CHAPTER - I
INTRODUCTION

Rabha is one of the nine Scheduled Tribes in the plains district of Assam. They are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, Rabhas are also distributed in Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bangladesh and Nepal. As per 1991 census, the total population of the Rabhas are 2,36,931, where 1,20,139 is male and 1,16,792 is female and the literacy rate for male 47.36% and for female it has been recorded as 31.19%.

Origin:

Regarding the origin of this community it has been stated that Rabha belongs to the great Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Most of the Rabhas are well conversant with Assamese and Bengali. By and large they use the Assamese script. According to Hon'ble on Rabha constitute a major segment of the Bodo linguistic group who belonged to the Mongoloid stock.
Division:

According to Rev. Endle this tribe has seven 'sub-Tribes' such as 'Rangdaniya', 'Maitoriya', 'Pati', 'Koch', 'Bitliya', 'Dahuriya' and 'Sangha'. Of the Seven Sub-Tribes, the Rangdaniya, Pati and the Maitoriya were described to be the dominant ones.

Physical features:

Physically the Rabhas show all the characteristics of the Mongolian stock such as they possess round face, flat nose, prominent cheek bones, obliquely set eyes, sallow complexion, coarse hair, scanty beard and well developed lower extremities.

Dwellings:

The Rabhas like to live in compact blocks comprising of 50 to 10 families in each block. Usually the dwellings of a Rabha household consist of four houses—where one is main house, one guest house, one is outer house for the adult family members and a fourth one for using as a look-shed. The Rabhas usually use those materials which are locally available. The structure of a Rabha house is identical with those of the Bodo Kacharis. Each household of the Rabha is surrounded by a well-planned betel nut, banana and coconut garden.
Occupation:

Like the rest of the other plains tribes, the Rabhas also derive their livelihood mainly from agriculture. The Rabhas usually like to reside in uplands and their cultivable lands constitute both uplands and low lands. They undertake both Ahu and Sali along-with some amount of pulses, mustard seeds and jute. Those who reside on the bordering areas with Meghalaya resort to shifting cultivation to a certain extent. Most of the Rabhas practice traditional method of cultivation, except a few section who take the resort of tractor for agricultural operation.

Food habits:

Rice is the staple food of the tribe with an inherent liking for dried and powdered fish, pork and rice beer. Rice-beer is a common drink among the Rabhas which is served to all irrespective of age and sex. Rice beer is brewed in their home from their agricultural product.

Dress:

The Rabha women are expert both in spinning and weaving. Normally they prepare own requirements including those used by the males. The women's dress consists mainly of Riton, kamdung and Khojadabang which are invariadly needed for attiring a bride at the time of her marriage. The male dresses consist of 'Pajal', 'Khasne', 'Fali'.
‘Buksi T.’ ‘Passa’ is made out of endi yarn while the rest are made out of cotton.

**Social life and institution:**

The basic structure of the Rabha tribe is governed by the ethnological ideas contained in the customary laws. This customary laws have been framed by the village people on the basis of customs, usage, traditions and religious beliefs, covering such subjects like judicial power of the society, mode of inheritance, succession to office of socio-religious nature, type of marriage etc.

The Rabhas were once a matriarchal tribe and this can be assumed from their belief of reckoning from the female line. The existence of Barai or Bar, which is considered as clan or grtra plays a poignant role in a typical Rabha society. It is considered as exogamous group. Usually the children identify themselves from mothers Barai other he Nan Barai, a Hur, and Mahari, are also some powerful unit of two or more Baraia, while a Mahari consists of the female members emerging from a Barai.

**Inheritance of property:**

Property is usually inherited through father’s line and all sons are entitled to get equal share of the fathers property. A daughter
inherits no property unless the father makes arrangement for her share before his death. A widow is not entitled to inherit property of her husband even though she is encumbered with issues. In regard to succession matters also, a son’s claim is socially recognized for his ascendency to the position of his father either on his death or incapacity.

**Marriage:**

Marriage among the Rabhas are strictly governed by the customary laws. Among them no marriage can take place between the same Barai, or between the two Barajs included in Hur. Practice of levirate and sororate at junior levels is prevalent among the Rabhas.

