Chapter 1

Conceptualizing the Study: Theory and Contexts

1.1 Introduction:

Though the *Communist Manifesto* brushed aside the necessity of nations in the sense that the “working men have no country” (Marx & Engels 2007, 28), Marx had realized the unstoppable stimulus of national consciousness, as he had written in a letter to one of his friends: “I assure you that even if one can feel no national pride, one does feel national shame…” (Marx 1843).

Nationalism, as an ideology and part of the superstructure, is a false consciousness in classical Marxist idioms. However, the identity of the self, or relating oneself to the group that one belongs to, is an irreducible psyche of every human being in the time of capital. In this line it can be argued that ‘man is a (r)national animal’ (Connor 1994, 195). The articulation of identity, ethnicity or nationalism in such rhetoric takes place either in the form of glorification or in the anxieties of national shame. During the 18th and 19th century, the western world invented the design of nation and brought to its colonies; although a definite social sense of belonging had existed either in community or regional line much earlier which later favoured the eruption of nationalism in these colonies. Hobsbawm argues that nationalism comes much earlier than nation (Hobsbawm 1990, 10-11). The temporal national consciousness took a concrete shape when the necessary conditions were created by the colonialism. Mahmood Mamdani, in studying the colonial legacy in Africa, asserts how the institution of law was reinforced by the colonial state to its different groups of citizens who were classified on the basis of ethnicities and races; and how these distinctions became sharper in
articulating ethnicity in the post-colonial times (Mamdani 2001, 654). In the case of India too, different forms of colonial modernity brought in by the British regime later became the sources of articulating identity by the different Indian communities in India in the postcolonial situations. Those structures and categories of colonial modernity may be seen in the forms of cartography, law, bureaucracy and education. Conversion of non-state spaces\(^1\) into parts of state was initiated through these instruments during the colonial regime. This resulted in a definite hierarchy of spaces and peoples in the administrative register of the state, which is now being used for articulating counter-hegemonic assertions from the bottom with the negation of the top down paradigm of nationalism authorized by the Indian state.

Assam is a state of India in the North-Eastern region, surrounded by six other States: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Meghalaya. Till 1963, all these seven states were one single state, known as Assam. However, the state was divided into seven different states as mentioned, in the post-Independence times due to regional aspirations of the diverge populations. This unit of the seven states, which is now frequently referred as North-East India, is connected to the rest of India through a narrow strip of land called *Siliguri Corridor* or *Siliguri Chicken-neck*.

This region of North-East India, in general, is the homeland of several communities who are all distinct in terms of language, religion and traditional expressive cultural forms. Most of the native populations, who were described as Indo-Mongoloids by early historians and ethnographers, demonstrate cultural similarities more with the people of South-East Asian regions than with their counterparts in the mainland India. When these various communities, distinct with their respective traditional values and practices, were subjected to the process of *Indianization* or the nation-building process

\(^1\) The spaces from where the state gets no tax. James Scott, *in his study of the jhum cultivation* (Slash and burn) in South East Asia, considers the hills as the non-state spaces and the population as anarchists (Scott 2009).
Location of North-East India (highlighted in color)

(Color rework by researcher)
The state of Assam, highlighted in color, within the North-East India
Map source: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India
(http://www.mdoner.gov.in/zoomimzgemap/imagemap.php?map=NE/NE Region)
(Color rework by researcher)
District of Karbi Anglong, highlighted in color, within the map of Assam
Map source: Survey of India(http://www.surveyofindia.gov.in/files/Assam.pdf) (Color rework by researcher)
of India after its independence in 1947, many things didn't go smoothly in the region. The recent political history of the region is not only marked by several state-reorganization exercises but also an increasing number of unresolved political crises, pertaining to the demands for greater autonomy, visibility and access, on the part of the different ethnic groups of the region.

Nationalism can be looked as the set of experiences that illustrates 'congruence between culture and power' (Gellner 1983, 52-53). As a result of discontents of varied nature, the on-going ethno-political scenario in the Indian context reveals that the idea of 'Indian nationalism' or that of 'India as a nation state' increasingly came to be realized not more than a myth; and the cultural heritage is materialized as a powerful weapon to negotiate with the state. This myth of nationalism, or the nationalized sense of belonging to the state, was created through the invention of homogeneous identity- with the creation of singular national anthem, national symbol, national language or culture, which came not from the people within, rather imposed from the top. The 19th and early 20th century Indian nationalism was based on certain classical elements of a nation which Stalin holds as the prerequisites. Stalin argues that nation is a "historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in community of culture" (Stalin 1991, 6). The Indian national leaders had left no stone unturned to create a nation in India by incorporating the western ideas of nation. It created the misnomer viz. -'unity in diversity'. In the cases of historiography, language, religion, culture and so on - it created oneness. These were the parts of such national imagination to create India as a nation to fight against the colonial rule. But once the colonial regime ended, the top down model of nationalism and nation building was challenged from various corners of the sub-continent. Phadnis and Ganguly argues that,

"The rise of ethnic nationalism and the formation of ethnic political movements in many developing states can in large part be attributed to the legacy of western colonization and decolonization which created sovereign states incorporating many ethnic groups by ignoring
existing ethnic and cultural divisions and popular political aspirations. ... different ethnic groups found little in common to bind them together once independence was achieved and common enemy (the colonial power) had departed. In their post-colonial political history, many of these states have had to deal with increased nationalistic assertiveness on the part of ethnic or subordinate minorities because such groups felt badly treated and, hence, came to regard the dominant cultural groups as new colonies" (Phadnis & Ganguly 2001, 16-17).

The Dravidian movement and the movement for independent Nagaland were some of the early challenges for the newly independent Indian state and these movements paved the road for later ethnic assertion movements and several other new social movements in ethnic line in the entire subcontinent during post-independence times. In North-East India, several movements in ethnic line emerged. In case of Assam, the region was Balkanized by increasing number of ethno national forces after the historic Assam Movement which lasted for six long years during 1979-85. In post 1990’s situation, almost all the ethnic groups of Assam viz. Bodo, Karbi, Dimasa, Mishing, Sonowal Kachari, Thengal Kachari, Tiwa, Rabha, as well others were seen to be asserting their respective ethnic identities having political goals of greater autonomy of variable intensities. Sharma argues that the idea of self-rule is quite an ambiguous term when it is put in relation to the ethnonational movements of Assam or the North-East. Historically, the term ‘self-rule’ is ambiguous for both the state and the representatives of these movements; as sometimes it talks about autonomy of different level, sometimes separate state or sometimes sovereign territory (Sharma 2005, 41). While the elites of a particular ethnic group mobilize the members of the group and aspire to negotiate the political demands, the Indian state looks such issues from the point of view of law and order, or more from a developmental framework. Sanjib Baruah argues that the region North-East India is framed in terms of development and militarization (Baruah 2009, 1-2). In the popular policy making as well academic discourses also it is looked with the similar outlooks.
In such disjunction, the ethnic assertion and ethnonational character of these different movements get complicated and become sites of dissonant worldviews from within and outside. This leads to a number of different approaches to understand and interpret these ethno-political mobilizations, such as:

- whether the currently proliferating ethno-national assertions can be understood as the simulations of the top-down model of nationalism of the Indian state, or they can be understood as something rooted in the local specificities pertaining to colonial-nationalism and beyond in the context of Assam.

