CHAPTER-II
THE RABHAS AND THE GENESIS OF RABHA AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

2.1 THE SETTING

India is an ethnically plural and culturally diverse country. Within the Indian multicultural liberal democracy, North-East India is characterized as the homeland of cultural diversity. Multiculturalism or cultural diversity is the basic feature of North-East India. Marked by diversity in customs, cultures, traditions and languages, the region is a home to over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects with a strong tradition of social and cultural identity. North-East India, the homeland of cultural diversity, is inhabited by more than two hundred culturally distinct ethnic groups of various sizes and at various stages of development. The North-East India is the home of different tribes having distinct ethnic identity and socio-cultural heritage and also represents unique traditional social and administrative structure and customary laws among them. The Constitution of India has scheduled the tribes of North-east India as hill tribes and plain tribes. The Rabha is a plain tribe which have been included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

2.2 THE RABHAS

The Rabhas are a distinct racial community of Indo-Mongoloid (Kirata) ethnic group as well as Tibeto-Burman Bodo sub-group of Sino-Tibetan language family. The Rabhas are a distinct racial community under the greater Mongoloid ethnic group in Assam. The Rabhas are recognised as a plain Scheduled tribe which is widely spread and scattered in the different plain districts of Assam, especially in the Brahmaputra valley. The Rabhas are ethnically Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman. They are regarded as a section of the Bodo race, which appears to be an offshoot of the Garos. As S.K. Chatterji observes,"the Rabhas belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group of the greater Indo-Mongoloid stock". S. Endle observes the Rabhas as the closely — allied tribes of the Kacharis. The Rabhas are one of the aborigines or the earliest known inhabitants in this region which is basically a scheduled plain tribe under
the greater Bodo Community. Now, the Rabha has been recognized as a Plain Scheduled Tribe under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. They are believed to have originated from the Tibetan region and it is estimated that several hundred years ago, they migrated to Garo Hills, now in Meghalaya, and then spread to the plain areas of Assam. The Rabhas are scattered throughout the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Darrang, Dhubri, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Udalguri, Baksa, Nalbari, undivided Sivasagar, Lakhimpur in Assam, though their main concentration is found on the South Bank of river Brahmaputra in the districts of Kamrup and Goalpara. A section of the Rabhas is also found in the northern part of hill districts (East and West Garo Hills) of Meghalaya and also in North Bengal. Even though the Rabhas are now spread over Meghalaya, Bangladesh, Nepal, West Bengal and Manipur, they are mostly concentrated in the undivided districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, and Darrang of Assam.

The Rabhas form a unique and distinct ethnic community having own language, literature, cultural life and also having rich socio-cultural heritage and traditions. The Rabhas are divided into a number of social cultural and linguistic groups and clans such as Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Kocha, Dahori, Bitolia, Totla and Hana etc. The Rangdani, Maitori and Kocha have retained its traditional language and culture while the Pati, Dahori, Totla, and Hana have given up their traditional language and culture to some extent. Lemabai (Aryan deities) and Lemakatha, a variety of Indo-Aryan language, may also be termed as Rabhamese are prevalent among these sections of the Rabha tribe.

From the population point of view, the Rabhas form one of the major tribes which occupy sixth position after Bodo-Kacharies, Mishings, Karbis, Mizo, Sonowal Kacharis, etc. which are among 23 Scheduled tribes enlisted in Assam.

Since time immemorial, the Rabhas were one of the pre-dominant inhabitants of the North-Eastern region of India. In the ancient Vedic and Epic ages, the Rabhas were known as the 'Kiratas'. The Rabhas known as 'Koches' in the Puranas and Tantras, originally belong to the Great Indo-Mongoloid family.

The Rabha tribe though is a special section of the Bodo ethnic group of Indo-Mongoloid stock, now, has become an integral part of the greater Assamese nationality. Dr. Birinchi kumar Baruah observes, "The Rabha constitutes a section of the major ethnic group known as the Bodo ethnic group who form a substantial portion of the
Assamese population. Many renowned scholars have established the Rabha tribe as a distinct ethnic tribal group having its own customs, traditions, language, literature and rich socio-cultural heritage. Renowned Anthropologist and scholar Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das observes, "The Rabha represents a distinct and separate tribal community having its own culture, traditions, customs, rituals, beliefs, heritage, physical appearance, dresses, language, literature, way of life and folk traditions etc." Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das, referring the 'Ethnography' of Baines (1912) quotes, "He classified them under the Assam Hill Tribes and is also of opinion that the Rabha originally occupied the northern part of the Garo Hills where from they came down in course of time. Regarding the migration and habitations of the Rabhas, the famous historian Playfair has mentioned in his book 'The Garos' that in ancient time these Rabha people migrated from the Tibetan region to the Brahmaputra valley and from the valley towards the hilly areas. The Garo Hills was occupied by the Rabhas prior to the migration of the Garos to these hills and in course of time, the Rabha people came down to the plain areas. Thus, Major Playfair indicates that the Rabhas had come down to Assam from the Tibetan regions and settled first at Garo Hills from where they subsequently came over to Assam plains. Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das in his "Ethnic Affinities of the Rabhas" observes, "It seems probable that Mongoloid peoples came in successive waves from the north to the north-eastern region. They have partly or wholly absorbed the autochthonous Australoid and later on formed various tribes like the Rabha, the Garo etc."

According to Dhananjoy Rabha, when king Dadan and their followers introduced Baikho festival in Athiabari of Goalpara district making essential work division, this led to the creation of certain sub-groups of Rabhas such as Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Dahori, Chonga, Bitolia, Kocha etc. Thus the Rabhas are divided into a number of social cultural and linguistic groups such as Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Kocha, Dahori, Bitolia, Totla and Hana etc.

However, as soon as the need for ethnic identity arose and for the identity consciousness among the Rabha tribe in the context of present political situation, the observance of the original festival of Baikho was revived. At present, the Baikho festival is being observed in several Rabha villages. Now-a-days, the Baikho festival is
considered as the national festival of the Rabha tribe which is a traditional agro-based festival performed by the Rabha tribe since its inception as a social group.

When we try to trace the origin of the Rabhas, we find legendary views regarding the origin of the term "Rabhas". There are different opinions as regard to the origin of the generic word 'Rabha'. The word was first referred in the middle of the 17th Century in "Beharistan-I-Ghaybi", a history in Persian language written by Ghayabi alias Mirza Nathan in 1632. According to a legend, Sirgi Risi (Mahadeva) brings the Rabhas down from Rangkrang (heaven) to the Hasong (earth) and they are called the Rabha (bring down means Raba>Rabha). That means brought down from heaven to the earth by God. Another legendary belief shows that the Garos were not quite acquainted with agricultural activities mainly the wet cultivation. So, they hired some Rabha people and engaged them as appointed workers. As the people (workers) were brought on hired terms and conditions they used to say as 'Raba' in their tongue and subsequently the tribe came to be known as 'Rabha'. In return the Rabhas called the Garos as 'Mungtang (mung tanbatang) i.e. 'The name givers'. Till today some of the Rabha sections like the Rongdani and the Maitori call them as Mungtang or Mungtang. These two legends have a strong base among the Rabhas as well as the Garos, particularly among the Atong and Ruga sub-groups who are very akin to them. Dodan Raja, the first and foremost leader (king) of the Rabhas, who was supposed to be a descendant of Ban Raja (Bana), a famous mythological king of ancient Kamrup along with his followers migrated from Northern Bank (Darmang<Darrang i.e. Sonitpur) to Southern Bank (the foothills of Garo Hills) of the mighty Brahmaputra. In due course of time, they came to be known as Banni thok> Banthok or Bantho (a clan of the Rabhas) in particular and Rababatang > Rabatang (brought by leading) i.e. the Rabhas in general. Thus, Huseng, a chieftain of the Atong group, who was supposed to have brought the Rabhas to Someswari (Simsang) valley for wet cultivation, was driven away from there by one of his Brahmin ministers to their present habitat.

Although, the description of the Rabha language is recorded in the early part of the 19th Century as mentioned, the records regarding the Rabha tribe are found as early as in the 17th Century. It is mentioned for the first time in the "Baharistan-I-Ghaibi", a Persian history written by Mirza Nathan, a captain of the Mughals in 1632 (M.I. Borah:
Baharistan-I-Ghaibi, English Translation published by D.H.A.D., 1931). Thus, M. Martin in his book named "History, Antiquity, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India (1838) and J.M. Dosh in his monograph "Topography of Assam (1837) also described about the various aspects of the Rabha tribe excluding their language.

From the point of view of ethnic affinities, the Rabha people resemble the characteristics of the Mongoloid race, which was priorly known as 'Kirata' i.e. the Indo-Mongoloids. The affinity of the Rabhas is very akin to the Garos in general and to the Atong and Ruga sub-groups in particular. Friend Pereira states that, "in general appearance of the Rabha show all the characters of the Mongolian stock, a round face, a flat nose, prominent check bones, obliquely set eyes, sallow complexion, coarse hair, scanty beard and well developed lower extremity". Major Playfair also points out that there are some linguistic and cultural similarities between the Garos and the Rabhas. Hodson's remark that the Rabhas constitute a major segment of the Bodo linguistic group also goes to testify their affinities along with other constituents of the Bodo group like Garo, Kachari, Mech, Hajong, Koch etc. who belong to the Mongoloid stock.

When we see the religion, religious beliefs and practices of the Rabhas, it appears to know that the Rabhas represent a distinct religious beliefs and practices which is a combination of ancient tribal religious beliefs and animistic practices with certain Hindu religious practices. The Rabhas were animist in the beginning. As animist they worship various kinds of natural phenomena attributed to different deities. The Indo-Mongoloid origin tribes of North-East India known as the Kiratas worship mainly the Sakta traditions and Saiva traditions. So, some scholars state that the Rabha tribe as a branch of Kiratas traditionally worship the Sakta traditions and Saiva traditions in their religious practices. It is said that the 'SigiRisi' (The God Shiva) is the main worshipping God of the Rabha tribe.

Since early times, the Rabha society was distinct and autonomous in character in the sense that it was equipped with an ancient administration regulated by certain distinct and autonomous traditional social institutions and organizations under their distinct customary laws. As a distinct ethnic community having distinct ethnic identity and rich socio-cultural heritage, the Rabha tribe has certain traditional social organizations and institutions of their own. Several social organizations and institutions
have been organized by the Rabhas since the inception of the Rabha society with a view to keep the socio-cultural heritage intact and also to reorganize different sections of the community i.e. Rongdani, Maitori, Pati, Dahori, Totla, Bitolia and Kocha (Songga) under certain social norms. In doing so, three distinct types of administrative social organizations in hierarchical order namely (i) The Mandal or village/clan organization, (ii) The Jamad or branch organization and (iii) The Sanmilan or district/regional organizations have been constituted. Besides village level or clan organizations in different Rabha inhabited areas, quite a large number of regional organizations are in existence of which mention may be made of Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj, Dudhnoi Pachimanchal Rabha Samaj, Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha samaj, etc. Above all these organizations, a national level organization namely, the Rabha National Council (R.N.C) which acts as an apex body among all the social organizations and institutions of the Rabha community, has been in existence as the supreme administrative organization with an objective to ameliorate social cohesion, social integrity and amity among the different levels and also to uplift language, literature and culture of the Rabha community. Another important feature of these organizations is that each of them has a women and youth wing. Apart from these, there are also student’s organizations at various levels i.e. unit, district, state level, etc. Thus, The All Rabha Students Union (ARSU) has emerged as one such state or national level organization in this respect, which has played a key role in assertion of distinct ethnocultural identity as well as the socio-political mobilization among the Rabha community. Several social, cultural organizations and institutions which are prevalent in the Rabha community exert their influence in the ethnic identity assertion of the Rabha community as well as in the process of the all round development of the Rabha community.

The Rabhas as a distinct tribal community represents a distinct socio-cultural heritage and customary laws. The Rabhas form a unique community having rich socio-cultural heritage. The society of the Rabha community is strictly governed by democratic social system having certain rites and rituals, social customs and magico-religious beliefs.
The Rabhas, as a distinct tribal community under the Indo-Mongoloid Non-Aryan family, represents a distinct language and dialects with a few literary evidences. Linguistically the Rabha belongs to the Bodo sub-group under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman stock\textsuperscript{24}. It appears to be more akin to the Garo in general and the Ruga and the Atong (two dialects under the sub-types of Garo) in particular than any other languages of this stock\textsuperscript{25}.

