Chapter IV: Ethnic Conflicts and Role of Political Parties in Assam

Assam has a highly complex and colorful social mosaic. In Assam, several cultural markers - language, race, tribe, caste, religion and region serve as identity axes for ethnic groups and their mobilization. In most of the ethnic groups, more than one of these cultural markers are pertinent for identification. In other words, Assam's ethno-communities have multilayered and multidimensional identities that impinge on each other in a non-stratified and dynamic manner. The identity composition of ethno-communities has been further complicated by the imposition of class distinctions, not only between one and another ethno-community, but also within each. Multilayered, non-stratified identity composition has enabled ethnic groups to assert and reshuffle their cultural markers to advance their perceived objectives.255

Any diversity and heterogeneity is not conflict-producing per se, although it may carry a potential for conflict. India has witnessed ethnic conflicts in the process of its historical evolution and the leadership of independent India was conscious that while India presents the picture of "unity and diversity," the possibility of conflict between the "unity" and the "diversity" could not be ruled out.256 Independent India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, said: “While on the one hand, we the people of India are bound together by strong bonds of culture, common objectives, friendship and affection, on the other hand, unfortunately, there are inherent in India, separatist and disruptive tendencies... ... In preserving its unity, India needed to... fight against communalism, provincialism, separatism, statism and casteism”.257 On another occasion, he admitted that when we talk loudly of our nationalism, each person's idea of nationalism is his own brand of nationalism. It may be Assamese nationalism, it may be Bengali, it may be Gujrati, Punjabi or Madrasi. Each one has his own particular brand in mind. He may use the word nationalism of India but in

255 Internet source: www.archive.unu.edu/unupbooks/uu12ce.htm, S.D. Muni, “Ethnic conflict, federalism and democracy in India”
256 ibid
257 ibid
his mind, he is thinking of that nationalism in terms of his own brand of it. When two brands of nationalism come into conflict, there is trouble.\textsuperscript{258}

In the process of the "passing" of ethnic identities and politicization of ethnic groups, “non-ethnic” factor plays a critical role. These include the state, pace and pattern of economic development, political élites and forces and outside subversion. Without these factors and the process of transformations in the ethnic groups, diversity would not assume conflictual dimensions.\textsuperscript{259} Emphasizing the role of political vested interests in precipitating ethnic conflicts, Gupta observes: “the manifestation of ethnicity in Indian politics is not so much an outcome of popular grassroots passions as it is a creation of vested political interests. The reason for stressing this is because it is often uncritically accepted that politicians at the secular centre are holding back the popular surge of communalism, for ethnicised politics is a natural inclination of the Indian people. On the other hand, I argue here that communal ideologies are hatched up at the perennially hot house top, then broadcast below and only sometimes do they take root. On many other occasions, they languish as amorphous judgements, without concrete action prescriptions.”\textsuperscript{260}

Owing to the varying parameters of the process of identity transformations and the roles of external (non-ethnic) factors, ethnic conflicts and politics in India have "waxed and waned." Even some of the raging ethnic conflicts in India have shown inconsistencies in their ideological manifestations and intensity. The conflict in the Punjab, for instance, had a dominant linguistic thrust during the mid-1960s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s it was rekindled by the rivalry between competing Sikh sects, the Nirankaris and the Akalis. To this was an added intra-group political rivalry amongst the Sikhs in the Punjab. Subsequently, it assumed both religious and economic dimensions in the form of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The elements of the Punjab situation are also reflected in the Kashmir conflict, where the initial movement of the state's political and economic neglect has now clearly acquired overtones of Islamic religious assertion, to the extent of becoming fundamentalist. Accordingly, the earlier concept of Kashmir identity, or Kashmiriat, has been

\textsuperscript{258} ibid
\textsuperscript{259} P.N. Rastogi, “Ethno-Social Conflict and National Integration,” Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993, p9
\textsuperscript{260} ibid
replaced by communal confrontation, wherein the Muslim militants have pushed Hindu Kashmiris out of the valley. In Assam, where the initial movement was political and economic neglect, has now clearly acquired overtones of illegal immigrants issue and sovereign state by the militant movement of United Liberation Front of Assam.

In India ethnic conflicts have been resolved and reduced, but also re-created. The conflict arising out of the demand for the Tamil language and land during the early 1960s was resolved, although potential tension between Tamil and the declared (but not imposed) national language, Hindi, still exists. In the context of the Punjab conflict, the Rajiv-Longowal accord of 1985 was a major move to contain the conflict, although it proved futile. The initial thrust of ethnic conflict in Assam, which was directed against the influx of foreigners, experienced some respite in the mid-1980s, although now it has reemerged in violent form under the leadership of the Bodos and Assamese. At the same time there are signs of new conflict formations among some of the hitherto neglected tribes. The movements of tribal’s in Assam over the language issue have become sufficiently politicized and militant to create flashpoints.

As for the persistent and festering ethnic conflicts in India in general and Assam in particular, we have already noted that they have intensified and the extent of violence has grown. Even the character of these insurgencies, in terms of their objectives, ideologies, leadership and methods is becoming more strident and uncompromising. The growing violent activities of Sikh militants in the Teral region of Uttar Pradesh have become a matter of serious concern. In addition to this, other potential ethnic conflicts such as in Jharkand and the Nepali/Gurkha communities are reportedly gathering political momentum. In the state of Assam, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland

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261 ibid
262 Sanjib Baruah, “India against itself: Assam and The Politics of Nationality”, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p155
(NDFB) has decided to take up arms and coordinate its activities with the militant organisation of north-eastern states. The tribal situation in Assam is also moving fast towards the boil.\textsuperscript{266}

According to Tambiah, “The present plethora of ethnic conflicts... coincides with an increasing sense of shrinking economic horizons and political battlement. Many things have gone awry with economic development…”\textsuperscript{267} It is illustrative in this respect that economic maldevelopment has fuelled diverse ethnic insurgencies in Assam. Some recent studies on ethnic conflicts in Assam show that the insurgent groups were involved in ethnic cleansing to control the economy of the particular area.\textsuperscript{268} For example, one of the important factors of Karbi-Kuki ethnic conflict is that the militant groups clashing among themselves for control over the public resources particularly control over the ginger cultivation and trade, which is a profitable business enterprise in Karbi-Anglong. Both the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) have intimidated the local tribal population in the Singhason hill area which produces about 2,000 metric tons (MT) of high quality ginger every year. Therefore, economic blockade over ginger selling was imposed alternatively by United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA). This is a cause of rivalry between Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) and United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). This added to the sufferings of the people.\textsuperscript{269} The North-East in general and Assam in particular has been one of economically neglected and discriminated in the perception of the affected masses. Even when national funds were allocated, they did not reach the targeted groups, because of the corruption of bureaucrats, politicians and other mediators. In the absence of any serious attempt to correct these economic distortions, it may not be realistic to expect resolution of these raging ethnic conflicts.\textsuperscript{270}

\textsuperscript{266} B.B. Kumar, “\textit{Tension and Conflict in North East India\textit{", Cosmo Publications, New Delhi,2005,p45}
\textsuperscript{267} A.K. Singh, “\textit{Ethnicity and Inter community conflict: A case study of Kuki -Naga in Manipur\textit{", Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi,2008,p34}
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{Internet Source: \textit{www. Karbi Information Network. com}}
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{ibid}
\textsuperscript{270} Rongbong Terong, “\textit{Ethno-Centric Problem and Karbi Anglong\textit{", eds, Peace Studies, OKDESCD, Guwahati \& Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2007, p601-604
The functioning of federalism has nevertheless also had undesirable implications for the ethnic scene in India. The linguistic reorganization of the states gave impetus to various groups of specific cultural markers and ethnic identities to seek political expression and legitimacy. This was because ethnic identity was provided a territory under the scheme of reorganization. The importance of ethnic territory in ethnic conflict is very crucial, as can be gathered from recent developments in Assam. In Assam along with the transformation of identities and issues, the territorial base of ethnicity is being perfected by driving out Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The potential for conflict formation along ethnic identity lines has been encouraged.\textsuperscript{271}

