

**AUTONOMY MOVEMENT OF THE RABHAS:
A STUDY ON TERRITORIAL AND
NON-TERRITORIAL DIMENSIONS**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Dhrubajyoti Das, Research Scholar in the Department of Political Science of Gauhati University, worked under my guidance while preparing his thesis entitled “AUTONOMY MOVEMENT OF THE RABHAS: A STUDY ON TERRITORIAL AND NON-TERRITORIAL DIMENSIONS”. He has fulfilled all necessary requirements relating to submission of a thesis for Ph. D. Degree of Gauhati University. The thesis is the result of his own investigation and neither this thesis nor any part thereof was submitted for any other degree or diploma to this or any other University.

The thesis consists of 72, 336 words.

(Jayanta Krishna Sarmah)

DECLARATION

I, Mr. Dhrubajyoti Das do hereby declare that the thesis entitled “AUTONOMY MOVEMENT OF THE RABHAS: A STUDY ON TERRITORIAL AND NON-TERRITORIAL DIMENSIONS” is the original work which is the outcome of my own investigation. I have completed the study under the supervision of Dr. Jayanta Krishna Sarmah, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Gauhati University. The thesis or any part of it has not been submitted by me for any degree/ diploma to this or any other University/ Institution.

The thesis consists of 72, 336 words.

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PREFACE

The concept of 'Autonomy' occupies a significant place in modern democratic theory and practice. The modern pluralist democratic states on the basis of the principles of collective minority rights, indigenous rights and right to self-determination has invented and adopted the device of autonomy as sub-state institutions and decentralized mechanisms under constitutional law in order to resolve ethno-political conflicts and to protect and accommodate ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity within their borders. Autonomy is granted basically on two dimensions-territorial and non-territorial dimension of autonomy.

This study is guided by non-territorial dimension of autonomy.

Within the Indian multicultural liberal democracy, North-east India, the homeland of cultural diversity is inhabited by more than two hundred culturally distinct ethnic groups of various sizes at various stages of development. The politics of Northeast India has been increasingly shaped by the autonomy movements of various ethnic communities for safe-guarding and maintaining their distinct ethnic identities, their traditional ethnic homeland with a substantive political autonomy. The autonomy movements of different ethnic communities in North-East India as well as in Assam have witnessed a series of ethnic mobilization and counter mobilization creating inter-ethnic tensions, mistrust and generating inter-ethnic rivalry in this region. The Rabha community is a small Scheduled Tribe (Plain) in Assam having distinct ethno-cultural identity, socio-cultural heritage and traditional ethnic homeland of their own. The autonomy movement of the Rabha community popularly known as "Rabha Hasong movement" has also witnessed a series of ethnic mobilization and counter-mobilization resulting inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas which has posed a serious threat to inter-ethnic harmony, peace and democratic order in the RHAC area in Assam. In this context, this study tries to examine the Rabha autonomy movement in the context of territorial and non-territorial dimensions.

The study has been divided into six chapters. The First Chapter deals with introduction and conceptual analysis of the autonomy movement, dimensions of autonomy,

statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, review of literature, database, methodology, significance and limitation of the study.

The Second Chapter deals with a brief profile of the Rabha community, the inherited autonomy character of the Rabhas, ancient Rabha kingdom and traditional ethnic homeland of the Rabhas. This chapter also attempts to analyse the genesis of Rabha autonomy movement.

The Third Chapter deals with the formation and development of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

The Fourth Chapter deals with the implications and contentions of Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This chapter also highlights the new dynamics of Rabha autonomy movement and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

The Fifth Chapter attempts to examine and understand the feasibility of granting territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, to the Rabhas vs. non-territorial cultural autonomy to the territorially dispersed Rabha community in the ethnically mixed RHAC area. This chapter is based on statistical analysis of the data gathered through field-survey.

The Sixth Chapter is the conclusion chapter which explores the findings and draws general conclusions and makes recommendations based on the findings.

The study is a systematic academic investigation to find out a peaceful settlement and comprehensive democratic solution and accommodation of both the rights of the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas residing in RHAC area in order to promote inter-ethnic harmony, peace and to ensure true autonomy in a democratic framework in the ethnically mixed RHAC area in Assam.

Date:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

| | |
|-------------|---|
| TA | Territorial Autonomy |
| NTA | Non-territorial Autonomy |
| CA | Cultural Autonomy |
| PTCA | Plains Tribal Council of Assam |
| AASU | All Assam Students Union |
| ABSU | All Bodo Students Union |
| NDFB | National Democratic Front of Bodoland |
| BTAD | Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts |
| BTC | Bodoland Territorial Council |
| BLT | Bodo Liberation Tigers |
| BAC | Bodoland Autonomous Council |
| KAAC | Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council |
| DHAC | Dima Hasao Autonomous Council |
| NDA | National Democratic Alliance |
| ARSU | All Rabha Students Union |
| RHAC | Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council |
| ARWC | All Rabha Women Council |
| ARNC | All Rabha National Council |
| RHDC | Rabha Hasong Demand Committee |
| SSDC | Sixth Schedule Demand Committee |
| NRCF | Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum |
| GNC | Garo National Council |
| ARSS | All Rabha Sahitya Sabha |
| BRKR | Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| ARCC | All Rabha Cultural Conference |
| RHJMC | Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee |
| NRSF | Non-Rabha Security Forum |
| NTSF | Non-Tribal Security Forum |
| AANTSU | All Assam Non-Tribal Students Union |
| RCS | Rabha Chatra Sanmilan |
| RYS | Rabha Yubak Sangha |
| ARS | Assam Rabha Sanmilan |
| RNC | Rabha National Council |
| AARS | All Assam Rabha Sanmilan |
| ARSS | All Rabha Sahitya Sabha |
| SRKS | Sadau Rabha Krishti Sanmilan |
| RHSP | Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad |
| AGP | Asom Gana Parishad |
| RHVC | Rabha Hasong Village Council |
| ADC | Autonomous District Council |
| RC | Regional Council |
| PESA | Panchayat Extension Scheduled Area |
| TSP | Tribal Sub-Plan |
| ITDP | Integrated Tribal Development Programme |
| TBB | Tribal Belts & Blocks |
| AATS | All Assam Tribal Sangha |
| MOS | Memorandum of Settlement |
| SC | Scheduled Caste |
| ST | Scheduled Tribe |
| OBC | Other Backward Classes |

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The modern democratic states have adopted a variety of sub-state institutions and decentralized mechanisms under constitutional law in order to resolve ethno-political conflicts and to accommodate ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity within their borders. The plural democracy on the basis of the principles of right to self-determination, collective minority rights and indigenous rights has invented the device of autonomy for the protection and accommodation of minority rights within its purview. Autonomy, as a socio-political discourse, was evolved as an essential tool for resolution of ethno-political conflicts, management of ethno-cultural diversity and accommodation of ethnic minority rights through decentralization of state power within multi-ethnic states around the world. Autonomy, as a discourse in the socio-political arena around the world has been much debated and contested which continues to dominate the paradigm of identity politics, ethnic minority rights, issue of self-determination etc. in different countries around the globe.

1.2: CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

The concept of 'Autonomy' occupies a significant place in modern democratic theory and practice. The idea of autonomy, addressing theoretical as well as practical public policy oriented issues, occupies a central place in contemporary political and philosophical debates and is often recognized as a central value in moral and political philosophy¹. The term autonomy is derived from two Greek words: 'auto' meaning 'self' and 'nomos' meaning law or rule, that is, the right to make one's own laws is therefore the basic meaning of autonomy². Self-rule has two components: the independence of one's own deliberations and choice from manipulation by others and the capacity to rule oneself. In its political and legal context, autonomy mainly refers to the "self-governing of a people or the power to regulate their own affairs by enacting legal rules"³.

Autonomy based on the principles of minority rights, indigenous rights and right to self-determination is intended to give a community or a region, substantial powers of

policy, administration and fiscal resources. It also aims to preserve and promote the traditional indigenous culture⁴. Pluralist democracy is considered a condition for genuine modern autonomy⁵. The modern pluralist democratic states on the basis of the principles of collective minority rights, indigenous rights and right to self-determination has invented and adopted the device of autonomy as sub-state institutions and decentralized mechanisms under constitutional law in order to resolve ethno-political conflicts and to protect and accommodate ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity within their borders. When we see the history of autonomy discourse, the history of autonomy did not begin before the 20th century. Autonomy as a form or device of protecting minorities and minority rights from constitutional majoritarian rule as well as an effective instrument of ethnic conflict resolution and management, emerged in the last Century (20th century) in various parts of the globe. But in Europe, since the 16th century some forms of autonomy of religious communities have been sanctioned for different minorities such as the Protestants in Catholic regions, Jews in various countries, Muslims in Christian areas, Catholic and orthodox Christians as well as Jews in the Ottoman-Muslim areas. This latter system of religious and cultural autonomy, called the Millet system, was employed during the Ottoman Empire, until 1918⁶. In 2009, there is an 88 year old record of experiences with regional autonomy, as the first autonomy in the modern sense was established on the Aland Islands in 1921. Today, this case is one of the best practices of autonomy in the world. Although most of the working autonomies are still located in Europe, especially in its Western part, autonomy is a consolidated concept of power-sharing of modern state through self-government on every continent⁷.

In the multicultural liberal democracies, autonomy has gained theoretical importance and practical urgency as a tool or as a policy in the accommodation of ethnic minority rights. Autonomy can be granted under different legal forms. There is no uniform use of terms for the different kinds of arrangements for autonomy.

Hurst Hannum in the 1990's developed the first legalistic analysis of autonomy in the book "Autonomy, Sovereignty and self-determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting rights", (2nd edition, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996). Today's understanding of political autonomy in all of its forms and application owes a

great deal to the ground breaking scholars such as Hurst Hannum, and later Ruth Lapidoth, Markku Suksi, Yash Ghai, Marc Weller, Heintze, Nordquist, Stefan wolff, James Crawford, Thomas Benedikter etc. different well-known scholars have defined the concept of 'Autonomy' in different ways and meanings. Kjell Ake Nordquist defines "An autonomy is a territory with a higher degree of self-rule than any comparable territory of a state"⁸. Ruth Lapidoth defines 'Autonomy is a means for diffusion of powers in order to preserve the unity of a state while respecting the diversity of its population⁹, that is the political or cultural aspirations of minorities, indigenous populations and people striving for self-determination inside an established state. Lapidoth classifies the theoretical discussion concerning autonomy into four categories, (1) Autonomy as a right to act upon one's own discretion in certain matters, either on an individual basis or through an official body, (2) Autonomy as a synonym of independence, (3) Autonomy as synonymous to decentralization and (4) Autonomy as a reference to an entity that has exclusive powers of legislation, administration and adjudication in specific areas. Lapidoth calls the fourth category 'Political autonomy' seemingly most populated by authorities on the matter¹⁰. Hurst Hannum defines 'Autonomy is a relative term for describing the degree of independence that a specific entity enjoys within a sovereign state'¹¹. Hans-Joachim Heintze defines, in International law, autonomy means that a part or territorial unit of a state is authorized to govern itself in certain matters by enacting laws and statutes, but without constituting a state of their own¹². James Crawford defines 'autonomous areas are regions of a state usually possessing some ethnic or cultural distinctiveness, which have been granted separate powers of internal administration, to whatever degree, without being detached from the state of which they are part'¹³. Yash Ghai defines 'Autonomy is a device to allow ethnic and other minority groups claiming a distinct identity to exercise direct control over affairs of special concern to them, while allowing the larger entity, those powers which cover common interests'¹⁴. Thomas Benedikter defines 'Autonomy can be seen as an instrument for approval for ethnic or national minorities or other groups to maintain their distinct identity and exercise direct control over issues particularly important for this purpose'¹⁵. In international law, autonomy denotes "parts of the state's territory are authorized to govern themselves in certain matters by enacting certain laws and statutes, but without constituting a state of their own"¹⁶. As Chatterton points out, The Oxford

Dictionary describes it as “the right of self-government, of making its own laws and administering its own affairs¹⁷. Thus, we can define autonomy as governed by self-established rules, self-determination, self-organization and self-regulating practices particularly vis-à-vis the state and capitalist social, economic, economic and cultural relations.

In some places, social movement theory has registered the importance of claims for political voice and autonomy. Political thought moved the concept of autonomy from the individual to the collective level by referring to autonomy as self-legislation or creating a group's own custom and law. Thus, the concept of autonomy initially entered modern thought as a way of referring to 'self-legislation', whereby the autonomous individual carries out its will on itself by itself¹⁸.

Thomas Benedikter observes the traditional ethnic or national minority issue all over the world is linked to the geographical region in which a group with a collective identity is setting, which has become a part of states with a different ethnic-cultural majority. This is the very origin of the idea of autonomy¹⁹. Endowing a minority group with its own territory and all necessary powers to ensure cultural survival and the protection of collective minority rights has in recent history been a device to redress the imbalance between a state majority and the ethnic minorities sharing the same territory. This is a first, simplistic approach to the rationale of autonomy²⁰. Theoretically the concept of autonomy derives from the existence and recognition of ethnic and national minorities who are subjects of collective rights. Control over territory is essential for the creation of normal organs of local and regional, self-government and may also be in terms of economic viability or development. The territory can be seen as a primary guarantor of two fundamental human needs-identity and security. He also observes that autonomy as a special mechanism for minority rights protection gain importance and significance in order to giving a space to fulfil and enjoy the collective minority rights under constitutional law and a sovereign state authority²¹.

The majority of secessionist conflicts could finally be solved through negotiations leading to accords and peace treaties that are entrenched in constitutional or organic laws and autonomy statutes. It is in this way that many violent intrastate conflicts have been transformed into institutionalized forms of power-sharing,

participation in decision-making by minority groups and stable forms of self-governance. Autonomy as a compromise solution provide the possibility of sharing legislative and executive powers between the central state and the national minorities, safeguarding both aims:- the fundamental collective/group rights of ethnic or national minorities to enjoy at least internal self-determination without changing the state borders, and the integrity of the state they are living in²². In this way, the legal design of an autonomy corresponds to the claims, needs and interests of a specific minority group living in a specific part of the state's territory²³. The greatest value of autonomy lies in its ability to grant conflict solution through self-government without disrupting existing states²⁴. The whole issue of autonomy centres around three concepts- Autonomy, integration and development.

Experiencing many autonomy regimes, Yash Ghai has considered certain pre-conditions for the success and failure of autonomy arrangements. Yash Ghai has rightly observed that autonomy arrangements are most likely to succeed in states with established traditions of democracy and the rule of law. Autonomy arrangements which have been negotiated in a democratic and participatory way have a better chance of success than those which are imposed²⁵. Ghai has rightly asserted that autonomy does not promote secession; on the contrary, careful design and true autonomy prevents secession. Careful design of institutional structures is essential for the success of autonomy²⁶. Svante E. Cornell has pointed out certain integral characteristics or elements of an autonomy or autonomous region. One integral characteristic of autonomous regions is established, recognized and clearly delimited borders²⁷. The importance of borders has been emphasized by Benedict Anderson in his classic work 'Imagined Communities'²⁸.

Thomas Benedikter observes that when an autonomous entity is established, a number of aspects such as, geographic or geopolitical and demographic aspects, democratic participation of the population of the autonomous region in the central state, socio-economic and financial aspects, cultural and ethnic aspects etc. which must be considered to ensure the conditions for its success for the establishment of an autonomy. The issue of fundamental human rights, civil rights, equality and non-discrimination has an extremely important role to play in the system of autonomous entities²⁹.

Increasing demand for autonomy by various ethnic groups and religious communities has been behind persistent ethnic conflicts around the world both in the developed and developing countries. Yash Ghai argues that despite its popularity, autonomy is controversial and many conflicts are themselves about the demand for and resistance to autonomy. At other times, autonomy seems to offer a way out of conflict or the transformation of the conflict. However, autonomy has also become an instrument for negotiating competing claims in multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. In fact, it has been seen as a panacea for solving ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world³⁰.

1.3 DIMENSIONS OF AUTONOMY-TERRITORIAL AND NON-TERRITORIAL

Accommodating cultural distinctiveness of minority ethnic groups in multi-ethnic states has been an issue of theoretical importance and practical urgency for decades. The concept of autonomy has evolved as an instrument for the protection of ethno-cultural identity of the ethnic minorities around the world. Autonomy is granted on the two dimensions- territorial dimension and non-territorial dimension, that is, autonomy on territorial basis- territorial autonomy (TA) and autonomy on non-territorial basis-non-territorial (NTA) or cultural (personal) autonomy (CA).

1.4 NON-TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF AUTONOMY: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Under the principle of decentralization and federalism, the states have adopted autonomous arrangement and have provided autonomy on a territorial basis to the ethnic minorities that have a geographical and territorial base of their own where they constitute the majority within the borders of a multi-ethnic state, but the state policy under decentralization and federal principle has not given any attention to accommodate and safeguard the ethno-cultural distinctiveness of the ethnic minority groups that live dispersed or scattered and intermingled with other groups within the borders of different multi-ethnic states around the world and in this way, these territorially dispersed ethnic minority groups have been excluded from the public policy in regards to their cultural protection and proper political representation and have been submerged in the mainstream majoritarian rule leading to cultural alienation due to hegemony and

dominance of majority culture within the border of a multi-ethnic state. In this context, in order to accommodate and safeguard distinct ethnic minority rights of territorially dispersed different ethnic minority groups within the multi-ethnic states around the globe, the non-territorial solution of autonomy has been evolved as a relevant mechanism of granting autonomy on a non-territorial basis to these territorially dispersed ethnic minority groups that live in a scattered and intermingled pattern and which do not have a distinct ethno-territorial base of their own, within a border of a state of a multi-ethnic setting, and have been given cultural autonomy on the basis of non-territoriality principle for the accommodation and protection of their ethno-cultural identity. The protection of ethnic minorities by way of non-territorial autonomy arrangements, also called cultural autonomy, is receiving increased attention in modern democratic theory and practice. The minorities that do not have a territorial base of their own, and that live dispersed or scattered or intermingled with other groups are, however, regularly excluded from effective participation in public policy. Many ethnic minorities are, however, dispersed or scattered or intermingled with other parts of the population and without a territorial base where they constitute a majority. As a result, such dispersed ethnic minorities often do not enjoy the potential benefits of territorial decentralization or federalism. In this regard, the non-territorial cultural autonomy can potentially protect the rights of the minorities that do not have a territorial base of their own and that live dispersed and intermingled with other groups through a state³¹. It is realized that, particularly in the countries with large numbers of ethnic minorities, most of which are scattered and intermingled in their living pattern throughout the territory and they do not have an integrated territorial base of their own, then, neat territorial or geographical solutions cannot be found and seemed to be not viable practically to accommodate all the minority groupings in a comprehensive settlement and in this regard also the non-territorial cultural autonomy can act as a potential autonomy tool to protect and accommodate the territorially dispersed ethnic minority groups. The recent international developments to protect ethnic minorities by way of non-territorial-autonomy arrangements, shows how the theory and practice of cultural autonomy have gained legitimacy in certain countries of Central and Eastern Europe such as Estonia, Slovenia, Kosovo and Finland³².

Non-territorial or cultural autonomy is an autonomy that applies to all members of a certain linguistic or cultural community which are however, not resident in a particular territory³³. Non-territorial autonomy rests on two principles, firstly, the decentralization of decision-making to a group rather than to a geographical territory, and secondly, the clothing of such a group with public powers as a form of government in contrast to a private club or an association³⁴. Non-territorial cultural autonomy is generally speaking "adequate for minorities who live dispersed in the country but have a strong political will for self-government and articulate their claims as such. The community is entitled to different, wide-ranging rights in political, economic and social life, although these rights have so far usually been limited to matters of culture, language, religion and education³⁵. This form of autonomy, then, is appropriate when national minorities do not form the majority of the population in areas in which they reside or when national minorities, for whatever reasons, do not consider the claim for territorial autonomy to be of use³⁶. This model of autonomy, which provides for the members of an ethnic community to be governed through institutions and/or their own legislation, allows minorities a significant degree of autonomy and cohesion even when minorities are dispersed throughout the territory. Non-territorial Cultural Autonomy grants collective cultural autonomy to minority groups so as to enable them to make and implement laws about their culture, language and traditions. The essence of non-territorial cultural autonomy is the recognition of the right of national minorities to protect, promote and preserve their identity, language and culture³⁷. The Non-territorial cultural autonomy of a group is awarded to a legal entity, a cultural council, which has the power to make decisions and administer those decisions on behalf of a group. The jurisdiction of the cultural council is exercised on a personal/individual rather than on a territorial basis. The decisions of a cultural council are therefore applicable to all of its members regardless of where they reside³⁸.

Non-territorial cultural autonomy is generally speaking "adequate for minorities who live dispersed in the country but have a strong political will for self-government and articulate their claims as such. The community is entitled to different, wide-ranging rights in political, economic and social life, although these rights have so far usually been limited to matters of culture, language, religion and education³⁹.

Hoffman observes as follows in regard to the practical application of non-territorial autonomy to minority rights: - "Generally speaking, the concepts of non-territorial cultural autonomy or functional layering of public authority may be usefully applied in situations where a minority does not constitute the majority or a sizeable minority of the population in a given region of a state, but finds itself dispersed throughout the whole of state⁴⁰. Yash Ghai defines non-territorial cultural autonomy as 'Corporate autonomy' when an ethnic group is given forms of collective rights. Rights and entitlements protected under such autonomy can be personal (e.g. access to educational facilities, double citizenship), cultural (e.g. language rights, media) or political (a minimum representation within public institutions)⁴¹.

The scope of the model of non-territorial cultural autonomy includes- all the powers considered necessary for the preservation and development of the ethno-cultural identity of the respective ethnic minority through the establishment of a cultural council-specifically, Language rights-the right to safeguard, maintain and develop minority's own mother language, Culture- the rights related to the preservation and development of distinct socio-cultural heritage, Education system- right to use minority's own language as medium of instruction and develop educational system and policy for community development, Information and public media including radio and television, Right to use of ethnic minority group's national emblems and toponyms, heritage sites, the right to use local public authorities, in local legal proceedings, participation in the settlement of possible second citizenship and any other matters necessary for preserving and exercising the protective rights they are entitled to⁴². By the devices of non-territorial autonomy, especially educational and other cultural rights and services are extended to ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities.

In multi-national or multi-ethnic states with communities dispersed and mixed all over the country, classical federalism as a purely territorial project has serious intrinsic limitations as a solution to manage successfully ethnic identity conflicts and secure rights, dignity and security of all people. The territorial federal logic of traditional federalism is also hardly applicable when there are competing claims over territory. So in such complex situations, traditional territorial federalism is an insufficient mechanism for the comprehensive accommodation and just representation

of all minority rights and concerns. Territorial federalism could even plant the seeds for new explosive ethnic antagonism by creating new intra-regional minorities. It needs therefore to be supplemented and balanced by a non-territorial approach. In fact, autonomy (federalism) in general, and non-territorial autonomy (federalism) in particular, are the best conceptual tools for tackling ethnic conflicts that have been running around the different multi-ethnic states in the world⁴³.

The issue of group rights can be found at the heart of most ethnic conflicts. Group rights are rooted in distinct group interests and the subsequent mutual recognition of their legitimate existence by the ethnic groups in conflict, and their recognition and codification in the form of rights by the institutions of the host state, respectively. This is a complex process of interest-based negotiation between all parties involved in the conflict. While the recognition and codification of distinct group rights is a first important step on the way to settle ethnic conflicts in ethnically mixed areas, their equal satisfaction is of no lesser significance. The subsequent satisfaction of rights under the circumstances of potential or actual ethnic conflict in ethnically mixed areas requires an institutional framework in which the distinct rights of each ethnic group in the territory and the common rights, their members enjoy as citizens of the same state can, be accommodated. It is within this context, that territorial and non-territorial autonomy arrangements gain their importance⁴⁴.

