CHAPTER-IV
RABHA ETHNIC ASSERTION FOR TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY: IMPLICATIONS AND CONTENTIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

India, as a multicultural liberal democracy has adopted the idea of granting autonomy to the ethnic and tribal communities as relevant mechanism in order to deal with growing ethnic uprising and to accommodate linguistic and cultural diversity as well as to protect and maintain collective ethnic minority rights. The Indian polity has initiated the idea of granting autonomy to the different marginalized indigenous tribal communities of North-East India in order to safeguard and maintain their distinct ethnocultural identity. Indian polity has adopted the Constitutional politico-administrative mechanism of Sixth Schedule as a policy and a relevant device for tribal autonomy and granted territorial autonomy to certain major ethnic and tribal communities specifically in the tribal-dominated North-Eastern region. The root of this ethno-territoriality principle can be traced to the colonial ethno-cartographic principle which is driven by the colonial strategic imperatives that had fixed particular ethnic identities with definite territories\(^1\). Thus, ethno-territorial autonomy in North-East India can be seen as a colonial legacy of ethno-cartographic policy fixing a particular geographic and territorial entity for a particular ethnic group which occupies predominantly a majority population in that territory. It can be noted that the ethno-territorial design is the product of indignity factor and territorial linked to ethnicity in North-East India.

4.2 THE POLITICO-ADMINISTRATIVE DEVICE OF SIXTH SCHEDULE OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA: ISSUES IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

North-East India, the homeland of more than 200 different tribal groups, has some special problems of its own. Article 244(2) of the constitution of India provides for a Sixth Schedule, which is a unique administrative device for bringing socio-economic development along with the protection of their indigenous socio-cultural heritage of the tribes of North-East India only because it was assumed that these tribes have some special problems of their own. To tackle the problems of this unique area and safeguard the democratic traditions and cultural diversity of its people, the framers of the Constitution conceived the instrument of tribal self-rule. This stands embodied in
the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, This Schedule was drafted by a Sub-Committee on North-East Frontier (Assam Tribal and Excluded Areas) of the Constituent Assembly headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Premier of Assam. The effort was to accommodate the collective aspirations of tribal communities within the broader framework of a democratic political system characterised by centralised powers, in a situation characterised by a mix of apprehension, confusion and hope in the days immediately preceding the adoption of the Indian Constitution. The 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution is termed a contrivance embedded with the idea of decentralization from the existing state structure with certain autonomy provisions. The aim of this constitutional provision was to see that the ethnic aspirations of this part of the region are met and to integrate the region into the mainstream. The Sixth Schedule which fuels to evolve and sustain the ethnic autonomy movements is a comprehensive innovation of the Constitution of India and is one of the important features of administration in North-East India, which aims to preserve the democratic tradition and cultural diversity of the region and deals with the unique problems of the tribes of North-east India by Constitutionally mandating a special kind of autonomous governance structure and these autonomous structures of governance are entrusted with the twin task of protecting tribal tradition, culture and customs and at the same time, undertaking development plans for them. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is instrumental in setting up of Autonomous Regional /District Councils in the four states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. These provisions have been made in exercise of the enabling provisions given in Article 244(2) and 275(1) of the Constitution. As stated in Article 244(2), the tribal areas as specified by this Article in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura are to be administered as per the provisions of the Sixth Schedule only.

The Sixth Schedule is described as 'Constitution, within a Constitution', and the study and understanding of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution is highlighted in the unit. Tribal areas generally mean areas with a preponderance of tribal population. However, as specified in the Constitution of India, tribal areas within the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram are the areas specified in paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule.
The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is based on the recommendations of the North-East Frontiers (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee, 1947 popularly known as Bordoloi Sub-Committee under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi the then Chief Minister of Assam. When the Indian Constitution was adopted after independence in 1947, the Constitution makers recognized the necessity of a separate political and administrative structure for the hill tribal areas of the erstwhile province of Assam by creating Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee (a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly) studied carefully the then existing administrative set up in the hill areas of North East India with a view to setting up of an autonomous body for the administration of the hill areas and thus recommended the setting up of an administrative body based on the concept of regional autonomy in all matters relating to customs, laws of inheritance, administration of justice, land, forests etc. Thus, the report of the Bordoloi sub-committee which had been accepted by the Drafting Committee was approved by the Constituent Assembly of India. The recommendation of the sub-committee was incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. As a result, Autonomous District Councils which were based on the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India were established in the states of North East India. The idea behind the creation of Autonomous District Council was to provide the tribal people of North East India with a simple administrative set up which can safeguard their customs and ways of lives and provide autonomy in the management of their affairs.

The Sixth Schedule contains detailed provisions for 'Autonomous District Council' and 'Regional Council' in districts dominated by the tribal people providing territorial autonomy to the areas under its jurisdiction. These councils under the Sixth Schedule enjoy legislative and executive powers on various vital areas. Under the provision of Sixth Schedule, the Government of India has been forming autonomous councils since 1952 in the form of 'Autonomous District Council' and 'Regional Council' as constitutional device to deal with ethnic problems. As a result of this initiative, a number of autonomous councils have been formed in different states of India which is shown in the following table:-
Table 4.1: Territorial Autonomous Councils in India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomous Council</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year of Constitution</th>
<th>Ethnic Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Cachar Hill District</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Dimasa, Kuki, Hmar &amp; Zemei tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaintia Hill District</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Pnar, Jaintia &amp; Khasi tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasi Hill District</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Khasi tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong Autonomous District</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Karbi tribes &amp; SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo Hill District</td>
<td>Meghalaya</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Garo, Rabha &amp; Hajong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District</td>
<td>Tripura</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>ST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakma Autonomous District Council</td>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Chakma tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lai Autonomous District Council</td>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Lai tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mara Autonomous Council</td>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Mara tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Nepalis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous Hill District Council, Leh</td>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>ST- Ladakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomous Hill District Council, Kargil</td>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>ST- Purigba, Balti &amp; Brokpa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodoland Territorial Council</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Bodo, Rabha, Garo, Hajong tribes &amp; SC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sarmah, 2014.

