Identity, Society and Politics:

Identity is not inherent. It is not a fixed or determined structure. It is rather open and fluid. Identity is constructed through close interaction between the individual, the society and history. As a social construct, every type of identity undergoes changes as changes take place in society, culture, technology and political system thereby acquiring its own style, organization, substance and legitimacy over time and space.

In general, identity is defined with the help of sameness and difference. Sameness focuses on the 'self' of identity whereas the difference focuses on the 'others' of identity. This perception helps to distinguish one group from another and stratifies the society. To have an identity, a thing must have features that are both relevant and enduring. Actually these relevant features build the notion of identity. Generally, culture has emerged as the most relevant feature in the construction of sameness and difference with the 'others'.

Charles Taylor\textsuperscript{3} argues that identities are formed in a continuing dialogue and struggle with significant others. In a wider and diverse social space, this dialogical model of identity formation also necessitates a continuous reinforcement of the same to be acknowledged and respected socially. The problem of identity arises only when the relevant features of an identity are believed to be under threat. If nothing is ever lost there would not have been the problem of identity dominating the political scene.

Individual identity becomes collective or group identity when solidarities become organized for collective action and decision. This process usually 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.\textsuperscript{4} Consciousness (race, language, religion, and ethnicity) again is multi-dimensional in structure.

As such, an individual or a group may have more than one identity. The value based interests of the individual or group plays a decisive role in deciding which identity will take the foreground over the other identities at a certain point of time. A group may transform its identity in order to suit its requirements. As such an ethnic group may have loyalty towards the nation with varying degrees despite having loyalty towards its own group identity.\textsuperscript{5} It should not however be forgotten

\textsuperscript{3} Taylor, C cited in no2, p.84

\textsuperscript{4} Hasan, Zoya et al ., The State, Political Process and Identity, Sage, New Delhi. 1989,p.25

that the nation does not lose its significance merely for organization of groups on ethnic lines. The whole development process in the society is the result of interaction between the state and the ethnic groups. In this process the ethnic groups fulfill their aspirations along which they change the intensity of the identity both in terms of nation and ethnicity.

A sense of identity means a sense of being at with oneself and it also means at the same time, a sense of affinity with a community’s sense of at one with its future as well as history or mythology.\(^6\) There is no doubt that identity is basic to both individual and collective life and is formed in a process of interaction and relationship with ‘others’ in a multi-cultural context. And the only reason of its assertion in the political sphere is to secure a group’s social as well as material domination. This relationship could be better understood with help of the following diagram:

**DIAGRAM:**

\(^6\) Erikson, E *Dimension of New Identity*, New Delhi, 1975, p.27
The political dimension of identity is very complex. India is a multi-ethnic nation-state. Here, the political conflicts around identities assume different forms and versions at various times due to divergence of regions and its people. Moreover, there are differences in people's expression of their community identities at the local, state and national levels. As such India has vivid experiences in respect of politics of identity. In Maharasthra, the region had emerged as the symbol of distinctiveness of its people. In other parts like Punjab and Kashmir, religious identity has become the major issue of conflict between the Centre and the respective ethnic groups, while in North-East India, linguistic identity has caught the political limelight. This variation is the result of defining distinctiveness along various aspects of identity like region, religion, caste and language etc. by different ethnic groups. And political conditions seemed to be instrumental in this regard. Political conditions include the nature and actions of the state on one hand and power competition and movement politics on the other hand. According to Atul Kohli, the institutionalization of state authority and leadership strategies influence the pattern of these movements (ethnic politics of identity). Political conflicts around identities are posing a serious issue before the Indian state (in the form of ethno-nationalism). It has already led to dismemberment of Pakistan and other South-Asian countries like Srilanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan all are suffering from it.

