very hot. However, with the passage of
time, the temperature range decreases both days and nights and becoming hot.

(2) Monsoon: The monsoon season prevails over Assam during the months of June, July,
August and September. The onset of monsoon season in June is characterized by the
occurrence of heavy downpour and the rising of temperature. Over the plains the average
temperature ranges between 20°C and 32°C. The amount of rainfall varies spatially
according to the orographic situations. The average rainfall during the summer monsoon
season varies from 106 cm to 185 cm. During this season, the tributaries of the
Brahmaputra and Barak valleys start rising causing extensive floods on the low-lying
areas.

(3) Retreating Monsoon: The south-west monsoon starts withdrawing from the state in
late September or early October. The orographic low pressure center are replaced by high
pressure with a flat pressure gradient. Consequently, the intensity of rainfall and the number
of rainy days go on decreasing. This season continues up to the middle of November, when
fogs commonly occur. This is the shortest season in the state, but most pleasant period of the year

(4) **Dry Winter**: The dry winter season begins in the middle of November and continues up to the end of February. The weather conditions during this period are influenced by the high pressure system of central Asia, the Sub-tropical Jet stream and the high pressure center over northern Myanmar. This season is characterized by low temperature, regular morning fogs and very little amount of rainfall. While December and January are the driest months of this season and January is the coldest month. The Brahmaputra and Barak plains show an average temperature of 13°C.

**Soil**

As regard the soils of Assam, geology, physiography, climate and vegetation seem to play vital roles in their formation. Therefore, under varying geological conditions, physiographical characteristics and agro-climatic situation different types of soils are found to occur in hills, plateaus and plains. The soils of Assam may thus generally divided into four groups. Alluvial soils, lateritic soils, hill soils or mountain soils and piedmont soils.

Soils of the Brahmaputra and Barak plain are mostly alluvial in character. There are two types of alluvial soils - the new alluvium and old alluvium. The new alluvial soil occurs in an extensively belt of the north-bank and south-bank plains including the active flood plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. On the other hand, the old alluvial soils occur above the annual flood level. The old alluvial soil occur in patches of Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts between the northern piedmont soil belt and the southern new alluvial soils of the Brahmaputra valley. In the south bank districts of the Brahmaputra it occurs in a narrow belt bounded between the southern hill soils and northern new alluvial soils. The old alluvial soils suitable for the tea plantation as well as sugarcane, fruits, vegetables etc. are more acidic then the new alluvial soils. The lateritic soils in the state extensively occurs almost over the N.C Hills and in some parts of southern Karbi plateau. These soils are dark and finely textured with heavy loams and deficient in nitrogen and potash.

In the hilly and mountainous areas of the state the soil cover is thin. The hill soils are generally found the southern hilly terrains of the state. Most of the soils of north
eastern hills either sandy soils and red loamy soils. These soils are rich in nitrogen and organic matters.

The piedmont soils are confined to the northern narrow zone along the piedmont zone of the Himalayan foothills. These soils comprise the Bhabar soil and Tarai soil covering respectively the Bhabar and Tarai belt of the Brahmaputra valley. The Bhabar soil formed as a result of coalescence of alluvial fans or cones and is characterized by unassorted detritus of boulders, pebbles, cobbles, sands and silts. The Tarai soil varies from sandy to silty loams that remain saturated and support tall grasses.

**Natural Vegetation**

Assam has its rich potential for the development of forest. The variations in altitude, climate and soil types have a significant influence on the luxuriant growth of wide variety of trees, herbs and shrubs in this state. The luxuriant evergreen and deciduous forests of the state abound in variety of valuable timber species. Of the total geographical area of the state (78,438 sq.km), the area under forest is only 22 per cent which is far below the minimum norm of 33.3 per cent prescribed by the National Forest Policy. The highest concentration of forest in the state occurs in Karbi-Anglong (43.64 per cent) and North Cachar Hills (38.55 per cent) and the lowest concentration occurs in Bongaigaon district.