To trace the historical written instance of Rabha, there is no other evidence except the rock-inscription (supposed to be Rabha) at Rendu-Bendu hill (at Goalpara district of Assam). It is after the arrival of the British that writing materials became available and the writing tradition got initiated among the Rabhas. Therefore, there was no literary writing in Rabha during pre-independence period, except the selected chapters of the Holy Bible translation done by the missionaries. The translation of The Prodigal Song into Rabha language in 1900 A.D. recorded in linguistic survey of India (1903) is the first instance of such translation work. Thereafter, several references of Rabha language and culture by several anthropologists and historians emerged. Among these, The Garos (1909) by Playfair, The Kacharis (1911), by Endle and Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal (1872) by Daltan are worth mentioning. Moreover, Grierson offered descriptive note on Rabha grammar in about four pages. The translation of The Gospel of Mark into Rabha `Markni Nima Saikai (in Rongdani dialect) written in Bengali script in 1909 is deemed to be the earliest literary work. Thus, it is only after independence that true literary work in Rabha language began with the publication of a magazine called -Champai' in 1978.

Rongda (Rongdani), Maita (Maitori) and Songga (Kocha) are the three major speech communities among which the Rabha language is prevalent. However certain groups of Rabha tribe viz., Pati, Dahori, Totla, Hana and Bitalia known as Habai by the native speakers use a type of Assamese creole heavily influenced by Rabha language known as Rabhamese. According to the census report of 2001, total Rabha speakers in India are about 1, 64,770 out of which 1, 30,875 are in Assam. However, of the total Rabha population in Assam, (in 2001 being 2, 77, 517) only 47.49\% of them are recorded as the Rabha language speakers\textsuperscript{26}.
The Rabha Bhasa Parisad is a Rabha national level organization, which emerged for the upliftment of the Rabha language, has introduced five levels of professional efficiency course e.g. Phamansini (Introductory), Chamansini (Primary), Majartini (Middle), Mytprisini (Prabodh) and Mungsrangsi (Visharad) since 1981. The Rabha language is being taught in the primary schools in the Rabha dominated areas of Assam since 1988-89. The Rabha national level organizations are demanding to promote the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the schools of the Rabha dominated areas of Assam with a view to uplift the Rabha language²⁷.

The earliest evidence of the Rabha language is found in the translation of the Bible "Markni Nima Saikai" by British Foreign Bible Society, published in 1909 A.D. however, since time immemorial the tradition of oral literature was among the Rabhatribe. The collection of love lyrics known as 'Sathar' represents the unique treasure of oral literature of the Rabha tribe. Rabha literature may be said to have begun from lyrical composition and dramatic performance in the Sixth decade of 20th century. Till now, large numbers of poetry collections have come out. The short stories are also being written popularly. 'Champai' (1978-82), a literary journal is being considered as the milestone of Rabha literature. Accordingly, the Rabha literature may be categorized into three stages i.e. Pre-Champai stage (1950 A.D.-1978 A.D), Champai stage (1978 A.D.-1982 A.D.), and Post-Champai stage (1982 A.D.-onwards).

The foundation of Rabha literary body as a Rabha national level organization for the promotion of Rabha language and literature called Bebak Rabha Krowrang Runchum (BRKR), the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha in 1973 provided a unique platform among the Rabha writers and also brought a progressive environment of Rabha literature. The voluntary Rabha organization called the Rabha Bhasa Parishad founded in 1980 also played a vital role in spreading Rabha language and literature and contributed to the upliftment of Rabha language and literature²⁸.

When we examine some historical based writings and evidences, it appears boicraw that the Rabhas as a distinct racial community represented ancient kingdoms and territories ruled by Rabha-origin kings with their followers who came to be known as the Rabhas in the subsequent pages of time. Though from a historical point of view, we find an ancient Rabha kingdom, but it is not clear due to lack of reliable historical
evidences. A few historical literatures reveal that the Rabhas had an ancient kingdom of their own. If we see from the historical point of view, there were certain small small princely states in the Southern Bank (Dakshin Kul) in the 16th and 17th centuries of ancient Assam, which were ruled by certain ancient Rabha and Rabha origin Kocha kings. From historical point of view, it is said that prior to the rule of the ancient Koch king Biswa Singha, in Garo hills, Khoiram, and in the northern frontiers of Khasi hills and its adjacent areas as well as the slope down areas and also the various parts of these small and big hills, there were certain places such as : Koraibari, Mechpara, Sambhor, Rongdan, Athiyabari, Kulung (Luki), Boko, Bongaon, Bogai, Pantan, Jalukbari (Kamakhya Duwari), Beltola, Rani Duwar, Moirapur, Bholagaon duwar, Borduwar, Haladhi Duwar etc., which were known as small princely states once ruled by some ancient Rabha or Kocha kings29. Robinson Sahab in his "Descriptive Account of Assam" has mentioned four states ( Dumuria, Panbari, Rani, Beltola) and Nine Duwars (Moirapur South from Rani state, from south from that, Bholagaon Duwar, Barduwar, Pantan Duwar, Chaygaon, Sogai, Bongaon, Boko, and Luki Duwar respectively) in which certain Rabha kings ruled from time to time30. It has been mentioned in 'Baharistan Ghaybi' and in 'Kamrup Buranji' that there were eighteen frontiers kings while the Ahom Buranji has mentioned that there were ten frontier kings who were King Howraboriya, King Joy, King Khukar, King Mansing, King Haladhiboriya, King Bornogoriya, King Kanta, King Rup Singh, King Bamun and King Borduwaria31. Martin sahib in his 'Eastern India' Vol. III, P.619, has mentioned ten hilly frontiers kings and they ruled in the different locations in the southern bank of Brahmaputra valley such as: Borduwar, Bhologram Duwar, Pantan Duwar, and Bongaon. Duwar etc. all were ruled by certain Rabha kings32. It is found in the 'Baharistan-I-Ghaybi' that there were eighteen frontiers kings of the Southern region which fought against the Mughals several times and ultimately they got defeated and surrendered in the hands of the then Mughal captain 'Mirza Nathan'. In 'Baharistan-I-Ghaybi' for the first time the evidence of the word 'Rabha' and the fight between the Rabha king and Mughals was found33. From the historical evidences it has been found that there were certain princely states in the Southern location ruled by some famous and popular Rabha kings from time to time in about 17th, 18th, and the first half of 19th Century. Among them, the Koraibari state (ruled by Nagakha), Mechpara state (ruled by Kamallochan), Sambhor
state (ruled by Rabha king Parashuram), Habraghat state (ruled by King Howriya), Rongjuli state (ruled by King Hosta), Athiyabari state (ruled by King Akora), kulung Luki state (ruled by Queen Toba after the demise of King Dodan), Boko-Bongaon state (ruled by King Mohiram), Bogai state (ruled by King Bogai), were prominent among them. It is said that many of the ancient Rabha kings who were the rulers of these princely states of the Southern location, surrendered to the Koch King Biswa Singha subsequently one after another. Dr. Bhuban Mohan Das in his book "Ethnic Affinities of the Rabhas" and Rajen Rabha in his book "Rabha-Janajati" has mentioned the glory of ancient Rabha kingdom with special focus on the Rabha king Dadan. According to a legendary belief, King Dadan is regarded as the first king of the Rabhas. Dhananjoy Rabha in his book "Rabha Janajatir Itihas" has mentioned that king Dadan and his followers for the first time introduced the 'Baikho' festival in Athiyabari (now at Goalpara district) and he also gets the credit of creating the sub-groups among the Rabha tribe. It is worth mentioning that, king Dadan and his sisters names are still pronounced in the traditional rituals observed in the 'Baikho' festival. Grierson in his book "Linguistic Survey of India" has portrayed a map with the location inhabited by the Rabha people.

From the socio-historical and legendary point of view, it has been said that the Rabha king Dodan is the first king of the Rabha tribe and he is considered as the leader and founder of the Rabha community. King ‘Dadan’ was a contemporary king and a close relative of ‘Bana' the great king of ancient Assam (then Pragjyotishpur) who ruled in Sonitpur. The powerful king Dodan associated with king Bana and defeated many kings of that time but at last king Dodan was defeated by an outsider king. After being defeated by an outsider king in a historic battle, king Dodan left Sonitpur with his groups crossing the river Brahmaputra and settled at Mayong and after then Sonapur in the Southern bank of the river. Afterwards, he came to contact with Maru Khetri, a Khtriya bear and after facing many ups and downs, in the subsequent period, king Dodan and his groups settled at Nilgiri or Nilachal, Narakasur hill, Boko, Bogai, Baghmara, Dhupdhara and Tura subsequently. Afterwards, being threatened and displaced by the Garo kings, king Dodan and his groups finally settled at the Southern bank of Brahmaputra valley and expanded his kingdom and habitations at Phulbari, Tikrikilla, Lakhipur, Pancharatna, Rongdan, Dudhnoi, Rongjuli, Tiplai, Athiyabari, etc.
(which falls under present Goalpara district and also South Kamrup) and also the foothill areas of Garo hills and expanded the Rabha kingdom and Rabha habitations covering this huge land\(^9\).

From a historical point of view, it is evident from the 'baharistan-i-ghayabi' -that the Rabha king Parasuram ruled over South Goalpara in the first decade of 17\(^{th}\) Century. His territory with the Capital at Sambal, Sambhul or known as 'Sambhor' (present Solmari near Goalpara district) extended from the Brahmaputra on the north to the Rongdan river in the Garo Hills border on the South and from Rangjuli on the East to Nalbari on the West. This is the South Goalpara and South Kamrup district in which the indigenous Rabha people were the master till this region was annexed to British India, not only that, the entire foot hills which is known as 'B’ mahal under the present state of Meghalaya are still occupied by the Rabha tribe as majority\(^{40}\).

2.3 RABHA KINGDOM: THE ANCESTRAL HOMELAND OF THE RABHAS

The Rabha people, now-a-days, on the basis of their glory of ancient Rabha kingdom as well as the ancestral homeland, demands the huge land ranging from Phulbari from West (now included in Garo hills district) to Rani and Beltola in the East, and the northern foothill areas of Meghalaya, as "Rabha-Hasong" i.e. the ethnic homeland of the Rabha tribe. At present, the Rabha national level organizations are demanding with the support of the Rabha people, this region as 'Rabha ethnic homeland' as their imaginary homeland basically tracing the roots of the glory of the ancient Rabha kingdom and their ancestral land.

From these evidences of ancient Rabha kingdom and Rabha inhabited traditional homelands, the Rabha community today assert themselves as the son of soil of this region and demands this region as their traditional ancestral ethnic homeland as 'Rabha-Hasong' that is the 'land of the Rabhas' on the basis of their ancient glory and have launched movement to attain and preserve their traditional ethnic territory.

2.4. THE INHERITED AUTONOMY CHARACTER OF THE RABHAS

From the above analysis, it may be noted that the Rabhas are a distinct tribal community having distinct language, literature, socio-cultural heritage, traditional administrative organizations, social institutions, customary laws and a historical ancient
Rabha ethnic territory or kingdom. Though the Rabhas are under the greater Indo-Mongoloid family and a sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman Bodo group, it represents a distinct and unique ethno-cultural identity among the different tribal ethnic groups in Assam. The different social and cultural markers of the Rabha community such as the distinct ethnic affinity, distinct language and dialects, ancient administration with distinct social institutions and organizations, religious beliefs and practices, distinct socio-cultural elements and institutions, customs, traditions, festivals etc. contributed to create and develop social cohesion, ethnic affiliation, social integration among the different clans and groups of the Rabha community under a distinct ethno-cultural identity. This distinct ethno-cultural identity of the Rabha community inherited from their distinct socio-cultural markers also greatly developed and enhanced the sense of autonomy among the Rabha community. It may be noted that the Rabha community was divided into different clans and sub-groups and used to lead their own ways of life in the past. There was no social cohesion among them in the past. It was only after the emergence and formation of inter-group traditional social organizations like the Mandal at the village level, Jamad at the middle level and the Sanmilan at the district or regional level that the different Rabha clans and sub-groups were regrouped, reorganized, united and integrated as a single ethnic group. These ancient administrative social organizations and institutions have been organized by the Rabha society with a view to keep the socio-cultural heritage intact and also to reorganize different sections of the community i.e. Rongdani, Maitori, Pati, Dahori, Totla, Bitolia and Kocha (Songga) under certain social norms and customary laws. These traditional administrative social organizations and institutions of the Rabha community contributed greatly in maintaining their distinct ethnic identity and socio-cultural heritage and their traditional ethnic homeland. In this way, these ancient traditional administrative social organizations and institutions were unique and autonomous with deep community feeling and sentiment which contributed to lead a unique and autonomous way of life among the Rabha community since the past. The 'Thal' or Khel, Mandal, Jamad and Sanmilan, all the tiers of these traditional administrative organizations were formed consisting of the different Rabha clans and sub-groups with executive and judicial powers to settle all kinds of disputes and administer their society. The formation of such inter-group organizations among the Rabha society was regarded to have consolidated different Rabha sub-groups as a single
unified ethnic group and maintained ethnic solidarity and social cohesion among the Rabhas living in particular areas. This ethnic unification and distinct and autonomous way of life of the Rabha community resulted in the formation of different regional socio-cultural organizations in different Rabha inhabited areas which also deeply contributed to maintain and develop ethnic solidarity, social cohesion, and to lead and develop an autonomous way of life as well as a sense of autonomy among them.

