Any social movement aims to bring a change in the prevailing system. For that every social movement organizes itself as collective action under an organizational structure, with an ideology and set goals. While trying to achieve its specific goals, social movements leave powerful effects both within its organizational and support structure and on the larger society of which it is a part. The most glaring impact of the Bodo Movement has been the redefining of the Assamese Identity. During the Movement of 1987 the Bodos, under the young and dynamic student leadership of ABSU, asserted themselves as distinct ethno-linguistic community and tried to reverse Assamese formation. According to them Bodo speaking people can not be Assamese. This, indeed, was the first time when the Bodos clearly asserted their distinct ethnic identity to realize their political demand.

Although socio-economic and political processes in Assam in post-independence years prepared the background of the Bodo hegemonic project, the immediate circumstances were provided mainly by two factors - a. the signing of Assam Accord and b. AGP politics and policies.

It is interesting to note that till the 1980s the Bodos considered themselves as part of Assamese identity. In fact, the Bodo leaders never

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1 ABSU document *Why Separate State*, p.286
2 For detail see chapter 2, pp.19-21
rejected Assamese as one of their own languages and Bodo students always studied through Assamese medium. Although in 1967 they, along with all the Plains Tribes, had formed a joint forum, namely PTCA, and had demanded a separate state, ‘Udaychal’ comprising all the tribal belts and blocks of Assam yet, that demand was the result of the Central Government’s decision to reorganize Assam on federal lines. That movement, however, had died soon. During the initial stage of the Assam Movement, the Bodos supported the Assamese cause. The issue of Bodo identity started taking serious turn only with the signing of Assam Accord. The question therefore arises as to why the Bodos suddenly started feeling insecure about losing their ethnic identity.

We have observed earlier that the Assam Accord consisted of two controversial Clauses 6 and 10. The Bodo leaders were especially apprehensive about Clause 6 of this Accord that promised constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. They feared that this Clause might give legitimacy to the imposition of Assamese language and culture on them. Hence, doubts surfaced and leading sections of the Bodo community conceded that with out a separate state their language and identity would soon become extinct. Out of this apprehension the Bodos led by ABSU started a mass movement for the creation of a separate Bodo state during the first tenure of AGP, who came to power as result of the Assam Accord. And it became clear by then that the state’s major tribal population (Bodos) was not willing to be identified as Assamese. Until then it had probably not crossed any of the
signatory’s mind that the term “Assamese people” would have meant anything other than the composite Assamese community.

This chapter will explore how the growth of Bodo politics of identity led to ethnicization of Assamese as well as the redefinition of the Assamese identity. Before that a brief insight into the historical process of formation of the Assamese identity is necessary.

The Assamese community and identity formation process:

The formation of Assamese community and identity is related to the process of Aryanization as well as rise and consolidation of Ahom rule in Brahmaputra Valley.

Since time immemorial people from Indian sub-continent as well as from the Far-East used to migrate to Assam. Various groups belonging to Mongoloid origin entered the Valley from different directions- China, Tibet and Burma. They were followed by Aryans from the Indian mainland. Around 1000 B.C. the Mongoloid ruling figures in Assam had come to the fold of Brahmincal Hinduism with which the process of Aryanization commenced in the Brahmaputra valley. Although it was not as rigid as in some parts of India the caste

3 In fact, even recently the Central Government has asked the leaders of Assam Movement to provide the exact definition of ‘Assamese people’ while responding to latter’s demand for immediate implementation of Assam Accord for prevention of influx of foreigners for the benefit of Assam and its people. This led to a wholesale debate in Assam at various (political, organizational and intellectual) levels in 2005 and the matter is still waiting for a settlement.

4 Chatterjee, S.K. Kiraia- Jana-kriti, Asiatic society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1970, pp.16-17
system gradually took root with gradual growth of Hinduism. But, the process of Hinduization in the valley was not complete since the tribes retained most of the aspects of their religion and culture in practice. It remained incomplete during the colonial period and post-colonial period as well. Even then the interaction, assimilation and integration of various cultures, religions, races and civilizations had produced a distinctive synthesis among the people of Brahmaputra Valley and gave birth to a distinct community semi-tribal and semi-feudal in nature. This unique community later became known as the Assamese.

