

CHAPTER-VII

Concluding Observations and Some Suggestions

The emergence of the demand for political autonomy among the Tribal ethnic groups is a contentious issue in the post-independent politics of Assam. Soon after the Independence of India, the Plain Tribal groups in Assam have become conscious about their ethnic identity and have mobilized it for the demand of a separate territory. It is noteworthy that, these tribal groups are an integral constituent of the greater Assamese nationality. They have enormously contributed to the growth and enrichment of the Assamese nationality. According to Lakshminath Tamuly, “The Assamese society and culture is the outcome of tolerance, mutual cooperation and good faith of all the Tribal ethnic groups of Assam. There is no factual or explanatory evidence that proves that it is an outcome of exclusive contribution of a single ethnic group. Once historiography picks up the perspective of the masses in place of that of the royal dynasty, the importance of ethnic or communal perspective gets naturally decreased.”¹ Therefore, the ethnic assertion of the Tribal ethnic groups, and feeling of separation may severely affect the unity and strength of the greater Assamese nationality.

The Plain Tribes in general and the Tiwas and the Rabhas in particular, in their struggle for political autonomy have alleged that, they have been denied the constitutional protection which has been provided to the Hill Tribes of Assam ever since the enactment of the Constitution of India. Responding to the growing dissatisfaction of the Plain Tribes, the Government of Assam has adopted policy, providing statutory tribe specific Autonomous Council facilitating self-governance. In this situation, the enquiry of the factors which led to the emergence of the feelings of separate entity among the Plain Tribes and assessment of the Government’s policy of formation of tribe specific Autonomous Council has become relevant now. With these broad objectives, an attempt has been made in this study to find out the factors of ethnic assertion by the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam and trying to assess the functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils for the socio-economic upliftment as well as for the protection of ethnic identity of the Tiwas and the Rabhas in

¹ The quotation is cited by Dr. Prafulla Mahanta in “Janagosthigata Chetana: Atmapratisthar Prashna” published by Bhabani Books, An imprint of Bhabani Offset Pvt. Ltd., Guwahati-781026, Assam.; page-16. The text is translated from Assamese to English.

Assam. In this Chapter, we will present our observations gained from this study and will put forward some suggestions on the issue along with the limitations of the present study and the future prospect for further study on the Issue.

7:1 Demand for Political Autonomy by the Tiwas and the Rabhas:

7:1:1 Autonomy Demand and the Question of Ethnic Identity of the Tiwas and the Rabhas:

The demand for political autonomy by the Plain Tribes of Assam is associated with the feeling of ethnic identity crisis in Assam. The very basic question which is to be answered here is, why the Plain Tribes of Assam after having assimilated into the greater Assamese nation have of late started raising the question of ethnic identity and trying to establish their separate entity?

The intelligentsia of Assam has tried to explain this complex issue in their own ways. Dr Prafulla Mahanta (2014), is of the opinion that the hegemonic character of the Aryanised Assamese society is the factor for the emergence of ethnic assertion of the Plain Tribes in Assam. He states, “..after the reorganization of the States in the Independent India, the Assamese Nation had achieved all possible privileges within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The Assamese language was constitutionally recognized. In this situation, the dominant caste Hindu Assamese middle-class elites who conquered the ruling power of the State were supposed to concentrate on over all development of the region and to help the other smaller communities to develop their language and culture. Contrary to that they started to establish Aryanised Assamese Socio-Cultural and linguistic hegemony. For that they started Language Movement (during 1960’s), the Assam Movement.” (Mahanta Prafulla, 2014) In this reference he cited Dr. Rajen Saikia, who, in an article on the Bodo Movement, published in the Assamese magazine Satsari, in the 1-15th June 1989 issue, page-53-54, said that “The State Re-organisation Commission (1955) has elaborately considered the question of Assam for its re-organization. At that time, the Commission had cautioned us that, the economic development of the State and the enjoyment of the real cultural freedom by the linguistic and ethnic sub-national groups are possible if they fulfill two important conditions. One, the State should be well integrated and economically developed. Second, the mutual tolerance and prevalence of good will in all times in the State. Particularistic tendency, to be precise, the Hegemonic tendency will hamper the progress of the State.” (Mahanta Prafulla, 2014) In his opinion the Assamese leaders have ignored these two conditions given by the State Re-organisation Commission. In the post independence Assam, the prominent core

values, which unite the linguistically and ethnically diverse society of Assam and the North East, have been destroyed. According to him, three such core values are- a) English language and education b) non-guardianship of Assamese Language c) mutual tolerance and co-existence of Baisnavite and Mongolian culture. (Mahanta Prafulla, 2014)

The Tiwas and the Rabhas are two prominent Plain Tribal ethnic groups, originating from the greater Tibeto-Burman Bodo linguistic family. These Tribal ethnic communities are very proud of their distinct socio-cultural life. They have their own system of social life which makes them unique from other communities of Assam. They have their own language, customs and traditions governing their society.