Cross cousin marriage is permissible, but it is limited only to marrying the daughter of one’s maternal uncle. Though permissible, it is limited only to marrying the daughter of one’s maternal uncle. The parallel cousin marriage is strictly prohibited with few exceptions.

**Religious life:**

Friend Pereira stated in the ethnographic notes on the Rabhas that the Rabhas are animists in their religious outlook. Even today their belief on animism can not be denied, though the influence of Hinduism
is considerably quite higher among the Pati Rabha. This group observes all the Hindu religious festival like Durga puja, Kali puja, Ganesa puja, etc apart from this, another development of religion has also come to notice—the adoption of Christianity by a section of the tribe.

Festivals:

Strictly speaking the Rabha community as a whole does not have any national festival of their own. The different groups celebrate their ritualistic festivals which relate more of their own religious concepts and beliefs. Rangali Bihu and Bhogali Bihu are celebrated only by the Pati group like other Assamese people of Assam plains. The Rangdani and Naitori groups celebrate Baikho. Khoksi puja festival with the intention to propitiate the Goddess of wealth and prosperity. The Langle puja celebrated by the Pati Rabha is an important festival which is specially meant for Lord Siva.

Yet another religious festival of the tribe is connected with the propitiation of Kecai-Khaiti the deity presumed to be the protector of all humanity.
Movement for Ethnic Autonomy in Assam

The discord among groups defined by their ethnicity or race claiming redrawing the politico-administrative map has become a very prominent and sensitive issue in today’s Assam. When demands are made with racial and ethnic ties for Autonomy the dilemmas of democratic governance are posed most starkly. It is more true in Assam because of its social and cultural diversities. In Assam, excluding the Autonomous districts, there are nine Scheduled Tribes-Barmans in Cachar; Boro, Boro-Kachari; Deori; Hojai, Kachari Sonowa; Lalung (Tiwa); Mech; Miri (Mishing); and Rabha. In the Autonomous districts of Assam there are fourteen main scheduled Tribes and sixteen main Scheduled castes.

The Boro, Tiwa, Mishing, Rabha Hasong etc. of plains districts of Assam launched Movement and involved actively in the process of Collective Bargaining for Autonomy resulting signing of Accords and passing of legislation by the Governments towards that end.

Now let me make a brief analysis of the terms “Autonomy and Ethnicity”. These two terms are evolving terms. Autonomy is not a self-contained concept, it cannot be divorced from responsibility, responsiveness and accountability. It is not a gift to be received from higher Authority, it has to be earned through effective self-rule. While
Talking about autonomy one must not confine it to institutional or organizational autonomy only. It has to be realized in terms of planning, programme and budgeting and their successful implementation to achieve the ultimate goals of public welfare. It may also be noted that autonomy is not dependent on the relationship of different individuals within a particular group, it is dependent on its external relationship also.

The term “Ethnic” comes from Greek word “Ethnikoes” referring

- Nations not converted to Christianity
- Races or large groups of people having common traits.
- Groups in an exotic primitive culture

Paul R. Brass says that there are three ways of defining ethnic group, in terms of objective attributes, with reference to subjective feelings, and in relation to behaviour. An objective definition assumes that there must be some distinguishing cultural feature that clearly separates a group of people from another. That feature or features may be language, territory, religion, color, diet, dress or any of them. The problem with it is that it is usually extremely difficult to determine the boundaries of ethnic categories in this way. The subjective definition has no answer to the basic question of how a group of people arrives at
subjective self-consciousness in the first place. Behavioral definition is a form of objective definition.

De Vos defined ethnicity as a sense of ethnic identity consisting of the "Subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people. They may use any aspect of culture in order to distinguish themselves from other groups. This definition is used to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups.