- How the communities are (re)imagining themselves through these kinds of movements? How culture, tradition and history are being asserted, opposed or negotiated to articulate the desired ethnicities?

Centering to these questions, I want to argue that the production of ethnicity or the phenomenon of ethnonationalism in Assam is not simply a question of acquiring or gaining of political spaces as argued by the instrumentalist theorists of ethnicity. On the contrary, there is definite socio-historical lineage of this rhetoric of revolting against the hegemony and exclusion of the dominant sections. As such, to understand the present ethnic upsurges we need to historicize the social and political formation in Assam, which opens up the issues of ethnic questions. While I try to locate the genesis of this political consciousness in the colonial and the pre-colonial, I also emphasize that the nuances of the new economic and political regime after the 1990s, popularly known as globalization, can never be excluded from this historicization.

Thus, the basic objective of this thesis is to understand the present ethnic ferment in Assam through examining pre-colonial, colonial and the post-colonial temporalities. The pre-colonial situation had elevated the politics of inclusion of various groups; the colonialism made sharp distinctions among communities whereas the post-colonial affairs led to the politics of exclusion. The 19th century Assam is one of the major focuses in this thesis as political
consciousness in modern sense started with the introduction of colonial modernity during this time. The creation of distinction in the colonial situation continued in the post-colonial phase with an exclusive ethnic politics. It has been attempted here to look at how different social situation is articulated by the emerging elites in ethnic line as well as the role of different neo-liberal intrigues for such political articulation. More emphatically, the thesis also argues that the process of cultural hegemony of dominant sections also worked as catalytic factor to articulate ethnicity as a counter-hegemonic instrument. After studying the ethnic situations of Assam in general, this research work explores, as a special case, the specific contexts of the ethno-cultural manifestations of the Karbi community of Assam in current times.

1.2 Defining the Concepts:

In the following pages, the different theoretical concepts and arguments, which will be extensively used in the later chapters, have been conceptualized and defined. Different terminologies such as ethnicity, ethnonationalism, nationalism, ethnic assertion movement, identity movement etc. are used frequently to understand different kinds of group formations in diverse socio-historical and political contexts. These concepts are interconnected in nature; and in many literatures of social sciences they are often seen to be used synonymously. However, they do bear nuanced variations in their connotations in different context.

1.2.1 Ethnic Group & Ethnicity:

An ethnic group is a group of people who share a common belief of ancestry. So it can be best understood in terms of collectivity – in being member of a group. The collectivity may be bounded by blood relations, kinship ties, language, religion, and some other material and non-material cultural similarities. The ethnic groups often carry a common myth of ancestry which relates all individuals of the group and strengthen the identity as well the sense
of belongingness. The origin of the term *ethnic* can be traced back to Greek word *ethnos*, which was used to refer a group, tribe, race, a person or a swarm. The meaning of the term changed radically throughout history. Eriksen refers to the use of the term in 19th and 20th century in the USA to the migrant population as well as the non-western or northern descent. Although in the 1960's decade the term got a new turn when D. Riesman in 1953 coined the term *ethnic* and it came to popular domain during the 1960's and 1970's.

Weber defined an ethnic group as one whose members "entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of non-kinship communal relations" (Weber 1922, 389).

Hutchinson and Smith consider six characteristic features of an ethnic group:

i. a common *proper name*, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;

ii. a myth of *common ancestry* that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnie a sense of fictive kinship;

iii. Shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;

iv. one or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, and language;

v. a *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and

vi. a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the ethnie's population (Hutchinson and Smith 1996, 6-7)

The popular definition given by Schermerhorn on 'ethnic community' or 'ethnie' to understand the content of an ethnic group is useful. He holds, "An ethnic group is defined here as a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a
cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as a localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some kind of consciousness among members of the group" (Schermerhorn 1978, 17).

In classical anthropological literature, an ethnic group is understood with the following attributes:

1. Is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. Shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
3. Makes up a field of communication and interaction
4. Has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as a continuing category distinguishable from other categories of the same order. (Narroll 1964, quoted in Barth 1969, 12-13)

Thus these literatures on ethnic group were mostly dominated by the idea of ancestry and cultural ties. In the essay ‘Ethnic Group and Boundaries’ Barth opened up the idea of ‘boundary’ to understand ethnic group. For him, it is not the cultural markers or descent rather the boundary of a group that makes it distinct. The subjective belief of common descent was replaced by Barth and holds that the boundary makes a group distinct. He further extends the debate by arguing that it is not the cultural features that make a group distinct, on the contrary the social interactions that make a group distinct. He holds, “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969, 15). As such, Barth is not concerned with the fixed cultural traits which define a group; rather, he emphasizes on the processing of the boundaries which differentiate a group from other groups. Hence, ethnicity is largely based on the social interactions between the groups. Barth further considers ethnic group as an organizational type, a form of social organization. Ethnic group is largely understood in relation to cultural differences to other,
but Barth holds that there is no one-to-one relationship between cultural differences or similarities between ethnic units. He argues "...one cannot predict from first principles which features will be emphasized and made organizationally relevant by the actors. ......ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural system" (ibid, 14). Moving away from the objective markers of an ethnic group, he shifts the attention to subjective understanding of belongingness. This leads to the idea that ethnic group is not found in isolation, rather found in relation to other groups only.

Anthony D Smith defines *ethnie* (ethnic communities) as "a named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity" (Smith 1986a, 32). Here, Smith refers to the ethno-symbolic importance of a group, where shared past and the history which bind the members of the group.

Cohen defines ethnic group as "a collective of people who share some pattern of normative behaviour and form a part of a larger population interacting with people from other collectivities within a framework of a social system" (Cohen 1974, 9). By normative behaviour Cohen implies different activities and other symbolic formations or forms may be kinship, marriage, ritual and so forth.