Above the Autonomous Councils, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Autonomous Council under the state of West Bengal and the Leh Autonomous Hill District Council and the Kargil Autonomous Hill District Council under the state of Kashmir does not fall under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It is worth mentioning that the Darjeeling Gorkha Autonomous Hill Council was formed in 1988 in the state of West Bengal, Leh Autonomous Hill District Council was formed in 1995 and Kargil Autonomous Hill District Council was formed in 2003 in Kashmir, which are ethno-territorial in nature but does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and lastly, Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (Bodoland Territorial Council-BTC) was formed under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003.11
Besides these, in North-East India, the Government of Assam has formed a few statutory autonomous councils to address the aspirations of some smaller tribal communities of the state which do not fulfil the criteria of Sixth and Fifth Schedules. Such autonomous councils like the Mising Autonomous Council, Tiwa Autonomous Council and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council were formed in 1995 and the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council and Deuri Autonomous Council were formed in 2005\(^2\). Such ethnic-based statutory autonomous councils have been shown in the following table:

Table 4.2: Statutory Ethnic-based Autonomous Councils in Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomous Council</th>
<th>Year of Composition</th>
<th>Dominant Ethnic Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mising Autonomous Council</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Mising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiwa Autonomous Council</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Tiwa-Lalung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Rabha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Sonowal Kachari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Thengal Kachari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deori Autonomous Council</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Deori</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sarmah, 2014

4.3 POLITICS OF SIXTH SCHEDULE AND TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY FROM HILLS TO PLAINS

Though the Constitutional provision of Sixth Schedule was granted mainly to the hill tribes in North-East India, but the politico-administrative device of Sixth Schedule fuelled and inspired the political movements for more autonomy under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India among the different marginalized plain tribal communities in North-East India as well as in Assam. Among them, the Bodos of Greater Indo-Mongoloid origin was the first and prominent. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India were formulated basically to retain tribal customs, traditions and traditional administrative norms in the hills of North-East India. With the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Areas District (BTAD) exclusively for the Bodo ethnic group which is a major plain tribe belong to Greater Indo-Mongoloid stock and its
inclusion within the Sixth Schedule of Constitution of India (which is essentially a plains tribal area) in 2003, the provision of Sixth Schedule comes down from hills to plains.

4.4 Rabha Ethnic Assertion for Territorial Autonomy in Assam: Demand for Sixth Schedule Status Under the Constitution of India

Inspired by the Bodo territorial autonomy under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 2003 and the formation of BTAD, which became a rallying point as well as a reference movement for these small plain tribal groups and subsequently in later phase, these smaller plain tribal groups demanded territorial autonomy and launched massive movements in order to seek territorial autonomy for these ethnic minorities and inclusion of their autonomous councils into the Constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, which has resulted in a series of ethnic mobilization and counter-mobilization among the groups in these multicultural social setting. The constant assertion of these ethnic communities for territorial autonomy has also generated inter-ethnic tensions, mistrust, and inter-ethnic rivalry among the contending ethnic groups in this group overlapping and ethnically mixed plain areas. Moreover, the various smaller tribal groups like the Misings, the Rabhas, the Tiwas, Sonowal-Kacharis, Deuris, etc. also launched massive movements and violence inspired by the autonomous arrangement for the major plain tribal groups in Assam under Indian Constitutional law, demanding autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for their respective communities. This development also creates discontents among the tribal and non-tribal groups and generates conflict and violence in these areas which has made the autonomy discourse a contested one in Assam.

The Rabhas is one of the small plain tribal community in Assam which also launched their movement for territorial autonomy and inclusion of their RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India basically inspired by the Bodo autonomy movement and their achievement to bring and include the BTC under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

It has been observed that the Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy started with the formation of All Rabha Student's Union in 1980. The All Rabha
Student's Union for the first time, in its memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira. Gandhi, on 31st August, 1982, demanded for district and regional autonomy for the Rabha community under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The All Rabha Students Union in its memorandum submitted in 1982 put forward its demand for the creation of district and regional autonomy for the Rabha community by reorganizing the present districts boundary and by curving 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. But, in practical sense, the ARSU did not specify the definite territorial boundary for the proposed Rabha Hasong district and regional autonomous council. This demand for territorial autonomy for the Rabha tribe under the provision of Sixth Schedule was also extended by the Rabha Hasong Demand Committee formed in 1992 under the patronage of All Rabha Students Union. It has been observed that ARSU, RHDC, ARNC, ARWC etc. The leading Rabha organizations submits memorandum to the Government of Assam as well as Government of India from time to time demanding territorial autonomy for the Rabhas under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

In the subsequent phase of Rabha autonomy movement, the All Rabha Student's Union organized a 'Rabha National Convention' on 7th & 8th June, 2003 at Dudhnoi College and in this Conference, the Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) was formed under the active patronage of All Rabha Student's Union, taking Gaurisankar Rabha as President and Biren Totla as General Secretary. The movement for Rabha territorial autonomy started actively and strongly in actual sense, with the formation of SSDC. With the formation of Sixth Schedule Demand Committee, the movement for territorial autonomy of the Rabha community under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution achieved new vigour and direction and took a new face to raise their voice and represent their right and demand for greater political autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The ARSU, with SSDC, started different agitational programmes and organizational strategies and launched a massive movement actively and strongly to gain Rabha territorial autonomy. The Rabha autonomy movement for demanding territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India started under the active dynamic leadership.
and patronage of ARSU, ARWC and SSDC since 2003 with the famous motto "No Sixth Schedule No Rest". Hence, "No Sixth Schedule No Rest" became the motto or slogan of the Rabha autonomy movement, which continues till today under the banner of these leading Rabha organizations.