Forest in Assam can be classified into three types: evergreen, semi-evergreen and deciduous types. The evergreen forest occurs in the tracts of higher rainfall. This type of forest are found in the districts of Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi-Anglong, N.C. Hills and Cachar. On the other hand semi-evergreen forest are found in the districts of Sonitpur, Nagaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Darrang, Karbi-Anglong and N.C. Hills. Deciduous forest are found the areas of Assam where the average rainfall is 80 cm to 200 cm. The districts of Dhubri, Barpeta, Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Kamrup, Nalbari, Sibsagar, Sonitpur and drier part of the Barak valley supports deciduous forest (Fig 2.4).

The valuable species found in the forest of the state are Sal (*Shorea robusta*), Makai (*Shorea assamica*), Teak (*Tectona grandis*), Titasapa (*Michelia champaea*), Khair (*Acacia catechu*), Gomari (*Gmelina arborea*), Sanaru (*Cassia fistula*), Agar (*Aqualaria*).
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NATURAL VEGETATION

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Fig. 24
Simul \textit{(Bombax ceiba)} etc. Apart from these, bamboo, canes and a variety of fruit trees found the state are of great economic value.

Besides the varieties of trees, there are a large number of orchids in the forest of Assam. The wildlife diversity in the state has been evolved on the basis of the forest and 4000 wetlands, ponds, beels and the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems.

\textbf{SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND}

Agriculture is the main base of the economy of Assam. Fifty per cent of the state's annual income is derived from agriculture. Moreover while it covers 65 per cent of the state's total working force and 85 per cent of the state's total population are directly or indirectly connected with agriculture. According to the agricultural census, 1990-91, the average size of operational holding is 1.28 ha. As a matter of fact, in spite of various efforts made by the government towards improving the condition of small farming through land reforms and number of agricultural modernization programmes, Assam still continues to be dominated largely by small holders, less productive subsistence type of farming. Although the state is well endowed with an infinite variety of natural resources required for secondary productions, its pace of industrialization and urbanization has altogether been very slow. Although percentage share of workers in secondary and tertiary sectors is slowly increasing over the years, the primary sectors still absorbs more than 70 per cent of the total main working force. Added to these, in the cultural front, the state is a variable cauldron of diverse racial, linguistic and socio-cultural groups coming from different directions since time immemorial. Thus, a brief discussion on the region's growth and distribution of population, ethnic composition, religious composition, linguistic composition and the overall economy would certainly help understand electoral politics and voting behaviour of electorates in Assam in proper perspective.

\textbf{Social Structure}

Human activities are determined by social structure of the people. Social environment and social structure of the people influence the level of economic activities and the growth of economic organization etc. There are some peculiarities in the behaviours, customs and traditions and social institutions of every nation or any section there of.
Similarly, population of Assam is composed of heterogeneous elements of different races, religions, languages, castes and cultures. This diversity led to the growth of diverse social institutions and political ideologies. In the past, caste system played a very significant role and still plays important role in the determination of economic activities of the people of the state. In Assam many castes have grown largely due to the influence of the non-Aryan population.

There are different types of tribal population in Assam and they maintain different languages and profess different faiths. Every tribe has its own peculiarities and peculiar social institutions. Now-a-days it is observed that the old type of static society is fast disintegrating in Assam which has an important influence in determining the life and shape of the economy of the people of the state.

**Economic Structure**

A study of the economic system of any area is a study of the combination of three economic structures - production, distribution, and consumption. Generally speaking, the economic structure of Assam is similar to the general economic structure of India as a whole. It differs from the rest of India only in kind and not in degree. That is to say, the economy of the Assam is multi-structural as in the rest of India. But due to its physical geography as well as the social and political conditions prevailing in the state has a relatively backward economy. Geographically, the state of Assam consists of hills and plains with different levels of economy.

Assam is rich in mineral wealth such as crude oil, coal, limestone, and natural gas. Tea is a major industry. There are nearly 750 tea estates in the state. Assam contributes 15.6 per cent of world's tea production and 55 per cent of the country's tea output. Assam is the first state in the country where oil was struck in 1889 at Digboi. Other industries are sugar, jute, silk, paper, plywood, and oil drilling. Important cottage industries are handloom, sericulture, manufacture of cane and bamboo articles, carpentry, smithy and manufacture of brass utensils. Assam is the largest producer in the world of the golden coloured 'muga silk'.