Politics of identity in India is deeply connected with democracy and development. In post-independence India, the ongoing process of modernization and development nurtured the growth of ethnic identification and cohesion. But in a multi-ethnic society like ours, the ethnic groups vary in size from highly localized castes and tribal groups to large linguistic and religious groups. No single group is clearly dominant. Here too the boundaries between groups are not fixed. Therefore, the ethnic variations and regional imbalances very often overlap. Under such conditions, the attainment of hegemonic position becomes the express aim of groups who use identity as an organizing principle, and a tool by which they attempt to assimilate and then alienate rival competitor groups. It is indicative of articulation of identity for social dominance and to exert moral and material dominance via its influence. Since most of the identity assertions are sub-national or regional, 'victimization' of specific groups by the Central Government figures an important aspect of their self-assertion as a movement. In other cases, where the antagonism is against the State Government, similar allegations are brought against the State.

The effect of globalization has of late encouraged the proliferation of identities on a large scale in country’s politics. Improved means of communication and globalization have tremendously changed the self-perception of local, sub-regional and regional social identities. Globalization has exposed them to the forces of market and finances which in turn have invigorated and refashioned their cultural identities. Therefore, the issues of cultural identity assume significance in the

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8 Brass, P Language, Religion and Politics in North India, Vikas, New Delhi. 1974, p.46
process of globalization. Globalization impacts upon the social, cultural and economic life in different societies. Its pattern differs from one society to other due to differences of historicity and their initial conditions which characterize their society and culture.  

It is to be noted that religion, caste, language and region are the most common categories of identities that have found expression in Indian politics so far. But, these are not permanently rooted identities. The transformational effect of politics is clearly evident in the identification of a group, for example, the Shiva Sena in Maharasthra. Although it was initially depicted and described itself as a ‘sons-of-the-soil’ movement, today the Shiv Sena is commonly identified as a militant Hindu nationalist group. Similarly, in Punjab the Akali Dal which started as a regional movement is increasingly being coloured as a Sikh religious movement. In comparison to these two examples the Tamil nationalism which was asserted as a regional force won some victories and later declined in intensity.

Conflicts and controversies around identities: Indian context:

The history of identity assertion in Indian politics is as old as the Indian nation-state. The very first event of identity assertion was the Telegu speaker’s movement for a separate state just after independence. In the composite province of Madras the Telegu speakers were the minority group. They considered that their economic

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9 Singh, Y Culture Change in India: Identity and Globalization, New Delhi. Rawat, 2000, p.73
10 op cit, no 7, p.5
interests would be best guaranteed in a separate state where they could be the majority, and started a movement towards that end by defining their regional distinctiveness along the line of language. The net outcome of the movement was the creation of Andhra Pradesh and reorganization of Indian provinces on linguistic lines. Thus, 14 new states were created in 1956 based on majority language of the regions.

During the period immediately after independence, nationalism appeared to be a united response to colonial rule, and internal political differences and contradictions were pushed under the carpet wherever possible.\textsuperscript{11} The rise of ethnic nationalism and ethnic identity movements in India can in large part be attributed to the legacy of colonialization and de-colonialization. During the freedom movement the common political agenda of achieving independence from colonial rule could successfully unite different ethnic groups by ignoring existing ethnic and cultural divisions and political aspirations under the single banner of nationalism. Such feelings of unity, however, were the result of colonial exploitation and domination rather than the expression of a common political will. Consequently, different ethnic groups found little in common to bind them together once independence was achieved and common enemy had departed. Hence, the project of national integration had to be strengthened with the coercive apparatus of state in post-colonial India. Many tend to say that the linguistic reorganization of states was an effort of the unitary state to subsume local identities into the larger national identity. It was

\textsuperscript{11} Sathyamurthi, T. V. "Downsizing the Nation: Divide Identities in Postcolonial India", Damodaran, V and Kumar, M U ed., Postcolonial India: History, Politics and Culture, New Delhi, Manohar, 2000, p. 341
hoped that linguistic reorganization would calm regional demands but it overlooked the fact that certain multi-lingual states like Assam and Punjab were left intact which later provided fertile grounds to political conflicts around language issue.

