

Political Decentralization and Ethnic Violence in Sixth Schedule Areas of Assam

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By

Aniruddha Kumar Baro

Registration No: 11614116

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Guwahati, India

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Dedicated to

My Parents

Sarat Chandra Baro and Salita Baro



Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Guwahati-781039, Assam, India

Declaration

This thesis entitled “**Political Decentralization and Ethnic Violence in Sixth Schedule Areas of Assam**” submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university and is my original work.

In keeping with the general practice of reporting scientific observations, due acknowledgement has been made wherever the work described is based on the findings of other investigations.

IIT Guwahati
April, 2018

(ANIRUDDHA KUMAR BARO)
Research Scholar
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences



Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Guwahati-781039, Assam, India

Certificate

This is to certify that Mr. Aniruddha Kumar Baro has prepared the thesis entitled “**Political Decentralization and Ethnic Violence in Sixth Schedule Areas of Assam**” for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The work was carried out under my supervision and in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose. The thesis is the result of his investigations and has not been submitted either in whole or in part to any other university/ institution for a research degree.

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(Dr. Pahi Saikia)

Supervisor

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Abbreviations

Explanations

AAPTL	All Assam Plain Tribal League
AASU	All Assam Students' Union
AATL	All Assam Tribal League
ABEF	All Bodo Employees' Federation
ABMSU	All Bodoland Muslim Student's Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students' Union
ABWWF	All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation
ACMF	Adivasi Cobra Militant Force
ADC	Autonomous District Council
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
APCC	Assam Pradesh Congress Committee
ASDC	Autonomous State Demand Committee
BAC	Bodoland Autonomous Council
BCF	Bisa Commando Force
BDDC	Bokajan District Demand Committee
BEC	Bodoland Executive Council
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BLT	Bodoland Liberation Tigers
BNC	Bodo National Conference
BPAC	Bodo People's Action Committee
BPF	Bodoland People's Front
BPPF	Bodoland People's Progressive Front
BRTF	Bodoland Revolutionary Tiger Force
BSF	Bodo Security Force
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTAD	Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
CPI	Communist Party of India

DHAC	Dima Hasao Autonomous Council
DHD	Dima Halim Daoga
DSU	Dimasa Students' Union
GJM	Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha
GTA	Gorkhaland Territorial Administration
HSDP	Hill State Democratic Party
HTF	Hills Tiger Force
IMDT	Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals)
INC	Indian National Congress
IND	Independent
IPF	Indigeneous People's Forum
JACAS	Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State
KAAC	Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
KANCASDCOM	Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous State Deamand Committee
KLNLF	Karbi Langri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front
KLO	Kamtapur Liberation Organization
KNV	Karbi National Volunteers
KPF	Karbi People's Force
KPLT	Karbi Peoples Liberations Tigers
KRA	Karbi Revolutionary Army
KSA	Karbi Students' Association
KYA	Kachari Youth Association
MNF	Mizo National Front
MoS	Memorandum of Settlement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCHISF	North Cachar Hills Indigenous Students Forum
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDFB	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NNC	Naga Nationalist Council
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland

PAPA	People's Alliance for Peace Agreement
PCDR	People's Co-ordination for Democratic Rights
PDF	People's Democratic Front
PJACBM	People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement
PTCA	Plain Tribal Council of Assam
RHAC	Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council
RKMS	Representative of Karbi Mass Student
RNHPF	Renga Naga Hills Protection Force
SATP	South Asia Terrorism Portal
SRC	States Reorganization Commission
TTAADC	Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council
UPDF	United Democratic People's Front
UPDS	United People's Democratic Solidarity
UPP	United People's Party
UTNLF	United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front

Abstract

What are the conditions under which political decentralization instead of preventing can actually foster ethnic violence? Political decentralization is considered to reduce ethnic violence and demands for ethnic separatism, by granting contending groups control over political, social and economic affairs. However, in practice decentralization has been comparatively effective in reducing ethnic violence in some places while in other cases, political decentralization created conditions for violence. While some ethnically diverse regions manage to maintain a veritable record of peaceful relations between ethnic groups, others experience enduring violence. Countries like Aland Island, South Tyrol, India and Indonesia contained ethnic violence by providing politically autonomous regions and devolving decentralized powers to different separatist ethnic groups. On the other hand, there are cases in South Asia, particularly, some regions in Northeast India, northeastern region in Sri Lanka and the northern region in Bangladesh where political decentralization has not produced effective outcomes and in some cases this led to conflicts and recurring ethnic violence. Variation of the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence across time and space therefore constitute an unresolved puzzle in the field of ethnic conflict prevention.

Two sets of theories of conflict prevention are applied to understand the relationship between ethnic violence and conflict prevention. One set of theory explains the success of political decentralization as a conflict reducing mechanism while the other set explains the failure of decentralization as a preventive measure. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to analyze the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence. With this objective, the research aims to understand the factors that may contribute to ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas and therefore to understand the variations in the outcome of the conflict prevention mechanism. The study has incorporated data from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include data collected during fieldwork between 2013 to 2015 and briefly in 2016 in Assam, Tripura and Manipur. For the primary sources the study conducted in-depth interviews of political leaders, violence affected communities, officials of decentralized institutions and government officials. Relevant government documents are also used as a source of information. Secondary sources consist of books, articles, and journals. The research is based on qualitative and comparative methods with a sub-national level analysis in a politically decentralized area. As far as the cases are concerned, the study focuses on Bodoland with references drawn from Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts in Assam.

Chapter One

Introduction

Introduction

Why and under what conditions political decentralization may lead to ethnic violence?¹ This study aims to address this question with the help of established literature on conflict prevention and elite competition. Empirical evidence is drawn from Bodoland and other decentralized areas in Assam located in Northeast India where devolution of power through territorial autonomy has been used as a conflict prevention measure. Territorial autonomy has been granted to different groups on the basis of cultural distinctiveness and territorial concentration. This study argues that devolution of power, a conflict prevention measure providing recognition to aggrieved ethnic groups, may lead to varied outcomes and may create conditions for violence. This study examines the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence. The study begins with an understanding that the process of political decentralization treated as a conflict preventive mechanism has failed to reduce ethnic violence in many parts of the world. Examples of cases where political decentralization reduces violence can be drawn from parts of Turkey, New Zealand, India and Indonesia. However, there are places like India's northeastern region and Sri Lanka where political decentralization led to enduring ethnic violence. This thesis borrows insights from two sets of literature (a) which examines how political decentralization reduces ethnic violence and (b) which explains how political decentralization may promote ethnic violence.

¹ Political decentralization, autonomy and territorial space have been used interchangeably in this thesis.

Interethnic relations in Northeast India seem to be fluid because of contention between ethnic groups for homelands and autonomy. Although some groups acquired self-governing councils, others have been discontented for lack of decentralizing of power which resulted in movements for autonomy and statehood. Some movements turned to violence, while others remained relatively peaceful.² In order to contain violence, the state government adopted means of accommodation in the form of autonomous councils. Some groups, such as the Bodos were even granted the Sixth Schedule after a Constitutional Amendment. The accommodative strategy adopted by the government to the aggrieved ethnic group, was expected to reduce violence. However, in practice political decentralization showed a different outcome. The creation of autonomous areas failed to accommodate the aggrieved ethnic groups and instead promoted intense violence. This thesis is an attempt to understand the conditions under which political decentralization leads to ethnic violence. This thesis tries to make a contribution to the literature on ethnic violence and political decentralization.

This study begins with a discussion of different concepts like ethnic identities, ethnic violence and political decentralization. While discussing different concepts, we also draw from established literature on ethnicity, nationalism, political decentralization and ethnic violence. To understand the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence the study examines relevant literature of political decentralization and ethnic violence. While understanding the concepts and based on field research this study tries to uncover the conditions which may have lead to ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas of Assam in Northeast India.

² For a comparative analysis of such movements see Saikia, (2011).

The system of Indian federal structure insists on different initiatives that are aimed at generating good governance. The creation of autonomous district councils in Assam under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was one of the initiatives granting political space to the tribal ethnic groups to administer themselves.³ Distinctive identity and politicization of ethnic identity by the political elites promoted violence in most parts of Northeast India. Creation of separate and distinct identity became a strategy in the political process in Northeast India. Reorganization of states and the provision of territorial space to the aggrieved ethnic groups were echoed in the claims for self-determination.⁴ New political institutions were introduced for the tribal people without taking away their traditional practices and administration. As a mark of such initiatives, autonomous councils were established which was provided with legislative, executive, financial and judicial powers.⁵

The formation of autonomous councils in Northeast India (previously, undivided Assam) to preserve the socio-political institutions of tribal communities symbolizes the recognition of traditional political institutions in the region. However, the experiment of

³ Radcliff-Brown who stated, “The primary mark of a tribe is that it consists of persons speaking one language, or dialects of one language. Its unity is primarily linguistic.” He also stated that, along with language there is unity of customs throughout the tribe (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930). He stated this in the context of tribes of Australia. But, in case of India, there is no conception of a tribe, but the constitution guarantees special privileges to groups based on tribal identities. Tribes are believed to stand more or less outside the influence of Hindu civilization though there is a process of detribalization and retribalization in the Indian context. The British used the process of designating or ‘scheduling’ tribes in India which was formally introduced in 1931 census. On that basis, Government of India Act of 1935 created special provisions for tribal people in the constitution of India in 1950. Accordingly the nomenclature ‘Scheduled Tribes’ was used to refer to these groups (Beteille, 1986).

⁴ Self determination is a principle which allows people to choose its own status of development. On December 14, 1960 in a resolution 1514 (XV) the United Nations General Assembly recognized self-determination as “a right to freely determine the status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development (*Source: UN General Assembly, Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, 14 December 1960, A/RES/1514(XV), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f06e2f.html> [accessed 6 June 2017]).”

⁵ See, Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 under No TAD/R/23/51, 1987 edition, published by Government of Assam.

such political decentralization has created the ground for the emergence of cleavages among different ethnic groups which resulted in ethnic violence. The experiences of ethnic violence in different autonomous councils that were formed under the provision of Sixth Schedule substantiate the argument that political decentralization may lead to mixed outcomes, reducing ethnic violence in some areas while promoting differences and violence in others.

This study also indicates that creation of autonomous councils or granting territorial space to one ethnic group can encourage new demands from other ethnic groups. This is because of the emergence of political elites for personal and political incentives in a decentralized area. Elites play a crucial role in mobilizing the masses. Elites seek for a long term incentive in terms of political and economic benefits or to contest in elections in the newly decentralized regions. Therefore, the thesis argues that elite competition is one of the primary conditions of discontentment and ethnic violence in a territorial autonomous region of Assam.

The following sections in the chapter explain the concepts that are used in the thesis to understand the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence. The following section tries to understand the concepts of ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnonationalism.

Understanding concepts: ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnonationalism

The word 'ethnic violence' is related to ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnonationalism. Ethnic violence can be conceptualized as the outbreak of violence which is based on ethnic identities choosing the victims on the criteria of ethnicity (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). Ethnicity refers to a feeling of oneness among individuals of a group on

account of ascriptive status like- race, language, religious belief, color, tribe or caste (Horowitz, 2000, p. 17). It is a group identity with an emotional vitality which is commonly known as ethnicity. The fundamental in forming such a group identity is the ascription of body, names, languages, and history of origin, religion and nationality (Issacs, 1975). Ethnicity or ethnic identity also refers to a process of differentiation from 'other' groups where identity is strongly felt because of the behavior of the group and hostility shown to 'out-groups'. Out-grouping members of another group on the basis of ethnic differences created by in-group members leads to the formation of a new identity. The assertion of ethnic identity is, therefore, based on social recognition of exclusion and inclusion, where individuals try to form individual and group identities.⁶ We can draw examples from Sri Lanka where the Sinhalese faced exclusion during the colonial rule. Tamils received more recognition due to fluency in English which helped the colonial government to govern the regions accommodating the Tamils in the government jobs. Colonial policies of exclusion and differentiation fostered clear-cut ethnic boundaries between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. In the post-colonial phase, the former sought to assert their ethno-linguistic identity where Tamils were deprived of official recognition of their ethno-linguistic identity. As a result of the implementation of Sinhala-only Act since the late 1950s, Tamils experienced relative deprivation at various levels (DeVotta, 2003). Another example can be drawn from Malaysia where the Chinese and Indians faced relative deprivation by the *bumiputeras*.⁷ Ethnic preferences for one group at the exclusion of the other, thus may lead to the assertion, differentiation or struggle for recognition of ethnic symbols by the excluded group.

⁶ Exclusion means social exclusion from a recognized ethnic group.

⁷ There are preferential education and employment policies in Malaysia for Malays excluding mostly the Chinese and Indians. See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (London, University of California Press, 2000): pp. 8, 42, 208, and 670.

The importance of ethnic identity is strongly felt in divided societies. The question of who we are, what place we belong to, what language we speak or what religion we profess becomes important. Existing literature examines the importance of ethnic identity from two different perspectives: individual and collective identity. Individually, ethnic identity is important to distinguish between “us” and “them”. Individual identity is traced to ascriptive attributes such as place of birth or origin. On the other hand, collective or group identity is produced by the membership of an individual in a group based on common descent or blood ties. Collective identity depends on the salience of group identity, demonstrated in inter-group relations or ways in which societies are structured (Horowitz, 2000). For example, in Sri Lanka, group relations are based on high or low status ranking of groups. Rodiyas of Sri Lanka are considered to be untouchables and polluted as they are involved in unclear activities. Similarly, party formations may take place along ethnic lines. Even economic occupation may be organized along ethnic lines or even in recruitment in specific jobs, individual and group identity plays a crucial role. For instance, the recruitment of cadres in Gorkha regiment have been taking place since colonial times on the basis of specific cultural characteristics of the Gorkha people. In many regions, such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka, employment is generated on the basis of ethnic identity of a recognized group. Preferences are given to the recognized group or a community. E.g. Sinhalese in Sri Lanka and Malays in Malaysia got preferential treatment in education, employment, and all other aspects.⁸ Political rights and status may also be provided on the basis of ethnic identity. Granting autonomy and special right in parts of India and elsewhere have taken place along ethnic

⁸ For Sri Lanka, see Neil DeVotta, *Ethnolinguistic Nationalism and Ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka* in M.E. Brown, & S. Ganguly, *Fighting Words: Language Policy and Ethnic Relations in Asia* (London, The MIT Press, 2003): p. 105-139 and for Malaysia, see Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (London, University of California Press, 2000): p. 8, 42, 208, and 670.

lines. Ethnic identity also becomes salient for the demands or the movements for autonomy. For e.g. Bodoland of Assam and Aceh region of Indonesia acquired special recognition based on ethnic identity.⁹ So, it can be stated that ethnic identity is very much important for individuals and groups to gain access to resources. In order to gain access to resources, ethnic groups mobilize or engage in political movements. Scholars have used the term ethnonationalism to understand ethnic movements.

According to Walker Connor, ethnonationalism means cultural and ethnic consciousness, for claims to acquire the right of self-determination. Ethnic groups may strive for the formation of separate states or preserve historical territories, to protect their political integrity or to maintain internal order. The rise of ethnic nationalism of various groups in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are some of the examples whereby, groups demand political recognition of ethnic identities (Connor, 1967). Further, Connor notes that ethnonationalism is based on the feeling of commonness along the lines of ethnic identity. Though ethnonationalism encompasses all other phenomenon of nationalism and sub-nationalism, a slight difference can be observed between the two terms. According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism is strongly associated with national identity and it also includes definite language, sentiments and symbolic representation, where national identity is comprised of some sense of political community. Political community according to Smith refers to common institutions and a common policy of civil liberties and duties for all members of the group of people with a demarcated and bounded territory (Smith, 1991). Some of the basic components of nationalism according to Smith are the sense of

⁹ For Bodoland see Pahi Saikia, *Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India* (New Delhi, Routledge, 2011): p. 50-77 and for Aceh, see Edward Aspinall, East West Centre Policy Paper series (Honolulu), Sovereignty, the Successor State, and Universal Human Rights: History and the International Structuring of Acehese Nationalism (*Indonesia*, No. 73, Apr., 2002)

belongingness to a nation, existence and survival of a nation and the right to share common values as members of a community.¹⁰ Moreover, Smith made a distinction between Western and non-Western conceptions of nationalism. Western conception of nationalism insists on belonging to one nation. On the other hand, non-Western conception is based on ethnic lines, which is very much related to the community of birth and native culture.