This potential has been further sharpened because linguistic reorganization in a vast and diverse country like India cannot be perfectly precise. On the periphery of the newly formed linguistic states, unassimilated linguistic minorities continued to exist.\textsuperscript{272} Then many other linguistic groups continued to remain in the larger Assamese-speaking state like Assam without being accommodated in the new political arrangement. The dissatisfactions of some of the recognised/unrecognized minority linguistic groups also continue to simmer. Such problems exist with regard to the Bengali, Khasi, Bodo, Karbi etc in the region of Assam.\textsuperscript{273}

Thus, a sense of political insecurity and fear has developed among different ethnic groups regarding their position and future in the political set up of Assam. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine how ethnicity has emerged as a major instrument for the political parties to have share in and access to political power. Politicisation of ethnicity by the political parties takes place at two levels- at one level, politicisation of people’s cultural, linguistic and most importantly ethnic sentiments resulting in ethnic conflicts and at another level, politicisation by the political parties to find a solution to the conflict.

The growing inequalities between the communities and the hegemony of dominant Assamese middle class have created a sense of relative deprivation among

\textsuperscript{271}Girin Phukon, “Ethnicity, Politics of Language and Reorganisation of States in North-East India”, eds, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p 50
\textsuperscript{272}ibid
\textsuperscript{273}Girin Phukon, “Ethnicity, Politics of Language and Reorganisation of States in North-East India”, eds, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p 56
the various ethnic groups. The intensity with which it is felt, has reached its zenith with the introduction of language bill of 1960. It made the tribal suspicious about the hidden motive of the dominant section of the Assamese. In a situation when the tribal elite used language, religion, ethnic history and other cultural resource to mobilize the respective groups in order to achieve certain economic and political end, the government of Assam declared assamese as the official language of the state ignoring the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic character of the state. It injured the emerging tribal identity and consciousness for their language and culture. Consequently they became more organised in a bid to maintain their own lingo-cultural identity. The emerging ethnic tribal elite both in the hills and the plains increasingly felt that in order to fulfill their lingo-cultural aspiration, they must possess separate political unit and as a result All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed and submitted a memorandum to the president of India on 21 August, 1960 urging the separation of hill districts from Assam. The introduction of Assamese as the medium of instruction reinforced the demand for union territories in Cachar. Besides, the ethnic groups such as the Bodos, the Karbis, the Mising, the Tiwas, and the Deories etc. who have been maintaining their lingo-cultural identity were not happy to accept Assamese as the medium of instruction. As a result, the ethnic groups who greatly contributed to the Assamese nation building process started demanding for their own languages and culture which they thought was the symbol of identification of their respective communities. Even some of them began to plead for either separate or autonomous states which is responsible for emerging ethnic tensions among the ethnic groups in Assam. Therefore, two commonly accepted characteristics of the spectrum of ethnic diversity in Assam deserve attention. One is that there is dominant pattern of one group over the other ethnic groups. Secondly, the ethnic groups do not have territories marked out for them because the cultural markers identifying such groups do not coincide with territorial boundaries. Accordingly, people belonging to specific religions, tribes, castes, races and languages are found scattered in various territorial regions. In fact

274 ibid
275 ibid
277 Balin Hazarika, “Students’ Instrumentality in Reorganisation of India’s North-East”, eds, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p 75
the reorganization of states in India on linguistic lines has not been able to overcome this aspect.278

In the post-reorganized Assam, a new dimension came into sharp focus and that is the steady ingress of the Muslims into the political power structures and now it is viewed as the principal threat to the political security of the ethnic Assamese in the State.279 Relatively better economic opportunities have led to mass migration from Bangladesh into India, particularly into the bordering state of Assam.280 Looking at role of the Central Government, State Government and the ethnic interest groups, there seems to be a constant conflict between the Assamese and Muslim Bengali on immigration issues with no practicable solution. The ethnic interest groups especially the student organizations and ethnic political parties constantly demanded the government to implement laws and policies which will prevent immigrants from entering into the State and robbing the indigenous people of their opportunities and their resources. There is a threat perception that immigration would change the demographic composition of the State and hence erode the cultures and traditions of the indigenous. The reason that has led the youths of ethnic Assamese to demand such policies is the lack of opportunities for the youth to get employment and realize their potential and fear of becoming minority and losing of political power in the state of Assam. Economically Assam is a very backward State, agriculturally it is very poor and its industry is in a very sad stage. As these two major sectors have not taken off at all employment generation is becoming a major problem in the State. Thousand of educated unemployed are compelled to look for alternative opportunities and at times they face stiff competition from the migrated population especially in terms of trade and business related activities. These youths become frustrated and start developing a feeling of animosity towards the ‘immigrants’. They start mobilizing on ethnic sentiments and press for demands to the Government to implement policies which will promote ethnic interest and

278 P.N. Rastogi, “Ethno-Social Conflict and National Integration”, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993 p.34
279 Internet Source: www.nits.ac.in/department/Humanitiesnew/1.doc, Gurudas Das, “Identity and Underdevelopment: On Conflict and Peace in Assam”
280 ibid
discourage non-ethnic interest in the State.\textsuperscript{281} The native Assamese have mobilized in protest against the new migrants and have accused the central government of deliberately ignoring their loss of jobs, overcrowding and political shifts unfavorable to the native Assamese. Assamese leaders charge that India’s central government, largely dominated by the Congress Party, sought the migrant vote and therefore, ignored the Assamese demands.\textsuperscript{282} M. N. Karna observed that “Because of the influx of the immigrants, the possibility of a complete reversal of the demographic composition of the region is not ruled out. Under these conditions the demand for the deportation of illegal immigrants that started with the foreign nationals is now applied even to those who have come to this area from other parts of the country. Thus the frequent ethnic clashes between tribal-non tribals, outsiders and insiders, and even inter and intra tribal quarrels have become very common. The proliferation of groups reposing faith in violent means to achieve intended goals also shows the internal ideological debates and clashes which result in factionalism and splits in the organisation itself.”\textsuperscript{283} As a result, in the late 1970’s and in the mid 1980’s, a large-scale movement was led by a student organization and some political parties namely All Assam Student Union and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad in Assam which is known as Assam Movement or the movement against the foreign nationals.\textsuperscript{284}

The by election of the Mongaldoi parliamentary constituency in Assam in 1978 focused fresh public attention on Assam’s problem of illegal immigration.\textsuperscript{285} The leaders of All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), the Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal (AJD, Assam Nationalist party), the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP, Eastern Regional People's Council), the Assam Sahitya Parishad (Assam Literary Association) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) argued that the unusual rise in the electoral roll prepared for the by-election of Mongaldoi parliamentary constituency was caused by the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangaladesh. They demanded the detection of the names of foreigners on the