This social process got further momentum with the advent of the Ahoms in the thirteenth century. Under Ahom system of centralized administration the various indigenous ethnic groups like Kacharis, Moran, Muttaks, Karbis, Chutias, Tiwas, Rabhas, Bodos, Mishings, Deuris and Koches all assimilated themselves into a single cultural community. The rise of *Vaisnavism* in the fifteenth century provided further impetus to this social process of assimilation in Brahmaputra Valley.

It is to be noted that the Assamese identity did not emerge before or during the Ahom rule nor did Assamese language and literature develop in its present form during that period. But, it is a fact that the Assamese language developed locally, and expanded more through the cultural assimilation of myriad tongued peoples during the 600 year Ahom rule. They even gave up their *Tai-Ahom* language and adopted Assamese as the state language. In natural course events the language

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5Conversion to *Vaisnavism* was complete in the sense that those who took *saran* to *vaishnavava* religion no longer identify themselves as belonging to any tribe and after a generation or two they did not even speak the tribal language.
also spread to the areas of their influence. Further, the Assamese language, literature, dance and drama developed very significantly due to the endeavours of Vaishnava preachers or gurus.

Assam was even able to successfully resist Mughal invasion due mainly to the unity and stability brought about by Ahom rule. This can be regarded as a sign of pre-national collectivity of the people of pre-colonial Brahmaputra valley. Ideally, this collectivity should have in future reached the stage of conscious collectivity and found expression in a single Assamese national identity, but this did not happen. The prevailing chaotic political situation in 17th century Assam led to British intervention and in 1826 Assam (Ahom territory) became part of the British Indian Empire. With it, the entire ongoing social processes in Brahmaputra Valley came to a halt, leaving fissures for future Assamese identity.

**Assamese identity and its assertion during British period:**

As a social process identity formation involves close interaction between the individual, the society and history. Individual identity becomes collective or group identity when solidarities become organized for collective action and decision. This is how categories of persons transform to collective actors through organization and articulation of identity. The determination of such a collective actor involves legitimating of its boundary in terms of psychic, social, cultural and sometimes in territorial domains. Therefore, identity formation should be seen as a process that takes place in time context and its coherence and intensity depends on the culmination of
overlapping symbols of assimilation and inclusion essential in the formation of group consciousness.6

As early as 1837, the Colonial rulers had replaced Assamese with Bengali in the schools and courts of Assam. This decision came out of their concrete belief that Assamese was a dialect of Bengali language. This, however, was not a sudden decision. Many British officials like John Peter Wade7, Francis Hamilton8 who had the opportunity to come to Assam even prior to 1826 expressed that common people were familiar with Bengali. In fact, Wade in the preface of his report commented upon the originality of the Assamese language that the original history of Assam exists in two distinct languages i.e. the Bailoongh or Ahum (the language of the race of Swargadeo) and Bakha (Bassa) being a dialect of the Bengalee9. Later David Scott10 also opined on the same line with Hamilton. Moreover, the Assamese

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6 Hasan, Zoya et al., in The State, Political Process and Identity, Sage, New Delhi, 1989, p.25

7 He came to Assam as an assistant surgeon with Captain Welsh and while Welsh was busy in solving the political situation, Wade collected historical materials of the region and compiled them as a Report on Assam from pre-historic period to 1780.

8 He was a British administrator and conducted a wide survey of eastern India and of the territories lying adjacent to it during 1808-1814. He conducted the survey of Assam from the advent of the Ahoms to the period of Gaurinath Singha and Moamoria rebellion; from his headquarter at Goalpara during his stay there in 1808-1809.