It may be noted that the Rabhas are one of the aborigines or the earliest known inhabitant of North-East India as well as of Assam. As one of the aborigines or earliest known inhabitant of North-East India as well as of Assam, the Rabha community regards themselves as the "Son of the Soil" that is the indigenous community of this region. This "Son of the Soil" or the indigenous factor also contributed to create, develop and enhance a sense of autonomy among the Rabha community in Assam.

It may also be noted that historically the Rabha community had an ancient ethnic homeland and territory of their own. This historical and inhabitant factor created and developed a sense of autonomy among the Rabha community.

From the above analysis, it appears that the autonomy character of the Rabhas evolves and develops through the different stages of time with the different social and ethnic cultural elements. The Rabha community inherits its own autonomous way of life and a sense of autonomy or autonomous character from the different ethnic, social, cultural elements such as distinct ethnic affinity, distinct language and dialects, distinct ancient traditional administrative social institutions and organizations under certain social norms and customary laws, religious beliefs and practices, distinct socio-cultural elements and institutions, customs, traditions, festivals, historical factor, inhabitant factor, indigenous factor etc.

2.5 THE GENESIS OF RABHA AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

The movements for autonomy have marked the socio-political discourse in Assam for the last decades. The movement for autonomy launched by different ethnic communities from time to time in Assam is very much closely linked to ethnicity, that is, to safeguard and promote distinct ethnic identity of the respective ethnic communities. Autonomy movements in Assam basically revolve around the notion of
ethnicity. The ethnicity or ethnic identity has been observed as central to the demand for autonomy in Assam. Every autonomy movements launched by different marginalized tribal communities in North-east India as well as in Assam have a socio-historical background of its own. The roots of every autonomy movements in Assam can be traced from the ethnic assertion and identity formation of the different ethnic communities. The genesis and growth of different autonomy movements have its base or background on the revitalization of ethnic identity, ethnic identity consciousness as well as ethnic identity assertion of the respective ethnic groups at different stages of development.

The Rabha autonomy movement also has a socio-historical background of its own. The origin and genesis of Rabha autonomy movement is very much closely linked to Rabha ethnicity, that is, to protect and preserve distinct Rabha ethnic identity. The roots of Rabha ethnic assertion as well as Rabha autonomy movement were found in the pre-independence period mainly in the beginning of the 20th Century. The ethnic identity assertion of the Rabhas is a pre-independence phenomenon. The ethnic identity consciousness among the Rabhas found expression during the protest against the process of religious transformation i.e. against the process of Sanskritization and Christianization among the Rabha community under the Southern Dudhnoi Rabha Samaj in Salpara, Chotmatia, Manikganj of Goalpara district in the beginning of 20th Century.41 During this period, Dwarikanath Rabha (1888-1983), Gobardhan Sarkar (1887-1982), Rajen Rongkho (1890-1974), Jagat Pam, Rajen Pam etc. were the pioneers or the pathfinders of Rabha Community who contributed to develop ethnic identity consciousness and in the assertion of ethnic identity among the Rabhas through modern education, social reforms and cultural revivalism42. They took active initiatives in order to upgrade their community which was backward in terms of education, economy and socio-political consciousness as well as to safeguard and assert their distinct identity which resulted in the formation of certain Rabha national level organizations like Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1915), Rabha Yubak Sangha (1941), Assam Rabha Sangha (1963) etc.43 Certain traditional social organizations such as- Mechpara Purbanchal, Madhyanchal etc.- the traditional Jammad system among the Rabhas, and the different sections among the Rabha community, which are called "Thal or Khel" of the community as well as the existence of different types of traditional administrative social
units such as the village or clan organization, the Jamad or branch organization and the
district, state or regional organization, contributed in the ethnic formation and assertion
among the Rabha community. It is worth mentioning that from the beginning of the 16th Century under the
regime of the Koch king Biswasingha, the process of religious transformation started
among the Rabhas and since then many Koche-Rabha people accepted Hinduism and
get religiously converted to Hinduism and also become Aryans from Non-Aryans. Since
the beginning of 16th Century, the Koche-Rabhas who adopted Hinduism, took up the
titles as Das, Barman, Rai, Singha, Deka, etc. and completely became Koch-Rajbanshis. During 1540-1587, under the regime of Malladev Maharaj Naranarayan,
Shukladhaj-Chilaray and also the influence of the Eksoron Bhagawati Baishnavism of
Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva, the process of religious transformation to nation
identity transformation among many Rabha people was found evidently. This process of
religious transformation to national identity transformation continues to the regime of
British rule. According to 'Tabalcat-E-Nasiri written by Minhaju-sa-Miraj', a large
number of the koche-Rabha people under the Koche-Rabha king who ruled in the huge
geographical land which ranges from Bharali in the East and Tista in the West, adopted
Hinduism and got religiously converted and changed their national identity. In the 17th
and 18th Century, the fear provoked by the attack of the Mughals and also the impact of
the religious restrictions of Hinduism, compelled many Koche-Rabha king and many
Rabha people to convert into Islam. In the 19th and 20th Century, under the influence of
the Christian Missionaries, many Rabha people got transformed into Christianity but
they did not transform their national identity. Thus, the process of religious
transformation and to transformation of national identity among the Rabhas continued
from the 16th Century to the beginning of the 20th Century. This process of religious
transformation among the Rabhas led to the acculturation and assimilation in the Aryan
culture and they completely lost their own distinct ethnic identity in the waves of time.

The Rabhas have a rich and colourful social life. The social life of the Rabha
tribe is basically governed by their age-old customary laws. The Rabhas strictly follow
the customary laws in the performance of their socio-religious activities and rituals. But
a trend of socio-cultural change was noticed among the Rabhas especially in 19th and
early 20th Century. The socio-cultural change among the different clans of the Rabha tribe during this period happened because of the process of assimilation and acculturation among the Rabha community under the influence of Sanskritization and Aryanization. It has been observed that this assimilation and acculturation process threatened the Rabha community to sustain their distinct ethnic identity.

It may be mentioned that under the influence of Sankardeva and Madhabdeva's "Ek Saran Nam Dharma", a large proportion of people from the Rabha community were Sanskritized and Aryanized through the process of religious transformation into Saraniyas and became Rajbanshis taking different titles such as Das, Deka, Thakuriya, Patgiri etc. in the Southern region of Kamrup and the Eastern region of Goalpara district. Gobardhan Sarkar, the pioneer of the Rabha community, deeply speculated on the ways and means to keep the Rabha society intact. He observed that the Rabha people abandoned their traditional animistic beliefs and became aryanized under the influence of Sanskritization. He thought for social emancipation of his community by revitalizing the social system. In view of this, he emphasized on agitational programmes through social organizations against this influential process of Sanskritization among the Rabha community. Immediately, in the month of February, 1916, the Rabha students of Rangjuli area of Goalpara district unitedly established 'Rabha Chatra Sanmilan' with Mihir Chandra Rabha as President and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary. The main objectives of this Rabha organization were (i) to promote educational interest among the Rabha community, (ii) reformation of social system and (iii) establishment of schools by awakening the Rabha masses in the viable areas. Keeping these in view, Gobardhan Sarkar started his pioneering efforts by bringing ethnic consciousness and solidarity among the Rabha masses. Gobardhan Sarkar further strengthened this organization by establishing 'Assam Rabha Chatra Sanmilan' in 1925 at Krishnai Santipur wherein Dwarikanath Rabha was nominated as President and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary and Kartik Chandra Rabha as Joint Secretary. On 15th January 1926, the first annual conference of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan' and 'Assam Rabha Chatra Sanmilan' was successfully organized under the aegis of Dwarhai Rabha Samaj and Presidentship of Dwarikanath Rabha and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan' which further enlightened the process of ethnic
consciousness and identity assertion among the Rabha people to move their demand for Rabha autonomy.

In the late 19th and early 20th Century marked a great awakening in socio-cultural development among the Rabha society. During this period, there emerged a number of personalities who sacrificed their lives for the development of the Rabha community. Gobardhan Sarkar, Khirod Mohan Rabha, Dwarikanath Rabha, Bishnuprasad Rabha, Kartik Rabha, Rajen Rabha Rongkho, Jogendra Nath Rabha were the pioneering social activists, social organizers and social reformers whose relentless efforts had far reaching impact in the awakening of distinct Rabha identity consciousness and Rabha ethnic assertion preparing for a Rabha nationalist movement to gain greater Rabha ethnic autonomy. In the early 20th Century, some educated and socio-culturally conscious Rabha youths came forward and got united to check and stop the process of religious transformation and also the process of the transfer of national identity among the Rabhas. These educated and socio-culturally conscious Rabha youths tried to create and bring ethnic identity consciousness among the Rabha people for the first time. With a view to revitalize their distinct ethnic identity, they got united and formed 'Asom Rabha Sanmillan' at Salpara Shantipur area of Krishnai under present Goalpara district in 1926 under the Presidentship of Dwarikanath Rabha and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary. During the pre-independence period, in the beginning of the 20th century, this section of educated and socio-culturally conscious Rabha youths represented the Rabha community and became the path finders of the Rabha community. The path finders of the Rabha community were Dwarikanath Rabha, Gobardhan Sarkar, Rajen Rongkho, Jahaj Rabha, Khirod Rabha, Bishnuprasad Rabha, Kartik Chandra Rabha. And among them Dwarikanath Rabha, Gobardhan Sarkar and Rajen Rongkho were prominent who were known as Trimurty among the Rabha society and they came to be known as the social reformers and socio-cultural activists of the Rabha society. Gobardhan Sarkar is recognized as the "Rabha Jatir Kandari" the pioneer of the Rabha community for his dedicated and commendable service to the Rabha community at large. Gobardhan Sarkar was the driving force and pioneering organizer in the formation of 'Rabha Chatra Sanmilan', 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan', 'Rabha Jatiyo Parishad (now Nikhil Rabha Jatiyo Parishad) etc. In the beginning of the 20th Century during the pre-independence period, these social reformers and socio-cultural activist tried to
create and enhance ethnic identity consciousness among the Rabha people organizing
different community awareness programmes at grass root level among the Rabha people
of different Rabha dominated villages in order to revitalize distinct ethno-cultural
identity and rich socio-cultural heritage of the Rabha tribe. For this purpose, they went
to the Rabha dominated villages and visited and met the chiefs and leaders of the Rabha
society and created awareness against the Aryans and the process of religious
transformation and the transformation of national identity among the so-called
uneducated and socio-culturally unconscious Rabha people. They held various
meetings and conferences in the different Rabha dominated villages with a view to
create community awareness and social cohesion and also make suggestions to stand
against the process of religious transformation and national identity transformation
among the Rabhas during the decades. They mobilized and organized the Rabha people
giving awareness about their distinct ethnic identity and rich socio-cultural heritage, in
order to counter the anti-national process of religious transformation and national
identity transformation basically produced by the forces of Sanskritization and
Christianization. Due to the relentless efforts and community awareness programmes of
the social reformers and socio-cultural activists of the Rabha community, the anti-
national process of religious transformation and national identity transformation became
flexible and stopped gradually during the 1950s. The Trimurty with the help of Jagat
Pam, Karendra Patgiri, Kartik Chandra Rabha, Haliram Bak, Pujaru Rabha of Dudhnoi
area, also took bold efforts and initiatives through dramatic and cultural programmes to
expand modern education among the uneducated and socially backward Rabha people
and for this purpose, they also established schools under the patronage of local boards in
the Rabha dominated villages in the pursuit of educational and socio-cultural
enhancement among the Rabha people. The first Rabha national organization 'Asom
Rabha Sanmilan' founded in 1926 which became 'Rabha National Council' in 1971 and
came to be known as the famous 'All Rabha National Council' in 1976 plays a vital role
in the ethnic identity consciousness, socio-cultural revitalization, reformation of socio-
cultural rites and rituals, promotion and development of ethnic language and literature,
socio-economic and educational advancement etc. among the Rabha tribe since its
inception.
In the pre-independence period in 1926, the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilan in Santipur (Krishnai of Goalpara district) under the leadership and patronage of Dwarikanath Rabha, Gobardhan Sarkar, the two great pathfinders of Rabha community, marked the significant beginning to assert Rabha ethnic identity. The Assam Rabha Sanmilan become All Assam Rabha Sangha in 1949, All Assam Rabha Sanmilan in 1965, Rabha National Council in 1971 and since 1976, it is functioning as All Rabha National council (ARNC) till today. This is the first ever father institution of the Rabha community and thus, the socio-historical background of the Rabha ethnic autonomy can be traced back to the pre-independence period as its root found expression in 1926 during the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilan. The ethnic unification of the several clans of Rabha ethnic group merged into a single entity under the umbrella of ARNC which paved the way to create national solidarity among the Rabhas and provided a common platform and played a significant role in the ethnic identity assertion of the Rabhas since its inception.