The end of freedom movement in India from foreign bondage ushered a new era to country but it could not put an end to the process of ethnic assertion in North East India particularly in Assam. In the Constituent Assembly series of debates took place amongst the members for identifying a best way to solve the problems of hill people of the state. Beginning with the creation of Autonomous District Councils for administration of hill areas of North east India under Sixth Schedule to the Constitution till date Assam politics is conditioned by this problem of Autonomy for Ethnic Groups. Today it has come down from hills to the plains districts of the state.

The contemporary Assam politics is marked with pluralism and pressure politics. The system of Collective Bargaining between state authority and interest or Movement leaders has become a prominent feature of the political process of the state. While discussing the
movement for ethnic autonomy in Assam Bodo movement has been taken as the main thrust area.

The scheduled tribes constitute a notable part of the population of Assam and is a basic factor for politico-administrative changes in the State. During the British rule the hill districts of Assam were administered as Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. The administration was more or less of patriarchal in nature and was vested in the Deputy Commissioner under the control of the Governor. After the Government of India Act 1935 was passed, the Jawai Sub-division and some other areas of the Khasi and Jaintia hills districts known as British Sirdarship together with the Garo hills and the Mikir hills tracts or Nowgoong and Sibsagar districts were constituted into what were known as partially Excluded Areas enabling them to send five elected representatives to the provincial legislature.

While framing the Constitution of India a Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi was formed to examine the position of the hill areas of Assam. The Sub-Committee recommended the constitution of District Councils in all the hill districts of the state. The recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The philosophy behind Sixth Schedule was to safeguard and
conserve their way of life and to make it possible for them to participate in the political life and administrative of the state.

The Autonomous District Councils started functioning in the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Mizo Hills, the Garo Hills and the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills except the Naga Hills. The Naga Leaders boycotted not only the elections to the district councils under the Sixth Schedule but also the general elections of 1952 to Assam Legislative Assembly and Parliament. This was the turning point of the political history of the state and sowed the seed of ethnic assertion creating the chain of dissensions amongst different ethnic groups affecting seriously the unity and integrity of the nation, constraining very heavily the political process of the State and women in the State. However, the factors like the process of development, world’s socio-political scenario, dysfunctions of the socializing agencies, impact of science and technology etc. can never be denied for such a situation in the State.

A study of the sixth schedule:

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India recognizes certain areas of the Country as “Tribal Area” and provides for constitution of Autonomous District Council and Autonomous Regional Council.
At the beginning the following Autonomous Districts were created under the Sixth Schedule:

**Assam**

The North Cachar Hills Districts

The Mikir Hills Districts

**Meghalaya**

Khasi Hills District

Jaintia Hills District

Garo Hills District

**Mizoram**

The Chakma District

The Lakher District

The Pawi District

Subsequently, the Sixth Schedule was extended to Tripura in 1984 and Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council was created and to Assam in 2004 for creation of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts.

No Autonomous Regional Council has so far been created although the provision exists in the Sixth Schedule.

The amendment made for Karbi Anglong and NC Hills of Assam in 1995 has deleted the word ‘District’ and renamed the
Councils as Karbi Anlong Autonomous Council and NC Hills Autonomous Council.

The Autonomous Councils under Sixth Schedule have legislative power in the fields of land, forest, shifting cultivation, irrigation, town and village administration and social customs like marriage and divorces, inheritance of property etc.

The Autonomous Councils have executed powers in the following subjects:

- Primary education, dispensaries, markets, roads, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, road transport and waterways.
- Assessment and collection of land revenue.
- Levy and collection of some other taxes like those relating to profession, trades, vehicle, as well as tolls.
- Taxes for maintenance of schools, dispensaries, roads
- Share of royalties accruing from license and lease of minerals.
- Regulation and control of money lending and trading

Being notified Tribal area, all the MLA & MP constituencies in these Autonomous Council areas are reserved for ST. But, in the case of Autonomous Council, there is no such reservation of seats.
However, the Sixth Schedule has been considerably amended in case of BTC to protect the rights and interests of the non-tribals there. Some of the amendments made to Sixth Schedule for creation of BTC area as follows

- Safeguard for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance of property etc. of non-tribal will be suitably incorporated in para 3 of the Sixth Schedule. Any such law as may be made by the BTC in this regard will not, in particular:

  Extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by any citizen of India in respect of his land at the commencement of council, and

  Bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bonafide acquisition of land within council area.