On 3rd September, 2003, a joint convention assembling all the struggling ethnic organizations of Rabha, Tiwa and Mising Community at Pandit Tirthanath Sarma Hall, Guwahati, was held to raise their Sixth Schedule demand jointly and in this conference, the 'Sixth Schedule Joint Movement Forum'(Sastha Anusushi Joutha Sangram Samiti) was formed to assert their demand in a joint and cooperative effort. Under the banner of this forum, they took up a series of agitational programmes jointly such as 17:-

(1) Declaring Assam Bandh on 23rd September, 2003.
(2) A huge public meeting of Rabha, Mising and Tiwa people on 20th November, 2003, etc.

Afterwards, the SSDC, with ARSU and ARWC mobilized and organized the Rabha people and launched a democratic movement to extend their movement for territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and started its agitational programmes with different organizational strategies with its own effort since its inception, such as 18:-

(1) Protest movement and submitted Memorandum on 26th September, 2003,
(2) Submit Memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam through the Deputy Commissioner of all the districts and adopted strike on 29th September, 2003,
(3) A cycle rally from Joyramkushi of Goalpara district to Rani of Kamrup district on 1st October, 2003,
(4) A huge public meeting at Dudhnoi public field on 22nd October, 2003.
(5) Submitted Memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam through the Deputy Commissioner of all the districts and adopted strike on 7th December, 2003,
(6) A bike rally from Joyramkushi of Goalpara district to Rani of Kamrup district on 10th December, 2003,
(7) Jor Samadal in each Anchalik office on 25th December, 2003.
The SSDC with ARSU and ARWC in this way, started agitational programmes with different organizational strategies with the active support and participation of all the sections of the Rabha people. They launched a massive democratic movement and demanded to include the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

ARSU, ARWC and SSDC submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, in 2003, with the basic demands of:

(1) Inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India with the territorial boundary right from Joyramkushi G.P.(39 Jaleswar Assembly Constituency) of the Goalpara district to Rani Mouza (West Guwahati Assembly Constituency) of Kamrup district.

(2) To constitute four districts in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area with their Head Quarter of Rani, Bekeli (Boko), Thekasu (Dudhnoi) and Baida.

(3) To constitute 2 (two) new Parliamentary and 10 (ten) MLA constituencies in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area and implement clause no 332(2) for the Parliamentary and Legislative Assembly Constituency within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

(4) To create the Rabha Autonomous District Council in Darrang District and Regional Council within the district of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Nalbari, in the BTAD area and Village Council in the District of Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Dhemaji, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Karbi-Anglong and Dimoria area of Kamrup district.

(5) Nomination of a member in Assam Public Service Commission from the Rabha community with special provision.

(6) All the tribal belts and blocks, Tribal Sub-plans, ITDP and every historical area must be included into the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

In this memorandum, the SSDC demanded the State Government to include total 1023 villages including revenue villages and forest villages within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.
As a result of the constant demand for Sixth Schedule, of the Rabha, Tiwa and Mising organizations, the Government of Assam constituted a Ministerial Sub-Committee under Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes & Backward Classes, orders by the Governor Notification No. TAD/BC/198/97/Pr-1126-A, on 18th December, 2003, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, Minister of Health, Family Welfare and Higher Education, and Debananda Konwar, Minister of Law, Anjan Duna, Minister of Transport, Dr. Nazrul Islam, Minister of Food and Civil Supplies, Pranay Rabha, Minister of State INPT&BC, as members and Bharat Chandra Narah, Minister of WPT & BC as Convenor, and agreed to recommend the proposal for inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and also holding the election of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council within the year 2005.

In the wake of the constant struggle for the demand of Rabha Territorial Autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi announced on the floor of the Dudhnoi College playground on 12th January, 2004 and on 13th October, 2007 at Guwahati to grant the Sixth Schedule autonomy to the Rabhas. Presently, as many as 779 revenue villages with a total population of Six(6) lakhs (approx.) has been notified by the Hon'ble Governor of Assam as under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

The Ministerial Sub-Committee headed by the Health Minister, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, on the basis of the amended parts (Section 6-1, 2, 3, 4, 24 Clause amended in 1996) and again on the basis of the RHAC Amendment Act, 2001, includes 473 revenue villages having 50 percent more tribal population along with including the tribal belts/blocks/tribal sub-plan along with 306 revenue villages which was included according to the RHAC Amendment Act, 1995. In this way, on the recommendations of the Ministerial Sub-Committee headed by the Health Minister, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, the RHAC Act was further amended on 17th May, 2005, and this Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment Act) 2005, includes total 779 revenue villages in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and also extends the General Council's constituencies of RHAC from 26 to 36 and also increases the number of members from 30 to 40. According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment Act),
2005, in the amendment of Section 6 of the RHAC Act, the number of members of the General Council is expanded from 30 to 40 and it is substituted namely that "The General Council shall consist of 40 (forty) members of which 36 (thirty six) shall be directly elected and 4 (four) shall be nominated by the Government with the concurrence of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council from amongst the groups of communities residing in the Council Area and not otherwise represented in the General Council. Out of the 40 (forty) seats, 25 (twenty five) seats shall be reserved for Scheduled Tribes Community and 6 (six) seats shall be reserved for women of any community". In the amendment of Section 13 of the RHAC Act, it is inserted namely "provided that no allotment or settlement of land shall be made in the Council area without the recommendation of the Executive Council". In the amendment of Section 63 of the RHAC Act, it is inserted namely that "The General Council may prepare in each financial year a supplementary estimate providing for any modification of its budget for the year and may submit to the Government for approval". Receiving the assent of the Governor, an extraordinary Gazette "The Assam Gazette, Extraordinary" was published on May, 17, 2005 on the basis of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2005. According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2001 and 2005, total 779 revenue villages was included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, which was earlier only 306 revenue villages included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council according to the RHAC Act, 1995\(^\text{23}\). Afterwards, the Government of Assam recommended Electoral Roll under respective authority for the conduction of RHAC election in the council area but the council election could not be held and the constituted interim council on the basis of the Rabha Accord was also dismissed since 2010 and it went under the control of the administration of the Commissioner of Lower Assam Division since 2011.

