

CHAPTER-V

MANAGING DIVERSITY: CHANGING DYNAMICS IN THE BODO AND THE MISING MOVEMENT

The entire North East region of India is a homeland of diverse cultures and ethnic groups. The same diversity is visible in geographical, social and cultural aspects of the region. There seems to be growing tendency among policy planners and social scientist these days to club together the different states of north eastern region as the North East. While there is no denying the geographical reality of the North East, yet complexities are bound to arise if the term is used as an umbrella connotation involving cultural and political aspects as well. The states of North East not only possess distinct culture and historical traditions, but economically too they are in different stages of development.¹

‘The socio-cultural and economic diversity of North East region has significance in Indian socio-politics in post-independence period. The similar socio-cultural diversity is found in Assam too (Table 5.a). Table 5.a clarifies the socio cultural diversity of Assam as it shows the district wise population distribution of various tribes of Assam. The table shows that there are numerous tribal groups with other ethnic groups scattered throughout the state having their own unique cultural heritage. On the one hand, these varieties reflect the beautiful facet of Assam’s socio cultural side. On the other hand, the same varieties become the main factor of social as well as political conflict at times. However, the problem created by socio-cultural variety becomes a common issue in all over India. The politics of India in the post-Independent period is increasingly designed by issues based

on this socio-cultural variety. It becomes the guiding line that determines the nature of post-independence Indian politics. Further, this socio-cultural diversity poses a challenge to Indian nation building process at times. It is in this complex mosaic of different nationalities at different stages of socio-economic and political growth that Indian nation state is today facing some of the gravest challenges, with the entire process of nation building being questioned. It is here that the centralized authority of the Indian state is being repeatedly questioned, issues based on uneven development of the socio economic order raised and the idea of mainstream redefined. Time and again, the Indian nation state has had to work out new strategies and adjustment to deal with the issues raised by different autonomist.² In the case of Assam too, this socio-cultural diversity posed a challenge to the Assamese society formation in the outset of the twentieth century and is continued. This multi-ethnic state had to face problem of assertion by various ethnic groups basically in 1960s to protect their identity and had to face reorganization.³ North East India refers to eight states, among them a number of small states created in course of the government's effort to manage ethno national tensions. Indeed the category 'north east India' itself implicated in the official efforts to manage ethno national tensions in the region'.⁴

Managing diversity or handling ethno-national tensions has been a global tension since nineteenth century. In the post independence India there has been seen some arrangements to face the ethno-national tensions. While discussing the multi-ethnic set up and Indian strategy to address the ethnic tensions in the post independence period Maya

Chadda writes '*despite serious limitations and glaring flaws Indian federalism had finally forged a nation state from a vast array of diverse and divided ethnic entities*'⁵. She opines that the state reorganization in three stages in 1950s, division of Assam and very lately in 2000 creation of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal was a great initiative in managing diversity. But it has been observed that reorganization of states whether in North East India or elsewhere could not end the socio-political problems, rather, the reorganization followed by another chain of movements for self assertion. In Assam too reorganization could not fulfill the ethno-nationalist expectations rather smaller ethnic groups started asserting with ethno-political demands. It is seen that there has been increasing demands of this type among the ethnic groups of Assam. M.S Prabhakar pointed out three types of movements with demands of three different natures in Assam.⁶ Firstly, the demand of six schedule status by the communities now listed as Plain Tribe of Assam. Secondly, the demand of several other non tribal communities for recognition as ST or somewhat of an alternative and descending order of preference as other exclusionary communities like the Other Backward Class (OBC) and More Other Backward Class (MOBC) and variations thereof. Thirdly, following from the earlier is the resistance from people outside these structures as well as from the leaders of the communities already in such exclusionary status to any fresh assertion to the membership of a supposedly exclusive class. Beyond these above demands of three types the demand of a separate state by the Bodos after the reorganization in Assam gradually became stronger.

It is said that majoritarian democracy is especially suitable for and works best in homogenous societies, whereas consensus democracy is more suitable for plural societies.⁷ *'Federalism can become a component of consensus democracy when it tries to give autonomy to particular groups such as religious and ethnic minorities, particularly if they form distinct subsocieties in a plural society'*.⁸ The arrangements of Indian federal structure while facing the ethno-national tensions of a plural society like Assam has to be worth mentioned. While managing diversity with ethno-political demands like the demand of a separate state by the Bodos, the demand of formation of autonomous district at the initial stage to the creation of separate state for Dimasas and Karbis, inclusion of Misings in Six Schedule, demand of socio-political autonomy by the Rabha, Tiwa, Deori etc. the federal arrangements of creating administrative divisions works better. Creation of these administrative divisions to which the central government has given varying degrees of autonomy within the state legislature is more or less success in fulfilling the ethno-political demands of the people and managing diversity as well. Apart from these Autonomous councils there are thirty one Development Councils formed by the govt. of Assam for development and upliftment of ethnic communities of Assam. Among them BTAD was created under six schedule while Mising Autonomous Council was created within the state of Assam with maximum autonomy within the framework of the constitution, comprising of satellite areas and core areas for the social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Misings.