Non-territorial or cultural autonomy or personal or corporate federalism is an unconventional federal concept. This concept defines the right of self-determination not from the narrow perspective of a privileged traditional nation or nationality with its well-defined own territory, but from the wider perspective of the individuals who subjectively profess a group identity without taking into consideration their place of residence. So the concept dissociates the right for self-rule from territory. It transcends the limits of homelands or places of residence. This way, the so called non-territorial minorities can assert their rights of self-determination and several ethno-national groups can enjoy autonomy in the same territory. Thus, this concept empowers the members of a community which lives outside the boundaries of their 'homeland'. It would likewise empower those ethnic or religious communities which do not define themselves as traditional nations, and which do not claim a specific part of the country as their

homeland, but which also may want to rule themselves and not to be ruled by others. Non-territorial federalism secures, that the linguistic, educational and cultural rights of such minority communities are also guaranteed. So, non-territorial federalism aims at something more than the negative right of minorities to get protection against exclusion and discrimination by national or regional majorities. It establishes a positive right of self-determination even for territorially dispersed minorities⁴⁵.

The idea of non-territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds emerged in the late nineteenth (90th) Century (usually it is perceived as ascending from Austro-Marxists), which became popular in the early twentieth (20th) Century, contributed to ethnic minority related debates in 1920-30s and in the last twenty years again, it has become a topic for scholarly and political debates⁴⁶. The Austro-Marxists -Karl Renner, Otto Bauer and Victor Adler perceived non-territorial 'cultural' or 'personal' autonomy as a complex institutional arrangement where ethnic groups would be organized as corporate self-governing entities based on individual membership rather than on territory and residence. The idea of personal or non-territorial federalism had been propagated already at the beginning of the 20th Century by the Austrian Social Democrat Karl Renner (1902) and Otto Bauer (1907) who tried to find a fair and democratic solution for the ethno-national diversity in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The idea was to represent different nations at the state level in separate autonomous national councils. These councils would have the power to legislate in matters of cultural policy and education⁴⁷.

While territorial autonomy has more chance to generate inter-ethnic conflicts among the groups over land, territory and other relevant issues within a territorial entity, non-territorial solution may be a viable tool to mitigate the conflicts into a peaceful and comprehensive accommodation of ethnic groups. When territorial autonomy, is not a viable option in a particular multi-ethnic state, it may be adequate to provide for a form of "Personal or Cultural Autonomy" which is de-territorialized. This will notably, but not exclusively occur when a group linked on the basis of some "personal characteristic" (e.g. religion, language, ethnicity, etc.) is geographically dispersed.

Non-territorial cultural autonomy is widely recognised, especially in some of the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe that practical solutions to the question

of dispersed ethnic minorities are needed so as to deepen and consolidate the progress that has been made in democratic development in the emerging democracies. An option that is increasingly being pursued is to decentralise decision-making and administrative powers to communities or to cultural councils established by the communities. Non-territorial cultural autonomy is therefore seen as a supplement to territorial autonomy and even in some instances as a substitute for territorial autonomy⁴⁸. In order to avoid the creation of new minorities, a number of advocates have put forth the option of non-territorial autonomy.

Bertus De Villiers has pointed out some of the most important practical differences between territorial and non-territorial cultural autonomy- for territorial autonomy, the boundaries of geographical entities be it regions or local government, must be defined, while for non-territorial cultural autonomy, the cultural group, the subject of the autonomy must be defined or a process must be established for groups to register for purposes of cultural autonomy. The jurisdiction of non-territorial cultural autonomy relates to the individuals that are members of the cultural group regardless of where they live, while the jurisdiction of territorial autonomy affects everyone residing within the geographical area of the local or regional government. The typical functions that can be allocated to a cultural council are more restricted than the powers and functions that can be allocated to a territorial entity. This is because non-territorial cultural autonomy deals predominantly with the culture, language, religion and customs of a group and with wider governmental functions that have a territorial dimension⁴⁹.

The great advantage of extra-territorial solutions is that a degree of self-rule can be granted to a group without assigning exclusive control over land and territory. In this way, several ethno-national groups can enjoy autonomy in the same territory. Territorial claims are not required to establish group autonomy. Territorial control and claims, therefore, lose their relevance for the ethno-national groups. It is clear that the dissociation between territory and political control can be highly useful in ethnically mixed territories. Matters such as education, cultural and language policies, religion, social welfare, aspects of civil law, health policy, taxation, media, sports, etc. can be separately administered by each of the ethno-national groups over the same territory. Legislative and executive councils with jurisdiction over the above-mentioned

prerogatives can be created for each of the groups. In this way, ethno-national groups obtain a substantial share of autonomy and tangible political power without entering into perilous territorial issues.

Territorial autonomy focuses minority attention on self-government and the strengthening of "mini-states", whereas non-territorial autonomy allows for minorities to engage in self-governance on these matters of identity, while leaving non-identity matters within the structure of the main state⁵⁰. The potential trade-off how the "mini-state" features of Territorial autonomy can produce a dynamic that is difficult for states and minorities to resolve. Non-territorial autonomy eliminates the trade-off which territorial autonomy produces. Non-territorial aspects remove the trade-off effects of territoriality with regard to minority questions. Non-territorial autonomy allocates certain functions of governance according to a personal principle, rather than a territorial principle. The potential avoidance of territorial restrictions shows great promise for transforming negotiations between states and minorities by eliminating trade-offs on identity questions and here non-territorial autonomy has gained importance⁵¹.

Collective or group rights establish a foundation for minorities to govern themselves, providing a means for them to protect their identity-based practices with a minimum of majority influence. Such institutions take the form of autonomy structures for minorities. Non-territorial autonomy have become recognized in international documents such as the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public life, produced by the OSCE'S High Commissioner on National Minorities, as a useful means to preserve minority identity against majority pressures in democracies⁵². The Lund Recommendations proposed for the model of non-territorial cultural autonomy in contrast to 'Mini-State' produced by territorial autonomy for the minority groups which are geographically dispersed as a remedy in terms of accommodation.

The model of non-territorial cultural autonomy has been widely recognized and developed in some of the new democracies of central and Eastern Europe for the protection of distinct cultural rights of the dispersed ethnic minorities. Although practical examples of non-territorial cultural autonomy are scarce, there are nations that

have experimented with non-territorial cultural autonomy. The developments of the model of non-territorial cultural autonomy have been observed in different countries around the world as- The non-territorial minority self-government in Hungary (1993-2011), The non-territorial autonomy for the Sorbian people in Germany (1998), Functional non-territorial autonomy in Denmark and Germany (1945-1955), Guaranteed non-territorial cultural autonomy in Croatia (1991-2002), non-territorial national minority cultural councils in Serbia (2002-2014), non-territorial autonomy arrangement in Slovenia (1991), non-territorial cultural autonomy in the form of Sami Parliament for the dispersed Sami minority group in Finland, Norway and Sweden (1973-1995), non-territorial cultural autonomy in Canada in the form of minority educational self-management in Canada (1990), non-territorial cultural autonomy in Estonia (1920-1939, 1993-1995) and non-territorial cultural autonomy in Kosovo (1998)⁵³.

1.5 AUTONOMY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM:

India is an ethnically plural and culturally diverse country. Within the Indian multicultural liberal democracy, 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. North-East India has witnessed several movements for the assertion of ethnic identity in recent times which show significant differences in the definition of goals and in the adoption of strategy⁵⁴. Some of these, such as the Naga or the Mizo movements put forward the demand for complete sovereignty, while those of the Khasi, Jaintias, Karbi, Dimasas, and the Bodos put forward the demand of autonomous statehood within the Indian Union, while the movements of the Rabhas, Tiwas, Misings, etc., of the ethnic minorities have been limited to achieving greater political autonomy under the framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The politics of Northeast India has been increasingly shaped by movements of various ethnic communities for safe-guarding and maintaining their distinct ethnic identities. The autonomy movements of the various ethnic communities to assert and protect their, what is commonly called 'ethnic identity' are the most significant aspects of the contemporary socio-political reality of India's North-East⁵⁵. The autonomy movements of different ethnic groups in this region, on the basis of ethnicity have changed demographic composition, the socio-political structure

and it has assumed great political significance within the framework of centralised state-structure. Movement for ethnic autonomy has become a strong force through which the different tribal groups in Northeast India try to fulfil their aspirations, protect their ancestral soil or ethnic homeland as well as to create a political space for themselves within the existing polity in order to safeguard their distinct ethnic identity. Ethnic identity has been observed as central to the process of demand for autonomy. The demand is either for greater political autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India or separate state within the Indian Union or extends to secession from India. The autonomy movements launched by most of the ethnic communities in North-East India, on the basis of ethnicity, for creating a political space within the system, have not yet ended⁵⁶. Thus, this phenomenon continues to be a major factor in moulding the nature of politics of North-East India. Various socio-economic, political and cultural-linguistic causes may be considered responsible for the growing intensity of the movements in North-East India demanding political autonomy, recognition of distinct ethno-cultural identity or even outright secession from India⁵⁷. The autonomy movement in North-East India as well as in Assam is a combination of different factors, such as: historical factor (son of the soil theory), inhabitant factor of the tribal groups, demonstrative factor (Reference movement- Reference Group theory), emergence of a pretty educated tribal middle class, role of different tribal organizations, economic factor, land problem- alienation of tribal land, chauvinistic attitude of the mainstream Caste Hindu Assamese people towards the tribal people, language policy of the Assam Government and the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India etc⁵⁸. In view of this, the present research work attempts to study the autonomy movement of the Rabha ethnic community in Assam in the context of territorial and non-territorial dimensions autonomy.

The question of autonomy has become a complex phenomenon in North-East India as well as in Assam during the post-independence period. Assertion of 'ethnic identity' is a commonly accepted slogan of most of the autonomy movements. In the past decades, movements for ethnic autonomy have marked the political discourse in North-East India as well as in Assam. While some have resolutely expressed the need for more autonomy within the present administrative set-up, other movements have evolved more militant, secessionist ideas of political and geographical demarcation of

territory. The autonomous districts in Assam, formed under the auspices of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, are a showpiece for the State's capacity to address indigenous ethnic aspirations in the Northeast⁵⁹.

The autonomy movements among the hill tribes of the Northeast are, in many respects, different from those of the plain tribes. The hills surrounding the Brahmaputra valley were always the home of independent tribes who were never governed by any ruler from the plains. Even the powerful Ahom rulers of Assam followed a policy of reconciliation backed by a display of force vis-i-vis the hill people. Punitive expeditions were sometimes undertaken against the hill tribes when they carried out raids on Ahom territories⁶⁰. The Inner Line Regulations introduced by the British in North-East India basically among the hill tribes, were followed by a series of other regulations. According to Section 52A of the Government of India Act of 1919, most of the hill areas of Assam were declared 'backward areas' where the application of any Legislative Act was prohibited. The Simon Commission recommended in 1930 that 'the backward tracts' should be excluded from the province of Assam and be administered by the Governor-in-Council as the agent of the Governor General-in-council. The Government of India Act of 1935 made further provisions for the exclusion of the hill areas from the influence of the plains by regrouping the 'backward areas' into 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas where the provincial legislature of Assam would have no power, although these areas would be administered as parts of the province of Assam⁶¹.

After independence, the problem of administering the 'excluded areas' of Assam was reviewed by a committee set up by the Constituent Assembly under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the first Chief Minister of Assam. The recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Among these, the most important one relates to the provision for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils in some of the hill areas. Thus, a new era of demands for 'autonomy' ensued in the North-East. Most of the movements forged by the different ethnic groups of this region in recent times have been centred around the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. While the Khasis, Garos, Jaintias, Mizos, and the Nagas have been disillusioned with the limited scope for autonomy provided by the Sixth Schedule and have demanded and attained separate

states, and the struggle of the Karbis and the Dimasas for political autonomy have been recognized by granting them Sixth Schedule status and again the Bodos, the major plain tribal group have also got political autonomy under the amended Sixth Schedule after a prolonged Bodo autonomy movement, while at present, other plain tribes such as the Misings, the Tiwas, the Rabhas, the Sonowal Kacharis, etc. are launching autonomy movement demanding inclusion into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India⁶².

The question of ethnicity, ethnic identity and autonomy in North East India is a very complex issue which leads to the emergence of many tribal autonomy movements. The hill tribes of North-East India first took the initiative which automatically influences the Plain Tribes. During the post-independence period in India, the nation-building process took place amidst large ethno-cultural and religious diversities. The framers of the Indian Constitution had enacted a local Autonomous Administration under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for some tribal communities (Hill Tribes) of North-East India to preserve and protect their identity, culture and development. The other tribal groups living in the plains of Assam were left outside the ambit of Constitutional protection and provision of the Sixth Schedule. Subsequently, these Plain Tribes of Assam also mobilized their ethnic identity to get a share in the political process of Assam following the path of hill tribes. To contain the growing demands of the Plain Tribes in Assam the State Government has constituted the Autonomous Council's for the Rabhas, Tiwas, Misings, Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, and Thengal Kacharis under a state act which does not contain the provisions of the Sixth Schedule.

When the Indian Constitution was adopted, it envisaged strong democratic institution at the grass root level as well as concerning the affairs of the tribals. For the general people they made the provision of Panchayati Raj however, as tribals have a separate type of livelihood so the decentralization process regarding the tribals was made separately. The Constitution makers also recognized the necessity of a separate political and administrative structure for the hill tribal areas of the erstwhile province of North-East India as well as of Assam by enacting the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India⁶³. North-East India, the homeland of more than 200 different tribal groups have some special problems of their 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 of the instrument of tribal self-rule. This stands embodied in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sixth 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, cultural diversity of North-east India 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 Indian polity under Article 244(2) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India has granted territorial autonomy to 10 major tribes in 4 states in North-East India and among which 3 are in the present recognised Assam⁶⁴. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao) Autonomous Council (DHAC) were created in 1952 under the provision of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India. In 1993 the Congress-led Government initiated the policies of ethno-exclusivity instead of maintaining an inclusive policy, by creating Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) followed by another six ethnic-based autonomous councils in 1995 under a State act. The creation of such ethno-exclusive councils in these ethnically mixed areas has generated inter-ethnic tensions, mistrust and inter-group rivalry among the ethnic people in these autonomous entities. Though basically the constitutional provision of Sixth Schedule was granted to the hill tribes and there are already two autonomous hill districts under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India in Assam and the creation of Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts (BTAD) by the NDA Government under the amended 6th Schedule in 2003

generated more inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts and brought more instability instead of stability in Assam's socio-political scenario⁶⁵. The creation of such exclusive councils has generated mistrust and inter-group rivalry among the ethnic groups, which needs serious and systematic academic attention to ensure true autonomy and democracy in the contemporary democratic landscape. Besides, in Assam, The Govt. has also granted ethnic autonomy in the form of non-sixth schedule autonomous councils to its 6 (Six) plain tribes such as: the Rabhas, the Tiwas, the Misings, the Deoris, the Sonowal Kacharis, and the Thengal Kacharis. These ethnic minorities are already struggling through their socio-political organizations, for the demand of the 6th Schedule status to their councils, that is, the granting of territorial autonomy to these ethnic minorities. The constant assertion of these ethnic communities for territorial autonomy has also generated inter-ethnic tensions, mistrust, and inter-ethnic rivalry among the people. The groups which overlap each other and forms a mix population pattern in these areas, now, creates a unstable social condition. It has been observed that it has been passing through a series of predicaments explicitly exemplified by competing ethno-nationalist dissents. Within the contemporary socio-political landscape, a series of identity mobilization and counter-mobilization has been observed in these areas, which deepen the sense of self-identification and self-security in the region. The result has been cycles of mobilization and counter-mobilization which has eventually aggravated ethnic relations and has created inter-ethnic tensions and has generated inter-ethnic conflicts.

Observing the contemporary crisis on ethnic lines in these areas, it has been assumed that granting of territorial autonomy appears unfeasible to address the region's myriad ethnic problems and aspirations as well as to ensure true autonomy and democracy in this multicultural region. In view of this, this present research work tries to study the feasibility of granting territorial vs non-territorial dimension of autonomy with special reference to the autonomy movement of the Rabha community in Assam.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even after several decades of independence, the Rabha elites increasingly felt that they remained much more backward in terms of educational, economical and even political fields than the other sections of the advanced Assamese society. They strongly felt that the existing governance and political processes under the Government of Assam

could not protect the Rabhas from exploitation, deprivation from basic human and constitutional rights and bring about faster socio- economic development among the Rabha community which is considered as the most backward tribal community in Assam. Their right over their traditional land and forest was snatched away. Due to illegal migration and other developmental activities, large scale tribal land alienation among them started uprooting the Rabhas from their own ancestral soil. Indeed they had not only been experiencing the problems of land alienation, unemployment, socio-economic and political oppression under the existing socio-economic system but also discrimination in achieving their rightful place in the society. This led the Rabhas to seek protection under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and demand greater 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. Due to the feeling of deprivation and to get their rightful place in the society, the emerging Rabha elites become conscious about their own distinct identity and they realized the fact that without organizing themselves, they cannot conserve and develop their language and socio-cultural heritage. As a result of the autonomy movement of the Rabhas under the active leadership and organizational banner of ARSU, ARWC, RHDC etc. the leading Rabha organizations, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) was created according to the Rabha Accord, 10th March, 1995, with much hope and expectation which got shattered soon. The state machinery showed interest neither to strengthen the council nor to hold the election of RHAC to make it a democratic institution by implementing the Rabha accord properly. The pathetic failure of the RHAC compelled the Rabha people to reject it and demand fresh and greater autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution by ARSU, ARWC and SSDC with other Rabha national level organizations and launched mass movements in joint effort with a new spirit in to achieve their desired destiny. In the wake of this mass movement, the Chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Tarun Gogoi announced on 12th January 2004 and on 13th October, 2007 to grant the Sixth Schedule Autonomy to the Rabhas. At present as many as 779 Revenue villages with a total population of 6 lakhs (approx.) has been notified by the Hon'ble Governor of Assam as under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC)⁶⁶.

ARSU and SSDC submitted memorandums to the Chief Minister of Assam Tarun Gogoi in 2007 and 2009, demanding to send the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Government and include the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and also exemption of Panchayat elections from the RHAC area according to clause no. 5 of the Rabha Accord of 1995 and demanding immediate holding of fresh RHAC elections in the area and implement the provisions, decisions of Rabha accord of 1995 and complete all necessary steps and action to recommend the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Govt. and holding of RHAC election with immediate actions⁶⁷. It has been observed that the leader of these organizations adopted various methods such as- bandh, economic blockade, rail blockade etc. in the Rabha Hasong area to pressurize the Govt. to fulfil their long standing demands.

In the recent trends of the autonomy movement of the Rabhas, ARSU, ARWC and SSDC submits memorandum to the State Government demanding to recommend and send the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Government and include the RHAC into the Six Schedule of the Indian constitution, and to implement and amend also the Rabha accord of 1995 making RHAC a democratic and dynamic institution for proper development and also demand the exemption of Panchayat election from the RHAC area according to Clause No.5 of Memorandum of Settlement (Rabha accord) of 10th March, 1995 and immediately hold the council election as well as to implement the decisions taken the Government of Assam to complete all the necessary steps for recommending the Sixth Schedule proposal to the Union Govt. and to conduct RHAC election with immediate effect. They also demand not to take any step for holding Panchayat election instead of RHAC election in the area falling within the council area which may take into violent turn and ethnic clashes in this area⁶⁸.

The constant struggle of ARSU (All Rabha Students Union), SSDC (Sixth Schedule Demand Committee), ARWC (All Rabha Women Council) etc. the leading Rabha organizations for the demand of territorial autonomy for the Rabhas under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and the demand for the exemption of Panchayat election from the RHAC area according to Clause No.5 of (Rabha Accord) of 10th March, 1995, inclusion of more villages in RHAC, immediate holding of council election⁶⁹ etc. creates discontent among the non-Rabha ethnic

communities residing since ages due to the sense of deprivation and feeling of insecurity of their rights within the RHAC area. The non-Rabha ethnic communities under the organizational banner of Non-Rabha Coordination Forum (NRCF), Garo National Council (GNC) etc., launched a counter-movement against the movement for Rabha territorial autonomy, demanding exclusion of more than 223 non-Rabha dominated revenue villages from the purview of the RHAC area and conduction of Panchayat elections in the non-Rabha dominated areas⁷⁰. These developments have created a series of mobilization (movement) and counter-mobilization (counter-movement) between the Rabhas and the non-Rabha ethnic communities which has generated inter-ethnic tensions and clashes (Rabha-non-Rabha clashes) in the RHAC area. Inter-ethnic tension and conflict manifested itself for the first time during the Panchayat polls of 2008 and again during the session of Panchayat polls of the middle of the month of February, 2013. The conflict resulting from Rabha-Non-Rabha conflict turned into a massive violence in RHAC area during 2013, which has been referred here as 'Rabha-Hasong Crisis'. The contemporary crisis of Rabha Hasong has posed as a serious issue to inter-ethnic harmony, peace, human rights, security and democracy in RHAC area. Rabha Hasong crisis needs a special academic attention and systematic serious investigation of the concerned issues for solution of these lingering problems since decades. In response to the Rabha Hasong crisis, there is an urgent need of an alternative feasible institutional arrangement for comprehensive ethnic accommodation as well as protection of constitutional rights of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabha communities in order to restore Inter-ethnic harmony, peace, human rights, security and true democracy in the RHAC area.

The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, ranging from Rani of South Kamrup to Jairamkuchi of Goalpara district including 3161sq.kms land of Southern bank of river Brahmaputra and the Northern foothill areas of Meghalaya⁷¹ encompasses different ethnic communities along with the Rabhas, such as: the Assamese Caste groups, Bengalis, Muslims, Koch-Rajbangshis, Bodos, Garos, Hajongs, with a small population of tea tribes and Nepalis, which forms a culturally diverse or multicultural region within the state of Assam. The notable presence of Non-Rabha ethnic communities in the RHAC areas since time immemorial and their present position in the structure makes it imperative that their rights are safeguarded within the proposed

"autonomous" arrangement. Within the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, granting of territorial autonomy to the Rabhas appears unfeasible and impracticable due to the considerable presence of non-Rabha population and to address and secure their constitutional rights of the non-Rabha communities within the polity. Granting of territorial autonomy to the Rabhas will deprive more in the fulfilment of rights of the non-Rabhas in RHAC area, and it will have more chance to foster inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in near future in this area. Granting ethnic autonomy on territorial basis has serious limitations as a solution to manage successfully ethnic identity conflicts and secure rights, dignity and security of all the communities living within the entity. So in such complex situations, territorial ethnic autonomy is an insufficient mechanism for the comprehensive accommodation and just representation of all minority rights and concerns. Territorial autonomy may even produce new explosive ethnic antagonism by creating new intra-regional minorities within the territorial project which may lead this region into more violent and divisive forms. In order to avoid the creation of new intra-ethnic minorities within the territorial entity, we may put forth the option of non-territorial autonomy for a comprehensive accommodation and representation of rights of all the ethnic minorities residing in this multicultural region. In order to overcome the conflicting situations between the contending Rabha and non-Rabha groups and to secure the rights of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in this conflict-prone area, we may put forward the model of non-territorial autonomy to be granted to the Rabha ethnic community as the Rabhas do not constitute a majority on territorial basis and they are even dispersed throughout the different parts of the state and also in the RHAC areas. Hence it is needed to frame the ethnic council for the Rabhas on the basis of the principles of reconstruction and de-territorialisation that is protection of Rabha ethnic minority on non-territorial basis. A non-territorial council for the Rabhas will help in the representation in the ethnic council and also in empowerment of the members of the Rabha ethnic community which live outside the boundaries of their 'ethnic homeland' the so-called "Rabha Hasong". The Rabhas which are dispersed and scattered in different districts within the state of Assam besides the Rabha Hasong areas, will have the rights to represent in the non-territorial Rabha ethnic council. The linguistic, educational and socio-cultural rights of the Rabha ethnic community would be also guaranteed within the framework of non-territorial autonomy. So, such model of non-

territorial autonomy will help to establish a positive right of self-determination even for territorially dispersed ethnic minorities like the Rabha ethnic minority in Assam against the negative policy of exclusion and discrimination. The model of non-territorial autonomy may be a feasible alternative autonomy arrangement for the Rabhas which will help to prevent the inter-ethnic conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in near future and it will also help in the protection, recognition and accommodation of rights of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabha communities within the RHAC area.