But the study reveals that due to their close contact with non tribal caste Hindu Assamese society in Assam, the Tiwas and the Rabhas have, over a period of time, assimilated into the “mainstream” Assamese nationality. It was during the wave of the Bhakti Movement led by saint Srimanta Sankardeva (1448-1569) that the Tiwas and the Rabhas came under the fold of Hindu tradition and accepted “*Ek Saran Nam Dharma*” of Srimanta Sankardeva. The process of assimilation simultaneously led to the gradual erosion of the indigenous social and cultural traditions of the Tiwa and Rabha communities.

From the study it is also found that erosion of language is a major concern for both the communities which they considered as the key factor of their ethnic identity. According to the 2001 census report on the Rabha society, only 1,30,875 no. of people are speaking the Rabha language while in the Tiwa society it is only 26,480 people speak the Tiwa language (Source: Office of the Census India, Guwahati, Assam). The Assam Government had assured the Tiwa and the Rabha leaders to introduce the Tiwa and the Rabha language as a subject in the schools at the primary level and for that the Government was to appoint the teachers in the Tiwa and the Rabha Language. But, till date, neither the language introduced nor the teacher appointed by the Government.

Due to this trend of socio-cultural identity crisis, a new awakening for the revival of their culture and tradition had emerged among the educated sections in both the communities in Assam and started a movement for the assertion of identity among the Tiwas and the Rabhas. These tribal ethnic communities have felt that, the Political Autonomy is essential for the protection of their ethnic identity in Assam.

The demand for the protection of ethnic identity of an indigenous community can be conceived as a legitimate demand in a plural society like us. In a democracy, every ethnic

group has their right to preserve and protect their identity and they can legitimately raise the demand to the political system if such identity is at stake and the Political system must have the capacity to accommodate such demands.

7:1:2 Autonomy Demand and the allegation of socio-economic backwardness of the Tiwa and the Rabha tribes:

The study reveals that one important factor of raising the demand for political autonomy by the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam is the allegation of socio-economic deprivation and backwardness. Through the demand of political autonomy they claimed for equal development and equal dignity of their community with the other sections of the people in Assam.

The study reveals in both the communities a weak trend of literacy and work participation. In both the areas the women's percentage in both the communities are very less. Hence, empowerment of women is an urgent need in both the societies.

It is noteworthy that loss of agricultural land in the Tribal Societies in general and the Tiwas and the Rabhas in particular, is a major issue so far as the economic development of these communities is concerned. Majority of the peoples in the Tiwa and the Rabha communities are the cultivators. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in these societies. But loss of ownership of the agricultural land and the problem of land alienation is the major issue of concern in these societies. This has caused poverty, unemployment and also indebtedness of the Tiwa and the Rabha peoples in a very large way. The agricultural practices are not modernized and upgraded though majority of families are depending on agriculture. Due to such backwardness in the agricultural sector they are unable to meet the essential expenditure of their day to day life from their earnings. In such conditions, in any eventuality they have to sell their agricultural land. Even to perform the occasions like marriage of daughters or sons, death rites and other socio-religious ceremonies, they have to sell their lands. In most cases, they sell their lands to the non-tribal well- to- do class of the locality. This has increased poverty, unemployment, indebtedness etc. in these societies. The characteristic feature of this phenomenon is that, this has become a gradual process of legacy for generations without the consciousness of the poor Tiwa and the Rabha people about this inevitable economic problem.

Apart from this, they have not been benefited by the modern development process in the State. The infrastructure facilities like road connectivity, commercial or industrial

establishments, schools, health center facilities are very poor in the Tiwa and the Rabha inhabited areas. Although the physical structures are there, the operation of the services of these facilities are very deplorable. Such backwardness in the socio economic life generates the feeling of deprivation and provides fertile ground to raise the demand for political autonomy in Assam.