Table 5.a
DISTRICT WISE SCHEDULED TRIBAL POPULATION, ASSAM (2011)

Name of the Tribes	Name of the Districts													
	Dhubri	Dhemaji	Morigaon	Nagaon	Golaghat	Jorhat	Sivasagar	Dibrugarh	Tinsukia	Karbi Anglong	Dima Hasao	Baksa	Chirang	Karimganj
Chakma	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,984	48	0	0	0
Dimasa, Kachari	3	14	15	8,541	207	41	9	5	6	28,459	74,502	8	8	200
Garo	737	577	9	6,996	781	34	978	68	189	24,988	327	129	443	14
Hajong	3348	7,097	126	3,233	8	20	19	26	2,428	349	87	1029	384	30
Hmar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	675	15,070	0	0	0
Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12,214	3,722	0	0	0
Any Kuki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9,320	24,079	0	0	0
Lakher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36	1	0	0	0
Man (Tai Speaking)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,266	3	0	0	0
Any Mizo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	506	374	0	0	0
Any Naga Tribe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8,935	20,832	0	0	0

Pawi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Synt eng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Karbi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	421,156	9,296	0	0	0
Barmans in Chachar	0	255	3	150	5	0	2	0	7	0	0	25	1	962
Boro, Boro kachari	1,203	45,392	12,070	17,317	29,994	4,103	3,554	1,945	2,487	0	0	288,397	167,888	111
Deori	7	7,887	626	339	77	4,174	3,780	2,444	8,080	0	0	38	1	29
Hojai	0	5	577	34	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Kachari Sonowal	240	25,356	6,430	8,557	19,189	22,058	8,639	76,007	40,560	0	0	1	0	0
Lalung	10	6,130	109,530	58,511	217	103	55	78	68	18,180	72	7	5	1
Mech	1	258	0	144	1,076	64	1,406	3,969	1,912	0	0	7	1	0
Miri	7	220,042	31	178	53,028	102,270	27,834	9,285	18,145	0	0	10	4	12
Rabha	235	2,332	153	2,263	2,085	137	124	329	1,103	0	0	20,009	2,040	15
Singpho	0	2	0	2	1	22	218	105	1,947	0	0	0	0	0
Khamti	0	19	0	0	7	0	23	28	368	0	0	0	0	1
Total ST	6332	325,560	136,777	115,153	111,765	139,971	49,039	102,871	82,066	538,738	151,843	331,007	178,688	1,940
Total Population	194,9258	686,133	957,423	2,823,768	106,6888	109,2256	115,1050	132,6335	132,7929	956,313	214,102	950,075	482,162	1,228,686

Name of the Tribes	Hailakandi	Cachar	Kokrajhar	Bongaigaon	Goalpara	Barpeta	Nalbari	Kamrup	Kamrup(Metro)	Darrang	Sonitpur	Lakhimpur	Udalguri
Chakma	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dimasa, Kachari	166	9,758	9	12	2	18	13	8	580	0	63	11	0
Garo	25	15	10,424	3,600	71,452	6	6	26,037	5,750	67	2,550	15	5,175
Hajong	48	65	7	162	10,021	27	2	408	896	279	342	3,300	950
Hmar	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng,Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Any Kuki	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lakher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Man (Tai Speaking)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Any Mizo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Any Naga Tribe	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pawi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Synteng	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Karbi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Barmas in Chachar	202	4899	84	8	0	1	0	5	10	2	3	1	89
Boro,Boro kachari	47	174	225,041	7,315	41,224	25,311	14,178	51,885	33,916	4,580	154,311	10,711	281,581
Deori	14	36	0	51	9	60	34	121	1,358	16	1,198	13,220	151
Hojai	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	9	0
Kachari Sonowal	0	6	1,729	1607	10	11	6,387	7,044	8,029	2,161	112	19,203	8
Lalung	2	2	5	21	30	5	11	17	7,318	4	86	432	15
Mech	0	122	4	13	15	2	2	5	79	5	757	28	13
Miri	12	21	44	52	21	1	22	125	2,290	9	49,028	197,886	67
Rabha	29	109	22,254	5,599	103,757	152	50	91,034	1,958	641	4,161	274	30,873
Singpho	0	2		4			0	0	1	0	25	10	0
Khamti	0	0		4			0	0	17	0	10	614	15
Total ST	691	17,569	278,665	18,835	231,570	27,344	23,364	182,038	75,121	8419	232,207	249,426	267,372
Total Population	659,296	1,736,617	887,142	738,804	100,8183	169,3622	771,639	1,517,542	1,253,938	1928,500	1,924,110	1,042,137	831,668

Source: Census of India, 2011

Towards a Solution: Managing the Bodo and Mising issue

The Bodos are the aborigines of Assam inhabiting the northern part of river the Brahmaputra and having a scattered population in other parts of Assam (Figure 5.a). It is worthless to think about the process of Assamese society formation without the Bodos. The Bodos have a geopolitical influence as it is the largest plain tribe of Assam. Therefore, the Bodos could have played a significant role in the politics of Assam too. Likewise, the Misings are the second largest plain tribal group following the Bodos inhabiting large parts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur and Tinsukia District of Assam (Figure 5.b). Like the Bodos the Misings too are an active partner in the greater Assamese formation. But, both these groups, who identified once themselves as ‘Assamese’ because of the long historical process of assimilation to Assamese formation, gradually, have started their efforts to drift away from the identity. It has been discussed in our previous chapters that the self assertion among the various ethnic groups of Assam began in the outset of the 20th century. Though it was started in the beginning, the attitude among the Bodos and the Misings turned to an organized form in the second part of the 20th century. In this period, both the Bodos and the Misings raised some fundamental questions to the Assamese formation and demanded a separate socio cultural identity than Assamese. This socio-cultural identification was followed by the demand of political autonomy and an organized movement by the way of politicization of cultural symbols. However, it is already discussed in third chapter of this work that ‘unlike the struggle to establish a separate Bodo–identity from Assamese with

the demand of autonomy at the initial stage, later demand of separate state and cultural totality, the Misings gave preference to solve their core political and economic issues through political autonomy and preservation and development of their traditional cultural heritage. At the same time they also gave importance to the formation of greater Assamese society with the equal partaking of all ethnic groups of Assam'. However, as a result of these long standing movement by the Bodos to establish their socio-cultural and political identity Bodo Accord was signed 1993 for creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council and later replaced this accord by the formation of BTAD⁹ in 2003. Likewise, as a political solution to the long standing Mising issues, the Mising Autonomous Council¹⁰ was created in 1995.