The foregoing discussion on socio-economic background of Assam clearly reveals that the socio-economic characteristic in the state is significantly different from rest of the
country. Primarily based on agriculture and other natural resource base, the state is economically lagging much behind the advanced states of India. The state would economically march further ahead if infrastructural facilities are provided, capital investments made and prevailing insurgency problems solved. For the last few years the growth of the economy of Assam has not been an expected owing to the prevailing situation of insurgency and financial constraints. Besides, the annual floods, which has been a regular feature of Assam has more or less affected the growth of the state’s economy.

The state’s economy in terms of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) has registered an annual growth rate of 8.2 per cent at constant (1993-95) prices during 1999-2000 as against a negative growth rate of 2.2 per cent during 1998-99. At current prices the NSDP recorded a growth of 16.0 per cent in 1999-2000 as against 6.9 per cent growth recorded in the preceding year. In respect of the per capita income, the year registered a growth of 6.8 per cent in real terms as against a negative growth of 3.6 per cent recorded in 1998-99. The estimates of state income show a steady but slow growth of the economy of Assam in the past few years.

GEOPOLITICAL SETTING

The state of Assam is situated at the north-eastern Himalayan sub-region of India. It is surrounded by seven Indian states and two foreign countries. The state is bounded by the Bangladesh on the west and south and is very near to Myanmar on the east and to Tibet, Bhutan and China in the north. Internally the state has a common boundary with Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal. It is connected with the main land by a narrow corridor of foothill land of only 12 km width.

Geographically Assam is a shadow of its former self. It has been reduced to one-third of its original size in thirty years. In the partition of India (1947) Assam lost Sylhet district, except a major portion of Karimganj district to East Pakistan (present Bangladesh). Out of the 27 lakh population of Sylhet, Assam retained only 7 lakh, the rest going to East Pakistan. There after Assam continued to lose territory and population step by step as Nagaland (1963) Meghalaya (1972), Mizoram (1973) and Arunachal Pradesh (1973) were separated. Though different states bifurcated from the state of Assam but from the geopolitical point of view Assam is the most important state of North-Eastern region of
India. Her relative location with reference to other political areas of North-East India, India and above mentioned foreign countries possesses immense geopolitical significance.

The Assam has a long geopolitical history. In medieval times the composite Assam or old Kamrup was ruled by various indigenous dynasties such as Chutia, Koch, Kachari or Bodo and later by the Ahoms who came from Burma (present Myanmar) and ruled the area for about 600 years. After the British annexation in terms of the Yandabo Treaty (1826) it was known as Assam more explicitly than before and formed part of the British Empire of India. However, no definite or conclusive explanation is available as to why the area was called ‘Assam’. According to some well-known writers, the name was derived from “asama” bearing a topographical meaning; some others felt that Assam equivalent to Asom; still others were of the view that Assam meant “peerless”. E.A Gait, author of “A History of Assam”, however, held the opinion that ‘Assam is a Sanskrit derivative and is a fair equivalent to Ahom’

Guwahati, the pulsating center of Assam, is an ancient town whose history back to the Puranic days. The city, anciently known as “Pragiyotishpura” was said to have been founded by king Narakasur, who is mentioned in the Puranas and epics

Assam is the ideal meeting ground for diverse races Assam gave shelter to various streams of human wave carrying with them distinct cultures and trends of civilizations It has been witnessed several waves and streams of migration of people belonging to various racial and ethno-linguistic groups from different directions since pre-historic time. Austro-Asiatics, Dravidians, Alpine, Mongoloid, Indo-Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burmese and Aryans penetrated into Assam through different routes and contributed in their own way towards the unique fusion of a new community which came to be known in later history as the Assamese.