Here, it can be mentioned that the non-territorial autonomy model has been developed for preservation and protection of the distinct ethno minority rights of the territorially dispersed Sami ethnic minority in Finland during the period of 1973-1995. The Sami is a small ethnic minority having distinct ethno-cultural identity and who are traditionally territorially dispersed in different parts of Finland and also outside it. The socio-cultural rights, educational rights and other services related to the preservation and maintenance of their ethno-cultural identity have been extended and tried to safeguard for the territorially dispersed small Sami ethnic minority through a non-territorial Sami cultural council in Finland. In this regard, it may be stated that the non-territorial Sami model may be applied and developed in the context of Rabha community who are territorially dispersed and intermingled with other groups in different parts of the RHAC area and also outside it within the multi-ethnic state of Assam in India. A non-territorial Rabha ethnic council may be feasible for the Rabha ethnic minority having distinct ethno-cultural identity and who are scattered and intermingled with other groups in the ethnically mixed RHAC area and outside it. The socio-cultural rights, educational rights and other services which are necessary for the preservation and protection of their distinct ethno-cultural identity may be preserved and protected through a Rabha ethnic council on a non-territorial basis.

1.7 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is an important part of research and this research is no exception. For carrying out this research work, a number of books, magazines, journals, mouth pieces, have been reviewed. Though not much literature is available on the aspects of autonomy movement of the Rabha ethnic community of Assam, there some amount of literature on the Rabhas of Assam which are reviewed to have a better

understanding of the Rabhas in general and the aspects of autonomy movement of the Rabhas in particular. For a comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of autonomy -territorial autonomy and non-territorial autonomy in the context of Rabha autonomy, a number of books, journals, and articles of international standard have been reviewed for this research work.

Thomas Benedikter's book "The Worlds Modern Autonomy Systems: Concepts and Experiences of Regional Territorial Autonomy"⁷² deals with theoretical orientation and conceptual analysis of autonomy. Taking into account the process of power-sharing in the modern state, it analyses the history, legal basis, institutional framework and scope, advantages, and limitations of autonomy, procedures and fundamental rights for establishing autonomy and the basic criteria to determine modern autonomy systems. It also describes the various forms of autonomy operating in different modern states with their experiences around the contemporary world.

Svante E. Cornell in "Autonomy and Conflict: Ethno-territoriality and Separatism in the South Caucasus-Cases in Georgia"⁷³ analyses the general perceptions and theoretical aspects of autonomy. It attempts to investigate the relationship between autonomy and conflict and considers autonomy as a mechanism of conflict resolution on the one hand, and as a further catalyst of conflict on the other hand. It also tries to investigate the role of autonomy for violent conflict and tries to explore the root causes of ethno-political conflicts that have ravaged the South Caucasus in Georgia since the late Soviet era.

Marc. Weller and Stefan Wolff in "Autonomy, Self-Governance and Conflict resolution: Innovative approaches to institutional design in divided societies"⁷⁴ analyses the theoretical framework of autonomy and also describes the various forms of autonomy. It considers the role of autonomy as a mechanism of conflict resolution and describes the viability of the innovative autonomy arrangements such as Non-territorial cultural autonomy for conflict resolution as innovative and comprehensive institutional design in the deeply divided societies.

Ranabir Samadar in his (ed.) book "The Politics of Autonomy: Indian Experiences"⁷⁵ analyses the origin and development of autonomy arrangements in

Indian perspective. Taking the experience of politics of autonomy in India, he also analyses the success and failure of autonomy arrangements in India as a whole.

R.K. Bhadra and Mita Bhadra's in (eds.) book "Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure: Contested Cultural Identity"⁷⁶ attempts to explore the genesis, factors, causes, consequences of the growth of ethnicity, autonomy movement, political formation and inter-ethnic relations in North-east India and its impact on the social structure of the region. It describes the role of economy, ill planned economic development, aimless political process, regional imbalance, socio-economic backwardness as the wider causes of the autonomy movements in the region. It also discusses several theoretical issues which provide analytical understanding about the emerging and developing trends of autonomy movement as strong mobilising force among the marginally differentiated ethnic groups in the region.

Udayan Misra and Tilottama Misra in the article "Movements for Autonomy in India's North-East"⁷⁷ analyses the causes and the courses of the major movements for autonomy in North-east India such as the Naga movement, the Karbi-Dimasa movement and the Bodo movement. It attempts to explain the changing concepts of 'national' or 'ethnic' identity and 'autonomy'. It also describes the various socio-economic, political and cultural-linguistic causes which may be considered responsible for the growing intensity of the movements in North-east India demanding political autonomy, recognition of distinct ethno-cultural identity or even outright secession from India

P.S. Dutta in "Autonomy Movements in Assam"⁷⁸ provides a systematic analysis of the genesis and development of autonomy movement among the hill tribes at the initial phase as well as the plain tribes at the latter phase and consequently the formation of autonomous arrangements with their organization, scope, powers and functions in the post-colonial Assam. He has adopted an extensive and in-depth method to study the demands for autonomy by various tribes of Assam which is of great importance in the present research.

Chandana Bhattacharjee in "Ethnicity and Autonomy Movement: Case of Bodo Kacharis"⁷⁹ describes the Bodo ethnic identity assertion and emergence of Bodo movement in Assam. It also makes an attempt to analyse the historical background,

genesis, root causes, issues, implications and consequences of autonomy movement of the Bodo-Kacharis in Assam.

Niru Hazarika in "Ethnic Autonomy Question in North-East India: Search for an Answer"⁸⁰ briefly describes the Autonomy movement of the Rabha ethnic community in Assam. The description helps in understanding about the role of different Rabha socio-cultural and socio-political organizations in the Rabha Autonomy movement as well as several demands of the Rabha organizations and the formation of Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council under Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995.

Niru Hazarika in "Profile of Youth Organizations in North-East India"⁸¹ gives a clear profile of the Rabha Youth Organization-All Rabha Student's Union (ARSU), the leading organization in the Rabha Autonomy movement. It helps in understanding about the numerous grievances of the Rabhas, demands of ARSU, and the constitution, provisions and powers of the Rabha Hasong Autonomus (interim) Council, 1995 which is considered as an achievement of ARSU for their struggle of Rabha Autonomy.

The book "Tribe of Assam: Part-I" edited by B.N. Bordoloi, G.C. Sharma Thakur and M.C. Saikia,⁸² describes the origin, migration, settlement and distribution of the Rabhas in different parts of India and its different sub-groups and their physical features. It provides an extensive understanding about life pattern, social life and institutions, socio-religious rituals and outlook, celebration of festivals, marriage and ceremonies as well the development of language and literature of the Rabhas.

Rajen Rabha's book "The Rabhas"⁸³ deals with the detailed description on the Rabhas of Assam. It describes the origin, migration, population distribution, sub-groups, village and domestic life, social organization, position of women, kinship terms, customary laws, birth, marriage and death ceremonies, occupation, religion and religious rituals and literature and language of the Rabhas.

Bhuban Mohan Das in "Ethnic Affinities of the Rabhas"⁸⁴ analyses the origin, migration, settlement and distribution of the Rabha ethnic tribe in different locations of North-east India. It elaborately explains the geographical location of southern bank of the river Brahmaputra inhabited by the Rabhas, division among them, size and location of the villages and houses, food habit, occupation, clan organization, social system,

marriage relation, physical feature and nature of the Rabhas, position of women in their society, relations with other people, socio-cultural heritage and language spoken by them.

Sidney Endle in his book "The Kacharis"⁸⁵ identifies the Rabhas merely as a branch of the Kachari race who are called Totlas or Datyal Kacharis.

S.K. Chatterji in his historical book "Kirata-Janakriti"⁸⁶ mentions about the Rabhas and observes that Rabhas belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group of the greater Indo-Mongoloid stock.

Upen Rabha Hakacham in his book "Rabha Samaj aru Sanskriti"⁸⁷ describes the origin and development, social structure, social system, socio-cultural heritage, inhabitation, social division, Jamad or clan organization etc. of the Rabhas. It explains the role and contribution of certain Rabha social activists since the late 19th and early 20th century in revitalizing and preserving the Rabha language, culture, tradition, ethno-cultural identity and in developing socio-economic, educational, political spheres of the Rabhas. It mentions the formation of several socio-cultural organizations since 1926 among the Rabhas and describes their role and contribution in struggle in achieving the demands in fulfilling the aspirations of the Rabhas to safeguard and maintain their distinct ethno-cultural identity.

Upen Rabha Hakacham in his book "Focus on the Rabhas- language, literature and culture"⁸⁸ provides a systematic analysis of the language, literature, culture, traditions of the Rabhas and recognise the Rabhas having distinct ethno-cultural identity.

M. Gopal Singha in his book "Socio-cultural activists and reformers of the Rabhas"⁸⁹ analyses the role and contribution of certain socio-cultural activists and social reformers of the Rabhas in the late 19th century and early 20th century in awakening identity conscious has among the Rabhas against the process of religious transformation-Christianization and Sanskritization among the Rabhas and in revitalizing socio-cultural identity, cultural revivalism and social reforms among the Rabhas.

M. Gopal Singha in his article "Ethnicity, language and cultural identity of the Rabhas: A brief Analysis"⁹⁰ explains the growth and development of ethnicity and ethnic formation in terms of language and culture in North-east India. He also highlights the analytical understanding of the role of Rabha socio-cultural and literary linguistic organizations in Rabha ethnic identity formation and identity assertion since the colonial period.

M. Gopal Singha in his article "Socio-cultural and Economic development of the Rabhas since the ages",⁹¹ explains the growth of different socio-cultural institutions among the Rabha community which contributes to uphold and sustain distinct Rabha cultural identity and provides a brief account of socio-economic development of the Rabhas through the different ages of development.

Mrinal Kumar Borah in his article "Ethnic Assertion of Assam: Rabha Hasong Movement"⁹² conceptualises the nature of ethnic assertion and autonomy movement of different ethnic tribes in North-East India. He analyses the genesis, growth and development, success, failure, achievement of Rabha ethnic assertion and autonomy movement famous as Rabha Hasong Movement in Assam.

Prasanta Chakraborty in his article "Autonomy movement in Assam: with special reference to the Rabhas"⁹³ highlights the emergence and development of autonomy movement among the Rabhas, the role and contributions of different Rabha organizations in the movement and their achievements as well.

Dhaneswar Rabha in his book "Rabha Hasongor Samu Itihas"⁹⁴ outlines the origin of the Rabhas, their ancestral homeland, their social division, social system and their distinct socio-cultural heritage. He briefly describes the origin and development of Rabha Autonomy movement known as Rabha Hasong movement. He also provides an understanding about the role of different Rabha socio-cultural organizations in the Rabha Hasong movement, Memorandum of settlement Rabha Accord and the formation of Interim Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council till 2007.

Dhananjay Rabha in his book "Rabha Janajati Samu Itihas"⁹⁵ traces the origin and development of the Rabhas in North-East India as a distinct tribal community, their

migration, settlement as well as the language, literature and cultural elements of the Rabha community as a distinct ethnic community in Assam.

Bhupinder Singh's book "Autonomy movement and federal India"⁹⁶ deals with the urges and aspirations of some ethnic and tribal communities specially in North-East India, to acquire, through socio-political movements or autonomy movements, some measure of control over societal resources like political power, economic endowment and social status. In this book, the Indian Constitution is visualized as an architecturally multi-faceted modern edifice of accommodative versatility.

Jayanta Krishna Sarmah's book "The Autonomy Paradox-Interrogation of Autonomy Movement and Autonomous Councils in Assam"⁹⁷ tries to examine the genesis, policies, and status of autonomy in the autonomous councils of North-East India in general and Assam in particular and explores alternatives for good governance in these autonomous entities.

Marku Suksi's (ed.) book "Sub-state Governance through Territorial Autonomy- A Comparative Study in Constitutional Law of powers, procedures and institutions"⁹⁸ tries to explore the theoretical concept of autonomy and examines territorial autonomy in a comparative context with the Constitutional law of powers, procedures and its institutions.

T.H. Malloy, Alexander Osipov and Balazs Vizi's (ed.) book "Managing diversity through Non-territorial Autonomy: Assessing Advantages, Deficiencies and Risks"⁹⁹ tries to explore the theoretical framework of the concept of Non-territorial autonomy and describes the origin, development and operation of Non-territorial autonomy institutions in different parts of the world in ethno-cultural accommodation also examining its advantages and disadvantages.

John Coakley in his article "Approaches to the Resolution of Ethnic Conflict- The strategy of Non-territorial Autonomy"¹⁰⁰ assesses an alternative, "non-territorial" approach that has had some limited success as a device for the resolution of ethnic conflict. He also provides a more systematic scheme of non-territorial autonomy appropriate to the modern state was elaborated in Austria-Hungary during its last years, and some instances of its attempted application may be seen immediately before and

after the First World War. In the contemporary world, elements of this approach have been present in efforts to resolve the problems of indigenous minorities and in systems of consociational government.

Stefan Wolff in his article "Politics of Multiculturalism- Territorial and Non-territorial Autonomy as institutional arrangements for the settlement of ethnic conflicts in mixed areas "¹⁰¹attempts to examine the potentials and limitations of territorial and non-territorial autonomy arrangements for the settlement of ethnic conflicts in ethnically mixed areas for example taking the cases of ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland, South Tyrol or Quebec.

Bertus de Villiers in his article "Protecting minorities on non-territorial basis- Recent international developments"¹⁰²provides a systematic analysis how the model of non-territorial cultural autonomy for the protection of ethnic minorities by way of non-territorial arrangements is receiving increased attention in modern democratic theory and practice. He analyses how non-territorial cultural autonomy can potentially play a vital role to grant protection to ethnic minorities that do not have a territorial base of their own. He also reflects on certain recent international developments to protect ethnic minorities by way of non-territorial arrangement, shows how the theory and practice of non-territorial cultural autonomy have gained legitimacy in countries such as Estonia, Slovenia, Kosovo and Finland.

Jayanta Krishna Sarmah in his article "An alternative formulation for Autonomous Councils in Assam"¹⁰³provides a systematic analysis of an alternative formulation of 'de-territorialised' autonomy in Assam which is staying true to the controversial and contested autonomy on Sixth Schedule, but entailing amendments to the Constitution is proposed. He makes an attempt to examine how it will help to address the concern of ethnic minorities, the claim of other ethnicities for their own autonomous councils and indeed reconcile the presence of "differentiations" and ethnic claims in the state and which will also help to promote the idea of true autonomy and democracy in the state.

1.8 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To study the autonomy movement of the Rabha ethnic community in Assam.
2. To analyse the movement for territorial autonomy (demand for Sixth Schedule) of the Rabhas with its implications and contentions.
3. To examine Rabha autonomy in the context of territorial and non-territorial dimensions.
4. To examine and understand the feasibility of granting territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India , to the Rabhas vs. Non-territorial cultural autonomy to the Rabhas in order to find out a comprehensive solution for peaceful accommodation of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area.

1.9 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study is steered by the following research questions:

1. What are the factors behind the origin and growth of Rabha autonomy movement in Assam?
2. Why there has been a resurgence of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India?
3. What are the implications and contentions of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India?
4. What are the reasons of the non-Rabha communities living in the RHAC area feeling of insecurity towards Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India?
5. What is the reaction of the non-Rabha communities towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India?

6. What is the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as an alternative autonomy model for a peaceful and comprehensive accommodation of the Rabhas and the non-Rabha communities in the ethnically mixed RHAC area?

1.10 DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The data for the study has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been gathered from Government reports and other relevant documents. The primary data has also been collected through in-depth interviews through structured questionnaires with Presidents and General Secretaries of the leading Rabha national level Organizations like All Rabha Students' Union (ARSU), Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC), All Rabha Sahitya Sabha (ARSS), All Rabha Women Council (ARWC), and All Rabha National Council (ARNC), Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) and the Ex-officials of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils (interim councils) and also the Presidents and General Secretaries of the non-Rabha organizations which stands against the movement for territorial autonomy (Demand for Sixth Schedule status for the RHAC) of the Rabhas, such as: the Non-Rabha Coordination Forum (NRCF), Non-Rabha Security Forum (NRSF), Non-Tribal Security Forum (NTSF), All Assam Non-Tribal Student's Union (AANTSU), Garo National Council (GNC), for a comprehensive understanding of the feasibility of the provision of Territorial vs. Non-territorial autonomy for the Rabhas in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas in Assam. For understanding the contradictions of Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy as well as for understanding the feasibility of the provision of territorial vs. non-territorial autonomy for the Rabhas, in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas in Assam, a survey has been conducted in Goalpara and Kamrup district from which maximum areas fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC area. For this purpose, two urban areas and two rural areas both from Goalpara and Kamrup district have been identified. A sample of 100 respondents- 25 each from Dudhnoi town which is an urban area falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC and also Headquarters of Rabha organizations and RHAC) and Krishnai Paikan Part-I (A) village (This village falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC from Goalpara district), and Boko town which is an urban area from Kamrup (rural) district falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC and Singra village which is a rural area

falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC from Kamrup (rural) district, are selected through stratified random sampling in order to ensure that the sample is representative of both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas and proportional to the size of their population to make an empirical study of my research subject. The data has been obtained from the respondents with the help of structured questionnaires.

The secondary data has been collected from books, monographs, articles in newspapers magazines, journals, souvenirs, mouthpieces and other printed materials.

A statistical analysis of the data elicited from the respondents through a field-survey with the help of Interview-Schedule and Structured Questionnaires are quantified and analysed by using SPSS (16.0 Version) for understanding the feasibility of the provision of territorial vs. non-territorial autonomy in the context of Rabha autonomy, for a peaceful settlement of ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas and a comprehensive accommodation for both the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas, in order to ensure peace, human rights, true autonomy and democratic order as well as assigning democratic rights to both the Rabhas and the Non-Rabhas, in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas in Assam. A content analysis of the information obtained from interviews and other relevant documents and other printed sources has been taken up for a comprehensive understanding of the Rabha autonomy movement, the genesis and development of Rabha autonomy movement, role of different Rabha organizations in the different phases of Rabha autonomy movement, and also the implications and contentions of Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the ethnically mixed RHAC areas in Assam.

1.11 CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter-I: Introduction: In the first chapter, an attempt has been made to explore the conceptual analysis of the research, statement of the problem, review of literature, objectives of the research, research questions, database and methodology, significance and limitation of the research work.

Chapter-II: The Rabhas and The Genesis of Rabha Autonomy Movement: In the second chapter, an attempt has been made to focus on the Rabha tribe with its distinct

ethnic identity in Assam and also provides a brief analysis of its origin, migration, settlement, affinity, demography, social structure, social institutions, customary laws, socio-cultural heritage, religion, traditions, customs, language, literature and the ancient Rabha Kingdom etc. This chapter tries to trace the growth of the demand of the "Rabha-Hasong"-the ethnic homeland of the Rabhas based on their ancient territory of Rabha kingdom. This second chapter attempts to examine the inherited autonomy character of the Rabhas as a distinct tribal community in Assam. This chapter traces the genesis of the autonomy movement of the Rabhas and also attempts to highlight various political demands raised by different leading Rabha national organizations formed in different stages of time in the genesis and development of Rabha autonomy movement.

Chapter-III: Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council: Formation and Development:

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to understand and analyze the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, and also attempts to understand and analyze development and nature of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment Act) 2001 & 2005, including its composition, and nature.

Chapter-IV: Rabha Ethnic Assertion for Territorial Autonomy: Implications and Contentions: This fourth chapter tries to trace the growth and development of territorial autonomy under Constitutional law in India. This fourth chapter attempts to study the Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India with its implications and contentions. This chapter also attempts to highlight various political demands raised by different leading Rabha national organizations in their movement for greater political autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This chapter also highlights the new dynamics of Rabha autonomy movement and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

Chapter-V: Territorial Vs. Non-territorial Dimension of Autonomy: The Rabha Autonomy Question: In this chapter, an attempt has been made to understand the feasibility of granting territorial vs non-territorial autonomy in the context of Rabha autonomy in Assam for a peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts and a comprehensive ethnic accommodation in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas in order to restore

peace, human rights and to ensure true autonomy and democratic order in the RHAC areas, based on statistical analysis of the data gathered through field-survey.

Chapter-VI: Conclusion: This Chapter explores the findings and draws general conclusions and makes recommendations based on the findings.

1.12 SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

The present study tries to examine the root causes and consequences of the ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas for Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and also searches a solution for a peaceful settlement of conflicts and a comprehensive accommodation of the democratic rights of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas. It has been observed that the ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas are the reflection of suppression of democratic rights, land rights, security etc. of the non-Rabhas within the RHAC area. The present study examines the problems in a comprehensive way. The outcome of the study will help to tackle these problems and will help to bring a better alternative autonomy governance for a comprehensive peaceful accommodation of the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area.

There exists some limitation in each and every study. The present study is no exception to that. The most important limitation of the study is that it does not have enough supporting and relevant literature. Although there exists a number of literatures on language, literature, and cultural aspects of the Rabha community, but there is lack of sufficient literature on the political aspects of the Rabha community as well as the ethnic politics and the autonomy movement of the Rabha community in Assam.

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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 family¹. 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 Garos². As S.K. Chatterji observes, "the Rabhas belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group of the greater Indo-Mongoloid stock"³. S. Endle observes the Rabhas as the closely — allied tribes of the Kacharis⁴. 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 Assam⁵. 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 etc⁶. 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 tribe⁷. 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 Assam⁸.

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 population⁹. 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 etc¹⁰". 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 time¹¹". 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 themigration 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 plains¹². 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 etc¹³".

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 etc¹⁴.

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 God¹⁵. 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 Mungtang¹⁶. 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 general¹⁷. 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 habitat¹⁸.

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 language¹⁹.

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 cheek bones, obliquely set eyes, sallow complexion, coarse hair, scanty beard and well developed lower extremity"²⁰. Major Playfair also points out that there are some linguistic and cultural similarities between the Garos and the Rabhas²¹. 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 stock²².

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 ethno-cultural 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 community²³.

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 stock²⁴. 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 stock²⁵.

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 speakers²⁶.

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 Mungsrangsini (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 Rabhatribes. 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 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 Borduwar³¹. 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, Bholagram 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 them³⁴. 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"³⁵ and Rajen Rabha in his book "Rabha-Janajati"³⁶ 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. Dhananjay Rabha in his book "Rabha Janajati 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 tribe³⁷. 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 people³⁸.

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 'Dodan' 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 land³⁹.

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 17th 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 majority⁴⁰.

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 Century⁴¹. 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.⁴⁴

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 Kocha-Rabha people accepted Hinduism and got religiously converted to Hinduism and also became Aryans from Non-Aryans. Since the beginning of 16th Century, the Kocha-Rabhas who adopted Hinduism, took up the titles as Das, Barman, Rai, Singha, Deka, etc. and completely became Koch-Rajbanshis⁴⁵. During 1540-1587, under the regime of Malladev Maharaj Naranarayan, Shukladhaja-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 rule⁴⁶. According to 'Tabalcat-E-Nasiri written by Minhaju-sa-Miraj', a large number of the Kocha-Rabha people under the Kocha-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 Kocha-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 identity⁴⁷. 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 Aryanization⁴⁸. 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, Dekha, 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 Sanmilian' 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 areas⁴⁹. 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 Sanmilian' 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 Sanmilian' and 'Assam Rabha Chatra Sanmilian' was successfully organized under the aegis of Dwarhai Rabha Samaj and Presidentship of Dwarikanath Rabha and Gobardhan Sarkar as General Secretary of 'Assam Rabha Sanmilian'⁵⁰ 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 Secretary⁵¹. 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 society⁵². 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 Sanmilian', 'Assam Rabha Sanmilian', 'Rabha Jatiyo Parishad (now Nikhil Rabha Jatiyo Parishad) etc⁵³. In the beginning of the 20th Century during the pre-independence period, these social reformers and socio-cultural activists 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 people⁵⁴. 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 inception⁵⁵.

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 Sanmilan⁵⁶. 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 inception⁵⁷.

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 people⁵⁸. 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 anyprotective

measures taken by the government to safeguard the original Rabha language, culture and traditions⁵⁹.

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 Brahmins 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 revivalism⁶⁰. 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 led 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 literature⁶¹. 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 tribe⁶².

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 prominent⁶³.

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.⁶⁴ 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 etc⁶⁵.