In the whole world, the ethnic groups have been trying to revive their cultural heritages which are on the verge of extinction and giving increasing importance on preserving culture as well. In the beginning of the twentieth century the Bodos and the Misings of Assam also have come forward to revive and preserve their cultural heritage. The newly emerging middle class from both the tribes presented themselves as the vanguard in this venture. Though there is a scope that the revival process could make the greater Assamese society stronger, but this hope diminished at the very beginning as it could not find expected support from the caste Hindu Assamese middle class, rather they opposed considering as a threat to the greater Assamese society formation¹¹.

It has been seen that, gradually, the cultural regeneration process turned a political move. At this time, they paid special efforts in securing their collective rights and correcting perceived injustices, discrimination and alienation from the mainstream of political and economic development. It is worth mentioning that the cultural revival became the guiding line and mobilizing factor behind this movement for political economic end. Hence, in changing situations the, cultural regeneration became the driving force in mobilizing people in both the movements. It is already discussed that while the Bodos demanded a separate Bodo – identity from Assamese and a separate state and cultural totality, the Misings preferred greater political autonomy under six schedule and wanted to form a greater Assamese society with equal share of all ethnic groups.

In such a situation the central government and the state government initiated a round of discussion with the Bodo leaders and subsequently, signed the first tripartite agreement on February 20, 1993 providing for a Bodoland Autonomous Council.¹² As it was discussed in the second chapter of this work the memorandum of settlement provides for the creation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council having the right to control and administer the local affairs of certain specified areas. The legislative power is to be vested on the 40 member council and the executive powers were entrusted on an executive council. Subsequently, an interim Bodoland Executive Council was created under the leadership of S.K. Bwiswmutiary until the election.

Creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council under the Bodo Accord-1993 brought hope to all sections as it was a step forward to solve the Bodo problem. But the optimism got sudden end as the leader of the interim BEC S.K. Bwiswmutiary resigned from the council over differences with the state government on some of the basic issues including the demarcation of the geographical areas that were to be included under the jurisdiction of Bodo Autonomous Council. Further, though the issue of protection of all rights of the non-Bodo people living there was categorically assured in the accord, still the accord could not acquire much support from the non-Bodos. Further the accord is not specific about the geographical area of BAC. The accord speaks only of contiguous geographical areas between the western and eastern boundaries of the north bank. Regarding the reserve forest areas it states that BAC will include reserve forest areas according to the guidelines laid down by the Defense and Environment Ministries of the govt of India. Notably it says nothing in detail about the southern boundary of the BAC, which directly impinges on territories, occupied mostly by non-tribals or mixed population. Though peace was expected in Assam after the signing of this accord but ultimately it proved wrong. Most of the Bodo leaders rejected the Bodo accord as anti-democratic and anti Bodo. As a result of these controversies the whole process of accommodation got stalled.

The whole process of establishing peace by the accord 1993 finished with total uncertainty and as a consequence NDFB and BLT started creating violence. Despite their inter-organizational differences regarding their main objective NDFB and BLT used violence against the Indian state and pushed the state government into pressure. It is seen

that during late 90s and early 2000 they created a kind of instability in Assam and thus pressurized both the central and the state governments for attainment of their objective. Governments also used repressive actions as retaliatory measures and as a result both the organizations gradually lost its grip and forced to surrender of a good number of its cadre in 2003 and the subsequent integration of the former BLT cadres in central paramilitary forces.¹³ Because of the growing weakness of BLT and the pressures on government as well another tripartite deliberation held at New Delhi on 10th February 2003 and Bodo Accord 2003 was signed. While one militant group, NDFB, denied the memorandum of settlement the BLT came to the mainstream and arrived at a compromise to form the territorial council, leaving aside the main demand of a separate state outside Assam’.

The memorandum of settlement 2003 and the creation of Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts succeeded some of the demands of the Bodo people to a certain extent. Unlike the Bodo accord of 1993, the Memorandum of Settlement 2003 had been welcomed by most of the Bodo leaders from all factions excluding the NDFB group and the popular election to the council was held in May 13, 2005. The newly elected BTC consisted of 40 elected (30 reserved for tribals, 5 for non-tribals and five for others) and six nominated representatives by the government. Dominated by most of the ex BLT leaders, a eleven member executive council works as the supreme body of the council.

The movement to establish separate socio-cultural and political identity by Mising got a break with the creation of Mising Autonomous Council. It was soon followed by

the demand for greater political autonomy. For establishing greater political autonomy they demanded the devolution of the powers and demanded an autonomous body within Assam. Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK) led this movement. They wanted greater political autonomy specified in terms of the six schedules (Art-244) of the Indian constitution. But Mising Bane Kebang¹⁴ another leading organization of Mising society started criticizing the TMPK proposed model as unrealistic and rather appealed for limited form of cultural and political autonomy in the Mising dominated areas.