- Provision will be added in para 6 of Sixth Schedule that in council area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without approval of the State Government.
- Provisions of para 8 of sixth Schedule regarding power to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes shall be applicable to council.

- Para 10 of the Sixth Schedule will not be applicable to Council area.

- Provisions of Article 332(6) of the Constitution will be so modified that the existing status of representation of council area in the State Assembly is kept intact. After the creation of council, the Parliament & Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

- In the event, Panchayat Raj system ceases to be in force in the Council area, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in such matters shall be vested with the Council.

- The amendments to the Sixth Schedule shall include provisions in such a manner that non-tribals are not disadvantaged for council and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected.

The Sixth Schedule provides for creation of Autonomous District Council and Autonomous Regional Council. But the concept of Autonomous Regional Council has not been applied to any tribe or
tribal area. The scope remains open for experimentation and exploration. Further, the Bhuria Committee examined the possibility of providing Autonomous Council at Sub-District level and mad the following recommendation:

- “We know of certain districts which are not tribal majority districts, in the sense that schedule tribal population do not constitute more than 50% of the total population of the district. But the STs are concentrated in a part or parts of the district, say in some blocks or a sub-division or sub-divisions. If the tribal population in these units is substantial in absolute terms, there is no reason why analogous arrangement should not be ushered in such areas. Councils to be formed for such areas could be termed as autonomous Sub District Councils (ASDC).”

There is growing popularity for the Sixth Schedule form of Autonomy in other parts of India too as indicated in the report of the Bhuria Committee: “Following from the rationale of the two constitutional amendments and drawing sustenance from the Fifth Schedule, a general view has emerged among the tribal leaders, representatives and experts that even for the vast Central Indian tribal
heartland, with certain changes, the overall design of the Sixth Schedule could serve as a relevant reference frame.

One of the nine scheduled tribes in the plains districts of Assam, the Rabhas are widely scattered but mostly concentrated in the undivided districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang. Besides Assam, their distribution spreads over Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal and Manipur. The trend of change occurring to the Rabha society appears to be multidimensional in character as we see them through their socio-religious, socio-cultural and socio-economic perspectives. The changing trend gained momentum during the post-independence period in the earlier years.

After independence along with the Hill tribes, the tribes of plains of Assam have become conscious about their distinct identity. A strong belief prevails in their minds that the protection of their separate identity will be possible only if they are left to manage their own affairs by themselves with the transfer of political and administrative power to them. The Bodos, Missings, Tiwas, Rabhas, Koch Rajbangshies have started demanding Autonomy or separate state.

In comparison of other tribes, social system of the Rabhas is also very disciplined. The community is strictly governed by some traditional organization, which have been existed from remotest past. 
These organizations are at the root of smooth administration of the Rabha society and also preservation of their traditional customs, manners, practices, religious beliefs etc. Besides the social organization there are some democratic institutions found in the Rabha society. These institutions are traditional and have existed from the past. They have been taking important role in the management of the Rabha society. The aim and objective of the different organizations and institutions is to keep the social and customary heritage intact and also to get cemented the different sections of tribe.

Three distinct types of administrative and social organizations are found in the Rabha society, viz.

1. The village or clan organization.
2. The Jamad or branch organization and
3. District, State or Regional organization.

It is also relevant to mention here that the organizations are formed in hierarchical order.

The village organization is the smallest and said to be the grass-root organization in the Rabha Society. The jurisdiction of the organization consists of a village. Besides village organizations a large number of regional organizations are in existence in the different Rabha inhabited areas. In Goalpara district several such organizations
are bund, viz. Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj, Dudhnoi Paschimanchal Rabha Sanmilan, Mechpara Rabha Samaj, Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj, Pub-Ajagar Rabha Samaj, Maurchi Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, Phulari Anchalik Rabha Samaj, Goalpara Zila Rabha Jatiya Parishad etc. Similarity in the Kamrup District also, there are several such organizations in existence viz. Brihat ar Guwahati Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, Dimoria-Sonapur Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, Luki-Bekeli Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad etc. These types of organizations are also found in other districts of Assam viz. Dhubri, Barpeta, nalbari, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur etc. Moreover, in Meghalaya and West Bengal also such types of organizations are in existence among the Rabhas.