It is to be noted that India has identified its national identity with the identity of the majority community and its language. Due to the Centralized nature of Indian state this majority Indian identity acquired more and more powers and relegated regional socio-cultural identities to the periphery of the public domain. With the extension of development network and pressure of the overarching political arrangement of modern, so called secular nation-state the ethnic divisions in society\textsuperscript{12} have sharpened and assertion of regional identities became a tool to ask for a better deal from the Center. The Tamils were pioneers here. They were untold of the North Indian domination in national identity and employment of Hindi as \textit{rastrabhasa} or sole official language in the country. In their movement, culture and language was used to express their Tamil identity. As a result in 1967 the \textit{David Munnetra Kazhgam} (DMK) captured power in Tamilnadu as the first regional political party in India. Another assertion of cultural identity was Shiv Sena’s anti-south Indian campaign in the mid sixties in Maharasthra. The ever growing South Indian domination on the soil of Maharasthra was viewed as threat to the economic interests of the ‘sons- of- the- soils’ and the South Indian \textit{Udapi} Restaurants were torched, and offices and factories were warned not employ South Indians in their establishments.

\textsuperscript{12} Basu, S. \textit{Regional Movements: Politics of Language, Ethnicity, Identity}. New Delhi, Manohar, 1992, p.120
After the conduct of fourth general elections, almost half of Indian states came under the rule of regional political parties who advocate the socio-cultural identities of their respective regions. With the rise of regional political parties new version of Indian nationalism was articulated in which political identity came to be expressed more and more in dual terms the regional and all India dimension of nationalism both receiving equal emphasis. The rhetoric of national integrity, unity and security being in danger disappeared.13

In the eighties two most significant political movements occurred in Indian politics almost simultaneously in Assam and in Punjab. A separatist movement in Kashmir and the rise of a pan -Indian Hindutvta identity followed soon after.14

The practice of politics of identity naturally entails some degree of separatism which was based on ethnic minorities hope to leave the Indian nation-state and form separate nation of their own. India has faced a number of such fantasies since independence. For example, the Nagas once demanded secession from India based on their ethnic distinctness. The Kashmiri Muslim groups have been fighting in pursuit of an independent Kashmiri nation-state on the basis of their separate ethnic identity or Kashmiriayat.In Punjab religion furnished as the key dimension of the process of assertion of Sikh identity with its goal of creating an independent Sikh nation-state- Khalistan. In fact, even the Dravidian Movement for many years formally upheld a right

14 Jodhka, S. S. Communities and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India, Sage, New Delhi, 2001,p.20
to carve a separate nation out of India which was dropped in 1963 from the DMK’s manifesto.

After 1980’s, politics of identities took the lead role in Indian politics with increased tendency among various ethnic groups for regionalization\textsuperscript{15} or localization. Democratic society and the development process set in motion a decentralizing tendency in politics, the state of course remained unitary. Now within the regional identity grew out identities that are ready to compete in the regional political domain. The rise of ethnic minorities often seem to proceed hand in hand with the growing assertion on part of majority or dominant ethnic communities for the promotion and retention of their political, economic and socio-cultural privileges. These minorities, who occupy a definite territory (sub-region) within a state, often assert their distinct identity based on language or ethnicity against the majority domination in the state. Such movements include the Gorkhaland movement in West Bengal, Bodoland movement in Assam. The two Movements were organized for separate states but had to be

\textsuperscript{15} Regionalization may be defined as a steady movement away from a single centre towards multiple poles lying in the states. This process began in the colonial era being a product of the historical –cum – geographical configurations of the sub-continent—the way in which nationalism arose and the modern nation-state was formed here. In 1980’s the entry of under-privileged groups into the political arena in large numbers, and the increase in the size of the electorate due to lowering of the voting age led to rapid increase in politicization and democratic consciousness in states thus encouraging decentralization tendencies among ethnic groups especially of minority ethnic groups.
contented with autonomous councils within the existing territorial arrangements. The triumph of minority’s state demand movements could be seen in the creation of Uttaranchal and Jharkhand as new states of India, giving legitimacy to sub-regional linguistic and ethnic identities.