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.⁶⁶

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.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 Khel' 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 are⁶⁸ —

- (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 existence⁶⁹. 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 (fortyfour) such regional organizations are distributed in different Rabha inhabited parts of Assam, Meghalaya and North Bengal⁷⁰. 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 etc⁷¹. 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 community⁷².

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

ethnic identity assertion as well as on the Rabha nationalist movements through the ages.⁷³

Even after several decades of independence, 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 rights 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 Sanmilian was the first step in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion, but in the pre-independence period in 1926, the formation of Assam Rabha Sanmilian was the first significant effort in the Rabha ethnic identity assertion. In the pre-independence period in 1926, Assam Rabha Sanmilian 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 Sanmilian. The Assam Rabha Sanmilian became All Assam

RabhaSangha 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 ethnic identity formation and identity assertion among the Rabhas.⁷⁴

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 poured⁷⁵ 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 instruction⁷⁶. 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 community⁷⁷. 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 Assam⁷⁸. 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 form⁷⁹. 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 1979⁸⁰. 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 language⁸². 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 areas⁸³. 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 India⁸⁴. 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 effect⁸⁵.

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 etc⁸⁶. 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 literature⁸⁷. 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 literature⁸⁸. 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 Mungsrangsini (Visharad) since 1981⁸⁹. 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 inception⁹⁰. This organization has so far introduced Diploma Course in Rabha language since 1981. The 'Text Book Publication Board' and 'Rabha Adhyan Chakra' located at Dudhnoi under the aegis of the Rabha Bhasa Parishad has

also the credit of publishing a number 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 Rabhas⁹¹. 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 society⁹². 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 1955.⁹³

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 heritage⁹⁴. 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 heritage⁹⁵. 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 abroad⁹⁶. 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 ages⁹⁷. 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 caste 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 school⁹⁸. 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 Rabhas⁹⁹. The ARWC has played significant role to empower the Rabha women from top to grassroot 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 movement¹⁰⁰. 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 tribe¹⁰¹. 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 launce 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 programe, 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 sqr. Klms. 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 (Dhuhnoi). In this Memorandum, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also demand all the powers and functions for their proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous State in the lines as enjoyed by the existing Karbi-Anglong Autonomous Council, Bodoland Autonomous Council etc. within the state of Assam, including Finance, General Administration and Police¹⁰⁸.

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 portrays 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 identity¹⁰⁹.

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 autonomy¹¹⁰.

The RHDC in its memorandum also asserts that the privileged 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 technology¹¹¹.

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 12th 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

asolid 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 Rabhas¹¹². 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 Rabha¹¹³.

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 Sanmilen in 1915 under the patronage of Gobardhan Sarkar, Dwarikanath Rabha and Kartik Chandra Rabha which gave birth to Assam Rabha Sanmilen 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 Sanmilen (1945) and 'Garo Hills Rabha Chatra Sanmilen' (1956) etc¹¹⁴. 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 demand¹¹⁵. 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 Assam¹¹⁶. 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 1988-89¹¹⁷. 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 ARSU¹¹⁸. 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 identity¹²².

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 people¹²³.

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 representation¹²⁴. 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 31st August, 1982, under President Dr. Kantaram Rabha, Vice-President Pranoy Kumar Rabha, and General Secretary Shabya shachi Rabha, on the demands¹²⁵ 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 3161sq. Kms. land of Southern bank of river Brahmaputra and the northern foothill areas of Meghalaya¹²⁶. 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 RHDC¹²⁷. 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 10th 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, 10th March, 1995 in the Assam Legislative Assembly which led to the formation of the first ever Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council on 10th March, 1995¹²⁸. 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 19th 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 20th 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 20th 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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CHAPTER: III

RABHA HASONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL: FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 THE SETTING

The autonomy movement of the Rabhas gained popularity as Rabha Hasong movement started strongly after 1980s with the active initiatives of the leading Rabha national level organizations such as: ARSU (All Rabha Students Union), RHDC (Rabha Hasong Demand Committee), ARNC (All Rabha National Council), RHSP (Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad), ARWC (All Rabha Women Council)¹. 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 long struggle of the Rabhas for the demand of Rabha autonomy since pre-independence period 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 on 5th July, 1995. Consequently, the Memorandum of Settlement, the Rabha Accord came into force through the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, on 10th March, 1995 that resulted in the formation of RHAC in 1995².

3.2 FORMATION OF RABHA HASONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL: BACKGROUND AND GENESIS

It has been observed that the Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy started with the formation of All Rabha Students Union in 1980. The All Rabha Students Union for the first time, in its memorandum submitted to the then Prime Minister of India, Smt. Indira Gandhi, on 31st August, 1982, demanded district and regional autonomy for the Rabha community under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India³. 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 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 India⁴. 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. The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee demanded a Rabha Hasong Autonomous State covering the Rabha concentrated areas of South Kamrup and Goalpara District, from Rani in the East to Joyramkushi in the West, within the state of Assam. The Rabha Hasong Demand Committee in its political demand for the first time sketched a guide map to specify the definite territorial boundary encompassing the Rabha dominated areas of both the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup, for the proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in 1992. On 8th June, 1992, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee for the first time submit a memorandum to the then Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam Hiteswar Saikia, with the demand for constitution a Rabha Hasong Autonomous District⁵. In this memorandum, RHDC proposed the demand to constitute a Rabha Hasong Autonomous District in the district of Goalpara covering Dhupdhara from East to Jairamkushi, in the West. RHDC, with the demand for Rabha Hasong Autonomous District, launched a mass movement with ARSU to assert their right to greater Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. After the formation of RHDC, the struggle for territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India 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 autonomy⁶. 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 from the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup. On 29th January, 1993, RHDC with the active cooperation of ARSU, ARNC, BRKR, ARKS, 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 Kamrup⁷. But, the State Government under the Chief Ministership of Hiteswar Saikia did not give any response to their demand. For this, on 15th August, 1993, RHDC, ARSU, ARWC, etc. the Rabha national level organizations started agitational programmes boycotting celebration of Independence Day and launched a massive movement to assert their right to political autonomy. In this massive movement, a series of agitational programmes were taken up 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 etc⁸. On 10th November, 1993, RHDC, ARSU etc. these Rabha organizations also submitted a Memorandum to the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, on the basic demands of⁹:

- (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 the 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 of 6,09,1355,57,358 constitute Tribal population (91.5%) and in this 3,74,152 is Rabha population (66.5%) and 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, KarbiAnglong 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 and other such organizations, demands the inclusion of 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 demands the 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 that, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also demands for creation of two Parliamentary Constituencies namely (1) Bogai (Boko-Bongaon), and (2) Thekasu (Dhudhnoi). In this Memorandum, Rabha Hasong Demand Committee also wants and demands all the powers and functions for their proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous State in the lines as enjoyed by the existing Karbi-Anglong Autonomous Council, Bodoland Autonomous Council etc. within the state of Assam, including Finance, General Administration and Police¹⁰.

It has been observed that under the active initiative and patronage of ARSU, and RHDC, the movement for territorial autonomy for the Rabha community started actively and strongly in the last decade that is decade of 90's of the 20th Century. Under the active leadership and patronage of ARSU and RHDC, the Rabha ethnic assertion for territorial autonomy started with new vigour and got momentum, which resulted in the signing of the Rabha Accord, 1995 between the Assam Government and the leaders of ARSU and RHDC, leading to the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with a minimum autonomy under a State Act, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995. The RHAC formed in 1995 could not discharge its powers, functions and obligations and also could not fulfil the rights and aspirations of the backward Rabha community, due to the lack of proper implementation of the provisions of the Rabha

Accord, 1995. This pathetic failure of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council of 1995 compelled the Rabhas to reject it and they under the active patronage and dynamic leadership of ARSU, RHDC, ARWC, launched a massive movement for a fresh and greater Rabha territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

The Rabha educated elites felt that after several decades of independence and governance, the Assam Government could not protect the Rabhas from exploitation, and deprivation from basic constitutional rights, or ensure human rights and civil liberties and bring about faster socio-economic development. They have been exploited and suppressed socially and even politically ignoring their crisis situation of their identity by the advanced section of society within the existing socio-political set-up. Their right over their traditional ancestral land and forest has been snatched away. Large scale land alienation due to the encroachment by illegal migrants and outsiders and governmental development activities and erosion of tribal belts, blocks, tribal sub-plan areas which have started uprooting the Rabhas along with other tribals from their own homeland. This led the Rabhas to seek protection under the tribe-specific safeguard provision under the Constitution of India and demand greater Rabha territorial autonomy.

A popular mass movement was launched on these demands by ARSU and RHDC in the decades of 80s and 90s. In the wake of this mass movement, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, announced on the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly on 16th March, 1993 to grant autonomy to the Rabha ethnic community. He reiterated the announcement again on 11th May, 1993 at the open session of the 8th General Conference of All Rabha Sahitya Sabha (Bebak Rabha Kraourang Runchum) held at Dudhnoi in Goalpara district¹¹.

In response, the leading Rabha organizations sat down for talks with the Government of Assam and ultimately signed an Accord with the Government of Assam on 10th March, 1995 accepting an Autonomous Council in the name of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the State Act, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995¹².

Thus, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was constituted in interim form with much hope and expectation which got shattered soon. The Assam Government showed interest neither to strengthen the council nor to hold the election of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (according to the provisions of the Rabha Accord, 1995) to make it a democratic institution by implementing the provisions of the Rabha Accord, 1995. Due to the procedural lapses in the implementation of the provisions of the RHAC of 1995 from the side of the Assam Government, ultimately the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council failed to exercise its autonomous powers and functions for the greater interest of the marginalized Rabha community in practical sense, and become the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council although ad-hoc in nature. This pathetic failure of the RHAC of 1995 created discontent among the Rabha masses and they totally ignored and rejected it subsequently. Thus, the pathetic failure of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council compelled the Rabha people to reject it and demanded fresh and greater autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution and launched mass movement under the active leadership and patronage of All Rabha Students Union, Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad, All Rabha Women Council and Sixth Schedule Demand Committee¹³.

It is worth mentioning that in 1994, the Indian Government under the Ministry of Rural Development appointed the "Bhuriya Commission" under the Chairmanship of Dilip Singh Bhuriya in order to coordinate between the 'Scheduled Areas' and the 'Tribal Areas' (adopted by the Constitution of India) of different states of India with the amendment of 73rd Panchayatiraj Act. On the basis of the report submitted by the "Bhuriya Commission", the Panchayat Extension Scheduled Area (PESA) Act was passed in 1996 in the Parliament. On the basis of the recommendations of the PESA Act, 1996, the Government of India provided more autonomy through decentralization to the Scheduled Areas and Tribal areas enshrined in the Constitution, but the State Government did not take any steps to implement the recommendations of the PESA Act, 1996 due to the lack of compulsory enforceability of the PESA Act. In spite of the Constitutional provisions for the protection and development of the Plain Tribal areas of Assam, the Government unfortunately has excluded the Plain Tribal Areas of Assam both from the Fifth Schedule and the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India till today. The "Bhupinder Singh Committee" appointed in 1995 also recommends the

inclusion of the Plain Tribal areas of Assam into Article 243 (A) & 4(B) of the Constitution of India. But, the State Government never takes any step to protect and develop the Plain tribal areas as well as the most backward and marginalized tribal groups such as the Rabhas, the Misings, the Tiwas, etc. under these proposed and recommended Constitutional provision¹⁴. Thus, after several decades of Independence, the Rabhas along with other Plain Tribes have faced discrimination and deprivation to achieve and enjoy their Constitutional rights under the tribe-specific Constitutional provisions of the Constitution of India.

On the basis of this historical background for the demand of tribal autonomy in Assam, the backward Plain tribal communities of Assam have been struggling to gain their desired autonomy demand under the Constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Against this long-term exploitation, discrimination and deprivation, the Rabhas along with other Plain tribal communities such as: the Misings, the Tiwas, etc. have been launching massive movement demanding greater autonomy under the Constitutional provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, in a democratic way to protect and preserve their distinct identity, their ancestral land, as well as to establish their right to self-determination in their traditionally inhabited ancestral land as the 'Son of the Soil'. The autonomy demand movements of these Plain tribal communities which started in the pre-independence period with a little and limited organizational base, becomes more popular, dynamic, extensive, strong and progressive under the active leadership and strong organizational strategy of the new youth generations of these respective tribal communities in the decades of 80s and 90s of the last 20th Century.

The Rabha educated elites felt and asserted that the formation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in 1995 under the State Act, namely the RHAC Act, 1995 without a proper demarcated territorial boundary of its own and also without financial and legislative powers, could not accommodate the democratic rights, aspirations and longstanding demands of the most backward Rabha community. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Councils without democratic elections continued from 1995 to 2007 with nominated members and in this regard, the State Government totally failed to make it a viable democratic institution without holding democratic elections, rather the

State Government created divide and rule politics in the name of interim Councils. After the formation of 1st RHA(interim) Council, the Congress-led Assam Government pursued divide and rule policy and fractioned and divided the leaders of Rabha Hasong Demand Committee into two political units: one is 'Rabha Gana Sanmilan' (Rabha People's Conference, RPC) which supported Congress and another is 'Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad' (RHSP) which supported AGP. In this way, a political strategy was adopted to capture the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Interim Councils by the political parties in order to sustain strengthen and hold party-base and political holding in the formation of RHA (interim) Councils since 1995. Basically, the Congress and AGP, in the politics to capture and form RHA (interim) Councils, pursued a divide and rule policy among the leaders of ARSU and RHDC and tried to include them in their party to strengthen and hold party base of their own in order to capture and form interim Councils¹⁵. This political process created a co-optive Rabha educated elite section among the Rabha community which only stood for their individual as well as party interest, and ignored the interest of the marginalized Rabha masses and the right and demand for greater Rabha autonomy. These developments helped the political parties to generate political profit as well as to sustain, strength and hold their party base, and totally ignored the autonomy demand of the Rabha people.

The leaders of All Rabha Student's Union realized and asserted that the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the Rabha Accord, 1995 has become mal-functional and ad-hoc in nature due to the lack of Constitutional guaranteed provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Rabha leaders apparently felt that the Rabha autonomy without a special separate political autonomous arrangement under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, it would be impossible to preserve and maintain distinct Rabha ethnic identity as well as to accelerate all round development of the Rabha community. With these views, the All Rabha Students Union rejected the Rabha Autonomous Council formed under the Rabha Accord, 1995 and demanded a greater territorial political autonomy for the Rabha community under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India¹⁶.

It has been observed that 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 RHDC¹⁷. 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 10th 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, 10th March, 1995 in the Assam Legislative Assembly which led to the formation of the first ever Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council on 10th March, 1995¹⁸.

Referring to the Rabha accord, the 1st Interim Rabha Hasong autonomous council (RHAC) was constituted under the chairmanship of Sabyashasi Rabha along with other 19 executive members on 20th July, 1995, but the boundary of the proposed council's area is yet to be demarcated in an agreed manner. During 1995- 2007, three interim RHAC's were constituted by the Government of Assam. The 1st interim RHAC was constituted in 1995, the 2nd interim RHAC was constituted in 1997 and the third one was in 2001. The 2nd interim RHAC, was constituted in 1997 by the Government of Assam with the initiatives of Chief Minister Prafulla Kr. Mahanta taking Sarat Chandra Rabha as Chief Executive member along with other 25 additional members and the 3rd interim RHAC was formed in 2001 by the Government of Assam with the initiatives of Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi taking Dr. Sarat Chandra Rabha as Chief Executive member along with other 24 additional members¹⁹. During 1995- 2007, three interim RHAC's were constituted by the Government of Assam. The 1st interim RHAC was constituted in 1995, the 2nd interim RHAC was constituted in 1997 and the third one was in 2001. But the boundary of the proposed council's area is yet to be demarcated in an agreed manner. Although the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was supposed to be formed through election as per the provisions of the RHAC Act, 1995, but the council election could not be held until November, 2013. Although the council was supposed to be formed through polls till 2001 according to the provisions of the RHAC Act, 1995, but later on the council poll was not being held. Thus, although some amount of

political autonomy was granted to the Rabhas, but in real sense, the aspirations of the Rabha people weren't fulfilled due to the gaps in the implementation of the Rabha Accord. As a result of the autonomy movement of the Rabhas, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Councils were constituted during the period of 1995-2007, according to the Rabha Accord, 10th March, 1995. But, in real sense, the councils could not fulfil the aspirations, hopes, expectations, long cherished demands and rights of the Rabhas due to the lack of proper implementation of the Rabha Accord from the Government's side. The failure of RHAC led to a new dimension in the agitation for more autonomy for the Rabhas under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Thus, the failure of RHAC compelled the Rabha educated elites to reject it and they started mass movements demanding fresh and greater political autonomy under Article no- 244 (A) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India²⁰.

The feeling of discrimination and deprivation and the socio-economic backwardness of the Rabhas for several years paved the way to mobilize the Rabha masses on ethnic lines to build ethnic solidarity, for claiming their rights, as well as to redress their grievances and fulfil their longstanding demands and rights. At any rate, with the growing intensity and popularity of Rabha autonomy movement, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) came into being in 1995 in interim form. But due to procedural lapses, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Councils was not able to function and discharge its obligation as envisaged in the Rabha Accord, 1995. Determination of electoral constituency was an obstacle for conduction of council election and for this, the councils elections were not being held in a regular manner due to lack of a proper demarcated boundary of the proposed Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. The stumbling block is the boundary delimitation of the Council area.

Due to the failure of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous (Interim) Council formed in 1995 and non-implementation of the Rabha Accord and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995, the members of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous (Interim) Council submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India in 1998 under the Chairmanship of Sri Sarat Chandra Rabha, the Chief Executive member of the council, with the following demands²¹:

- (1) To implement the provisions of the Rabha Accord, signed on 10-03-1995.

- (2) To implement the provisions of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 without further lapses.
- (3) To demarcate the boundaries of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council including 830 numbers of revenue villages in to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council demanded by the Rabha community.
- (4) To amend the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, suitably to allow the council to exercise better autonomy with more financial, administrative and legislative powers.

They also asserted that the creation of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council under the Rabha Accord and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, existed only in the papers and nothing had been done to materialize and implement the provisions of the Rabha Accord and the RHAC Act, 1995. Hence, they demanded the implementation of the provisions of the Rabha Accord and Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 with immediate effect for the proper functioning of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with a substantive political autonomy²².

Another Rabha national level organization, the Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad (RHSP) emerged in 1996 and came forward with the aim to achieve a real, proper, full-fledged and a substantial political autonomy for the Rabha community²³. The Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad (RHSP) also launched agitational programmes and mass movement demanding a proper and definite demarcation of the boundary of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council with more financial, administrative and legislative powers. With these views, the Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad also submitted a 6th Point demand memorandum to the Government of Assam in 1996, under the President Dhaneswar Rabha and Secretary Dr. Sarat Chandra Rabha, on the basic demands of²⁴:-

- (1) Determination of a demarcated boundary of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, —(a) include all the tribal belts and blocks from Rani in the East to Joyramkushi, in the West in the southern bank of river Brahmaputra, (b) include all the Rabha dominated villages under Tribal Sub-Plan in to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, (c) include all the Rabha dominated villages related to historic settlement of Rabha tribe in to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council,

- (d) include all Rabha dominated forest villages in to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.
- (2) Provide maximum financial power with self-preparation of budget in every financial year to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council,
 - (3) Provide maximum legislative power to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council,
 - (4) Create and prevail new land policy for proper protection of the tribal people. In this regard, demanded the removal of Articles 166 & 167 included in the Tenth Chapter of the Assam Land and Revenue Act, 1886 and also follow and accept the recommendations of the U.N. Dhevar Commission in this regard.
 - (5) Reserve 7 seats in the Village Councils and 21 seats in the General Councils for the Rabha community in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.
 - (6) Dismiss the Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Council under the leadership of Shabyasachi Rabha with immediate effect and re-construct it through democratic process.

Since its inception, the Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad struggled with its demands for a greater political autonomy of the Rabha community. The RHSP also signed an accord on 1st March, 1996 with the AGP Government in order to fulfil their basic demands²⁵. The AGP Government in 1996 formed a high-profile committee to solve the longstanding problems of the Rabha community and the RHSP also held a series of discussions with this committee on 18th March, 1997 and 28th October, 1997 and as a result of these discussions, the AGP Government decided to include 307 revenue villages in to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, while the RHSP demanded the AGP ruled Assam Government to include 854 revenue villages in to the RHAC with determination of a proper demarcated boundary of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council²⁶. The Government included only 306 revenue villages in to the RHAC but did not take any necessary step to fulfil and enforce the basic demands of RHSP.

The RHSP asserted that though 34 administrative departments had been transferred to the RHAC under the RHAC Act, 1995, but in practice no

administrative department was transferred to the RHAC, which led to the non-implementation of the provisions of the Rabha Accord and RHAC Act, 1995 and for this Rabha autonomy under RHAC Act, 1995 becomes ad-hoc in nature. Due to the lack of financial power, the RHAC in practical sense could not fulfil the interests and aspirations of the Rabha community. The Government is not at all interested to protect the interests and rights of the Rabha community on the other hand, the Government only tries to hold state power in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. Neglecting the demands of the RHSP, the State Government announces and intends to hold Panchayat elections in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, which ultimately violates Clause No. 5 of the Rabha Accord. Hence, the RHSP launched massive movement against the Government's effort of holding Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong areas and boycotted Panchayat election in the Council area. RHSP also asserts that holding of Panchayat election is not applicable in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area according to Clause No. 5 of the Rabha Accord, 1995. Countering the Governmental effort of holding Panchayat election in the Council area, the RHSP also demands to determine a proper demarcated territorial boundary of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council including total 854 revenue villages in to the RHAC and hold Council elections with immediate effect. The Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad asserts that the Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi led Congress Assam Government has illegally imposed Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas and has totally pushed back the Rabha autonomy to in a dark background. The RHSP also argues that according to Article 1 of the Assam Panchayat Act and also according to the provisions laid down in the Rabha Accord and RHAC Act, of 1995, the State Government cannot impose and hold Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas²⁷.

With these views, the Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad submitted a memorandum to the then Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam, Sri Tarun Gogoi, through the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara district in 2000 with Sarat Chandra Rabha as Chief Advisor, Dhaneswar Rabha as President and Karnabhushan Rabha as Vice-President, demanding exemption of Panchayat election in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas and also demands the conducting of the Council election

within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area before December, 2001 with immediate effect²⁸.

The RHSP asserts that after prolonged struggles of the Rabha people for the creation of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council within the State of Assam since 1992 under the provision of the Article 224(A) and 275(A) of the Constitution of India, the government of Assam, was pleased to constitute the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and made an Accord on 10th March, 1995 and later passed the most awaited 'Act' namely the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 on 5th July, 1995. The demand for creation of RHAC and demarcation of territorial boundary of its own was right from Rani (West Guwahati) to Joyramkushi (Jaleswar) of Goalpara district which covers an area of 3161 sq. Kms. comprising of total 854 revenue villages and forest villages under tribal belts/blocks/Tribal Sub-Plan areas and also outside Sub-Plan area's villages adjoining to these Tribal belts/blocks/tribal Sub-Plan areas, but the Government of Assam not guaranteed the provisions of the Rabha Accord. The Government of Assam itself made the present crisis because RHAC was created only in paper and nothing has been done to materialize and implement the provisions of the Rabha Accord. In this condition, several discussions were held at different times with the concerned authority of the State Government since 1995. In this regard, the RHSP also submitted memorandum to the Government of Assam demanding for demarcation of territorial boundary of RHAC, constitution of the Village Councils and General Council's constituencies, to be held council election and also devolution of powers and functions to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. After general discussion with the Government of Assam, Section 4(1) of RHAC Act, 1995 has, already been amended vide notification No. LGL 20/95/60, Dated-29th March, 2001 and again in 2005 with further amendments of RHAC Act, 1995. But, inspite of the assurances from the Government end, the State Government exhibits no positive attitude in constituting the constituencies of the Village Councils and the General Councils and also for holding the Council election within the RHAC area. With these views, in this regard, the Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad launched a massive movement demanding the State Government to hold the Council election under provision of Section 48(1) of RHAC Act, 1995 before December, 2001, positively within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area²⁹.