7:1:3 Political Factor of Autonomy Demand by the Tiwas and the Rabhas:

From the study, it has been observed that there are some political factors behind the formulation of the demand for political autonomy by the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam. Emergence of young educated leaders in both the communities is an important political factor for the articulation of the demand for autonomy. These leaders are under the impression that they do not have the opportunity to take part in the political decision making level of the State. It is true that, in the present Assam Legislative Assembly, there is not a single representative from either community. In Assam, there are altogether 11 seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly reserved for the Schedule Tribe (Plain) groups (excluding Bokajan, Howraghat, Diphu, Boithalangsu and Haflong constituency in the Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao Hill districts). The S.T. reserved constituencies are Kokrajhar East, Kokrajhar West, Sidli, Udalguri, Barama, Chapaguri, Dudhnoi, Majuli, Dhakuakhana, Dhemaji, Jonai. In all these constituencies, it is only in the Dudhnoi constituency, the Rabhas can have the chance to get their representatives. On the other hand, there is no constituency where the Tiwas can elect a representative of their own. (Earlier the Morigaon Legislative Assembly Constituency was reserved for the Schedule Tribe from 1935 to 1975. But in 1975 the seat was declared as Open Constituency). Moreover, in the present first-past-post system in the election of the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Rabhas and the Tiwas could not elect their representatives because, though they are abound in many constituencies, they are not dominant population compared to the other peoples in those constituencies. In case of the Lok Sabha seats of Assam too, there are two reserved seats for the Schedule Tribe communities' i. e. the Kokrajhar and the Diphu seats where the Tiwas and the Rabhas cannot contest in the election.

The leaders of both the communities have alleged that, due to this prevailing condition in the political process of Assam, they don't have the opportunity to take part in the decision making process in the State which is affecting the political interest of both the communities. Therefore, they demanded political autonomy so that they can enjoy the right to development according to their own endowment.

The newly emerged leaders in both the Tiwa and the Rabha communities, in the initial stage of their ethnic assertion, have started the revival movement for the re-establishment of their culture and languages for the protection of their ethnic identity and after that gradually they started political demand, inspired by some other political developments i. e. Assam movement, the Bodo movement etc. They considered that the denial of political autonomy is a relative deprivation for them in particular since such privilege is provided to other tribal communities. More specifically, they asserted their demand for autonomy more vigorously after the signing of the Bodo Accord in 1993. They have been inspired by the success of Bodo movement which secured political autonomy for the Bodos.

7:1:4 People's awareness about the Autonomy Demand:

It is observed that, the common people living in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area are aware about the Autonomy demand. They are also aware about the factors raised by the leaders in support of the Autonomy Demand. At present, the organizations from both the communities have raised the Demand for more autonomy i.e. inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. From the inquiry it is found that though, all the sections of the people have not participated in various agitational programmes yet, the issue is known to the general public of both the Council areas.

However, if we compare the mass awareness and participation in the autonomy movement among the Tiwas and the Rabhas, the Rabha people are more involved than the Tiwas. The reason is that the core organizations of the Rabhas have their local units in Rabha dominated areas which is not done by the Tiwa organisations. They are holding local workshops at the village level to make the people aware about the autonomy demand.

7:2 Functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils:

In Assam, in response to the demands of the Tribal communities the State Government has undertaken the policy to constitute the Tribe specific Autonomous Councils in Assam. As a part of such policy, the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils are formed under the Tiwa Autonomous Council Act, 1995 and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995.

From the analysis of the findings of the opinion survey, it is clear that the common masses in both the Councils are not satisfied in the functioning of the Councils. There are many reasons for the people's dissatisfaction in the functioning of the Autonomous Councils.

Some issues which are responsible for the popular dissatisfaction regarding the functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils are discussed below.

7:2:1 Factors which affecting functioning of Autonomous Councils:

a) The Ad-hoc Autonomous Councils:

Strictly speaking, the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils started functioning as per the Tiwa/ Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act only since 2010 and 2013 respectively. This is because of the fact that it was in June 2010 and February 2013 that the first elections of the Tiwa Autonomous Council and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council were held respectively by the State Government. Prior to that, the Councils were run in an ad-hoc mode. Instead of holding direct election of the Councils, the State Government formed the Councils with nominated members. In both the Councils, the State Government nominated party workers from the respective tribal communities who were loyal to the state government. They were not responsible to the people of the Council area rather they were trying to satisfy the Ministers and the ruling party leaders to secure their positions. This led to the misuse of funds and large scale corruption in the Councils. Thus, during the period of Interim Councils, there was no development for two reasons- a) the persons nominated to the Councils were not directly responsible to the people since they were not elected by the people b) they could not demand anything from the State Government to initiate developmental work because they were appointed by the State Government due to their party affiliation. In such a situation, the interest of the general masses living in the Council area remained neglected. Due to these practices the new generations of leaders from both the communities have raised the demand for autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution so as to make the Council free from the direct control of the State Government.