\textsuperscript{281} Manirul Hussain, “The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity”, Manak Publications Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, p 141
\textsuperscript{283} M. N. Karna, “Conflicts amid the Historical Experiences of Identity, Nation and the State in North Eastern India”, eds North Eastern Social Research Centre Guwahati, 2008, p 18-28
\textsuperscript{284} Sanjib Baruah, “India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality”, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001. p121
\textsuperscript{285} ibid
electoral rolls, the deletion of those names and the deportation of foreigners from Assam. Therefore, the then Janata government supported a policy of screening voters to ensure that noncitizens were not on the voter list. When the Janata coalition government fell in mid-1979, a new coalition government, led by J. N. Hazarika, was formed with the support of a dissident Congress group. The various Assamese nationalist organizations namely All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) etc pressed the Hazarika government for removing foreigners name from the electoral rolls before the 1980 parliamentary election. This initiative of nationalist organisation was criticised by the Congress dissidents, the Congress (I) and the Communist parties and refused to join the agitation. Congress and Communist leaders argued that the people, who had come to Assam after independence as refugees, were entitled to citizenship, were threatened by the agitating organisations in the name of illegal immigration. Therefore, they said, their name should not be excluded from the electoral rolls of the government. Moreover, the movement to exclude foreigners from the electoral rolls soon took an ominous anti-Indian overtone. Many members of the Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal (AJD) adopted a secessionist stance, arguing that Assam's natural riches—its oil and tea—had been exploited by the central government. It argued for the formation of a greater Assamese society. The party actively co-operated with the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) on the Foreign National Movement. It issued various documents and thereby claiming that Assamese culture, language and identity would be in danger unless foreigners were detected and deported from Assam. On 22 February, 1980 the party submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister and blamed the governments for not taking early steps to stop the migration of immigrants to Assam. On 31 October, 1983, Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal (AJD) submitted another memorandum to Sarkaria Commission and thereby claimed to review the Centre-State Relations. On December 8, 1984 the Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal (AJD) submitted another memorandum to the Chief Election Commissioner and thereby it welcomed the intensive revision of electoral roll. The party boycotted 1983 General Election to state legislature as a part of the programme on Foreign


287 ibid
National issue. Meanwhile, the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) called for the secession of the entire northeastern region, including Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram, as well as Assam. The party argued that the North Eastern Regions were highly sensitive areas and as such it required a separate administrative set up. Leaders like Nibaran Bora pleaded that the culture, language and identity of the Assamese people was in danger due to large scale infiltration of foreigners. The party for the first time raised the voice against serious consequences of influx of foreigners into the state. On June 12-13, 1982 a conference of all regional parties was held at Guwahati under its initiative. From the Conference of the regional parties there developed the All Party Leaders Conference (APLC) for deciding future course of action. The All Party Leaders Conference (APLC) opposed the holding of 1983 election without a solution to the Foreign National Problem. On November 14, 1983, the party in its conference at Guwahati strongly demanded the detection and deportation of foreign nationals. It urged upon the government to solve the problem arising out of foreigner’s issue. In February, 1984 the party observed protest day against the passing of Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Bill (IMDT) in parliament. The Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) strongly demanded the immediate dissolution of the Saikia Ministry which was the outcome of a farce election in 1983. The ministry was illegal as it was elected on a voters list which contained the names of foreigners, the Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP) stated.

The agitation also took an anticommunist turn when the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), a coalition of 11 constituent organizations supporting the agitation, denounced the leftist parties in Assam as "agents of the Bengalis. Some Assamese nationalists were concerned simply with reducing the number of Bengali voters and therefore did not distinguish carefully between Bengalis from West Bengal and Bengalis from Bangladesh as well as did not distinguish between legal and illegal migrants. "My party," said Giri Garu, president of the Asom Jatiyotabadi Dal (AJD), "demands that each person staying in Assam must have two

288 B.C Bhuyan, “Political Development of the North-East”, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p66
289 ibid
certifications of citizenship, one for India and the other for Assam." When told that dual citizenship was against the Constitution, he replied, "Get the Constitution changed then."291 All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and All Assam Students Union (AASU) took the position that the government should review the legal status of all those who had entered the state after 1951. Bengalis and other non-Assamese would have to produce some evidence of their citizenship. Foreign nationals who had come between 1951 and 1961 should be screened and entitled citizenship. Those who came between 1961 and 1971 should be declared stateless and distributed throughout India. And those who had come after 1971 should be returned to Bangladesh. Some of the members of the Janata party advocated a cut off date of 1971 for revising the electoral rolls because that would force many Muslims to leave but permit Bengali Hindus to remain. Though all the organizations participating in the agitation disavowed attacks on Muslims and insisted that their opposition was not to Muslims but to any foreigners illegally residing in the state. In some areas clashes took a communal (Hindu-Muslim) turn.292 On several occasions the supporters of this movement have taken the law into their own hands and have resorted to violence to let out their frustrations on the migrated population.293 As a result there took place a series of ethnic conflicts between native Assamese and immigrants Bengali Muslim in different part of Assam such as in char areas (Riverrine areas) of south of Mongaldoi district, Nellie massacre near Guwahati, massacre at Chaulkhowachaporin in Darrang district. According to Makiko Kimura, “One of the important factors responsible for this inter-ethnic conflict between the immigrant Bengali Muslims and native ethnic Assamese is that it was instigated by leaders of the movement. Apart from that the other Hindu organisation such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) instigated the local people to target the Muslims.” 294

The more dangerous aspect of Assam's emerging democratic politics has been political parties' ruthless and cynical use of communal and ethnic contradictions for short-term, narrow political gains. Monsters of ethnic separatism
and conflict were created or encouraged out of such expediency. A typical example is formation of United Minority Front (UMF) and All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) to weaken the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) hold over Assam falls into the same category. The rising expectation of ethnic groups namely, Assamese and Bengali Muslims resulted in the formation of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and United Minority Front (UMF) in Assam just after the signing of Assam Accord in 1985. In 1986, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) formed the government in Assam and being the ruling party it has got the opportunity to fulfill the promises made by the party before the electorate on the eve of election. The party has adopted a number of resolutions. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) stated that present system of issuing permanent residence certificate is defective. So the concerned authority ought to be very careful in issuing the certificate. The govt. adopted a resolution and declared that a person residing in Assam for more than twenty years with clear evidence should be allowed to obtain Permanent Residence Certificate (PRC). But it should not be applicable to the indigenous people of Assam. It urged the Central Government to deport all foreign nationals coming after 1971. The party appealed to the central government to amend the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983 (IMDT), to evict foreigners from the tribal Belts and Blocks, to construct wire fencing on Indo-Bangla border. On the other hand, United Minorities Front (UMF) was playing a communal role in the body politics of Assam. It was formed on 10 Nov. 1985, as a sort of reactionary force to the Assam Accord. On the eve of election of 1986, in its poll manifesto the party stated that Assam Accord is becoming a potential danger to the minorities in Assam. According to M Amorjit Singh, “so far, the Indian state has also not been able of framing consensus legal measures against illegal immigration. Each of the measures have been taken differently by Muslim and non-Muslim groups. For instance, opinion was widely divided on the erstwhile Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act of 1983. Organisations representing the Muslim community supported the Act while the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and All Assam Students Union (AASU) vehemently

297 B.C Bhuyan, “Political Development of the North-East”, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p67
298 ibid
opposed it.” In this regard Subir Bhaumik also observed that, “The Assam accord was signed in 1985 and that brought an end to the agitation against illegal migration. Immediately after this agitation the Muslims of Bengali origin joined their linguistic Hindu brethren to form the United Minorities Front (UMF). Traditionally they had voted for Congress but they felt let down by the Congress government in 1983. One of the founders of the United Minorities Front (UMF) said: “For the first time in post-Partition Assam, the Bengali Hindus and Muslims felt the need to come together to protect their interests. We found we were in the same boat. Since we were more than 40 percent of the state’s population, we were sure we could defend our interests against rising Assamese chauvinism.”