In a nutshell, ethnic groups thus can be looked as a throng of people who shares common assumptions of their lineage and/or are bounded by certain variants of feelings of belongingness through different cultural markers or economic or political situation(s). It is best understood or expressed in relation to other groups or people. It has become more apparent in current times that an ethnic group or the expression of its *ethnicness* is more political to serve the purpose of the contextual political negotiations.
1.2.2 Ethnicity:

In common parlance, ethnicity is understood as the sense of belongingness of the individuals to its group. It may be referred to the affiliation of an individual or set of people to its group as per the ascriptive quality. Glazer and Moynihan define ethnicity as "the condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group" (Glazer and Moynihan 1974, 1).

Ethnicity and race are two diverse concepts used extensively in social science discourse. Both are treated as biological in nature by the primordialists. While the notion of race is understood to imply the biological characters of an individual such as skin colour, and other physical traits viz. hair, nose, jaws and so forth; the notion of ethnicity refers to the cultural traits of a community or group viz. language, religion, ancestry myth and so on.

Eriksen defines ethnicity as an aspect of "social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. The first fact of ethnicity is the application of systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between 'Us' and 'Them'. If no such principle exists there can be no ethnicity" (Eriksen 2002, 12-19).

1.2.3 Theories of Ethnicity

There are two different categories of theorists, viz., the primordialists and the instrumentalists, who offer two different perspectives in interpreting the phenomenon of ethnicity. These two schools hold a polar opposite positions in relation to one another. The primordialists believe ethnicity to be a given category. On the other hand, the instrumentalists hold that ethnicity is a social/political/cultural construction. In the debates of these two paradigms, a third approach got developed which is known as situative-primordial
approach. All these perspectives, which are discussed in the following pages, hold good in varying degrees for interpreting different ethnic situations in different contexts.

1.2.3.1 Primordialist School of Thought: The primordialist school of thought considers ethnicity as innate. One’s ethnic identity is determined by the deep-rooted primordial attachment to a group or culture. Thus, primordialists argue that the ethnicity is ascriptive and hence the ethnicity of an individual is permanent. If a child is born in a particular ethnic group, s/he will identify himself/herself with the identity of that group only. As such, ethnicity is biologically given or a natural phenomenon. For them ethnic identity is a "subjectively held sense of shared identity based on objective cultural and regional criteria" (Phadnis & Ganguly 2003, 23). Shils, Glazer, Moynihan, Rex, are some of the names of this school of thought.

The idea of ‘primordial’ was first developed by the American sociologist Edward Shils in 1957. In his essay “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties: Some particular Observations on the Relationship of Sociological Research Theory”, he developed the idea of the primordial and different kinds of social bonds between members in modern society. Shils examined the public civil ties in modern societies and in existing primordial ties of family, religion and ethnic group which are manifested in their symbols and ceremonies (Shils 1957, 130-145). For Shils, primordial ties may be real or imaginary, but it relates the community to its historical origin, and the kinship ties bind the members to a common ancestor. These primordial ties are available in the modern societies also. Moreover, the culture that is shared by the members is considered as naturally given. Thus for him ethnic bonds are natural and given – not acquired. Henceforth, primordialism gives the scope to identify a community in terms of kinship relations, and ancestry.

The idea was further developed by the American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. He argues that,
"By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the "givens"--or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed "givens"--of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves." (Geertz 1964, 259-60).

Primordial school of thought thus, looks ethnicity as a natural phenomenon. It presents ethnicity as static and naturalistic. But the primordialists fail to explain why different kinds of identities emerged in different points of time and also get decayed. People’s imagination to construct various identities in various situations also can’t be explained by the above theory.

A more radical version of primordialism is presented by the sociobiologists who argue “genetic reproductive capacity as the basis of, not only of families and clans, but of wider kinship-groupings like ethnies”(van den Berghe 1981, 20). The radical primordialists suggest that these groups are bonded by nepotism and inclusive fitness. Myths of descent which underpin ethnies correspond with such nepotistic reproductive strategies. But the sociobiologists face criticism on the ground that they have reduced the social and cultural behaviours into biological categories.

1.2.3.2 Instrumentalist School of thought: The instrumentalisists look ethnicity not in terms of the primordial qualities; rather they consider ethnicity as a necessary instrument in achieving certain goals. They treat ethnicity as the social, political and cultural resources for different interest groups.

The instrumental school of thought largely belongs to the ideas of Barth, Paul Brass, Ted Gurr, Abner Cohen and so forth who consider ethnicity as
construction; constructed by the elites of a group for economic and political gains. Barth (1969) defines ethnic identity as an “individualistic strategy” in which individuals move from one identity to another to “advance their personal economic and political interests, or to minimize their losses” (Jones 1997, 74).

Paul Brass on the other hand argues that the

“cultural forms, values and the practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantages. They become symbols and referents for the identification of members of the group, which are called up in order to create a political identity more easily. The symbols used to create a political identity also can be shifted to adjust to political circumstances and the limitations imposed by the state authorities” (Brass 1991, 15).

For Brass, ethnicity is constructed by the elites of a group with the motive of sharing/occupying state resources – which may be political and/or economic. Hence for Brass, ethnicity is purely a construction as he maintains that “it is quite obvious that there are very few groups in the world today whose members can lay any serious claim to a known common origin, it is not actual descent that is considered essential to the definition of an ethnic group but a belief in a common descent” (ibid, 70).

In the similar way, Abner Cohen looks ethnicity and ethnic formation as an approach to the situational interest group approach. He argues that the “earning of livelihood, the struggle for a larger share of income from the economic system, including the struggle for housing, for higher education and for other benefits and similar issues constitute an important variable significantly related to ethnicity” (Cohen 1974, xv). The interest groups form “in the perennial request for livelihood in a divided labour market, competition for a greater share of income results in the formation of interest groups”. As opposed to Barth, he claims himself as a normalist and Barth as realist. He argues that the role of the interest groups remains as instrumental in the
formation of ethnicity. For him, it is the process where "some interest groups exploit parts of their traditional culture in order to articulate informal organizational functions that are used in the struggle of these groups for power" (ibid, 91). Thus for Cohen, ethnicity is useful to serve the goal of individual as well collective agenda.