3.3 RABHA HASONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL UNDER RHAC (AMENDMENT) ACT, 2001 AND 2005: COMPOSITION AND NATURE

As a result of the protest movement of the other tribal groups within the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area, such as the Bodo-Kacharis, Hajongs, Garos etc. under the organizational banner of 'Ethnic Groups Co-ordination Committee', a platform organization of Garo, Bodo and Hajong community of South Kamrup and Goalpara district of Assam was formed in 2003. The protests were due to the feeling of insecurity and discontent in terms of rights and development, financial allotment to the RHAC in the name of TSP (Tribal Sub-Plan), etc. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council was further amended in 2001 and 2005³⁰. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 was further amended in 2005 with some modifications which received the assent of the Governor on 8th May 2005. Earlier in the RHAC Act, 1995, it was said that Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council will be established within the state of Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution comprising of the satellite areas of Village Councils formed out of blocks of contiguous revenue villages, each having more than 50 percent population of the Rabha community without having any compact area for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha community residing therein³¹ whereas according to the RHAC (Amendment Act) 2005, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council will be established within the state of Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution, comprising of the Satellite Areas and Core Areas, having more than 50 percent Rabha and other Scheduled Tribes communities residing therein for their social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement³². According to the amendment of Section 2 of the RHAC Act, "Satellite Areas" would now mean the area or areas consisting of non-contiguous cluster of villages predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50 percent and above as a whole in the cluster and not necessarily in the individual villages", and the "Core Areas" would mean the compact and contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50 percent and above as a whole in the area and not necessarily in the individual villages",. In the amendment of Section 4 of the RHAC Act, the word "Rabha" is substituted by the word "Scheduled Tribes". In the amendment of Section 6 of the RHAC Act, the number of

members of the General Council was increased from 30 to 40 numbers and it was reconstituted: 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 "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 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, 2005, total 779 revenue villages was included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, which was only 386 revenue villages included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council according to the RHAC Act, 1995³³. 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. Thus it was put under the control of the administration of the Commissioner of Lower Assam Division since 2011.

According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Amendment Act, 2005, the RHAC consists of 'Core Areas' and 'Satellite Areas' of villages. The 'Core Areas' means the compact and contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the Schedule Tribes population having 50 percent and above as a whole in the area and not necessarily in the individual villages. The 'Satellite Areas' means the areas consisting of non-contiguous clusters of villages predominately inhabited by Schedule Tribes population having 50 percent and above as a whole in the cluster and not necessarily in the individual villages. This shows that the RHAC is constituted by the tribal

communities. As tribal communities, the Rabha, Bodo, Kachari, Garo, Hajong etc. form the council. Besides them, other non-tribal communities are also found living in the council area. Thus, the council includes other non-Rabha tribal and non-tribal communities within its jurisdiction. In regard to this point, ethnic composition of the council can be shown in the following table as per 2001 Population Census³⁴.

Table: 3. 1. Population of RHAC as per the Population Census, 2001

| Name of the communities | Number of population | Percentage of S.T. |
|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Rabha, Bodo, Kachari | 2,49,305 | 59.49% |
| Garo | 76568 | |
| Hajong | 3080 | |
| Total ST Population | 3,28,953 | |
| Schedule Caste | 15,695 | |
| Other | 2,08,385 | |
| Total Population | 5,52,997 | |

Source: Population Census Report, 2001

In the above table, it is observed that although the Council is named after the Rabhas, the composition of other tribal and non-tribal population of the area is significant. On this ground, the council may be observed as inclusive in nature. However, the objective of the Council appears to be exclusive in terms of representing the interest of other non-tribals living in the area. In this regard, we may refer to the objective of the Council: "whereas it is expedient to provide for the establishment of a Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council within the State of Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution, comprising of the Satellite Areas and Core Areas, for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha and other Schedule Tribes Communities residing therein." So, the council may be observed as exclusive since the objective does not reflect about the interests of other non-tribals in spite of having a large number of aforesaid communities in the area. Moreover, the objective tells about socio-economic and cultural advancement of the Rabhas of only the council area excluding the aspirations of the Rabhas of other parts of Assam. In this regard, the council may also be observed as exclusive. Such exclusive nature of the council becomes more evident on ground that it includes the Rabhas of

779 villages of Goalpara and Kamrup districts excluding the Rabhas of Darrang, Dhubri, Nalbari etc. districts of Assam although the council came out as a result of the assertion of Rabha ethnic identity. Thus, the council may be observed as both inclusive and exclusive.

According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995, the RHAC is constituted by a General Council, an Executive Council and Village Councils. The General Council consists of 30 members of which 26 are directly elected and 4 members are nominated by the Government to give representation to those communities of the council which are not otherwise represented in it. Out of 30 seats, 15 seats are reserved for the Rabha community and out of 15 reserved seats, at least 3 seats are reserved for women. Then other remaining 11 seats may be understood as unreserved and open for all since the Act does not mention whom these seats belong to. Through this provision, the non-Rabha communities have the opportunity of representation in the council. On such ground, it may be observed that the council is representative to some extent. However, 11 seats may be contested not only by the non-Rabhas but by the Rabhas as well as these seats are unreserved as a result of which a large number of non-Rabha community may have least representation in the council. In this regard, distribution of 30 seats into 15 for the Rabhas and 4 for the non-Rabhas through reservation system may also be observed as inadequate in terms of accommodating the political aspirations of a large section of existing non-Rabha communities. On the other hand, the Act does not mention any scope of representation for the Rabhas whose villages do not fall within the council area.

According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, the RHAC is an apex body consisting of Village Councils of Core and Satellite areas, called the Rabha Hasong Village Council (RHVC). The RHVC is constituted with the villages having more than 50 percent of the tribal population in the Rabha dominated areas with population of 6000-8000 in order to exercise grass root democracy in place of Village Panchayat in the RHAC area. However, the RHVC also includes the non-tribals since the population Census shows the existence of a large number of non-tribals. According to the Accord, the RHVC is constituted by 10 elected members out of which five are from the Rabha tribes. Out of five reserved seats one is reserved for a woman member.

If five out of ten seats are for the Rabhas then other five seats may be understood as unreserved and open for all. Through these unreserved seats the non-Rabhas have the chance of representation in the RHVC. However, it may be observed that the Accord has failed to make the RHVC a truly representative council, As the Accord does not mention about the reservation of seats for other non-Rabhas except reservation for women in the RHVC. On the other hand, the five unreserved seats may not be sufficient to represent the political aspirations of a good considerable number of non-Rabha communities in the RHVC. Therefore, it may be observed that although the council is inclusive by comprising other non-Rabhas within the area, it is incapable of accommodating adequately the political interests of all sections of the people of the area.

According to the RHAC Act, 1995, the executive council of the RHAC is vested with the executive powers and functions on 34 subjects in relation to the council area. According to the Act, the RHVC has the executive powers and functions on 29 subjects in relation to the village council area. This implies that both the councils are entrusted with the power of execution of development schemes within their respective jurisdiction which are essential for protection and development of the Rabha and other tribals of the area. Moreover, the RHAC has also the legislative power which is assigned to the General Council. Regarding the legislative power of the General Council, the RHAC Act, 1995 mentions that "the apex council shall have the power to make bye-law/ rules and orders which shall apply to all the RHVC." This implies that the laws, rules and orders made by the General Council to exercise control and administration over aforesaid subjects are applicable only within the area. Thus, the powers and functions of both the executive and General Councils are found applicable only within the council area and on such ground the RHAC may be observed as territorial in nature.

Although the General Council has power to make bye-laws/ rules or orders on aforesaid subjects, it has to exercise its power according to the norms prescribed by the State Government. Besides, all laws or rules made by the general council are subject to the approval of the State Government. Moreover, the Accord specifies that "Views of RHAC shall be given due regard before any law is enacted by the State Government on religious/ social practices, customary laws and procedures for ownership/ transfer of

land in the council area." This means that the real legislative power in terms of enacting laws on aforesaid affairs is in the hands of the State Government. Regarding the judicial powers of the council, the Accord says that "the State Government shall take steps to set up Customary Courts in the Council areas to try and cases whenever both contesting parties prefer to approach such courts." This implies that the council is not assigned the judicial power and moreover, the State Government shall take step to set up Customary Courts only when both the rival parties wish to settle their dispute in these courts. In regard to the legislative and judicial powers of the Council, the State Government has full power to intervene. On such ground, it may be observed that the Rabhas of the council area do not enjoy substantial form of autonomy. Furthermore, the autonomy they are enjoying may be observed as partially non-territorial form of autonomy since the State Government has the power to interfere in the legislative and judicial affairs of the Council.

According to the RHAC Act, 1995, the State Government has the responsibility to conduct election to the general and village councils of the RHAC after every five years. Immediately after the formation of RHAC, the State Government constituted an interim council on 20th July, 1995 to run the council for time being which lasted till 1996. Instead of conducting election after the first interim council, Government constituted second interim council which existed from 1996 to 2001. Moreover, the Government constituted another interim council for the third time in 2001 which became malfunction after 2010. Accordingly, the RHAC had been run by the nominated members for many years since its inception and the State Government never held election to the council till today. Although the Government announced the 30th April, 2013 as the date for election to the RHAC after 17 years of its formation, election could not take place due to Panchayat-council election debate among the Rabhas and non-Rabhas. For such a long period of time, neither the council nor the Panchayat election was held in the council area as a result of which the people falling within the council were deprived from the right to exercise grassroots democracy. On such ground, it may be observed that the Government has failed to implement the Act. Moreover, the RHAC has been run under the control and administration of the commissioner of lower Assam division since 2011.

The above analysis has found the RHAC as partly inclusive, partly exclusive, territorial and non-territorial in nature. Such territorial and non-territorial dilemma has made the Council as unconstitutional by keeping it aside from falling under the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of Indian Constitution. Government's failure in implementing the RHAC Act, 1995 has also made the Council malfunction. Such malfunctioning and inclusive-exclusive nature of the Council may be regarded as responsible factors for emerging conflict between the Rabhas and non-Rabhas in the Council area. There is a constant demand from the Rabhas to hold election to the Council and to include the Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. On the other hand, the non-Rabhas under the banner of Non-Rabha Coordination Forum are also launching movement by urging the State Government to exclude their villages from the council and to hold Panchayat election in non-Rabha dominated villages of the council area. Such development has involved both the groups to organize counter mobilization and movement against each others' demands leading to violent clashes among the Rabhas, non-Rabhas and police forces in December 2008, between the Rabhas and Garos in December, 2010 and January, 2011 and among the Rabhas, non-Rabhas and police forces in February-March, 2013. In fact, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council has become a contested autonomous Council in Assam. However, if the Government of Assam and India concedes a form of autonomy to the Rabhas including all scattered Rabhas of Assam and at the same time protecting the aspirations and rights of other minorities as necessary strategy, then it may be hoped that it would be able to tackle such autonomy related clash between the Rabhas and non-Rabhas.

3.4 RABHA HASONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL: NEW DYNAMICS

The Rabha leaders under the organizational banner of RHJMC (Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee- an ethnic umbrella organization composed by 34 ethnic organizations of 19 ethnic groups of the RHAC area) constantly organizes and mobilizes the Rabha masses and launches a protest movement demanding to exempt the Panchayat elections from the jurisdiction of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area which is imposed by the State Government in the RHAC area violating the Clause No. 5 of the Rabha Accord, and demand to hold and conduct Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council election with immediate effect³⁵. 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 to hold and conduct 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 13th, 16th, and 25th November, 2013, respectively. 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 were 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 Act³⁶.

However, the formation of democratically elected body of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council for the first time in 2013 gave a positive development and direction to 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 inclusion of 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 Sixth Schedule status to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council.

Though the Rabha Accord was signed in 1995, the State Government formed the interim council of the RHAC with 306 revenue villages. In 2004, the Garos, Bodos, Hajongs, and Bodos of the council area formed the Ethnic Group Coordination Committee and along with the forum, the other organizations like Garo National Council, Garo Student's Union, Garo Mother's Association launched an intense agitation seeking to include the Garo dominated villages in the RHAC. The State Government reviewed the situation and made another 473 revenue villages dominated by Garo, Bodo and Hajong community, part of the RHAC³⁷.

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 and 2005, 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, 2001. 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 into the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council³⁸. Thus, According to the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2001 and 2005, total 779 revenue villages is included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, earlier which was only 306 revenue villages included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council according to the RHAC Act, 1995. Presently, total 779 revenue villages with a total population of six (6) lakhs (approx.) have been notified by the Hon'ble Governor of Assam as being under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council³⁹.

3.5 CONCLUSION

It has been observed that Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council which is the outcome of the prolonged Rabha autonomy movement is also marked as the political formation of Rabha community at large. RHAC has passed through different stages of development since its formation in 1995 on basis of the Rabha Accord, 1995. While tracing the formation and development of RHAC, the study shows that as a result of the Rabha autonomy movement, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) came into being in 1995 according to the Rabha Accord, which was signed between the Government of Assam and ARSU, RHDC, the leading Rabha organizations on 10th March, 1995. 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 on 5th July, 1995. Consequently, the Memorandum of Settlement, the Rabha Accord came into force through the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, on 10th March, 1995 that resulted in the formation of RHAC, 1995. The Rabha Hasong Autonomous (interim) Councils without democratic elections continued from 1995 to 2007 with nominated members. During 1995- 2007, three interim RHAC's

were constituted by the Government of Assam. Due to lack of implementation of the provisions of Rabha Accord and continuation of RHA (interim councils) without democratic elections, without demarcated territory with inclusion of no specified villages and without proper financial and legislative powers, ultimately RHAC failed to exercise its autonomous powers and functions for the greater interest of the marginalized Rabha community in practical sense, and become mal-functional and ad-hoc in nature. This Pathetic failure of RHAC to discharge its powers and functions as a substantive political autonomy compelled the Rabha leaders to reject it and demanded fresh and greater autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. They launched mass movement under the active leadership of ARSU, RHDC, ARWC, Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad (RHSP) formed in 1996, Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC), demanding to implement the provisions of the Rabha Accord of 1995, to implement the provision of the RHAC Act, 1995 without further lapses, to demarcate the boundary of RHAC including specified revenue villages and to amend the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, with more financial, administrative and legislative powers, making a real, proper, full-fledged and a substantive political autonomy for the Rabha community. As a result of prolonged constant movement of the leading Rabha organizations, the RHAC Act, 1995 was further amended in 2001 and again in 2005 with certain structural changes basically in Section 4 and Section 6 of the RHAC Act, 1995. Besides, 779 (306 according to 2001 Act + 473 according to 2005 Act- Total- 779) revenue villages are included in RHAC from both Goalpara and Kamrup (Rural) districts which fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC area.

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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 ethno-cultural 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 territories¹. 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 indiginity 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 Constitution². 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 only³.

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 Assam⁴. 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 India⁵. 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 etc⁶. 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 India⁷. 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 affairs⁸.

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 areas⁹. 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 problems¹⁰. 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

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

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 2003¹¹.

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 Deori Autonomous Council were formed in 2005¹². Such ethnic-based statutory autonomous councils have been shown in the following table:

Table 4.2: Statutory Ethnic-based Autonomous Councils in Assam

| (Outside Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India) | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Autonomous Council | Year of Composition | Dominant Ethnic Community |
| Mising Autonomous Council | 1995 | Mising |
| Tiwa Autonomous Council | 1995 | Tiwa-Lalung |
| Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council | 1995 | Rabha |
| Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council | 2005 | Sonowal Kachari |
| Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council | 2005 | Thengal Kachari |
| Deori Autonomous Council | 2005 | Deori |

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 plains tribal area) in 2003, the provision of Sixth Schedule comes down from hills to plains¹³.

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 India¹⁴. 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 India¹⁵. 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 Secretary¹⁶. 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 as¹⁷:-

- (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 as¹⁸:-

- (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 of¹⁹:-

- (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 Council²⁰.

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/Pt-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 2005²¹.

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 Council²².

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, 1995²³. 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 23rd 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 18th December, 2003²⁴.

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 Assam²⁵. In spite 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 14th 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 council²⁶.

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 area²⁷. 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 of²⁸:-

- (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 Demand²⁹. 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 of³⁰:-

- (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 Constitution³¹.

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 rights³². 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, 2001³⁵. 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.³⁶. 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 4.3: Contested Rabha Autonomy: Territorial Inclusion and Exclusion

| Name of District | Number of Villages included into RHAC | Number of Villages Claimed for Exclusion having more than 50 percent Non-ST Population |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Goalpara | 401 | 89 |
| Kamrup (Rural) | 378 | 134 |
| Total | 779 | 223 |

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 land³⁷.

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 districts³⁸.

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/blocks 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, 2001³⁹ 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 area⁴⁰. 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 areas⁴¹. This change led to insecurity among certain sections of non-tribal people living in Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam⁴². 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 2004⁴³. 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 RHAC⁴⁴ 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 etc⁴⁵. 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 granted⁴⁶. 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 RHAC⁴⁷. 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 area⁴⁸ 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 12⁴⁹.

Since 2012, the Rabha autonomy movement took a new direction and got a new trend. On 17th 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 17th 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 effect⁵⁰. 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 Convenors⁵¹. 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 effect⁵².

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 areas⁵⁴. As a result, the Rabha leaders stood against the State Government's 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 movement⁵⁵. 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 area⁵⁶.

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 13th, 16th and 25th November, 2013, respectively⁵⁷. 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 13th, 16th, and 26th November, 2013 in response to the demands of the Rabha organizations⁵⁸. 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 Act⁵⁹. 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 Member⁶⁰.

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 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 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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CHAPTER-V

TERRITORIAL VS NON-TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF AUTONOMY: THE RABHA AUTONOMY QUESTION

This chapter is based on empirical findings of the data gathered through a field-survey. It attempts an empirical academic investigation with the help of the collected data. An attempt has also been made to understand the feasibility of territorial and non-territorial dimensions of autonomy in the context of inter-ethnic conflicts and a peaceful comprehensive ethnic accommodation in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas. In order to understand the feasibility of territorial and non-territorial dimensions of autonomy in the context of Rabha autonomy, the data collected from 100 respondents through structured questionnaires are quantified and analyzed by using SPSS (16.0 version).

5.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD-STUDY

The field-survey was conducted in two urban areas and in two rural areas which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC. In order to collect data through field-survey, I have purposively selected Dudhnoi Town as an urban area and Krishnai –Paikan Part-I (A) as a rural /village area from the district of Goalpara, which fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC and I have selected Boko Town as an urban area and Singra as a rural/ village area from the district of Kamrup (Rural), which also fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC. Both the urban and rural areas from the two districts of Goalpara and Kamrup, have been selected purposively taking into account the ethnically mix population inhabitant areas inhabited both by the Rabhas and the non-Rabha and non-tribal communities for a viable data collection for a empirical study of my research problem.

A sample of 100 (one hundred) respondents, 25 (twenty five) each from Dudhnoi Town, Boko Town, Krishnai Paikan-Part-I (A) village and Singra village, were surveyed through structured questionnaires.

Dudhnoi is one of the revenue circles of Goalpara district which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC area. This place is not considered as an urban area and at the same time, this place is not a village. Rather, this place is known as a revenue town where one

of the development blocks of Goalpara district is situated. This revenue town is situated at the Southern side of Goalpara district, the district Headquarter of Goalpara district. Like other towns in Goalpara district, this revenue town is also inhabited by different ethnic groups and has high population density. This town is known as the heart of RHAC where the Headquarter of the Council and Headquarter of a few Rabha organizations like ARSS, ARSU, ARWC, SSDC, are situated. In terms of communication, this town is the gateway of Garo Hills of Meghalaya through which NH 37 passes through. Likewise, this NH also passes through Boko town. Boko is one of the places of Kamrup (Rural) district which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC area. Like Dudhnoi, Boko is also not considered as an urban area. However, this place is known as a small revenue town where one of the development blocks of Kamrup (Rural) district is situated. This revenue town is situated at the South-Western side of Amingaon, the Headquarter of Kamrup (Rural) district and at the eastern side of Dudhnoi town, the Headquarter of RHAC. This revenue town is also inhabited by different ethnic groups and has high population density. In view of the location and demography of Dudhnoi and Boko towns, both the places were selected as urban areas for field-survey, where 25 respondents each from these two urban areas were surveyed.

Krishnai-Paikan Part-I (A) is one of the revenue villages which fall under Paikan revenue circle of Goalpara district. This village is situated in the South-eastern side of Goalpara town, the Head Quarter of Goalpara district and at the North-Western side of Dudhnoi, the Head Quarter of RHAC. This village is one of the villages from Goalpara district which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC area and is inhabited by different ethnic communities including both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas. Like Dudhnoi and Boko, NH 37 passes through this village. Unlike, Krishnai Paikan Part-I (A), Singra is situated in a remote area which also falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC area. Like Krishnai-Paikan Part-I (A), Singra is also inhabited by different ethnic communities including both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas. This village is situated in the South-Western side of Amingaon, the Head Quarter of Kamrup (Rural) district and the eastern side of Dudhnoi, the Head Quarter of RHAC. In view of the location and demography of Krishnai Paikan Part-I (A), and Singra, both the villages were selected as rural areas for field-survey, where 25 (twenty five) respondents from each were surveyed.

In view of the location and demography of these urban and rural areas, 25 (twenty five) respondents from each place were selected through stratified random sampling in order to ensure that the sample is representative of both the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas and proportional to the size of their population to make a empirical study of my research problem.

In order to examine the feasibility of Rabha autonomy in the context of territorial vs. non-territorial autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, I have tried to analyze the data collected from the respondents through structured questionnaires in the following tables and figures using SPSS of (16.0 version).

A profile of the respondents surveyed in the selected locations, have been showcased for an empirical understanding of the collected database.

5.2 PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Number of Respondents: 100

Age:

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| a. 18-25 | 10.0% |
| b. 25-40 | 45.0% |
| c. 40-60 | 35.0% |
| d. 60+ | 10.0% |

Sex/Gender:

- | | |
|-----------|-------|
| a. Male | 68.0% |
| b. Female | 32.0% |

Education:

- | | |
|------------------|-------|
| a. Illiterate | 9.0% |
| b. Below Primary | 9.0% |
| c. Primary | 17.0% |
| d. Matriculation | 37.0% |
| e. Graduate | 22.0% |
| f. Post-Graduate | 6.0% |

Monthly Household Income:

- | | |
|-------------------|-------|
| a. Below Rs. 5000 | 21.0% |
| b. 5000-10000 | 43.0% |
| c. 10000-20000 | 6.0% |
| d. Above 20000 | 30.0% |

Community:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Rabha | 45.0% |
| b. Bodo-Kachari | 7.0% |
| c. Koch-Rajbongshi | 8.0% |
| d. Garo | 6.0% |
| e. Hajong | 4.0% |
| f. Nepali | 4.0% |
| g. Bengali | 6.0% |
| h. Muslim | 8.0% |
| i. Others (including non-Rabha non-tribals, tea tribes etc.) | 12.0% |

The above data about the profile of the 100 respondents belonging to different communities shows the community of respondents, age of the respondents, sex of the respondents, education of the respondents, monthly household income of the respondents in percentage. In my field survey, out of 100 respondents, the Rabha community represents 45.0%, the Bodo-Kachari community represents 7.0%, the Koch-Rajbangshi community represents 8.0%, the Garo community represents 6.0%, the Hajong community represents 4.0%, the Nepali community represents 4.0%, the Bengali community represents 6.0%, the Muslim community represents 8.0% and the others including the non-Rabha non-tribals, tea tribes etc. represent 12.0%. Out of the 100 surveyed respondents of different communities, the age of 10.0% respondents is between 18-25, 45.0% respondents is between 25-40, 35.0% of the respondents is between 40-60 and 10.0% respondents is above 60. Out of the surveyed 100 respondents belonging to different communities, 68.0% is male while 32.0% is female. When we observe the educational qualifications out of the surveyed 100 respondents belonging to different communities, 9.0% is illiterate, 9.0% is below primary, 17.0% is primary, 37.0% is matriculate, 22.0% is graduate and 6.0% is post-graduate. When we see the monthly household income out of the surveyed 100 respondents belonging to

different communities, the income level of 21.0% is below 5000, 43.0% is between 5000-10000, 6.0% is between 10000-20000 and 30.0% is above 20000.