It may be noted that the Rabha autonomy movement has its root in the pre-independence period, during the period of the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilan in 1926. The Assam Rabha Sanmilan (ARS), which became All Rabha National Council (ARNC) in 1976, the first ever father institution of the Rabha ethnic community created ethnic solidarity among the Rabha people, unified all the groups and clans of the Rabhas into a single unified entity, which acts as a common platform among them in the assertion of Rabha ethnic identity at the initial phases, further contributes in the Rabha ethnic assertion for autonomy. The ARNC intended to include all the Rabhas in India and other neighbouring countries. The Rabha leaders by organizing themselves under the banner of ARNC took bold efforts to preserve their culture, language, customs, traditions, and identity; emphasized on education and socio-economic issues of the Rabha society, with the view to reform the Rabha society as well as the all round development of the Rabha people. In a bid to save their language, literature, culture and traditions as well as the rich socio-cultural heritage, the Rabha educated elites organized the All Rabha Cultural Conference (ARCC) in 1955, which is on the verge of extinction because of the social and cultural onslaught of the developed and flourishing culture of high caste, the dominant section of society and the absence of any protective
measures taken by the government to safeguard the original Rabha language, culture and traditions

As ethnic identity assertion is a historical process, the Rabha ethnic identity assertion has its historical background. The roots of Rabha ethnic identity assertion was found in the pre-independence period mainly in the beginning of the 20th Century. The ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas started during the pre-colonial period in Assam. At the earlier phase of Rabha ethnic identity assertion, the ethnic identity consciousness found expression during the protest against the initiatives when the upper caste Hindus, mainly the Brahmmins tried to turn the Rabhas into saraniyas or Rajbangshis in the name of untouchability through the process of saran-bhajan-the process of religious transformation. During this period, three pioneers of Rabha society contributed to develop ethnic identity consciousness and in the emergence of ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas through modern education, social reforms and cultural revivalism. The main three pioneers or pathfinders of Rabha community were—(1) Dwarikanath Rabha (1888-1983), (2) Gobardhan Sarkar (1887-1982) who was the founder and led the Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1915) Rabha Yubak Sangha (1941), Assam Rabha Sangha (1963) and in the subsequent phases he became the founder chairman of Rabha National Council and leded this Rabha national level organization with his pioneering personality. (3) Rajen Rongkho (1890-1974) who authored Rabha Grammar and other writings in order to develop and establish properly the Rabha language and literature. The Rabha Yubak Sangha formed in 1941 became ‘Rabha Jatiya Sewa Sangha’ in 1948 under the patronage of Khirodmohan Rabha, and emerged as a major Rabha national organization in the eve of Indian Independence, with the basic aim for the liberation of the marginalized Rabha tribe.

At the early phase of Rabha ethnic identity assertion, especially in the beginning of 20th century for the first time, identity consciousness and ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas emerged against the process of religious transformation under the Southern Dudhnoi Rabha Samaj in Salpara, Chotmatia and Manikganj. In a bid to conserve traditional Gotra-pratha among them, recover lingo-cultural identity and to develop, establish and expand the Rabha language, literature and culture some socially
conscious educated people came forward. Among them, Jagat Pam, Rajendra Rangkho, Jiberwar Pam, Prasanna Kr. Pam, Rajen Pam were prominent.

The pioneers or the path finders of the Rabhas known as Trimurty-Dwarikanth Rabha, Gobardhan Sarkar and Rajen Rongkho, tried to reform the Rabha society in order to upgrade the Rabha society giving priority on education, social reform and cultural revivalism and to create consciousness about lingual, ethno-cultural identity among the Rabhas which was backward in terms of education, economy, socio-political consciousness, ethno-cultural consciousness etc. The Trimurty-Rabha, Sarkar and Rongkho, took active initiatives for ethnic identity assertion among the Rabha which resulted in the formation of certain Rabha National level organizations like Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1915) Rabha Yubak Sangha (1941), Habraghat Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1945), Goalpara Garo Hills Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1956), Garo Hills District Rabha National Service Sangha (1948), etc. The 'Bardal' organization originated in Krishnai Salpara area to counter the process of religious transformation among the Rabha and by the Christian Missionaries in 1909, which became 'Rabha Sangathani Sabha' in 1955 and 'Dudhnoi Pachimanchal Rabha Sanmilan' in 1963 as a big integrated Rabha national organization. In 1957, under the patronage of Kalaguru Bishnuprasad Rabha, the 'Bikali Rabha Jatiya Panchadal' was extended and became 'Tudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj' in 1960 under the patronage of Gobardhan Sarkar and Kartik Rabha etc.

From the beginning of 19th Century, the small units of Luki-Bekeli Rabha Society, Boko-Bongaon Rabha society etc. and after independence, the united units of Mechpara Purbanchal, Madhyanchal etc. the traditional Jamad system along with the small units together came into being as Rabha National council i.e. from 1971, the Rabha National Council became established as an unique and common platform for the Rabhas to assert their distinct ethnic identity.

The ethnic identity formation and ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas has already been found to have taken place with the help of ethnic properties like cultural attributes, psychological traits and consciousness as well as 'we-feeling' shared by the members of different clans and groups of the Rabha community. The eight different clans namely Pati, Rangdni, Maitari, Kocha, Dahori, Bitolia, Totla and Hana...
occupied different habitations and by removing the linguistic differences and going through the complex process of adjustments, came in a single unit to establish their independent national level bigger organization. This process of adjustment has brought about a certain form of assimilation and amalgamation.\textsuperscript{67}

Certain traditional social organizations and institutions among the Rabhas have already helped in the process of ethnic identity formation, ethnic identity consciousness and ethnic assertion among the Rabhas and contributed to bring and enhance community solidarity and social cohesion among the Rabha tribe which paved the way for a nationalist movement of the Rabhas on the basis of the right to self-determination and autonomy. The Rabha social life is endowed with a variety of traditional social organizations and institutions. The essence of these organizations and institutions are to keep the social and customary heritage intact and to get cemented several different sections, which are called 'Thal or Khet' of the community under certain social norms. So far three different types of administrative social organizations in hierarchical order have been found in existence which are\textsuperscript{68} —

(i) The Village, Mandal or Clan organization.
(ii) The Jamad or Group or Branch organization
(iii) The District, State or Regional organization or Sanmilan.

The Village or Mandal or Clan organization is the lowest level of traditional community organization among the Rabha community. This can be said as a grassroots organization of the community which consists of a settled group of villages of the same clan or sometimes mixed clan.

The Jamad is the middle-layer organization which consists of a group of villages or Mandals and it is also known as branch organization uniting different clans of different Rabha inhabited villages. Besides village level or clan organizations in different Rabha inhabited areas, quite a large number of regional organizations are in existence\textsuperscript{69}. In Goalpara district alone ten such organizations have been established so far in the names of Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj, Mechpara Pachimanchal Rabha Samaj, Mechpara Madhyanchal Rabha Samaj, Pub Ajogar Rabha Samaj, etc. In Kamrup district, Luki-Bekeli Rabha Samaj, Boko-Bongaon Rabha Samaj etc. nine such organizations have
been in existence. A total of 44 (forty-four) such regional organizations are distributed in different Rabha inhabited parts of Assam, Meghalaya and North Bengal. It may be noted that the regional organizations are extensive in their area coverage and a number of branches are included in such regional organizations. As for instance, Dudhnoi Purbanchal Rabha Samaj has branches like Amjonga, Darrangiri, South Rangjuli, North Rangjuli, Madang, North Bikali, East Bikali, South Bikali and Pragati Rabha Samaj. Another important feature of these regional organizations is that under the parent organization there are women and youth wings. Apart from these, there are also student organizations at various levels, such as unit, district level and state level etc. The All Rabha Student's Union has emerged as one such state level or national level Rabha organization in this respect. Above all these organizations, a national level organization namely the Rabha National Council (RNC) has been in existence as the supreme social and administrative organization with an objective to ameliorate ethnic solidarity, social cohesion, social integrity and amity among the different levels of social organizations and institutions as well as the different clans or sub-groups of the Rabha community. The main aims and objectives of the father organization among the Rabha community are to (1) protect and maintain distinct ageold identity, unity and integrity, (2) preserve and safeguard Rabha language, literature, culture and art, (3) Uplift and improve the standard of living, (4) develop socio-economic condition and (6) remove the ageold superstitions prevailing among the Rabha community.

It may be noted that all these traditional community organizations attempted to bring community awareness and ethnic identity consciousness among the Rabhas and also developed ethnic solidarity, and cohesion which helped in the unification of all the different clans and sub-groups of the Rabha community and further which contributed in the assertion of, distinct Rabha identity and demand for autonomy.

Despite the community's setback due to 'Sanskritization and Christianization' of a section of people in the early and middle part of the 20th Century, it has been able to maintain their rich socio-cultural heritage traditions through the dynamic socio-cultural organizations of the Rabhas. The relentless efforts of the pioneering personalities and the socio-cultural and political organizations had far reaching impact on the Rabha
even the Rabhas remained backward economically, educationally and even politically hence, the emerging educated middle class Rabha elites wanted to organize the community for all round development. The Rabhas felt that they have been exploited and suppressed by the dominant Assamese society, particularly the high caste Hindus. Due to feeling of deprivation and to get their rightful place in the society, the Rabhas especially the middle class elite sections among the Rabhas became conscious about their own distinct identity and formed certain socio-political, cultural organizations and mobilized and organized the different sections of people of their community and led their socio-political movement known as Rabha Hasong movement to assert group eights or ethnic identity of the Rabhas. They gradually forwarded their movement to improve and establish their socio-cultural, economic and political status with a view to safeguard their ancestral soil and their own distinct ethnic identity.

The elite sections of the Rabhas seemed to have felt that their community faced some setback due to the process of Sanskritization and Christianization and also economic, educational and political backwardness as well as deprivation and discrimination by the high caste Assamese Hindu society. Having developed ethnic identity consciousness, the Rabha leaders started their Rabha ethnic identity assertion movement establishing different Rabha national socio-cultural and political organizations at different phases in order to uphold the aspirations of Rabha community and to recover the Rabhas.

In the pre-independence period, in 1915 though the formation of Rabha Chatra Sanmilan was the first step in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion, but in the pre-independence period in 1926, the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilan was the first significant effort in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion. In the pre-independence period in 1926, Assam Rabha Sanmilan was formed in Santipur of Goalpara district under the leadership and patronage of Dwarikanath Rabha and Gobardhan Sarkar the two great path finders of Rabha community who were the President and Secretary of the 1st conference of Assam Rabha Sanmilan. The Assam Rabha Sanmilan became All Assam
Rabha Sangha in 1949. All Assam Rabha Sanmilan in 1965, Rabha National Council in 1971 and since 1976, it is existing as All Rabha National Council (ARNC) till date. This was the first ever father institution of Rabha community through which the roots of Rabha ethnic identity assertion found expression in 1926. At present this organization has been functioning under total 44 regional councils in almost 13 different districts of Assam and also in North-Bengal and Meghalaya. The ARNC the first ever national level organization among the Rabhas render relentless efforts to assert distinct Rabha ethnic identity since its inception. The ARNC paved the way to create national solidarity among the Rabhas. The Rabha leaders by organizing themselves under the banner of ARNC took bold efforts to preserve their culture, language and identity and to reform the Rabha society. The ethnic unification of the several clans of Rabha ethnic group merged into a single entity under the umbrella of ARNC and thus it played a significant role in the process of identity formation and identity assertion among the Rabhas.