The division regarding the main objective among the two leading Mising organization made the problem complex here. This time TMPK was accompanied by other socio-political organizations as such the Mising Mimang Kebang started a stronger movement than in the earlier years. At the same time, the other group led by Mising Bane Kebang also waged a more vigorous struggle. With the increasing pressures, the Assam government led by Hiteswar Saikia (1991-96) tried to accommodate some of the demands made by the second group led by Mising Bane Kebang¹⁵. Thus, while the TMPK waited for the acceptance of their demand of greater autonomy by the government, the second group led by Mising Bane Kebang with the backing of the state government formed a committee called Mising Autonomous Demand Committee and formally accepted the limited offers by the government at a general conference held in April 1995¹⁶. But the problem did not

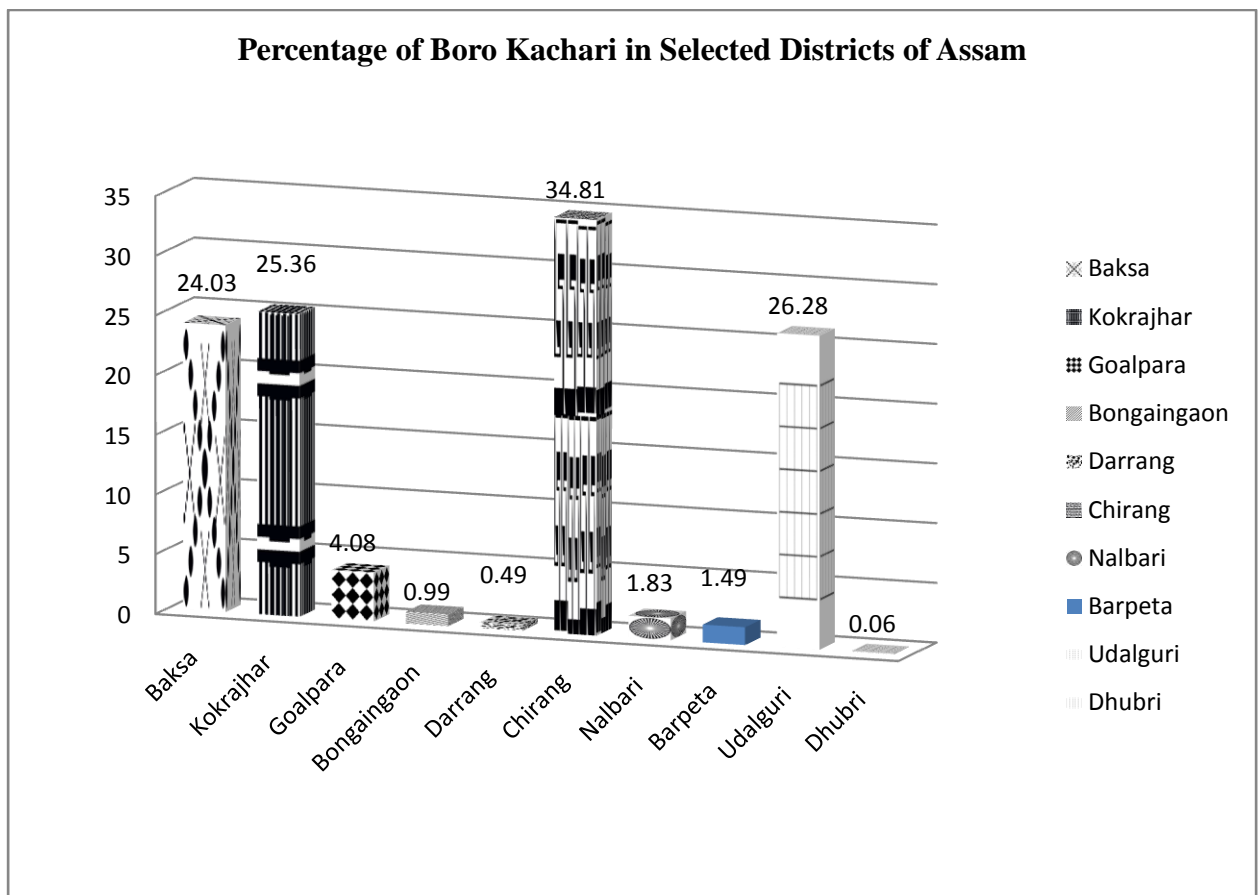
end and took another beginning. TMPK and MMK did not stop their movement. With the change of government in 1996 (shift from Congress to AGP) it was thought that it would give the Misings a permanent solution. But it did not work. So they started a legal battle and filed a case against the state government to reconsider the institution of interim council and the final verdict on 11th May 1998 went in favour of dissolving the council¹⁷. After this verdict the state government negotiated a deal with the leaders of TMPK and All Mising Women's Association in April 1998 that will grant a decentralized structure (limited autonomy), dissolve the interim council and conduct popular elections to establish a new autonomous council. It was followed by temporary suspension of the movement. Again, the government failed to implement this and the Misings had to wait for another government until 2001. This new government on the recommendation of a ministerial committee offered for the creation of Mising Autonomous Council with some slight changes of the previous proposal. Although the TMPK leaders did not give up their original demands for greater autonomy, they finally accepted the proposal.