b) Negligence of the State Government:

Today, though the Councils are formed by the elected representatives of the people, the State Government does not empower the Autonomous Councils to function as autonomous institutions. The allocations of funds were not sufficient compared to the subjects entrusted to the Councils. Although there is provision for creation of separate funds by the State Government for the General Councils and the Village Councils to carry out the developmental functions, the Government does not implement the provision. At present, the State Government sanctions a marginalized amount of funds out of the Tribal Sub Plan fund given by the Central Government for the development of the Tribal areas. There is no

uniform basis for distribution of funds for the Autonomous Councils in Assam. Moreover, there is an allegation of untimely release of funds which affects its proper utilizations. There is also allegation of bureaucratic red tapism which caused unnecessary delay in fund release and corruption in the process.

Apart from the financial hindrances, there are some other administrative problems which are also affecting the functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils. As per the provisions of the Act, the State Government has to depute the personnel and attach the offices to the Councils for the execution of the development works. But the state Government is not taking appropriate measures in this respect too. On the other hand, the respective Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 provided for the constitution of Village Councils at the grass root level in both the Council areas. But this important provision of the said Acts is not yet implemented by the State Government.

c) Lack of integrity among the Leaders:

Lack of integrity and dedication towards the welfare of the community among the leaders is a major cause of dismal functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils. The trend of corruption had started with the Interim Council systems, where only the loyal party workers were appointed in the Councils. Today, though the elections are held in the Council areas, the trend is not improved than the earlier. During elections, huge amount of money is spent by the candidates. One of the factors for this is the participation of the mainstream political parties of the State. Their participation makes the election of the Councils more competitive. In the present juncture, the political parties in the State considered the elections of the Councils as one of the political grounds to test their hold over the voters. Therefore, the Council elections gained so much focus from the political point of view. Moreover, another consequence of the competitive nature of the Council elections is that, the electoral malpractices are taking place during elections. Due to this type of unhealthy competitions the committed and devoted persons of both the Tiwa and the Rabha communities who originally contributed a lot towards the Tiwa and the Rabha ethnic nationality are refraining from the Council politics. As a result, the actual purpose of the constitution of these Councils has been derailed.

d) Opportunistic behavior of the Leaders of both the communities:

It has already been mentioned that the leaders from the respective communities are also responsible for the dismal functioning of the Autonomous Councils. The opportunistic

behavior of some leaders is affecting the usefulness of the policy of constitution of tribe specific autonomous councils in Assam.

It has been observed that, when the State Government formed the Councils by the nominated members instead of holding election, many leaders from both the Tiwa and the Rabha community joined the ruling party in the State to gain political power in the Council. In the Tiwa Community the leaders like, Sidam Deuri joined in the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Narayan Radu Kakati joined in the Indian National Congress party (all these leaders are actively involved in the Tiwa Autonomy Movement and were the signatories in the Tiwa Accord). In the Rabha community too, the leaders like Sarat Rabha, Sabya Sashi Rabha etc. (actively involved and leading the agitations for Autonomy) joined the parties which had been in power in the State. Thus, after the formation of the Autonomous Councils, the Councils have been influenced by the party politics of the State. This trend has been continuing in the subsequent stages.

Even though the elections are held to constitute the Councils, the political power centric clash among the Tiwa leaders was evident after the first election of the Tiwa autonomous Council in June 2010, when the Executive Council was not formed for more than 2 (two) years due to the unanimity between the elected members for the post of Chief executive Councillorship. At last, with the intervention of the Gauhati High Court, the Executive Council was formed under the leadership of Rama Kanta Deuri on 9th May 2012 (Amar Asom, 10th May 2012). Later on he was ousted again from the post of Chief executive Councillorship by a group of elected members in the month of November 2014 and elected a member as the new Chief Executive Councillor. Thus, the power centric political behavior of the elected members of the Council had affected the functioning of the Council.

It is noteworthy that, in the present ruling party (Tiwa Oikya Mancha) in the Tiwa Autonomous Council, most of the leaders in the Party, including the present Chief Executive Councilor were former members of the Indian National Congress Party (<http://www.telegraphindia.com>, viewed on 25th November, 2015).

Thus, after the formation of the Autonomous Councils, the Tribal leaders belonging to the respective communities are taking the Councils as an opportunity to serve their own political interest often neglecting the larger interest and welfare of the general people of their communities.