In 2003, in the meantime, the Central Government of India, in response to the violent movement of the Bodos, the BTC Act, was implemented and the BTC was included into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India under the Amendment Act of Sixth Schedule of 2003 of the Constitution of India. This political development of the Bodo community, i.e. the formation and inclusion of BTAD into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, inspired the Rabhas and they also launched a massive movement strongly and started agitational programmes declaring 24 hour 'Assam bandh'
on 23\textsuperscript{rd} September, 2003, under the active leadership of ARSU, ARWC, and SSDC, demanding for inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. In the wake of this mass movement of the Rabha community, a Ministerial Sub-Committee was formed under the Chairmanship of former Health Minister Dr. Bhumidhar Barman and WPT & BC Minister Bharat Chandra Narah as Member Convenor in order to monitor the Rabha autonomy demand as well as to consider the inclusion of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which recommended to include 779 revenue villages into the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and it also submitted an interim report in this matter on 18\textsuperscript{th} December, 2003\textsuperscript{24}.

The Ministerial Sub-Committee headed by the Health Minister, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, in its interim report, reported that "The Government of Assam has already agreed on principle that the three Autonomous Councils-the Mising Autonomous Council, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, and the Tiwa Autonomous Council should be included into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India". It also reported that "in case of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, there is no necessity of creation of Satellite areas as the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council will remain restricted to only Southern part of Goalpara and Kamrup district, therefore it submitted its interim report for certain urgent steps to be taken up for establishment of democratically elected councils accelerating development works and to protect the interest of the tribal communities". On the basis of the recommendations of the interim report submitted by the Ministerial Sub-Committee of 2003 headed by the Health Minister, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, inclusion of 779 revenue villages into the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with a population of six(6) lakhs (approx.) has been Gazette notified by the Hon'ble Governor of Assam\textsuperscript{25}. Inspite of these recommendations, Tarun Gogoi led Assam Government did not take any positive step to include the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as well as to hold elections of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

In 2006, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi led Assam Government included 5 executive members from the Bodo, Garo and Hajong community and also other 5 general members in to the 3rd interim Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council which was
constituted on 14\textsuperscript{th} June, 2001, under the leadership of Dr. Sarat Chandra Rabha as Chief Executive Member. But, the State Government did not take any positive attitude neither to hold council elections of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council nor to strengthen the council\textsuperscript{26}.

The leaders of ARSU and SSDC felt and asserted that the State Government showed interest neither to take any positive step to include the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India nor to hold election of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council to make it a democratic institution for the protection and preservation of distinct Rabha ethnic identity as well as accelerating all round development of the Rabha community. Rather it involved in a deep conspiracy against the movement of the Rabhas and pursued a divide and rule policy and intended to divide and motivate the other non-Rabha and Non-tribal groups of people to mobilize and organize against the movement for territorial autonomy of the Rabha community and to minimize the Rabha autonomy movement for Sixth Schedule demand, which resulted in the formation of certain non-tribal and non-Rabha organizations such as Non-Rabha Coordination Forum, Non-tribal Security Forum, Garo National Council etc. in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area\textsuperscript{27}. The non-Rabha people in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, under the banner and patronage of these organizations launched counter movement against the autonomy movement of the Rabhas which resulted massive violence and conflict situations between the Rabha and non-Rabhas in the Rabha Autonomous Council area. It has been observed that the Assam Government did not take any positive step to solve the longstanding problems of the Rabha community, but motivated the counter mobilization against the Rabha ethnic mobilization for territorial autonomy and also tried to minimize the autonomy demand of the Rabha community.

With these views, the SSDC with ARSU and ARWC started various agitational programmes and launched mass movement to achieve their Sixth Schedule autonomy. In 2007, ARSU, ARWC and SSDC submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Sri Tarun Gogoi, on the basic demands of\textsuperscript{28}.
(1) Send the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Government of India and include the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

(2) The exemption of Panchayat election from the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area according to Clause No. 5 of the Memorandum of Settlement (the Rabha Accord) on 10th March, 1995 and immediate holding of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election.

(3) Implementation of the Rabha Accord of 1995 by signing between All Rabha Student's Union, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee and the Government of Assam after due amendment.

(4) Implement the decision taken by the Chief Minister of Assam on 13th October, 2007 in presence of All Rabha Students Union, All Rabha Women Council, Sixth Schedule Demand Committee and All Rabha National Council to complete all necessary steps for recommending the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Government of India within 60 (sixty) days and conduction of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election within 31st March, 2008.

On 18th December, 2004, the Rabha, Tiwa and Mising organizations jointly in a cooperative effort launched a mass strike under the banner of "Sixth Schedule Demand Joint Movement Forum" at Dispur Last Gate, Guwahati, in order to assert their Sixth Schedule Demand. They asserted that the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is the adequate mechanism to establish their legitimate right to autonomy and hence, they pressurized the Government to fulfil their Sixth Schedule autonomy demand with mass support.

The leaders of ARSU, ARWC and SSDC asserts that Rabha autonomy under the constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, is a democratic right of the Rabha tribe to protect and preserve their distinct ethnic identity, development of Rabha language, literature and rich socio-cultural heritage, socio-economic development, and to achieve political rights for their all round development within the existing socio-political set-up. Hence, they mobilized and organized the Rabha masses to fulfil their long-cherished demand of territorial autonomy under the constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. They also
asserts that instead of fulfilling their rights and demands, the Assam State Government has imposed the Panchayat election in 2001 and again 2008 in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area which violates the provisions of the Rabha Accord and also minimizes the strength of the demand of Rabha territorial autonomy. On 2nd August, 2007, they launched a protest movement against the initiatives of the State Government to hold Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area violating the provisions of the Rabha Accord, and submitted a demand memorandum in this regard.