Managing Diversity within Council Area

While state is more or less successful in managing diversity and facing the ethno-national tensions of the Bodos and Misings next concern is the management of diversity within council area as none of these councils are comprised of a particular ethnic groups rather having intermixing of various ethnic groups (Figure 5.a and figure 5.b). Almost

each of these groups has demands arising out of the anxieties about its identity and aspirations for autonomy; each demand impinges and encroaches on similar anxieties of other occupying broadly the same political space and, more importantly, sharing the same socio-economic and cultural space as well, forcing them on a path of shifting confrontation and collaboration with other.¹⁸

Figure 5.a



Source: Census of India, 2011

For instance the creation of BTC has led to the formation of *Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti*¹⁹ (United Ethnic Peoples Struggle Committee), an ad hoc alliance of about twenty non Bodo organizations within BTC area, including some of the non-Bodo tribal people, who are opposed to the very creation of BTC. It is noteworthy that one of the major constituent of this organization, the Koch Rajbongchi, a people historically belonging to the same stock, now a caste Hindu community classed as OBC, demanding to be recognized as ST and having other ethno-political demands opposed the very creation of BTC, also have been playing a major role in BTAD elections²⁰. In the 2014 Loksabha election the division between the Bodos and the non Bodos became sharply visible when 20 non Bodo ethnic and linguistic groups under the banner of *Sanmilita Janagosthiya Aaikyamancha*²¹ came together and support an independent candidate, Naba Kumar Saraniya, a former ULFA leader from Kokrajhar constituency, a constituency which is the both the core and contested area of Bodo assertion. Noteworthy, that the non Bodo candidate won the constituency by a huge margin because of the strong alliance among the organizations representing the non Bodo people. The formation and growth and *Oboro Surakshya Samiti*,²² an organization of the non-Bodo people, totally opposing the formation of BTAD from the very beginning has importance in this aspect. The organization was established with a view to protect the rights of the non Bodo people in the rising Bodo majoritarian politics in BTAD area²³. Notable, that *Oboro Surakshya Samiti* has been playing a major role in the preceding elections of BTAD. It is worth mentioning that BTAD consists of less than thirty percent Bodos and rest of the

population are non Bodos which includes the Asomiya Hindus, Koch Rajbonshis, Muslim, Bengali Hindus, Adibasis, Nepalis etc. As already mentioned the council comprising maximum of 46 members, of which 30 members will be reserved for scheduled tribes and five for non tribal communities, five seats are open to all communities and six members are to be nominated by the governor of Assam. Since it's very beginning to the first election in 2005 it was governed on ad hoc basis by Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF), led largely by former cadres of the militant group Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The first election to the council that took place in 2005 was won by BPF but at the same time it is clear from the table 5.b and table 5.c that BPF, a party that most of the Bodo people think as 'their party' gradually has to struggle a lot to maintain its political power in this multi-ethnic set up.

Table 5.b

BTAD Elections 2015 (Percentage of votes scored by each party)

AIUDF	BPF	AGP	CPI(M)	BJP	INC	IND	
4%	28.5%	0.50%	1%	13%	6%	47%	

Source: Assam State Elections Commission.

Table 5.c**Seats Won by Political Parties in the BTAD Elections**

Political Parties Seats	Contested in 2010	Seats Won in 2010	Seats Contested in 2015	Seats Won in 2015	Gain/loss Since 2010
BPF	40	31	40	20	-11
INC	23	3	40	0	-3
AIUDF	--	--	08	04	+4
BJP	08	--	40	01	+1
IND	40	06	40	15	+9
CPI(M)	05	0	07	0	Nil
AGP	09	0	06	0	Nil
AITC	30	0	--	--	--

Source: Assam State Elections Commission.

Formation of *Sanjukta Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti* and *Oboro Surakhsya Samiti* and the preceding election results shows that in both political and societal context the population of BTAD is by and large divided in to two segments as the Bodos and the non-Bodos. The clash between the Bodos and Adivasis in 1996 was one of the worst, resulting death and internal displacement of the Adivasis and the conflict between Bodos and

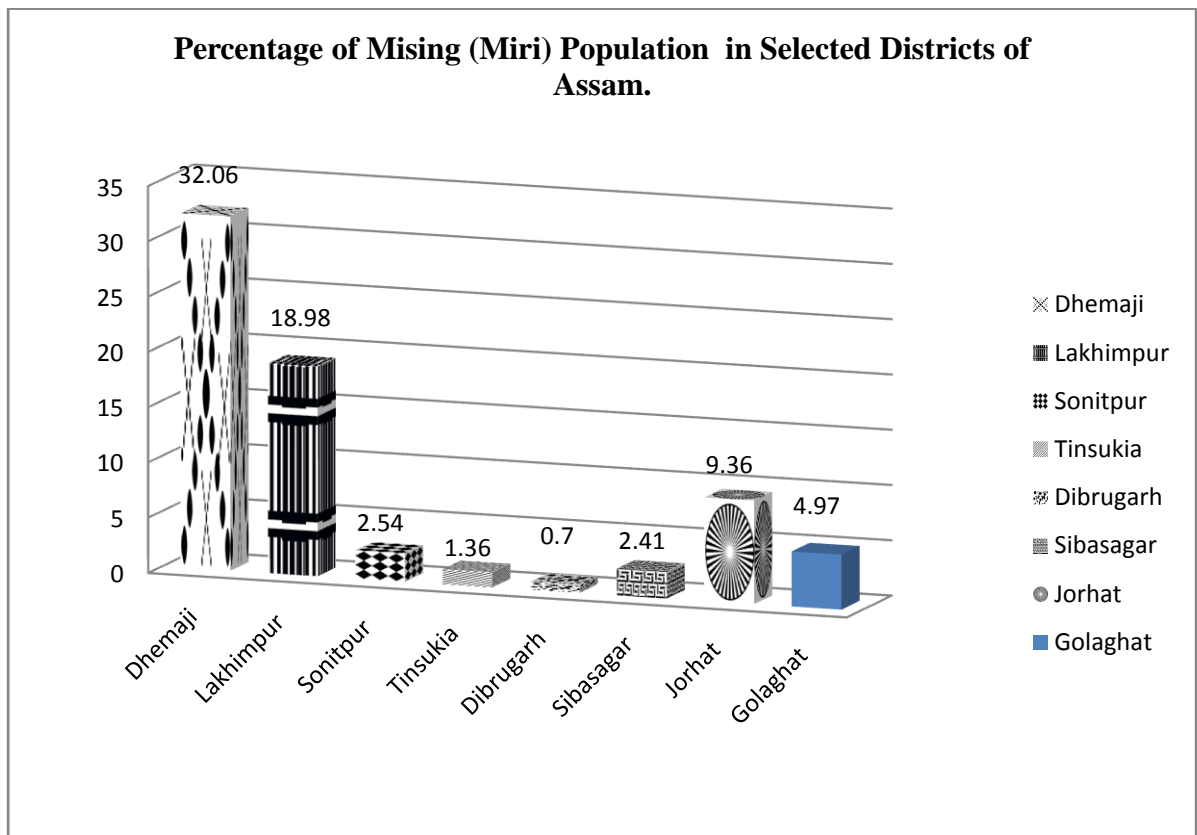
Muslims in 2012 resulting unprecedented killing of Muslims clearly identifies the division of Bodos and non-Bodos one hand and the security complex of the non-Bodo people within the council area on the other hand²⁴. The major issue of non- Bodos so far is security while the Bodos voted largely for governance, development, infrastructure and delivery related issues. In this period, since the formation of BTC, managing diversity within the council area is an issue of grave concern in front of the Bodo ruling elites.