It has been observed that the Rabha autonomy movement has its roots as well as the socio-historical background in the pre-independence period with the formation of Rabha Chatra Sanmilan in 1915 and Assam Rabha Sanmilan founded in 1926. After the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilan in 1926 during the pre-independence period, the journey of the assertion of Rabha ethnic identity started with organizational strategies. `The Assam Rabha Sanmilan' which became 'All Rabha National Council' in 1976 got the status of the first ever national level organization of the Rabha community. The All Rabha National Council united all the traditional Rabha social organizations and institutions into its purview and gave a new and positive impetus in the identity assertion movement of the Rabha community. Rabha ethnic assertion under the integrated organizational banner got a positive dimension encompassing all the clans and sub-groups of the Rabha tribe which encourages the further development of Rabha ethnic assertion at different stages. The All Rabha National Council provides an unique platform and a solid base among the Rabha community and plays a positive and dynamic role to create ethnic solidarity and ethnic cohesion among the different clans and sub-groups of the Rabha tribe and becomes an umbrella organization of these different clans and sub-groups of the Rabha tribe as well as different traditional social organizations and institutions of the Rabha community. Under the
integrated organizational banner of All Rabha National Council, the Rabha ethnic assertion got momentum and achieved real growth and development and this development has led to the further growth and development of Rabha ethnic assertion in the demand for greater Rabha autonomy in the subsequent phases. The All Rabha National Council, the first ever national level organization of the Rabha, which is also known as the father institution of the Rabha community, is the end product of the 'All Assam Rabha Sanmilan' which was founded in 1926 during the pre-independence period. Dhaneswar Rabha, a Rabha national leader in his book 'Rabha-Hasongor Samu Itihas' has mentioned that during the days of the formation of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilan' the seeds of Rabha autonomy was poured and the demand for Rabha autonomy was further accelerated under the regime of different Rabha national level organizations established from time to time in the different stages of growth and development of Rabha ethnic assertion as well as the Rabha autonomy movement.

The foundation of Rabha literary body as a Rabha national level organization for the promotion of Rabha language and literature called Bebak Rabha Krowrang Runchum (BRKR) the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha in 1973 provided a unique platform among the Rabha writers and also brought a progressive environment of Rabha literature. The Rabha literary organization, the Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum (BRKR) i.e. the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha (ARSS) established on 8th April, 1973, contributed in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion and provided a solid base for their autonomy demand movement. The formation of Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum (BRKR) the all Rabha Sahitya Sabha was another significant effort in the ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas. The formation of ARSS on 8th April 1973 under the president Dukherwar Koch and secretary Baneswar Koch in its first conference at Ghagsa Kachiyabari provided a common literary and cultural platform for the Rabhas to safeguard and develop their language, literature and socio-cultural heritage. Since its inception, the ARSS has rendered relentless efforts to upgrade their mother language Rabha and provide it a Constitutional safeguard with a view to promote it as a medium of instruction. The All Rabha Sahitya Sabha organizes various camps and programmes for the Rabha educated youths as well as Rabha litterateurs to prepare Rabha text books and make plans, programmes and also launch agitations with a view to establish the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the schools of the Rabha dominated areas
of Assam since its inception. As a unique platform for the assertion of Rabha linguistic identity, the Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum provides a solid base to assert their distinct ethnic identity which also contributes to the enhancement of the further demand for Rabha autonomy among the Rabha community. Due to the relentless efforts and struggle of the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha, the Rabha language got recognized in 1988 and the Rabha language was introduced in the Rabha dominated primary schools of Assam. It has been observed that the Rabha language is being taught in the various Rabha dominated primary schools of Assam since 1988-1989 under the patronage of ARSS and necessary steps are also being taken in Meghalaya and West Bengal to teach the Rabha language as a subject in the Rabha dominated primary schools. The All Rabha Sahitya Sabha plays a significant role in the process of Rabha ethnic identity consciousness as well as assertion of distinct Rabha ethnic identity basically based on Rabha linguistic identity and creates community awareness about their distinct language and literature among the Rabha community and starts an intellectual movement for the promotion, development and expansion of Rabha language and literature. This intellectual movement launched by the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha contributed to enhance the sense of national identity among the educated Rabha youths and people and also accelerated their movement to demand for greater Rabha autonomy.

The Rabha leaders after the formation of ARSS came forward with the vital task of protecting their language shaping it into a written form. Their principal demand was to introduce Rabha language in schools in the Rabha dominated areas in place of Assamese and thus language became an instrument for the assertion of Rabha ethnic identity. They organized the Rabha people under the banner of ARSS and launched mass movements to fulfill their demands since 1979. Along with ARSS, the Rabha Bhasa Parishad of Dudhnoi also has rendered commendable service to the up-gradation of Rabha language and literature.

During the struggle for the language issue, the formation of ARSU on 12th February, 1980, encouraged the agitation of the Rabha people to achieve their objectives. Their claims for a long duration resulted in the introduction of Rabha language as a subject up to class iii in 70 primary schools in Goalpara, Dhubri and Bongaigaon districts in 1988. The state government assured to provide Rabha language
as a medium of instruction in the schools of Rabha dominated areas from 1991, but due to lack of implementation, it hasn’t come into force till today.\(^81\)

In 1973, the Rabha educated elites and the members of ARSS submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam Sarat Chandra Singha for recognition of the Rabha language\(^82\). Though the Assam Government during the regime of AGP in 1987 assured to introduce the Rabha language as a medium of instruction since 1991, but in practice, it has not been implemented yet. So, it appears that since 1973 onwards, the ARSS along with different Rabha national level organizations articulated the demands for the adoption of the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the Rabha dominated areas\(^83\). Thus, ARSS and other Rabha national organizations have provided relentless efforts to fulfill their aims and to safeguard their language, literature and culture in order to assert their distinct ethnic identity.

The Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum (BRKR) asserts that the great population of the Rabhas was left far behind in the sphere of education during the pre-independence period. Even after several decades of Independence, they are backward in the sphere of education due to the fact that their children cannot follow the Assamese language in Assam and the Bengali language in West Bengal at the very beginning of their studies in the primary schools. There is no denying the fact that the Rabhas, the Son of the soil and who are the indigenous tribal community of Assam since time immemorial have distinct ethnic identity, language and socio-cultural heritage. In the social set-up, the Rabhas have been metamorphosed and sophisticated under the pretext of socio-cultural assimilation, political integrity and religious harmony under the hegemonic and dominant forces of society. They have so long been frustrated racially, neglected economically, exploited socio-religiously, deprived materially and deceived intellectually and are still made prone to unjust treatment by others. The Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum firmly demands the Government to promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the Rabhas who are the most backward Scheduled Tribe of Assam and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation as per provision laid down in Article 46 of the Constitution of India\(^84\). The Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum asserts that after achievement of independence and enforcement of the Constitution of India, the Rabhas like the others felt the urgent need to educate their
children in their own mother-tongue, the Rabha language as the medium of instruction in the primary schools of the Rabha-concentrated areas of Assam. That is why, with a view to move the Government of Assam for this purpose, a Rabha delegation met the then Chief Minister as well as the Minister of Tribal Affairs in Shillong during the year 1961. A memorandum demanding introduction of the Rabha language as the medium of instruction in the primary schools of the Rabha inhabited areas of Assam was also submitted before the Dhevar Commission when it visited Kokrajhar in the same year. But this demand of the Rabhas has not yet been fulfilled. In view of the provisions laid down in the Article 350 (A) and 29 of the Constitution of India, they assert that the Rabhas also have the equal right to get adequate facilities from the Government for giving instruction to their children in their own mother tongue at the primary stage of education as well as to conserve their own distinct language and culture from generation to generation. With this view, the Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum submitted a memorandum to the then Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Sarat Chandra Singha on 10th July, 1973, with President Moni Rabha, Vice-President Sarat Chandra Rabha, General Secretary Baneswar Koch, and Joint Secretary Listi Rabha Rongkho, for introduction of the Rabha language as the medium of instruction at the primary stage of education in all the Rabha concentrated areas of Assam with immediate effect.

Assertion of linguistic identity of the Rabhas provided a new and strong spirit in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. On the basis of linguistic identity, the Rabha leaders try to assert their demand for autonomy and believes that without an autonomy arrangement for the Rabhas, they cannot preserve their distinct linguistic identity in the hegemonic forces of mainstream Assamese linguistic chauvinism and dominance. The Rabha leaders felt that the mainstream Assamese linguistic chauvinism and dominance has already submerged the various Rabha dialects used by the Rabha clans or sub-groups since time immemorial and hence, they started their autonomy demand movement based on linguistic and ethno-cultural identity basically against the cultural hegemony and dominance of the Assamese linguistic chauvinism. The Rabha autonomy movement emerges as a counter-productive of the cultural hegemony and dominance of the Assamese linguistic chauvinism.
Another Rabha national level organization the 'Rabha Bhasa Parishad' emerged with a view to provide a solid base among the Rabhas in order to protect and preserve their distinct Rabha language as well as to maintain their distinct linguistic identity. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad came forward with the vital task to promote and uplift the Rabha dialects and Rabha language. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad was formed in 1980 at Dudhnoi under the patronage of some well-known Rabha personalities such as Rajen Rabha, researcher of Rabha culture, Sangeet-Natak awardee Rajen Pam, Naren Rabha, Robin Pam, Sailen Rabha, Ex-MLA Hakim Rabha, Ex-MLA Sarat Rabha, Social worker Pujaru Rabha, Joshen Hato etc. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad came forward with the chief aim to give a grammatical form to the Rabha language and establish the Rabha language as a medium of instruction as well as a mass language in the Rabha dominated areas of Assam. With a view to upgrade and expand the Rabha language among the Rabha masses in the Rabha dominated areas of Assam, a 'Text-book Production and Publication Committee' of the Rabha language was formed under the leadership of Rajen Rabha which for the first time published a Rabha language grammar book and provided a dynamic platform to uplift and expand Rabha language and literature. Under its patronage and efforts, gradually the Rabha language became accepted among the different clans and sub-tribes of the Rabha tribe and hence contributes as an instrument in the assertion of distinct Rabha ethnic and linguistic identity. The voluntary Rabha organization called the Rabha Bhasa Parishad founded in 1980 also played a vital role in spreading Rabha language and literature and contributed in the upliftment of Rabha language and literature. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad as a Rabha national level organization, which emerged for the upliftment of the Rabha language, has introduced five levels of professional efficiency course e.g. Phamansini (Introductory), Chamansini (Primary), Majartini (Middle), Mytprisini (Prabodh) and Mungsangsini (Visharad) since 1981. The Rabha language is being taught in the primary schools in the Rabha dominated areas of Assam since 1988-89 under the patronage of Rabha Bhasa Parishad. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad located at Dudhnoi, has been rendering commendable service by imparting Rabha language education and conducting examinations since its inception. This organization has so far introduced Diploma Course in Rabha language since 1981. The 'Text Book Publication Board' and 'Rabha Adhyaan Chakra' located at Dudhnoi under the aegis of the Rabha Bhasa Parishad has
also the credit of publishing a numbers of books on Rabha language study, Rabha folk literature and also on other literary aspects of the Rabhas. The Rabha Bhasa Parishad as a Rabha national level organization is demanding to promote the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the schools of the Rabha dominated areas of Assam with a view to uplift the Rabha language and literature along with different Rabha national level organization since its inception. As a Rabha national level organization, the Rabha Bhasa Parishad has played a vital role in the assertion and promotion of Rabha linguistic identity and also has played a considerable positive role in the Rabha autonomy movement and also contributes in the further growth and development of the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas.