In Meghalaya, the organizations viz. Pub-Gari Pahar Jila Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, paschim Garo Pahar Jila Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad are in existence. Similarly, in West Bengal, Kamashyaguri Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, Borshalbari Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad, Alipur Duwar Anchalik Rabha Jatiya Parishad etc. are found.

On the other hand, each regional organization consists of a number of branch organizations. As for examples, Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj of Goalpara district has several branch organizations.

On the other hand, Machpara Purbanchal Rabha Samaj in the same district has the following organizations under its jurisdiction.


Similarly, the remaining regional organizations in the district have also branch organizations under their respective jurisdiction.

Above all these organizations a national level organization namely the all Rabha National Council (R.N.C.) is in existence as the supreme administrative organization in the Rabha society. As supreme organization it includes all the Rabhas residing in Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Aruachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura and also those of the Foreign countries.

The regional organizations have been playing important roles in the administration of Rabha society since their inception. The
organization gave written shape of the customary law unwritten and so the Rabha people of different areas faced problems in observing these. The different Regional organizations of Goalpara district removed the problems by framing Pandulipis (constitutions containing the customary rules) dealing with the socio-religious rites and other matters. As a result administration of Rabha society has become more disciplined and society. Now the Rabha people do not face any problem in so far as the performance of their social activities is concerned.

Another important feature of the administration of the Rabha Society is the institutions of Mandal and Gaonburah. Mandal is the chief of the Rabha village and the Gaonburah (village headman) is the chief of number of villages taken together (generally 5 to 6 villages).

The Gaonburah is elected by democratic method by the people of 5 to 6 villages assembled at a particular place. So the Gaonburah is the head and so he has a lot of powers and functions. He is too see that the administration of the village is running normally. He has some judicial powers also. He is to try and punish the criminals responsible for theft or robbery or any other anti-social activities referred to him by the Mandal. In this connection it may be stated that first the criminals are tried by the Gaonburah before handing over to the police. The post of
the Mandal is hereditary, on the other hand Gaonburah is elected by the people and required the approval of the Government. Generally it is approved by the Deputy Commissioner or the Sub-divisional officer.

As a result of the existence of traditional administrative system, the Rabha society is very disciplined which led to the preservation of their age-old customs, manners, heritage and maintenance of unity and integrity among the community.

In comparison with the other tribes the Rabhas are still backward in various expects, viz. economic, social, political, educational etc. Even they are lagging behind the Bodos and the Karbis in so far as the autonomy movement is concerned. It is due to the fact that most of the Rabhas are illiterate and politically not conscious. The constitution of India has provided special rights and facilities including reservation of seats in the State Legislature and Union Legislature and those of Central and State Government service for the upliftment of the backward classes. Though the political achievement is not up to expectation yet some political changes have taken place among the Rabhas during the post independence.

The Rabhas inhabiting in different areas in Assam are facing many problems. Most burning among them is “Land Problem”, “Socio-Economic Problem” and “Educational and Cultural Problem”.
According to the leaders of the community the existing clauses and provisions enshrined in the constitution are not adequate for the solution of these problems. They have got their Members in the State Legislative Assembly from the First General Election held in 1952. They got only one MLA up to 1962 election. In 1967 election two MLAs were elected from the community. Their representation was nil in the State Assembly in two election viz. 1978 and 1983. On the other hand the Rabhas have so far got two ministers on two that too one and the same person became ministers of the State Council of Minister on two occasions. Akan Rabha became a member for a period in the Assam Council of Ministers in 1990 and again he became a cabinet Minister during 1996-2001.