Further, scholars distinguished between civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism. According to civic nationalism, a nation is the involvement of citizens with affinity to a single nation, where members share similar political liberty, respect civic institutions and follow the same political measures. Civic nationalism can be related to national identity or national consciousness of individuals, sharing common values based on nationality (Smith, 2010). National identity is the attribute to one state or country, a sentiment which is shared with groups of people irrespective of different identity. National identity is the direct consequence of commonness among the people, because of language, national symbols, color, and history. This kind of civic nationalism or national identity is different from ethnic nationalism. The term ethnic nationalism refers to collective mobilization in ethnically characterized territories based on attitudes, reminiscences, bonds of people and identities (Smith, 2010). While civic nationalism refers to a sense of commonality within a specified political territory and under the roof of a single nation, ethnic nationalism indicates the feeling of nationalism along ethnic lines where groups may still strive for a proposed ethnic territory. Ethnic demands are based on cultural distinctiveness which may lead to separatist violence or secessionist movements where demands are tied to ethnic nationalism

¹⁰ According to Smith a nation refers to “a community of people who have common language, culture, and ethnicity and share a common territory and a government, see Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London, Penguin Books, 1991).”

(Horowitz, 2000). Ethnonationalism can be understood from the process of ethnic demands, and to understand this, the next section discusses the role and conceptualization of ethnic demands.

Conceptualizing ethnic demands

The issue of territory or place of origin where ethnic groups inhabit is an integral part of ethnonationalist demand. For an ethnic group, the territory may possess both tangible and symbolic value which includes ancestral homeland and ownership of natural resources within the bounded territory. Every ethnic group wants to have control over its own territory so that the elite members of the group can establish their political legitimacy. In a multiethnic society, when a group demands complete separation of autonomy, other groups residing in the territory fear that their right will be undermined and they will eventually become a considerable minority. The latter may fight back for their rights. Discriminatory policies legislated by the dominant groups may set the background for violence between majority and minority ethnic groups (Wolff, 2006). An ethnic demand is the result of nationalism of ethnic groups who seek to separate from other ethnic groups. The factors of ethnic social differentiation may be physical factors, geographical factors, communication factors, superimposed political factors and superimposed psycho-political factors. These factors contribute to the consciousness of the ethnic groups about their grievances and the fight for their ethnic demands (Lightbody, 1969). Ethnic demands include the demands for homeland and political representation of the aggrieved ethnic groups.

These demands may be made out of fears of ethnic domination or fear of losing access to territorial resources that creates the background conditions for elite manipulation.

Primordial attachments to territory and the group's settlement history are often used as tools for such mobilization for ethnic demands as scholars rightly argue that the local leaders try to ethnicize the grievances of a community framed along lines of ethno-territorial identity for such demands (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). Existing myths and historical narratives play a significant role in such demands for instance, demands for territorial self-government. Every group has its history or myths of control, conquest or domination. The narratives often revolve around issues related to control over ancient territories, a group's settlement history or myths that indicate conquest by force or false promises. Competing notions on the territory between contending ethnic groups add to frustration caused by the inaccessibility of territorial resources by the relatively deprived groups. This may motivate the aggrieved group to engage in violence. For example, competing claims on territory and homeland between the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka led to violent ethnonationalism of the Tamils. The demand was territorial separation by the Tamils. Let us draw some examples from Indonesia. Regions like East Timor, Irian Jaya and Aceh of Indonesia experienced violent ethnic movements that were responded with brutal and indiscriminate repression by Suharto. Historically, these regions have distinct cultures and identities that are different from the Javanese identity. Each region has a particular history of settlement, control and conquest. In the post-colonial phase, most of these regions were possibly integrated into Indonesia. Ethnonational leaders of these regions demanded separation from centre so that they could exercise complete autonomy in the separated regions (Aspinall & Berger, 2001). The demand for a separate statehood of Gorkhaland in India, which took a violent turn, is another example where notions of homeland and territorial identity of the Gorkhas led to mass mobilization and armed conflict. Repression and indifferent attitude of the government

intensified the movement (Ganguli, 2005). How do we establish the relationship between ethnicity and violence? The next section discusses this in detail.

Conceptualizing ethnic violence

In the literature, scholars try to disaggregate ethnic violence and ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict may be a feature in ethnically heterogeneous societies. In such societies, groups may organize for expression of political demands, fight for control of resources, identity, patronage, and legislation of ethnic policies. The presence of institutionalized channels may allow nonviolent mobilization. However, if the institutions for peaceful mobilization are relatively closed or restrained then groups may take to violence that can take various forms such as rioting, pogroms or even genocidal deaths against weaker ethnic groups. A situation of conflict is, therefore, considered as a situation where incompatibilities of interest exist, but where violence is absent.¹¹ Another point needs to be noted about the relationship between ethnic identity and ethnic violence. Ethnic identities by themselves do not produce ethnic violence unless identities become salient for the political and economic interests of the group. The politicization of ethnic identities leads to ethnic violence. The formation of ethnic political/non-political parties and mobilization on the basis of ethnic political identity led to ethnic violence (Tambiah, 1996). Tambiah tried to describe the relation of ethnic identity and ethnic violence by understanding from different perspectives of identity formation. In other words, in spite of the existence of strong ethnic identities, groups may coexist peacefully rather than engaging in violence. Inter-group conflicts can be negotiated and resolved by nonviolent or institutionalized means. There are examples of

¹¹ See Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002): p. 25

coexistence of groups such as Hindus and Muslims in India or Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab or tribal and non-tribal groups in Northeast India within a defined territory or a region where groups negotiate their grievances by peaceful means. However, difference existed between religious violence and ethnic violence. A religious violence is a phenomenon between groups having religious affiliation which may be based on the religious differences and on the different issues of religious matters. On the other hand, ethnic violence can be understood as the violence on ethnic lines when one of sides represents an ethnic community. The difference between religious and ethnic violence lies in the nature of the violence. In religious violence, religion plays a crucial role and religion remains the matter of issue. On the other hand, ethnic violence is the violence created out of identity based on the ethnic lines. As Varshney points out, ethnic violence is a consequence of difference and conflict between different groups.¹²

Ethnic heterogeneity may lead to conflict and violence involving the state and different cultural ethnic groups or between two ethnic groups. Ethnic demands could be based on cultural or administrative autonomy. In extreme cases, the demand could be for a separate territory. The latter situation may lead to separatist violence or violent secessionist movements where demands are tied to ethnic identity. Horowitz stated that, in the 1950s and 60s, the Ceylon Tamils, inhabiting in the Northern and Eastern parts of the land mass, demanded some form of regional autonomy in the areas where the Tamils were highly concentrated.¹³ The demand was a reaction to the growth of Sinhalese ethnic movement that resulted in the imposition of Sinhala as the official language in 1960s. There was a growing sense amongst the Tamils that they were losing their advantages in government employment

¹² *ibid.*, p. 26

¹³ See Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (London, University of California Press, 2000): p. 132

and the favorable positions that they had experienced so far in the island. Tamil nationalism emerged in this context. Their movement was to gain control over the claims of administration and to control the bureaucratic positions that were being occupied by the Sinhalese after decolonization.¹⁴ In the same way, advocates of independent Telangana state of India felt that the arrangements of the policies of the centre and affirmations from the parliament over the issue of separate state for Telangana, in the last fifty years have not been privileged and as a result Telangana continued to be ignored, oppressed and underdeveloped.¹⁵ They asserted that the experiments of being with Andhra Pradesh proved to be futile. Therefore, separation was the best solution for development. The arrangement of governance meant lower salary scales for the Telangana administrators. Moreover, a large proportion of the important administrative positions in Telangana were filled by outsiders—the “non-mulkis” (Forrester, 1970). Growing unemployment and exclusion were some of the root causes of the agitation for a separate Telangana state (Parthasarathy, Raman, & Rama Rao, 1973). Ethnonationalism in Sri Lanka and Telangana can be considered as a response to exclusion and relative deprivation.

The existing tradition of inquiry into the causes of ethnic violence can be classified into three categories: essentialism, instrumentalism and constructivism.¹⁶ The next section discusses these concepts and approaches in detail.

¹⁴ *ibid* p. 132

¹⁵ The State Reorganization Commission (SRC), 1956 stated that, states will be created on the basis of language. Andhra state was created out of worst wile Madras province on the basis of Telegu language (Forrester, 1970). This however did not meet the aspirations of the historically disadvantaged region of Telangana until recently when the new state was formed.

¹⁶ See Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002): p. 23

Existing tradition of understanding ethnic violence

Essentialism is related to primordial sentiments. Essentialism may be defined as an attribute or a sentiment, which is intrinsic to a group's genealogical characteristics (Sury, 2001). Anthony D. Smith argued that nationalism could be built in terms of sentiments and consciousness of belongingness to a nation based on language and symbolism. In the same way, ethnicity can be understood as the feeling of oneness on the basis of common myths of ancestry, shared memories and cultural commonalities. He further said that it is defined as, "the 'objective' factors, such as language, religion and customs, territory and institutions, and 'subjective' factors, such as attitudes, perceptions and sentiments (Smith, 2010)." Clifford Geertz insisted that a man's culture is essential and exclusive which is even a dominant element in his nature. Cultures adopted by people create primordial sentiments among them because of commonality based on assumed blood ties, race, languages and other cultural attributes. Primordial discontent among cultural ethnic groups strives more deeply and satisfied less easily, dividing people based on the cultural attributes (Geertz, 1973). He was drawing examples from the cockfights in Bali, Indonesia. According to essentialism ethnic conflict in modern states can be traced back to older animosities between groups. Violence occurs in many places when a rational choice is overpowered by emotional sentiments of blood relation or by ancient hatred towards others.¹⁷ History witnessed cases where inherent differences activated animosity and triggered violence between ethnic groups. Violence between Hindus and Muslims, Serbs and Croats, Arabs and Jews, White and Blacks, Catholic and Protestants, Hutus and Tutsis are often cited by primordialists to explain ethnic violence caused by prejudices and hatred based on blood ties. A small spark

¹⁷ See Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002): p. 27

of conflict between two different ethnic groups may be caused by any discriminatory measure taken by the government. In the process, some groups may try to establish dominance over ethnic others.

Ethno-nationalism may take various forms and trajectories. In extreme cases, it can take to violent forms. What are the conditions under which ethnic groups resort to violence? According to one set of literature, ethnic violence occurs due to primordial attachments. According to Clifford Geertz, primordial attachment refers to identities that are fixed, more precisely identities that are assumed as “given”. It refers to social continuation, actual blood relation mainly, but apart from these the notion of ‘givenness’ that emerge from taking birth into a specific religious community, adopting a particular language, and social practices also refer to primordial identities. Geertz further states,

“Congruities of blood, speech, custom, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coercive in and of themselves. One is bound to one’s kinsman, one’s neighbor, one’s fellow believer, ipso facto: as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself.”

(Geertz, 1963)

The broad potency of such primordial sentiments differs from individual to individual, from culture to culture and according to time. But in practice every individual in the society experiences at some point of time, some attachments which are natural and spiritual rather than from social interaction (Geertz, 1963). Differences of primordial attachments have abnormally led to serious disaffection among the different ethnic groups in the modern world (Shils, 1957).

From an essentialist perspective, Castells argued, “The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory, from power apparatuses and religious revelations (Castells, 2010, p. 7). Castells also argued, “Ethnicity has always been a basic attribute of self-identification, not only because of shared historical practice, but also because ‘others’ remind them of ‘otherness’ by external attributes, color, language and biology. This ethnicity has become a major source of self-organization, confrontation and often, hatred and violence (Castells, 2010).

Critics claim that identities are not always fixed. Sometimes they are manipulated or constructed due to situational demand. Through the construction of identity and culture at a particular place and time, individuals and groups try to address their resentments or may even try to redraw ethnic boundaries (Nagel, 1994). Ethnic uniqueness is very much connected with the subject of boundary that a group always wants to preserve. Culture is also build up in the same way as racial boundaries are constructed by the group. Groups seek answers to the question of who and what we are, through the construction of ethnic identities.¹⁸ Ethnic symbols, legendary belief, and customary traditions of community or people are manipulated for organizing the group for regulating social behavior, and to establish societal bonds which facilitate the means for structuring an ethnic conflict (Swidler, 1986).

Ethnicity or ethnic nationalism is not simply a historical legacy, but it is constantly undergoing redefinition and reconstruction. In the modern world, ethnonationalism is

¹⁸ See Joane Nagel, Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture (*Social Problems*, Vol. 41, No. 1, Feb., 1994): pp. 152-176

conditioned more by rational choice, which has personal or collective political or economic advantage (Hechter, 1987). A distinction can be made between primordialists and constructivist understanding on the basis of character and sources of ethnic nationalism (Fearson & Laitin, 2003). Primordial sentiments depict oneness on the basis of common culture and identity, but the modern form of identity is being constructed for personal political and economic advantages. Identities are created and grievances are manipulated for the interest of some individuals or groups. To redress the grievances, ethnic groups may engage in violent movements against a government or other ethnic groups.

Rational choice arguments take note of other factors like competition. The competition between ethnic groups compels them to get involved in violence. Competition between two groups or within a group and the government arises because of political, economic and social interest of a group.¹⁹ Existing socio-economic relation between two ethnic groups or economic exploitation of a marginalized group by the dominant group also acts as a driving force of ethnic violence. Intergroup economic relations in this context are therefore characterized by marginalization and discrimination of the weaker group/s. Moreover, relative deprivation faced by any ethnic group may lead to a violent movement between two groups. Competition structured along ethnic lines may lead to ethnic stratification and may result in violent mobilization (Noel, 1968). Political interest consists of acquiring autonomy, political power and legitimacy. Groups want to restore the identity so that outsiders or other ethnic groups cannot usurp the identity of that group. Ethnic groups mobilize by using violent means and may demand autonomy to redress ethnic grievances, discrimination and deprivation by dominant ethnic group/s or the state.

¹⁹ Rational choice model and interest-based politics is used interchangeably in the thesis.

On the other hand, Frank P. Harvey insists that ethnic identities emerged in definite conditions to move forward the personal interests of elites. Elites try to politicize the ethnic identity for their personal and political incentives. Politicization of ethnic identities formulates interethnic tensions and inter-ethnic violence (Harvey, 2000). The primordial sentiment differs according to place and time, which creates differences among different ethnic groups. Differences created on the basis of sentiments evokes as violence between the groups. E.g. the linguistic difference between Malay and Chinese in Malaysia, linguistic and religious differences between Tamils and Sinhalese leads to violence because of their primordial sentiments. A group or an individual may want to assert ethnic differences based on primordial sentiments.

Scholars arguing from a constructivist perspective point out that the occurrence of violence may differ from case to case and from time to time. Violence in a region between two ethnic groups may not always spread to other areas despite the presence of same ethnic groups. Violence between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 did not spread to other parts of India though there were differences of ethnic identity between Hindus and Muslims all over India (Varshney, 2002). If violence is caused by primordial sentiments between the two groups, violence would have diffused to other parts of India where both the communities reside in neighboring zones. Critics therefore argue that primordial sentiments are not the only causal factors for promoting violence in India or elsewhere (Brass, 1997). In other words, primordialism cannot explain the variation across time and space (Horowitz, 2000; Varshney, 2002). The varying pattern of violence can be understood by a different set of arguments put forwarded by scholars who believe in instrumentalism.

According to instrumentalism ethnicity serves as a tool that can be used for mobilization by the political and economic elites.²⁰ Elites mobilize the masses for material gains. This kind of an explanation is referred to as instrumentalism. The main argument of instrumentalism insists on the instrumental use of ethnic identity by the elites for their personal political or economic gains, not considering whether they believe in primordial ethnic identities or not. Elites manipulate primordial sentiments of a group to promote hatred against other ethnic groups or towards the government. Primordial sentiments become the weapon for mass mobilization of an ethnic group. The elites use ethnic identity as a tool to organize groups by means of provocative action for personal, political and economic benefits (Brass, 1997). As some scholars argue, violence of the Hindus and Muslims in India during 1992 was not because of primordial sentiments of the groups, but due to manipulation of ethnic identity by elites. Mahmood Mamdani also stated that difference is created by the political elites among different groups for personal incentives. Elites take interests in divide and rule of these groups for the political or economic incentives. British administration also took the same strategy to control diverse groups of India during colonial administration (Mamdani, 2012). He also explains that lines were drawn between settlers and natives, with distinct political identities. He draws examples from Africa where a difference is made between settlers and natives. Differences of ethnic groups on the basis of settler and native identity were used by the political elites as instruments for their purposive interest.

According to instrumentalism, ethnic mobilization in politics therefore fosters differences against other groups. The increase in power and privileges of the dominant

²⁰ See Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslim in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002): p. 30

group may threaten or increase the fear of survival and security of competing groups. When the other group is threatened of losing their identity and political rights, they fight back to revive or establish their losing identity. Ethnic entrepreneurs take the role of mobilizing against the competing group by capitalizing on issues of relative deprivation and discrimination of the weaker group. They try to instigate violence between the groups for their interest or political and economic motives. For instance, spreading rumors during communal violence by ethnic entrepreneurs promotes inter-group violence, which further spreads to places other than the original site of violence. Brass insisted that instrumentalism, therefore, is an actor-oriented approach (Brass, 2004). These actors (rumor mongers) fill hatred and fear in the minds of the members of the communities. Groups resort to violence as a preventive or defensive measure to overcome such fears.