Another Rabha national organization, the All Rabha Cultural Conference (Sadau Rabha Kristi Sanmilan) contributed to create and deepen cultural consciousness and cultural mobilization among the Rabhas which fueled ethnic identity assertion as well as autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The formation of All Rabha cultural conference in 1955 under the founder president of Ganapati Pam and Secretary Naren Rabha Hakacham was also a significant effort in the ethnic identity assertion among the Rabhas. Niru Hazarika observes that even after decades of India independence, due to the absence of any protective measures taken by government the original Rabha language, culture and traditions are on the verge of extinction because of the social and cultural onslaught of the developed and flourishing culture of high caste or the dominant sections of the society. In a bid to save their language, literature and the rich socio-cultural heritage and traditions, the Rabha educated elites organized the All Rabha Cultural Conference in 1955.

In 1955-56, the popular Rabha artist Rajen Pam organized a Rabha cultural group gathering some lady dancers from villages of Chotmatia, Habonggiri and Manikganj and for the first time a Rabha cultural dance programme was performed at all India level in the 8th conference of Tharatiya Gananatya Sangha' held at New Delhi under the leadership and patronage of Rajen Pam and Sarat Chandra Rabha in 1957. In this way, the struggle to keep alive and preserve Rabha culture started under the patronage of the All Rabha Cultural Conference. The All Rabha Cultural Conference (Sadau Rabha Kristi Sanmilan) under the patronage of Rajen Pam, Ganapati Pam,
Prasanna Kumar Pam, Jogesh Rabha etc. made attempts to preserve Rabha folk song, Rabha folk dance and Rabha socio-cultural heritage\textsuperscript{94}. In 1957, for the first time, Rabha song was sung and broadcast in All India Radio, Guwahati under their effort and patronage. In 1957, for the first time, a Rabha drama was performed in Nadiyapara, written and directed by Prasanna Kumar Pam. The All Rabha Cultural Conference tried to create community awareness about their rich socio-cultural heritage among the Rabha people and also mobilized and organized all segments of the Rabha people for the preservation and maintenance of their rich socio-cultural heritage\textsuperscript{95}. For the bold efforts and initiatives of ARCC, various Rabha cultural groups came into being for the preservation, maintenance and performance of Rabha culture in different Rabha dominated villages. The All Rabha Cultural Conference also made efforts to preserve the Rabha songs and dances which are traditionally prevalent and performed in the different socio-religious rites, rituals and festivals of the Rabha tribe and tried to make them as performing art forms suitable to perform in cultural stages and programmes. For this effort, it was able to make 17 numbers of Rabha traditional musical dance and song programmes as performing art forms were performed in different cultural stages in Assam and abroad\textsuperscript{96}. In 1986, under the patronage of Ganapati Pam and Naren Rabha Hakacham, a book containing the guidelines of All Rabha Cultural Conference (Sadau Rabha Kristi Sanmilan) was published with a view to preserve, maintenance, sustenance and performance with organizational integration, of the traditionally sustained cultural elements and properties of the Rabha tribe since ages\textsuperscript{97}. This cultural preservative guideline of ARCC was passed and came into force in the 30th annual conference of ARCC held at Maladhara in Goalpara district, and which was applicable in the five layers conferences viz. state, district, anchalik, branch and primary conference under the patronage of the umbrella organization `Sadau Rabha Kristi Sanmilan (All Rabha Cultural Conference). The All Rabha Cultural Conference played a vital role in the socio-cultural mobilization among the Rabha tribe. This socio-cultural mobilization produced by the ARCC gave a new impetus for preservation and maintenance of cultural elements and properties of the Rabha tribe and also contributed in creating an environment of renaissance among the Rabha tribe. The socio-cultural mobilization produced by the ARCC, contributed in creating and deepening ethnic identity consciousness, ethnic solidarity, and socio-cultural revivalism among the Rabha
people which also further fueled the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The Rabha educated elites apparently felt that without a separate autonomy arrangement for the Rabhas, they will not be able to preserve and maintain their rich socio-cultural heritage in the Assamese high aste induced socio-cultural dominance and hegemony. On the basis of their distinct socio-cultural identity, assertion of ethnic identity as well as movement for autonomy was articulated by the Rabha ethnic elites through their socio-cultural organizations.

Another Rabha national organization, the All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) provided active role and great contribution in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion as well as in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The formation of All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) was another significant effort in the Rabha autonomy movement. The All Rabha Women Council emerged as the women wing of the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas and organized and mobilized all the Rabha women with a strong spirit and vigour to enhance the Rabha autonomy movement. Under this organization, the Rabha women got encouraged and participated freely and actively in the various programs of the Rabha autonomy movement with their male counterpart. The All Rabha Women Council has played a vital role with active co-operation with other Rabha national level organizations and contributes in the process of dynamic mass support in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The All Rabha Women Council is considered as the proactive women wing in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabha tribe. The All Rabha Women Council unites all the Rabha women in the different Rabha dominated districts of Assam and form regional committees with active support and association of the Rabha women and plays an active and strong role in providing active participation and association in all the programmes and strategies of the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The All Rabha Women Council was the biggest national organization of the Rabha women which played an active associated role in the Rabha autonomy movement known as famous Rabha Hasong movement since its inception. The All Rabha Women Council provides a helping hand to expand the Rabha autonomy movement at the grass root level of Rabha society. The All Rabha Women Council encourages and provides a strong solid base for the Rabha women to participate actively and raise their demands which also contribute in the enhancement for the demand of greater Rabha autonomy.
The All Rabha Women Council, the first ever Rabha women's organization was established on 8th August, 1993, under the founder President Sumitra Hato and Secretary Rangili Rabha, under the active patronage of All Rabha Student's Union (ARSU) in Boko High school. ARWC provided a common and active platform for all the Rabha women of Assam and abroad in order to organize and mobilize the Rabha women to play an active and efficient role and provide dynamicity to the Rabha ethnic identity assertion movement. Since its inception, ARWC has taken important initiatives to organize and unite all the Rabha women of all the Rabha dominated districts of Assam in socio-political and cultural front by establishing Anchalik or regional committees in different districts of Assam with the assistance of the organized Rabha women in order to create active participation among the Rabha women in all the plans and programmes of the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The ARWC has played significant role to empower the Rabha women from top to grass root level in the fields of education, socio-economic, cultural and political and it encouraged the Rabha women in their active participation in the various actions and programmes of the Rabha autonomy movement. Thus, the ARWC has played an active and associated role and cooperative effort with ARSU in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion and autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas.

In the month of December, 1988, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) organized a national convention at Jorhat town regarding the solution of the nagging problems of different tribes of Assam. In this national Convention, some Rabha leaders from Goalpara district such as: Rajen Pam, Dhaneswar Rabha, Sulochan Rabha, Maheswar Rabha, Bichitra Narayan Rabha, Manabendra Rabha, and Banikanta Rabha were invited to raise their voices about the problems of the Rabha community. But, it was unfortunate for them that they did not get any positive response to represent their voices about- their marginalized community in the convention. Being neglected, deprived and dissatisfied with the AASU leaders they returned from the convention with a negative result and on the way, they took rest at Kaziranga National Park and there under the Chairmanship of Rajen Pam, a meeting was organized to discuss about the existence and national liberation of the Rabha tribe. After this discussion, they realized the attitude of the non-tribals towards the tribals and apparently took the decision not to depend on the non-tribals for their issues and problems and argued that
depending upon the non-tribals, it would be impossible to protect and preserve their language, literature, rich socio-cultural heritage, socio-economic development, educational advancement etc for their own tribal community. As a result of this discussion, they realized and felt that without proper political power sharing, it would be impossible to preserve and maintain their distinct ethnic identity, rich socio-cultural heritage, their ancestral land, socio-economic development, political development, educational facilities etc. They realized and felt that in order to attain political power, it would be necessary to struggle for political autonomy for the Rabha community.

With this view, the All Goalpara District Rabha National Council organized a Rabha National Conference in Goalpara district on 11th February, 1989 and in this conference, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDC) was formed to raise their voice for greater Rabha autonomy, taking Sarat Chandra Rabha as President and Sulochan Rabha as General Secretary102. On 8th June, 1992, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee for the first time submitted a memorandum to the then Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia, demanding for formation of a Rabha Hasong Autonomous District. In this memorandum, RHDC proposed the demand to constitute a Rabha Hasong Autonomous District in the district of Goalpara covering Dhupdhara from East to Jairamkuchi, in the West103. RHDC, with the demand for Rabha Hasong Autonomous District, launched a mass movement with ARSU to assert their right to greater Rabha autonomy. After the formation of RHDC, the struggle for political autonomy for the Rabha community started with a new vigour. The struggle for political autonomy as well as to consolidate political power sharing within a separate political arrangement for the Rabha tribe started and got momentum, in real sense under the patronage of RHDC. Rabha Hasong Demand Committee was re-organized in the Rabha National Conference which was held covering Goalpara and South Kamrup, on 21st and 22nd July, 1992 at Krishnai Salpara of Goalpara district in order to unite all the Rabha people of Assam in their struggle for political autonomy. Thus, the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee became a full-fledged and strong Rabha national organization for Rabha autonomy demand, taking Sarat Chandra Rabha as President, Dhaneswar Rabha and Sabyashasi Rabha as Vice-Presidents and Sulochan Rabha as General Secretary and also included 65 active members both from the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup104. On 29th January, 1993, RHDC with the active cooperation of ARSU, ARNC, BRKR, ARCC, etc.
the other strong Rabha national organizations, submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam Hon'ble Hiteswar Saikia, demanding for constitution of ‘Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council' covering the Rabha dominated areas of both Goalpara and South Kamrup. But, the State Government under the Chief Ministership of Hiteswar Saikia did not give any response to their demand105. For this, on 15th August, 1993, RHDC, ARSU, ARWC, etc. the Rabha national level organizations start agitational programmes boycotting celebration of Independence Day and launch a massive movement to assert their right to political autonomy. In this massive movement, a series of agitational programmes taken such as: (1) 15th August, 1993, Independence Day boycott. (2) Publicity programme, 20th-29th August, 1993, (3) 4th September, 1993, 24 hours economic blockade, (4) 10th September to 25th September, 1993, public meeting, (5) 4th October, 1993, 12 hours Road bandh, (6) 11th October to 20th October, 1993, 2nd public meeting, (7) 5th November, 1993, 12 hours Rabha Hasong area bandh, (8) 24th November, 1993, protest movement at Guwahati Judge's field etc106. On 10th November, 1993, RHDC, ARSU etc. also submit a Memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, on the basic demands107 of:

(1) Rabha Hasong Autonomous State within the state of Assam covering Joyramkushi G.P. in Goalpara district to Dakhin Rani Mouza in Kamrup district. That is, creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous State in the area covering 3161 sq. Kms. Comprising total 862 numbers of revenue villages and forest villages, 63 numbers of Gaon Panchayats covering partly or fully of the present 8 Assembly Constituencies i.e. (1) West Guwahati, (2) Palasbari, (3) Chhaygaon, (4) Boko, (5) Dudhnoi, (6) East Goalpara, (7) West Goalpara and (8) Jaleswar, in the total population 6,09,135 which 5,57,358 Tribal population (91.5%) and in which 3,74,152 Rabha population (66.5%) forms the largest single majority among the total population.

(2) Rabha Hasong Autonomous District within the district of Darrang.

(3) Rabha Hasong Autonomous Regional Council within the district of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Nalbari and Sonitpur.
(4) Rabha Hasong Autonomous Village Council in the district of Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Dhemaji, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Karbi Anglong and Dimoria areas of Kamrup district.

(5) Reservation of 5 (five) seats for the Rabhas in the Bodoland Autonomous Council.