Since 1990s, with implementation of Mandal Commission Report on caste based reservation for OBCs, conflicts around caste have come to the forefront of Indian politics once again. Anti-Mandal sentiment played important role in rise of Pan-Indian Hinduttva identity and subsequent growth of Bharatiya Janata Party in national politics of India. This on the other hand intensified OBC identity. Therefore, in a heterogeneous and multi-cultural society like India, the process of assimilation that is used to construct a national identity is bound to result in the manifestation of different forms of identity in its politics.

**The Assam scenario- the Bodo Movement:**

In Assam the situation is very complex. Assam is a land of diversity and is home to diverse ethnic groups. These groups, each with their own culture, language and customs, have contributed considerably over the centuries to the growth and development of a composite Assamese society through a process of socio-cultural fusion.

Independence made Assamese the dominant group in socio-economic and political sphere of Assam. Therefore, the Assamese tried to safeguard this social space by imposition of Assamese language on its diverse people and in that process gave rise to political conflicts around identities in Assam. In the years following independence.
Assam has witnessed a number of identity movements and the Bodo identity assertion is one among those.

The Bodos or Bodo–Kacharis are one of the important Plains Tribes of Assam. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock and speak the Tibeto-Burman language. Numerically they are the largest of the Bodo population inhabiting Assam and are mainly concentrated on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra, with scattered populations in other parts of the state. In the late 80s, the Bodos started a mass movement demanding a separate Bodo state on the north bank of Brahmaputra, comprising almost half of the territory of Assam, the creation of autonomous district councils for Bodos living on the south bank and inclusion of the Bodo-Kacharis living in the hill district of Karbi-Anglong under Scheduled Tribes of Indian Constitution. They also demanded inclusion of their language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Bodo movement did not emerge out of a vacuum. It was the product of a long historical process of identity formation among the Bodos that started in the colonial period and became gradually assertive in the post-independence period. The twentieth century brought about some momentous changes in the collective life of the Bodos. The spread of education led to the emergence of a small number of Bodo elite class which felt the need to reform the Bodo society to save it from complete extinction and from caste-Hindu domination. Kalicharan Brahma the father of Brahma movement, worked untiringly for reforming and developing the Bodo society by removing its medieval practices. He was assisted in his endeavours by Bodo elite organizations like the Bodo Chattra Sanmilani, Bodo Mahasanmilani etc. Thus, a strong socio-cultural movement among the
Bodos started with the objective to establish distinct linguistic and cultural identity of the Bodos as a separate community. Meanwhile, the British Government's policy to provide special privileges to the scheduled tribes led to the formation of a united political organization of all the Plains Tribes of Assam - the Tribal League in 1933. Thereafter, the League became an important political platform for articulating Bodo political aspirations and it played an important role in colonial Assam's legislative politics. With the attainment of independence this political organization was transformed into a socio-cultural organization and renamed as the Tribal Sangh. Tribal leaders believed that the Government of free India would take full care of the plains Tribes; hence they deliberately merged their separate political identity with the mainstream politics of Assam and devoted more attention to the socio-cultural and economic development of their society. Their hopes were, however, soon belied.

In the post-independence period, the Bodos remained largely undeveloped. They felt neglected at the hands of the mainstream political leaders who were busy in nation-building endeavours. Under such conditions, the main issues of Bodo society i.e. land, education and employment remained unattended. They had to struggle hard even to implement Bodo language in schools and colleges in Bodo dominated areas. For their deplorable socio-economic conditions, they blame their not getting the Constitutional protection under provisions 5th and 6th Schedules meant for tribes in India. The very first demand of autonomy for all the Plains Tribes of Assam was made in 1967 under the banner of Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). The Bodos took a lead in it. This demand came out as an impact of separate state formation by Nagas and the probable reorganization of Assam on the
federal lines. But due to organizational weakness of PTCA and prevailing political condition of the time, the separate state demand was dropped from the party’s agenda. As a result, PTCA and its leadership lost hold over the Bodo people.