Scholars however criticized the instrumentalist approach. Critics believe that this approach cannot explain why leaders mobilize masses at all. Apart from elite manipulation, there are other contingent factors responsible for framing grievances of ethnic groups to allow members of the groups to engage in violence.²¹ The emotional and psychological dimensions of ethnic conflict could be understood from the writing of Tambiah. Tambiah explained the process of interactions and social psychology that intensify violence in the crowds. He explored the causes of collective violence in South Asia and argued that social psychology played an important aspect in ethnic violence (Tambiah, 1996).

How do ethnic identities get constructed? What are the factors responsible for the construction of ethnic identities? These are some of the questions that constructivists

²¹ See Ted Gurr, Psychological Factors in Civil Violence (*World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Jan., 1968): p. 245-278

address. Scholars argue that modernization altered the sense of identity by bringing the people into a bigger and extra local structure of consciousness. Modernization leads to mobilization where highly developed, innovative practices in society, know-how and economic life are popularized and acknowledged on an extensive scale (Deutsch, 1961). Nationalism in Europe was formed by a common language, which is English forming an imagined community for that particular group. Basque and Catalonia of Spain used linguistic nationalism for their group rights and for linguistic autonomy (Anderson, 2006). Constructivists therefore argue that identities are fluid. New identities are created through teaching, repetition, and social interactions. Identities can be attached with emotions like pleasure or anger, aggression, pain, discomfort or danger (Suny, 2001). According to Petersen, emotion is an instrument that brings about action to please an imperative concern.²² Emotions explain the shift in motivation that acts as a cause of action (fight) to meet a pressing concern (satisfy) (Peterson, 2002). The emotions are tied up with the ethnic symbols such as ethnic flags, common language, common history and culture, the trend of fashion, clothing, food habit etc. which brings ethnic members closer to construct their identity. In constructing ethnic identity on the basis of ethnic symbols, press, elites and social networks play an important role to raise the awareness of ethnic symbols. When an individual feels culturally threatened, he/she has a rational choice to change or construct particular ethnic identity according to the situational and desired goals. The desired goals can be both collective and personal. Although elites try to manipulate such fears, the individual member of the group has to resonate with those fear or grievances. Group fear,

²² Frustration is an intrusion with goal oriented actions; aggression is behavior intended to damage, physically or otherwise, those in the direction of whom it is bound for. Frustration is a biological makeup that results from fairly rational psychoanalysis of the social world. Relative deprivation is one of the factors responsible for discontent, anger and rage which leads to frustration of individuals resulting in a construction of new identity to forward their frustration to violence (Gurr, 1968).

frustration, discontent and relative deprivation motivates the group to engage in collective action. States will however try to put restrictions on the collective mobilization of the group. Institutional constraints imposed by a state often fail and adds to the aggressive behavior of the mobilizing group (Tilly, 1978).

From another constructivist perspective, Varshney insisted that identities are constructed by the need of time and space by the same community according to their need and personal interest. The focus was on social change which is based on aspects which force that change, the circumstantial expedite, the consequence of particular actions, affairs and processes that are themselves subject to change. So, ethnic identities change according to situational changes and temporal necessity. That is why violence perpetrated in some situation by the same community may not be perpetrated in other situations (Varshney, 2002). He explained this dimension in the context of Hindu-Muslim violence in 1992, which was confined to only some states in India. Constructing political community inside the same political system, therefore, differed significantly. Subramanian examines mobilization based on the internal pluralism of political parties such as DMK in Tamil Nadu which is based on ethnic lines (Subramanian, 1999).

The understanding of constructivism is more convincing than other approaches about ethnicity and violence. Constructions of ethnic identities thus differ according to time and place. In the subfield of ethnonationalism, temporal and spatial variables help one understand the causal factors that explain variation across cases (Varshney, 2002, p. 6).

Primordialists considered violent conflicts as a product of older animosities. According to primordialists, violence occurs in many places by emotional ties of blood or by

ancient hatred. On the other hand, instrumentalists argue that ethnic identities are no more salient than any other form of identity, but they become significant when they are mobilized by self-interested political leaders in the instrumentalist pursuit of material and political gain.²³

Therefore ethnic violence is a cause of concern because it leads to huge humanitarian losses as well as the destruction of public properties. States respond to ethnic mobilization in certain ways. In order to prevent violent mobilization, government agencies often use repressive measures by force or counter-violence (Gurr, 1993). Repressive measures used by the government may build more frustration within the group, and they may use violence as a combative measure against the government.

The previous section explained different concepts like ethnicity, ethnic identity and the approaches. The next section discusses the research design and methodology used to examine the research question and during fieldwork conducted for the study.

Research Design and Methodology

In social science research, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can be used to understand social realities. But, these two traditions use different tools of data collection and analysis and are often debated to be opposed to each other. King, Keohane and Verba argued, “these differences are mainly ones of style and specific technique (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 3).” They also argued that ‘quantitative research uses numbers and statistical methods’ for specific aspects of phenomena for description or to test causal hypotheses. On the other hand, ‘qualitative research covers a wide range of approaches

²³ See Gurr, T. R. (1994). People Against States: Ethnopolitical Conflict and the Changing World System. *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 347-377.

which does not rely on numerical measurements'. Both methodologies have merits and demerits. Pepinsky argued that though qualitative methods can contribute to theory building, it is tough to generate knowledge by implementing only one method. He further added that there should be a combination of many methods to generate reliable knowledge (Pepinsky, et al., 2010). Geddes also argued that the theory or generation of knowledge depends on the applicability of units of analysis. If units of analysis are at a local level, accessibility becomes easier for the researcher. Scholars also debated on the issue of the number of cases, whether it should be small 'n' or large 'N'.²⁴ Small 'n' and large 'N' determines the tools and the methodology of a study. Studies with a large number of cases can be generalized compared to a small number of cases taken for a study (Pepinsky, et al., 2010).

Collier, Seawright and Brady made a distinction between qualitative and quantitative research on the basis of (a) the stages of measurement, (b) the size of N, (c) employment of arithmetical test, and (d) thick and thin analysis.²⁵ In qualitative research, there is in-depth knowledge of cases and context focusing on relatively few numbers of cases. It employs little or no use of statistical tools in reaching conclusions and mostly relies on thick analysis. On the other hand, quantitative research uses a large number of cases, explicitly or directly employ statistical tools and thin analysis (Collier, Seawright, & Brady, 2003).

This study used a qualitative and comparative method with local level analysis. Small 'n' and in-depth knowledge of cases is the method of analysis used in this research to make it more comparative and to analyze relevant cases and their causal explanation

²⁴ See Pepinsky, et al., 2010.

²⁵ Clifford Geertz argued that thick description is necessary not only for facts but also for analysis of commentary and its interpretation (Geertz, 1973).

(Lieberso, 1991).²⁶ According to Arend Lijphart, comparative method is a fundamental and systematic method which describes ‘how’, but does not specify the ‘what’ of the analysis. It tries to understand phenomenon discovering empirical relationships among variables. Basically, comparative method is the comparison of analysis to get a result, where we can differentiate or look for similarities or dissimilarities. For a proper comparative method to be carried out there should be similarities among the cases or variables (Lijphart, 1971). Selection of cases and causal explanation for this study relied on these understandings.

Some of the methods of inquiry used are observation and interviews of ethnic groups in the BTAD areas through representative and purposive sampling. In representative sampling, the interviewees are viewed as a proper representation of the population which is closely related to the concept of non-selectiveness. In other words, it is a method of selection, which takes samples possessing similar characteristics of larger set of population/community on which study will be conducted (Kruskal & Mosteller, 1979). Purposive sampling, on the other hand, is a non-probability sampling technique when one needs to study a certain cultural domain. The researcher goes to the field for a purpose and selects the respondents according to the type of information required for the study (Bernard, 2011). For this study, respondents were selected from the ethnic groups from different socio-economic backgrounds. The research relies mostly on two different ways of collecting information: (a) participatory observation and in-depth interviews and (b) analysis of written records and oral histories. Participation helps the researcher to draw from personal experiences of the surroundings learning about the daily life of the communities. Observation is a procedure of perceiving and documentation of the nature of events and

²⁶ Causal explanation means something which brings about or increases the likelihood of an effect. It explains the relationship between independent and the dependent variables.

objects in the field of study. Field notes are an important source of insight that helps to understand a social setting. In-depth interviewing methods have been adopted to uncover participant's view by means of informal conversations. Such interview is useful to get a large amount of information (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This study focuses on a few cases and uses a relatively open-ended approach (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007). Observation method used in this study helped to learn about specific cultural traits of ethnic groups. Inter-group relations were also understood by observation method in the rural as well as semi-urban areas of decentralized units. Additionally, the study benefited by interacting with the leaders and cadres of ethnic organizations and ethnic political parties functioning in the decentralized areas. The interviewing process would have been incomplete if we do not consider the approach of the political leadership of the decentralized areas as well as the state legislature. Elite interviews were carried out to know about the overall views of the leaders of the political and government institutions and their views on socio-political matters.²⁷ The elite interview helped the study to know about their definition of problems and understanding the incidents taking place in the selected cultural setting (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002).

During the interview process and visits to different areas in Assam, help was taken from local interpreters and respondents/participants. In most cases local assistance was arranged before going to the field in the areas where people use dialects other than Assamese, Hindi, English and Bengali.

²⁷ Elites are the individuals considered to be influential, prominent and knowledgeable persons with expertise. Elites are involved in political life in the community or national level. They are considered to be politically conscious about the local conditions (Rose, 1962). In local areas elites are approached by people for suggestions, help and to lead social purposes.

The study reviewed historical documents to understand the past history of the ethnic groups and the geographical location where they laid the claims for homeland. The archives were an important source of information. Archival material included census reports, British records and other available government records, document on cultural history and policy debates (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To access the relevant documents and archival materials different libraries within the country were visited, especially Delhi, Assam, Tripura and Manipur. The data collected from the archives were analyzed using historical analysis. The historical analysis is a technique of unearthing the records of past. Historical analysis helped to understand the situations and environment before implementing the observation and interview methods (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It also helped in acquiring knowledge about the unexplored areas in Assam and other places.

Supporting evidences were collected from other ethnic groups affected by political decentralization in the districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in Assam and the Sixth Schedule areas of Tripura. The interviewing process initially involved building rapport with the respondents of affected ethnic groups. While giving enough space to the interviewee and keeping the interview open-ended helped this study to accumulate more knowledge about the subject. To make the interview more interactive, open-ended and semi-structured questions were preferred to provide more space to the interviewee. Other sources of information comprised of appropriate books, articles from periodicals, pamphlets, memorandums and newspaper cuttings. This study used analysis of local newspapers to understand the process of violence in the politically decentralized areas of BTAD. South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) reports were taken into account to understand whether violent

activities in the region carried out by insurgent groups could have any relation with ethnic violence.

The research design is a plan for systematic understanding of phenomenon to execute the research successfully. The systematic research design, the theoretical framework and methodology helped the research to respond to the research questions. Different strategies for data collection and different analysis procedures guided this research to explore the desired objectives. Literature review provided with a theoretical framework to organize and draw linkages between theory and real-world phenomena (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This research design helped the study to link the empirical evidences with the theoretical background to understand the phenomenon of ethnic violence.

Process of Case selection

Selection of cases for a study depends on the research question(s), and when the research question deals with 'how and why', a case study method is considered to be relevant. It is also relevant when the study needs an in-depth description of some social phenomenon/mechanism over which the researcher has less control. Case study research included single case study and multiple case studies. When we use multiple case studies, we preferably use comparative case methods. To design case studies, the empirical research includes a research design which is known as a logical plan for the study. Such research design consists of few components, such as question for the study, propositions, defined elements of analysis, rational connectivity of data to the assumptions and criteria for explaining the results (Yin R. K., 2009). Theory should be strong to define appropriate research design and data collection for case study research. For collecting evidence for the case study, multiple sources of evidence are used. Chain of evidence is maintained including

documentations, factual reports, conversations and dialogues, observation method, being a part of the setting and accepting man made antiquity to have an in-depth understanding of case (Yin, 2009). Strategy for performing case studies is based on strengthening confidence by using comparative methods. The researcher selects a number of cases on the basis of differences among the cases on some dimensions for analysis of the study. Mill's 'method of agreement and method of difference' can be used for such research. These methods are used for comparing outcomes in the various cases and try to relate the causes of different outcomes by different conditions or a common outcome by the presence of common conditions. But, there should be design for implementation of case studies by analyzing the history of the case, understanding conditions, parameters, and variables for the phenomenon which have a logical understanding with relation to theoretical propositions. Developments of explanations for the outcome(s) are necessary in each case to link independent causal factors with the outcome (George & McKeown, 1985). These studies also stated that both qualitative and quantitative research can use a case study method, but these research traditions differ in terms of the number of cases selected. Qualitative research examines a small number of cases and quantitative research selects a large number of cases. Tools and technique used for analysis and data collection differ according to the need of the study. This study selected a small number of cases to study the relation between political decentralization and violence.

To understand the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence, the study focuses on the case of Bodoland in Assam. Bodoland acquired institutions of political decentralization in 2003. The study shows that despite political decentralization, violence recurred in Bodoland and intergroup tensions increased in the

region. Despite some development plans undertaken by the newly formed institutions, ethnic grievances continued. Political decentralization also led to the formation of ethnic political parties and emergence of new political elites. Representation of Bodos increased. However, violence continued. This study, therefore, argues that political decentralization shows a different outcome at least in the case of Bodoland. After political decentralization, ethnic violence took place in Udalguri district which spread to other parts of the region. But, violence which took place in 2012 and 2014 in other parts of BTAD did not spread to Udalguri district. This needs further analysis: a subject of future research. Therefore, BTAD is selected as the main case study for this study. It is also important to note that different groups in Northeast India are demanding their ethnic territories. Whether granting ethnic territories prevent violence or lead to more violence something that will need further attention and research.

Ethnic mobilization of the Bodos, Dimasas and Karbis started in the post-colonial period. After more than a decade of violent conflict, Bodos were granted partial autonomy in 1993. The process failed and armed conflict led by Bodo Liberation Tiger continued until 2003 when the Bodos were granted territorial autonomy. Political decentralization in Bodoland has not reduced ethnic violence in the region. Instead, the decentralized region has experienced further intergroup violence after 2003. Similarly, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in North Cachar Hills were granted special political decentralization since the 1950s. Nonetheless, decentralization failed to foster interethnic accommodation in these regions. Therefore, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao are also selected to compare the case with Bodoland.

Criteria for selecting the cases from Assam were based on ancestry, grievances, cultural as well as political claims. The groups selected have fairly a common root of origin i.e. Tibeto-Burman origin. Tribal status to the ethnic groups (Bodos, Dimasas, Karbis and other Scheduled Tribes) was granted in 1950. Moreover, some of these ethnic groups (Karbhis and Dimasas) were provided with autonomous councils for their self-rule. Despite autonomy and political decentralization these regions (Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in Assam and the tribal areas in Tripura) experienced violence in 1990s and 2000s. The selection of the case is also based on the events and processes of violence experienced in the decentralized areas. Special focus was on the Sixth Scheduled areas of Assam to compare and contrast with the case of Bodoland after political decentralization.

For analysis of data, the study employed qualitative tools like content analysis.²⁸ To analyze the historical records, newspapers reports and government documents, the research used the process of latent and manifest content analysis. The latter tool involves interpretation of the contents of the available data. Manifest content is a component that is actually there which are computable. On the contrary, latent content is known for analytical interpretation of the imagery hidden under actual data. Content analysis is treated as an object and impartial method of acquiring a qualitative explanation of the content which is found in the different design of documents (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This method is also known as event and action to draw suitable inferences from documents (Weber, 1990). Using archival materials, oral history and different documents requires content analysis.

²⁸ Content analysis is a technique for evaluating documented data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It interprets the contextual meaning of the textual data. Data analysis is about examining all data again and again to obtain a sense of the entire data. Along with that, data are read by every word to acquire codes from the document.

Another method to understand uncovering causal mechanism is process tracing. Process tracing helps to analyze the complex political and social phenomenon and understand the causal mechanism that connects independent and dependent variables (George & Bennett, 2004). Simple process tracing was also used to examine historical and archival documents, interview transcripts and other sources. Tansey argued that process tracing method will help to understand the phenomenon taking interview of elites. Elite interview, as well as process tracing, helped the research to understand ‘the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from political outcomes’.²⁹ This tool was used to systematically examine the propositions and its relation to the research questions posed in the study.³⁰

Marshall and Rossman stated “Typical analytic procedures fall into six phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report” (1999). Raw data have no meaning without interpretive act and writing the report on the basis of data collected. Data is organized for analysis in a systematic manner. In this study, data was arranged according to categories, themes and patterns. Data was analyzed by using content analysis, process tracing method and interpretive method to understand the pattern of ethnic violence.

Analyses of existing literature on ethnic violence reveal that the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence may lead to different responses. It varies according to time and space, promoting violence in a region and bringing peace in others. To

²⁹ Also see Tansey, 2007.