1.2.3.3 Situative-Primordial Approach: Both the instrumentalist and primordial school are agreeing in some points, like considering ethnicity as group formation. But both the approaches raise many questions instead of answering them in the contemporary global scenario. As a result, a third approach emerged which came to be known as situative-primordial approach developed by Carsten Wieland. Wieland examined the ethnic situation in India, Pakistan as well in Bosnia (Balkan region) and discovered the problems of the primordial and instrumental school of thoughts (Wieland 2006, 17-43). The primordial idea considers ethnicity as given, objective and ethnic group as a solid unit. As such, “[i]n comparative politics they can thus be used as independent variables which influence political outcomes” (ibid, 18). On the other hand the instrumentalist approach considers ethnicity as construction, “a common origin of people recedes into the background or is dismissed from the beginning” (ibid). As such, for the instrumentalists ethnicity is subjective and ethnic groups are flexible and constructed for political gains by the elites. In such case, ethnic group can be seen as an interest group. Wieland hence argues that an ethnic group and the ethnicity are products of exterior influences, they are dependent variables. He further extends the problems of both the schools, especially regarding primordialists that for them ethnicity is given or natural or ethnic group as fixed. But the primordialists “cannot explain why some ethnic group decay, some appear anew and others merge. Neither can they tell us why some characteristics seem more important than others and why some ethnic groups (seemingly as a whole) fight each other and others co-operate.” He criticized the instrumentalists also on the ground of negating the factor of origin. He holds: “[t]his approach gets into trouble when it comes to explaining why masses tend to be mobilized so easily with appeal to origin
and culture and why people are even ready to die without any material reward" (ibid, 20).

Wieland, responding to both these approaches, has developed the situative-primordial approach where it sees ethnicity both as a dependent and independent variable. The proponents of the approach see ethnicity not as older phenomenon rather is an invention and formed, where selective 'old materials are used 'to articulate the same. Examples can be given from the use of selective past events interpreted and finally sold as “common history”.

The situative-primordial approach gives the scope to see ethnicity both as dependent and independent variable. Ethnicity is an independent as well dependent variable in the sense of primordial quality of a group which gives the scope to mobilize the people by the elites of the group (dependent variable).

1.2.4 Nation and Nationalism:

In the discourse of nation and nationalism, Anderson’s pioneering work Imagined Communities opened up new dimensions to see the formation of a nation. For him nation is an ‘imagined community’ and a cultural artifact. He defines nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1991, 6). Anderson viewed emergence of nation not as a result of given sociological conditions like language, religion or race which had been in the entire globe rather imagined into existence. He considers nation as imagined as “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”. Hence, for Anderson, nation is a particular kind of abstract phenomenon where members of the community imagine themselves as a member of the community. He also holds that “the nation is imagined as
limited because even the largest of them encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (ibid, 7). Nation is sovereign as the very idea of the same came up in the age of enlightenment destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Finally, Anderson contends that nation is imagined “because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (ibid).

On the development of nation and spreading of nationalism in the western world, Anderson refers to the rise of print media capitalism in West. He refers to the rise of the printing press, which he calls as print media capitalism. The business of print requires a large market and wanted to maximize profit. Thus print language brought the imagination of national consciousness, where print language is mutually intelligible for its members though spoken language may vary and may not be intelligible for each other. Through the printed books and newspaper it became possible for them to comprehending one another. “In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (ibid, 44). Moreover, in the development of the subjective idea of nation, the print capitalism created a condition for fixing the language to build the image of antiquity.

Partha Chatterjee, on the other hand, criticized Anderson’s view on imagined community. He criticized the idea of nationalism put forwarded by Anderson as ‘modular’ form developed in Europe and later adopted by the colonies, which left no space for the colonies to imagine in the name of nation. Chatterjee questions if “the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by
Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?” (Chatterjee 1993, 5). This leads to the fact that the colonies of Asia and Africa are only the perpetual consumer of modernity, and the imagination is also always colonized. Moreover Anderson ignores the spirituality – the space inside the internal domain, when he views nationalism focusing much on outside material domain. Chatterjee, thus proposes a new idea of nationalism on the spiritual domain which he views as fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa. The inner domain bears the essential marks of cultural identity. Chatterjee, brought the examples from the context of Bengal to see Indian nationalism in the colonial period by giving examples of language, drama, schools, family roles and the women. If the case of language is taken, Chatterjee accepts the idea of print media capitalism of Anderson for the development of ‘national’ language. In Bengal the first printed books in Bengali were published by the East India Company and by the Christian Missionaries in the end of 18th Century. The bilingual Bengali elites by the mid-century made it a cultural project “to provide its mother tongue with the necessary linguistic equipment to enable it to become an adequate language for “modern” culture” (ibid, 7). Outside the purview of the state a large number of magazines, newspapers, printing presses, and literary bodies came up and a standard shape of the language was given. One’s own language is the inner domain of one’s cultural identity where the colonial power was kept out. In case of different literary genres like drama which gave the opportunity to promote the standard version of the language as well also gave the space to sustain the cultural tradition (Sanskrit).

From the second half of the 19th century the new elites had started establishing schools to produce “suitable educational literature” before the state became the contention. Outside the domain, of the state these schools were the space for generalizing and normalizing the new language and literature.

Another inner domain Chatterjee looks as a part of national culture is the family. The European scholarship was mostly known for criticizing the
'barbaric' traditions, religious practices of Indian society specially related to treatment of women. The early nationalists were not ready to give the burden to the colonial state to legislate the reform of the traditional society. They believed that only the nation itself has the right to intervene in the cultural domain of the society. Moreover, the role of women was also important to create the national and cultural identity though a new patriarchy which was brought into existence. The new women need to be modern but essentially differ from the western women who, along with the idea of being new, "have to display the signs of national tradition" (ibid, 9)

Thus Chatterjee, twisting the Anderson's theory of the western and modular form of nationalism, offers an alternative in case of Indian nationalism, which argues that the nationalism in Indian context has a spiritual base. There were certain forms already available for which it was easier to imagine a nation out of these.

Gellner defines nationalism as primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent (Gellner 1983). He looks at the rise of nation and nationalism as a sociological condition of the industrial world. He views human civilization in three stages: pre-agrarian, agrarian and industrial. The pre-agrarian and the agrarian societies could not offer any space for nationalism. As per his modernist theory of nation the 'agro' societies were divided horizontally: rulers and ruled and cultural differences were marked. No one had an interest to promote the cultural homogeneity at social level; as well it seldom offered division of labour. As such, Gellner holds, "there is little incentive or opportunity for cultures to aspire to the kind of monochrome homogeneity and political pervasiveness and domination for which later, with the coming of the age of nationalism, they eventually strive" (ibid, 13) (Durkheim, however considers it as mechanical solidarity). But the industrial age offers high division of labour in society. Gellner finds nationalism in the root of "certain kind of division of labour, one which is complex and persistently, cumulatively changing" (ibid, 23). As modern
society based on division of labour, it requires cultural homogeneity to function and can create necessary condition for an ideology. The role of state is also important in promoting education to create nationalism. Gellner views the same as "some organism must ensure that this literate and unified culture is indeed being effectively produced, that the educational product is not shoddy and sub-standard" (ibid, 38). The modern state offers standardized education system to its members that fulfill the demands of the industrial world: mobile, educated, technically equipped people. These different sets of economic people need a common community as well a common culture. Education is the tool for promoting the homogeneous high culture.