In this memorandum, ARSU, RHDC etc. demanded the inclusion of 285 revenue villages and 52 forest villages from Kamrup district and 525 revenue villages from Goalpara district (total-862 villages) into the proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. Apart from creation of four tiers of autonomy for the Rabhas, the Rabha Hasong Demand committee also demanded for creation of 12 new Assembly Constituencies in the proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous State as follows: (1) Rani, (2) Barduar, (3) Pantan, (4) Bogai (Bongaon), (5) Luki (Boko), (6) Bikali (Dhupdhara), (7) Thekasu (Dudhnoi), (8) Bodahapur, (9) Kalyanpur, (10) Bardamal (11) Baida and (12) Panisali (Jayramkushi). Over and above, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also demanded for creation of two Parliamentary Constituencies namely (1) Bogai (Boko-Bongaon), and (2) Thekasu (Dudhnoi). In this Memorandum, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also demanded all the powers and functions for their proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in the lines as enjoyed by the existing Karbi-Angleong Autonomous Council, Bodoland Autonomous Council etc. within the state of Assam, including Finance, General Administration and Police.\\n
The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee asserts that the Rabhas who constitute a major block of the greater Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group of North-East India have been living for centuries back in the large area of South Goalpara and South Kamrup. From this point of view the Rabhas have the birth right to claim this large area as Rabha Hasong, (Rabha Homeland). The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee, also trace the ancient historical background and glory of the ancient Rabha kingdom and the historic habitations and sustenance of the Rabha tribe in this large area and demands this large land as 'Rabha-Hasong', the ethnic homeland of the Rabha tribe. On the basis of their ‘Rabha-Hasong’ demand, it also portraits and prepares a guide-map to assert its demand for greater Rabha autonomy. The RHDC with the spontaneous support from various Rabha national level organizations viz. All Rabha Students Union, All Rabha National Council, All Rabha Kristi Sanmilan, All Rabha Women Council etc. demands for the
first time in the Rabha autonomy movement for the creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous State under the Article 244(A) and 275(A) and the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to protect and safeguard their distinct identity, language, socio-cultural heritage and to secure justice in the existing socio-political set-up. They also demand and seek to enjoy the Constitutional rights, equal status, opportunities and basic human rights and liberties just like the other advanced tribes of India. They also argue that the demand for creation of Autonomous State under Article 244(A) and 275(A) of the Indian Constitution is not a recent demand as it was raised by the various other ethnic groups and organizations through peaceful democratic mass movement time to time.

The RHDC in its Memorandum asserts that in the national movement for free India against the British rule, the Rabhas took active part, but, after independence of India, the Rabhas, as an indigenous tribe have been deprived from all civil and political rights. The Government is not at all interested in protecting the interest of the Rabha people. They adopt policies to minimize the Rabha population in various ways, they used to convert the Rabhas into Hinduism, secondly, they recruit people from outside for employment without giving the chances of employment to the indigenous Rabha people in different Government jobs and also they freely allow the influx of people from Bangladesh to in the Rabha population pockets. In this way, they minimize the Rabha population only to keep leadership in their hands. In this way, the Government has been exploiting the Rabhas socially, economically and even politically exhibiting a deep conspiracy to root out the Rabha people from Assam. The RHDC urgently felt that the Rabha identity is now at a crisis situation and without a separate political arrangement and a substantive form of political autonomy, the Rabha tribe could not protect and preserve its distinct identity, their traditionally habitated ancestral land, as well as to survive and sustain as a distinct tribal community in Assam. With this view, the RHDC demands a separate political arrangement or a greater political autonomy for the Rabha tribe in order to secure their identity.¹⁰⁹

The land problem, that is, alienation of tribal lands among the Rabhas is one of the burning problems of the Rabhas in Assam. Though the Assam Land and Land Revenue Regulation Act, 1889 under Chapter-X have provided for protection of tribal
land of the Rabha people in Assam, under the provisions of Tribal belts and blocks and Tribal sub-plan, but which proved to be meaningless due to the lack of implementation and lack of good will of the Governments. The tribal lands among the Rabhas have been alienated by the encroachment of illegal migrants, development activities etc. increasingly day by day. Hence, protection of tribal land among the Rabha tribe is an urgent need with a separate political arrangement with substantive political autonomy.

The RHDC in its memorandum also asserts that the priviledged and dominant high class and high caste rules of the state have been exploiting the Rabha people socially and economically through the policy of conversion from the traditional faith to Hinduism through the policy of assimilation, Assamesisation and silent aggression creating a sense of fear and apprehension of the total extermination of each social heritage of the Rabha people.

The RHDC in its memorandum also asserts that after several years of independence, the Government of India as well as of Assam have not taken due interest for development and progress of Rabha language and culture. The All Rabha Sahitya Sabha (Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum) launching various phases of mass movement since 1979 urging upon the Government of Assam to introduce the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the primary stage of education in the Rabha concentrated areas of Assam. It was in the year 1988 the AGP Government introduced Rabha language as a subject language only in 70 primary schools of the Rabha concentrated areas of Assam with commitment to introduce Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the primary stage of education to be followed soon. But, it is unfortunate that, the Governments in power from time to time have not implemented this longstanding demand. Hence, the RHDC also demands to introduce the Rabha language as a medium of instruction in the primary stage of education in the Rabha dominated areas of Assam with immediate effect in order to protect and promote Rabha language and literature. In its memorandum, the RHDC also demands for the protection and promotion and patronization of the indigenous highly rich Rabha culture, and also demand for protection and promotion of the rich traditional handloom textile designed by Rabha women weavers and also demands to establish All India Radio and T.V.
Station at Dudhnoi in the interest of promoting rich cultural heritage of the Rabhas and also to establish a Polytechnic Institute at Baida to motivate the young generation for the involvement in modern technology.\textsuperscript{111}

The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also submitted a humble memorandum to the then Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, in 1993 including the 5 point demands. It has been observed that the demand for territorial autonomy for the Rabha tribe started with the active initiative and patronage of RHDC with ARSU, ARWC, etc. since 1993.

It has been observed that the formation and role of ethno-based student's and youth organizations in the identity assertion as well as autonomy demand movements of the different ethnic groups in North-East India as well as in Assam is a remarkable important dimension and also a crucial, determinant and dynamic factor for the sustenance of the autonomy movements. The formation of ethno-based student and youth organizations for the protection and preservation of distinct ethno-cultural identity of the respective ethnic groups have been seen as a vibrant parameter for the growth of ethnic identity consciousness, ethnic assertion and rise and growth of ethno-nationalism amongst different ethnic sub-nationalities. This trend is very much visible in the North-East India as well as in Assam, which is a home of hundreds of ethnic communities. The ethno-based student's and youth organizations in this region have been observed for the very cause of protection and promotion of their respective cultural and ethnic identities. The ethno-cultural identity, socio-economic backwardness and assertion for political accommodation now have dominated the core of the issue of all the ethnic based student's and youth organizations in North-East India as well as in Assam. When we see all the autonomy movements in North-East India as well as in Assam, the ethnic based student's organizations have played the most active and significant role and becomes the front-runner of their respective autonomy movements. In the Rabha autonomy movement, the Rabha ethnic student's organizations also came forward and has played vital role in the Rabha autonomy movement since its inception. Formation of Rabha national level organization, the All Rabha Students Union (ARSU) on 12\textsuperscript{th} February, 1980 was the greatest and the biggest effort in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion as well as in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The All Rabha Students Union has emerged as the active Rabha ethnic based student's organization and provides
as a solid base for the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas giving a new hope and direction to the identity assertion as well as the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The movement for autonomy of the Rabha tribe starts in actual sense with the formation of the All Rabha Student's Union. When we observe the growth and genesis of Rabha ethnic assertion as well as the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas, the All Rabha Student's Union organized and mobilized the Rabha community to assert their right to autonomy in practical sense. ARSU was formed on 12th February, 1980 under the founder President Dr. Kanta Rabha and Secretary Sabyashasi Rabha in Boko, which provided the greatest contribution and played active and significant role in the ethnic identity assertion movement, the Rabha Hasong movement of the Rabhas.112

Certain earlier organizational efforts of some educated and socially conscious Rabha students and youths contributed a lot in the formation of All Rabha Students Union, the ethno-based student organization of the Rabha community which acted and played the major role as the main strong driving and mobilizing force of the Rabha autonomy movement. In the year 1971, in the month of October, a Rabha ethno-based student organization in the name of "Goalpara District and Garo Hills District Rabha Students Society" was formed in a meeting at Dermajakili High School with the following members as convenors-Bhupen Rabha, Bijoy Rabha, Pranoy and Rabha Ranjan Rabha.

In the year 1975, another Rabha ethno-based student organization namely "Greater Guwahati Rabha Student's Society" was formed with the following members as convenors as Pranoy Rabha, Lobo Rabha, Haren Rabha, Keshab Rabha and Kanto Rabha. The students of the Rabha community studied at Guwahati at that time. Subsequently, this Rabha ethno-based student's body was re-named as "Greater Guwahati Rabha Chatro Runchum" with Dr. Anil Rabha as President, Kanto Rabha as General Secretary and Pranoy Rabha and Sabita Patgiri as Joint Secretary. In the subsequent period, under the Presidentship of Listi Rabha Rongkho, the- "All India Rabha Student's Association" was formed on 12th February, 1979 at Goalpara College with a Convenor Committee was formed with the members- Pranoy Rabha, Sabyasachi Rabha, Haren Rabha, Amitabh Rabha, Chitra Rabha, and others. On its next meeting, a full-fledged Committee was formed with Kanto Rabha as President, Pranoy Rabha as Vice-President, Sabyasachi Rabha as the General Secretary. During the year 1980, in consultation with senior citizens and leading personalities of the Rabha community,
Inconvention held at Devitola, Dhubri, this ethno-based Rabha student's organization was finally re-organized and re-named as "All Rabha Student's Union" (ARSU) as a full-fledged Rabha Student's Organization in 1980 which further became the most active, strong and the leading organization among the Rabha community to accelerate the Rabha autonomy movement. The 1st Conference of ARSU was held at Boko in the year 1981 under the Presidentship of Dr. Kanto Rabha and 2nd Conference was held at Thomna under the Presidentship of Pranoy Rabha.¹¹³

In the pre-independence period, some educated Rabha youths came forward to safeguard and assert their distinct ethnic identity. The genesis of Rabha ethno-nationalism was started with the formation of the Assam Rabha Chatra Sanmilan in 1915 under the patronage of Gobardhan Sarkar, Dwarikanath Rabha and Kartik Chandra Rabha which gave birth to Assam Rabha Sanmilan in 1926 under the leadership of Gobardhan Sarkar, Dwarikanath Rabha, Kartik Rabha, Rajen Rongkho and Holiram Bak, etc. the path finders of Rabha community. In the subsequent period, certain Rabha student's and youth-based organizations were formed namely, 'Rabha Yubak Sangha' (1941), Habraghat Rabha Chatra Sanmilan (1945) and 'Garo Hills Rabha Chatra Sanmilan' (1956) etc.¹¹⁴ These organizations contributed to create community awareness and ethnic solidarity among the Rabha tribe and also accelerated the growth of Rabha ethnic nationalism among the Rabha community which paves the way to assert their demand for autonomy. These organizations were responsible for raising their voice against the deprivation and discrimination in the different walks of life and established a strong ground to assert for Rabha ethno-nationalism. They took proactive initiatives and efforts for socio-political awareness and socio-economic advancement of the Rabha community as well as to get a rightful place in the existing socio-political set-up. Initially, these ethno-based student organizations were not very strong and effective as they lacked modern educational facilities, proactive leadership and communication skill among themselves. However, these organizations helped in creating an ethnic consciousness among the Rabha people and which in course of time shaped the Rabha ethnic nationalism and which also accelerated in the growth of the demand for greater Rabha autonomy.
The emerging educated youths of the Rabha community could feel, even after several decades of independence that they have remained much more backward in terms of socio-economic, educational, even political power sharing than the other sections of Assamese society. They have faced the problems of land alienation, cultural alienation under Assamese high caste cultural hegemony, unemployment, socio-economic and political oppression under the existing polity. The feeling of deprivation and discrimination among the Rabhas produced a strong ground to unite themselves to assert their rights and aspirations. It appeared to them is that unless they are organized on a sound-footing nobody would care for their rights, aspirations and demands. They felt that without their strong organization, they would not be able to safeguard their own land, distinct ethnic identity from outside encroachment and dominance and also would not be able to fulfill their rights and demands. In view of this, the Rabha educated youths, especially those who were studying in Guwahati and Shilong started organizing the community with a new vigour and direction. Such developments led to the formation of All Rabha Students Union (ARSU) in 1980. Then, onwards, the ARSU has become the front-runner of the Rabha nationalist movement giving a positive and dynamic dimension to assert their right to greater Rabha autonomy.