³⁰ Also see Collier, 2011.

explain why political decentralization may cause violent outcome in some cases, we can draw examples from India, which is a multiethnic federation; where political decentralization has been implemented as a measure to redress ethnic grievances and combat enduring violence. To illustrate, in Darjeeling (Gorkhaland), the creation of DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council) reduced violence though there were tendencies of separate state demands (Ganguly, 2005). A separate state was demanded in the later phase of the movement, and after the creation of GTA (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration) in 2012. These demands were made by relatively peaceful means. In the case of Gorkhaland, we can say that the process of political decentralization reduced violence to a great extent. In other cases implementation of similar policies shows different results. Mizoram was granted statehood in 1987 respectively by the Government of India, but ethnic minorities in Mizoram still demand that their grievances have not been fulfilled and therefore calls for ethnic homelands continue (Baruah, 2010). Political decentralization failed in parts of Mizoram because of the failure to reach a consensus between the government of India and the contending groups.

Ethnic minority groups like Hmars in the state of Mizoram are demanding territorial autonomy from the Mizos. A similar situation can be observed in BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District), which was created in 2003 and where territorial decentralization failed to contain violence. In BTAD decentralization has produced a violent outcome. There were three prominent episodes of violence in 2008, 2012 and 2014. In Indonesia, Acehnese people of Aceh region demanded secessionism after political decentralization. Acehnese were not satisfied with the political decentralization and took

violence as a tactic for further demands (Bertrand, 2004). Thus similar conflict containing measures may produce different results in different regions.

The aim of this thesis is to examine what are the conditions that explain why political decentralization leads to violence outcome. This requires in-depth exploration and this thesis tries to understand the ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas of Bodoland, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. The next section provides a brief research note and experiences from the field.

A Brief Research Note: Lessons learned in the field

Field work is a very perceptive as well as difficult task. Building rapport with the participants in the interview is difficult/ challenging at the initial stage. Language can be one of the obstacles between the researcher and the respondents. But, before going to field, the most difficult task it to make the contacts. Contacting people in the field was challenging and finding the right person to help out in the field was more challenging.

Developing the semi-structured questions and also the right choice of questions was an immense learning exercise. The study chose not to ask questions directly to the respondents, lest they feel threatened. The subject required adequate homework before entering into the field. This I learnt from my field experiences in Darjeeling district of West Bengal where I began to work as a research assistant in a village called Lebong gaon. I visited Gorkhaland to understand the violent movements and decentralization structure of Gorkhaland. Initially the respondents seemed reluctant and avoided my questions on Gorkhaland movement. They suspected us as government agents, which created a sense of unwillingness on their part to participate. So, building trust with the respondents is

sometimes challenging. Asking a direct question about movement and violence can be avoided in those situations. Later on I realized later that, people are more concerned about their culture and tradition. So, I had an added advantage to gather knowledge about the cultural history, traditions and issues indirectly related to violence. Indirect questions were useful in this research. Language sometimes becomes the barrier. Therefore, in the field I took the assistance of an interpreter to understand and communicate with the respondents in some cases for e.g. in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao where people speak their own languages.

The most difficult task in the field is transport and communication to areas where there is no adequate roads infrastructure. Some hilly places were difficult to travel. The interior places had inadequate roads infrastructure. My experience to Hamren region of Karbi Anglong was quite challenging. I visited the place of Karbi king, who used to live in a village on the top of a hill called Rongbong Ronghang. There was virtually no road to reach the place, but a narrow unpaved path to walk. Old people living in this region do not know other languages than theirs. Although I was accompanied by the local interpreter, interviewing them was a big task, because a gap remains between the interpreter and the researcher. Questions asked by the researcher are not always understood by the interpreter for which getting proper perspective for the question is sometimes problematic. There was a similar experience from the field of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous Council, where we had to travel on foot to reach some of the interior hilly areas.

In some regions, women were more reluctant and would not like to share their ideas and even would not answer the questions put to them. They would simply say, “Ask my husband”. For a male researcher, it was challenging to interact with female members of

these areas. But, during my visit to different relief camps in BTAD, RHAC and Karbi Anglong it was interesting to see that women participated a lot because of their grievances and difficulties faced in the relief camps.

Most difficult and challenging task during field work was to collect information from the government officials. The first expression they showed when we entered their offices was: “I am very busy right now. Please come tomorrow”. They will be giving excuses of not to sharing government documents and information with anyone who does not have permission from a higher authority.

Overall what I learnt from my field experiences is that though there are some difficulties in the field work, it provides an understanding of the ground realities about the people, their places, cultural traditions and the perspectives on the subject of research.

The next section gives a brief outline of the chapters incorporated in the thesis.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter one (1) gave an outline of the thesis and discussed the concepts used in the thesis. It also explained briefly about the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence. The chapter also discussed the research methodology used to analyze the process of political decentralization and ethnic violence. Besides understanding the theoretical aspects, this chapter discussed the methods of case selection and data collection. A brief lesson learned in the field was also discussed in the chapter.

Chapter two discusses the theoretical background of political decentralization and the relation with ethnic violence. This chapter discusses the existing literature relevant to the

theoretical background and the area of study. The chapter gives an elaborate account of the process of political decentralization as a conflict prevention mechanism and why it may fail in some cases.

The third chapter attempts to locate the political history of Assam. This is an endeavor to understand whether the policies of British administration have relevance in present administrative procedures and structures in India. Many administrative structures in the constitution of India are the products of British legacy. British administration used different sets of administrative structures for hills and the plains of undivided Assam. The areas were divided as excluded areas and partially excluded areas where tribal communities were granted their own administration. The same structure has been incorporated into the constitution as the Sixth Schedule for the administration of hill areas of Northeast India granting autonomous structure to the ethnic tribal groups. Therefore, a descriptive analysis of the historical documents is made in this chapter on the political history of Assam.

Chapter 4 focuses on the case study of Bodoland to understand the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence in the Bodoland area. It also tries to establish a link between elite incentives and ethnic violence and explains how elite incentives may serve as a conditioning factor for ethnic violence in decentralized regions such as Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). The chapter tries to analyze how electoral incentives and competition for resources among elites may create conditions for ethnic violence in decentralized regions. While understanding elite incentives, it is understood in two perspectives, intra-elite and inter-elite competition. To understand the process of ethnic violence and elite incentives, the chapter also relied on local newspapers, archival records and extensive fieldwork to different parts of the autonomous region. For

this chapter, data was collected from various offices including the Election Commission, Deputy Commissioner's (DC) offices, and the offices of Superintendent of Police (SP) in different districts (administrative units) to know about ethnic violence and how it is related to elections and incentives of the elites.

In Chapter 5, the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in Bodoland, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao has been examined using the perspective of elite incentives. They have been deliberately chosen because Assam has three autonomous councils under Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India and all three have experienced ethnic violence after devolution of power and decentralization. The three autonomous areas consist of different tribal and non-tribal ethnic communities with demands and counter demands for their respective rights. Ethnic movements led by the dominant groups for separation led to violence in the process. However, after negotiations, autonomy was granted to dominant ethnic groups with the hope of peaceful and democratic transition in these areas. However in practice, the process of political decentralization failed to reduce ethnic violence in the decentralized areas. This chapter therefore explores the conditions under which political decentralization may have led to ethnic violence. Ethnic violence in this chapter is examined from the perspective of elite competition for political gains and resources. A comparative analysis has also been made between Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

The concluding chapter begins with the analysis and understanding of the relationship of political decentralization and ethnic violence using theoretical perspectives and lessons learnt from the case of Bodoland. The chapter examines peripheral cases like Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. The chapter provides an analysis of the cases while understanding the limitations of the research. It also tries to provide a note on the future

scope of the study and policy implications. In sum, the analysis made in the thesis contributes to the literature which insists that political decentralization is less successful in reducing ethnic violence; rather it has intensified in some areas of Assam in Northeast India.

Summary

The introductory part of the chapter briefly discussed different concepts used in the thesis. This chapter tried to conceptualize how ethnic identities were formed and what are the approaches to understand ethnicity and how it is related to ethnic violence. It also tried to discuss the outline of the chapters. The chapter also gave a background of the methodology used to organize the thesis and how the research is being done. The field experience earned while doing research is discussed in the last section of the chapter as a research note. This chapter introduced the reader to the argument in the thesis explaining the selection of cases, tools used in the thesis. The next chapter explains the theories and existing literature to examine the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence.



Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Political decentralization is considered to be one of the measures of conflict prevention that reduces ethnic violence and demands for ethnic separatism. Political decentralization allows contending groups to control their own affairs on culture, resources, politics and economy. However, the measure has been successful only in some cases, whereas in others, political decentralization has shown mixed responses. While some ethnically diverse regions manage to maintain considerable peace, others experience enduring violence. Variation across time and space has therefore been identified as dilemma in the literature on ethnic violence (Varshney, 2002, p. 6). Why does political decentralization lead to mixed outcomes? What are the conditions under which political decentralization fosters ethnic violence? The study addresses these questions with a special focus on the second question while trying to understand the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence in the context of Northeast India. The next section is an analysis of different approaches of conflict prevention measures and its relation to ethnic violence.

Existing Approaches on Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is an important feature of security and governance of individual countries. International, regional and non-governmental organizations also advocate various preventive policies and measures, which comprise of short-term goals such as conducting

democratic elections as well as long-term socio-economic development and post-conflict financial assistance programs to build up war-torn polities (Ackermann, 2003). Prevention of ethnic conflict was one of the main ambitions of the United Nations during the period of Cold war. Michael S. Lund defined conflict prevention as a basic and intervening factor to keep away disputes from growing into major violent conflict (Lund, 2009). It is also used to strengthen the capability of political parties to resolve such disputes peacefully. He also mentioned that two instruments can be used for conflict prevention i.e. direct or operational prevention and structural prevention. In operational preventions, instruments like the discovery of evidence, controlling the missions, compromise, intervention, construction of means for discussion amongst opposing groups and confident building procedures are used to prevent violence among contending groups. On the other hand, structural prevention measures comprise of establishing democratic regimes, promising good governance, human rights, long-term socio-economic and political stability and appropriate measures to allow civil society groups to contribute to durable peace building (Lund, 2009). Therefore, when ethnic violence erupts in a region, government authorities and agencies try to contain violence and settle the violent conflicts. To prevent violence between contending groups, individual governments adopt certain policies and conflict prevention measures.

The literature also reveals that conflict prevention allows the space to build up institutional arrangements that can stop tensions which usually leads to violent clash among groups. Regional organizations also offer several provisions in the pursuit of effective conflict prevention measures. Some of the preventive mechanisms that governments have so far applied include use of military forces in the conflict-ridden areas (Carment & Schnabel, 2003). These are however short term interventional measures used by governments and

international actors which may not ensure durable peace. Some of the durable measures that the international community employed in war-torn zones are accommodation of the ethnic leaders in the federal system of government, partial sharing of power and granting autonomy to the strife-torn regions. In recent decades, especially after the third wave of democratization, states have implemented autonomy and territorial decentralization as effective measures of conflict prevention (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985).

Other writings on conflict prevention mechanism which blossomed since the 1990s discuss different methods to prevent violent conflict. Structural and procedural arrangements have been used to prevent future conflict in some states of Western Europe.³¹ Institutionalization of preventive policies and strategies are important for effective prevention of ethnic conflict (Ackermann, 2003). In a violent situation, states can respond in different ways according to the need of the situation. States especially use two different ways, repression and accommodation of ethnic groups to reduce ethnic violence. Repressive measures include using of state armed forces to punish and suppress the violent conflict initiated by any ethnic groups (Tilly, 1978). Bleich, Caeiro and Luehrman argued that state responses to a violent conflict is primarily repressive and later the state may become accommodative to prevent future conflicts. Accommodation includes financial help, different welfare programs and good governance including self-governance of the community by means of decentralization. When repressive measures fail to solve the issues of violence, the state may resort to accommodative measures giving their rights of self-rule. Their study includes cases of London (Brixton), Bradford, Lyon and Paris to understand

³¹ Structural arrangements are the long term measures to contain ethnic violence which includes measures like good governance and financial assistance. On the other hand, procedural arrangements are known as immediate actions to suppress violent conflict using military forces and repressive measures to stop violent activities used by communities (Tanner, 2000).

state responses in violent conflicts (Bleich, Caeiro, & Luchrman, 2010). United Nations (UN) tried both repressive and accommodative measures to prevent ethnic violence in Rwanda and Bosnia (Tanner, 2000). Two principal methods of conflict prevention were used by the UN, structural or long-term and perational or short term. The structural methods use different accommodative measures like good governance or financial assistance as tools to prevent violence that may occur in the future. The operational method is used to alternate immediate threats by deploying military and repression to stop violent activities used by communities (Tanner, 2000). While analyzing state responses towards ethnic separatism of Assam Saikia argued that the government used prolonged coercion and constant refusal to ethnic demands made by different groups of Assam. Repressive measures were used by means of deploying armed forces against the insurgent groups like NDFB and BLT to stabilize peace in the region (Saikia, 2011). Davenport argued that states use repressive measures to maintain political order where repression comprises of intimidation, prohibition, arrests, persecution, and killing of people by government forces within the territory. Such repression or coercion is used to stabilize political order in conflict-ridden societies (Devenport, 2007).

On the other hand, there are scholars like Oberschall who disucussed about methods of accommodation to prevent conflicts. Oberschall argued that there are other means of conflict prevention which includes peace building through constitutional design, implying power sharing mechanism, signing peace accords, disarming and most importantly economic and social reconstruction in a multiethnic society. He insisted, “peace building rests on security, political reform, truth and justice, and social and political reconstruction (Oberschall, 2007).” Peace building is possible through a power sharing mechanism, by

process of political decentralization and empowering the local people with self-rule (Oberschall, 2007). He draws examples from peace processes in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine. Some scholars, however, argue that sometimes accommodation works more than repression in violence-affected regions. Horowitz insisted on accommodation of the communities that resort to ethnic violence for their demands. He draws an example from Malaysia where both Chinese and Malays were accommodated. Accommodation is classified into structural and preferential policies by the scholar where structural accommodation means strengthening federalism and changes of the electoral system which was adopted in Nigeria. On the other hand, preferential policies of accommodation means preferential treatment to certain communities to reduce ethnic violence in multiethnic societies. Such preferential policies were implemented in Malaysia and Sri Lanka where special preferences were given to certain communities and to reduce ethnic violence in these regions (Horowitz, 2000).

Coakley insisted on the territorial solution to reduce ethnic conflict. He argued that, if territorial autonomy is granted to the ethnic groups that are engaged in violence, it can prevent ethnic violence (Coakley, 2003). Devolution of power to the small territorial units and providing ethnic groups territorial autonomy can prevent ethnic conflicts. Granting territorial autonomy to the aggrieved ethnic groups provides space for self-administration by the ethnic groups keeping the tangible and symbolic values intact in the process of administration which may reduce ethnic violence and urge for separation.

Approaches on political decentralization as a conflict prevention mechanism

The process of political decentralization involves shifting of power and authority to local governments, where sharing of power is essential between the centre and the local authorities.³² The fundamental arrangement of governance is altered by transferring authorities and resources from the centre to the peripheral governments (Rodden, 2004). Sharing of authority is important in political decentralization. Electoral mechanisms are used as important means to shift power and authority to subnational levels. This also provides the political space to local political elites.

Political decentralization is often used to reduce ethnic violence in war-torn countries. It is implemented in the violence-affected areas in various countries to accommodate the ethnic groups while giving political rights to the population. The process of political decentralization is considered to reduce the gap between government and ethnic groups, bringing them closer to each other, to improve the service quality and relationship between the government and local people (Yin & Lucas, 1973). Yin and Lucas also stated that political decentralization makes the government more responsible to the need of the people, to receive better services and to become less alienated from the central political authority. At this point, definite command over different resources is shifted to local levels for participatory opportunities, to improve services and to distribute resources to local

³² Decentralization can be explained using three aspects, administrative, fiscal and political decentralization. Administrative decentralization is understood as the distribution of administrative setup from central to local level for an efficient administration. Fiscal decentralization is understood as the disbursing of control of finances to various points within a network of operation rather than controlling from a single point. Political decentralization involves overall transfer of power and authority to the local government (Rodden, 2004).

people. The process of transferring resources reduces political isolation by associating citizens in political arrangements reducing distrust and sense of powerlessness.³³

Decentralization policies implemented in post-conflict situations changed government and politics in fundamental ways in many places. Due to political decentralization, the contribution in earning and expenditure improved in developing countries where the process involves the transfer of most important government services like education, health services, housing and transportation to the local level. In countries like Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Ethiopia political decentralization led to the revival of subnational interests and territorial politics (Falleti, 2010, p. 3). Revival of territorial interests varied from one country to another, but when implemented, this kind of decentralization policies showed balancing of intergovernmental power among national and subnational executives. Political decentralization also includes constitutional or electoral reforms which transfer political power to local leaders and create or activate arenas for political delegation in local level politics.³⁴ In devolving authorities to subnational levels, central decision-making authorities may choose administrative decentralization over fiscal decentralization and fiscal decentralization over political decentralization. But, local elites prefer the system in an opposite way, demanding political decentralization as their first option because it involves territorial devolution of power to the subnational level. In transitioning societies like Indonesia, political decentralization has been a part of the democratization process after late 1990s post-Suharto regime. While political decentralization tends to increase the power of subnational political actors, democratization

³³ See Robert K. Yin and William A. Lucas, Decentralization and Alienation (*Policy Sciences*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Sept., 1973): pp. 327-336

³⁴ See Tulia G. Falleti, *Decentralization and Subnational Politics in Latin America* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010) p. 17

process tries to implement the policies of election and representation in a state that is in transition (Falleti, 2010). National governments decentralized power away from the center, as an electoral strategy in countries like Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Providing unprecedented power to subnational levels make political elites at local level believe that there have chances of acquiring decentralized power and positions through subnational elections (O'Neill, 2005). This has become a political strategy used by newly transitioning heterogeneous societies for accommodation of different cultural groups and marginalized ethnicities by creating federalist forms of government.