Hobsbawm, accepting Gellner’s definition of nationalism, holds that nation is neither a primary nor an unchanging social entity. For Hobsbawm, nation belongs to an exclusively particular and historically recent period. It is modern construction and a social entity only; it relates to a certain kind of modern territorial state - the 'nation state' and it is pointless to discuss nation and nationality except insofar as both relate to it (Hobsbawm 1990, 10-11). He further argues that artifact, invention and social engineering make a nation. That is why nationalism comes before nation and nation state appears later. He views the national question as “situated at the point of intersection of politics, technology and social transformation” (ibid, 10). As a Marxist historian Hobsbawm, points out that nation and its associated phenomenon must be studied in terms of political, technical, administrative, economic and other conditions and requirements. Moreover the top-down model to understand nation is though very much practiced but it should be looked at from bottom-up such as the “assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (ibid, 10). In contrast to Gellner’s model of modernization, which is a top-down model, Hobsbawm feels the necessity of the bottom up model which can be defended as firstly, the state ideologies and movements are not guides how the people feel; secondly, we cannot assume that for most people national identification is above other identities which constitutes the social being and thirdly, national
identity is not static rather changes over time even in the course of quite short period.

Historicizing the very idea of nation, Hobsbawn found the use of the term form 1830 when it took its modern meaning. It linked the people to a state. Hence, he proposed the equation as $\text{nation} = \text{state} = \text{people}$ (ibid, 19) which links sovereign people to a nation and to a territory. In that point of time, however, two different ideas of nation were operating viz. revolutionary democratic and the nationalist. “The equation state = nation = people is applied to both, but for nationalists the creation of the political entities which would contain it derived from the prior existence of some community distinguishing itself from foreigners, while from the revolutionary democratic point of view the central concept was the sovereign citizen – people = state which, in relation to the remainder of the human race, constituted a ‘nation’” (ibid, 22)

In the chapter entitled “Popular Proto nationalism” Hobsbawn starts with the question “why and how could a concept so remote from the real experience of most human beings as ‘national patriotism’ becomes such a powerful political force so quickly”? Answering the question he refers to the proto-national bonds. Proto national bonds are certain variants of feelings of collective belonging in macro political scale, which were suited for the modern ideas of nation and state. As such, its need to discover the sentiment of the illiterates as vast majority of the population was illiterate. These proto-nationalist bonds may be language, ethnicity, religion, holy icons and the most important the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity (ibid, 51-73). But for him the proto-nationalism is not enough to nationalities or nation. He further discusses the “Government Perspective”. The systematic shape of a modern state came into existence after French Revolution which can be characterized by a territory over all whose inhabitants it ruled separated by clear boarders with other territories. By 19th century, the state kept records of each person through census, which made direct contact of the population to
the administration, and subjects were ruled through the same institutions and administrative machinery. State also needs the subject either as tax payer or as soldier. Standardization of language and a ‘civic religion’ (patriotism) for the modern state were necessary so far. The national language became a soul of a nation.

The two major principles of a nation, after 1830, were i) “every nation a state” and ii) “only one state for the entire nation. But the nationalism of 1880-1914 shows major difference in three aspects: a) anybody of people considered themselves as nation can claim themselves and meant the right to a separate territory of their own b) ethnicity and language become the central c) a sharp shift to the political right of nation and flag (ibid, 101-102). Moreover “in the second half of the century ethnic nationalism received enormous reinforcement, in practice from the increasingly massive geographical migrations of peoples and in theory by the transformation of that central concept of nineteenth century social science, race”. He argues that the nationalism gained ground so rapidly from the 1870-1914, that it became a function of social and political changes “not to mention an international situation that provided plenty of pegs on which to hang manifestos of hostility to foreigner” (ibid, 107-108). Hobsbawm considers 1918-1950 as the apogee of nationalism, where he brought Woodrow Wilson’s views on nation and nationalism. Most of the nation got independent in this period. The sentiment of nationalism, for him, was more anti-imperialist rather than nationalistic. The more unifying meaning of nationalism before 1914 in Europe became more separatist later. In so far, mass media also had a significant role for the situation.

Anthony D. Smith, on the other hand, rejects both primordial and instrumental views of ethnicity and nationalism, showing a midpoint arguing for the ethnic origin of nation. He argues, “we can no longer regard the nation as a given social existence, a ‘primordial’ and natural unit of human association outside time, neither can we accept that it is a wholly modern phenomenon, be it the
'nervous tic of capitalism' or the necessary form and culture of an industrial society" (Smith 1986a, 3). As such, enquiring the strength and limitations, Smith holds a different approach and position by examining the nature and role of 'ethnie', as well formation and characteristics of nation. He draws a trajectory of the ethnic groups in the pre-modern time and the situations "that typically give rise to them" (ibid, 4). He again argues, "ethnicity and nations are not fixed and immutable entities 'out there', nor neither are they completely malleable and fluid process and attitudes, at the mercy of every outside force". Smith holds that modern nations are not as 'modern' as believed by many modernists. He views it with the following points: a) Nations are not static targets to be attained once-for-all. They are long term process: mobilization, inclusion, territorialization, politicization, and so forth which are never concluded and redefined in each generation; b) nations require ethnic cores to survive, in case of lacking it needs re-invent one; c) nation needs homelands d) nation needs heroes and golden age (ibid, 211-213).

1.2.5 Ethnonationalism:

When a nation is defined in terms of ethnicity, we can simply call it ethnic nationalism or ethnonationalism. Here, the nationhood is defined in terms of ethnicity, religion, language and so forth. Ethnic nationalism is thus largely based on cultural sameness and common descent. The term was invented and widely used by Walker Connor. However, Connor interchangeably has used the term nationalism and ethnonationalism. Nationalism has been defined by him as a "group of people who believe they are ancestrally related. Nationalism connotes identification with the loyalty to one's nation as just defined. It does not refer to loyalty to one's country" (Connor 1994, xi). For him, all kinds of nationalisms have an ethnic relation. Elaborating on Connor's ideas of ethnonationalism, Conversi wrote,
"This denotes both the loyalty to a nation deprived of its own state and the loyalty to an ethnic group embodied in a specific state, particularly where the latter is conceived as a ‘nation-state’. In other words, ethnonationalism is conceived in a very broad sense and may be used interchangeably with nationalism. For instance, Connor subsumes within the same spectrum anti-EC feelings in Denmark, Britain or Norway as well as anti-immigrant feelings such as emerged, say, in Switzerland in the 1970s (Conversi 2004, 2).