10 White, A. A Memoir of the Late David Scott, Deptt. of Historical & Antiquarian studies, Assam, 1988, p.200
language at that time was not in good shape nor was there any educational institution that was imparting education in Assamese in Assam. In comparison, the Bengali language and literature had been far advanced than the Assamese language and already was widely accepted as an elite language in different parts of India.

At the initial stage of British rule, the educated Assamese showed a strong desire to learn Bengali language. They were not concerned much about the status of their mother-tongue. Bengali was introduced as court language in Assam following the Act XXIX of 1837 passed by the President of the Council of India on the 20 November, 1837, which directed the vernacular language of a district to be used in the courts. Immediately decision was taken to introduce Bengali since Assam was a part of the Presidency of Bengal. In fact, for more than ten years after the annexation of Assam, Assamese was the court language in Assam and if the above Act was to implement fully Assamese should remained as the court language. Presumably that Act was not implemented in all parts of India alike. With introduction of Bengali in courts and schools in Assam the influence of both, the language and its speakers increased.

It is to be noted here that for the British colonizers Assam was merely an extension of Bengal and they showed no intention to establish schools and educate the Assamese people. Their main aim was to earn maximum profits by exploiting the resources of Assam. Therefore, the already surplus educated unemployed Bengalis were

brought from Bengal to work as subordinates in Assam's administration. Under such circumstances, the Bengalis monopolized nearly all Government jobs in Assam. The Assamese people became a subordinate class socially with which the former fascination for Bengali language began to decrease. The educated Assamese elite like Aandaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Baruah and Hem Chandra Baruah endeavoured for development and reintroduction of Assamese language with the help of American Baptist Missionaries. Although the language developed to an extent, they failed to convince the British Government to change their decision.

By the last quarter of 19th century the forces of modern education led to the emergence of an Assamese intelligentia with which the cry for Assamese identity also became intensified. They articulated the fear of the crisis of the Assamese identity and started pressing the British Government for restoration of Assamese language to its former position. This issue of restoration necessitated the establishment of the independent status of Assamese language. This was followed by establishment of literary societies like the Asomiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha in 1888 and by publishing journals like the Jonaki the intelligentia carried on the fight for Assamese identity. Other middle class organizations like the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, Assam Association and the Asom Sahitya Sabha continued to express and articulate the sentiments of Assamese identity. The efforts of this class bore fruit and, finally in 1873 Assamese was reintroduced in courts and schools in Assam.

12Guha, A Planter Raj to Swaraj-Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947, Indian Council of Historical Research, 1977, p.58
As is usually the case, in Assam also the educated elite was the most articulated section of the Assamese society. They stressed on issues like the preservation and promotion of the Assamese language, jobs for the sons of the soil and the overall development of society. But, most of the issues that they raised were related basically to their own class interests. From the very beginning they had to face intense competition from the advanced Bengali middle class, therefore all their rages were expressed against the Bengali speakers. They played a collaborative role with the Colonial Government for a long time only to serve their own interest and for that same purpose the issue of Assamese identity found dominant place in their agenda and politics. Their endeavours for restoration of Assamese language definitely created a ‘we’ feeling among its speakers and under their hegemony, the Assamese language became the most important and sensitive symbol of Assamese identity. It was only by 1920s, that the Assamese middle class was able to consolidate its position in Assam. Meanwhile, the growth of independence movement and popularity of Congress reshaped their agenda. They turned their attention to the on going Muslim immigration from East Bengal seriously. Conditions of land abundance, low population density, and Government revenue considerations led the British to encourage immigrants from East Bengal to settle in the wastelands of Assam. This offended the peasantry, both tribal and non-tribal, and their cause was articulated by the Assamese middle class.