It is already been noted in the second chapter of this work that the Mising people are widely dispersed in several districts of Assam. The figure 5.b reveals that the Misings constitute less than fifty percent of the total population in all the districts where they are mostly found. Again their physical settlement is widely dispersed and intermixed with Assamese settlement within a district. Even in Dhemaji and Lakhimpur only 51.04 percent of total Mising population are there (table5.b) and the rest of the population is widely dispersed in the rest of the districts that are non contiguous and geographically separated from the former two districts.’

There are unending controversies in the autonomous council areas regarding inclusion and exclusion of villages from the council area. While the non-Mising population demanded the exclusion of their villages from council area the Misings demanded their inclusion. For instance, “one claim is that the Mising Autonomous Council will comprise 1713 villages, a claim hotly contested by non-Mising population. Indeed, it is conceded on all sides that not all the 1713 villages are 100 percent Mising

villages²⁵”. Like all other council area boundary delineation was a major problem of Mising Autonomous Council area. Any enumeration in these villages with a view to the tribe wise identification of the inhabitants is bound to be a provocation for violence. It was a major challenge faced by the Mising ruling elites. But once election was held the problem was more or less managed and ‘others’ within the council area has accepted the process.

Figure 5.b



Source: Census of India, 2011.

Changing Dynamics

The Bodo accord of 1993, though far away from the fulfillment of the long awaited expectation of a separate state, paved the way for the establishment of peace in the Bodo areas and for the settlement of the long lasting Bodo problem. Though, excluding NDFB a militant outfit with its demand of sovereign Bodoland and BLT, an outfit with the demand of separate state, all other parties were optimistic to have a lasting solution to the issue, yet serious disagreement arose even during the conduct of the first election and the leader of the interim BEC S.K. Bwiswmutiary resigned from the council over differences with the state government on the demarcation of the geographical areas that were to be included under the jurisdiction of Bodo Autonomous Council. Another serious issue that the accord had to face, despite its categorical assurance of protection of all rights of the non-Bodo people living there, still the accord could not acquire much support from the non-Bodos within the council area. Ultimately it forced the government to find out a way to give a solution to and the memorandum of settlement 2003 was signed. The replacement of the previous document by the memorandum of settlement 2003 and the creation of Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts succeeded of the demands of the Bodo people to a certain extent. Unlike the Bodo accord of 1993, the Memorandum of Settlement 2003 had been welcomed by most of the Bodo leaders excluding the NDFB group and the popular election to the council was held in May 13, 2005.

Since the creation of BTAD, Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT) once a militant group with the demand of a separate state for the Bodos outside Assam in its new shape as Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) has been continuously in power. As already discussed, since its entry in electoral politics it has to give importance on managing diversity whether as a necessity of electoral calculation or other and at the same time the fulfillment of the expectations of the Bodo people waited for a long time. Once the organization with sole objective of creating a separate state for the Bodos now started alliance with Indian National Congress in state politics. The ardent proponent of ‘divide Assam fifty fifty’ ABSU and its workers with its commitment to have a separate state gradually started criticizing this ruling class as opportunist and compromising on the sentiments of Bodo people. The ruling elites at this time have to face three types of criticism.

1. ABSU criticizes it as opportunist and power greedy, compromising the national sentiment of the Bodo people, deviated from the main objective of a separate state for the Bodos.²⁶
2. Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the leading civil society organization of the Bodos started criticizing as not giving proper importance on the socio-cultural development of the Bodo people.²⁷
3. The non-Bodo organization’s criticism as majoritarian ruling, undemocratic and failure in maintaining law and order creating security problem, a grave concern for non-Bodo people inhabiting the council area.