PTCA was replaced by a group of young Bodo leaders under the banner of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU). Under ABSU’s lead the Bodoland Movement emerged as a reaction to the Assam Government’s (AGP) policy of Assamese cultural nationalism through imposition of the Assamese language. During this period the political aspirations of different ethnic groups of Assam rapidly increased. Assam is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual state. The spectacular victory of the Assamese speaking community ignited the youths of various communities and they started imitating the path shown by All Assam Students’ Union (AASU). Therefore, Bodos highlighted their grievances and asserted their ethnic identity to pursue their aspirations for political power. They were aware that without political autonomy their economic and other grievances would not be addressed.

The Bodo identity assertion shook the Brahmaputra valley from 1987 to 2003. In 1993, the ABSU movement ended formally with the signing of the Bodo Accord and setting up of an Autonomous council. However, the non-incorporation of the Sixth Schedule to the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and its subsequent political developments in Assam showed the futility of establishment of BAC. The Bodoland Legislation was rushed through the Legislative Assembly without any discussion with the opposition. There was no demarcation of the boundary nor was the Council given the privilege to prepare annual budget. The main cause of the failure of BAC was the failure of the Government to demarcate the boundary of the BAC which led to
violence on a great scale in Bodo council areas. As a result elections in BAC got delayed. In 1996 the BAC was dissolved by the Government and an interim BAC was formed in 2000. Meanwhile, a section of Bodos repudiated the Bodo Accord and floated an outfit organization the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). In their attempt to clean the prospective autonomous areas from non-Bodos, large scale attacks were carried out against other ethnic groups thus displacing thousands of people including Bodos in distress migration. It is to be noted here that although both the mainstream Bodo organizations and militant groups were working parallelly for one single cause, the Bodo people at large had not mandated either the BLT or NDFB to take charge of their cause. But they saw in their acts a kind of emancipation and hope of development.

Towards the end of 1997, ABSU declared that they would resume the movement for the creation of a separate Bodoland state soon. With this, the Bodo issue again dominated Assam politics for some time. Meanwhile, Government endeavours continued for solution of the issue by bringing the Bodo outfits to negotiating table. After innumerable parleys with the Central and State Governments the BLT gave in. Thus, the chaotic and unpleasant scenario came to an end with the signing of the Bodoland Territorial Council Accord on 10 February, 2003. This work is an attempt to study the history of construction, legitimization and assertion of Bodo ethnic identity in the politics of post-independence Assam.
Review of literature:

Today, politics of identity is the most dominant issue in the politics of our country. In India identity movements started along with the attainment of freedom and establishment of the nation-state. And with every passing year, it is at increase. Particularly since 1980’s identity assertions have multiplied both at national, regional and local levels. Modernization and development has nurtured the growth of ethnic identification. The impact of democracy and democratization on the other hand initiated political awareness as well as aspirations for political power among various ethnic groups of Indian society. In *Fighting Identities: Race, Religion and Ethno-nationalism* (2002) Leo Panitch opined that the persistence of communal conflicts is not simply a colonial legacy but an inevitable result of the penetration of capitalist logic in specific socio-cultural context. Liberal democracy only universalizes communal conflicts by fragmenting the society still further.

Erikson in *Ethnicity and Nationalism: An Anthropological Perspective* (2002) has argued that ethnic identity becomes crucially important the moment it is perceived under threat. According to him modern education and technology plays an important role in generating opportunities and constrains for cultural and social organizations. In fact, identity movements grew in India as a consequence of the power configurations on regional basis.

In *Realm and Region in Traditional India* (1977) same view has been expressed by the author Richard G. Fox who has discussed the consequences of new regional arrangements on the traditional Indian mind. In India the new wave of freedom has brought with it the growth
of new nationality consciousness among the people of different communities. This in turn has acted as the harbinger of various movements of different communities in different pockets of the nation. As opined by Urmila Pharnis in *Ethnicity and Nation Building in South Asia* (2001) the higher the stakes of community and its leadership in the power structure the greater the possibilities for strengthening the building of nation as an amalgam of ethnic pluralities and yet to be composite as well as secular in its totality, autonomists, secessionists manifestation of ethno-nationalism.