The Congress leadership in Assam which was virtually dominated by the Assamese high Caste Hindus did not share the idea of a broader Assamese identity consisting of the different communities of the hills and plains. And they never tried to give Assamese identity a territorial
limit. They rather adhered to the common perception of the time that Assamese identity was synonymous with the people living in Brahmaputra valley only, where natural assimilation had taken place for centuries. This is revealed in the election appeal of the Congress Party of 1946 that stated, “Unless the province be organized on the basis of the Assamese language and Assamese culture, the survival of Assamese nationality (identity) will be impossible.” The influx of immigrants from East Bengal and the prospect of grouping Assam with Bengali Muslim dominated areas of Bengal forced the party to take up the issue of Assamese identity more seriously. The Assamese identity remained fluid. It had undergone many changes along with territorial and demographic changes initiated by the colonial regime. New elements were added to the Assamese identity in the form of new immigrant populations like Muslim Bengalis, Marwaris, Nepalese and tea industry labourers who accepted Assamese as the lingua franca and became part of the Assamese culture thereby making it more diverse. Even if no conscious attempt was made by the Assamese middle class to bring the hill tribes within the fold of Assamese identity, Assamese language continued to be the link language among them. In fact, the policy of segregation of the hills was to a large extent responsible for this. The hill tribes became politically conscious quite early and within a few years after independence got separated from Assam to form their own states.

It is evident from the above discussion that the Assamese identity had undergone a historical evolution and had reached a particular stage of

\[13 \text{ibid, p.302}\]
its development with the emergence of educated elite and subsequently a middleclass. This middle class in the process of achieving its own interests became aware of its identity and propagated this idea of Assamese identity partly in order to attain its own interests and partly in its sincere belief that such an identity was necessary for the survival of any community. This idea of identity gradually began to permeate the whole Assamese society. Till the second and third decades of the twentieth century Assamese identity remained almost unchallenged because of the fact that other groups of the composite Assamese community had not reached that stage of maturity where an identity could emerge.

However, from the 1930s onwards the situation gradually began to change as other ethno-linguistic communities too began to develop elite class. Among those in the Assam Plains, the Bodos were the first to develop a small educated elite group. There were no apparent conflicts between the Assamese middle class and Bodo middle class in those days because their class interests hardly clashed with each other. It is a fact that during the colonial period the Bodos became aware about their distinct identity. But, this identity was mostly taken up with the task of bringing social reforms in their own society rather than articulating identifiable identity issues like language, religion, culture etc. They considered themselves part of composite Assamese community which is evident from their following words that the Bodos
can by no means call themselves other than Assamese\textsuperscript{14} and refused to be a part of Bengal due to cultural differences.\textsuperscript{15}

Rupnath Brahma in his Presidential Address of the History Session of \textit{Assam Sahitya Sabha} in 1956, talked about the contribution of the Bodo-Kacharis to the Assamese language among many other things. In fact, till a particular point of time after independence the issue of differentiation from Assamese identity was not central to the agenda of the Bodo educated elite as well as Bodo politics. Within a few years all the emotional outpourings about tribal and non-tribal unity within the Assamese society, vanished with an almost continuous quest of the Assamese middle class to establish their hegemony over Assamese society.

\textbf{Post-independence new projection of Assamese identity and assertion of Bodo identity:}

During the post-independence period the projection of Assamese identity acquired a new dimension. The linguistic reorganization of

\textsuperscript{14} A Memorandum to Simon Commission by Bodo community of Goalpara district, 1929.

\textsuperscript{15} The tone of this memorandum was very different from what the Bodos voice now.

The Cabinet Mission Plan on Grouping brought all sections of Assam together. The Assamese, both tribal and non-tribal denounced Grouping Plan and ultimately the British Government had to give it up. Tribal League was even prepared to unite with the Congress Party for the greater interest of Assamese people. This however became reality when the League leaders joined Congress at the time of independence and turned it into a non-political organization Tribal Sangh in 1954, for more detail see chapter 4,pp.1-3
States within the framework of the Indian nation-state necessitated this new projection of Assamese identity as the regional identity. Usually a group attaining or wishing to attain a hegemonic position uses identity as an organizing principle by which it tried to assimilate and alienate rival competitive groups. The quest for an Assamese identity in post-independence period is suggestive of this hegemonic project. It is interesting to note that Assamese speakers actually were a minority in colonial Assam, the second largest group after the Bengali speakers. Independence made the Assamese numerically and politically stronger in Assam. As a majority group, the Assamese leaders tried to consolidate their position in the apex of socio-economic as well as political sphere of Assam by implementing some vigorous policies like language policy.