The above picture reveals the Rabha’s participation in the state politics since the first General Election held in 1952, which is undoubtedly not significant. Due to the scattered habitations of the community in various Assembly Constituencies they have failed in most of the elections to send more than one member to the State Legislative. Even in district of Goalpara where Rabha population is dominant, they could succeed to elect only one MLA. So during the post-independence period the control of the Rabhas on state politics was not influencing and encouraging, which to a great extent
responsible for the backwardness of the community. So the leaders of the community felt that the transfer of political and administrative power to them only can solve their burning problems. So for achieving the goals the Rabhas have demanded creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous state under Articles 244 (A) and 275 (A) and Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in the Rabha dwelling areas in Assam.

To organize the Rabhas in favour of their demands several steps have been taken. As a part of these Goalpara District Rabha National Council was formed on 18-12-88 at Salpara under Goalpara district. Sri Dhaneswar Rabha and Sri Salochan Rabha became president and secretary respectively. Under the efforts of the Goalpara District Rabha National Council a State Level Conference was held from July 21 to 22, 1992 at Salpara where the leading organizations of the community viz. All Rabha National Council, All Rabha Sahitya Sabha and all Rabha Students’ Union took part. In this conference “The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee” was formed and Sarat Ch. Rabha and Sulochan Rabha became its first President and Secretary respectively.

The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee demanded autonomy for the Rabha Community. It also took various agitational phase to create pressure on the government to fulfil their demands. In the autonomy
movement, the All Rabha Student Union extended active cooperation to the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee. These two leading organizations took various peaceful methods like demonstration, rally, dharna, bandh including submission of memoranda to the government during the course of their autonomy movement.

They demanded

1. Rabha Hasong Autonomous State within the State of Assam covering Joyramkuchi G.P. in Goalpara District to Dakshin Rani Mouza in Kamrup District.

2. Rabha Hasong Autonomous District within the District of Darrang.

3. Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council within the Districts of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Nalbari and Sonitpur.

4. Rabha Hasong Autonomous Village Council in the Districts of Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Dhemaji, Nagaon, Lakhimur, Dibrugarh, Karbi-Anglong, and Demoria areas of Kamrup.

5. Reservation of 5 (five) seats for the Rabhas in the Bodoland Autonomous Council. The above organizations succeeded in uniting all the Rabhas dwelling in various parts of Assam, and received support of the community. The Autonomy movement of the Rabhas came to an end.
with the signing of “Rabha Accord” with the Government of Assam on March 10, 1995.

The Rabha Accord was signed between the Government of Assam and the representative of the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee and the All Rabha Students' Union in presence of the then Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia. The signatories included the President and General Secretary of the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee and those of the All Rabha Student's Union.

The Rabha Accord provides the setting up of Administrative Authority for the areas predominantly inhabited by the Rabhas. The objectives of the Administrative Authority are to provide maximum possible autonomy within the framework of the constitution of India for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha people in the state.

The Accord provides for constitution of a council which shall be known as “Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council”. The council shall be the Apex consisting of satellite areas of village council, called the Rabha Hasong Village Council. The village council shall be constituted with villages having more than 50% of the tribal population in the Rabha dominated areas with population of 6000-8000. The
According as also provided for suitable legislation to be made by the State Government for the constitution of the Apex Council.

It has also been included in the Accord that the provisions of Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 and the Assam Municipal Act, 1994 (amended) shall not apply to the areas of the villages included in Rabha Hasong Village Council. Moreover, the Apex Council shall have the power to make bye-laws/ ruled and orders which shall apply to all the village councils.

The Accord provides long lists of powers and functions in respect of execution of developmental schemes both for the Apex Council and Village Councils.

Accordingly the Apex Council shall have jurisdiction over 34 subjects and those of the village councils 29 subjects.

In accordance with the provision of the Accord the "Assam Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council" Act was passed in 1995 and accordingly first interim Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was constituted in 1995 with Sri Sabyasachi Rabha as the Chief Executive Member. Dudhnoi in Goalpara district was made its Headquarter.
Similarly, the second Autonomous Council was constituted in 1997 with S:i Sarat Ch. Rabhas as the Chief Executive member. And the third interim council was constituted in 2001 with Dr. Sarat Ch. Rabha as the Chief Executive Member.

