Abstract

This research is an attempt to study the current ethnic ferment in Assam, a state of India in its north-east corner, which is marked by organized political movements and cultural activism on the part of the various communities of the state. Assam has been witnessing a series of socio-political movements in the ethnic line since the time of independence of the country. Almost every community of this province is seen to be resorting to such movements (either in the form of insurgency or democratic protests) for registering its demands for specific kinds of empowerment (from sovereign territory to limited autonomy). Such demands of a particular group are also noted to be changing with the passing of time, responding to changing socio-political contexts. These political aspirations and activities have been redefining the borders of the self and the other by continuously changing, recreating and, if necessary, inventing the requisite cultural narratives to foster the desired ethno-national identities.

This study is firstly an endeavour to engage with the question of whether these proliferating ethno-national movements can be understood as the simulations of the top-down model of nationalism of the larger Indian state or they can be read as something more organically evolved at their local specific situations. This core issue of this study has been attempted by analyzing the socio-historical contexts of the processes of identity formation and cultural differentiation among the population of Assam. Secondly, this study is especially interested in understanding and describing how the culture has remained both as the cause as well the effects of these changes and ethno-political aspirations. This second query of this research is sought to be explored with the specific contexts of the ethno-cultural manifestations of the Karbi community of Assam in current times.