The classical works on nation used to reveal that nation co-insides with the state and both are same. Many scholars have misinterpreted nationalism simply equating it with the loyalty to the state. Ethnonationalism, on the other hand, is loyalty to the ethnic group. It relates to number of other relevant political concepts like ethnonational group, primordialism(s), tribalism, regionalism, communalism, regionalism, parochialism, sub nationalism (Connor 1994, 72). Connor, one of leading authors of the contemporary ethnonationalism theories, has exclusively criticized the classical ideas of nation building and its problems. In his essay ‘Nation Building or Nation destroying’, he holds that the scholars, who have associated nation with the nation building, “have tended either to ignore the question of ethnic diversity or to treat the matter of ethnic identity superficially as merely one of a number of minor impediments to effective state recognition”(ibid, 29). Connor’s view is further corroborated by Conversi as he points out that the “‘classical’ notion of nation-building viewed ethnic difference as a pre-modern pattern of social differentiation which stood in the way of development and therefore should (and eventually would) be overcome” (Conversi 2004, 562). Emphasizing on the ethnic validity of a nation, Lentz foresees that “in the years to come, ethnicity in whatever concrete form and under whatever name, will be so important a political resource and an idiom for creating community that today’s social scientists and anthropologists have no choice but to confront it” (Lentz 1995, 303-28).
Sanjib Baruah also defines Ethnonationalism as “a term that refers to a wide range of political phenomena including what may be called nationalism, separatism, secessionism, sub-nationalism, ethnic insurgency, ethnic militancy or sometime simply regionalism. It is best thought of as ‘a heterogeneous set of “nation” oriented idioms, practices and possibilities that are continuously available or “endemic” in modern cultural and political life’ (Baruah 2010, 1).

Many scholars perceive ethnonationalism as a phenomenon opposed to civic nationalism. Civic nationalism can be defined in terms of shared values, commitments, loyalty to the state and to the public institutions. Ignatieff, in defining civic nation, holds that “the nation should be composed of all those regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, language or ethnicity who subscribe to the nation’s political creed. ……it envisages the nation as a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values” (Ignatieff 1994, 6). Ethnic nationalism is defined as “a place of passionate attachment, peoples pre-existing characteristics: their language, religion, customs and traditions” (ibid, 3-4). He further extends the view by observing that the “ethnic nationalism claims that an individual’s deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen. It is the national community which defines the individual, not the individuals who define the national community”.

Hans Kohn distinguished the Western and Eastern forms of nationalism where he viewed Western form of nationalism as an occurrence of political necessity, which in later phases developed in the form of nation state. But in Eastern world it came quite late, in many cases in response to colonialism, where cultural similarities or dissimilarities (may be constructed or invented), traditional ties, kinship got a significant position (Kohn 1945). The dichotomy between ethnic and civic nationalism become more contextual with the fall of Berlin wall, collapse of the USSR and the rise of new nations in the ethnic lines as well the rise of ethno national politics throughout the globe.
1.2.6 The Concept of Elite and Elite Theories:

The Elite can be defined as dominating or influential group of people in a society in terms of politics and other aspects. Teun Van Dijk defines elite as the group of people having “property, income, decision control, knowledge, expertise, position, rank, as well as social and ideological resources such as status, prestige, fame. Influence, respect and similar resources ascribed to them by groups, institutions, or society at large.” (Van Dijk, 1993 quoted in Malesevic 2004, 117)

The classical elite theory was conceptualized by Pareto, Mosca and Michels. The other notable later elite theorists were C.Wright Mills and Durhendruff. However, their work did not connect with the politics of ethnicity but related with the power and its relation with the state.

1.2.6.1 Conceptualizing Elite: Pareto, Mosca and Michels: Pareto defines elites as a class of the people who have the highest indices in their branch of activity. He talks about two kinds of elites, viz. governing and non-governing elites. The elites are always in competition for power and status by manipulating the masses. Thus, the power circulates from one elite group to another which Pareto calls as circulation of elite. He provides a life cycle theory of the rise and fall of elites. Elites decay over time when they become “milder, more humane and less apt to defend their own power” (Pareto 2009, 59). The elites of a particular society are in constant conflict where a group of elite is replaced by the other. Mosca talks about the personal characteristics of elites; where an organized group (elites) rules over the unorganized masses. He holds that even the most primitive society was ruled by a numerical minority. Mosca named this minority group as the political class. The elites are influential in the sense that they have the intellectual, moral and material superiority. Mosca divided the society into ruling class and the class that is ruled. He defined the modern elites as the superior organizational skill holders
who can manage power in the modern bureaucracy. The minority may be military, priest, aristocracy of wealth of merit. Every elite section tries to develop a set of values and principles which is legitimized, and then accepted by the masses – which can be called as political formula of the political groups. He has discussed two kinds of political formula. Rational and supernatural - the rational formula may be self-determination and sovereignty where supernatural formula believes in the divine origins of monarch (Malesevic, 2004). The organizational quality of elites makes it possible and convenient for them to exploit the masses. Michels, however, developed the idea of iron law of oligarchy where social and political organizations are run by a handful of individuals (Michels 1949). He holds that all organizations are elitist and elites have three basic principles, such as:

1. Need for leaders, specialized staff and facilities
2. Utilisation of facilities by leaders within their organizations
3. The importance of the psychological attributes of the leaders.

1.2.6.2 Ethnicity and Elite theory: Though the works on elite of the Italian sociologists did not refer to the ethnicity question, they, however, set the paths for further study in this line. Abner Cohen, Teun Van Dijk, Paul Brass, Ted Gurr explored the relationships between culture, elite and ethnicity in their study. Cohen considers symbols as the integral part of power relations where he defines symbols as “objects, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions, and impel men to action” (Cohen 1974, quoted in Malesevic 2004, 115). His understanding on the “two dimensional man” implies the bivocal nature of symbols satisfying both existential and political end. Symbols are expressive and instrumentalist simultaneously. He has linked between the symbolism and power relations in society. For example, it is well experienced in the collective rituals and other social gatherings which aimed at the group mobilizations.
Apart from Cohen, Teun Van Dijk focuses on the link between power relations and the cultural productions. The ethnic antagonism, are for the most part, a product of subtle symbolic reproduction controlled and directed by the elites. He claims that the elites dominate the key means of symbolic reproduction, such as education system, mass media, business corporations, the churches, political institutions, trade unions and even welfare offices; they are in a position to control the content the structure of message disseminated in the public arena (ibid).