Benjamin Goldfrank relates participatory opportunity with deepening democracy. According to him, deepening democracy is also a part of political decentralization providing an opportunity for political participation of individuals directly. Participation of people strengthens the civil society and increases state responsiveness and transparency. The process of deepening democracy reaches the unrepresented and deprived sections granting them power and opportunity in the decision making process by decentralizing power and designing new participatory institutions (Goldfrank, 2007). Political decentralization leads to local autonomy, and is inherently beneficial to citizens. Decentralization is considered a feature of administrative or political systems comprising of constitutional, administrative and financial indicators on the actual working of the relations between the centre and local level institutions. It is a means for better governance by redistributing tasks, competencies and other resources between central and local governments (Fleurke & Willemse, 2004).

The above sections discussed how political decentralization is related to deepening democracy and may reduce ethnic violence. But some scholars show that political decentralization has an impact on ethno-political mobilization. Historically suppressed

minority identities in the decentralized regions may demand absolute political decentralization of 'regional ideational space' (Miodownik & Cartrite, 2010). An example can be drawn from Corsica in France which demonstrates that most of the governments worried that political decentralization may persuade local leaders for demands for group autonomy.³⁵

Further, it is also possible that granting power to local authorities may reduce ethno-political violence (Miodownik & Cartrite, 2010). These scholars argued that moderate level of decentralization encourages ethno-national mobilization, whereas a higher level reduces violence by giving the local elites their spaces for political and administrative power. Political elites garner support to gain power by engaging in local interests like issues of collective recognition or issues related to borders effecting groups inhabiting a definite territory. According to Miodownik and Cartrite, in such ethno-political movements, two things are mostly observed. First, social cleavages separating the minorities and majorities and secondly, as a response to bridge the gap between social cleavages, the government creates an accommodative structure which is likely to reduce the urge for separation and ethnic violence.³⁶ Transfer of authorities and formation of local self-governance are viewed to generate opportunities for local elites to demand more autonomy to the local institutions.

In the federal structure of government, decentralization plays a crucial role in reducing ethnic violence by sharing of power between centre and the state for proper

³⁵ In August 2000, the then French interior minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement resigned in protest against extending political decentralization to Corsica. The minister argued that accommodating the Corsicans would foster more demands from Corsicans as well as from Alsations, Bretons and Basques for additional demands for more autonomy and decentralization (Miodownik & Cartrite, 2010).

³⁶ See Dan Miodownik and Britt Cartrite, Does Political Decentralization Exacerbate or Ameliorate Ethno-political Mobilization? A Test of Contesting Propositions (*Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4, Dec., 2010) pp. 731-746

administration of the decentralized areas. In such an arrangement, ‘there is a vertical separation of authority among various levels of government’ (Brancati, 2006). Each level has autonomous powers to take decisions over some issues. In the majority of cases, decentralization arrangements have three layers of governments- central level, state level and local levels of government. Political decentralization explained as the territorial relocation of duties and power from the central level to local level governments (Braathen & Hellevik, 2008).

Thus, decentralization is inherently territorial. The process restructures the territorial boundaries of a state for proper administration of the area, where the centre and the state can reach people directly through these institutions. By decentralizing power, centre accommodates the ethnic leaders to administer the regions. Political decentralization therefore is treated as one of the most efficient conflict prevention mechanisms in many developing regions.

Political decentralization and autonomy can reallocate political control, representation, and command over the resources to the local level of administration which involve vertical division of autonomy to the authorities and horizontal division of powers such as political, administrative, fiscal decentralization.³⁷ It gives additional authority to local leaders in these areas to manage resources to their requirements and can regulate laws that can retain the cultural and ethnic identities of the group. Political decentralization may reduce ethnic violence in such cases because it empowers the minorities that are numerically small as compared to the dominant majority group (Tranchant, 2007). It increases the welfare of the ethnic minorities by empowering them to design and implement public

³⁷ In this thesis political decentralization, autonomy and territorial space have been used interchangeably.

policies according to their choices. Decentralization provides a degree of openness to the process of decision-making at the local level of the government. It also empowers the small ethnic groups. When the minority ethnic groups are recognized and empowered, there is a probability that violence will reduce to a considerable extent. Therefore, political decentralization has been an effective peace building mechanism in many conflict-ridden areas (Tranchant, 2007).

According to Brancati, political decentralization prevents violence by allowing the groups to manage their socio-political and economic affairs. This process decreases ethnic violence and secessionism while reducing the gap between government and people by means of providing more opportunity for popular participation (Brancati, 2006).

Other scholars also argued that political decentralization diminishes the likelihood of ethnic violence as it can satisfy the local grievances and provide an immediate response to the need of ethnic groups which reduces the tendency of contention among ethnic groups. They argue that political decentralization provides political representation to the ethnic groups, give them a scope for participation in the process of decision-making by transferring power and responsibilities to local level legislation which consequently reduces the likelihood of ethnic violence (Gurr, 1994; Lijphart, 1996; Brass, 2004). As these scholars argue, political decentralization is used as conflict management as an attempt to contain and limit ethnic violence by establishing an institutional framework through which interests of the conflicting groups can be accommodated. Power sharing mechanism in the decentralized structure can reduce violence and secessionism. For e.g. South Tyrol where power sharing through political decentralization reduced ethnic violence (Wolff, 2004). Similarly Cyprus

showed how consociational governments reduced ethnic violence in the regions (Jarstad, 2001). Cyprus experienced violent conflict led by *Ethniki Organosis Kyprion Agoniston* or National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) during 1955-59 (Cassia, 1999). Consociational was adopted in such regions to reduce ethnic violence by means of decentralizing political power to the local elites (Coakley, 1994).

Territorial and non-territorial autonomy has also been extensively used as mechanisms to reduce ethnic conflict in conflict-ridden areas. In Papua, decentralization and regional power sharing was adopted at the time of economic crisis and political reform that helped in increasing opportunities and to decrease the motivations for violence (Kivimaki & Thorning, 2002). Recently local and village leaders tried to reduce ethnic violence taking help of their native model of conflict prevention in Indonesia. Decentralized power to the local authorities helped to solve the conflicts among ethnic minorities in some parts of Indonesia. Although struggle for natural resources and corruption is very much prevalent in a decentralized structure in Indonesia, these institutions empowered the local authorities (Davidson, 2005).

Scholars also argued that creation of decentralized forms of governance helps reduce potential conflicts and violence by allowing ethnic minorities to have significant access to political power and economic resources (Fleiner, Kalin, Linder, & Saunders, 2003). The section discussed that decentralization is an effective tool to maintain peace and resolve conflict in heterogeneous societies. The process has been successful to manage the relation between the centrally dominant Javanese and peripheral minorities like Aceh and Papua in Indonesia. Decentralization is also considered to reduce conflict as it improves the

effectiveness in the working of the local self-governing institutions (Tambulasi, 2009). The process of political decentralization reduced ethnic tensions and violence to some extent between the dominant Javanese and ethnic minorities in Aceh. The decentralized regions administered their own region with their favorable law to the land with lesser interference from the central government. When there is less interference from the central government and from the dominant ethnic group, trust among the contending groups increases resulting in less ethnic tensions.

Critics on the other hand, argue that decentralization is not always helpful for the state to contain ethnic violence. Sometimes, decentralization may act as a contributing factor that causes ethnic violence. A significant point to emphasize in this context is that where the central state is weak, the introduction of decentralization may lead to secessionism or even to dissolution of the central political authority because some sub-national units are strong enough to effectively challenge the central government. In this situation, the introduction of local governance structures may have a destabilizing impact on the central political authority. In other cases, the central government may face severe challenges while granting territorial autonomy if the majority group/s oppose these kinds of policies. Adhoc peace agreements which involve providing decentralization to some group at the cost of autonomy of other groups may also lead to a spiral of similar demands.

How does political decentralization promote ethnic violence in multicultural societies and what are the reasons behind the failure of political decentralization? This question is addressed in the next section.

Approaches on political decentralization fostering ethnic violence

Ruth Lapidoth argued that decentralization is a process for distribution of power to protect the culture of groups in multiethnic societies. She emphasized that decentralization succeeded in a number of cases whereas in others, decentralization proved to be a failure. Successful cases included Aland-Island, South Tyrol, the Faroe Islands among other regions and failed cases included Eritrea, Southern Sudan and others. Lapidoth cites economic factors and regimes of internationalization as some of the factors for the failure of political autonomy and decentralization in these areas (Lapidoth, 1996). To examine the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence previous studies examined various perspectives. Some of these perspectives identified in this study are ***(a) institutional analysis (formation of subnational political parties and electoral incentives) and (b) group level analysis (emerging ethnic minorities and competition for resources)***. The following sections discuss these perspectives in detail.

(a) Institutional analysis

Tambulasi stated that there are fewer studies that examine the relations between political decentralization and intergovernmental conflict.³⁸ He draws the example of decentralization and conflict in Malawi in South Africa, where under the Local Government Act 1998 there was an overarching aim for a local government system to develop independent values, responsibility, lucidity and involvement of the public in executive and in the development process. The first Five Year Plan (2000-2005) in Malawi intensified

³⁸ Intergovernmental conflict means conflict for power between central government and the decentralized government, where the decentralized government tries to acquire more power and on the other hand, the centre tries to minimize the devolution of power (Tambulasi, 2009).

conflict because of inadequately designed decentralizing institutions. The central and local governments were in conflict because of structural problems with decentralization where the centre failed to shift actual powers to the decentralized areas. As a result, the conflict took place between the central and local governments (Tambulasi, 2009).

Montero also stated that conflict is likely to happen when the centre allows decentralizations to the local level bodies. Institutional or intergovernmental conflict arises when power is more centralized and dominated by central authorities leaving the local government in the state of powerlessness. On decentralization, local government bodies try to accumulate power which leads to conflict between the central and local governments. He draws examples from the cases of Argentina, Brazil, Spain and Mexico where power was more centralized (Montero, 2001). Another example can be drawn from Corsica in France where political decentralization persuaded local leaders to ask for more autonomy in the region (Miodownik & Cartrite, 2010).

Competition for political power in the decentralized structures also contributes to violence between the contending ethnic groups. For example, in Indonesia, a competitive party system which emerged in the transitioning phase of Indonesia contributed to elite competition and violence (Hadiz, 2004). Aspinall also argues with empirical evidence that power-sharing arrangement in decentralized autonomous regions like Aceh waged new forms of separatist violence (Aspinall & Crouch, 2003).

But how do we understand the relationship between electoral competition and ethnic violence?³⁹ The relationship between *political/electoral competition and ethnic violence* remained a subject of concern for instrumentalists as well as scholars using constructivist perspectives. Political powers can be acquired from the election process in the decentralized institutions. During elections and campaigns, political elites/ leaders try to motivate and spread rumour about the group members. They try to incite and create hatred against other ethnic groups. Gurr explains that intensive competition and inequalities among groups in heterogeneous societies may also intensify power struggle among the political elites, increase the salience of ethnic identities and the likelihood of conflict (Gurr, 1994). Scholars like Wilkinson argued that political competition may lead to violence as an outcome of rational choice and political incentives of elites (Wilkinson, 2004). Wilkinson uses an instrumentalist perspective which rests on the instrumental use of ethnic identity for political or economic purposes by elites.⁴⁰ Elites use old animosities and differences (primordial attachment) to motivate a group according to their preferences. To fulfill their material gains, elites instigate violence by spreading rumor and promoting primordial hatred.

Similarly to understand the relationship between electoral competition between elites and violence, Neil Devotta used the approach of ethnic outbidding. *Ethnic outbidding* can be stated as an action by which different sub-groups within the same ethnic group tries to depict themselves as the actual protector of the community. They try to portray themselves as legitimate actors within the group against their rivals. Devotta draws examples from Sri

³⁹ For further work on electoral competition see, Saumitra Jha, 'Unfinished business': Historic complementarities, political competition and ethnic violence in Gujarat (*Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organization*, Vol. 104, August, 2014) pp. 18-36.

⁴⁰ Also see Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 27.

Lanka, where Sinhalese elites resorted to ethnic outbidding for dominance over the Tamil minorities. According to him, political struggle among the leaders of the Sinhalese group led to ethnic outbidding for access to political power. The language policy or the Sinhala Only Act supported by the dominant Sinhalese group contributed to outbidding in the politics of identity and ethnic violence in Sri Lanka (Devotta, 2005). Initially, both Tamils and Sinhalese led the Swabasha movement to be implemented in Sri Lanka. But, Sinhalese being the majority ethnic group in the state feared to outnumber the people of Tamil origin. Sinhala only was therefore implemented as the outcome of ethnic outbidding between the Sinhalese parties (Devotta, 2005). The politics of dominance for power and outbidding led to conflict between the majority and minority groups in Sri Lanka.

According to Rabushka and Shepsle (also Horowitz), ethnic outbidding starts when political parties starts appealing voters on grounds of ethnic identity. However, parties cannot gain votes on the basis of mobilization, but they adopt extremist positions in competition against their competitors. As a result, the electoral competition is not only within the elites but among the voters as well. In these circumstances, political parties assume that voters are radical and they will be moved by the electoral agenda of the political parties (Horowitz, 1985; Rabushka & Shepsle, 1971). The candidates for the elections are selected almost exclusively on the basis of their ethnic identity (Rabushka & Shepsle, 1972).

Zuber and Szocsik argued, 'democracy cannot be stable in a heterogeneous society and there are constant competitions between political parties to garner support on the basis of ethnicity' (Zuber & Szocsik, 2015). These scholars argued that ethnic outbidding emerged as ethnically segmented electoral competitions when ethnic parties competed with

the parties that appeal to the same ethnic group and where ethnicity plays a crucial role for parties and the voters (Zuber & Szocsik, 2015).

Political decentralization therefore provides a political ground for stiff struggle for the resources and different political positions in the decentralized zones. This may also lead to the creation of new minorities within the decentralized areas and create situations of horizontal inequality between and amongst different ethnic groups inhabiting the region. Unequal distribution of resources can lead to material insecurity and economically threaten the marginalized ethnic group. This can further ignite conflict for further decentralization or distribution of scarce resources (Braathen & Hellevik, 2008). The limited autonomy structure in Sri Lanka and government's unwillingness to provide power to non-Sinhalese ethnic groups fostered more violence between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Some argue that limited incentives and incomplete autonomy fostered more violence in Sri Lanka (Sahadevan, 2012). From the above discussion, we can draw that, though political decentralization is considered as a conflict prevention mechanism, it does not always prevent violence but sometimes it intensifies more violence in decentralized areas.

Kanchan Chandra also uses ethnic outbidding to examine ethnic politics in Uttar Pradesh in India. Kanchan Chandra explained the case of Uttar Pradesh in the 1990s where political parties tried to outbid each other to get support from dominant Hindu population on the basis of a Hindutva identity (Chandra, 2005). Ethnic elites played a crucial role in outbidding as Chandra argues. Conflicting interests and weak internal structures of the

political parties created splits in the ethnic parties which further promoted outbidding in multiethnic societies (Chandra, 2000).

In the same way, in the case of *Bodoland* and other decentralized areas of India's Northeast, electoral competition and ethnic outbidding may have been the probable causes of ethnic violence in the 1990s and 2000s. Political leaders of the same ethnic group belonging to different political parties mobilized group members to engage in violence for political benefits. Political groups active in Bodoland, such as BPF, BPPF and UPDF (United People's Democratic Front) and recently formed United People's Party (UPP) may have used violence as the means to gain political power in the decentralized institutions in the region.