However, in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, it has been observed that, during recent times, the leaders of the Rabha community are strictly trying to strengthen their own organizations rather trying their best to join the ruling party. Thus, in the first general election of Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, the Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee won the majority seats and formed the Council.

e) Influence of Party Politics in the Councils:

From the study it is observed that, there is influence of party politics of the State in the functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. As a matter of fact, when the interim Councils were formed, the ruling party nominated their own loyal party workers to constitute the councils. In the subsequent period, in the first Tiwa Autonomous Council election held in 2010, the Indian National Congress (INC) party formed the Executive Council by winning 20 seats out of 30 seats. Again in the last election of the Tiwa Autonomous Council held in August 2015, the Indian National Congress (INC) party emerged as the largest party by securing 15 seats out of 30 seats. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also significantly showed its presence by winning 3 seats and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) won 2 seats. But immediately after the election, 3 elected members from the INC party joined the BJP. With the support of these 3 members, along with the BJP and AGP members, the Tiwa Oikya Mancha formed the Executive Council in the Tiwa Autonomous Council.

In the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council, we are not finding this trend. The Rabha Hasong Joint Movement Committee (RHJMC) formed the Council and they maintained a distance from the mainstream political parties. The reason behind the victory of RHJMC is their role in the movement for the Autonomy of the Rabhas as discussed in the third chapter.

f) Problem of mass participation in the Councils:

In any democratic system, for the successful working of the institutions, popular participation is essential. For that, mass awareness regarding the functioning of the councils is necessary. But the mass awareness in both the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas regarding the functioning of the councils is very less. Due to lack of awareness of the people, the leaders are not properly utilizing the money and thus involved in corruption. In this regard, constitution of the Village Councils in the Council areas is essential to ensure the mass participation in the functioning of the Councils. As a matter of fact, in the absence of the Village Councils, the functioning pattern of the Councils is very centralized,

hence the gap between the leaders and the common people is ever widening with the issue of political accountability taking a back seat.

7:2:2 Rise of the Tiwa and the Rabha Organizations in the Council Elections:

An important development in the electoral politics of the Councils which needs to be mentioned here is that, the victory of the Tiwa and the Rabha organizations in the Council elections. In the first election to the Tiwa Autonomous Council, the Indian National Congress party won the majority seats and formed the Executive Council. But in the last election of the Tiwa Autonomous Council held in August 2015, the newly formed Tiwa Jatio Oikya Mancha emerged as the second largest party with 10 seats. The INC party won 15 out of 30 seats which is just one seat short of absolute majority. But due to defection in the INC in the State level, the INC party could not manage the required majority; the second largest party the Tiwa Oikya Mancha with the support of the 3 BJP members and 3 dissident INC members and 2 AGP members formed the present Executive Council in the Tiwa Autonomous Council.

In the lone election of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council too, the RHJMC won most of the seats. The RHJMC won the election because of its role in the Rabha Hasong movement. RHJMC is a common platform of 34 organisations representing the communities including non Rabhas living in the Rabha Hasong area. Thus, the RHJMC is a national organization of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. The RHJMC has a mass support base with its local units in the Rabha Hasong area.

7:3 The Panchayat vs the Councils:

The operation of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas is a big issue for the Council system. In the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Accord 1995, the Government of Assam agreed to constitute the Autonomous Councils for the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam. It was also mentioned in the Accord(Clause-5) that the PRIs will not be constituted in the Council area. This required an amendment to the Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1994, because in the said Act, the operation of Panchayati Raj Institutions(PRI) was restricted only in the areas under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. But till 2001, the Government of Assam did not implement this provision of the Accord. Rather, in 2001 they amended the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995, abolishing the Clause-5 and ensured the operation of the PRIs in the Council areas. Accordingly in 2003, 2008 and 2013 the PRI election was held in

the Council areas. However, the State Government of Assam held the election of the Tiwa Autonomous Council and the Rabha Hasong autonomous Council in 2010 and 2014 respectively, for the first time since 1995.

But now the question has been raised by many quarters about the necessity of functioning of two self governing systems in the same area. The Chief minister of Assam had expressed his opinion justifying the PRI in the Council areas, during the political clash in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area on holding of PRI election in January-February 2013, that the Clause-5 in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Accord was a mistake of the Government which was abolished in 2001 from the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995, by amending the Act (Nath Manuj Kumar, 2013). The Chief Minister holds that, holding of Panchayat election is a constitutional obligation of the State Government. But the same State Government did not hold the election of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils for a long time which was also a legal and constitutional duty of the State Government (since the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 was also a Legislative Act passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly). This shows the negligence of the State Government towards the Autonomous Council systems for the Plain Tribes.