The ARSU asserts that the Rabhas have faced exploitation, deprivation and discrimination from 'basic human and constitutional rights' and 'faster socio-economic development' in the current socio-political set-up. Their right over their land and forest have now been snatched away, due to growing illegal infiltration of people in their habitations. Moreover, other developmental activities and especially the illegal encroachment by illegal migrants and outsiders have induced large scale tribal land alienation uprooting the Rabhas from their ancestral land. These reasons have led the Rabhas to seek constitutional safeguard under the provision of the Constitution of India and demand autonomy in order to safeguard their ancestral soil, preserve their distinct socio-cultural heritage as well as to safeguard and maintain their distinct ethnic identity.

ARSU, in the later phase of the Rabha autonomy movement, formed the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDC) in 1989, All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) in 1993, and Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) in 2003 to enlarge and enhance their movement for Rabha autonomy and launched a mass movement to assert and
fulfil their autonomy demand. ARSU also started to provide support to the efforts of the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha (ARSS), the common literary forum of the Rabhas for constitutional safeguard and to promote their ethnic language 'the Rabha' as a medium of instruction in the schools of the Rabha dominated areas of Assam. The ARSS, under the active patronage of ARSU demanded the State Government to introduce the Rabha language in the schools of the Rabha dominated areas of Assam. Their movement resulted in the introduction of Rabha language as a subject up to class III standard in 70 primary schools in district of Goalpara, Dhubri and Bongaigaon in the year 1988-89. At present, ARSU with the association and cooperation of ARSS is demanding the State Government to appoint 300 Rabha language teachers in all the schools of Rabha dominated areas in Assam. The All Rabha Women Council, the first ever Rabha women's national level organization formed under the support of ARSU which provided an active unique platform for all the Rabha women of Assam to play a dynamic role in the autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas. The ARWC took initiatives to organize and mobilize all the Rabha women in the Rabha dominated districts of Assam and formed regional committees on socio-political and cultural fronts uniting the Rabha women to enhance the demand for Rabha autonomy. ARWC under the active patronage of ARSU encouraged all the Rabha women to participate in all the actions, programmes and strategies of the Rabha autonomy movement.

The formation of the All Rabha Student's Organization, the Rabha ethno-based student's organization was the politically significant phase of the Rabha ethnic assertion. A politically significant phase of the Rabha ethnic identity assertion as well as the Rabha autonomy movement started since 1980s after the formation of ARSU. The autonomy demand movement of the Rabhas started with a new face after the arrival of All Rabha Student's Union which provided a new direction with strong spirit and vigour and organized all the segments of the Rabha people and mobilized the Rabha people with the aim to demand greater Rabha autonomy. The "All Rabha Student's Union (ARSU) was formed on 12th February, 1980 at Goalpara town in the district of Goalpara in Assam as a socio-economic and cultural organization of the Rabha students of Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal and other parts of India, which is quite detached from any political party and never associated with politics, but born with the aims and objectives to work together by mutual co-operation to promote Rabha student welfare,
improvement of Rabha language, literature and culture and welfare of social, economic and cultural life of the Rabhas as a distinct community in India and to preserve their rich cultural heritage handed down from and generations since time immemorial as the Rabha social custom traditions are unique in the world being materialized in decadence, succession and inheritance¹¹⁹. As a Rabha national level organization, all Rabha concentrated areas is considered as its area of operation. The All Rabha Student's Union emerged as a strong and active student's and youth based organization among the Rabha community with its basic aims and objectives¹²⁰: (1) to form and strengthen unity, integrity and feeling of Rabha ethno-nationalism among the Rabha students and youths of Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal, (2) to accelerate all round development of the Rabha community in social, economic, cultural, educational, and political fields (3) to promote and bring progress in the educational environment among the Rabha students and youths, (4) to try to secure the Constitutional rights of the Rabha community in any circumstances and any situation and any time (5) to raise voice and launch movement in order to solve the longstanding problems faced by the Rabha community, (6) to bring social harmony and peace.

The ARSU asserts that the Rabhas are socially and economically exploited by the members of the advanced section of society. The Rabhas having distinct language, culture and traditions of their own, have been swept over by the people of the advanced section of Assamese society. In absence of any protective measures by the Government or any social organization of their own till very recent times, the original Rabha language, culture and traditions are in the last moment of extinction. It is only because of the social and cultural onslaught of the developed and flourishing culture of high castes in society. This is the question of social and cultural subjugation of a minority tribal community by the prosperous majority groups in society¹²¹.

The ARSU also asserts that the lands possessed by the Rabhas had been alienated and already been transferred to other non-Rabha communities due to lack of efficiency to preserve Rabha tribal land alienation due to encroachment of illegal migrants and outsiders, other developmental activities, erosion of tribal belts, blocks, tribal sub-planetc have left most of the Rabhas landless. The Rabhas have their own distinct language, literature and culture, an ancestral inheritance, but the distinct Rabha
language has not been given due consideration for recognition and introduction as medium of instruction even in the elementary schools. Assamese and Bengali language in Assam and West Bengal respectively were imposed upon the Rabha children against their willingness and for which, the Rabha students have been discouraged and frustrated too and have not been able to safeguard and maintain Rabha linguistic identity.

Though the Rabhas have their own language and culture, the Government have not encouraged the improvement of this language. Hence, it should be encouraged by recognizing and introducing and allotting a separate time table to relay news, songs or other programmes through the All India Radio stations at Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Siliguri which may be considered as a measure of protection of the Rabhas, as a linguistic and cultural minority people.

The ARSU also asserts that the Rabhas are politically exploited, suppressed and deprived as the Rabha people are scattered in different corners of North-east India. There is no representation from the Rabhas in the Parliament and the State Assemblies, particularly in Assam and West Bengal. This community is politically and socially suppressed. It is very unfortunate that even after several decades of independence, this most backward tribal group of more than four lakhs population remained without proper political representation. In this regard, this most backward Rabha community needs a special care and attention with a separate political arrangement with a maximum substantive political autonomy within the existing socio-political set-up for their proper political representation and all round development.

With these views, the All Rabha Students Union submitted a 10 Point Humble Memorandum to the then Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, on 31
August, 1982, under President Dr. Kantaram Rabha, Vice-President Pranoy Kumar Rabha, and General Secretary Shabya shachi Rabha, on the demands of:

(1) Rabha language should be recognized and introduced as a medium of instruction in appropriate educational institutions immediately.
(2) Facilities for broadcasting programmes for 45 (forty five) minutes in Rabha language in All India Radio (Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Siliguri station) should be provided as early as possible.

(3) The Rabhas living in Meghalaya, Karbi Anglong & N.C. Hills (Autonomous districts of Assam) and other parts of India those who are not yet recognized as Scheduled Tribes, and those who are identified as "Koches" (Koch Rabhas) should be recognized & enlisted as Scheduled Tribe immediately.

(4) Eviction operations upon tribal people living in different forests reserves and grazing fields should be stopped immediately and occupation of those tribal people should be regularized.

(5) The English language should be maintained along with Assamese in the Universities of Assam so long as the tribal people desires.

(6) Active steps should be taken to prepare a correct census figures for tribals by encouraging tribal enumerators for census work in tribal areas in general and the Rabhas identified or known as Koches (Koch Rabhas) in Assam, West Bengal and Meghalaya should be included in Rabha group of tribals in particular, reservations in all purposes for Scheduled Tribes of Assam or other states invariably be increased 10% to 25% with the fulfillment of back-log and enforced immediately.

(7) Creation of district and regional autonomy by reorganizing the present districts boundary and by carving out the tribal areas, specially the sub-plan areas in Assam plains and extension of provisions under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

(8) (a) The rate of special scholarship for Scheduled tribe students be distributed monthly in the following enhanced amount. (1) Middle School stage---Rs. 15.00, (2) High School stage---Rs. 25.00, (3) Post-matric stage---Rs. 100.00, (4) Post-graduate stage---Rs. 200.00.

(9) (a) Tribal students should get free education facilities without tuition fees in all educational institutions.
(9) (b) A high power commission directly responsible to the central cabinet with a power to take on the spot decision (even when punishment is to be awarded in case of lapses) should immediately be constituted with time bound tenure to:

(a) Ascertain the injustice done to the tribals and remedial thereof, and,
(b) Examine and recommend the above grievances of the Plain tribes,

(10) All foreign nationals of North-Eastern region should be detected and deported from North-Eastern region within the framework of the Constitution of India and the borders of the region must be sealed immediately.

Since its inception, ARSU has been raising voices at all spheres to safeguard the distinct ethnic identity of the Rabhas and also to assert their right and demand for greater Rabha autonomy. The Rabha autonomy movement, ARSU, in the subsequent phases, deliberately patronized the formation of different Rabha national-level organizations such as the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDC) in 1989 and All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) in 1993 to represent their voice for greater Rabha autonomy. In the subsequent phases, ARSU launched mass movements with the cooperation of RHDC and ARWC by demanding the creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) in the Southern bank of river Brahmaputra. Having been inspired by the politics of ethnic identity, politics of the Sixth Schedule and the doctrine of self-determination, ARSU launched a mass movement with the active cooperation of RHDC and ARWC for the protection and safeguard of their ancestral soil or ethnic homeland from the problem of land alienation and encroachment by illegal migrants and outsiders to safeguard and assert their distinct ethnic identity. The Rabha autonomy demand movement started with a new vigour with the formation of RHDC in 1989 under the banner of ARSU. They launched mass movements demanding greater Rabha autonomy in the Rabha Hasong area under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and to form Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council covering the area of the two districts of lower Assam- South Kamrup and Goalpara from Rani of South Kamrup to Jairamkuchi of Goalpara district including 3161 sq. Kms. land of Southern bank of river Brahmaputra and the northern foothill areas of Meghalaya. The geographic area indicated by ARSU for Rabha autonomy in the form of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, is
primarily covering parts of two districts of lower Assam- Kamrup and Goalpara, from Rani of South Kamrup to Jairamkuchi of Goalpara district, which covers an area of 3161 sq. Kms. Due to the active and relentless effort and demand movement of ARSU, RHDC, ARWC, the Rabha accord was signed between the Government of Assam, the then Chief minister of Congress led Government Hiteswar Saikia, the Chief Secretary A. Bhattacharya and the members of ARSU, President Gangaraj Rabha and Secretary Ratan Rabha of ARSU, President Sarat Chandra Rabha, Secretary Sulochan Rabha of RHDC\textsuperscript{127}. Thus, their Rabha autonomy demand movement got a positive response from the side of the Government of Assam and accordingly the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 was passed in the Assam legislative assembly that resulted in the formation of Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council on 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 1995. The signing of Rabha Accord in 1995 between the Government of Assam and ARSU, RHDC, resulted in passing of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 1995 in the Assam Legislative Assembly which led to the formation of the first ever Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council on 10\textsuperscript{th} March, 1995\textsuperscript{128}. Thus, the Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council of 1995 under the Rabha Accord of 1995 is considered as the prime achievement of ARSU and has become the referring point for further movements demanding greater Rabha autonomy.

2.6 CONCLUSION

It has been observed that Rabha autonomy movement started with certain community organizations for the efforts of certain educated Rabha youths on the basis of awakening ethnic identity consciousness among the Rabha community during the pre-independence period. From the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century, Rabha autonomy movement started with a view to bring ethnic identity consciousness which enhanced ethnic cohesion and ethnic solidarity and community awareness and contributed to sustain the movement to grow further under the patronage of different Rabha national level organizations established from time to time. Though Rabha autonomy movement started with a little effort with Rabha ethnic assertion in the early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century, but in actual sense, the Rabha autonomy movement started actively and strongly with their demand for autonomy since the 1980s, the last part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} Century. If we analyze the background of Rabha autonomy movement, we can trace its
origin and growth from the pre-independence period, the early 20th Century) through the different stages of development to the achievement of Rabha autonomy as Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, 1995 on the basis of the Rabha Accord, 1995. The autonomy movement of the Rabhas, famous as Rabha Hasong movement, started strongly after 1980s with the active initiatives of the leading Rabha national level organizations such as: ARSU, RHDC, RHSP, ARWC, SSDC etc. As a result of the Rabha autonomy movement, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) came into being in 1995 according to the Rabha Accord, 10th March, 1995. The RHAC was the result of Rabha ethnic identity consciousness and Rabha ethnic assertion as well as Rabha autonomy movement. The long struggle of the Rabhas for the demand of Rabha autonomy since pre-independence had led the Government of Assam to pass the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act in Assam Legislative Assembly which received the assent of the Governor of Assam in 5th July, 1995. Consequently, the Memorandum of Settlement came into force through the Rabha Accord on 10th March, 1995 that resulted in the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC), 1995.
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