The United Minorities Front (UMF) leaders like Golam Osmani declared that the party would oppose the implementation of Assam Accord. According to Osmani, the Accord would surely bring a sense of fear and insecurity among the minorities. It has not been the accord of Peace but an Accord of Discord. During the Budget session of the Assembly, the party warned the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government against any hasty action in implementation of the Assam Accord. On 3 May, 1986, by passing a resolution, the party blamed the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government and its partial policy. It alleged that the posting and transfer of officers and employees belonging to the State Services have been done in such way that officers belonging to the linguistic and religious minorities have been tactfully shifted from important positions at all levels. The party also opposed the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) demand for amendment of Illegal Migration Determination by Tribunals Act, 1983 (IMDT). It urged the central government to act in the matter to check persistent violation of laws and the constitution by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government. On May 13, 1986 the United Minorities Front (UMF) leaders submitted a memorandum to the Central Government stating that there has been large scale harassment of the linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities in the state by the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) Government while implementing the Assam Accord. It complains that more than 20,000 Indian citizens become homeless due to

300 Internet Source: www.apcss.org/PagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsia, Subir Bhaumik, “Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India’s Northeast”
the State Government’s eviction policy. However, its performance was not popular
because its role had been largely confined among immigrant Muslims. The tribals
and the Assamese Muslims have suspicions on its role. Later on this political party
merged with Indian National Congress (I). In this regard Subir Bhaumik state that
after the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Bengali Hindus in Assam, unlike
their brethren in West Bengal and Tripura, largely turned toward the politics of
Hindutva in a decisive way. The Muslims were left with little choice—in elections,
they began to vote for the Congress and most of the United Minorities Front (UMF)
leaders returned to that party. In recent time, the All India United Democratic
Front is also playing an important role in state politics for the protection of distinct
identity and interest of Bengali Muslim. The All India United Democratic Front
(AIUDF), a minority political party, which was formed after Illegal Migration
Determination by Tribunals Act, 1983 (IMDT) was struck down, accused the state
government of ‘deceiving the minorities’ in the name of protecting them. It is to be
noted that the Supreme Court of India struck down the Act in 2005, the minority
organisations reacted sharply. Following the Supreme Court judgment, the Union
Government in 2006 passed an amendment to the Foreigners Order of 2006
(Tribunals for Assam), which placed the onus of proving a particular person as a
foreigner on the complainant. In December 2006, the Supreme Court held that too
unconstitutional. This judgment evoked mixed reactions in Assam and it was
welcomed by All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and
the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU), Asom
Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) objected to the
Foreigners (Tribunals for Assam) Order, because it shifted the onus of proof back to
the complainant and thus came in the way of detecting and deporting foreigners.
However, minority organisations expressed fears that in the absence of adequate
legal protection, genuine Indian citizens may be harassed by the police in the name
of detection and deportation of Bangladeshi migrants. Minority organisations felt
that the Foreigners Act gave the police enormous powers, which were often abused.
The Char Chaporli Sahitya Parishad, a minority organisation, claimed that before the

301 ibid
302 Internet Source: www.apcss.org/PagesfromReligiousRadicalismandSecurityinSouthAsia, Subir Bhaumik,
“Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India’s Northeast”
303 Internet Source: www.Assam Tribuneepaper.com
promulgation of the Illegal Migration Determination by Tribunals Act, 1983 (IMDT), as many as 210,446 Muslims were driven out of Assam between 1952 and 1971 without trial and without any opportunity to defend their status. It also claimed that 192,339 people were deported from Assam between 1972 and 1983 in a similar manner. Hence, there is a sharp division between the Muslim and non-Muslim groups on the legal measures to prevent illegal immigration.304 From the political point of view, the emergence of different separatist movements and formation of political parties for the protection of ethnic identity have led to a sort of consolidation of the emerging ethnic conflict in the state of Assam.305

Even after the formation of the hill state, the problem of language did not come to an end in Assam. The people of remaining two hill district of Assam- Karbi Anglong and North Cachar vehemently opposed the decision regarding the medium of instruction. The medium movement of the Karbis and the Dimasas became more articulate and organized in a bid to protect their own language and culture.306 Since then the young hill leaders have been successfully utilizing the language issue in articulating their demands for an autonomous state under article 244A of the constitution of India. In 1985 there emerged an organisation named “People’s Democratic Front” (PDF) which contested the 1985 assembly election and could send a representative to the Assam assembly. Later on, under the aegis of People’s Democratic Front (PDF), Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed in 1986. The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) encouraged reactivisation of Karbi Student Association and motivated its members to take active interest in demanding an autonomous state for the Karbis.307

The possibility of political movements and conflict among the ethnic groups arising out of these problems cannot be ruled out. There are already several political parties which are doing politics on ethnicity and they are able to build their strength

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by exploiting the linguistic frustrations of their constituencies in Assam.\textsuperscript{308} The process of linguistic reorganization of the state generates more complication than it solved in case of Assam. While reorganization was successful in accommodating conflicts on the issue of language through the creation of new state and formation regional political parties, violent conflicts on the issue of immigration, religion, ethnicity etc continued to be at the fore front of Assam politics.\textsuperscript{309} Monirul Hussain observed, “Our present socio-economic structure and the path of development that we have adopted after independence has sharpened not only the caste, religious, linguistic and ethnic distinctions, it has also increased regional disparities and the feeling of deprivation, negligence and in-security among various ethnic-tribal groups. Liberation of tribals from oppression, exploitation, underdevelopment and dependency depends fundamentally on a radical transformation of our socio-economic structure.”\textsuperscript{310} Therefore, demand for creation of new states specially on grounds of ethnicity and development of backward region have become a habit for politician of the state who are not actually interested in the development of the region as a whole. They want to grab political power to satisfy themselves in the name of the people of their tribe or community. Such tendency gave rise to fresh demands for creation of union territory in Barak Valley, Karbi Anglong autonomous state, Dimaraji, separate state of Bodoland etc.\textsuperscript{311}

The Bodos are one of the earlier inhabitant tribal group of Assam and an integral part of Assamese society. In one of his work on the early history of Kamrupa, K. L. Boruah wrote- “……during the time of Mahabharata war or even earlier, the Bodo tribes constitute the bulk of the population in the Assam valley, northern and eastern Bengal and the surrounding and intervening hills.”\textsuperscript{312} In course of time, there developed the bigger Assamese society composed of multi ethnic groups. The Bodos continued to remain as an important part of the greater Assamese society of Assam. During the colonial and post colonial period the Bodo people

\textsuperscript{308} Internet source: www.archive.unc.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu12ee.htm, S.D. Muni, “Ethnic conflict, federalism and democracy in India”\textsuperscript{309} ibid
\textsuperscript{311} Internet source: www.archive.unc.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu12ee.htm, S.D. Muni, Ethnic conflict, federalism and democracy in India
\textsuperscript{312} J. Upadhaya, “Politics and Reorganisation of North-East”, eds, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p 87-95
faced a lot of problem due to heavy influx of East Pakistani immigrants and their encroachment upon the tribal land of Bodo inhabited areas of Assam. Moreover, the imposition of Assamese language by the Assam government gave a bitter taste to most of the Bodo political leaders and therefore, they stared political movements to find out a permanent political solution to these problems. As a result, the Plains Tribal council of Assam (PTCA), a new regional political party was formed on February 27, 1967. The Plains Tribal council of Assam (PTCA) submitted a memorandum to the president of India in May, 1967 demanding autonomy for the predominantly tribal belts of Goalpara, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sivsagar district. It stated that the problem of land alienation has pushed the tribals, especially the Bodos, deeper into poverty and unemployment. The government admits that the planning and land reform policies adopted under the constitutional provision to safeguard their socio-economic and cultural life have been either neglected or implemented indifferently due to resistance from vested interests. Likewise, the provision of autonomy provided through sixth schedule also failed to provide protection to the tribal’s in the absence of political will.\(^{313}\)