It is noteworthy that, the operation of the PRI in the Sixth Schedule areas was restricted because of the existence of the institution of Village Council at the grass root level. As it has already been mentioned, in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils also there is provision for constitution of Village Councils at the grass root level but the State Government doesn't take the initiative so far to constitute Village Councils which is also a legal binding for the State Government. Moreover, it is observed that the functions entrusted to the Autonomous Councils are almost similar with the functions of the PRI. The same subjects with the PRIs are entrusted to the Autonomous Councils. Therefore, it is realized that there is no necessity to constitute two systems to perform similar functions in the same areas. This will be wastage of resources as well as leading to the overlapping of functions.

7:4 Some Suggestions:

After analyzing the problem of Tribal ethnic movement for political Autonomy and various aspects of functioning of the Tribe specific Autonomous Councils we like to put forward the following suggestions.

1. Government must be sincere in its effort to solve the issues raised by the Tribal Ethnic groups in Assam. The negligence by the Government towards the Tribal ethnic assertions further complicated the issue. Normally, the Government responds to any movement or agitation when it creates some sensitive and critical situations. Moreover, it is seen that in the prevailing political culture, the Government considers every political issue from the election point of view. Therefore, since the smaller tribal ethnic groups are not able to be the deciding factor in their respective areas, they are not getting sufficient attention from the Government. In such a situation, it is necessary that the Government should avoid consideration of the Tribal issues from the narrow political perspectives rather it should be addressed sincerely to draw the sentiments of these Tribal ethnic groups so as to encourage them to contribute towards the unity and progress of the state.

2. In the post independence period the successive Governments at the Centre as well as in the State have undertaken various policies and schemes considering the backwardness of the Schedule Tribe (ST) communities. The Constitution of India also provides special privileges to the ST communities. It is also the responsibility of both the Governments to monitor the actual implementation of the Schemes. Government should take measures to ensure effective implementation of the Schemes.

3. The smaller Tribal communities in Assam should not be treated merely as a cultural group. Their socio-economic and political aspirations should be properly addressed. It is not only the Government but all the sections of the people in Assam should be sympathetic and extend support to the legitimate demands of the Tribal ethnic communities.

4. It is observed that the Government took various political, administrative decisions in response to the Tribal ethnic assertions in Assam. In most of these cases only a few section of Tribal leaders are benefitted from this policy decision. Basic problems of the Tribal societies still remain unresolved. Therefore, it is necessary that the Government should adopt such policies which will resolve the basic problems of the Tribal societies rather than satisfying handful of leaders who are leading the Tribal agitations.

5. Lack of uniformity in the policy of the Government related with the Tribal ethnic groups has further complicated the Tribal politics in Assam. In contemporary situation, in Assam, the issue of ethnic identity of the Tribals and the demand for political autonomy by the Plain Tribes is a very contentious issue. Therefore, the policy decisions of the Government in the State should be clear enough to handle this fragile issue which has its impact on the unity and

integrity of the State. Unfortunately, since independence, there is lack of uniformity in the Tribal policies of the Government in the State. The Hill Tribes were provided constitutional privileges often neglecting the Plain Tribes. After that, the Government has been responding to the demands of the Tribal ethnic groups according to their own political expediencies. For example, at first the Assam Government constituted the Bodo Autonomous Council for the Bodos and later on the Bodo Autonomous Council was reconstituted as the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD) under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution by amending the Constitution. On the other hand, the Government constituted six tribe specific Autonomous Councils with limited autonomy providing self governance to the Tribal ethnic groups in Assam. But the Tiwas and the Rabhas along with the Mishings are demanding more autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. They considered that, after the inclusion of the Bodos under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which was earlier confined to the Hill tribes, denial of similar arrangements to them is a relative deprivation for the other Plain Tribal groups. Thus, the Assam Government should adopt a uniform tribal policy so that there may not be the feeling of deprivation among them.

In the prevailing situation, the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council should be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. With the inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution they will be able to get more funds from the Central Government. At the same time, it will give them the right over the resources and land in their respective jurisdiction. But it needs some constitutional changes too. The villages where the Tiwa or the Rabhas are not in majority should not be included in any case within the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council areas. For that, in the formation of the Council Constituencies the concept of Compact Area should not be followed rather, the concept of Satellite Village system should be followed since the Tiwa and the Rabha villages are not found in a contiguous area.