Table 5.1:

Community-Wise Respondents Awareness About Rabha Autonomy Movement

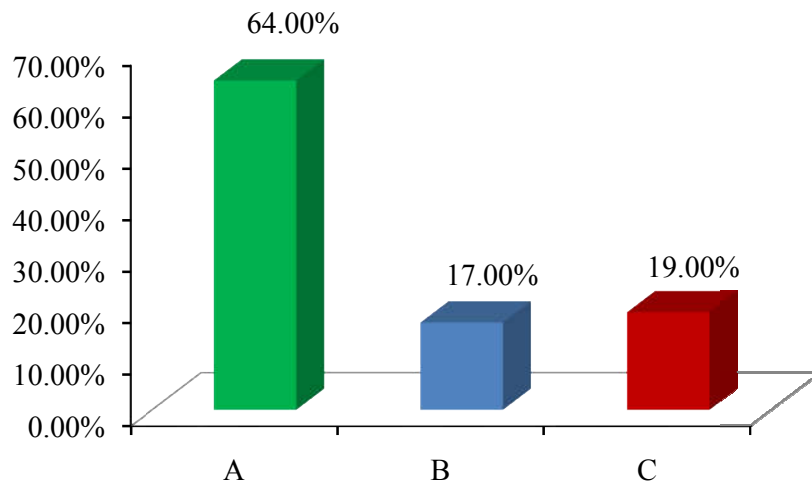
| Community of the respondents | Have you heard about Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India? | | | Total |
|------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No | No opinion | |
| Rabha | 39 86.7% | 2 4.4% | 4 8.9% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-Kachari | 3 42.9% | 2 28.6% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 4 50.0% | 2 25.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Garo | 3 50.0% | 2 33.3% | 1 16.7% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepali | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengali | 3 50.0% | 1 16.7% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 4 50.0% | 2 25.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 7 58.3% | 2 16.7% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 64 64.0% | 17 17.0% | 19 19.0% | 100 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

The above table 5.1 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 86.7% of the Rabhas have said that they are aware of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas only 4.4% of the Rabhas are not aware of the movement and 8.9% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion view in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 42.9% of the Bodo-Kacharis are aware of the movement, whereas 28.6% of the Bodo-kacharis are not aware of the movement and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis are

aware of the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis are not aware of the movement and 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion view in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the Garos are aware of the movement, while 33.3% of the Garos are not aware of the movement and 16.7% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs are aware of the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Hajongs are not aware of the movement and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed their no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis are aware of the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Nepalis are not aware of the movement and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the Bengalis are aware of the movement, whereas 16.7% of the Bengalis are not aware of the movement and 33.0% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the Muslims are aware of the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Muslims are not aware of the movement and 25.0% of the Muslims have expressed their no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 58.3% of the others including the non-Rabha non-tribals, tea-tribes etc, are aware of the movement, whereas only 16.7% of the others are not aware of the movement and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. From the above analysis, it appears that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is highest regarding their awareness about the movement, while the percentages of the Hajongs and Nepalis are lowest. The above table also indicates that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 64% of the respondents, that is, a major portion of the respondents are aware about the movement, whereas 17% of the respondents, that is, a small portion of the respondents are not aware about the movement and 19% of the respondents, that is, a small portion of the respondents do not know about the movement. This shows that the percentage of the respondents who are aware about the movement is highest while the percentage of the respondents who are not aware is lowest. This can be analyzed in the following figure:

Figure 5.1: Respondents Awareness About Rabha Autonomy Movement



Note: A- Yes, B- No, C- No opinion

Source: Field-Study

The above figure 5.1 shows that 64% of the respondents belonging to different communities have heard about the ongoing Rabha Hasong autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, 17% of the respondents belonging to different communities are not aware about the ongoing Rabha Hasong autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above figure also shows that 19% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion about their awareness of the Rabha Hasong autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

**Table 5.2: Community-Wise Respondents Support-Base Towards Rabha
Autonomy Movement**

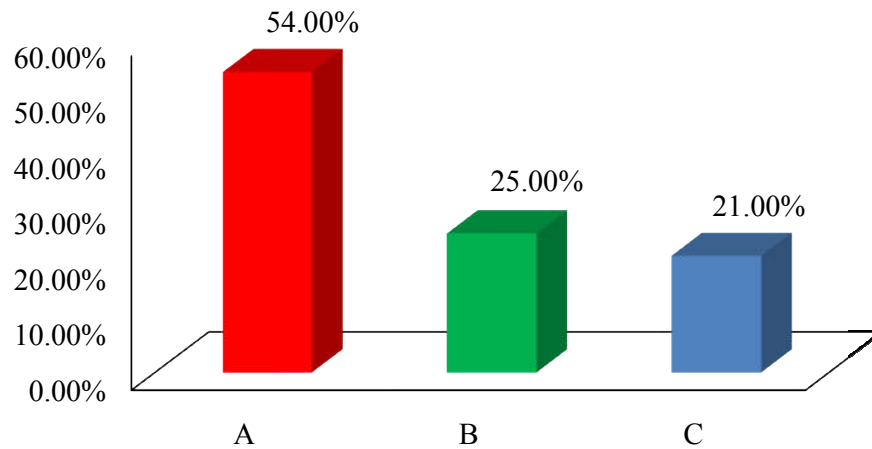
| Community of the respondents | Do you support Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India? | | | Total |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | Yes | No | No opinion | |
| Rabha | 39 86.7% | 2 4.4% | 4 8.9% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-kachari | 3 42.9% | 2 28.6% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch- Rajbangshi | 4 50.0% | 2 25.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Garo | 0 0% | 5 83.3% | 1 16.7% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepali | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengali | 2 33.3% | 1 16.7% | 3 50.0% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 0 0% | 6 75.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 4 33.3% | 5 41.7% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 54 54.0% | 25 25.0% | 21 21.0% | 100 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

The above table 5.2 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 86.7% of the Rabhas support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas only 4.4% of the Rabhas do not support the movement and 8.9% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 42.9% of the Bodo-Kachari supports the movement, whereas 28.6% of the Bodo-kacharis do not support the movement and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari has expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis support the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis do not support the movement and 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Garos support the movement, while 33.3% of the Garos do not support the movement and 16.7% of the Garos have

expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs support the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Hajongs do not support the movement and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis support the movement, whereas 25.0% of the Nepalis do not support the movement and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Bengalis support the movement, whereas 16.7% of the Bengalis do not support the movement and 50.0% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Muslims do not support the movement, whereas 75.0% of the Muslims do not support the movement and 25.0% of the Muslims have expressed their no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the others including the non-Rabha non-tribal, tea-tribes etc. support the movement, whereas only 41.7% of the others do not support the movement and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. From the above analysis, it appears to know that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is highest regarding their support towards the movement, while the percentages of the Garos and Muslims are zero which reveals the Garo and the Muslim community express negative view regarding the support towards the movement and hence, they totally oppose the movement. The above table also indicates that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 54% of the respondents, that is, a major portion of the respondents support the movement, whereas 25.0% of the respondents, that is, a small portion of the respondents do not support the movement and 21% of the respondents, that is, a considerable portion of the respondents do not know whether they support the movement or not. This shows that the percentage of the respondents who support the movement is highest while the percentage of the respondents who do not support the movement is lowest. This can be analyzed in the following figure:

**Figure 5.2 : Respondents Support-base
Towards Rabha Autonomy Movement**



Note: A- Yes, B- No, C- No opinion

Source: Field-Survey

The above figure 5.5 shows that 54% of the respondents belonging to different communities support Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above figure 5.5 also indicates that 21% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion in this regard.

Table 5.3: Causes For Community-Wise Respondents Support-Base Towards Rabha Autonomy Movement

Do you support Rabha autonomy movement? If yes, Why?

| Community of the respondents | For socio-economic development | For better livelihood | For safeguard and upliftment of identity | For Infrastructural development | For protection of Land | For political power and representation | No opinion | Total |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--|---------------------------------|------------------------|--|-------------|---------------|
| Rabha | 4 8.9% | 2 4.4% | 11 24.4% | 4 8.9% | 15 33.3% | 5 11.1% | 4 8.9% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-kachari | 1 14.3% | 1 14.3% | 0 0% | 1 14.3% | 2 28.6% | 0 0% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 1 12.5% | 1 12.5% | 0 0% | 1 12.5% | 3 37.5% | 0 0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Garo | 1 16.7% | 1 16.7% | 0 0% | 1 16.7% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 3 50.0% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 1 25.0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 1 25.0% | 0 0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepali | 0 0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 0 0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengali | 1 16.7% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 2 33.3% | 1 16.7% | 0 0% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 2 25.0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 2 25.0% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 4 50.0% | 8 10.0% |
| Others | 2 16.7% | 1 8.3% | 2 16.7% | 1 8.3% | 3 25.0% | 0 0% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 13 13.0% | 6 6.0% | 13 13.0% | 13 13.0% | 26 26.0% | 5 5.0% | 24 24.0% | 100 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

The above table 5.3 shows that the respondents belonging to different communities support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for various causes. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 8.9% of the Rabhas support the movement for socio-economic development, 4.4% of the Rabhas for better livelihood, 24.4% of the Rabhas for safeguard of cultural identity, 8.9% of the Rabhas for infrastructural development, 33.3% of the Rabhas for protection of their land, 11.1% of the Rabhas for political power and representation support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 8.9% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 14.3% of the Bodo-Kacharis support the movement for socio-economic development, 14.3% of the Bodo-Kacharis for better livelihood, 0% of the Bodo-Kacharis for safeguard of cultural identity, 14.3% of the

Bodo-Kacharis for infrastructural development, 28.6% of the Bodo-Kacharis for protection of their land, 0% of the Bodo-Kacharis for political power and representation support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 12.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis support the movement for socio-economic development, 12.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis for better livelihood, 0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis for safeguard of cultural identity, 12.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis for infrastructural development, 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis for protection of land, 0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis for political power and representation support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 16.7% of the Garos support the movement for socio-economic development, 16.7% of the Garos for better livelihood, 0% of the Garos for safeguard of cultural identity, 16.7% of the Garos for infrastructural development, 0% of the Garos for protection of land, 0% of the Garos for political power and representation support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs support the movement for socio-economic development, 25.0% of the Hajongs for protection of land support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis support the movement for infrastructural development, 25.0% of the Nepalis for protection of land support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 16.7% of the Bengalis support the movement for socio-economic development, 33.3% of the Bengalis for infrastructural development, 16.7% for protection of land support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 33.3% of the Bengalis

has expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Muslims support the movement for socio-economic development, 25.0% of the Muslims for infrastructural development support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Muslims have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 16.7% of the others support the movement for socio-economic development, 8.3% of the others for better livelihood, 16.7% for safeguard of identity, 8.3% for infrastructural development, 25.0% of the others for protection of land, support the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. The above analysis reveals that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is highest in the support of the movement for the cause of safeguard of cultural identity and protection of their land.

The above table also shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 13.0% of the respondents support the movement for socio-economic development, 6.0% of the respondents support the movement for better livelihood, 13.0% of the respondents support the movement for safeguard of cultural identity, 13.0% of the respondents for infrastructural development, 26.0% of the respondents support the movement for protection of land, 5.0% of the respondents for political power and representation and 24.0% of the respondents have expressed no opinion in this regard.

Table 5.4: Causes For Community-Wise Respondents Dissatisfaction Towards Rabha Autonomy Movement

Do you support Rabha autonomy movement? If no, Why?

| Community of the respondents | It will create problems to the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security etc. | It will create ethnic tensions and generate conflicts | Lack of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC in terms of population | No opinion | Total |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|-------------|--------------|
| Bodo-kachari | 0 0% | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Garo | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 0 0% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 0 0% | 1 33.3% | 0 0% | 2 66.7% | 3 100.0% |
| Nepali | 1 33.3% | 0 0% | 0 0% | 2 66.7% | 3 100.0% |
| Bengali | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 0 0% | 2 25.0% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 3 37.5% | 3 37.5% | 0 0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 3 37.5% | 2 25.0% | 2 25.0% | 1 12.5% | 8 100.0% |
| Total | 11 27.5% | 12 30.0% | 4 10.0% | 13 32.5% | 40 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

The above table 5.4 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for certain causes. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the ongoing Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area, 25.0% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for lack of provision of

proportional representation in RHAC in terms of population of the people other than the Rabhas and 50.0% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property, 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area, 25.0% of the Bodo-Kacharis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for lack of provision of proportional representation in RHAC in terms of population of the people other than the Rabhas and 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Garos have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property, 33.3% of the Garos have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area, and 33.3% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Hajongs have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area and 66.7% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Nepalis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the ongoing Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property and 66.7% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Bengalis have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the

ongoing Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property, 50.0% of the Bengalis have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area and 25.0% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 37.5% of the Muslims have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property, 37.5% of the Muslims have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area and 25.0% of the Muslims have expressed their no opinion view in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 37.5% of the others have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for the problem of the people other than the Rabhas in terms of land rights, security and property, 25.0% of the others have expressed dissatisfaction for the tendency of the movement to create inter-ethnic tensions and generate inter-ethnic conflicts which will harm peace, security and harmony among the people in the area, 25.0% of the others have expressed dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India for lack of provision of proportional representation in RHAC in terms of population of the people other than the Rabhas and 12.5% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. The above table reveals that the respondents belonging to different communities do not support the movement for their different perceptions towards the movement and hence expressed their dissatisfaction towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above table also shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 27.5% of the respondents do not support the movement and have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement for the cause of the problem of land rights, security and property of the people other

than the Rabhas, 30.0% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support the movement and have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement for the cause of the growing problem and fear of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas and 10.0% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support the movement and have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement for the cause of the problem of lack of the provision of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC and 32.5% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion in this regard.

It has also been pointed out that the respondents who do not support the movement and have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement, have given their opinion that the movement will harm peace and harmony among the people in the area and it will disturb the normal life of the area. They have also expressed their view that there will be no hope of socio-economic development even after the Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC.

Table 5.5: Community-Wise Respondents View Regarding the Feasibility of Territorial Autonomy in the Context of Rabha Autonomy in the Ethnically Mixed RHAC Area

Do you think, Rabha autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, will be a feasible option/tool for the Rabhas scattering and intermingling with the people other than the Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area?

| Community of the respondents | Yes | No | No opinion | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Rabha | 42 93.3% | 0 0% | 3 6.7% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-kachari | 2 28.6% | 3 42.9% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 2 25.0% | 3 37.5% | 3 37.5% | 8 100.0% |
| Garos | 0 0% | 5 83.3% | 1 16.7% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepali | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengali | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 0 0% | 6 75.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 3 25.0% | 6 50.0% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 53 53.0% | 27 27.0% | 20 20.0% | 100 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

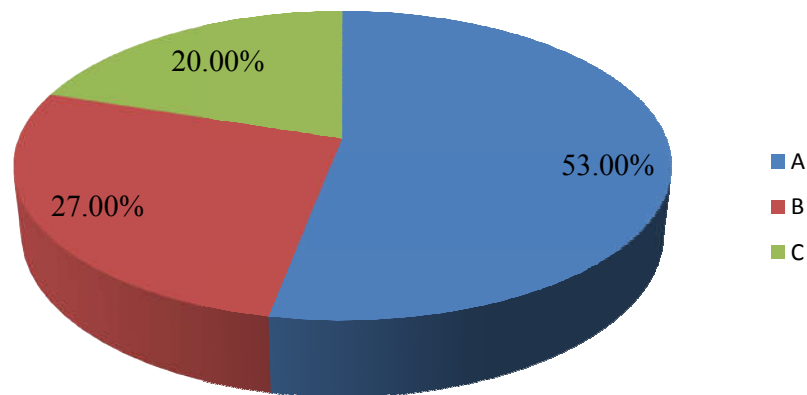
The above table 5.5 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 93.3% of the Rabhas have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 0% of the Rabhas, that is, no one of the respondents of the Rabha community are against the Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, and 6.7% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the

Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 42.9% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Garos, that is, the respondents of the Garo community are totally against the Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 83.3% of the Garos have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 16.7% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25.0% of the Hajongs have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25.0% of the Nepalis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Bengalis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 33.3% of the Bengalis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 33.0% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Muslims,

that is, the respondents of the Muslim community are totally against the Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 75.0% of the Muslims have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the Muslims have expressed no opinion in this regard.. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the others including the non-Rabha non-tribals, tea-tribes etc, have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 50.0% of the others have their negative view regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. From the above analysis, it appears to know that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is highest regarding their support towards Rabha territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, while the percentages of the Garos and Muslims are zero which reveals that the Garo and the Muslim community express negative view regarding their support towards Rabha territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, and hence, they totally oppose Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above table also indicates that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 53% of the respondents, that is, a major portion of the respondents support towards Rabha territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 27% of the respondents, do not support towards Rabha territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 20% of the respondents, that is, a small portion of the respondents do not know whether they support or not in this regard. This shows that the percentage of the respondents who support Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is highest while the percentage of the respondents

who do not support Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is lowest. This can be analyzed in the following figure:

Figure 5.5: Respondents View Regarding the Feasibility of Territorial Autonomy in the Context of Rabha Autonomy in the Ethnically Mixed RHAC Area



Note: A-Yes, B- No, C- No opinion

Source: Field-Survey

The above figure 5.5 shows that 53% of the respondents belonging to different communities support territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 27% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas. The above figure also reveals that 20% of the respondents have expressed no opinion regarding the feasibility of territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas.

Table 5.6: Community-Wise Respondents View Regarding the Feasibility of Non-Territorial Autonomy in the Context of Rabha Autonomy in the Ethnically Mixed RHAC Area

If Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is not feasible in the ethnically mixed RHAC area, then Non-territorial autonomy for the Rabhas may be a feasible option/tool to resolve conflicts and for peaceful and comprehensive accommodation of both the Rabhas and the Non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area?

| Community of the respondents | Yes | No | No opinion | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Rabha | 0 0% | 42 93.3% | 3 6.7% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-kachari | 3 42.9% | 2 28.6% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 3 37.5% | 2 25.0% | 3 37.5% | 8 100.0% |
| Garos | 5 83.3% | 0 0% | 1 16.7% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajongs | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepalis | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengalis | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslims | 6 75.0% | 0 0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 6 50.0% | 3 25.0% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 27 27.0% | 53 53.0% | 20 20.0% | 100 100.0% |

Source: Field-Survey

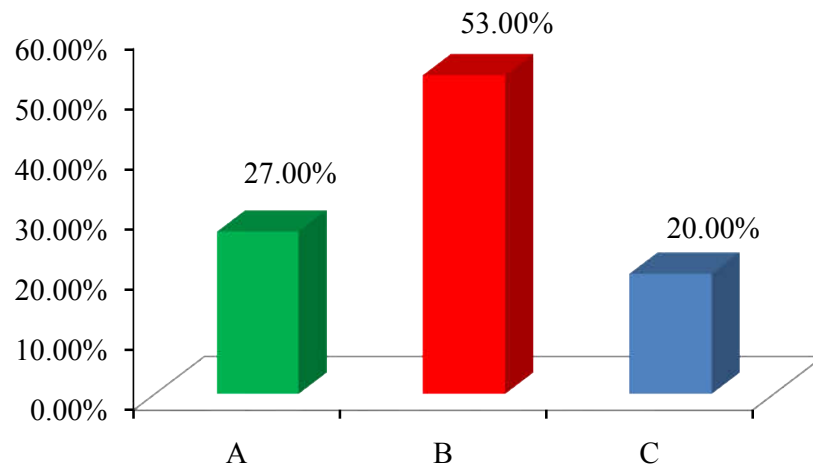
The above table 5.6 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Rabhas that is, no one of the respondents of the Rabha community support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 93.3% of the Rabhas do not support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 6.7% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 42,9% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the

context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas whereas 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 83.3% of the Garos have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas whereas 0% of the Garos have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 16.7% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 25.0% of the Hajongs have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 25.0% of the Nepalis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities,

33.3% of the Bengalis have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 33.3% of the Bengalis have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 33.0% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 75.0% of the Muslims have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 0% of the Muslims have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 25.0% of the Muslims have expressed no opinion in this regard.. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 50.0% of the others including the non-Rabha non-tribals, tea-tribes etc, have expressed their positive view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 25.0% of the others have expressed their negative view regarding the feasibility of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. From the above analysis, it appears to know that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is lowest regarding their support towards non-territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, while the percentages of the Garos and Muslims are highest which reveals that the Garo and the Muslim community totally support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, and hence, they totally oppose Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above table also indicates that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 27% of the respondents, support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 53% of the respondents, do not support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible tool/option in the

context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas and 20% of the respondents, that is, a small portion of the respondents do not know whether they support or not in this regard. This shows that the percentage of the respondents who support non-territorial autonomy is lowest while the percentage of the respondents who do not support non-territorial autonomy is highest. This can be analyzed in the following figure:

Figure 5.6: Respondents View Regarding the Feasibility of Non-Territorial Autonomy in the Context of Rabha Autonomy in the Ethnically Mixed RHAC Area



Note: A- Yes, B- No, C- No opinion

Source: Field-Survey

The above figure 5.6 shows that 27% of the respondents belonging to different communities support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas, whereas 53% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas. The above 5.6 figure indicates that 20% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion regarding the feasibility

of non-territorial autonomy as a feasible option/tool in the context of Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong areas.