On 7th December, 2010, the Government of Assam formed another Cabinet Sub-Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, the then Revenue Minister, recommended the proposal for inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and to hold council election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. But, the Assam Government did not take any positive action to implement this recommendation.

In reaction, the ARSU, ARWC and SSDC submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, in 2010, on the basic demands of 30:-

1. Send the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Government of India and include the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India with immediate effect.
2. The exemption of Panchayat election from the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area according to Clause No. 5 of the Memorandum of Settlement (the Rabha Accord) on 10th March, 1995 and immediate holding of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election.
3. To hold Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election with immediate effect, including 779 revenue villages as per implementing the provisions of the Rabha Accord, and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment Act) of 2001 and 2005.
4. To appoint 300 Rabha language teachers in the different primary schools of the Rabha concentrated areas of Assam, with immediate effect.

Since 2003, the SSDC with ARSU and ARWC jointly and with a cooperative effort have launched massive democratic movement with agitational programmes from
time to time pressurizing the State Government demanding the inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The SSDC with ARSU and ARWC since 2003 to 2010 constantly launched a massive democratic movement with a series of agitational programmes - Assam bandh on 23rd September, 2003, 36 hour Rabha Hasong area bandh on 17th and 18th December, 2010, 48 hour economic blockade on 27th-30th December, 2010, etc. to fulfil their longstanding demands.

4.5 RABHA ETHNIC ASSERTION FOR TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY: IMPLICATIONS AND CONTENTIONS

During the mass movement for the demand of Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, ARSU, ARWC, SSDC and other leading Rabha organizations submitted memorandum to the State Government demanding inclusion of the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule. They also demanded to make RHAC a democratic and dynamic institution for socio-economic development of Rabha community, which also include demand for exemption of Panchayat election from the RHAC area as per the Clause No.5 of Memorandum of settlement (Rabha Accord) of 10th March, 1995. Their basic demands also include holding of the council election, along with inclusion of RHAC within the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The demand for Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC created discontent among the non-Rabha communities. The non-Rabha communities living in RHAC area, under the organizational banner of Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum (NRCF) and Garo National Council (GNC) expressed their concern over the security of land rights and other democratic rights. They launched a counter-movement demanding exclusion of non-Rabha population dominated villages from the jurisdiction of the RHAC area. They also demanded to hold Panchayat election in the non-Rabha dominated revenue villages in Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts for the proper functioning of grass-root democracy.

These developments created a series of mobilization and counter-mobilization between the Rabha and the non-Rabha communities which has generated inter-ethnic tensions, mistrust and clashes in the RHAC area. Inter-ethnic tension and conflict manifested itself for the first time in 2008 when the state government took initiative to
conduct Panchayat elections in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup (R) in which most of the village Panchayats fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC area. The Rabha leaders protested it and reacted against the state Government’s action of violating the Clause No. 5 of the Rabha Accord, 1995. As a result of massive violence and conflict, the State Government compelled to postpone the Panchayat polls in the RHAC area. Again, the Government’s initiative to hold Panchayat elections in February, 2013, re-generated conflict and violence, resulting in injury, death and displacement of both Rabhas and non-Rabhas in the RHAC area.

There was no opposition to Rabha movement from the non-Rabha communities before the formation of the RHAC. Perhaps, the Rabha Hasong autonomy movement did not pose any major hindrance to the political rights and interests of the non-Rabha communities before the formation of the RHAC. It was only after the formation of the RHAC that tensions generated among the Rabhas and non-Rabhas on different contentious political issues. Therefore, the genesis of their inter-ethnic rivalry may be traced back to 2001 over the issue of the RHAC Amendment Act, 2001. This amendment brought changes in the section 4 of the Act, which laid down provisions for the formation of Village Council for each block of villages in Tribal Belts/Blocks/Tribal Sub-Plan Areas irrespective of population pattern therein and other villages, each having 50 percent or more tribal population (RHAC Amendment Act, 2001)\(^{33}\). It implies that the Village Council is to be formed comprising the Rabha tribal and non-Rabha tribal dominated villages falling under the Tribal Belts/Blocks/ Tribal Sub-Plan areas where the presence of non-tribal population is noticeable in number. However, the non-Rabhas could not accept these provisions of Section 4 of the Act and considered this Section as a ‘defective law’ (Memorandum of NRCF, 2013)\(^ {34}\). They also believed that this Section would curtail their democratic rights. This indicates that the rights and interests of non-Rabha communities are not secured in the RHAC area.

The Rabha organizations had been protesting against the holding of Panchayat election in the villages within the RHAC since 28th September, 2001\(^ {35}\). They demanded deferment of Panchayat election in the RHAC area as the election was not applicable in RHAC as per Clause 5 of the Rabha Accord, 1995. Mobilization of the Rabhas against
the holding of Panchayat election created a sense of deprivation among the non-Rabha communities in enjoyment of their democratic rights within the RHAC area.

Meanwhile, since 2003, the SSDC had started mass movement demanding inclusion of the RHAC under the provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This development led to further apprehension among the non-Rabhas living in the RHAC area as a result of which they constituted the Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum (NRCF) in 4th July, 2004. Just after its formation, the NRCF started a counter movement with certain objectives. Its objectives include demand for holding of Panchayat election in the villages of RHAC dominated by the non-Rabhas, to exclude the non-Rabha inhabited villages from RHAC, to oppose the demand for inclusion of the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule etc. These objectives clearly indicate that the NRCF countered various political demands of the Rabha organizations.

Counter mobilization by the non-Rabhas intensified when the RHAC Amendment Act, 2005 notified 779 revenue villages of Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts as villages under the RHAC. Looking at this development, NRCF submitted a memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam on 10th December, 2013, demanding exclusion of non-Scheduled Tribe dominated villages from the RHAC which can be shown in the following table-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of District</th>
<th>Number of Villages included into RHAC</th>
<th>Number of Villages Claimed for Exclusion having more than 50 percent Non-ST Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamrup (Rural)</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Memorandum of Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum (NRCF), 10th December, 2013

Besides, NRCF also demanded repeal of Section 6 of the RHAC (Amendment Act), 2005. To them, this section would prevent them from getting any right and title over the land within the RHAC area since it provides for certain specific powers to the Council in terms of allotment and settlement of land. This implies that the land rights of
the non-Rabhas are not secure within the council area, creating a sense of deprivation in their own land\textsuperscript{37}.