6. The issue of autonomy is related to the issue of identity and recognition of the ethnic identity of the Tiwas and the Rabhas. Protection of identity is a legitimate right of any ethnic group. In a heterogeneous society, protection of diversity is a necessity through which unity can be achieved. In Assam, the Tribal ethnic groups have enormously contributed to the growth of Assamese Nationality. Therefore, it is necessary to protect and nourish the cultural and ethnic identity of these small Tribal Communities. The protection of language, institutions and customs are very important in this regard. They should be allowed to practice their customary laws and social institutions in their society. The Government should take

necessary steps to introduce the Tiwa and the Rabha languages in the Schools in the Tiwa and the Rabha inhabited areas.

7. In Assam, the emergence of Tribal sub-national assertions should not be treated as antagonistic to the greater Assamese nationality. The Assamese socio-cultural organizations representing the Assamese nationality should accept, recognize these Tribal sub-nationality to accommodate them within the broader national identity of Asomiya. All the organizations (socio-political) in Assam should practice mutual tolerance and accept the multi-culturalism. This will strengthen the unity and integrity of Assam.

8. The Government of Assam should implement all the provisions of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995. The Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils should be strengthened to function successfully as an institution of grass root democracy for the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam. For the efficient functioning of the Councils, the Government should provide adequate funds as per the set law. It is necessary to fix some criteria for the funding of the Autonomous Councils in Assam. More reasonably, it should be done according to the total population living in the Councils' jurisdiction. The Authority, to control and monitor the Departments attached with the Councils, should be transferred to the Councils. The State Government should transfer the authority to levy and to collect the local tax to the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils. The Government should directly credit the sanctioning funds in the Accounts of the Councils to avoid the bureaucratic red-tape.

9. It is not necessary to constitute the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Council areas. Existence of two grass root institutions in the same area is wastage of money. Both the institutions in the Council area are entrusted with similar functions. Thus, instead of constitution of Panchayati Raj Institutions, the Autonomous Councils should be strengthened by implementing the provisions of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act 1995. The funds and Schemes earmarked for the Panchayati Raj Institutions should be transferred and implemented through the Autonomous Councils in the respective Council area.

10. At present, in the Councils, there is lack of grass root level mechanism facilitating the village level people to take part in the policy making level of the Councils. As a result of that, the Councils are functioning in a centralized manner. Today, there is a gap between the common peoples and the Council Authority. The State Government should constitute the

Village Councils in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area. Adequate powers should be entrusted to the Village Councils to empower the rural masses in the respective Council area. It will facilitate the rural masses in the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area to take part in the political decision making process and thereby strengthen the democracy in the Autonomous Councils. The development plans in the Councils should be formulated at the Village level through the Village Councils. The General Council will approve an integrated Plan formulated by the Executive Council for the entire Council area by incorporating the plan proposals formulated at the Grass root level. It will make the Council system more democratic in its functioning.

11. The functioning of the Autonomous Councils should be democratic in nature. The election of the Councils should be held regularly. It will create awareness of the people towards the Councils. Moreover due to election, the leaders will have to be accountable to the peoples of the Council area. The elections should be free from the general political trend of the State. As far as possible the mainstream political parties should not participate in the Council elections. People of high integrity and character should be encouraged to take part in the Council politics.

12. There must be strict monitoring and continuous assessment of the development work in the Councils. In every financial year schemes are undertaken by the councils but there is lack of effective monitoring system for implementation of the development works. There is lack of grass root level mechanism for the monitoring of works of the Councils.

13. One major objective of the constitution of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong is to ensure the socio-economic development in their respective areas. The major challenge before the Councils is the resource mobilization and employment generation. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in both the Council areas. So the Councils will have to take measures to improve the agricultural practices. The farmers should be properly trained for efficient cultivation with the help of modern methods and equipments. The Council shall have to facilitate necessary support by providing modern equipments of agriculture so that they may be able to sustain their day to day expenditure from their income. Along with that the management of the crop marketing is important to help the farmers to get appropriate income from their agricultural products.

In both the Council areas, there are aquatic resources like small rivers and “beels” which have a high potentiality for fish production. Some water bodies can also be used for

other purposes. For example, the “Charan Beel” in the Tiwa Autonomous Council area was used for water sports during the Assam edition of National Games.

Moreover, there is growing popularity of tribal ethnic foods, dresses and traditions and cultures not only in the state but at the international level. The women of both the communities are experts in weaving. Nowadays, the dresses or handlooms of the Tribal Communities have a very good demand in the market. The Council should provide necessary support to the weavers of both the communities as well as for the marketing of their dresses.