The first big step in that direction was made by passing the State Official Language Bill, 1960 in Assam Legislative Assembly which made Assamese the sole official language in Assam. They considered it necessary to bring a psychological unity among different people living in the Plains and Hills alike. It however, brought a major wedge between the Assamese speakers and other linguistic groups of the State. In 1972 Assamese was made the medium in Universities of Assam. The various linguistic communities protested by stating that decision as a means to enhance Assamese dominance in Assam. And among the Plains Tribes the Bodo protest was the loudest.

During the period Assamese identity also developed as part of both its global and local concerns. As India pursued a voracious quest for global economic power, Assam’s natural resources were exploited in a quasi-colonial manner but the Assamese accrued little benefit. Being situated at the periphery of modern state it had to reassert its identity in
relation to the Powerful Central Indian State and other competing regional groups to get a legitimate share in allocation of resources and developmental benefits.

Further, the threats created by large number of immigrants from across Assam's East border led to an essentialization of Assamese identity. The influx of immigrants in the post-independence era, especially after creation of Bangladesh, placed increasing strain on the limited resources and employment opportunities and radically changed the demographic composition of Assam. The Assamese people had to start movement against them. However, during the Assam Movement on foreign national issue both non-tribal and tribal segments of Assamese society stood together across class and caste lines. This unity did not last long. Soon the Bodos withdrew their support from the Movement. Their dismay grew along with the signing Assam Accord. The Assam Movement reinforced Assamese middle class's desire for policies that would protect Assamese cultural identity. The AGP Government ushered in a new wave of enforcement of the domination of Assamese language in schools, universities, administrative offices and communication systems to demonstrate that the Assamese were the effective masters in their own house. In doing that they paid little attention to the sentiments and fears of other linguistic groups.

Different tribal communities of Brahmaputra valley and perhaps even a few hill tribes like the Karbis and Dimasas, in the natural course of events, would have probably integrated themselves with the Assamese

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identity but, the forceful imposition of the Assamese language created a sense of identity crisis among them and the process of construction as well as assertion of distinct identities gained momentum among them. According to U Mishra\textsuperscript{17} the Assamese overzealousness in protecting their language has alienated the tribal communities of the Brahmaputra valley. For the same reason the Bodos started disowning themselves from the Assamese identity.

The growth of Bodo regionalism was the immediate aftereffect of the confusion generated by Clause 6 of that Accord. They were equally concerned about another Clause 10 of the Accord which promised evictions from reserved Government lands. While bringing it into action foreigners and indigenous people all were treated alike by the Government without considering the fact that a section of Bodo community still stuck to the traditional migratory habits. The issue of eviction of some Bodos provided the spark to the Bodo Movement that was launched during the first tenure of AGP Government. According to Sanjib Baruah the failure on part of Assam Movement leaders to select sufficiently inclusionary historical and cultural symbols and in being insufficiently insensitive to "foreigners" and "indigenous" peoples alike led to ethnicization of Assamese.\textsuperscript{18} On top of everything else this new Assamese leadership, politically secure, also tried to convert this security into economic security of their own community. And to a certain extent they neglected the interests of tribal population.

\textsuperscript{17} Mishra, U "Identity Transformation and the Assamese Community: Illusion and the Reality" in Aggrawal, K.S. ed. \textit{Dynamics of Identity & Intergroup Relations in North East India}, Indian Institute of Advance Studies, Shimla, 1999, p.115

\textsuperscript{18} Baruah, S in \textit{India Against Itself}, Oxford, New Delhi,2001, p.175
It is a fact that while crafting Assamese community, the Assamese political leadership never attempted to bring together the exclusive ethnic formations within one single political project by generating equal socio-economic developments among them. Rather they took it for granted that all sections would accept to be part of Assamese identity and culture since they had adopted Assamese as one of their own languages. Hence, the endeavour of Assamese leaders to equate the territorial identity of multi-ethnic Assam with the ethno-linguistic identity of Assamese speaking people of Brahmaputra valley led to assertion of a distinct Bodo identity.