P.S.Gosh in *Ethnicity vs. Nationalism* (2003) suggested that devolution of power is the only remedy to cope with the destructive pressures of separatism. The book is an excellent work on the Srilanka Government’s confrontation with LTTE led political regionalism. India, he further comments, probably is committing a mistake of treating it as a surgical problem and looking for quick remedy. The regional movements with high flares particularly in the north-east periphery, still are not getting proper course of action from the central authority according to author’s realizations.

The growth of ethnic consciousness in Indian society could be traced back to the British period. The British introduced an administration that hardly provided any scope to the indigenous population to venture into a radical social transformation. Though the traditional self-sufficient economy was replaced by the money economy, in reality the same shattered the very basis of traditional economy (both non-tribal and tribal society). The native societies were not accommodated in the modern economic sectors during the colonial rule. Whatever modernization efforts had been under taken during those days all served the colonial economic interests. This created fissures of
development between urban and rural areas. The same process continued even in the post-independent period. This unevenness in socio-economic conditions gave encouragement to ethnic identity movements. A good number of works have been done on the topic especially from the discipline of political science. Ethnic identity movements may be classified in two divisions, those purely economic one are the products of post-independence economic planning and development measures undertaken by the Central Government and others had their root in the pre-independence era. Some others of the kind are actually inspired by the new situation of democracy and freedom as has been mentioned above.

The identity movements India wide have brought their sustenance from ethnicity. Ethnic factors of culture, race, language, religion, caste etc have added dimensions to politics of identity. The works like *Indian Politics since Independence* (1994) by Paul Brass discusses on the politics of the country since independence; *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (1991) by the same author presents a clear picture of inter-relationship between nationalism and ethnic pressures in India. The violent expression of politics of identity in India is perhaps the “Punjab crisis” during Mrs. Gandhi’s tenure as Prime Minister. It has been observed by scholars that Politics at times accentuates communal conflicts for its narrow interests in India. *Indian Political System* (2000) by J.C.Johari, *Political Sociology* (1999) by B. K. Nanda has put valuable light on the emerging political trends and social response in India. Books like *Cultural Diversity and Social Discontent* (1998) by Khare stressed on the differences present on the cultural level for the on going social conflicts. *Ethnic Diversity and National Integration* (1996) by M.G.Hussain attributed the incidences
of communalism, social tension, terrorism, and secessionism to the lack of political knowledge and opportunitism on part of ruling politics in India.

Ethnic situation in North-East India is somewhat different from the rest of the country. Ethnic movements here are deeply connected with a search for identity. The different ethnic groups of North-East have passed through a chequered process of political evolution. Before British penetration different ethnic groups of Assam used to maintain independent political status. Despite interaction with mainland India, the Ahom kingdom never became its part politically. The subsequent change in the connotation of Assam came during the British reorganization system. The British made Assam an Indian province and brought it under one political formation. During their rule the various ethnic groups developed identity consciousness. The main aim behind any identity assertion here is to preserve the language and culture along with political power which is considered necessary for acquisition of economic equality as well as opportunities for their respective communities.

Studies like *Hill Politics in North-East India* (1973) by S.K. Chaube points out that the major factor behind the political turmoil in North-East India has been basically the concept of nationalism which partially ignored the smaller identities, territorial boundary that criss-cross different ethnic consolidation and the process of industrialization which practically had no relation with the traditional economy. Chaube observed the above facts as the root cause of the present crisis among the tribal communities.