For the revenue generation and to protect the rich ethnic identity of the Tiwas and the Rabhas, the Council authorities in collaboration of the State Government of Assam may take a policy to set up Model Ethnic Village as the Ethnic Tourist spot showcasing the traditions, cultures, food etc. of the respective community. This will boost the Rural Tourism sector of the State as well as will help to protect the Ethnic culture and traditions of the small tribal ethnic groups in Assam.

14. Protection of agricultural land is necessary and informal transfer of land should be stopped as far as possible. Though, there is a rule to get the prior permission for selling of land in the Council area, but there is no rule to regulate the informal or temporary transfer of land in the form of bandhak, sukti, etc. There should be some regulations to control informal transfer of land.

15. There is urgent necessity to give opportunity to the minority groups for the participation in the political decision making level in the State. In the present first-past-the-post system which is adopted for the Assam Legislative Assembly elections, the Tiwas and the Rabhas are not ever getting the opportunity to elect a representative to the Assam Legislative Assembly from their community. Therefore, in this situation, the constitution of an upper chamber in the Assam Legislative Assembly will be an effective measure where the small tribal ethnic groups will get the opportunity to nominate their representatives to the House. This will facilitate them to take part in the political decision making process of the State.

16. Commitment, good-governance at every levels of administration related with the affairs of Tribal Development is the utmost need to remove backwardness and to solve the basic problems of the Tribal societies in Assam. The Autonomous Councils should be sincere in its functions and committed towards the development of the people. This is because underperformance on the part of the councils will only enable others to put the blame of

under-development of the respective people of the Autonomous Councils areas on the leaders of the Autonomous Councils themselves.

7:5 Future Scope of Study:

The study about the demand for political autonomy by the indigenous Tribal communities and the Government policy of formation of tribe specific Autonomous Councils in response to such demands, has its importance in the perspective of social and political stability of the State. Behind the emergence of political demand for autonomy, there are multiple factors which are dynamic or changing in nature. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize all such factors in a single study within a limited span of time. So, there is scope for more empirical study to find out the factors of this political demand for autonomy by the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam.

The study was extensive one with the objective to have a general overview regarding articulation of the demand for autonomy by the Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam and functioning of the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. There is scope for further research to make an intensive study to assess the demand articulation as well as functioning of the Councils. But one serious limitation faced during the study was that the Council authorities could not provide the information sufficiently since they did not preserve the data properly. Digitalization of the office work is important to keep the records properly as well as to maintain transparency.

In the assessment of the functioning of Autonomous Council, we have to depend on the people's opinion. But the information gained from the popular responses is subject to limitations since some of the respondents are not well informed and knowledgeable. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out continuous empirical study to ascertain the facts regarding the functioning of Autonomous Councils.

7:6 Conclusion:

In the present academic discourses, it is pertinent to examine whether autonomy is an effective solution to the dissatisfaction of the Tribal ethnic groups in Assam. In this study attempt has been made to find out the factors of autonomy demand by the Tiwa and the Rabha tribal ethnic groups in Assam and to assess whether the present policy of the Government for constitution of tribe specific Autonomous Councils for the Tiwas and the Rabhas is an effective solution for their autonomy demand.

From the study it is found that the demand for autonomy is a manifestation of socio-economic and political grievances. The feeling of identity crisis and ambition for revival of such is an important factor in the articulation of the demand for autonomy. It could be admitted that the emergence of group consciousness of a certain section of tribal leaders is a consequence of the liberal democratic politics of the country whereby such an elite group tends to exploit the prevailing conditions in the Tribal societies as a crisis of democratic right of a relatively minor group to protect their own self. Together with that there involves the question of opportunity in the existing political structure in terms of development and representation.

While analyzing the policy and the structural arrangement i.e. the Autonomous Councils, it reveals the inefficiency of the system so far as the peoples' response is concerned. For the inefficiency of the Autonomous Councils both the Government in the State and the Authority in the Autonomous Councils are responsible. The Government is not facilitating the system to run in its true sense. On the other hand, the Council authorities are lacking efficiency as well as accountability in their functions. The lack of awareness among the masses that constitute the core element in the structure is also noteworthy. However, though there are shortcomings in the operation of the Autonomous Councils, today it is impossible to reverse the policy. So, the only solution is that the Government has to strengthen the system by transferring the financial and administrative powers as provided by the Act. Moreover, the leaders should be more accountable and the masses are supposed to be conscious to make the system democratic and efficient.