The NRCF also expressed their concern that as per provisions laid down in Section 2 and 3 of the Amendment Act, 2005; the system of compact area (including core and contiguous villages) has been initiated denying the satellite system of Autonomy, in violation with the specific provisions laid down in both Rabha Accord and RHAC Act, 1995. Moreover, by inserting Section-4 of RHAC (Amendment) Act, 2005, the word ‘Rabha’ is being substituted by ‘Scheduled Tribes’ in Goalpara and Kamrup districts\textsuperscript{38}.

At the same time, the Ministerial Sub-Committee headed by the then Health Minister of Assam, Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, included 473 revenue villages having 50 percent or more tribal population along with the tribal belts/blacks in the RHAC. This was basically done on the basis of the amended parts (Section 6-1, 2, 3, 4, 24 Clause amended in 1996) and the RHAC Amendment Act, 2001 and 2005. Therefore, it has been observed that after the enactment of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Acts, 2001 and 2005, a total 779 revenue villages were included in the RHAC. The inclusion of these revenue villages implies the constitution of a purely territorial RHAC with core and contiguous areas having more than 50 percent of ST population. Interestingly, along with this development, the Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) launched a mass movement to include the RHAC with these 779 compact villages into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Distribution of seats in General Council of RHAC is inadequate in terms of accommodating the political aspirations of a large section of existing non-Rabha communities as their political representation is not proportional to the size of their population. It has been observed that out of 30 seats for General Council of RHAC, 15 for the Rabhas and 4 for the non-Rabhas are reserved through reservation system. Distribution of seats in the Village Councils is also inadequate because it does not mention about the reservation of seats for other non-Rabhas except for women. In the Rabha Hasong Village Council, 5 unreserved seats out of 10 may not be sufficient to represent the political aspirations of a considerable number of non-Rabha communities.
An observation of the demographic profile of the RHAC area, clarifies that it is an ethnically mixed area and home of different communities. The Population Census Report, 2001 shows that the percentage of Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in the RHAC is 59.49 percent including the Rabhas, Bodo-kacharies, Garos and Hajongs. It has been observed the ST population in the RHAC comprises more than one lakh Garo population. This considerable size of Garo population has already been opposing and countering the Rabha territorial autonomy. They have already mobilized under the banner of Garo National Council (GNC) and demanded a separate Garo Autonomous Council carving out more than 45 Garo dominated villages from the RHAC area. Hence, Garo population, which is an integral part of the RHAC, have opposed the Rabha territorial autonomy and demanding separate Autonomous Council for them. On the other hand, the Rabhas have opposed the formation of Garo Autonomous Council within the RHAC area. This indicates the inherent contentions interrogating viability of the Rabha territorial autonomy. This development has also made the Rabha territorial autonomy a contested one.

It has been seen that at present, total 779 revenue villages have been included with the system of compact area by including core and contiguous villages having more than 50 percent ST population into the RHAC. It has been observed that the inclusion and existence of 779 revenue villages with the system of compact area with core and contiguous villages implies that RHAC at present is territorial in nature due to the existence of a compact territory composed by 779 revenue villages. The RHJMC is launching a mass movement to include the RHAC with these 779 compact villages into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This territorial project of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council by the Rabha leaders seems to be more contested in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas. This Rabha Hasong territorial project creates discontent among the non-Rabhas as well as the non-tribals in terms of inclusion of their villages in to the RHAC which curtails their land rights and democratic rights etc. in the RHAC area.

It has been observed that Rabha Hasong autonomy movement has different issues and implications. When we observe the implications of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, it reveals that the Rabha autonomy movement witnessed a series
of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas around different issues of concern. Inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts among the Rabhas and non-Rabhas occurred from 2001 around the issue of Section 4 of the RHAC Act, 1995. The RHAC Amendment Act, 2001 inserted provisions in Section 4 to form the Rabha Hasong Village Council with villages having 50 percent or more tribal population falling in Tribal Belt/Block/Sub-Plan areas. This change led to insecurity among certain sections of non-tribal people living in Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam. Moreover, mobilization of the Rabhas against Panchayat election in the RHAC area and for the Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC reinforced the apprehension of the non-tribals within RHAC area. This resulted in mobilization of a section of Assamese speaking people, Bengali Speaking Muslims and Garos under the banner of the Non-Rabha Coordination Forum (NRCF) in 2004. Meanwhile, again amendment of the RHAC Act, 1995 in 2005 also brought about some changes in the structure of the RHAC. Allotment of land settlement power to Section 6 of the RHAC Act, 1995 was one of the changes in the structure of the RHAC that led to further insecurity among the leaders of the NRCF. They realized that this Section would prevent the non-tribal and the non-Rabhas from getting any rights and title over their land within the council area. Therefore, the NRCF led a movement for repeal of Sections 4 and 6 of the RHAC Act, holding of Panchayat election in the Council area, exclusion of 223 non-tribal and Garo villages from the council area, resistance against the demand for the Sixth Schedule status of the RHAC etc. Such mobilization and counter-mobilization of the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas triggered inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts among them basically from 2004 onwards.

4.6 RABHA AUTONOMY MOVEMENT: THE NEW DYNAMICS OF CONTENTIONS

In the analysis of the genesis and development of the Rabha autonomy movement, an attempt has been made to analyze the Rabha autonomy movement into two significant phases one is from 1980s to the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Councils under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 under a State Act, and the other is from 1995 to 2012. The failure of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the RHAC Act, 1995, compelled the Rabhas to launch a progressive movement which continued through a series of popular mass
movements with the establishment of different Rabha national level organizations such as Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) in 2003 which came to the forefront in the intensified rigorous autonomy movement of the Rabhas and also certain conflict and violent situations occurred between the Rabha and the non-Rabhas regarding the debated and controversial issue of holding council election and Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area in 2007 and again in 2012 which reflected the significant implications of the Rabha autonomy movement.