The Rabha Accord has provided the Rabhas with substantial political and administrative powers and functions with necessary funds. As a first step of the implementation of the Accord, "Assam Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act" was passed in 1995. In the same year the first interim Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was constituted which covers the jurisdiction from Jayamkuchi of Goalpara district to Rani of Kamrup district. So far three consecutive interim councils have been constituted. In spite of such developments different Rabha organization seem not satisfied with these. Several factors have been raised by the community in support of their dissatisfaction. It has been alleged that the State Government has failed to implement the different clauses and provisions of the Rabha Accord. Even after passing several years the elections to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and Rabha Hasong Village Councils have not yet been held. Government has failed to amend the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 to exempt the Rabha Autonomous Council areas from the purview of the Panchayat Act. Under these circumstances the leading
Rabha organizations viz. All Rabha Student's Union, All Rabha Women Council and Autonomy Demand Committee, demanded amendment of the "Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995. Moreover, they have also demanded amendment of the Rabha Autonomous Council and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the India Constitution.9

From the above discussion it is clear that though in theory the Rabha Accord has brought about substantial political and administrative changes in the Rabha inhabited areas of Assam, the people belonging to the community are not satisfied due to the non-implementation of the Accord. They have been demanding the inclusion of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in Accord. They have been demanding the inclusion of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This has been reflected in the 10th Biennial conference of "All Rabha Students' Union" and 3rd Biennial conference of "All Rabha Women Council" held from February 11 to February 13, 2002 at Tokankata (Tongla) in Darrang district.

**Significance of the study:**

In post-independent India, problems of regionalism have become a very significant feature of the body-politic of the country. The ailment
like social divisions, ethnic conflicts and alienation, tension, suspicion have been deep rooted in our society. The problem of autonomy is a complex phenomena. In the context of tribal society, it is the most critical socio-political phenomena, specially in multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural situations in Assam.

The ethnic upsurge among the Rabha tribes who were once known as the most simple and peace loving people, deserves special attention from academic as well as administrative point of view. The study of autonomy and socio-political changes among the Rabha tribes of Assam is relevant in the context of present day political development of Assam.

The feeling of negligence, deprivation, exploitation and the sense of insecurity are deeply rooted in the mind of the people of Assam in general and the members of different ethnic groups in particular. It causes tension between centre and state relation and state local or state inter-ethnic groups relations resulting demands for more state Autonomy and Autonomy for ethnic group with the state.

To satisfy the aspiration of different ethnic groups the Government of Assam considered Autonomous Councils as the best device and accordingly it granted Autonomy through these Councils. But the experience shows that this policy of the Government is facing
new challenges at the rural and tribal areas. Under this circumstances the study of this kind is very essential.

The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDIC) demanded in its memorandum to Hiteswar Saikia, Chief Minister of Assam on 10-01-93 of Rabha Homeland in the year of South Goalpara and South Kamrup. Push and Pull of rural youth by the political party a significant role in attracting them to politics of the state. After a series of discussions between RHDC and the Government of Assam Memorandum of settlement (Rabha Accord) was signed on 10\textsuperscript{th} march 1995 by the Chief Minister of Assam. Chief Secretary and four Representatives of RHDC. It provided for creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHDC) at the area and Rabha Hasong Village Council at the bottom.

**Objectives of the study:**

The major objectives of the study are:

i) To trace the historical background of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

ii) To focus the changes in Rabha Society.

iii) To highlight the functions of the Rabha Autonomous Council.
iv) To explore the impact of the Council on the administration of the district of Goalpara.

**Hypotheses:**

i) Creation of RHAC will cause various conflicts amongst the administrative devices in the district of Goalpara.

**Methodology:**

The study is based mainly on primary sources of data which are available in the Census Report, Government departments, office of the RHAC, Assembly Library and offices of the different Rabha Organisations.
FOOT NOTE:


4. Memorandum of ARSU to Govt. of Assam. 1980.


7. Memorandum of the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee to the Govt. of Assam. 1992.