*North-East India –Quest for Identity* (1988) by Udyen Mishra contains two parts which deals with the contemporary developments of
the time. The first part deals with the Naga national question and the second part is on the Assamese national question. The emphasis is on the typology of Naga nationalism which stands as the major force behind the sustenance of Naga secessionist movement for such a long time. The author keenly observed that the poor assessment of the content of insurgency in Nagaland by the Government of India in a sense let the situation go out of control and hence despite the banning of the NNC by the Government the movement continued. The author opined in his book that the ongoing movement in North-East is basically the quest for identity among different communities of the region. The same has authored The Periphery Strikes Back (2000). This contains two parts – one deal with secessionist’s movement by ULFA at the end of Assam Movement and the other Naga secessionism. The study analyses in detail the social historical and political factors which led to secessionist’s insurgency in as different state as Nagaland which had never had any political or cultural link with Indian mainland and Assam shows how the future of the nation-state in India depends a lot on the ability to resolve the questions that are being thrown upon by the struggles for a swadhin Assam and independent Nagalim.

Much work has been done on insurgency in North-East such as Nexus web: Insurgency in North-East India (1996) by Kiron Sankar Mitra, Insurgency in North –East India (1997) by B. Pakem.

The on going ethnic identity movements in North-East India are the problems associated with change in socio-economic cum political relations in the region itself. Reorganization of North –East since 1947 (1996) by B. Dattaroy reveals the historical background of the problems in North-East region in post independence period and the
question of identity including the role of language and the demands centering reorganization also the consequences of partition and its effects on the social and economic development process in the region and the political fallout.

*The Problems of Change: a study of NEI* (1987) by B.P. Singh throws some valuable lights on the major changes occurred in the region and stressed on how modern political and administrative institutions has brought by development measures in turn created opportunities and problems transforming the region into one of the most volatile region in India. *Problems of North East India* (1996) by Satish Chandra Kakoti, a collection of articles is relevant on contemporary political situation in Assam.

*North-East India: Ethnic Explosion* (1981) pinpoints the ethnic and nativistic aspects behind the development of an explosive situation. The author, Nirmal Nibedon, studied all the current underground movements in the North-Eastern region with sufficient emphasis on the historical background of the mongoloid tribes of the region. Authors like V.I.K. Sarin (*India's North-East in Flames*, 1980) and B.Dattaroy (*Tribal Identity and Tensions in North-East India*, 1989) narrates how transition from traditional economy to modern economy has created turmoil in tribal societies. Immigration and land alienation etc are given attention to understand the upheaval among the tribes and their choosing the path of insurgency. K.S. Singh has covered almost all the tribal movements that occurred in North-East region in post-independent period in *Tribal Movements in India*, vol. 1. (1983).

*Political Development in North-East* (1989) edited by B.C.Bhuyan contained 17 papers, of which 5 papers were presented on tribal movements for autonomy in Assam and each of them provided quite
valuable data with systematic analysis and which is largely informative. 

*Ethnic Movements in Poly-cultural Assam* (1990) edited by P. S. Datta contains four articles, three of which deals with the people of mongoloid origin and the question of identity crisis with variations in the degree of assertion within the state of Assam the most impressive feature of the book has been its emphasis on ethnic connotation inherent in these movements which have hitherto been in a sense trapped in a stereotype framework of tribal movement ignoring the ethnic content.

*India Against Itself* (2001) by Sanjib Baruah presents an original and lucid interpretation of the politics and economic history of Assam since it became a part of British India. The author has also traced the history of tension between Indian nationalism and Assamese sub-nationalism since the days of India’s resistance to colonial rule. He has made the somewhat formal federal but centralized government structure responsible for today’s human right violation, abuses by security forces and by insurgents, ethnic violence and slide towards illiberal democracy. According to him, the apparent amnesia about identities that compete with official nationalism is the legacy of the cultural standardization particularly associated with successful state building endeavors.

Girin Phukan in *Politics of Identity and Nation Building* (1997) argues that the trend of identity crisis in North-East is mainly the result of wrong model of nation building process. The work is a good one to understand the nature of identity politics in this part of the country.
Studies on the different regional movements in North-East India from different approaches reveal the similar type of factors responsible for these movements but with varying degree of manifestations. These require greater attention on part of the Government and the scholars.