Table 5.7: Community-Wise Respondents View Regarding the Continuation of Rabha Autonomy Movement

Do you think, should the Rabhas continue the movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India?

| Community of the respondents | Yes | No | No opinion | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Rabha | 42 93.3% | 0 0% | 3 6.7% | 45 100.0% |
| Bodo-kachari | 2 28.6% | 3 42.9% | 2 28.6% | 7 100.0% |
| Koch-Rajbangshi | 2 25.0% | 3 37.5% | 3 37.5% | 8 100.0% |
| Garos | 0 0% | 5 83.3% | 1 16.7% | 6 100.0% |
| Hajong | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Nepali | 1 25.0% | 1 25.0% | 2 50.0% | 4 100.0% |
| Bengali | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 2 33.3% | 6 100.0% |
| Muslim | 0 0% | 6 75.0% | 2 25.0% | 8 100.0% |
| Others | 3 25.0% | 6 50.0% | 3 25.0% | 12 100.0% |
| Total | 53 53.0% | 27 27.0% | 20 20.0% | 100 100.0% |

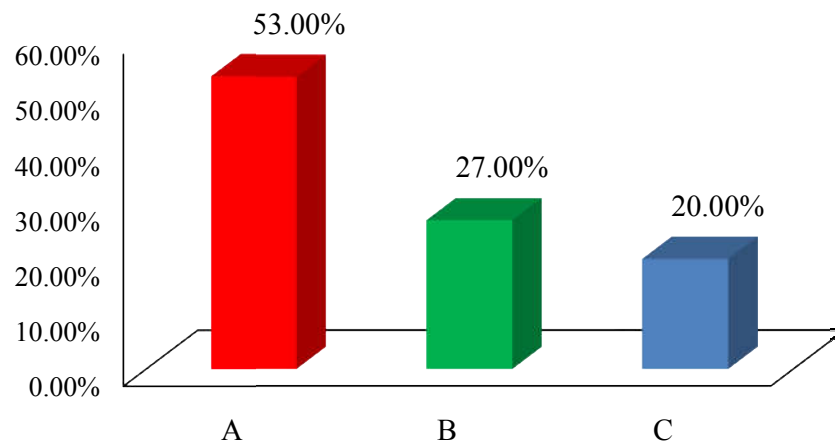
Source: Field-Survey

The above table 5.7 shows that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 93.3% of the Rabhas have said that the Rabhas should continue the autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas only 0% of the Rabhas, that is, no one of the respondents from the Rabha community are against the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 6.7% of the Rabhas have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the

Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 42.9% of the Bodo-Kacharido not support the continuation Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 28.6% of the Bodo-Kachari have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Koch-Rajbangshis support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 37.5% of the Koch-Rajbangshis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Garos that is, no one respondents from the Garo community support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 83.3% of the Garos do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 16.7% of the Garos have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Hajongs support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25.0% of the Hajongs do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Hajongs have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the Nepalis support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25.0% of the Nepalis do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 50.0% of the Nepalis have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 33.3% of the Bengalis support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 33.3% of the Bengalis do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 33.3% of the Bengalis have expressed no opinion in this

regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 0% of the Muslims, that is, no one respondents from the Muslim community support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 75.0% of the Muslims do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the respondents from Muslim community have expressed no opinion in this regard. Among the respondents belonging to different communities, 25.0% of the others including the non-Rabha non-tribals, tea-tribes etc. support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas only 50.0% of the others do not support the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 25.0% of the others have expressed no opinion in this regard. From the above analysis, it appears to know that among the respondents belonging to different communities, the percentage of the Rabhas is highest regarding their view towards the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding the inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, while the percentages of the Garos and Muslims are lowest. The above table also indicates that among the respondents belonging to different communities, 53% of the respondents, that is, a major portion of the respondents have expressed their positive view regarding the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 27% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed their negative view regarding the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding the inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and 20% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion regarding the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This can be analyzed in the following figure 5.7:

Figure 5.7 : Respondents View Regarding the Continuation of Rabha Autonomy Movement



Note: A- Yes, B- No, C- No opinion

Source: Field-survey

The above figure 5.7 shows that 53% of the respondents belonging to different communities support the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 27% of the respondents belonging to different communities do not support the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The above figure also shows that 20% of the respondents belonging to different communities have expressed no opinion regarding the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

From the above analysis based on the data gathered from 100 respondents belonging to different communities basically from two urban and two rural areas which fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC area, through a field-survey in the locations, which are quantified with the help of structured questionnaires and analyzed through SPSS (16.0 Version). The empirical findings have come out as a result of this study which can be summarized in the following way-

5.3 FINDINGS OF THE FIELD-STUDY

1. Among the surveyed respondents belonging to different communities inhabiting in RHAC area, 54% of the respondents extend support towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25% of the respondents don't extend support towards the movement and 21% of the respondents do not know whether they support or not. The study reveals that among the respondents, who support the movement, the percentage of the Rabha community is highest, while the Garos the Muslims and a considerable percent of the non-Rabha non-tribals do not extend support towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and totally oppose it.
2. Among the surveyed respondents some extend support towards the movement for different reasons. Among the reasons, the percentage is highest among the supporter respondents in terms of protection of indigenous land, identity and for political power and representation. The study shows that among the different reasons, protection of indigenous land, identity and for political rights, power and representation occupies significant position and major concerns among the respondents who extend support towards the movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.
3. Among the surveyed respondents, there are some who have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the movement and do not support the movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, for different reasons and perceptions. Among the reasons, which are expressed by the non-supporter respondents, are feeling of insecurity in terms of land rights and property, fear of inter-ethnic conflicts and lack of provision of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC in terms of population, occupies significant position and major concerns among the respondents who do not support the movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The study reveals that the respondents belonging to different communities who have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement and hence do not support it for their

different perceptions towards the movement and they have expressed their opinion that the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, will create problems in terms of their entitlement and rights over their land and property, the movement will also create inter-ethnic tensions and generate conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas which will definitely harm inter-ethnic harmony, peace, security among the people in RHAC area and it will disturb democratic order and normal life of the people of the area. They also have expressed dissatisfaction towards the provision of the RHAC that it has failed to accommodate the political aspirations of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC due to lack of the provision of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC in terms of population. Hence, they argue that Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India seems to be contested and defective in nature.

4. Among the surveyed respondents belonging to different communities inhabiting in RHAC area, 53% of the respondents extend support in the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 27% of the respondents don't extend support in the continuation of the movement and 20% of the respondents do not know whether they support in the continuation of the movement or not. The study shows that among the respondents, who extend support in the continuation of the movement, the percentage of the Rabha community is highest, while the Garos, the Muslims and a considerable percent of the non-Rabha non-tribals do not extend support in the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and totally oppose it. They totally oppose the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and express their view that it will curtail their democratic rights within the entity and will have chance to foster inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts which will affect inter-ethnic harmony, peace, security and true democratic order in the council area.

CHAPTER: VI

CONCLUSION

The present study entitled “Autonomy Movement of the Rabhas: A Study on Territorial and Non-territorial Dimensions” is the outcome of a systematic academic investigation of the ethnic identity assertion to the political autonomy demand movement of the Rabha Community in Assam. The present study tries to examine the Rabha autonomy in the context of territorial and non-territorial dimensions. This chapter summarizes the findings of the previous chapters and attempts to draw conclusions and also present recommendations for necessary policy formulation.

This study basically tries to examine the Rabha autonomy in the context of territorial and non-territorial dimensions of autonomy in the ethnically mixed RHAC area. The RHAC area with existing 779 revenue villages, ranging 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, is a home of different ethnic communities along with the Rabhas. After an analysis of the key concepts like autonomy and dimensions of autonomy, it is found that territorial dimension of autonomy appears to be unfeasible and complex regarding Rabha autonomy in the ethnically mixed RHAC area because of its inherent contentions results from the counter-mobilization of the non-Rabha communities, while non-territorial dimension of autonomy seems to be adequate, appropriate and feasible regarding Rabha autonomy due to the dispersed and intermingled living pattern of the Rabhas who don't have a neat territorial base of their own for which they do not form a sizable majority to demand territorial autonomy in the ethnically mixed RHAC area.

After an analysis of the dimensions of autonomy in the context of Rabha autonomy, it appears that for a peaceful settlement of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas and comprehensive accommodation of both the Rabhas and non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area, the non-territorial dimension of autonomy may be an alternative autonomy arrangement in contrast to territorial autonomy for the territorially scattered Rabhas in RHAC area and also outside it because there are inherent contentions of Rabha territorial autonomy which clearly

challenge the rationale of granting and applying the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to the RHAC. The feasibility and rationality of the demand for Rabha autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India seems to be complex and not negotiable unless and until the non-Rabha Garos and non-Rabha non-tribals are ready to accept the demand. As Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India appears to be unfeasible and complex, hence, non-territorial dimension of autonomy may be an alternative tool for accommodation in this regard.

After an analysis of the brief profile of the Rabha tribe, the study reveals that the Rabha tribe is a distinct ethnic community having own language, dialects, literature, rich socio-cultural heritage, distinct traditional social administrative institutions, customary laws, religious practices, festivals and traditional ethnic homeland which differentiates it from other ethnic community in North-East India as well as in Assam. The Rabhas are scattered in different districts of Assam, though their main concentration is found in the Southern bank of river Brahmaputra in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup. A few section of the Rabhas is also found in the Northern part of the Hill districts (East and West Garo Hills) of Meghalaya and in North-Bengal. The Rabhas are divided into a number of socio-cultural and linguistic groups and clans such as- Pati, Rangdani, Maitori, Kocha, Dahori, Bitolia, Totla and Hana.

Though the Rabhas are considered as a sub-ethnic group of the Greater Indo-Mongoloid Bodo ethnic group and the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, it represents a distinct and unique ethno-cultural identity which differentiates it from the other ethnic groups in North-East India as well as in Assam. The Rabhas inherited its distinct ethnic identity as well as its autonomous character from the different social and cultural markers of the Rabha community such as distinct language and dialects, literature, distinct traditional ancient administration with distinct traditional administrative social institutions and organizations, distinct religious beliefs and practices, distinct socio-cultural elements, customary laws, customs and traditions, festivals, traditional ethnic homeland etc. which contributed to create and deepen social cohesion and ethnic solidarity 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 greatly developed and enhanced the sense of autonomy among the Rabha community in its different stages of development. The study reveals 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 the inter-group traditional administrative social organizations like the Mandal at the village level, Jamad at the middle level and the Sanmilan at the district or the regional level that the different Rabha clans and sub-groups were re-grouped, reorganized, united and integrated as a single ethnic group. These ancient traditional administrative social organizations and institutions of the Rabha community greatly contributed to keep and maintain their distinct ethnic identity and socio-cultural heritage intact and their traditional ethnic homeland. This ethnic unification of the different Rabha clans and sub-groups under the Thal or Khel, Mandal, Jamad and Sanmilan, all the tiers of these traditional administrative social institutions under certain customary laws immensely helped to enhance the distinct ethno-cultural identity and autonomous way of life in the further stages of its development. This ethnic unification and distinct and autonomous way of life of the Rabha community further resulted in the formation of different regional socio-cultural organizations in different Rabha inhabited areas making a strong ethnic solidarity and social cohesion among them. As it has been observed that the Rabhas are one of the aborigines or the earliest known inhabitant in this region and for this, they regard themselves as the “Son of the Soil” that is the indigenous community of this region. This indigenous factor also contributed to develop and enhance the distinct ethnic identity and a sense of autonomy among them. The study also reveals that historically the Rabha community had an ancient Rabha kingdom of their own and which they recognize and claim as their traditional ethnic homeland as “Rabha Hasong-the Land of the Rabhas” till today. Historically, the Rabhas inhabited in their ancient traditional ethnic homeland with many ups and downs in different waves of time. This historical and inhabitant factor of the Rabha community also greatly developed and enhanced a sense of autonomy among them. From the socio-historical point of view, the study indicates that the ancient Rabha King ‘Dodan’ is the first king of the Rabha tribe and he is considered as the founder and leader of the Rabhas. The Rabha King “Dodan” was a contemporary king and a close relative of “Bana” the famous and great King of

ancient Assam (then Pragjyotishpur) who ruled in Sonitpur. It has been found that the Rabha King 'Dodan' ruled in the Southern bank of the river Brahmaputra with his followers. It is believed that he introduced the "Baikho" the unique traditional festival of the Rabha tribe with his followers. From a historical point of view, the study also reveals evidently from the "Baharistan-i-Ghayabi" that another famous ancient Rabhaking 'Parasuram' who ruled over in the South Goalpara in the first decade of 17th Century. His territory 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 in the West, and 'Sambhul' or known as 'Sambhor' (presently Solmari under the district of Goalpara) was known as his Capital. This is the South Goalpara and the South Kamrup area in which the indigenous Rabha tribe were the master inhabitants till this region was annexed to British India, not only that, the entire foot hill areas which is known as 'B' mahal under the present state of Meghalaya are still occupied by the Rabha tribe as majority. From these historical evidences of ancient Rabha Kingdom and Rabha inhabited traditional ethnic homelands, the Rabha community today assert themselves as the "Son of the Soil" of this region and demands this region as their ancient traditional ethnic homeland as "Rabha-Hasong", that is the 'Land of the Rabhas' on the basis of their ancient glory and launched movement to attain and preserve their traditional ethnic territory.

While tracing the roots or socio-historical background of Rabha ethnic assertion as well as Rabha autonomy movement, the study reveals that Rabha ethnic assertion as well as Rabha autonomy movement is historically rooted in the pre-independence period mainly in the beginning of the 20th Century in the line of ethnic identity consciousness and assertion of distinct identity of the Rabha community. The ethnic identity consciousness and ethnic assertion among the Rabhas was found expression during the protest against the process of religious conversion, Sanskritization and Christianization among the Rabha community under the organizational banner of "Asom Rabha Sanmilen" in 1926 leaded by Gobardhan Sarkar, Dwarikanath Rabha and Rajen Rongkho etc. the prominent socio-cultural reformers and activists of the Rabha community. The pathfinders of Rabha Community and their organizational efforts contributed to develop ethnic identity consciousness and in the assertion of ethnic identity among the Rabhas through modern education, social reforms and cultural revivalism.

The study reveals 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 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. Certain traditional social organizations such as- Mechpara Purbanchal, Madhyanchal etc.- the traditional Jamad 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 ethnic identity consciousness, ethnic identity formation and assertion among the Rabha community.

While examining the genesis of Rabha ethnic assertion and autonomy movement, the study reveals that certain traditional administrative organizations, the efforts of the socio-cultural reformers and activists and their socio-cultural organizations contributed in ethnic formation, identity consciousness and socio-cultural revivalism among the Rabha community at the initial phase. The All Rabha Cultural Conference (ARCC) formed in 1955 contributed socio-cultural mobilization among the Rabha community. The All Rabha National Council (ARNC) formed in 1976 contributed in ethnic unification of all the clans and groups of Rabha community into a single entity deepening strong social cohesion and ethnic solidarity among them. The All Rabha

Sahitya Sabha (ARSS) formed in 1973 and Rabha Bhasa Parishad formed in 1980 contributed in the assertion of distinct linguistic and cultural identity of the Rabhas. These developments pave way for autonomy demand movement of the Rabha community. The formation All Rabha Students Union (ARSU) in 1980 marked the politically significant phase of Rabha ethnic assertion and autonomy demand movement of the Rabha community. The formation of Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDC) under ARSU formed in 1989 intensified Rabha autonomy movement demanding political autonomy in the form of 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 All Rabha Women Council (ARWC) under ARSU formed in 1993 organized and mobilized all the Rabha women in active participation in the Rabha autonomy movement. As a result of Rabha autonomy movement under the leadership of ARSU, ARWC and RHDC, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council came into being on 10th March, 1995 under Rabha Accord, 1995. Due to lack of implementation of the provisions of Rabha Accord and continuation of RHA (interim councils) without democratic elections, without demarcated territory with inclusion of no specified villages and without proper financial and legislative powers, ultimately RHAC failed to exercise its autonomous powers and functions for the greater interest of the marginalized Rabha community in practical sense. The failure of RHAC to discharge its powers and functions as a substantive political autonomy compelled the Rabha leaders to reject it and demanded fresh, greater substantive political autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Formation of Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) in 2003 intensified the Rabha autonomy movement with the slogan “*No Sixth Schedule No Rest*” demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Formation of Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) in 2012 re-intensified Rabha autonomy movement making prime achievement with first democratically elected RHAC in 2013 after a long awaited 17 years of struggle.

The study shows that certain traditional social organizations like the Khel, Mandal, Jamad and Sanmilan and a number of socio-cultural organizations like the ARS, ARCC, ARNC played a significant role in bringing ethnic solidarity, ethnic

identity consciousness and assertion of ethnic identity among the Rabhas since the pre-independence period. Further the formation and role of the different socio-cultural, political organizations like ARSU, RHDC, ARWC, RHSP, SSDC, etc. has played significant role in Rabha ethnic assertion for political autonomy raising different political demands from time to time through their memorandums since their inception.

The study reveals that though the RHAC was formed in 1995 under the RHAC Act, 1995, it failed to discharge its powers and functions as a substantive political autonomy. The failure of RHAC compelled the Rabha leaders to reject it and demanded greater political autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and launched mass movement under the active leadership of All Rabha Students Union (ARSU), Rabha Hasong Demand Committee (RHDC), All Rabha Women Council (ARWC), Rabha Hasong Suraksha Parishad (RHSP), Sixth Schedule Demand Committee (SSDC) etc. demanding to implement the provisions of the Rabha Accord and the RHAC Act, 1995 without further lapses, to demarcate the boundary of RHAC including specified revenue villages and to amend the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, with more financial, administrative and legislative powers, making a real, proper, full-fledged and a substantive political autonomy for the Rabha community. As a result of prolonged constant movement of the leading Rabha organizations, the RHAC Act, 1995 was further amended in 2001 and again in 2005 with certain structural changes basically in Section 4 and Section 6 of the RHAC Act, 1995. Besides, 779 (306 according to 2001 Act + 473 according to 2005 Act- Total- 779) revenue villages are included in RHAC from both Goalpara and Kamrup (Rural) districts which fall under the jurisdiction of RHAC area.

The Rabha Hasong autonomy movement has different implications and contentions. The study shows that formation of SSDC in 2003 with the motto “No Sixth Schedule No Rest” demanded inclusion of the RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, exemption of Panchayat election from the RHAC area as per Clause No.5 of Memorandum of settlement (Rabha Accord) of 10th March, 1995 and holding of the council election with immediate effect. The study reveals that the demand for Sixth Schedule status to the RHAC, exemption of Panchayat election from the RHAC area, created discontent among the non-Rabha communities living in RHAC

area. The non-Rabha communities living in RHAC area, under the organizational banner of Non-Rabha Coordination Forum (NRCF) formed in 2008 and Garo National Council (GNC) expressed their concern over the security of land rights and other democratic rights. They launched a counter-movement demanding to oppose inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, exclusion of non-Rabha population dominated villages from the jurisdiction of the RHAC area and 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. From the above analysis, the study shows that 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 Clause No. 5 of the Rabha Accord, 1995. As a result of massive violence and conflict, the State Government was 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.

The study also reveals that counter mobilization by the non-Rabhas intensified when the the Ministerial Sub-Committee headed by Dr. Bhumidhar Barman, the then Revenue Minister of Government of Assam in 2005 under the RHAC Amendment Act, 2005 notified 779 revenue villages of Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts as villages under the RHAC. Reacting to 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 basically 89 villages from 401 villages of Goalpara and 134 villages from 378 villages of Kamrup (R) districts which fall under the jurisdiction of the RHAC.

The non-Rabha communities under the banner of NRCF also demands the repeal of Section 4 of RHAC (Amendment Act), 2001 for their feeling of insecurity in terms of

democratic rights and Section 6 of RHAC (Amendment Act), 2005 for their feeling of insecurity in terms of land rights. The NRCF also expressed their concern for initiating the system of compact area (including core and contiguous villages) as per provisions laid down in Section 2 and 3 of the Amendment Act, 2005, denying the satellite system of autonomy in violation with the specific provisions laid down in both Rabha Accord and RHAC Act, 1995. It also expressed concern for substitution of the “Rabha” word by “Scheduled Tribes” in Goalpara and Kamrup districts by inserting Section-4 of RHAC (Amendment) Act, 2005.

The study also reveals that inclusion of 779 revenue villages implies the constitution of a purely territorial project of 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), an umbrella organization of 34 bodies of 18 ethnic groups launched a mass movement to include the RHAC with these 779 compact villages into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Reacting to this development, NRCF launched a counter-movement and submitted memorandum to the State Government demanding to exclude the revenue villages dominated by having more than 50 percent non-ST population both from Goalpara and Kamrup (R) districts which falls under the jurisdiction of RHAC and also to repeal the RHAC (Amendment) Acts, 2001 & 2005.

An observation of the demographic profile of the RHAC area, clarifies that it is an ethnically mixed area and home of different communities. The presence of a considerable percentage of non-Rabha communities living in RHAC area express their dissatisfaction and concern that distribution of seats in General Council of RHAC and Village Councils are 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 in RHAC area. 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-Kacharis, Garos and Hajongs. It has been observed the non-Rabha ST Garo population comprises more than one lakh in RHAC area. 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 which indicates the inherent contentions interrogating viability of the Rabha territorial autonomy. These developments have made Rabha territorial autonomy a contested one.

The study reveals that the Rabha autonomy movement has different implications and these implications manifested itself in a series of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts among the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas in the RHAC area basically from 2001. 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. It was found that these inter-ethnic tensions and rivalries emerged due to their rivalries over different contentious issues of concern such as demand for repeal of Sections 4 and 6 of the RHAC Amendment Act, of 2001 and 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 some Garo population dominated villages of Assam-Meghalaya border areas which falls under the jurisdiction of the RHAC area. It has been observed that the Rabha autonomy movement has serious implications regarding the frequent inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts among the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas around different contentious issues regarding autonomy rights of the Rabhas and the democratic rights and peaceful accommodation of the non-Rabhas within the RHAC area.

While tracing the growth and development of Rabha autonomy movement, we find two significant phases of Rabha autonomy movement, one is from 1980s, that is politically significant phase of Rabha autonomy movement led by ARSU, ARWC, RHDC, ARNC etc. to 1995, that is the formation of Rabha Hasong (interim) Autonomous Council under RHAC Act, 1995 as a prime achievement of Rabha autonomy movement and another is from 1995, that is lack of implementation of the Rabha Accord and failure of RHAC to discharge its powers and functions as a substantive political autonomy without demarcated territory with inclusion of no specified villages and without proper financial and legislative powers which compelled the leading Rabha organizations to assert more political autonomy, to 2013, that is, the conduction of democratic elections to RHAC for the first time in 2013 which resulted in the formation of democratically elected RHAC for the first time in 2013 under RHJMC (Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee) an umbrella organization of 34 bodies of 18 ethnic groups of Goalpara and South Kamrup. It has been observed that after a long 17 years, RHAC becomes a democratically elected council which was earlier in the form of interim councils with nominated members till 2010. The study reveals that during the period from 1995 to 2013, a series of mass movements were launched by ARSU, RHDC, ARWC, ARNC, SSDC, RHJMC etc. the leading Rabha organizations witnessed a series of conflicts over different contentious political issues which have been mentioned earlier, between the Rabhas and the non-Rabha communities in RHAC area. However, it has been observed that formation of democratically elected RHAC for the first time in 2013 under RHJMC with the leadership of Mr. Tankeswar Rabha, as its Chief Executive Member, is considered as a remarkable achievement as well as a positive development and direction in the development of Rabha autonomy movement.

The findings of the field-study reveals that among the surveyed respondents belonging to different communities inhabiting in RHAC area, 54% of the respondents extend support towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 25% of the respondents don't extend support towards the movement and 21% of the respondents do not know whether they support or not. The study reveals that among the respondents, who support the movement, the percentage of the Rabha community is highest, while the Garos, the Muslims and a considerable percent of the non-Rabha non-tribals do not extend support

towards the Rabha autonomy movement demanding the inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and totally oppose it.

The surveyed respondents who extend support towards the movement have different reasons. Among the reasons, the percentage is highest among the supporter respondents in terms of protection of indigenous land, identity and for political power and representation. The study shows that among the different reasons, protection of indigenous land, identity and for political rights, power and representation occupies significant position and major concerns among the respondents who extend support towards the movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Among the surveyed respondents, who have expressed their dissatisfaction towards the movement and do not support the movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India have different reasons and perceptions. Among the reasons, which are expressed by the non-supporter respondents, are feeling of insecurity in terms of land rights and property, fear of inter-ethnic conflicts and lack of provision of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC in terms of population, occupies significant position and major concerns among the respondents who do not support the movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The study reveals that the respondents belonging to different communities who have expressed dissatisfaction towards the movement and hence do not support it for their different perceptions towards the movement and they have expressed their opinion that the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, will create problems in terms of their entitlement and rights over their land and property, the movement will also create inter-ethnic tensions and generate conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas which will definitely harm inter-ethnic harmony, peace, security among the people in RHAC area and it will disturb democratic order and normal life of the people of the area. They also have expressed dissatisfaction towards the provision of the RHAC that it has failed to accommodate the political aspirations of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC due to lack of the provision of proportional representation of the people other than the Rabhas in RHAC

in terms of population. Hence, they argue that Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India seems to be contested and defective in nature.

Among the surveyed respondents belonging to different communities inhabiting in RHAC area, 53% of the respondents extend support in the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, whereas 27% of the respondents don't extend support in the continuation of the movement and 20% of the respondents do not know whether they support in the continuation of the movement or not. The study shows that among the respondents, who extend support in the continuation of the movement, the percentage of the Rabha community is highest, while the Garos, the Muslims and a considerable percent of the non-Rabha non-tribals do not extend support in the continuation of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and totally oppose it. They totally oppose the continuation of Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and express their view point that it will curtail their democratic rights within the entity and will have chance to foster inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts which will affect inter-ethnic harmony, peace, security and true democracy in the council area.

To overcome the problems and inherent contentions of the Rabha autonomy movement demanding inclusion of RHAC into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, some recommendations are enlisted below-

1. For a peaceful settlement of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the non-Rabhas and comprehensive accommodation of both the Rabhas and non-Rabhas in RHAC area, the non-territorial dimension of autonomy may be an alternative autonomy arrangement in contrast to territorial autonomy for the territorially scattered Rabhas in RHAC area and also outside it because of the total opposition of non-Rabha tribal Garos, Muslims and a considerable number of non-Rabha non-tribals towards the Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India and there are inherent contentions of Rabha territorial autonomy which clearly challenge

the rationale of granting and applying the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to the RHAC.

2. The feasibility and rationality of the demand for Rabha autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India seems to be complex and not negotiable unless and until the non-Rabha Garos and non-Rabha non-tribals are ready to accept the demand.
3. As Rabha autonomy under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India appears to be unfeasible and complex, hence, non-territorial dimension of autonomy may be an alternative tool for accommodation in this regard.
4. Non-territorial dimension autonomy may be adequate and appropriate for the Rabhas who live dispersed and intermingled with other groups in RHAC areas and outside it and do not constitute a sizeable majority on a neat territorial basis. The non-territorial dimension of autonomy for the Rabhas will secure rights of both Rabhas and non-Rabhas with a peaceful comprehensive ethnic accommodation mitigating their conflicts over land, territory and democratic rights which will help to restore inter-ethnic harmony, peace, security and true democratic order in RHAC area.