A gradual disagreement arose among the ruling class and civil society organizations as according to the criticism the ruling class is compromising on the very basic issue of the Bodos. The clear division among the Bodo organizations forced the ruling elites to think other way and they organized Bodo National Conference on 18th and 19th November 2010. Noteworthy that forty three Bodo socio-political organizations united under the banner of Bodo National Conference with the aim of creating an environment of peace and security in BTC area. The conference aimed at unification of divided Bodos under different socio political organizations and to find out a way out for lasting solution to the basic questions of the Bodos. Worth mentioning that the conference unanimously adopted eleven resolutions considered as most important for all round development of the Bodo people and for establishing peace and security in BTAD area, lacks any resolution on the very basic demand of a separate state for Bodo people. Though the issue was discussed seriously the conference failed to give an institutional decision or could pass any resolution of this manner.²⁸

However, BTC chief Hagrama Mohilary, leader of the ruling party BPF and a former BLT leader while announcing the decisions of a meeting held at BTC secretariat on 20th January, 2010, after a long break once again declared the validity and legitimacy of the demand of a separate state for the Bodo people. Rihan Daimari, a BPF MLA, and Minister for Public Health and Engineering Department, Govt of Assam (coalition led by Indian National Congress in which BPF was a major part) on 21st January, 2010 spoke in a public gathering that *'peace and development cannot be sustained without a separate*

*state for the Bodos*²⁹. But this attitude of BPF was not convincing to ABSU and considered just as an electoral tactic.

Disagreement among the leaders of Bodo socio-political organizations gradually became sharp and it became quite visible when in front of BTAD election, 2015, Peoples Coordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR)³⁰ was formed and contested elections with its independent candidates. Notable that Peoples Coordination for Democratic Rights was formed basically under the leadership of ABSU and Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front (BPPF)³¹ in collaboration with pro-talk National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). PCDR was formed, according to its leaders, as a response to the rampant corruption by BPF, its dictatorship in governing process and its deviation from the main goal of a separate state for the Bodos³². PCDR was a dominant factor in 2015 BTC election as BPF had to limit it by 20 seats, a decrease of 11 seats from 2010 BTC election (Table 5.c). The PCDR which contested with its independent candidate had snatched seven seats in this election. The margin between the winners of BPF and the runners-up candidates were very less. Worth to mention that though BPF won 20 seats it only polled 28.5 percent of the total votes (Table 5.b). Election campaigning was with much hype as Hagrama Mohilary criticized Promod Boro, the ABSU president as a ‘congress agent’, working basically to divide the Bodo society³³. In return Promod Boro’s criticism was of substantive manner as he criticized BPF as deviating from its main goal, undemocratic, corrupted and non-committed for the socio-economic development of the Bodo people³⁴.

It is seen that ABSU has been continuously in movement for a separate state for the Bodos unlike the ruling elites of BTAD³⁵.

The Mising movement for political autonomy and protection and development of its own cultural heritage could get a break in 1995 with the signing of Mising Autonomous Council Act. But it could not work as there was a clear division among the leaders of Mising Bane Kebang and Takam Mising Porin Kebang on the basic objective of their movement and about the content of the Act. Still, sidelining TMPK who opposed the government model, Mising Autonomous Council Act 1995 was enacted and the Mising Bane Kebang and Mising Autonomous Demand Committee and formally accepted the limited offers in April 1995. Ultimately, the leaders ratified the agreement on June 1995 for creation of an interim Mising Autonomous Council. The council was headed first by Laxminath Pangging, a close ally of ruling congress party³⁶. But this state policy of 'selective incentives and partial accommodation' could not work well and TMPK agitation goes on.

Because of the continuous agitation by TMPK and Mising Mimang Kebang then AGP government negotiated a deal with them in 1998. Interestingly, TMPK did not only limit itself to demonstrations and started a legal battle and filed a case against the state government which gave its final verdict on March 1998 to dissolve the interim council. However the new congress government formed in 2001 offered for the creation of Mising Autonomous Council with some slight changes of the previous proposal.

Although the TMPK leaders did not give up their original demands for greater autonomy, they finally accepted the proposal³⁷. But because of some procedural lapses the council has not been able to function well for more than a decade. However, election was held in 2013 and the council was formed with Gana Sakti³⁸ majority. After the election Gana Sakti formed the council and Dr. Ronoj Pegu became the chief of the executive council. After the formation of the Mising Autonomous Council the long awaited demand six scheduled status to the Misings has gradually getting down. *‘The explanations demonstrate that the Mising leaders showed their willingness to get involved in the normal political process by accepting the offers proposed by the government and finally settled down for a less preferred deal³⁹.’* The recent development of joining BJP by some of the Gana Sakti leaders including Dr. Ronoj Pegu, once an ardent proponent of greater Mising autonomy, supports the argument. Another leading Mising organization Mising Agom Kebang, though not interested with any political move also gradually started criticizing Mising political leaders because of their failure to fulfill the socio-cultural and economic expectations of the Mising people⁴⁰.

Managing diversity in a multi ethnic set up like Assam was a major tension in the post independence Indian politics. In this regard, handling the ethnic tensions becomes an immediate necessity and accordingly the state tries to manage diversity by the way of reorganization of states basically in three stages. While managing diversity in Assam with ethno-political demands creation of administrative divisions to which the central government has given varying degrees of autonomy within the state legislature, creation

of the Development Councils by the govt. of Assam for development and upliftment of ethnic communities is more or less successful. Likewise Bodo Territorial Area Districts and Mising Autonomous Council was created in an intense move to solve the Bodo and the Mising issues. Creation of these autonomous bodies gave a turn to the process as this time the leaders more than concentrating on their age long demand of a separate state for Bodos and six scheduled for Misings started concentrating on electoral politics. Again, as the council areas are inhabited by different ethnic groups the inevitability of managing diversity within the council areas come to forefront. Another changing dynamics of this period is the rising difference and conflict among the political leadership and civil society of these ethnic groups.