We have observed earlier how Bodo politics over the years has evolved from tribal ethnicity to regionalism. The main theme of the Bodo state demand movement was the ethnic differentiation from the Assamese. The Bodo speaking people can not be Assamese. For reasons of legitimacy of a distinct Bodo identity and political power the reversal of Assamization was but necessary. In this context history and language has played important roles.

**Bodo contestation of Assamese community formation and identity by way of history and culture:**

A credible capacity to recall a community’s early historical accomplishments can offer valuable political capital for its political leaders. The Bodos have few comparisons here.

They have presented a continuous history of amalgamated Bodo race as masters of the Brahmaputra valley under different names in different
stages of history till 1854 when the last Bodo kingdom was captured by the imperial power.\(^1\)

They have made a study of their origin and history regarding Assam and based on historical authenticity claim that they were the original inhabitants of the land. They use the category ‘artificial Assamese’ to describe the present generation of Assamese ethno-nationals who represents the relatively upper formations of the Hindu caste structure. The latter’s ancestry, according to Bodo leaders, can be traced to migrants from northern India.

Politics of identities very rarely accepts homogenization. Recognition of differences in terms of ethnicity, language, religion is what strengthens identity politics. Since the relationship of power and subordination play central part in identity formation, identity tends to form boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Again all social relations can become the locus of antagonism in so far as they are constructed as relations of subordination. Many different forms of subordination can become the origin of conflict and struggle. There exists therefore in society a multiplicity of potential antagonisms and class antagonism is only one among many.\(^2\) The ethnic rage in Bodo case was directed mainly towards Assamese assimilation and subordination. And the Bodos do not call themselves ‘Assamese’ as user of the language. Assamese belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages. Most of the tribal languages historically associated with Assam belong to the

\(^{19}\) no1.p. 282

Tibeto-Burman cluster, which includes the Bodo group, Assamese language and literary history bear close affinity to their counterparts in Bengal and further west the eastern Hindi area to lend credence to their indigenous pretensions. Given such a perception on the part of the Bodos, it is understandable why they want a division of Assam and a homeland free from Assamese political domination and exploitation connected with 'land, education, culture and job opportunities.'

The young genre of Bodo leaders in their endeavour to denounce the historical process of socialization that led to the formation of Assamese identity and community even questioned, "So what constitutes the pure Assamese community?", and "What is the definition of Assamese?" According to them (ABSU) there is no clear cut accepted definition of Assamese. In practice one whose mother tongue is originally Assamese and not converted from non-assamese speaking community is known as Assamese. As such Bodos are not Assamese. They showed total disregard for the ethnic process that had taken place historically in Assam which led to emergence of the Assamese community.

It is interesting that the process of sanskritization that led to the birth first of Assamese community and later Assamese nationality was in fact geared up at the initiative of Bodo rulers. However, it was not imposed on them without their will. Compared to the formation of Assamese community the formation of Assamese regional identity is of recent origin.

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22 *ibid*, pp.225-38
23 no1, p271
Any nation is "imagined because the member of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each other lives the image of their communion." Therefore, endurance of a nation is basically an emotional process. However, in post-independence years, the Assamese identity became more exclusive.

The Movement also popularized the leaning to their pristine culture which could be noticed in their religious practices, death rituals, food habits, preferences for Bodo names over Assamese, use of Dokhana etc. It seems that for the Bodos of today, establishing a Bodo identity is more important than anything else. Bodos have attained something short of separate state in the form of BTAD and Bodo language is a schedule eight language at par with Assamese. Therefore, it is natural that any reference today to the Bodos automatically invites attention to their position in the state vis a vis the Assamese. The Bodos seemed to have no objection to be called Assamese as long as the term means all indigenous people and Indian citizens living within geographic boundary of Assam. But, they objected to be called Assamese in the sense of the speaker of the language. This, indeed, is a new development which the Assamese today have to digest with a grain of salt. However, the inadequate public recognition given to the Bodo language in Assam is both the result of the relative newness of the Bodo project of differentiation and the inevitable consequence of the very logic of