1.2 Cultural Hegemony

The concept of cultural hegemony was fostered by the Italian Neo-Marxist Antonio Gramsci in his Prisons Notebook. Apart from being critical to the orthodox Marxism, Gramsci was instrumental in shaping the fundamental perspectives of neo Marxism. Marx believed that with the development of capitalism, class polarization would be held in terms of bourgeoisie and proletariat, which would lead to class struggle and proletariat will eventually capture power. However, the proletariat win was never materialized at least convincingly and that apparent fallacy of Marx’s Utopia was subjected to rigorous scrutiny and re-theorization by several Marxist scholars, including Gramsci, of post-Marx time.

Gramsci initiated the concept of hegemony which was first used by Lenin. Gramsci conceptualized the entire concept of hegemony in relation to the capitalist mode of production. In a simple understanding, hegemony can be defined as domination of one group over another with an apparently mutual consent. It is such a state that a special thought or process gets emphasis so that the concept of reality distributed in a particular society influences the morality and ideology of the rest.
In Gramscian sense, "hegemony is the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental groups; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. .....ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to board the "dominant fundamental" express" (Lears 1985, 567-593).

For Gramsci state is not only a system of relying upon the domination through army, police legal system; rather a political or culturally hegemonic system. This hegemony sometime becomes so hidden that the domination becomes legitimized and population gives consent towards such dominations of the state. Though Lenin also talked about such kind of domination, Gramsci is regarded as more fundamental contributor to this notion of ensuring mutual consent.

Gramsci divides society into emergent, traditional, civil, political, subaltern dominant and so and so forth. In the Marxist understanding of society of base-superstructure model described by Marx in the Contribution to the critique of Political Economy, 1889, men inevitably enter into definite relations, namely, the relations of productions, independent of their will. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society, the real foundation, on which arises a political and legal superstructure and which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life (Marx 2010, 26). However, Gramsci divided the superstructure into political society and civil society. The social structure between the economic base and ideological superstructure has been called as historical bloc. The two levels are basically the same except the superstructure being divided by Gramsci into Political society and civil society. For him the historical bloc is
an alternative interpretation of the elements of social structure: dialectics between base and superstructure. Gramsci holds that the “material forces are content and ideologies are the form, though the distinction between form and content has purely indicative value, since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces” (Gramsci 2009, 377).

With such understandings of superstructure as mentioned above, Gramsci divided it into political and civil society where the first one covers the dominating groups like army, police, court, judicial system, bureaucracy and so forth; whereas civil society implies the church, school, political party, union etc. Althusser however, defined these two societies as two different state apparatuses, viz. Ideological state apparatus and Repressive state apparatus (ISA and RSA) (Althusser 2006). For Gramsci, both civil and political society is related with hegemony. The state as mentioned does not sustain, relying upon the dominating forces (political society) rather, along with the power, hegemony is also exercised which become the key tool for functioning the state. It is possible to run the state machinery by the domination of political society for a period of time but in a stratified society the ruling class generally through the economic, political and cultural hegemony takes the consent of the masses and run the state. Gramsci believed that if the proletariat could able to establish the rule by defeating the capitalists still there may have no revolutionary change in the structure of the system. Only through capturing power, a class cannot establish all kinds of social or ideological dominations in the society. With the power, a class has to establish the ideological, cultural and moral domination to the other classes. Otherwise it is not possible to rule the entire society only with the power. As the other class with the class domination can challenge the counterpart. Thus, Gramsci interpreted the concept of hegemony and domination in a class divided society.
The hegemony generally is imposed by a class through church, schools, cultural institutions etc. In this entire process of distributing hegemony, the intellectuals play a vital role. Gramsci considers two kinds of intellectuals in society viz. traditional and organic intellectuals. The ruling class through these two kinds of intellectuals propagates hegemony to the subaltern masses.

1.3 Methodology of the Study:

This study is guided by the conceptual and theoretical arguments discussed above in this chapter. Taking different perspectives on the formation of ethnicity and nationalism, the study draws the theoretical understanding from the situative-primordialist school, where it looks ethnicity as neither primordial nor instrumental but both. The situative-primordialist theory argues that, in ethnic politics selective cultural materials are used by a community to mobilize members for articulating their identity. The politicized ethnicity converts the community to a pressure group and thereby political negotiations occurs with the state for more economic and political benefits. The process of mobilization and articulation of ethnicity involve defining of boundaries, invention of tradition, re-writing history, ethnicization of space, cultural revivalism and so on. In this study, how different communities in Assam are articulating their respective ethnicity is explored bringing some empirical cases such as the Bodo, the Sonowal Kachari, the Adivasi, the Thengal Kacharis. The Karbi ethnicity and its cultural expressions is looked here as a case study.

An ethnic group is not found in isolation but in relation to other groups only through maintenance of various boundaries. In societies like the ones in Assam, which are multicultural in nature, the ongoing ethnicity movements need to be seen from various other associated issues related to multiculturalism. In a multicultural society, some groups are dominant and others are marginalized. The similar situation is experienced in Assam where almost all ethnic groups complain about their marginality in relation to the
larger dominant caste-Hindu Assamese society. Hence, Gramsci’s idea of cultural hegemony is used here as an important ‘ideal type’ to theorize the hegemony of the dominants over the marginal groups. As such, different literatures of the 19th century as well as of the last century such as novels, ethnographic works, and news-items are brought in the study to investigate the issue of cultural hegemony. Along with the same, the attitude of the Assamese gentry and their position in different social and cultural moments of history towards other communities are also scrutinized for theorizing the working of cultural hegemony in the context of Assam. Moreover, various established theories of ethnicity and nationalism given by Benedict Anderson, Partha Chatterjee, Eric Hobsbawm, Paul Brass and Carsten Wieland are frequently brought in for analyzing the cases discussed in this thesis.

In addition to relying on the perspectives articulated by the scholars mentioned above, this study also incorporated with relevant data collected from different published books, journals, newspaper, archival materials, leaflet, web-portal, web-sites are consulted which have been duly acknowledged.