The Bodos as a tribe of Assam are mentioned in many books. An extensive amount of study appears to have been done on this tribe. However, the following are important additions to the literature on the Bodos, their origin and socio-religious and economic life. *The Kacharis* (1911) by Sydney Endle is the first of the kind about this mongoloid tribe. The book presents in detail the social and domestic life of the Bodos. An outline of the grammar of the Bodo language adds more value to this book.

*Kacharir Buranji* (in Assamese) edited by S. K. Bhuyan is a chronicle dealing with the Kacharis, a branch of the Bodo race. It contains legends about the origin of the Kachari Kings and their kingdom. The book also contains a thorough history of the Ahom-kachari relations from the end of the 14th century up to the beginning of the 18th century. This is regarded as one of the main source books to understand the history of the Kacharis.

*The Bodo-kacharir Samaj Aru Sanskriti* (in Assamese) by Bhaben Narzi is an admirable work. The book is about the social and cultural life of the Bodos. He also touched the origin and the background of the kiratas in India. *Aspects of Social Customs of Bodos* by Dr. K. Brahma is an in-depth study into the social customs and traditions of the Bodos of North-East region, especially of Assam. The works like *A Study of the Socio-Religious Beliefs and Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos* by K. Brahma, *A Study in Cultural Heritage of the Bodos* by the same author presents a similar picture of Bodo social life.
The demand for a separate political entity as a separate state with in the nation-state has been made by the Bodo-Kacharis of Assam resulting in the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and also of regionalization of Bodo politics. The subject has not yet received proper attention from professional researchers. Though studies like ‘The Bodo Imbroglio’ (Ajoy Roy, 1995) and ‘The Autonomy Movement of the Plains Tribes of Assam: a Case Study of the Bodos’ (D.C. Das, 1999) has been made, they are not comprehensive studies. In “The Bodo Imbroglio,” the author has narrated the historical circumstances: the past history of the Bodos and changing socio-economic circumstances behind the violent and dangerous course by the Bodos. The author of the latter work has tried to locate the causes of the movement in the historical process of survival of tribal pockets and how their aspirations in post-independence period led to autonomy demands.

As the above two studies are not extensive, the present work is an attempt to fill the vacuum.

**Objectives of the study:**

The aim of the present study is to make a thorough, historical investigation into the background of the Bodo state demand movement that was started in 1987 in Assam and unveil, if possible, the reality. It is proposed to investigate the following questions:

1. What led to the Bodoland Movement in Assam?
2. When was the first cry of identity crisis spelt out by the Bodos? Why was ethnic mobilization thought to be necessary?
3. What were the issues of the Assam Accord that haunted the Bodo mind?

4. How did the Bodos try to reverse the process of Assamese formation to establish the distinctness of Bodo identity and also to construct boundaries between ‘Bodos’ and ‘Assamese’? How historical facts were re-interpreted to fulfill territorial criterion of a separate Bodo state?

5. What was the impact of Bodo identity assertion on Assamese society at large?

**Organization:**

The work has been organized into the following chapters:

In the present introductory Chapter, the concept of politics of identity has been briefly discussed and also the background of politics of identity in India as well as in Assam has been described in this context. In the second Chapter, the historical background and immediate circumstances leading to the Bodo movement of 1987 has been discussed. In the third Chapter, the role of interpretation of history to strengthen Bodo ethnic identity has been thoroughly discussed and in this context the contestation to Assamese identity and also emulation of the tactics of Assam movement by the Bodo leaders have been highlighted. In the fourth Chapter, the nature of the Bodo movement from its first stage in 1929 to 2003, when the Bodos finally achieved territorial autonomy under the provision of sixth Schedule of the Constitution has been analyzed. In the fifth Chapter, an effort has been made to investigate how the Bodo Movement led to the ethnicization of ‘Assamese’ in Assam thereby giving a new definition to the
Assamese identity. In the concluding Chapter, the important findings of the whole study have been summed up.

**Methodology:**

For the entire study the historical method of research has been adopted. Primary and secondary sources have been complemented by field work in the form of interviews.