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (PEOPLE)

"Autonomy Movement of the Rabhas: A Study on Territorial and Non-Territorial Dimensions"

Hello, my name isand I am a Ph. D. Research scholar of Gauhati University in the Department of Political Science. I am doing my Doctoral Research on "Autonomy Movement of the Rabhas: A Study on Territorial and Non-Territorial Dimensions". For the purpose of my Doctoral Research, I am studying the opinion of the common people of both the Rabha and the Non-Rabha communities on Territorial and Non-Territorial Dimensions in the context of Rabha autonomy. For this purpose, I have randomly selected you for which you will kindly spare some time to give your opinion in this regard and I will be happy if you co-operate with me for collecting necessary information. Information that you provide will be kept confidential. Kindly spare sometime for this interview and answer my questions, as I need your active co-operation and help for making this study successful.

Questionnaire No.....

Background Information

| | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. District: | | |
| 2. Constituency : | | |
| 3. Block: | | |
| 4. Town/Village : | | |
| 5. Name of Respondent : | | |
| 6. Age : | 1-18-25 Years | 2-25-40 Years |
| | 3-40-60 Years | 4-60-+ Years |
| 7. Gender : | 1-Male | 2 Female |
| 8. Religion : | 1-Hindu | 2-Islam |
| | 3. Christian | 4. Others |
| 9. Community | 1. Rabha | 2. Bodo Kachari |
| | 3. Koch Rajbongshi | 4. Garos |
| | 5. Hajongs | 6. Nepalis |
| | 7. Bengali | 8. Muslim |
| | 9. Others | |
| 10. Location : | 1. Rural | 2. Urban |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 11. Educational : Qualification | 1. Illiterate | 2. Below Primary |
| | 3. Above Primary | 4. Matriculation |
| | 5. Graduate | 6. Post Graduate and above |
| 12. Occupation : | 1. Cultivation | 2. Business |
| | 3. Government Service | 4. Private Service |
| | 5. Daily wage earner | 6. Others |
| 13. Household Income | 1. Below Rs. 5000 | 2. Rs.5000/- to 10,000/- |
| | 3. Rs.10,000/- to 20,000/- | 4. Rs. Above 20,000/- |

INTERVIEW STARTS:

| | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Have you heard about Rabha Hasong Autonomy movement? | 2. Yes | 3. No |
| | 4. No opinion | |
| 2. Have you participated in Rabha Hasong Autonomy movement during the past years? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. Somewhat | 4. No opinion |
| 3. Have you heard about Rabha Hasong Autonomous council? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 4. If yes, are you satisfied with the work of Rabha Hasong Autonomous council in terms of fulfilment of your expectations and aspirations? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| 5. If Yes, why | 1. It accelerates socio-economic development | 2. It gives livelihood |
| | 3. It helps to safeguard and preserve identity | 4. It provides a better infrastructure |
| | 5. Its help to protect land | 6. No opinion 7. |
| 6. If No, why | 1. It is failure due to lack of implementation of RHAC act. | 2. Its help only a section of the people |
| | 3. Corruption of the RHAC authority | 4. Democratic deficit of the structure and function of RHAC |
| | 5. No opinion | |
| 7. Have you heard about Rabha Hasong Autonomy movement demanding for inclusion of Rabha Hasong Autonomous council in to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. Opinion | |
| 8. Do you now the autonomy arrangement or autonomous council under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India has a definite geographical territory with certain government functions? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No Opinion | |
| 9. If the RHAC is included into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India it will have a definite geographical territory with certain government functions? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No Opinion | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| 10. Do you support Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No Opinion | |
| 11. If yes, why? | 1. For socio-economic development | 2. For better livelihood |
| | 3. For Safeguard and upliftment of cultural identity | 4. For infrastructural development |
| | 5. For protection land | 6. For political power political representation |
| | 7. No opinion | |
| 12. If no, why | 1. It will create discontents among the people other than the Rabhas (Non-Rabhas) in the RHAC area | 2. It will create problems to the people other than the Rabhas (Non-Rabhas) regarding land rights, property and security |
| | 3. It will create ethnic tensions and generate conflicts | 4. If will harm peace and harmony in the RHAC area |
| | 5. Lack proportional representation other than the Rabhas (Non-Rabhas) in the RHAC in terms of population | 6. All the above |
| 13. Do you know the RHAC area is an ethnically mixed area which is home of different communities other than Rabhas (Non-Rabhas) ? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| 14. Do you know the existing RHAC is itself a territorial in nature composed of 779 revenue villages of compact and contiguous areas according to RHAC amendment Act.2015? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 15. Does your village/town fall under RHAC area consisting of 779 Revenue villages including compact and contiguous areas? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 16. Whether you want the inclusion of your village/town into the RHAC area? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 17. If yes why? | 1. For socio-economic development. | 2. To protect ancestral land |
| | 3. To preserve and safeguard identity | 4. To gain political power & rights |
| | 5. For better livelihood | 6. For better infrastructure |
| | 7. All of the above | 8. No opinion |
| 18. If no why? | 1. There will be no hope for Socio-economic development of the area | 2. There will be no hope of proper political of power political rights and representation of the people their than to Rabhas |
| | 3. It will affect the land rights of the people | 4. It will harm security and property of the people |
| | 5. All of the above | 6. No opinion |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| 19. Have you heard, there is an ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Rabhas and the Non-Rabhas in the RHAC area regarding its existing territorial nature and also its demand for inclusion into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of the India? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 20. Do you think, if territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is granted to the Rabhas with a definite territory, there will be further conflicts between the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas in future? | 1. Agree | 2. Disagree |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 21. What kind of Autonomy should be granted to the Rabhas along with the Non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed Rabha Hasong area for settlement/management of conflicts and peaceful comprehensive accommodation of both the Rabhas and Non Rabhas? | 1. Territorial autonomy should be granted to the Rabhas along with non-Rabhas with a definite territory under 6 th Schedule | 2. Non-Territorial cultural autonomy should be granted to the Rabhas without fixing a definite territory. |
| 22. Do you think, Rabha territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India will be a feasible option for the Rabhas scattering and intermingling with the Non-Rabhas in the ethnically mixed RHAC area? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |

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| 23. If Yes, why? | 1. It will accelerate Socio-economic development of both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas | 2. It will provide political rights and representation to both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas |
| | 3. I will help to project indigenous land of both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas | 4. it will give better livelihood |
| | 5. it will provide better infrastructure | 6. It will have to safeguard and preserve cultural identity |
| | 7. All the above | 8. No opinion |
| 24. If no, why? | 1. Feeling of insecure of the Non-Rabhas in RHAC area in terms of land rights, security, property and proper political representation. | 2. Fear of inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts |
| | 3. It will harm peace and harmony in the RHAC area | 4. The-people other than the Rabhas don't support and protest Rabha territorial autonomy |
| | 5. It will disturb normal life of the people in the area | 6. There will be no hope of socio-economic development even after the 6 th schedule status |
| | 7. All of the above | 8. No-opinion |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| 25. Do you think, Should Rabhas continue the Rabha autonomy movement for territorial RHAC under the Sixth Schedule? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 26. Do you hope that same day the dream of Rabha territorial autonomy under the provision of the Sixth schedule of the constitution of India will come true in the ethnically mixed RHAC area? | 1. Yes | 2. No |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 27. If yes, how it could be? | 1. By peaceful movement | 2. By using violence |
| | 3. Both | 4. No opinion |
| 28. If no, why? | 1. The movement seems to be not so active after the council election | 2. The Government is not willing and not serious in granting the 6 th Schedule status to the Rabhas. |
| | 3. The people other than the Rabhas don't support and will protest the movement. | 4. No opinion |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| 29. If Rabhas territorial autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India is not a feasible/ viable in the ethnically mixed RHAC area, then Non-Territorial cultural autonomy for the Rabhas may be feasible/viable to resolve conflicts and for peaceful comprehensive accommodation of the both the Rabhas and Non-Rabhas viable in the ethnically mixed RHAC area? | 1. Yes | 2. No. |
| | 3. No opinion | |
| 30. If yes Why? | 1. It will resolve conflicts | 2. It will safeguard land rights and property of the non-Rabhas |
| | 3. It will protect and safeguard the democratic rights of both the Rabhas and Non Rabhas | 4. It will accelerate Socio-economic development both the Rabhas and Non Rabhas |
| | 5. It will also help to accommodate and represent the identity and rights of both the Rabhas living outside the RHAC area. | 6. All the above |
| | 7. No opinion | |

| | | |
|-----------------|--|--|
| 31. If No, why? | 1. It will not be helpful to protect ancestral land of the Rabhas without a definite territory from land alienation due to illegal encroachment of Rabha land | 2. It will be not helpful to protect the identity and culture of the Rabhas |
| | 3. It will hamper the Socio-economic development of the Rabhas without a territory and lack of political power. | 4. The indigenous Rabhas is not interested to support non-territorial cultural autonomy instead of territorial autonomy due to loss of political and Governmental power. |
| | 5. It will be very difficult and complex to implement and experience Non-territorial cultural autonomy for the Rabhas the RHAC area and also accommodating and representing the Rabhas from outside the RHAC area. | 6. All of the above |
| | | 7. No opinion |

Annexure-II



सत्यमेव जयते

MEMORENDUM OF SETTLEMENT

(Rabha Accord)

March 10, 1995
Guwahati

Memorandum of Settlement

(RABHA ACCORD)

1. Preamble:

Government of Assam has been making earnest efforts to provide more powers to different tribal and ethnic groups within Assam so as to bring about speedy development in the areas inhabited by these groups. Towards this end, series of discussions were held with the leaders of different tribal groups, including Rabhas. As a result of these discussions it has been felt expedient to set up an administrative Authority for the areas predominantly inhabited by Rabhas, the details of which are as follows:

2. Objectives:

Objective of setting up the Administrative Authority is to provide maximum possible autonomy within the framework of Constitution of India for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha people in this state.

3. Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) and Rabha Hasong Village Council (RHVC):

It is agreed that the State Govt. of Assam shall, by suitable legislation, constitute a Council which shall be known as Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and which shall be the apex council consisting of satellite areas of Village Council, called the Rabha Hasong Village Council (RHVC). There shall be no separate compact areas or boundary for these councils. The RHVC shall be constituted with villages having more than 50% of the tribal population in the Rabha dominated areas with population of 6000-8000. The Land Record Authorities of Assam shall scrutinize the list of villages furnished by the purpose of inclusion of these villages in the RHVC. Those villages which fall under the Reserve Forest shall be included only after necessary clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Govt. of India.

4. Constitution of Council:

Each Village Council shall consists of 10 elected members out of which 5 will be from Rabha Community. Out of 5 reserved seats one will be reserved for a woman member. RHAC shall consists of 30 elected members out of which 4 members shall be nominated by the Government of Assam to give representation to those groups/communities of the Council area which are not otherwise represented in it. MPs and MLAs, belonging to reserved constituencies (ST) of the area shall be ex-officio member of the Council. Each Village Council shall have elected President and Vice-President while the Autonomous Council shall have elected Chief Executive Councilor.

Term of office of the RHAC and RHVC shall be 5 years and co-terminus.

5. Powers:

(a) The RHVC shall have the executive power in respect of execution of development schemes on 29 subjects as listed in Annexure-I and the apex council shall have the power on 34 subjects as listed in Annexure-II. These powers will be subject to condition that the powers exercised by any other authority under the specific provision of law made by the Central/State Government shall not be delegated/transferred to the authority of RHVC or RHAC. However, the provision of Assam Panchyat Act, 1994 and the Assam Municipal Act, 1994 (amended) shall not apply to the areas of the villages included in RHVC.

(b) Apex Council shall have the power to make by-laws/rules and orders which shall apply to all the RHVC.

(c) State Govt. shall provide funds from TSP and other resource to the apex Council in accordance with an appropriate formula to be worked out keeping in mind the resource of the Government priorities on development works in other areas including other tribal areas along with other relevant deciding factors. The RHVC shall have the powers to raise local resources that fall within their jurisdiction.

Finances of RHAC shall be managed exclusively by its Executive Council and will be subject to Audit as may be decided by the Government of Assam.

6. Special Provisions for the RHAC:

Views of RHAC shall be given due regard before any law is enacted by the State Government on religious/social practices, customary laws and procedures for ownership/transfer of land in the Council areas. However, the existing laws, unless amended, shall apply in these areas also, though the authority under such law may

consider the views of the Council while exercising powers under these laws in these areas.

7. Customary Courts:

- The state Government shall take steps to set up Customary Courts in the Council areas to try and cases whenever both contesting parties prefer to approach such courts.

8. Employment Opportunity:

The people of the Council area shall have equal opportunity for employment in different Government jobs in accordance with the law in force for the time being.

9. Constitution of Interim Council:

The Government of Assam shall constitute an Interim Council which shall continue till the election to the Council takes place.

10. Protection of Rights of non-tribals in Council area:

The Government of Assam and the Council shall ensure that the rights and interest of the non-tribals and tribals other than Rabhas as on today living in the Council area particularly in the matters of land, industry, trade & commerce shall be protected.

Signed on this 10th day of March, 1995 in Guwahati.

1. Shri Sarat Chandra Rabha, President, RHAC (Sd/-)
2. Shri Ganga Raj Rabha, President, ARSU (Sd/-)
3. Shri Ratan Chandra Rabha, G/S, ARSU (Sd/-)
4. Shri Sulochan Rabha, G/S, RHDC (Sd/-)

Authorized Representative
of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council

Sd/-
(A. Bhattacharjya)
Chief Secretary,
Government of Assam

In the presence of

Sd/-
(Hiteswar Saikia)
Chief Minister, Assam.

(ANNEXURE-I)

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF VILLAGE COUNCIL:

•

1. Agriculture including Agriculture extension.
2. Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Poultry.
3. Fisheries.
4. Social and Farm Forestry, Minor Forest produce, Fuel and Fodder.
5. Khadi, Village and Cottage Industries.
6. Rural Housing.
7. Drinking water.
8. Roads, Buildings, Culverts, Bridges, Ferries, Waterways and other means of communications.
9. Rural Electrification.
10. Non-conventional energy sources.
11. Poverty alleviation programme.
12. Education including primary schools.
13. Adult and non-formal education.
14. Libraries.
15. Cultural activities.
16. Markets and fairs.
17. Rural Sanitation.
18. Public Health and Family Welfare.
19. Women and Child Development.
20. Social Welfare including welfare of Handicapped and Mentally retarded.
21. Welfare of weaker sections and in particular the SC and ST.
22. Public Distribution System.
23. Maintenance of Community assets.
24. Construction and Maintenance of Dharmasalas and similar institutions.
25. Construction and Maintenance of Cattle sheds, Pounds and Carts stands.
26. Maintenance of public parks and play grounds.
27. Construction and Maintenance of Slaughter houses.
28. Such other functions as may be entrusted from time to time be order of the Government.

(ANNEXURE-II)

• POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF APEX COUNCIL:

1. Cottage Industry.
2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary.
3. Forest other than reserved forest.
4. Agriculture.
5. Rural Roads & Bridges.
6. Sericulture.
7. Education.
 - (a) Adult Education.
 - (b) Primary Education.
 - (c) Up to Higher Secondary including Vocational Training.
8. Cultural Affairs.
9. Soil Conservation.
10. Co-operation.
11. Fisheries.
12. Panchyat and Rural Development.
13. Handloom and Textile.
14. Public Health Engineering: Drinking Water.
15. Minor Irrigation.
16. Social Welfare.
17. Flood control schemes for protection of villages (not of highly technical nature)
18. Sports and Youth Welfare.
19. Weights and Measures.
20. Library Services.
21. Museum and Archaeology.
22. Urban Development, Town and Country Planning.
23. Tribal Research.
24. Land, Land Revenue and Revenue.

25. Publicity/Public Relation.
26. Tourism.
27. Transport.
28. Any other matter connected with development.
29. Municipal Boards, improvement Trust, District Boards and other local self Government or village administration.
30. Tribal Welfare.
31. Market and Fairs.
32. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic Performance and Cinemas.
33. Vital Statistics including registration of Birth and Deaths.
34. Food and Civil supplies.

ANNEXURE-III

ASSAM ACT NO. XXIV OF 2005
(Received the assent of the Governor on 8th May, 2005)
**THE RABHA HASONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
(AMENDMENT) ACT, 2005**

AN
ACT

further to amend the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995.

Whereas it is expedient further to amend the Assam Act Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995, XXVI of hereinafter referred to as the principal Act, in the 1995 manner hereinafter appearing;
It is hereby enacted in the Fifty-sixth Year of the Republic of India as follows:-

Short title, extent and commencement 1 (1) This Act may be called the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2005.
(2) It shall have the like extent as the principal Act.
(3) It shall come into force at once.

Amendment of the preamble 2 In the principal Act, for the existing Preamble, the following shall be substituted, namely:-
"Preamble. Whereas it is expedient to provide for the establishment of a Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council within the State of Assam with maximum autonomy within the frame work of the Constitution, comprising of the Satellite Areas and Core Areas, for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Rabha and other Scheduled Tribes Communities residing therein."

Amendment of section 2 3 In the principal Act, in section 2, -
(i) for the existing clause (q), the following shall be substituted, namely:-
"(q) 'Satellite Areas' means the area or areas consisting of non-contiguous cluster of villages predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50% and above as a whole in the cluster and not necessarily in the individual villages;"
(ii) after clause (d), the following new clause (dd) shall be inserted, namely:-

"(dd) 'Core Areas' means the compact and contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes population having 50% and above as a whole in the area and not necessarily in the individual villages;"

Amendment of section 4 4 In the principal Act, in section 4 in sub-section (1), the word "Rabha" shall be substituted by the word "Scheduled Tribes".

Amendment of section 6

In the principal Act, in section 6,

5 (i) for sub-section (1), the following shall be substituted, namely:-

"(1) 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;"

(ii) for sub-section (4), the following shall be substituted, namely:-

"(4) The elected members of the General Council shall, at the first meeting to be convened by an officer authorised by the Government, after the election for the purpose of constitution of the Executive Council, elect from amongst themselves by a secret ballot one of the members to be the Chairman of the meeting to conduct the proceeding where he shall also cast his vote and elect from amongst themselves in the manner prescribed:-

(i) one member to be the Chairman;

(ii) one member to be the Deputy Chairman;

(iii) one Chief Executive Councillor of the Executive Council;

(iv) one Deputy Chief Executive Councillor of the Executive Council;

(v) as many Executive Councillors as may be decided by the General Council, but not exceeding one-third of the total numbers of members of the General Council."

Amendment of section 18

6 In the principal Act, in section 18, in entry 24, after the word "Revenue," the following proviso shall be inserted namely:-

"Provided that no allotment or settlement of land shall be made in the Council Area without the recommendation of the Executive council."

Amendment of section 63

7 In the principal Act, in section 63, after sub-section (3), the following new sub-section (4) shall be inserted, namely:-

"(4) 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."

M. K. DEKA,
Commissioner & Secy. to the Govt. of Assam,
Legislative Department, Dispur.

ANNEXURE-IV

**OFFICE OF THE
NON-RABHA CO-ORDINATION FORUM**

(অনা-ৰাভা সমন্বয়ৰক্ষী মঞ্চ)

H.O. GOALPARA, DIST. GOALPARA (ASSAM)

Shuhjahan Ali, Advocate

President

Ph. 094350 24632

Ref No.....

Date. 10-12-13.....

MEMORANDUM

in demand of exclusion of Non-ST dominating villages from the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area and repeal of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Acts, 2001 & 2005 on the occasion of meeting held on 10th day of December, 2013 in the Hon'ble C. M.'s Residential Office, Koynadhara, Guwahati.

To,

Sri. Tarun Gogoi

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam.

Reverend Sir,

With all due respect and humble submission, we, the undersigned on behalf of Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum, would like to place a few words before you for your benevolent perusal and follow-up.

1. That on the 10th day of March 1995, the Rabha Accord was constituted between the state Govt. of Assam and the then leading persons of the Rabha organization and accordingly, on the 5th July, 1995, the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 was constituted and as per section 4 of the said Act the village having 50% and above Rabha population should be included in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council in short RHAC but RHAC (Amendment) Act, 2001 was constituted wherein amendment section-4 was inserted whereby it is said that all the villages under Tribal Belt/ Block and TSP shall be included in the RHAC irrespective of population pattern which definitely curtails the DEMOCRATIC RIGHT of Non- ST people in Goalpara and Kamrup(R) Districts. It is obvious that in Goalpara District as many as 82 villages under TSP while in Kamrup(Rural) District 134 villages under tribal Belt/ Block and TSP wherein Non- ST population is more than 50%. Hence, it is our bonafide demand for repeal of section 4 of RHAC (Amendment) Act 2001.
2. That without implementation of the RHAC Act, 1995, it was amended for the second time on the 17th May of 2005. As per provisions laid down in Section 2 & 3 of the said amendment Act, 2005 the system of compact area by including

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**OFFICE OF THE
NON-RABHA CO-ORDINATION FORUM**

(অনা-ৰাভা সমন্বয়ৰক্ষী মঞ্চ)

H.O. GOALPARA, DIST. GOALPARA (ASSAM)

Shahjahan Ali, Advocate

President

Ph. 094350 24632

Ref No.....

Date...10-12-13.....

(2)

core and contiguous villages has been initiated denying the satellite system of Autonomous 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 substituted by Schedule Tribes other than Rabha Tribes in Goalpara and Kamrup (Rural) Districts. It is noteworthy that the proviso of section-6 of RHAC (Amendment) Act, 2005 says that no allotment and settlement of land in RHAC area shall be obtained without prior recommendation from the Executive Council of RHAC that will prevent the Non- Rabha people in RHAC area from getting any right and title over the land. Hence, for the sake of equality and justice, the above noted provisions of Law be repealed.

3. That though the final delimitation of constituencies for RHAC was published by Gazette notification on the 17th May, 2005 yet to respond our Democratic movement, on the 26th May, 2008 an order was issued by the joint Secretary of the Govt. of Assam in the department of WPT & BC for re-examination of delimitation and DC's of Goalpara and Kamrup(R) Districts were given authority to publish Draft proposal for Delimitation and accordingly, on the 10th September, 2008 list of villages was published providing opportunity for claims and objections. Necessary hearing was also conducted upon the claims and objections for finalization but it was not formally completed. On the other hand, as our demand, RHAC (amendment) Bill 2010 was placed in the Assembly for amendment of the aforementioned provisions of defective Law in RHAC Act but very surprisingly the said Bill was withdrawn with the plea to place corrected amendment Bill subsequently whereas till date no such Bill has been presented in the Assembly.

4. That to conduct the last RHAC election in Goalpara District 22 villages were bifurcated and 10 villages out of the total 401 villages kept outside the council area as per final list of villages published by the Chief Election Commissioner, Assam; but no Gazette notification was published. It is noted that in the villages which are bifurcated on papers only, the Non- ST population are more than 50% and so, it is our humble demand that those villages be excluded without bifurcation.

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**OFFICE OF THE
NON-RABHA CO-ORDINATION FORUM**

(অনা-ৰাভা সমন্বয়ৰক্ষী মঞ্চ)

H.O. GOALPARA, DIST. GOALPARA (ASSAM)

Shahjahan Ali, Advocate

President

Ph. 094350 24632

Ref No.....

Date...10-12-17.....

(3)

5. That as per census report of 2001 out of 401 villages included in the draft list of villages for RHAC published by the Chief Election Commissioner, Assam there are 89 villages in Goalpara District wherein Non- ST population is more than 50% and so, those villages be excluded from the RHAC area.

In the premises set forth above, it is our humble demand that You would be pleased enough to pave the way for exclusion of Non-ST dominating villages in Goalpara and Kamrup (R) Districts and also to repeal the above cited sections of Law in RHAC (Amendment) Acts 2001 & 2005.

And for this act of Your kindness, we shall be ever grateful to You.

With regards,

Yours faithfully

Shahjahan Ali

Shahjahan Ali
President
Non-Rabha Co-ordination Forum

*Mahananda Sarma
Working Proide*