Notes and References:

¹ Misra, U., *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation state in Assam and Nagaland*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000, p.1.

² Ibid. p.10.

³ Nagaland and Meghalaya were carved out of Assam in 1963 and 1971-72; Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1971 and a state in 1986; the other states of the North East are Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura. Now it is eight joined by Sikkim.

⁴ Baruah, S., *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp.4-5.

⁵ Chadda, M., "Integration through Internal Reorganisation: Containing Ethnic Conflict in India" in S. Baruah, (ed.), *Ethnonationalism in India-A Reader*, OUP, 2012, pp.382-384.

⁶ Prabhakar, M.S., "Invention, Reinvention and Contestation: Politics of Identity in Assam" in S. Baruah, 2012, Op. cit., pp.264.

⁷ Lijphart, A., "Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty One Centuries", in S. Baruah, 2012, Op. cit., p.9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) consists of four contiguous districts-Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang, carved out of the eight districts of Assam-Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur comprising an area of 27,100 km².

¹⁰ Mising Autonomous Council was created under the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 as amended by Assam Act No.VIII of 2001 and Assam Act No. XXI of 2005.

¹¹ Personal interview with Promod Boro and Mangal Sing Hazowary.

¹² The Memorandum of Settlement was signed in the presence of Home Minister, Govt. of India Rajesh Pilot, K.S. Rao, Addl. Chief Secretary, Govt of Assam: on behalf of the ABSU by president S.K. Bwiswmutiary and secretary Rabiram Brahma, and by a representative of the BPAC.

¹³ The Hindu, 17 December 2003.

¹⁴ Grand Councils of the Misings(Mising Bane Kebang) played an important role in the socio-cultural reform of the Mising society.

¹⁵Pegu, R., “Autonomy Movements of the Misings” in J.J Kuli, (ed.), *The Misings: Their History and Culture*, Dibrugarh, KaustavPrakashan, 2012, p.86.

¹⁶Ibid. p.87.

¹⁷Saikia, P.Op. cit., p.131.

¹⁸ Prabhakar, M.S., Op.cit. p. 267.

¹⁹ *Sanmilita Janagosthiya Sangram Samiti* (United Ethnic Peoples Struggle Committee), an ad hoc alliance of about twenty non Bodo organizations, including some of the non-Bodo tribal people, who are opposed to the very creation of BTC. The banner organization of more than twenty ethnic groups has decided to launch an agitation opposing the statehood demands raised by a number of ethnic groups in Assam including Bodos. Opposing further division of Assam, the SJSS chief convenor Brajen Mahanmta said that the people of the Assam would not bow down to the pressure tactics of the divisive forces this time.

²⁰ Prabhakar, M.S., Op.cit., pp.267-268.

²¹ *Sanmilita Janagosthiya Aikyamancha*, an ad hoc alliance of about twenty non Bodo organizations within BTC area, including some of the non-Bodo tribal people.

²² An organization of the non Bodo people based on the opposition of creation of BTAD. It criticizes the formation of BTAD as undemocratic and majoritarian and very much critical about BTC administration terming it as totally failed to maintain law and order and provide security to the non-Bodo people in the BTC area.

²³ Mahanta, N. G., “Lok Sabha Elections in Assam: Shifting of Traditional Vote Bases to BJP”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 August, 2014.

²⁴ For more detail see Assam Tribune, the English daily and *Dainik Janambhumi*, an Assamese daily of that particular period.

²⁵ Prabhakar, M.S., Op.cit., p.285

²⁶ Interview with Promod Boro, President, All Bodo Students Union.

²⁷ Interview with Bodo Sahitya Sabha Official.

²⁸ Mahanta, P., “Bodo Jatiya Abhibartan Aru Prithak Bodo Rajya”, Published in *Asomiya Khobor*, An Assamese Daily, dated 4th December,2010.

²⁹ Mahanta, P., “Prithak Bodo Rajya Prasanga”, Published in *Asomiya Khobor*, An Assamese Daily, dated 10th February,2010.

³⁰ Peoples Coordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR) was formed by All Bodo Students Union, Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front in collaboration with Pro talk NDFB opposing BPF rule as dictatorship and corrupted and failed to fulfill the basic expectations of the Bodo people.

³¹ Bodoland Peoples Progressive Front is a political party basically active in BTAD.

³² Personal interview with Promod Bodo, ABSU president, who took initiative in forming PCDR.

³³ Hagrama Mohilary, the BPF leader openly criticized ABSU president Promod Bodo in public gatherings and in front of media as ‘congress agent’ making divisions in the Bodo society in BTC election, 2015 campaign.

³⁴ Open criticism in public gatherings and on TV interviews. When the researcher had a personal interview with him he viewed the same argument.

³⁵ ABSU has been in continuous struggle for a separate Bodoland in recent years. It has been demonstrating in Jantar Mantar, organizes *Bandhas*, *Dharnas* at BTAD area, *dharnas* in front of Assam Legislative Assembly continuously in recent years.

³⁶ Saikia, P., Op.cit., p. 130.

³⁷ Ibid. pp.131-132.

³⁸ A political party of Assam basically active in the Northern Assam.

³⁹ Saikia, P., Op.cit., p. 130.

⁴⁰ Personal interview with Tabu Ram Taid and Jawahar Jyotu Kuli, both of them are former president of Mising Agom Kebang.