In 1973 the PTCA demanded for the formation of a Union Territory under the nomenclature of Udayachal. It is to be noted that after an interval of ten years it reiterated the same demand by submitting all particulars and papers supporting their cause to the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi on April 17, 1983. But after two years, the Plains Tribal council of Assam (PTCA) suddenly changed its demand from the Union Territory to status of statehood to Udayachal by submitting its memorandum under the title ‘Points of view on Political Spectrum of Assam’ in August, 1985.\(^{314}\) Such a step, they felt would necessarily help them to keep their identity intact and progress of their community within the country.\(^{315}\)

The All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) which was formed in 1967 came to limelight in 1986 after electing U. N. Brahma as the president of the union. The All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) decided to launch a ‘democratic mass movement on

\(^{313}\) ibid
\(^{314}\) ibid
\(^{315}\) Sanjib Baruah, “India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality”, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001, p151
March 2, 1987 for the fulfillment of their socio-economic and political demands.\(^{316}\)

It is to be noted that the twentieth annual conference of the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) at Bashbari in Dhubri district in December 19-22, 1988 marked the beginning of a militant phase of the movement. The militant phase was started to mobilize the mass people in the Bodo movement for a separate state for the Bodos. As a result of it Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) was formed in 1988. This meet demanded a full-fledged state of Bodoland wherein the non-tribals would also be constitutionally protected.\(^{317}\)

Within a short period, Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) adopted militant tactics which resulted in the loss of lives, particularly of non-Bodos living in the mixed populated villages of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur. As part of the tripartite talks, the government of India appointed a three men expert committee with Bhupinder Singh at the head to study the situation and to submit a report. Accordingly, the committee submitted its reports on 30\(^{th}\) March, 1992. However, the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU)- Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) rejected the report and recommendations of the committee accusing it as “anti-tribal policies of the ruling cliques”. However, in a sudden development, the leadership agreed to sign the Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord) on February 20, 1993 in a tripartite sitting of the centre, state and movement leaders. This accord is sought to grant maximum autonomy, within the framework of the constitution of India, to the Bodos, for their socio-economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement.\(^{318}\) According to Manirul Hussain, “However, since 1986, the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendranath Brahmas started Bodo movement in Assam and they virtually became the ethnic voice of the Bodos. Initially, the Bodo ethnicity, to use Yinger's concept was a 'soft ethnicity' but gradually it transformed into a 'hard ethnicity' with the change of guard and became highly exclusivist. It would be important to state here that the Assam movement became a reference group movement for the Bodo movement. This movement is still going on. To quote Manirul Hussain

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\(^{316}\) ibid

\(^{317}\) J. Upadhaya, “Politics and Reorganisation of North-East”, eds, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1996, p 87-95

\(^{318}\) ibid
‘Notwithstanding the differences, the Assam movement and the Bodo movements are remarkably similar in adopting both democratic and violent means simultaneously in order to reach their apparent and hidden goals. Both these movements in the process of their support mobilisation, energised prejudice against those groups living in the same plural society who were not their supporters. The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) which led the Assam movement, became the reference group for the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU). Similarly, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) became the reference group for the Bodo Security Force (BSF).’

Like the Assam movement, the Bodo movement also generated widespread destruction, terror and killings for a relatively longer period. During the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) rule between 1986-90, the Bodo movement under the leadership of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU), demanded creation of Bodoland as a separate state from Assam for the ethnic Bodos by dividing Assam by what they called 'fifty-fifty'. Along with the democratic protest actions, violent activities also started. It is widely assumed in Assam that the Rajiv Gandhi government at the centre patronised the Bodo movement in order to trouble the first Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government. It worked as intended. The Bodo movement for a separate state and the United Liberation Front of Asom’s (ULFA) demonstratively over ground activities severely destabilised the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government. In frustration, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government dealt with the Bodo movement with a vengeance wherein the Assam Police terrorised the Bodos repeatedly. However, with the return of Congress (I) government in Assam, the situation changed substantially and dialogue started again. Ultimately, the leadership gave up the demand for a separate state and agreed to have 'autonomy' instead under the provision of the Bodo Accord 1993. As a result of the Accord, pending elections, an interim Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed without a clear-cut boundary and with a non-Bodo population. Some areas under the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) had more than 50 percent non-Bodo population composed of Asamiya Hindus, Asamiya Muslims, Rabhas, Na-Asamiya Muslims, Bengali Hindus, Santhals and Nepalis. In a large part the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) area, the Bodos do not constitute a simple

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majority. And, therefore, in order to create a majority for the Bodos, ethnic cleansing process started.»

After the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), the intra-party factionalism caused the Bodos split into two factions led by S.K. Biwshmutiary on the one hand and by Prem Singh Brahma on the other. Further, the militant outfits, Boro Liberation Tigers (BLT) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) had their frequent clashes on the nature of separate Bodoland state. In another event, the People’s Democratic Front (PDF), a regional political party formed by a section of the Bodos urged upon the international community including the United Nations to help the Bodos in Assam in attaining their right to self determination. More importantly, a Bodo organization has sought the help of the working group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous People and tried to drive Centre’s attention to internationalize the issue. Obviously, such attempts made by Bodo organisations have pushed up the issue to the international arena.

Although, the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed, the All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) and the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) were not satisfied with the demarcation of the boundary of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC). The problem of demarcation of the boundary was a complicated and sensitive issue for the fact that there were many villages in the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) which were not Bodo dominated. Nevertheless, the Government’s notification on April 2, 1999 has virtually accepted the demand of the Bodo leadership as stated in clause 3 (a) of the Accord, “….there shall be formed, by an Act of Assam Assembly a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) within the state of Assam comprising contiguous geographical areas between the river Sonkosh and river Pansoi.” But a condition was laid down that the land records authority would scrutinize the list of villages furnished by All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU)- Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) having 50% and more tribal population which


should be included in the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and the villages which are non Bodo dominated should be excluded from it. In fact, out of 2941 villages of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), only 1199 villages are Bodo dominated, while 1742 villages are non-Bodo dominated. Viewed from this perspective the non-Bodo people have reacted on their genuine grievances and put forward legitimate demand of reservation of seats in the 40 member council.\textsuperscript{322}

It needs to be mentioned that the non-Bodos of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) were included in the tripartite talks on the issue of demand for separate statehood. But opposing the participation of the non Bodos in the talk, the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) leader, S.K. Bwismutiary argued “all non-Bodo groups who have been invited have no right to oppose creation of a separate state of Bodoland.” It appears that the non-Bodo groups living within the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) area unanimously opposed to the demand for a separate state. The All Adivasi Students Association and Adivasi Council of Assam opposed the demand of Bodo for a separate statehood. They even went to the extent of saying that creation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was a wrong step as the Bodos are not in a majority in the area. The organisations like All Assam Koch-Rajbonshi Sanmilani, Assom Ana Bodo Gannatantrik Adikaar Surakha Sangram Samity, and Religious Minority Council also joined in the opposition for the separate statehood.\textsuperscript{323}

The two hill districts of Assam have been demanding an autonomous state since 1970, to chart out their political, social and economic destiny. The two hill districts, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong were given the option to join the state of Meghalaya which became an autonomous state on 2\textsuperscript{nd} April 1970. In this connection, Monirul Hussain stated that “it would be pertinent to recollect that the Reorganisation of Assam Act of 1969 had given the option to these two districts either to join or not to join the first autonomous state, Meghalaya. The autonomous district councils of these two districts by an overwhelming majority decided against

\textsuperscript{322} ibid
\textsuperscript{323} ibid
They did not join the autonomous state of Meghalaya precisely because of two reasons: (1) fear of dominance by the christianised tribals and (2) well-entrenched Congress organisation whose leadership was not in favour of joining the autonomous state. At that time, the Congress leaders belonging to these two districts were well-represented both in the council of ministers and in the Congress organisational network. Besides, the then government at state promised greater autonomy to the autonomous councils of the two hills districts and consequently, the leadership of the two districts decided to stay with Assam. The people who in 1969 so enthusiastically decided to stay with Assam and refused to join the autonomous state of Meghalaya, now after 18 long years are launching a movement for the creation of an autonomous state. Elwin Terron, a spokesman of the Autonomous State Demand Committees (ASDC) stated that the state government did not fulfill its promises to the people of Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar. Thus, an Autonomous State Demand Committee was constituted for the creation of an autonomous state under article 244 A of the Indian constitution to safeguard the language, culture and tradition of the hill people of the North Cachar and Karbi-Anglong. For the cause of an autonomous state, people were mobilized and build up a democratic movement in Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar which subsequently transformed from democratic movement to militant movement.