25 For detail see chapter 3, pp.6-8
language based sub-nationalisms and cultural grammar of the nation-province of India.\textsuperscript{26}

The Bodoland Movement brought about a new height of identity consciousness among the Bodos and also gave a new definition to the Assamese identity. Assamese identity could no longer be regarded as a monolithic identity. The linguistic chauvinism of the Assamese middle class severely affected the natural process of assimilation of different ethnic groups into emerging Assamese nationality. In fact, the Bodos clearly rejected being part of it. Other tribes also want their respective identities to be preserved. In fact, the Assamese nationality formation came to a halt.

The movement had brought such a confidence among Bodo speakers that now there would be Bodo youths with in the BTAD who do not prefer to speak or can not speak Assamese. For example, the students of 20 no. Boragari J.B. School situated in Kokrajhar revealed that they do not know Assamese.\textsuperscript{27} Bodo writer Bidya Sagar Narzary was selected for the Sahitya Academy Award for his work Birgwsrini Thungru in 2008. In 2005 Mangalsingh Hazowary got the award for \textit{Jiuni Mwgthang Bisombi Arw Aroj} -a collection of Poetry and in 2007 Janil kumar Brahma also got the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award. Central Institute of Indian Languages, a Central Government organ, has also made provision to make interested people proficient in Bodo language through its ten month long training programme. Today, Bodo speakers proudly identify themselves as Bodo with their

\textsuperscript{26} no18, p.191
\textsuperscript{27} Setiya, D "Boro Bhaxa Sikilo" in \textit{Sambhar}-Sunday special addition of Asamiya Pratidin, 26 October, 2008
distinctive language, culture, rituals and history. Earlier knowledge of Assamese was important to avail of economic opportunities. Now, after the formation of the BTAD and political autonomy, this is no longer necessary.

The idea of Assamese identity is no longer relevant today. Lack of inclusionary historical elements to bind different social communities and the chauvinistic attitude of Assamese political mainstream to make Assam an Assamese speaking province proved detrimental to the unity and integrity of people living in Assam. In 2003 when the Bodos finally got the BTC, reluctant Assamese mainstream ultimately accepted the fact that Assam is a multi ethnic and multi-lingual state. To maintain the territorial oneness of Assam it has to be accepted anyway. The Assamese mainstream has accepted the multi-cultural nature of its identity which was reflected in the representation of State’s culture at the inaugural function of National Games held in Assam in 2006. Earlier, a Bodo cultural party which had won the first prize in a national competition held at Hyderabad and was selected for Festival of India in Moscow was dropped by the Assam Government and replaced by an Assamese Bihu Cultural Party. Bodo cultural programmes have been exhibited as Assamese Bodo dance in the Apna Utsav held in Delhi. The first Bodo documentary film Daina was also awarded as being an Assamese Bodo language film. Many other such instances are there.

The rising ethnic and linguistic aspirations of the very communities who were contributory to the formation of Assamese community have brought about a transformation to it.
From the above discussion the following can be concluded:

A. The question of Assamese identity emerged only by the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} century and intensified in the twentieth century, gaining momentum from the ascendancy of the Assamese intelligentsia.

B. From then language became an important symbol of the Assamese identity and all the later conflicts and controversies surrounding Assamese identity arose out of this fateful connection.

C. Another significant development was the emergence of a Bodo educated elite. This class, conscious of its ethnic identity, had always considered itself be a part of the composite Assamese community and Assamese identity. Independence and growing competition from the advanced Assamese section led to the emergence of Bodo middle class aspirations for hegemony and assertion of a separate Bodo identity in the late eighties of the twentieth century.

D. This led to the ethnicization of the Assamese. Separate Bodo identity got public recognition in Assam.