Lack of power sharing arrangements in the decentralized institutions may also lead to competition for power and violence between the contending ethnic groups. The effects of power sharing on conflict prevention have been examined elsewhere by scholars like Arend Lijphart who argued that in an extremely alienated society where groups are culturally divided, the demands for recognition of divisions can be made by a power sharing mechanism. According to Lijphart, power sharing is the inclusion of political leaders belonging to different ethnic groups in the decision making process of the state (Lijphart, 2004; Lijphart, 1991). According to Arend Lijphart, power sharing model can only be applicable in deeply divided societies but, that society should have a consociational democracy. Consociational democracy includes four aspects: an alliance government to facilitate a legislative body consisting of major linguistic and cultural groups, self-government for these groups, quota in the political system and appointment in the civil

services and lastly veto power for the marginalized groups. India also experienced a power sharing model till 1960s. After 1960s power sharing reduced and it became less strong and pervasive with the rise of BJP. Declining of power sharing has shown an increase in ethnic resentment and violence in many parts of India (Lijphart, 1996). Similarly, Hartzell and Hoddie argued that power sharing among ethnic groups increases political interactions which can be implemented as a conflict prevention mechanism. A coalition of different ethnic groups in a territory reduces violence and increases peace among the ethnic groups (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003). These scholars proposed that power sharing can be an efficient tool to prevent violence among ethnic groups. Power sharing model offered by these scholars will lead to interaction among the different ethnic groups and resolution of conflicts by mutual power sharing and consensus.

Lijphart's work has been criticized by Wilkinson who argued that consociationalism may act otherwise and increase ethnic tensions as it happened in India. He pointed out that under conditions of consociationalism, certain groups will be left out as ethnicity is 'multidimensional and oppositional.'⁴¹ According to Wilkinson, inefficiency of power sharing and unequal political representation of ethnic groups in a politically decentralized institution may foster violence.

The absence of adequate power sharing arrangements and unequal political representation between the minority ethnic groups in the decentralized institutions may

⁴¹ Wilkinson while taking reference from Fredrick Barth (Barth, 1968) stated, "The basic assumption of consociationalism- that there is a fixed number of ethnic groups that can each be satisfied with a portion of political power and state resources- is fundamentally flawed. Consociational settlements will always leave some groups out because ethnicity is multidimensional and oppositional- multidimensional because an individual is usually a member of several different ethnic groups simultaneously and oppositional because an individual's ethnicity is defined by opposition to another ethnic group that seems to be blocking access to economic resources and political power." See, Stevan Ian Wilkinson, India, Consociational Theory, and Ethnic Violence (*Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, Issue. 5, 2000), pp. 769-791.

perhaps explain the recurring phenomena of violence in BTAD. Though there are reservation of seats for other communities that are smaller in number in BTAD, political representation and the allocation of seats in the decentralized institutions are not adequate compared to the number of ethnic minorities and the claimants for the distribution of resources in BTAD.

(b) Group level analysis

The second perspective on the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence is related to a group level analysis where ethnic relations between groups are an important causal factor. Lake and Rothchild stated that ethnic violence is frequently generated by groups that are uncertain about their future. Ethnic violence is not always the outcome of differences between groups or *ancient hatreds* or age-old animosities (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). They also argued that political elites of an ethnic group may construct identities around group fears and uncertainties to create a divide among the groups. Memories and old sentiments may be intensified by creating distrust and suspicion that may force the fighting groups to resort to violence. Competition for possession of scarce resources and government goods (school education, labor, land, jobs, health care facilities) between the fighting groups may also be the predictor of violent activities. These scholars draw examples from Nigeria, Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia, where competition for public resources played an important role in ethnic violence (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Barry Posen used the approach of 'security dilemma' to examine conflict in Yugoslavia after the disintegration of the region and the processes of democratic transition that were taking

shape in the 1990s in post-cold war Europe (Posen, 1993).⁴² Fear of domination by one particular ethnic group (Serbs) led to fear and suspicion of others like the Croats about their security and existence in the region. To draw an example from Indonesia, decentralization led to conflict and violence in the late 1990s and 2000s. Aspinall argued that Habibie provided power to local elites through ‘Big Bang’ decentralization allowing control over local resources. However, instead of preventing violence, decentralization intensified violence in some places and led to another phenomenon which is referred to as ‘bossism’ in some districts in Indonesia. Aspinall identifies a major problem with the new forms of decentralized governance in Indonesia which he feels is continuously run by inherited institutions of networks and patronage which do not suit the newly decentralized structures in Indonesia. This resulted in more violence (Aspinall, 2010). Aspinall draws a relationship between *natural resources and ethnic violence*. He argues that natural resources *per se* may not contribute to violence but the abundance of natural resources may produce territorialized cultural identities and a collective frame that social elites may use to legitimize contention for resources and the resulting ethnic violence. He draws examples from Aceh, East Kalimantan and Riau (Aspinall, 2007). Jamie Davidson also argued that ethnic violence in Indonesia in the late 1990s is not the product of primordial animosities or incompatible cultures of the region. Rather, decentralization led to the politicization of ethno-religious and territorial identities which created more ethnic violence. The process of political decentralization provided a ground for political elites to mobilize the ethnic groups for more autonomy on the basis of identity. Elites manipulated ethnic identities on the issue of natural resource control and exploitation by the central political elites in Java. Mobilization of

⁴² Security dilemma as stated by Posen was the anarchy after the collapse of imperial regimes. It is a state of absence of a sovereign where each country is suspicious of others regarding internal as well as external security. The dilemma rests on the question of alliance and security of nations (Posen, 1993).

ethnic grievances on control of natural resources and ethnic violence in decentralized areas like Kalimantan, Aceh and other marginal areas in the archipelago is an example of the relationship between resources, competition and violence in politically decentralized regions (Davidson, 2005).

The end of Cold War led to the emergence of nationalist, ethnic and religious conflicts in Eastern Europe due to the collapse of former Soviet Union. Security dilemma which is the result of anarchy affected the relations amongst the nationalities of the breakup nation. Distrust and dilemma in a situation of anarchy made the smaller nationalities of transitioning Eastern Europe highly insecure. Uncertainty and fear of survival, as well as security of the nation, forced them to resort to preventive violence (Posen, 1993). Interethnic violence between the Serbs and Bosnians is often cited as an example of preventive war produced out of a situation of anarchy.

Group level analysis in relation to competition for resources like land may also be used to understand ethnic violence in decentralized regions in India's northeast including BTAD. Land and other resources such as forest resources from where revenue is generated have been a contentious issue. **Land rights** have been governed by state laws. But, in the case of indigenous people, land rights are dominated by the customary law of the land for land ownership.⁴³ Civil law of land is the common law of the land which is regulated by the government. On the other hand, customary law of land is governed by group rights for protection of land and resources. In a multicultural and multiethnic society, the customary laws of a community are not overarching over civil laws. If land laws of that territory are

⁴³ According to customary law, traditional land holdings remain in the hands of tribal people. These lands are not transferable to the non-tribal population.

defined by the customary law of a community, there are chances of disagreement between ethnic communities and further conflict between communities living in that territory.

Though no customary law of the land is prevalent in the Bodoland areas, the land is administered by the Land Regulation Act of 1886 and under the jurisdiction of BTAD. But, in some places, the tribal population sells their land to non-tribal people out of heavy debts. Conflict may emerge when the tribal population tries to regain the land that they lose in the process. Elites may politicize the issue of indigeneity and land as a source of competition with non-tribal or non-indigenous population occupying their land. According to Jeremy Waldron indigeneity means the original inhabitants with first occupancy of the land and place. The first occupancy means occupying prior to anyone else. Due to colonialism and migration indigeneity may acquire political significance. Waldron draws the examples of Maori and Iwi communities in New Zealand. He also said that indigeneity gains significance for issues of property, political control and self-determination (Waldron, 2003).

In the BTAD area Bodos claimed that since they are the first inhabitants of Assam, they have indigenous rights to land. In the politically decentralized areas like BTAD, transferring land to other ethnic group is not legally allowed as it falls in the category of tribal blocks and belts.⁴⁴ Empowering the Bodo community with political autonomy and decentralization of power increased the fear of non-Bodos residing in the decentralized areas of Bodoland.

Another perspective on the relationship between political decentralization and violence is related to the *emergence of ethnic minorities and formation of subnational*

⁴⁴ For further discussion on land issue and the politics of indigeneity in BTAD see Saikia, Chima & Baro, *India Review*: 2016.

political parties. Scholars like Fleiner and Saunders argued that decentralization allows limited autonomy and self-government to aggrieved communities. Nevertheless, the central power still continues to exercise subnational power and influence based on the majority principle. The central government retains the power to decide how much governmental power should be provided to ethnic minorities (Fleiner, Kalin, Linder, & Saunders, 2003). Another challenge faced by the newly decentralized authority is the question of newly emerging ethnic minorities within that region. Former minority groups may become predominant in the power structure and the decentralizing process. This may lead to political competition and struggle for control over local power and elite positions. Brancati observed that this encourages the increase of local political parties. The local parties reinforce the locally established ethnic identities, generating measures that provide special treatment to some group above others and that organized the other groups to fight for more power. The formation of small parties in the decentralized regions increases competition amongst smaller groups. Competition among the political parties formed along ethnic lines promotes the struggle to accumulate power and establish political legitimacy by competing groups. Creation of more regional parties in decentralized areas increases the chances of ethnic violence and secessionism as observed by Brancati (2006). This is also applicable to a certain extent to the case of Bodoland where competition among political parties formed along ethnic lines promoted ethnic violence in the region.

Scholars working on ethnofederalism also discuss the relationship between ethnofederalism and emergence of other ethnic minorities and the demands for secession or extreme autonomy and independence from the existing state. This can lead to a situation of violent mobilization. Liam Anderson stated that, if autonomy is granted to one minority

group in an ethnofederal unit there are chances that *other minorities may demand for more autonomy* from the ethnofederal unit. This might lead to a situation of violent mobilization. He draws examples from Slovakia and Yugoslavia, the cases of failed autonomy in ethnofederal states, where ethnic minorities organized government resources to protest against centralization and demanded further statehood and secessionism (Anderson L. , 2014).

Similarly, Cornell stated that ethnofederalism may not be the best indicator to prevent ethnic violence or secessionism. Factors influencing secessionism or violence in the autonomous regions may include territory, group identities, leadership, mass media and external support. Cornell draws the example of South Caucasus (Cornell, 2002). Roeder also argued that in a multiethnic society, ethnofederal provisions may politicize ethnic identities and escalate tensions between the existing centre of power and the ethnic minority groups (Roeder, 2009). In the Caucasian and Baltic republics, local leaders mobilized their ethnic groups using primordial ethnic sentiments. The resulting interethnic conflict created a further divide between Armenians and Azeris, Georgians and Abkhazians, and Georgians and Osetians in the Caucasus (Roeder P. G., 1991).

This study draws insight from the framework of power sharing forwarded by these scholars to understand whether lack of power sharing and unequal political representation of ethnic groups in decentralized areas like BTAD may have an impact on ethnic violence. Although the study argues that there are reservation of seats for other ethnic communities in the BTAD region, representation of minorities and political seat sharing is inadequate. This

factor may also have contributed to ethnic violence in the decentralized institutions of northeast India.

In order to understand the relationship between ethnic conflict and decentralization, this study therefore draws from two sets of literature. The first set of literature emphasizes the process of political decentralization which helps governments to prevent ethnic violence, whereas the second set of literature adds to the consideration of decentralization as the probable cause of ethnic conflict and violence.

To summarize, the analysis of the two sets of literature on political decentralization and ethnic violence shows that political decentralization may not always reduce ethnic violence. Sometimes political decentralization may promote ethnic violence. The thesis, therefore, argues that political decentralization as a conflict prevention mechanism may produce varied outcomes and therefore the effect of political decentralization has to be examined separately at a deeper level using historical and contextual factors of the particular case in question. The next section provides the research questions, propositions and the objectives of research in this thesis.

Research Questions

As political decentralization has shown varied outcomes in different places, the fundamental research questions that this thesis examines are:

- a) *Does political decentralization reduce ethnic violence or intensify violence?*
- b) *What are the conditions under which political decentralization may foster ethnic violence?*

Objectives

The main objectives of this research are to analyze the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence. With this objective, the research aims to understand the factors that can contribute to ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas and therefore to understand the variations in the outcome of conflict prevention mechanism.

The study will contribute to two sets of literature: a) ethnic violence and b) conflict prevention.

There are some contributing factors that are responsible for the failure to implement conflict prevention measures, but no thorough research has been done on this particular phenomenon. The research will enable us to fulfill the research gap in the existing literature. Furthermore, the research will provide newer empirical findings to the literature on ethnic conflict.

Explaining the variable

Based on the research problem and review of different sets of literature, this study developed workable proposition to understand the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in Assam with special reference to Bodoland. The workable proposition for the study is as follows:

Proposition: *The process of political decentralization may foster ethnic violence if there is an intensive power struggle among **political elites** within the decentralized areas.*

There may be ethnic violence in a region if there is a power struggle among the political elites within the decentralized areas. The power struggle can be understood using two perspectives, i.e., a power struggle within an ethnic group and power struggle among the elites of contending ethnic groups. In this study, elite competition will be understood using electoral incentives and competition for resources among elites within the decentralized areas.

(a) Electoral competition among elites and ethnic violence

Based on the understanding from the literature reviewed in the previous section, electoral competition/incentive is one of the primary factors responsible for ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas. In this thesis, ethnic violence will be understood from the perspective of elite competition for electoral incentives. Violence in the BTAD areas after political decentralization may have been caused because of intense competition of local elites for political incentives. Elite incentives may be understood based on competition between elites within the Bodos (intra-elite) and between the Bodos and other ethnic groups (inter-elite).

As there are many ethnic political parties in the BTAD area, competition for electoral incentives is very likely in the decentralized region. This section tries to understand whether intra-elite competition may promote ethnic violence in the decentralized regions. Ethnic political parties like BPF, UPP, and BPPF have their political bases and they compete to outbid each other. Intra-elite competition may therefore promote ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of BTAD.

Elite competition for political incentives can also be examined at an inter-elite level. The presence of non-Bodo political parties along with Bodo ethnic political parties may have promoted ethnic violence for electoral incentives in the Bodoland area.

(b) Competition for resources among elites and ethnic violence

According to the literature, it is not only the electoral incentives that may foster ethnic violence but also competition for resources, especially land and forest resources play a crucial role in promoting ethnic violence in the decentralized areas. Therefore, from this perspective, this thesis also tries to understand, how competition for resources (relative resource inadequacy) fosters ethnic violence in the decentralized regions of Assam.

The relation between political decentralization (independent variable) and violent outcome (dependent variable) can be explained with the help of the following diagram.

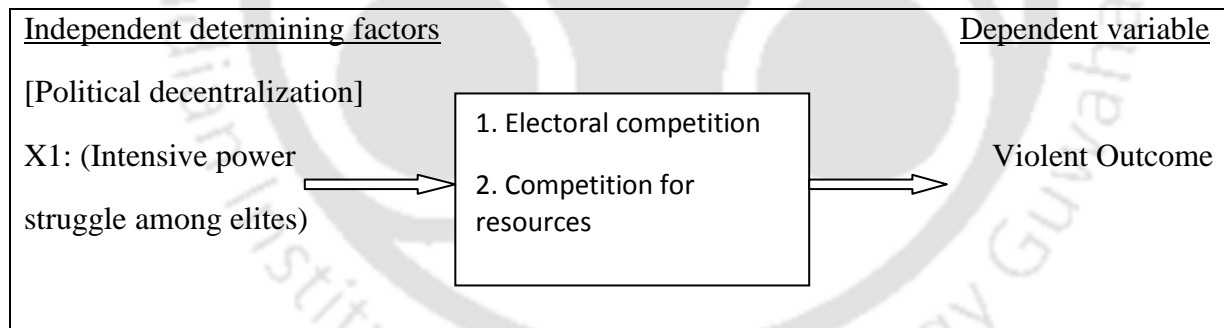


Diagram 2.1: Determining factors: Independent and Dependent variables

The determining factor for this thesis has also been converted from more generalized to specific after a preliminary field visit to different parts of Northeast. The later part of this research, it analyzed the proposition with relevant theoretical understanding and analysis from the field.

Summary

This study advanced the claim that political decentralization may not reduce ethnic violence, but rather may intensify tensions and violence in some places. Political decentralization shows mixed responses depending on time and space as claimed by Varshney. A brief review of the earlier literature on ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas reveals that 'elites' play a crucial role in instigating violence between ethnic groups for personal interests. Their interests may include electoral incentives or possession of resources. This chapter reviewed the existing literature on political decentralization, ethnicity and ethnic violence along with the proposition that is used for the thesis. Drawing from the ethnic violence and political decentralization literature, the thesis tries to examine the relation between the two variables and tries to explore the conditions that may promote ethnic violence in decentralized institutions. The next chapters will discuss the history of political administration of Assam, policies of political decentralization, Sixth Schedule in the hills and plain areas of Assam and the impact on inter-group relations. The chapter will provide a background to analyzing the relationship between the history of political decentralization and the contingent factors/conditions that may have led to ethnic violence in Northeast India.