It may be noted that the RHAC was set up neither under the Fifth nor the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, no territory was demarcated, no villages to be included therein were specified and no financial and legislative powers were granted\textsuperscript{46}. As soon as the movement of the ARSU, ARWC, and SSDC gained momentum in 2003, the Congress led State Government appointed a Ministerial Sub-Committee on 18th December, 2003 to study the viability of granting the Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC\textsuperscript{47}. As per the recommendations of the Sub-Committee, the State Government amended the RHAC Act, 1995 in 2005 resulting in the inclusion of 473 revenue villages with the earlier 306 revenue villages which were included by the AGP Government in 1998 in the Council area\textsuperscript{48} granted land allotment and settlement power to the Council, increased the total seats of the Council from 30 to 40, reserved 25 out of 40 seats for the Rabhas and increased the total seats of the Executive Council of the RHAC from 6 to 12\textsuperscript{49}.

Since 2012, the Rabha autonomy movement took a new direction and got a new trend. On 17\textsuperscript{th} July, 2012, in the midst of the summer session of the Assam Legislative Assembly, the leading Rabha organizations such as ARSU, ARWC and SSDC etc. launched a series of mass movements and staged a dharna programme at Dispur Lastgate on 17\textsuperscript{th} July, 2012 demanding inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and holding and conducting of council election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with immediate effect\textsuperscript{50}. During this time, the conflict situations in BTAD got momentum and it was reported that the same conflict situation may occur in the Rabha Hasong also in the line of BTAD. The violent situations in BTAD gave a setback and threatening among the different communities residing in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area.
Afterwards, the Rabha leading organizations like ARSU, ARWC and SSDC called for an important meeting. In this meeting the All Rabha Sahitya Sabha, All Rabha Cultural Conference joined with these three leading organizations but the All Rabha National Council under the leadership of Ex-MLA Pranay Rabha did not join in this important meeting. ARSU, ARWC, SSDC, BRKR and ARKS jointly organizes a Round Table conferences regarding the issues on the future paradigm of Rabha autonomy and also the peaceful co-existence of different communities in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area. These Rabha national leading organizations organized two Round Table conferences on 31st August and 23rd September, 2012 at Janamandir Auditorium of Dudhnoi and after a consultative deliberation with the representatives of the 34 organizations of 18 ethnic groups of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, the Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) was formed on 18th November, 2012, taking the President of ARSU, Tankeswar Rabha and Secretary of ARSU, Ramensingh Rabha as Chief Convenors. The RHJMC emerged as an umbrella organization including 34 ethnic organizations of total 18 ethnic groups of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area which intensified the Rabha autonomy movement in a peaceful and democratic way with joint spirit. On 13th December, 2012, the 7 member delegates of the RHJMC submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi, Minister Rajiblochan Pegu, Minister Prithivi Manjhi, Minister Nilomonisen Deka, and Minister Chandan Brahma demanding inclusion of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and also holding of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election with immediate effect.

The Rabha leaders urgently felt the need of active cooperation and coordination of the different ethnic communities inhabiting in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, in the successful sustenance and achievement of the desired goal of the Rabha autonomy movement. They realized that without active cooperation and coordination of the different communities other than the Rabhas residing in the RHAC area with the Rabhas since the ages, the Rabha autonomy cannot be a peaceful and democratic one, and also realized to secure the rights and dignity of the other ethnic communities in the Rabha autonomy. With this view, the Rabha leaders formed the Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) jointly with the active cooperation and coordination of the other ethnic communities in the RHAC area and
positively this development makes the RHJMC as a unique umbrella organization encompassing 32 different bodies of 19 different ethnic communities inhabiting the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area which contributed to intensify the Rabha autonomy movement in a democratic way.

In the meantime, unfortunately, the Government of Assam on 17th December, 2013, announced the dates of holding Panchayat elections in Goalpara district including the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area in, four phases from 27th January, 2015. After the announcement and declaration of the Panchayat polls, the Government of Assam started the process of holding and conducting the Panchayat elections on 12th February, 2013 in the first phase in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas. As a result, the Rabha leaders stood against the State Governments step to hold and conduct Panchayat elections and reject it. The Rabha leaders under the banner of RHJMC launched a massive protest movement against the State's Government's step to hold and conduct Panchayat elections in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas and demand immediate exemption of the Panchayat election from the Rabha Hasong Autonomous council area. But, in spite of the constant protest movement of the Rabha leaders, the state Government did not provide any response to the protest and demand of the Rabha leaders under the organizational banner of RHJMC. As the State Government did not provide any positive response to the democratic protest movement of the Rabha masses, they became more violent in their attitude and action. The Rabha masses plan to stop the state Government's process to hold and conduct the Panchayat polls in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area at any rate and tried to burn the Panchayat polling stations established in different schools at different places in the RHAC area to hold and conduct the Panchayat elections. In this violent movement, thousands of Rabha people including youths, men and women spontaneously came forward and joined and burned many Panchayat polling stations at different places at night in the entire RHAC area and as soon as, to control the violent situations, the state Government's police force jumped in the field and attacked and shot the Rabha people and as a result, at least 20 Rabha people including men and women reported dead and almost 96 persons were reported injured in this violent movement. The district administration proclaims Curfew to maintain law and order situation in the entire Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area. This unfortunate violent movement as well as the conflict between the
Rabhas and the non-Rabhas regarding the holding of Panchayat elections in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area compelled the state Government to stop the holding and conducting of Panchayat elections in the entire Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area\textsuperscript{56}.