During the pre-Independence and post-Independence period a large number of people belonging to various stocks have migrated to Assam from other parts of India and from the neighboring foreign countries like Bangladesh and Nepal. The migrants have created many socio-economic problems besides disturbing the original ethnic structure, linguistic structure, religious structure and political atmosphere of the state. The problem of ethnicity in Assam, let it be acknowledged, is a real one. But the problem has been made more complicated by the legacy of the British policy (divide and rule).
The unsatisfactory and inadequate communication system between Assam and the rest of the country is a relevant feature in the geopolitical life of the state. In terms of natural resources, the Assam is one of the richest states, but in point of economic development, it is one of the most backward.

For over last two decades or so, inter-ethnic tension and ethnic hostility have been supplemented by armed struggle against the nation-state in the name of either self-determination or secession and separation. Continued neglect of the region had much to do with it. The ruling authorities granting some autonomy among the ethnic groups but proved to be nothing but a fraud on the constitution.

It is surprising that even after the restoration of elective regimes in the state Assam whether in 1985, 1991, 1996 or 2001, there has been no abatement in the violence committed by the police and security forces. The operations by Army and Paramilitary forces were apparently launched to deal with militants bodies like ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam), Bodo militants outfits like NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland), BLT (Bodo Liberation Tigers) etc. While ULFA demands a sovereign Independent Assam, the Bodo fronts want either a separate or independent state for the Bodo tribal people, dissatisfied as they are with BAC (Bodoland Autonomous Council) under the Act of 1993. Bodo insurgency came to an end with Bodo Accord of 2003 granting BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council). But ULFA problem still continues. So, geopolitics of Assam can be understood on the basis of the dialectical relationship geography, society and politics.

In the last few decades, Indian politics has become increasingly besieged by the "politics of identity" emanating from the awakening of ethno-cultural consciousness. The identity assertion of various ethnic groups has been articulated through religion, language, culture, caste, and race. This problem is very much acute in Assam. The diverse groups inhabiting this state have been pressing either for the creation of separate or autonomous state on the basis of their lingo-cultural identities or for spatial constitutional safeguards of their respective identities. Though at the beginning they started their assertion with non-political issues such as the development of their language and culture, the unresolved economic apprehensions gave it a political direction in the subsequent period. A section of the emerging educated elite of the ethnic groups began to feel that in order to establish
their community into rightful place; they must be politically powerful and assertive. For this purpose, some of them started forming certain political platforms too such as Ujani Asom Rajya Parishad, Bodo People’s Action Committee, Karbi Autonomous State Demand Committee, Mising Autonomous State Demand Committee, Tiwa Autonomous State Demand Committee, Rabha-Hasong Autonomous State Demand Committee, Kamatapur Autonomous State Demand Committee etc. It appears that since the late sixties some of the ethnic groups become more articulate organized and capable of challenging the dominant position of the ruling Assamese elite and bargaining for adequate share of administrative jobs and political power. At any rate, organizational capacity and involvement of these groups into active politics has given birth to ethno-cultural and linguistic politics in the state. In effect, politics of distinct identity has become a living phenomenon in Assam. It is, therefore obvious that the emerging ethnic elite or these groups consciously or unconsciously involve in the process of ‘politics of identity’ some of them; however, started believing that establishment of either a separate or autonomous state is the only solution for maintaining their distinct identity.

A section of the tribal elite strongly felt that they were markedly from the Assamese caste Hindus. It appeared to them that they remained economically, educationally, and even politically much more backward than the Assamese caste Hindus. They believed that the dominant upper caste elite of the state were mainly responsible for their backwardness. In fact, in accordance with the degree of assertion and legitimacy of their claim, the emerging middle class provides their respective communities a definite direction in the changed democratic political process. It may therefore be observed that the “politics of ethnic identity” is not only the result of traditional traits of the ethnic groups but it results in as “defense mechanism” against the domination by the relatively advanced section of the Assamese society.