Chapter Three

Governance structure, political mobilization and process of decentralization in Assam: A historical analysis

Introduction

Northeast India experienced numerous annexations when British took over the hill areas of Assam. Hill tribes, such as Nagas, Kukis and Jaintias started resisted British annexations into their territory. As a result, the British administration implemented policies of repression and later 'non-interventional' administrative policies towards the hill tribes. Different administrative structures implemented by the colonial administration widened the gap between the hills and plains people which intensified the differentiation of people living in the hills from the plains. Provisions of the Inner line and declaration of excluded areas created the divide between the hills and the people living in the plain areas. In the post-independent period, on the basis of distinctiveness of the hilly regions, the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India was implemented by the Government of India in undivided Assam which was earlier known as excluded areas. Under the Sixth Schedule, different administrative structures were made to accommodate and give autonomy to the tribal ethnic communities living in the hill areas. The decentralizing autonomous structures were created to reduce the ethnic grievances and to maintain cultural and political autonomy of the formerly excluded tribes. The Constitution provided these areas with different political and administrative structures by creating institutions called the Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This thesis uses the term political

decentralization to describe the process of power devolution and decentralization. The process of political decentralization has been treated as a conflict prevention mechanism and as a means for further democratization by devolving resources and responsibilities to subnational governments. This chapter makes an attempt to discuss the history of power devolution in Northeast and the colonial and post-colonial structures of governance which led to different forms of political mobilization in post-colonial India.

The chapter tries to examine the political history of Assam, making of frontier regions, the different administrative structures developed by the British and how these influenced the process and politics of political decentralization in the post-colonial phase/period. An important question that this chapter addresses is how the policies of pre-independence and post-independence affected the political process of accommodating and integrating tribal ethnic minority groups? The core question that this chapter tries to address is whether political decentralization helped to reduce ethnic violence of Northeast India? The process of political decentralization which is considered as the conflict prevention mechanism was implemented in undivided Assam while giving autonomy to some tribal ethnic groups. Despite decentralizing, under Article 244A and Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, the conflict prevention mechanism failed to reduce violence in some cases. In this chapter, the focus has been the colonial and post-colonial structure of governance to analyze its influence on the present structure of political decentralization in Assam. This chapter also deals with the politics of autonomy and further decentralization in Assam and its relation to ethnic violence. It tries to analyze the processes of political demands, creation of sub-state units, autonomous structures and the beginnings of ethnic mobilization in the post-independence period.

Northeastern part of India is the easternmost region of India linked to the rest of India by a narrow stretch of land. States that are included in Northeast India are- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. These states are known as Northeast because of its geographical location. As the region is situated in the extreme east and the northern side of India, it is popularly known as Northeast India. Northeast India comprises of different ethnic groups with different ethnic identities. Ethnic groups are different in terms of their culture, language, religious beliefs, food habits, and customs. Although there is a great ethnic and religious diversity in these states of India, they also have similarities in different political, social and economic contexts. The region comprises of both tribal and non-tribal communities.⁴⁵ The tribal communities in Northeast India are mostly Tibeto-Mongloid from Western China.⁴⁶ The Northeast frontier was usually known as the boundary line and sometimes termed as a *tract* because it embraces all the frontier regions of Assam Valley lying between Bengal and Burma which experienced many invasions Shans, Moamorias, Burmese and finally the Kacharis and the Ahoms who established their rule in Assam from the 12th to 19th century witnessed wars and conquests in the region. Finally, on 24th February 1826, the Ahoms signed the treaty of Yandaboo with the British (Mackenzie, 1999).

⁴⁵ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

⁴⁶ Edward Gait said, "The so-called Aryans, and many later invaders, such as the Greeks, the Huns, the Pathans, and the Mughals, entered India from the north-west, while from the north-east, through Assam, have come successive hordes of immigrants from the great hive of the Mongolian race in Western China. Many of these immigrants passed on into Bengal, but in that province they have, as a rule, become merged in the earlier population. Their influence is seen in the modified physical type of the present inhabitants, who are classed by Mr. Risley as Mongolo-Dravidians, but there are very few who possess the distinctive Mongolian physiognomy or who speak Mongolian dialects. In Assam, on the other hand, although in the plains large sections of the population, like that of Bengal, are of mixed origin, there are also numerous tribes who are almost pure Mongolians, and the examination of their affinities, in respect of physique, language, religion and social customs, with other branches of the same family forms one of the most interesting lines of enquiry open to Ethnologists." (Gait E. A., 1906, p. i)

Undivided Assam was characterized by rough hills and deep canyons inhabited by different tribes. Administrative setup of the region changed during the British period. Hills which consisted of tribal communities were named after the name of the tribes, such as Naga Hills which was inhabited by Nagas and westward from the Naga Hills, Khasi and Jaintia hills were also named after the tribes. These were the frontier regions which fall between India and Burma. Other hill tribes in the frontier regions were Lushai, Kuki, Twipperahs, Akas, Duphlas, Abors, Miris, Mishimis, Khamtis, Singphos, Moamarias, Manipuris, Mikirs, Chittagong frontier tribes and Chakmas. Among all these frontier tribes Jaintias were the first hill people who came into direct contact with the British administration in 1774 though it was not fully annexed (Gait, 1906).

From a geographical, historical and also from a strategic point of view, the Northeast region occupies an important position in India. The region shares an international border with many South Asian countries. As far as language groups are concerned, colonial historians argue that though Dravidian (colonial language) was the earliest linguistic form recognizable in India, it is now spoken by the people that are inhabitants of Southern part of India, whom ethnologists call the Dravidians. This linguistic group has a connection with the African Negroid race, which suggests that they came from Africa, entering northwest India from Arabia. Dravidian families are found even in the plains of Assam (Gait E. A., 1906, p. 3). Another family of languages was the Mundas with a separate form of a linguistic identity.⁴⁷ The migration of Dravidian and Munda linguistic forms were followed by the Indo-Chinese groups, as Gait argued. The Indo-Chinese group is associated with the tribes

⁴⁷ Mundas are the tribes who migrated from Chota-Nagpur during British period as daily laborers to work in the tea gardens of Assam (Gait, 1906).

with Mongloid (term used in colonial language) origins from Western China.⁴⁸ They entered India from the north-east and descending the Brahmaputra, spread into Bengal and Assam. However, the Indo-Chinese linguistic family is divided into three sub-families that are Mon-Khmer, Tibeto-Burman and the Siamese-Chinese which includes Shan language. History shows that the Ahoms belong to this category of Shans (Gait E. A., 1906, p. 4). Edward Gait in his book stated:

“The Mom-Khmer speakers came first, and they were followed by successive incursions of tribes speaking dialects of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family, who either absorbed and imposed their own forms of speech on, such of the earlier inhabitants as survived, or pushed them back into the hills. The dialects of this sub-family belong to three groups, mainly Naga, spoken in east of the Naga Hills, Kuki-Chin, spoken in Manipur, Cachar and the Lushai Hills, and Bodo, which claim practically all the surviving non-Aryan languages of the Brahmaputra valley and the Garo Hills and the principal ones of North Cachar and Hill Tippera; it includes, amongst others, Kachari or Mech, Garo, Dimasa, Tippera, Lalung, Rabha, and Chutiya.⁴⁹ Later, there have been several intrusions of tribes speaking Tai or Shan languages, the most notable being that of the Ahoms.”

(Gait E. A., 1906, p. 5)

Opinion also differs when we discuss the origins of the term ‘Assam’. Interpretations are made on the Assamese word, *Asam* meaning ‘unequal’ and ‘peerless’ which was used by the local people to address the Ahoms or the Shans.⁵⁰ Some historians on the other, hand argued that the word is derived from *Asama* to represent unevenness of the place as *Assam* is comprised of many rivers, hills and plain areas showing its uneven nature or *Asaman*

⁴⁸ See, Assam State Gazetteer of 1999, Vol. 1 which stated that Indo-Chinese groups that are now predominantly indigenous population of Assam, migrated from Western China entered from various routes. The Ahoms entered Assam in the early 13th Century, and other groups such as Khamtis, Phakials, Aitongs, Khamjangs and Turungs entered the land of Assam by 16th Century.

⁴⁹ Garo hills are the hill areas inhabited by mostly tribal communities dominated by Garo population which now falls under the state of Meghalaya. Naga Hills are the frontier areas that fall between India and Myanmar inhabited by the Naga tribes.

⁵⁰ See, Assam State Gazetteer, Vol. 1, 1999.

landmass. The uneven landmass was significant for the colonial government in the administrative structures of the British period.

Undivided Assam therefore comprised of many linguistic families with different ways of living. Interaction of different groups was rare where fights and clashes were daily affairs among the groups. To bring together all the people of Assam, Sri Sankardeva and his disciple Sri Madhabdeva brought a renaissance through their teaching in religion in the 15th century A.D. They are known as the pioneers in the field of socio-cultural reform in Assam. They tried to bring social reforms through education and religious teaching in Assam. *Ek Sarana Dharma*, which insisted on equality and one god, irrespective of caste and creed was the practice that was popularized during the reforms. They also introduced cultural practices of *Bhabana*, *Ankianat*, *Bargeet* and *Ojapali* to bring unity among the people of Assam, which also contributed to Assamese literature and culture.⁵¹ These reforms were mainly in the plain areas of Assam. The hills remained isolated and were not brought under the purview of *Ek Sarana Dharma*.

The next section discusses the administrative structures in undivided Assam during the British administration.

Advent of British and their administration in undivided Assam (1826-1935)

To understand the present political decentralization and its relation to violence, it is important to analyze the process of political decentralization during the formation of states/provinces in India and the political developments which led to the formation of states

⁵¹ See, Assam State Gazetteer, Vol. 1, 1999.

in northeast India. Analysis of historical accounts suggest that prior to the Ahoms, Bodos were the dominating groups in Assam. Language and societal structure of the Bodos were similar to ethnic tribes of southwest China with Mongolian origins (Gait E. A., 1906). There were different kingdoms and tribes dominating the area. Kachari, Koch, Chutias and the Ahoms were the prominent rulers of Assam. The Ahom kingdom was weakened and overthrown by wars with the Moamoriyas.⁵² Assam was annexed by the East India Company once the Treaty of Yandaboo was signed in 1826. The East India Company also conquered Cachar in 1830, Khasi and Jaintia Hills between 1833 and 1835, Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong) in 1838 and North Cachar in 1854. Gradually, the Garo and Lushai hill were taken into control in 1872-73 and 1890 respectively. Naga Hills were conquered between 1866 and 1904 (Gait, 1906). Since the 1870s all legislative arrangements were made with a clause on how the British would administer the region. Different administrative provisions were made for the plains and hills and for the frontier regions. The annexation of Upper Assam led to the establishment of tea plantation in 1837 and the establishment of the Assam Company in 1839 (Guha, 2012). Laborers were brought from the Central India to work in the tea gardens.⁵³

After annexation and consolidation of the British rule in Assam, there were many changes in the administration like the formation of districts and subdivisions.⁵⁴ Though the British conquered most of the hills of Assam they were not interested in ruling them directly. In the name of administration, the British created few rules for the hilly areas (Gait E. A., 1906). The British administration insisted that they did not want to break the

⁵² The name Assam is perhaps derived from the word Ahom.

⁵³ See, Assam State Gazetteer, Vol. 1, 1999.

⁵⁴ There was reorganization of different districts under the British administration of the areas, for instance, the division of Brahmaputra valley into four districts, viz., of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nagaon in the year 1834.

traditional administrative provisions of the hill areas and that is why they implemented different administrative structures for the hill areas. In reality, the administration of the British was centered on economic profits and they wanted profit out of their administrative structures. Brahmaputra and Surma valley were profitable for the British administration but due to difficult terrain the British administration had to spend more money to administer the hill areas and hence administering them directly was in less profitable. The British therefore made the policy of 'least interference' in the hills granting the missionaries to expand Christianity (Mackenzie, 1999).⁵⁵ To extract more resources British levied many taxation measures both in hills and plain areas of Assam.

Middle-class Assamese people protested against the British domination and their system of taxation.⁵⁶ There were many uprisings in the later 19th century to protest against the taxation system of the British. Two remarkable uprisings took place in the Jaintia Hills and the plains of Nowgong district against the taxation measures of the British (Guha, 2012).⁵⁷

Apart from the taxation policies the British created provinces. The Province of Assam was constituted in 1874 and comprised of two river valleys. The Act of 1874 provided for the exercise of powers to the Chief Commissionership of Assam which was earlier exercised by the Lieutenant-Governor and the Board of Revenue of Bengal. The

⁵⁵ The plain areas of Assam especially the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma valley (at present Barak valley) were more profitable places for administration because there was less expenditure in terms of administration and maintenance of troops. But, in hilly terrains, it was difficult to maintain law and order in one hand, and on the other hand, it was quite expensive to facilitate administration, providing basic needs and facilities. There was no good communication system to hill areas which resulted in high cost of transportation. To get out of such problems, British administration was keen to provide 'no-interference' to hill tribes, but extracted taxes from hill areas and at the same time permit the missionaries to expand to the areas to preach Christianity (Mackenzie, 1999).

⁵⁶ Maniram Dewan's critique of the British rule that was submitted to the authorities in the 1850s, a political document discusses the unlawful taxation measures of the British administration.

⁵⁷ The name of the place is written as it was known in that period of time. In 1850s present Nagaon was known as Nowgong (Guha, 2012).

territories included in the schedule came under the direct control of the Chief Commissioner of Assam which includes Kamrup, Darrang, Naugong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Goalpara, Cachar, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia and Naga Hills.⁵⁸ It was created with the view to relieving the responsibility of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal which was earlier a huge administrative unit and it was tough to administer the huge area. Bounded on the North by the Himalayas and in the south by a broken range of hills, the Brahmaputra valley covering an area of 20,683 square miles or one-half of the whole provinces flows east to west. Non-Aryan tribes inhabited in the southern edge which consisted a landmass of 14,447 square miles. To the south of these intervening mountains, lies the valley of Surma, extending over 6,668 square miles.⁵⁹ The province was divided for administrative purposes into eleven districts, with an aggregate population of 41,32,019 persons, and an area of 41,798 square miles.⁶⁰ The formation of Assam in 1874, as a separate province under a Chief Commissioner, neither relieved the Government of Bengal nor benefited Assam to the extent desired. The Province of Bengal still comprised, besides Bengal proper, Bihar, Orissa and Chota Nagpur. In British India, Bengal was still the most populous province.⁶¹ Administrative powers for most of the regions nearby Bengal rested in the hands of Bengal state itself. Though Assam was formed in 1874, the main power of administration was in the hands of the Bengal province.

The Scheduled Districts Act of 1874 was modified giving power to the local government for the settlement of any questions or issues regarding frontier regions of the territory.⁶² Earlier, powers were exercised under the Bengal province, but modification to

⁵⁸ See, the Assam Chief Commissionership Act, 1874, Act No. VIII of 1874.

⁵⁹ Surma valley is known as Barak valley at present time consisting districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi (Assam State Gazetteer, Vol. 1, 1999).

⁶⁰ See, Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Assam, Vol-1, p. 1.

⁶¹ See, Report of Government of India to the Section of State No. 2 dated 2nd February, 1906.

⁶² See, Government of India Legislative Department, The Scheduled Districts Act, 1874.

the act gave the local government more power in the administration. According to the act, the newly created local government had to look after all issues related to the boundary, criminal cases, the appointment of officers to look after the collection of public revenues and also the justice system within the Scheduled Districts. The act stated:

“Whenever any question arises as to the line of boundary between any of the Scheduled Districts and other territory, such officer as the Local Government or (where the said District and the other territory are not subject to the same Local Government) as the Governor General in Council from time to time appoint, may consider and determine such line of boundary; and the order made thereon by such officer, if confirmed by the Government which appointed him, shall be conclusive in all Courts of Justice.”

(The Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, as modified up to the 1st October, 1895)

It also decided to remove the remote or backward tracts of British India from general regulation of acts. British administration left the backward tracts to administer themselves with their traditional administrative structures. In the hill areas, there was encroachment and use of forest resources by the people of plain areas. To prohibit these acts regulations were passed by the British. The Garo Hills Regulation tried to prohibit unauthorized entry into the territory of Garo Hills for cutting wood, hunting animals, the collection of wax, ivory and rubber.⁶³ In 1891, the forest regulation was passed which created reserved forests in the province. Chapter IV of the regulation created norms for the general protection of forest and forest products and along with that, it prohibits any use of forest goods.⁶⁴ It was a move to protect forest resources and to restrict movement of people from plain areas to hills. The

⁶³ See, The Garo Hills Regulation, 1882, Regulation No. 1. It stated that, it prohibits any plain people to enter into the hill areas for collecting resources, cultivating in the forest and settling in the hill areas. Under this regulation, if someone is found collecting resources in the Garo Hills he/she would be liable to the punishment under the law.

⁶⁴ See, The Assam Forest Regulation, 1891.

Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act which came into effect in 1886, restricted the movement of the people and helped in the settlement of tribal ethnic communities in Assam.