The Rabha leaders under the organizational banner of RHJMC constantly organized and mobilized the Rabha masses and launched a protest movement demanding the exemption of Panchayat elections from the jurisdiction of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area and demanded to holding and conduction of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election A with immediate effect. As a result of the massive protest movement of the Rabha people, the State Government was compelled to hold and conduct the long-awaited council elections to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. The State Government declared the holding and conduction of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council elections in three phases in the 36 Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Constituencies including different Rabha dominated areas of both Goalpara and Kamrup district and announced the dates on 13\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th} and 25\textsuperscript{th} November, 2013, respectively\textsuperscript{57}. Thus, it has been observed that the Rabha autonomy movement led by the leading Rabha organizations with its few demands became successful to some extent and the Congress led State Government conducted the long-awaited election to the Council for the first time on 13\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th}, and 26\textsuperscript{th} November, 2013 in response to the demands of the Rabha organizations\textsuperscript{58}. The Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC), the ethnic umbrella organization contested in all the 36 council constituencies and among the 36 Council constituencies, the candidates of RHJMC was able to win from 29 Council constituencies and ultimately, the Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee got absolute majority in the long-awaited Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election in 2013 which was held for the first time after 17 years since the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the RHAC Act, 1995 under a State Act\textsuperscript{59}. After long 17 years, the RHAC became a democratically elected ethnic council which was earlier a council formed by nominated members till 2007. At last, the RHJMC, getting the absolute majority constituted the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and took charges to function smoothly and democratically for socio-economic acceleration of all the ethnic communities inhabiting in the RHAC area along with the Rabhas. The Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) took
the charges, powers and functions of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, the ethnic parliament in the Rabha Hasong area, under the leadership of Mr. Tankeswar Rabha as its Chief Executive Member.\textsuperscript{60}

It has been observed that the formation of democratically elected body of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council for the first time in 2013 is a remarkable achievement in the development of the Rabha autonomy movement. After a long and constant struggle for more than 17 years, the Rabha elites became successful to constitute a democratically and procedurally developed en ethnic council in the Rabha Hasong area. The present democratically elected body of RHAC was constituted under a State Act, which does not fall under the constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Like the Rabhas, the formation of democratically elected autonomous councils in Assam for the Mising tribe, Tiwa tribe, Sonowal Kacharis, Deoris, etc. have been constituted under a State Act, hence, it can be regarded that the present Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council is a an extra-Constitutional body. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council is considered as an Extra-Constitutional ethnic council unlike the BTAD, because this type of ethnic autonomous arrangement has not been mentioned and invented yet in the Indian Constitutional law.

However, the formation of democratically elected body of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council for the first time in 2013 gave a positive development and direction in the Rabha autonomy movement. This development enhanced the Rabha autonomy movement and also encouraged the Rabha leaders to upgrade the status of the RHAC into Sixth Schedule status as well as include the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It has been observed that the Rabha leaders under the organizational banner of RHJMC are already struggling and demanding the Union Government and the State government to provide the Sixth Schedule status to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. The Rabha leaders realized and apparently felt that unless and until the Constitutional safeguard under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is assigned to the RHAC, the Rabha distinct ethnic identity and their ancestral land will not be possible to safeguard in near future.
4.7 CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it has been observed that Rabha territorial autonomy has witnessed conflict dynamics among the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the RHAC area. The study reveals that Rabha autonomy movement has different issues and implications and these different issues and implications manifested itself in a series of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the RHAC area basically since 2001. It was found that these inter-ethnic tensions and rivalries emerged due to their rivalries over a range of contentious political issues such as demand for repeal of Sections 4 and 6 of the RHAC Act, 2005, demand for holding and deferment of Panchayat election from the RHAC area, demand for conducting and suspension of election to the RHAC, demand for inclusion and exclusion of revenue villages within and from the council area, demand for and protest against the Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC and demand for and protest against the formation of Garo Autonomous Council carving out more than 45 Garo people dominated villages of Assam-Meghalaya border areas which falls under the jurisdiction of the RHAC area. Thus, it is observed that the Rabha autonomy movement has serious implications regarding the frequent inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas around different issues regarding autonomy rights of the Rabhas and the democratic rights and peaceful accommodation of the non-Rabhas within the RHAC area.

The issues and implications of Rabha autonomy movement reveals that the territorial entity of RHAC with the system of compact area by including 779 core and contiguous villages from both Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts and the constant intensified demand movement of the Rabhas for inclusion of the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India creates discontent and generates inter-ethnic tensions, inter-ethnic rivalry and conflict dynamics between the Rabha and non-Rabha groups in RHAC area which made the territorial project of Rabha autonomy contested in nature.

It has been observed that the territorial project of RHAC with a compact area of 779 villages including core and contiguous areas from both Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts and the demand for exclusion of more than 233 revenue villages dominated by more than 50 percent non-ST population out of total 779 revenue villages from both
Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC reveals the inherent contradictions of the territorial project of RHAC. It may be noted that the territorial project of RHAC seems to be more problematic and less feasible for a peaceful and comprehensive settlement of ethnic problems with a true democratic autonomous governance in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas in Assam.
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48. Notification issued by the Department of WPT and BC, Government of Assam on 18th December, 2003 regarding the formation of Ministerial Sub-Committee to study the Feasibility of Granting the Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC, Mising Autonomous Council and Tiwa Autonomous Council of Assam.

49. Notification of villages included in the RHAC, notified by the Governor of Assam, Published by the Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, The Government of Assam, Dispur, Guwahati, 17th May, 2005.

50. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2005, Amended under the Assam Act No. XXIV of 2005, Received the assent of the Governor of Assam on 8th May, 2005, Published by the Assam Gazette, Extraordinary, The Government of Assam, Dispur, Guwahati, 17th May, 2005.


52. Rongkho, Kushodhoj, "1995r pora 2014 loi Rabha Sangram-Samu Alokpat", in Mapakchini, a Souvenir published on the occasion of 10th Bi-annual Conference
of Goalpara District Rabha Student's Union & Rabha Women's Council, Damra, 19-21st December, 2014, P. 43.


