

PREFACE

In a multi-ethnic pluralistic society, the emergence of the demand for autonomy in the political process, by smaller ethnic communities is a natural phenomenon. Such demands are being articulated taking the advantage of the democratic process. In fact, democratic politics today is characterized by the accommodation of various autonomous units, by conceding decentralization of powers to such units. But the question as to why these constituent ethnic groups are demanding autonomy and the working of the policies adopted to solve such demand have been always subjects of empirical research for the academicians.

In India, after independence, some special provisions are incorporated in the Constitution for the governance of the Tribal communities, to ensure protection of their identity, culture as well as to help them to develop in their own ways. But the Tribal communities, living in the Plain areas of Assam, which had assimilated to the Caste Hindu Assamese society, have remained outside of the constitutional provisions provided to the other Tribal communities in India. In Assam, these Tribal communities are being recognized as a distinct cultural group but their social and political aspirations are not properly addressed. Therefore, these Plain Tribal communities have gradually raised the demand for political autonomy in Assam for the protection of their identity and to ensure development of their communities.

The Tiwas and the Rabhas in Assam are two prominent Plain Tribal ethnic communities. These two Plain Tribal communities had struggled for a long time for securing autonomy in Assam. Responding to their long standing demands for autonomy, the Government of Assam constituted the Tiwa and the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils in Assam, ensuring self-rule in the areas where the people of both these communities are dominant. In the study, we are trying to find out the factors for which the demand for autonomy have been raised by these two communities and a practical assessment of the effectiveness of the Autonomous Councils for the fulfillment of the aspirations for the development of their communities.

The literatures consulted in this study are listed in the bibliography. The major findings of this study are based on the public opinions collected through personal interview which was carried out with the help of a structured questionnaire. The schedules used in personal interviews with the leading personalities as well as the common voters are also

given as annexure. Moreover a good number of memoranda submitted by different Tiwa and the Rabha organizations to the Government are consulted in the study. I offer my gratitude to all who have immensely helped me to develop my ideas in the Study.

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(**Dadul Dewri**)