The democratic movement turned violent with the emergence of tribal militant outfits such as the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and the Dima Halom Daoga (DHD) respectively. The United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), a Karbi militant outfit formed in 1999, demanded a separate state status for Karbi-Anglong district of Assam. The Dima Halom Daoga (DHD) is a Dimasa militant outfit and it was formed in 1995. The basic demand of the Dima Halom Daoga (DHD) was separate Dimasa homeland namely "Dimaraji" comprising the Dimasa inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts

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325 ibid
326 B.C Bhuyan, “Political Development of the North-East”, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p79
327 ibid
of Nowgaon district and parts of Dimapur district of Nagaland. Militant groups clashing among themselves for control over political power and land even at the cost of the rights of the local tribal or ethnic community is an important factor behind persistent inter-ethnic conflicts in Karbi-Anglong district of Assam. It is to be noted that insurgent organizations in Karbi Anglong are the creation of the political Party. Along with insurgency there started a propaganda mission by all political parties only for their own benefit. Thus, politicization of ethnic movement and using insurgent groups as instrument for political gain by the political parties leads to a series of ethnic conflicts in Karbi-Anglong district of Assam. A study of the conflicts between Karbi and Kuki, Karbi-Dimas tribal groups in Karbi-Anglong district supports this point.

From October 2003 to March 2004, the district of Karbi-Anglong witnessed the Karbi-Kuki conflict. The Karbi-Kuki conflict was initially ignited by the state ruling party. In its bid to sabotage the popular movement for Autonomous Statehood led by Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), the ruling party (the Congress) floated a number of sectarian organisations to divide the movement and the people. The Kukis were instigated to join one such outfit called ‘Banner Organisation’, with a declared anti-Autonomous State movement stand and radical anti-Karbi orientation. At the same time one section of Kuki tribe under the leadership of Kuki National Assembly (KNA) demanded for the creation of the ‘Kuki National Council’, an autonomous administrative council for the Kukis in Karbi-Anglong. Kuki National Assembly (KNA), the apex Kuki political organisation in Karbi-Anglong, had first demanded an autonomous regional council for the Kukis in 1992 through a memorandum to the state government. Two rounds of talks were also subsequently held in 1997 and 1998. The Karbis including the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) rejected the demand of Kuki National Assembly (KNA) for an autonomous council for the ‘indigenous’ Kuki population which is around 35,000 in the Singhason hills area of Karbi-Anglong. According to the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), the total

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328 Internet Source: www. assamconnect.blogspot.com, Habibur Rahman Laskar, “Insurgencies in NC hills and Karbi-Anglong”
329 Suhas chakma, “Lessons Not Learnt by Assam : Ethnic cleansing and internal displacement in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills”, Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi, 2005
330 Internet Source: www.Karbi-Information network.com
331 ibid
population of Kuki in that area is not more than 2,000. They allege that to ‘justify’ the ‘Kukis’ demand for an autonomous council, Kuki National Assembly (KNA) had given wrong population figure of Kukis of Singhason hills area. It is to be noted that soon after their desertion from the original Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) in September 2000, ASDC (U) entered into a written pact with Kuki National Assembly (KNA) on 4 December 2000. The ASDC (U) entered into this pact only to secure Kuki votes in election and promised to recognised Singhason hills area as a Kuki area and agreed to give a Kuki Hill Council for kuki people in Karbi-Anglong. This agreement was condemned by the various nationalist organisations, political parties like Communist Party of India (CPI) and militant outfit namely, United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) of karbi-Anglong. It is to be noted that after this agreement the Kukis who were residing in Nagaland and Manipur due to internal conflicts there also started to migrate to Karbi-Anglong in a big way. And Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), so far active only in Manipur, also sneaked into Karbi Anglong. This massive increase in the Kuki population further hardened the anti-Autonomous State stand of Kuki National Assembly (KNA), resulting in heightened tension with the indigenous Karbi community.  

Thus, this ethnic tension finally led to ethnic conflict between the Karbi and Kuki in 2003-04 in Karbi-Anglong of Assam.  

The district of Karbi-Anglong has witnessed another ethnic conflict between the Karbi and the Dimasa tribal groups in 2005. The involvement of armed opposition groups, the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) claiming to represent ethnic Dimasas and the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), aspiring to represent ethnic Karbis has been established beyond reasonable doubt. In the conflict between the Karbis and Dimasas which began on 26 September 2005, about 90 persons were killed before the conflict was brought under control by the first week of November 2005. It is to be noted that both the state and non-state actors are responsible for this emerging ethnic conflicts. Lack of political will of the

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332 ibid
333 ibid
334 Suhas chakma, “Lessons Not Learnt by Assam :Ethnic cleansing and internal displacement in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills”, Asian Centre for Human Rights, New Delhi, 2005
335 ibid
political parties’ vis-a-vis government makes the situation worst during the time of conflict.

The Congress-led state government, before district council election in May 2006, initiated negotiations and confidence-building measures to restore normal relations between the two communities. However, opposition parties have criticized the state Congress leaders for failing to respond quickly enough to stem the violence. The state authorities were totally clueless in the first few weeks when trouble broke out. The law enforcement officials admit that such developments in far-flung districts often go unnoticed. The regular law and order problem is also cause for this large-scale violence in Karbi-Anglong and government is responsible for it.\(^{336}\)

The intensifying violence in Karbi Anglong district gave birth to a bitter blame game among the political parties of the state. They accused each other of being involved in the violence. Opposition parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) accused the ruling Congress of failing to control the escalating violence. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Brindaban Goswami demanded the resignation of the state government.\(^{337}\) The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the other hand accused the local Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) leader Jayanta Rongpi of instigating the clashes. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sent a team led by S S Ahluwalia to assess the situation. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) strongly criticized the role of congress and demanded Center’s intervention. The party stated that the Congress led state government had failed to comprehend the gravity of the situation.\(^{338}\)

It is to be noted that the Assam government accused the involvement of Jayanta Rongpi and Red Army for this ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong district. According to the state government, it was the Red Army who triggered the whole

\(^{336}\) Internet Source: [http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/10/05CALCUTTA372.html](http://wikileaks.org/cable/2005/10/05CALCUTTA372.html)

\(^{337}\) Internet Source: [www.manipuronline.com](http://www.manipuronline.com), Anand Kumar, “Assam: Ethnic Clashes Threaten Prospect of Peace”

crisis by indiscriminately attacking both Dimasas and Karbis. However, the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) leader Jayanta Rongpi alleged that the Congress was trying to escape itself from the responsibility during time of violence between Karbis and Dimasas. Rongpi claimed that there was nothing called Red Army in Karbi Anglong. He also dared the state government to arrest him, if he was involved in the violence. Opposition political parties stated that political machanisation is an art of politics but incorporating violence, nepotism, corruption, exploitation are the art of Congress party. This is going to raise further repercussion in the near future in the district. This is what the Congress leadership wants and they will keep exploiting the situation to be in the seat of power. The present stage of the movement for an autonomous state in Karbi-Anglong and NC Hills has passed through two important stages of life-cycle of a socio-political movement, i.e., (1) generalised discontent and (2) sharpening of objectives and strategies. The future of the movement largely depends upon the response of the state/central government on the one hand and the capacity of the leadership to carry on their movement for a longer period. The way the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Congress are behaving politically, Assam is bound to face further reorganisation and reduction of her size. The problems of Cachar and the movement for an autonomous state have really threatened to further reduce Assam's size to the Brahmaputra valley alone. Again in the Brahmaputra valley, there is another threat of Udayachal. Irrespective of our likes or dislikes these threats are real. However, the creation of more small states is likely to increase the existing number of subsidised tribal states. Though these new states have given a distinct political identity to certain groups of tribals, at the same time, it has made them almost entirely dependent on central grants in the absence of internal resources. In such a situation, the question of autonomy itself deserves a serious scrutiny from social scientists.