The primary data for the Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, which collectively comprise a case study in the Karbi ethnonationalism, are collected through fieldwork in various locations of the Karbi Anglong District. The Karbis, who mostly reside in the Karbi Anglong District, can be divided into three subgroups in terms of their settlement areas: – Eastern (Bokajan Sub-division), Western (Hamren Sub-division) and the Central (Diphu, the District Headquarter). The primary data were collected from Diphu town and different fringe villages around Diphu. For the necessary comparison, ethnographic data were also collected from the Hamren sub-division as well as in the Bokajan sub-division of the district.

1 Weber conceptualized the idea of ‘ideal type’ to understand different social facts like bureaucracy, capitalism etc.
This study is primarily a qualitative one. Therefore, more emphasis is given on textual and discourse analysis of the historical texts, literary and other representational narratives to analyze the ethnicity question in Assam in general, and among the Karbis in particular. Interview and observation are the major techniques used in collection of data. People of different age and sex were interviewed in different social and cultural settings. No special technique of sample design was done, rather purposive sampling becomes the major interest along with clinical interviews in the study. Most of the leaders of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) movement (1986) and some other cultural activists of present were interviewed during the course of the study. Through it, it is tried to understand the trajectory of the Karbi ethno-political situation in historical context. Moreover, interviewing different cultural activists, the study seeks to relate to interrelationship of the movement and the cultural definition and redefinition. Ethnographic observations on different cultural functions, rituals, festivals were carried out during the course of the study and randomly people were interviewed to understand their perspectives toward ethnicity and related issues.

As observation is an important tool used in the study, hence, the researcher kept close eye on the different events, protests as well as other cultural expressions in articulating ethnicity during the days of the research. The manner in which the Karbi community as a whole are exploiting different cultural forms (both tangible and intangible) in both private and public spaces are observed and analyzed in context. Such cultural categories are dress pattern, food habit, use of cultural symbols in public and personal life are critically seen.

The historical evidences of Assam and the North-East show that, almost all the ethnic and nationalistic movements are led by students’ organizations or different students’ organizations are actively engaged in the ethnic assertion movements of the respective community in the post-colonial period. Karbi ethnicity articulation is also heavily influenced by the participation of the
students and students’ bodies from the very beginning of the movement. The script movement of the late 1980’s and the ASDC movement started in 1986 the role of the students are seemed to be quite active. As such, to look into the perspectives of the students as well as their contribution in the present context and also to map the future course of the Karbi ethno-politics, students (irrespective of the affiliation to different Student bodies) of different colleges and University were interviewed and questionnaires were distributed to a select age group of 20-30 years. The questionnaires were descriptive and divided into four sections – the first section carried questions to know the experience of the individual in the multicultural society and placing of himself/herself as a Karbi individual. The questions were objective queries about informant’s reading habits (preferred language), entertainment habit of the individual as well as relationship with other community, and any kind of hegemony in any form that the individual experienced from other community or vice-versa etc.

The second section of the questionnaire dealt with questions pertaining to the ideas of the individual which separated them from other and establish the Karbis as a distinct cultural group. Their understanding, views on the evolution, migration, religion, national icon/hero of the Karbis were tried to be known. More emphatically, different folklore or oral forms such as songs, narrative prevalent in the Karbi society which the individual is aware of are collected through the questionnaire.

The third section of the questionnaire carried questions to taste the political consciousness of the students and their views on the different issues such as development, statehood movement, demands and the stance of the individual on the above issues.

The final sets of questions were asked to see the role of the respondent in Karbi ethnicity discourse. How the individual contributes in the entire project of Karbi ethnicity through various expressions of Karbiness in terms of food
habit, dress pattern, language, festival, ritual, religion etc. It also asked their participation in the rallies/procession and the process of motivation.

The questionnaires were distributed amongst the Karbi students of the University campus at Diphu and also in Kheroni College of West Karbi Anglong. As the questionnaires were descriptive, hence qualitative data and information could be collected from the responses. These are analyzed in the later chapters.

1.4 Organization of the Study:

The present study is an attempt to make a historical-sociological account of the contemporary ethno-national politics in Assam. In this study it is endeavoured to locate those historical and social processes in Assam, from the medieval period till the post-colonial times, of which the present-day ethno-national dynamics can be seen as the cumulative effects. It has also taken into account how the expressive or material cultural forms play the vital roles to create an alternative identity and thereby shapes the political articulations. Although the nature of most of the movements is same viz. how and to what extent the state resources can be exploited and the cultural expressions also are similar in nature, there are variations in terms of the amounts and intensities of demands, and local-specific nuances. The creation of otherness, creation of alternative discourses and the negotiations with the dominant hegemony are experienced in such movements.

The second chapter of this thesis is an attempt to delineate the general historical overview of Assam, highlighting the emergence and development of the relevant socio-political process which are to be seen later as the contributors to the contemporary ethno-political consciousness in Assam. The third chapter examines the patterns of articulation of such ethno-political
consciousness through the various expressive cultural forms by different ethnic communities of Assam like the Bodos, the Sonowal Kacharis, the Tea Tribes and the Thengal Kacharis, along with their respective political demands. It engages in a discussion of the exploitation of oral resources like myth, folksong, folktale and other genres as the handy resources to construct history and to create otherness. The increasingly heterogeneous nature of the locally renewed territories; and production of diverse socialities of the region bring interesting issues in the fore. Examples can be drawn from the study of the political movement of the Karbis where with the signing of the Accord with Indian State and UPDS (an insurgent group of the Karbis), it converted the medium of instructions in schools of Karbi Anglong from Assamese to English. But some of the non-Assamese organizations of Karbi Anglong, like the Bodos, Tea Garden Community opposed such moves, whereas the same Bodo group is demanding the same in Kokrajhar or in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area District). The same model is seen to be at work in the context of the Bodos in BTAD, as after the signing of the Accord with the Central Government, BPF (a political party formed by Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force) came to power but it did not work in Karbi Anglong (United Peoples Democratic Solidarity could not come to power).

The fourth chapter examines the Karbi ethnonationalism in the format of a case study, highlighting the specificities of the political history of Karbi Anglong as well as the present political discourse. The fifth chapter is an illustrative discussion on the use of the different cultural forms in the public and private sphere of the Karbi population to articulate the contemporary Karbi ethnicity.

The conclusion in the sixth chapter is primarily a summary of the understandings, pertaining to the issues discussed in the previous chapters. However, a holistic understanding of the ethno-nationalism in Assam is attempted here by putting these apparently local political and cultural dynamics within the larger context of global processes at the macro level.