**Electoral Landscape of Assam**

For the purpose of elections, the states of India are divided into geographically compact areas, known as constituencies. There are two types of constituencies: Parliamentary Constituencies (for the elections of Lok Sabha) and Assembly Constituencies (for the elections to state Legislative Assemblies).
In 1952, the state of Assam was divided into 94 Legislative Assembly constituencies for electing 108 members. Out of 94 constituencies 80 were single member constituencies and the remaining 14 were double member constituencies. Out of 108 seats, 77 were general, the remaining 31 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (5 were reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC), 9 for Scheduled Tribes (ST), Plains and 17 for the Scheduled Tribes, Hills). There was no change in the number of constituencies for the second General election held in 1957. The third General election held in 1962 was based exclusively on single member constituencies. In Assam the question of abolition of double member constituencies was taken up in the early part of 1961. The Delimitation of parliamentary and Assembly constituencies order 1961 provided for 105 Legislative Assembly seats of the Assam Legislative Assembly, of which 5 seats were reserved for the Scheduled Castes, 14 seats were reserved for Scheduled Tribes (Hills) and 9 seats for the Scheduled Tribes (plains) of Assam. With the separate of Naga Hills from Assam, the strength of the Assembly constituencies was reduced from 108 to 105. Out of the total 105 seats 15 seats went to the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam. The Delimitation Commission which went into operation after the publication of 1961 census figures recommended an increase in the strength of the Assam Assembly from 105 to 126 seats (Table 2.1). Of these the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes would have 8 and 26 seats respectively.

With the coming into force of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganizations) Act, 1971, the state of Meghalaya and the Union Territory of Mizoram were curved out of Assam. As a result, the size of the Assam Legislature was reduced to 114 seats as against 126 seats in the 1967 General elections. At the time of fifth General election which held in 1972 was 114 Legislative Assembly constituencies. The seats reserved for Scheduled Castes continued to be 8 as in 1967 but those reserved for Scheduled Tribes were reduces from 26 in 1967 to 14 in 1972. The Delimitation of parliamentary and Assembly constituencies order in 1976 provided 126 seats for the state Legislature of which 8 seats were reserved for Scheduled Caste and 16 for Scheduled Tribes (Table 2.2). For the House of people 14 seats were provided one seat being reserved for Scheduled Castes and two for Scheduled Tribes. There was no change in the number of constituencies for General election held in 1978, 1983, 1985, 1991 and 2001 (Fig. 2.5).
Table 2.1

Composition of Legislature and Allocation of Assembly and Parliamentary Seats (from 1952 to 2001) in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Election</th>
<th>Legislative Assembly</th>
<th>House of People (Parliamentary)</th>
<th>Council of State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Election Statistics of Assam, 2001 (Published by Jansanyog, Govt. of Assam)*

The first four General elections were held in due time and simultaneously for both the House of people and the State Legislative Assembly. General elections to the House of people were delinked from the election to the Legislative Assembly in view of dissolution of the parliament in 1970 and the consequent elections to the parliament were held in 1971. Thereafter, General elections to the House of people were held in 1977, 1980 and in 1999 which was a midterm poll. However, the General election to the House of the people and the State Legislative Assembly were held simultaneously in 1985, 1991 and 1996 in Assam.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No of Constituency</th>
<th>No &amp; Name of Constituency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Karimganj</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 Ratabari (SC), 2 Patharkandi, 3 Karimganj North</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 Karimganj South, 5 Badarpur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Hailakandi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 Hailakandi, 7 Katlichera, 8 Algapur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cachar</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9 Silchar, 10 Sonai, 11 Dholai (SC), 12 Udharbond, 13 Lakhimpur, 14 Barkhola, 15 Katigora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 N C. Hills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16 Half-long (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Karbi-Anglong</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17 Bokajan (ST), 18 Howraghat (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19 Dipu (ST), 20. Badhalangoo (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Kokrajhar</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28 Gosaigaon, 29 Kokrajhar West (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30 Kokrajhar East (ST), 31. Sidli (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Bongaigaon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32. Bangaigaon, 33. Bijnai, 34 Abhayapuri North, 35. Abhayapuri South (SC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Marigaon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79. Jagrood (SC), 80. Marigaon, 81. Laharrghat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Dhemaji</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>113. Dhemaji (ST), 114. Jonai (ST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Tinsukia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>122. Tinsukia, 123. Digboi, 124. Margherita, 125. Doom Dooma, 126. Sadyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>Source: Election statistics of Assam, 2001, Published by Jansanyog, Govt. of Assam</td>
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</tbody>
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