339 ibid
340 ibid
341 ibid
342 ibid
The state of Assam also witnessed the ethnic conflict between the Garo and Rabha community. It took place in January, 2011. The conflict has rendered almost 30,000 people homeless, more than 30 villages burnt to ashes and an increasing number of dead and missing people. The root of this conflict lies in the politics of the autonomous councils in both the states of Meghalaya and Assam. In Meghalaya, there have been problems brewing up because of the suspension of the Garo Autonomous Hills Council. The ruling United Meghalaya Alliance (UMA) coalition government in Meghalaya (Shillong) has dissolved the Garo Autonomous Council following allegations of discrepancies in the fund and unchecked appointments. The Garo Students’ Union (GSU) as well as the political parties have again and again raised demands that the Council be soon made functional and enquiry into it be done simultaneously. However, as quoted in many news reports from Shillong, Chief Minister Dr. Mukul Sangma deliberately kept the issue in limbo so that he can run the Council through “Administrator Rule”. Common people and council employees have suffered the most in this process. Till last October payments of salary were overdue for 8 to 9 months. The insecurity regarding land and property has set in and has fueled the discourse of “the outsider” and the “son of the soil” in the Garo Hills. In East Garo Hills, when rumours started about the clashes, Rabha people who had pattas (land titles) to their landholding and the mining labours from Assam working in East Garo Hills were especially targeted. The exodus started following the failure of the administration to prevent the planned destruction of property. It is often said that Garo and Rabha communities have lived together in relative harmony since many decades. While this is true, regular clashes inside the borders of Assam in Goalpara, have taken place between the two communities, sometimes involving their civic and political organizations a well. 343

Ironically, it also pertains to another autonomous council inside the borders of Assam, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. Garo people and their organizations along with a conglomeration of non-tribal minority communities and their forums have been jointly protesting against the inclusions of their villages inside the Rabha Hasong Autonomous jurisdiction. Such protests have caused

serious clashes among the communities. It is to be noted that on Nov 3, 2010 at the Central Office of the All Rabha Student Union in Dhudhnoi, under the leadership of the President of Garo Jatiya Parishad, namely, Arbitson D’ Momin several Garo organizations declared no objection in regard to formation of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. A. D Momin stated that there was no demand for any other autonomous position since Garos already have a “functional” Autonomous Council in Meghalaya and also there was no demand for conducting “Panchyat Election” as that would further complicate the struggle by the Rabhas for their own council. Momin further added that such demands are made by some “self-styled” leaders of Garo community in Assam for selfish interests. He also extended his support to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and declared a joint struggle for Rabha Hasong. However, Assam government failed to capitalize on the progress that civil society had made.\(^{344}\)

At the initial stage of conflict between the Rabhas and the Garos, both the state governments failed to take precautionary steps to curtail any such incidents or their escalations. The news of Garo villages being burnt in Assam resulted in destroying of Rabha colonies in Meghalaya. People started vacating villages prior to attacks, which made it even easier to burn them down. Again, with reaching the news of deteriorating conditions of Rabhas in relief camps in Mendipathar in East Garo Hills, more villages were burnt and Garo relief camps attacked. This cycle was allowed to continue with little or no policing of the affected areas. Since the Garo relief camps in Assam were in Rabha dominated area and the highways and roads were controlled by Rabhas, therefore relief materials were not available in the Garo camps. This infuriated the Garo people and they attacked the relief carrying trucks. The roads in the Krishnai region to Kukurkata relief camp was controlled by angered mobs of both communities. In this regard, Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti, Asom stated that “When our team visited the area, the absence of administration was starkly visible. Scattered soldiers of the Sikh Regiment tried to guard the camps, while people began filling the relief camps. The only Assam Police officials we noticed in escorting various politicians and high officials paying a visit to the

\(^{344}\textit{ibid}\)
In an important political development, Rabha groups had boycotted the Congress from that area in the upcoming elections. They had also contemplated supporting an independent candidate from their side against the Congress. It should also be remembered that the Congress-led government had been castigated for rampant corruption.\textsuperscript{346}

One of the main factors of this conflict was the newly formed (in 2010) ultra-nationalist underground organization of the Garos, namely, the Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA). In order to make their presence felt in the Garo community they actively participated in the riots with the objective of chasing away the Rabha people living there. There were several reports that “surrendered” militants were ransacking and attacking Rabhas in East Garo Hills.\textsuperscript{347}

The collection of taxes by the Rabha groups in that National Highway which goes to East Garo Hills via Goalpara, Assam, was also a hidden cause of this conflict. Garo groups in that area have always complained about this. Taxation on this National Highway was also a major coffer-filler for various organizations. Interestingly, this conflict reiterated the case for building the Shillong-Tura Highway through Nongstoin, the headquarters of West Garo Hills. Every organization has been lobbying for the national highway, which has been stalled by red-tape in Delhi. The estimated cost of the construction of the road is INR1498.48 crores. Opposition Leader Conard Sangma, who has his base in Tura is said to be pushing this project while the incumbent Chief Minister, Dr. Mukul Sangma’s government has urged the Centre to set up a special project monitoring committee, with the involvement of the state government, to speed up pending road projects in Meghalaya.\textsuperscript{348}

The consistent and reversible processes of ethnic conflicts can be understood in the context of Bodoland Movement, which have been releasing simultaneously the impulses of both conflict formation and containment. Both the alienation and integration of ethnic groups have been going on side by side, a process which Arun

\textsuperscript{345} ibid  
\textsuperscript{346} ibid  
\textsuperscript{347} ibid  
\textsuperscript{348} ibid
Bose describes as "Disintegration and Reintegration." The state of Assam faced another massive humanitarian crisis of today which become a hot topic of discussion at various levels once again. With over 50 people were killed and thousands refugee in relief camps since early July, 2012 in Gossaingaon, Kokrajhar and Chirang, still awaiting assurance of long term security and survival.

The number of Bodos and non-Bodos injured, killed and displaced in the month of July 2012 in the ongoing clashes is indeed appalling. Even more shocking are the definitional debates in the local and national media that emerged in the aftermath of the riots. There is a debate about whether these clashes be termed ethnic, religious or communal. Political parties including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Congress are not far behind these debates. The congress claims that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is trying to ‘give a communal or religious fervor’ to the recent ethnic clashes. Such claims made by the congress and counter allegations by the opposition parties on ‘minority vote-seeking politics of the congress may not be totally unfounded or surprising. Ironically, many of us are cognizant of these kinds of diversionary tactics that are frequently applied by the political elites to somehow deflect public attention from the actual subject. No doubt, the regional and central level congress elites out rightly abnegated the opposition claims. Nonetheless, these debates are thought provoking as they compel us to reanalyze the archetypical pattern of violence that resurfaced in the BTAD areas since late 2000s. Certainly, one has to be much more careful before analyzing the pattern of these riots through issues such as number of the migrants, the amount of land increasingly occupied, the government’s reluctance to take precautionary measures against land accusation by settlers etc. Land encroachment is a major problem because the aggrieved groups directly feel the tension and scare for land resources on which they are highly dependent. On the other hand, migrant communities have lesser non agricultural avenues other than land. Even the state’s chief minister Tarun Gogoi categorically expressed that land security had a direct correlation with the recent violence between the Bods and non-Bodos. What Gogoi and the Congress general secretary Digvijay Singh, however, failed to acknowledge

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349 Internet source: www.archive.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu12ee.htm, S.D. Muni, “Ethnic conflict, federalism and democracy in India”
350 Internet Source: www.AssamTribuneepaper.com,August22,2012
are the perennial causes of the problem- the issue of undocumented migration and resultant demographic pressures. Inflation of doubtful name in voter list and district wise decadal increase in the population of Assam’s Muslim minority concentrated districts is considered to be major pointers to this situation which both the state government and the central government are most reluctant to accept.\textsuperscript{351}

What also intensified inter-group rivalry is the issue of political reconfigurations in the Bodoland Territorial Council where the Bodos are allocated 30 seats (out of total 46 seats) and the rest are given to non-Bodos and unrepresented groups including two women to be nominated by the governor of Assam. This form of asymmetrical provisions are usually meant to provide a platform where the aggrieved group can exercise the autonomy while negotiating with other minority ethnic communities in the sub region. But many a times such arrangements can fail to assuage the tensions if the clauses are filled with ambiguities. Clause 4.3 in the BTC accord contains some ambiguous provision on land rights. On the other hand, it retains the ‘existing rights and privileges of the indigenous groups’ and the immediate clause says that ‘any citizen will not be barred 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 the BTC area. Because of these ambiguities, perhaps the biggest intergroup security dilemma is caused by the apprehension of non-Bodos on gradual ethnic homogenization of BTAD, as the areas comprise of villages with ethnically mixed population. To quote Syed Shabuuddin, “the Muslims feel insecure, physically, linguistically and socially as well as religiously and at the same time they are being continuously subjected to repeated judicial checks on their nationality. In the targeted violence, the Bodos actually do not make any distinction between the old residents and the newcomers, if any. Over the years, particularly after 1994, the Muslims also began to procure arms in order to protect themselves and to form militant groups. It may be added that when there was agreement with the Bodo militants, one of the conditions was that the Bodo militants would surrender their arms but no step was taken to disarm them, then or later. They still have their arms. Interestingly, when on November 17, 2012 the second conflict of 2012 began, the

\textsuperscript{351} \textit{ibid}
police arrested a senior Bodo leader, a member of the Council, and confiscated AK-47 rifle from him, on order from the State Government." This in turn, has caused a reverse trend of ethnic mobilization of non-Bodos as well as stiff political competition between the leaders of Bodos and non-Bodos. Growing political presence and organizational capabilities of non-Bodos, particularly the Muslim minorities under the banner of All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), is a strong indicator of this development. All India United Democratic Front’s (AIUDF) prominence in the BTAD areas has been accounted to the voter support of continuing waves of Muslim migrants of Bangladeshi origin.

In this regard Syed Shabuddin observed that “in demarcating the border of the Bodo territory, two basic mistakes were made. The first was to include the non-Bodo majority villages lying on the fringes of Bodoland and the second was that although the area of the Council had only 25-30 per cent Bodo population, 30 out of 46 seats were, directly or indirectly, reserved for the Bodos. In this Council, the Bodo People’s Front, one of the several Bodo organisations, is in power and it is also a coalition partner of the Congress in the Assam Government. So while Bodos were not satisfied, the non-Bodos felt marginalised. Naturally, in an area where they form a 30 per cent minority, they cannot impose their culture or economic dominance. They control the entire administration, minus law and order and cannot reject the non-Bodos from the land they occupy. The Bodos also claim that the rate of growth of Muslims is much higher than that of the Bodos. The net result is that the Bodos are using both political means and guns to secure a majority in Bodoland through repeated wave of ethnic cleansing. Neither the Central Government nor the State Government is prepared to redraw the boundary of Bodoland which gives rise to a permanent conflict of identity and territory.”

Like many post-mortemist findings, the leaders of BTC and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) share at least one view in common that the onus lies on the state government for not controlling the riots. But why did the


\[353\] ibid

government ‘fail to prevent the diffusion of violence to other areas’ in the first place? Some argue that the problem lies with India’s ‘cosmetic federal arrangements’ a term employed by Ian Copland in the 1990s in the context of Eastern Europe. The state has in fact, contributed to intergroup rivalry by electoral mobilization on the basis of ethnic and religious identities as a result of which, it has tremendously failed to execute the process of genuine identification and extradition of illegal migrants on the basis of March 25, 1971, the agreed cut-off date. All concerned agree that the Indo-Bangladesh border should be sealed by all possible means. In this regard Syed Shabuddin suggested many a time that at least in the border districts, the government should introduce identity cards to all those who are residents, so that newcomers can easily be identified. But this has not been done.

Thus, in Assam one has to respect diversity and build an inclusive society by adopting policies that explicitly recognize cultural differences. Individuals can and do have multiple identities that are complementary—ethnicity, language, religion and race as well as citizenship. Identity is not a zero sum game. There is no inevitable need to choose between state unity and recognition of cultural differences. The main question is how one can accommodate the burgeoning demands of the tribal groups. To achieve this objective, one has to explore a socio-political structure that can satisfy the Bodos, the Rabhas, the Karbis, the Dimasas, the Tiwas, the Chutias, the Koch-Rajbangshi, the Tai-Phakes, the Matak and Moran, the Ahoms, and the minority groups like the Bengali Hindus, the Muslims, the Nepalis and the Adivasis. Unless one works out a comprehensive structure that can at least satisfy the basic socio-cultural and economic needs there will be continuous turmoil in the state. Thus, how the Asomiya middle class and elite accommodate their own demands with the growing aspirations of the smaller tribes and nationalities will be the single most important factor that can generate violent conflict in Assam.  

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355 ibid
Summary:

This chapter gives an insight into the role of political parties, ethnic interest groups as well as insurgents groups in ethnic mobilization and for that purpose how they used ethnicity, ethnic identity as an instrument to secure their personal interest. In the case of political parties’ ethnicity, identity becomes only an instrument for a group of like minded people to exploit as much resources as they can. Ethnic identity, language, culture becomes some sort of platform for political parties to mobilise ethnic sentiment to gain political benefits. They are hardly interested in the affairs of their ethnic community. It also reveals that the gradual emergence of ethnic identity issues and autonomy/separatist movement led by the political parties have resulted in numerous inter-ethnic conflicts in the state of Assam such as Karbi-Kuki, Karbi-Dimasa, Bodo-Santhal, Bodo-Muslim and so on. The presence of numerous ethnic political parties such Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Bodoland Progressive Front (BPF), All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) etc and insurgent groups such as United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dima Halam Daogah (DHD), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and so on who stand to defend and fight for the interest of their ethnic group are responsible for occurrence of different ethnic conflicts in Assam. It also reveals that the failure of the Government to improve the economic conditions in the state, to implement laws to check illegal immigration are some of the reasons responsible for growing ethnic tension among the ethnic groups in recent time. The growing consciousness of ethnic groups of the limited resources available has created not only a very competitive atmosphere but also a very volatile situation in which conflicts can break out anytime. Hence, over the years the situation of peace and security has drastically declined and it seems that fear has overtaken the minds of the people. This situation of fear and insecurity and frequent breakdown of law and order has affected the region both in terms of human and economic development.