In the year 1886, Assam Land and Revenue Regulation came into effect in Cachar, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. Chapter X of the land and revenue act provides protection of the ethnic tribal communities who live in their primitive conditions and are deprived of material advantages.⁶⁵ The regions inhabited by tribal ethnic communities were included in the tribal belts and blocks for the protection of their land and non-interference of other classes. Rules were made to evict any person who encroach the land without legal authority. No tribal land could be transferred to other communities and transfer is possible only within the classes of people.⁶⁶ The main reason behind the regulation was to stop migration from other parts of the country. British administration therefore made different rules for different communities while dividing tribal and non-tribal communities. Within the tribal communities as well, administrative mechanism of hill tribes was different from the plain tribes. A regulation came into force to amend the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 which stated that for any order to pass the regulation, confirmation should be given by the Chief Commissioner.⁶⁷

The newly created province was headed by the 'Chief Commissioner' and in 1905 Lord Curzon combined the eastern district of Bengal with Assam. In the year 1912, the province was divided into three divisions, i.e. the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma (Barak) Valley and the Hills. Two frontier tracts, Sadiya, and Balipara were separated from the Assam Valley Division. These two tracts were constituted in 1912 and 1914 respectively

⁶⁵ See, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, Government of Assam.

⁶⁶ See, the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, Government of Assam which came into effect in 1886 to provide laws and revenue system for land in Assam.

⁶⁷ See, Regulation No. II of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1889.

from parts of the Lakhimpur and Darrang districts and for administration purpose they were put in charge of Political Officers directly under the local government.⁶⁸ In 1921, according to the provision of Government of India Act 1919, Assam was promoted to the status of the Governor's province. There were certain policies administered by the British especially for the tribal population living in the hill areas. Administrative divisions were created according to the needs of the places because the hills and tribal administration was quite different in the pre-colonial period. Therefore, separate administrative policies were made for the administration of the tribal and non-tribal areas in the Northeastern region.

As mentioned earlier, British annexation led to resistance. Like the Naga, Khasi and Jaintia tribes, Singphos also rose against the administration of the British. Inter-tribal violence also occurred for resources and territory. As far as social interactions were concerned, dwellers of the hill communities usually came to plain areas to gather food and other necessary items which, sometimes led to violence between the people living in the plains and the hills. Therefore, non-interference was made as a policy to contain violence in the hills. Later, these policies became a justification for the decentralization of political power in the post-colonial period. To contain violence in the hill areas local officials insisted on a 'forward policy for the hill tribes, but the government was keen on a policy of 'non-intervention' in the hill administration as it would have been harmful for their own administration. According to the Frontier Regulation Act of 1900, Inner line were implemented for the hill areas to have their own administration with least-interference from the British.⁶⁹ Lines were demarcated as 'inner line' and 'outer line' where British administration granted the population living in 'outer line' a status of non-interference to use

⁶⁸ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

⁶⁹ See, Frontier Regulation Act, 1900.

them as a buffer from any attack from neighboring countries (Reid, 2013). According to Inner line provisions, without prior permission from the authorities no officer or individual could cross the demarcated territory. Stamped pass provided by competent government authorities was necessary to travel to these restricted hilly areas. If any individual passed the Inner line illegally or encroached land or the products of land, the individual was deemed for punishment. The inner line was implemented in the hill areas to stop migration of people from the other parts of India. By the provision of Inner Line, tribal communities of the preserved areas were granted to administer themselves.

British feared that if they imposed new laws while withdrawing the traditional laws of the tribes, it can pose a threat to the British administration. Therefore, the British administration retained the traditional administrative structures of the tribal communities living in hills of Assam. Moreover, the policy was used to keep the hill areas as a buffer for the protection of plain areas from the neighboring states.

The Chief Commissionership of Assam during the 1874 to 1921 included not only the districts of Assam including Lakhimpur, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Kamrup and Darrang but also the three Bengal districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara and the Hill districts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills and the North East Frontier Tract. The name 'Assam' was thus given when it was used as the designation of the whole territory of the Chief Commissionership of Assam comprising the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma Valley, the Hill Districts and the North East Frontier Tract (Bhattacharjee, 1983, p. 100).

The powers that were transferred to the Chief Commissionership and the Lieutenant Governorship included the Land Revenue Administration, Revenue Administration, Land

Records and Agriculture, Police, Jails, Registration, Excise, Education, Forest, Public Works Department, Medical and Sanitary Establishment, Local Self-Government, Municipalities, Immigration and Labor Inspection, and Finance of the region.⁷⁰ The Chief Commissioner of Assam had practically no legislative power at that time because no legislative power was transferred to Assam until 1905. The Chief Commissioner only had the privilege to propose the drafts for any regulation regarding peace of the region called Assam and report about the territories to the Governor-General.⁷¹ The Governor-General in Council had full control over the legislative powers in Assam. Along with that, the Government of Assam had no freedom in maintaining any relation with the surrounding tribes (Bhattacharjee, 1983). All the administrative decisions about maintaining relations with the surrounding tribes were taken from the Bengal province. The tribes residing in and around Assam which were under the British administration were treated differently for the administration of those areas which had distinctive identities and their own administrative structures. Later, for the purpose of administrative and legal purpose, decisions were taken on the basis of distinct identities of the areas of northeast during the period of 1874 and 1935.

Administrative policies of British (1935-1947)

Major policies for the administration of the tribal areas in undivided Assam were the Scheduled District Act of 1874, Frontier Tracts Regulation II of 1880, Government of India Act 1919 and Government of India Act of 1935.⁷² According to Scheduled District Act of

⁷⁰ See, the Assam Chief Commissionership Act, 1874, Act No. VIII of 1874.

⁷¹ See, the Assam Chief Commissionership Act, 1874, Act No. VIII of 1874.

⁷² To define tribe, we can refer back to Radcliff-Brown who stated, "The primary mark of a tribe is that it consists of persons speaking one language, or dialects of one language. Its unity is primarily linguistic." He also stated that, along with language there is unity of customs throughout the tribe (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930). He stated this in the context of tribes of Australia. But, in case of India, there is no conception of tribe, but constitution guarantees the tribal identities. Tribes are believed to stand more or less outside the influence of

1874, Assam was constituted as a separate province. Authority and power was given to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The act also formulated scheduled districts which consisted of Kamrup, Darrang, Naugong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Goalpara.⁷³ The Frontier Tracts Regulation Act of 1880 empowered the Chief Commissioner for removal of certain frontier tracts from parts of Assam. These tracts were separated and granted with political administration because of the 'barbaric' nature of the tribes.⁷⁴ Under the Government of India Act of 1935, the tribal policies that were structured were considered as the first tribal policy for Free India.⁷⁵ Tribal policies that were adopted were meant for accommodating the tribal population and to safeguard their interest for the development of the backward communities.

The Assam State Gazetteer stated that prior to the British rule and even after, the hill people had close contact with the plains people for commercial purposes. The market was a meeting point for the people residing in the hills and the plains. But, when the British took over, considering the differences in social and cultural life between the hill and plains people, they tried to introduce an administrative device for the hills without affecting the plains people. The British thought that civil administration adopted in the plains was not suitable for the hills. On the basis of differences and political status, excluded and partially

Hindu civilization though there are detribalization and retribalization in Indian context. From the British period itself, there was process of designating or 'scheduling' tribes in India and which was formally introduced in 1931 census. On that basis, Government of India Act of 1935 created special provisions for tribal people and in the constitution of India in 1950 it was nomenclature as 'Scheduled Tribes' (Beteille, 1986).

⁷³ See, Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, Act No. VII.

⁷⁴ See, The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, 1880. The tribes were known as 'barbaric' because of their hostility among groups. Tribes living in the frontier areas use to practice 'head hunting' to have their dominance and influence over other communities living nearby. The Naga community was well known for practice of head hunting for which British administration treated them as 'barbaric' and in government document as well tribes were known as 'barbaric tribes'.

⁷⁵ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

excluded areas was included in the Government of India Bill 1935.⁷⁶ The excluded areas constituted of North East Frontier, Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur, Naga Hills and Lushai Hill district. On the other hand, partially excluded areas constituted of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Hills, Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Shillong Municipality and Cantonment areas were excluded from this provision.⁷⁷ The Government of India Act, 1935 accepted certain recommendations from the Simon Commission (Indian Statutory Commission, 1930) and divided the backward tracts into two categories, 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas.

The Government of India Act, 1935 made reclassifications in the matters of backward areas as excluded and partially excluded areas. The excluded areas were the Naga Hills district, Mizo hills district and the North Cachar sub-division. The Naga Hills district was inhabited by a large number of tribes grouped under Nagas, such as Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha. The Nagas spoke different languages and practiced different traditions and customs. On the other hand, Mizos consisting of different clans spoke a common language. Another excluded area, the North Cachar hills were inhabited by Kacharis, Nagas, Karbi and Khasis. Partially excluded areas consisted of the Khasi hills district, Garo hills districts and the Karbi hills.⁷⁸ The hills people of Naga Hills and the North Cachar hills appreciated the decision to set up regional councils in 1952. The regional councils would grant them autonomy to prevent frequent frictions. The Sub-committee on Tribal and Excluded Areas in

⁷⁶ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

⁷⁷ See, Government of India Act, 1935 (Chapter V) which was adopted on 2nd August 1935 [26 Geo. 5. Ch. 2].

⁷⁸ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

1947 also recommended the creation of Autonomous Councils to give the power of making laws over forest resources, village land and social customs with a few financial powers.⁷⁹

For the administration of excluded areas or partially excluded areas, no act of the federal legislature was to be implemented unless it was necessary and notified as such by the Governor for implementation. It also indicated that British policies for the backward classes and hilly areas were different from the well off classes. Hill tribes therefore received autonomy under the supervision of the British rule.⁸⁰ Governor in such areas may make regulations if necessary for maintaining peace and good governance.

On 7th April 1937, the Assam Legislative Assembly was constituted in Shillong for the legislation of the undivided Assam which earlier had combined legislature of Assam and Bengal under the “Legislative Council of Eastern Bengal and Assam” since December 18, 1906.⁸¹ But, the Government of India Act, 1935 provided with the Legislative assembly in each province and, as a result, the legislature of Assam was created which was bicameral in structure.⁸² Assam Legislative Assembly had the strength of 108 members, whereas the Legislative Council (Upper House) comprised of 21-22 members. The bicameral structure of the Legislative Assembly was transformed to unicameral right in the year of independence. The Assam experienced division in several smaller states in years that followed independence.

⁷⁹ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

⁸⁰ See, Government of India Act, 1935.

⁸¹ See, document published by Assam Legislative Assembly, titled as “A Brief Historical Profile of Assam Legislative Assembly”. URL: www.assamassembly.gov.in/history.html. Accessed on: 05/02/2014, 11:24 AM.

⁸² Ibid.

Gopinath Bordoloi was made the Chief Minister of independent Assam who insisted on the welfare of the tribal communities and to conserve their culture and tradition.⁸³ The issue of migration was very prominent in the hills as well as in plains tribal areas. But, when Saadulla ministry came into power in 1943 wastelands in the districts of Nowgong, Darrang and Kamrup was made available to the immigrant laborers from Bengal. In the year 1946, when Bordoloi ministry came to power again, he cleared the grazing and forest reserves from the illegal encroachers. But, due of resistance from the immigrants and fear of retaliation from Assamese villages, the government had to go slow on the issue of migration and hence tribal land alienation continued. However, after Indian independence, the Bordoloi ministry amended the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 to create reserved tribal belts in different parts of Assam (Misra, 2012). There were also initiatives to create autonomous councils for hill tribes of Assam to resolve the problem of migration in undivided Assam.

Bordoloi Committee's recommendation for Sixth Schedule

When Northeast was debated in the Constituent Assembly, the aim was to assimilate with the rest of the country and to provide a constitutional set up for the administration of tribal and hill areas. For this purpose, a Sub-Committee was formed to report on the Northeast Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas. Chairman of the Sub-Committee was Gopinath Bordoloi, who had to function as the advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded areas. The committee was formed on 27th February 1947 which toured the province of Assam. The tour included visits to Lushai Hills

⁸³ See, Report of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Source- Appendix 13 of *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India- A Study* by B. L. Hansaria, Jyoti Printers, Guwahati, 1983.

District, North Cachar Sub-Division, Mikir Hills and the Naga Hills District. The report was submitted on 28th July 1947 to Ballabhbai Patel, the Chairman of Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights. The report dealt with 'aspects relating to the administration of the tribal areas, to provide special features of these areas, like land, forest, courts, finance, control of immigration, mines, legislation, representation, services etc'.⁸⁴ The committee also recommended that the hill people feared about their security of land and exploitation by more advanced people and from immigrants (Mishra, 2012).

After amendments and debates, the draft was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 7th September 1949. The first draft was incorporated in the Eighth Schedule. The draft was prepared by Shri B. N. Rau. The president of the Drafting Committee, while considering the matter on 13th February 1948 incorporated the Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India. While framing the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, views of the premier of Assam, Shri Gopinath Bordoloi, were taken not only because of his Chairmanship of the Sub-Committee, but also because he was also known to be compassionate to the hill people and had studied very closely the condition of the tribal people. These areas were entirely excluded and communication between the plains and the hills were very tough. Officials of those regions assured the people their autonomy and independence. During the investigation, it was found that the people of the hill areas were comfortable with isolation and separation of hills from plain areas of Assam. Therefore, the

⁸⁴ See, Report of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Source- Appendix 13 of *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India- A Study* by B. L. Hansaria, Jyoti Printers, Guwahati, 1983.

Bordoloi Committee confronted with the question on what methods should be applied to hill areas to integrate the hill tribal communities to plain areas.⁸⁵

It was found that there were certain efficient local institutions among the hill tribes for their own administration, it would have been wrong to destroy such local institutions. Such institutions worked for village administration and the settlement of any disputes that arose in these areas. So, the committee considered not to destroy such traditional institutions and decided to bring them under the broad principles of local governance by granting separate administrative structures. At that time, the proposal for an autonomous district was accepted by the committee and the various tribal leaders. The report of the Sub-Committee considered giving a chance to the tribals to develop themselves in their own way.⁸⁶ The Bordoloi Committee Report recommended for autonomy/ decentralization in the hill areas for the proper administration, and accordingly, autonomous hill district councils were set up in Assam in 1952.

The Constituent Assembly took the recommendations from the Bordoloi Committee, discussed and debated and considered the matter on the dates of 5, 6 and 7 September 1949.⁸⁷ Accordingly, the Sixth Schedule was implemented for the hilly tribal society and was incorporated in the constitution along with articles 244 and 275. Later on, amendments were made to extend the Sixth Schedule to other areas in the Northeast with the recommendations, views and comments of the Advisory Council for Autonomous districts

⁸⁵ See, Constituent Assembly Debate relating to the Sixth Schedule on 5th to 7th September, 1949. Source- Appendix 12 of *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India- A Study* by B. L. Hansaria, Jyoti Printers, Guwahati, 1983.

⁸⁶ See, Report of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee. Source- Appendix 12 of *Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India- A Study* by B. L. Hansaria, Jyoti Printers, Guwahati, 1983.

⁸⁷ See, Constituent Assembly Debate relating to the Sixth Schedule on 5th to 7th September, 1949.

of Assam and the state government of Assam.⁸⁸ The aim of the Sixth Schedule was to meet the aspirations of the people of the area and on the other hand, to assimilate the tribal people with the mainstream country (Hansaria, 1983). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar felt that the tribal of Assam were different from the tribal population of other parts of India and to retain their distinctiveness, they should have different administrative structures.⁸⁹ Therefore, despite many criticisms, Ambedkar supported the views of Gopinath Bordoloi and left the provision for a different administrative structure for the hill tribes of Northeast India.

Creation of autonomous councils and implementation of Sixth Schedule

The previous section discussed that Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India was implemented to accommodate the tribal communities while granting them separate administrative structures. British colonialism also implemented policies of non-interference to the hill tribal areas and granted them self-administration to reduce resistance in the region. Political decentralization is a historical legacy which was used to reduce violent resistance in the hilly tribal areas. In the post-colonial state-building period, the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India territorial and administrative power was granted to the hill tribal communities after the recommendation of the Bordoloi Committee. The Sixth Schedule was implemented to meet the aspirations of the hills tribes in undivided Assam.

The idea behind the Sixth Schedule or the decentralized structure in the constitution of India was for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram (except Naga Hills District) under the article of 244(2) and 275(1) of the Indian constitution. On the other hand, Sixth Schedule of the Constitution is different from

⁸⁸ See, Report on “*Tribal Areas and Welfare of Backward Classes Department, July 1961*”. Printed at Assam Government Press, Shillong.

⁸⁹ See, Constituent Assembly Debate relating to the Sixth Schedule on 5th to 7th September, 1949.

Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. The Fifth Schedules provides Tribes Advisory Council to promote educational and economic interest of the tribal communities. The Schedule also aims to provide social justice and prevent from exploitation of dominant classes. The central government provides financial assistance to tribal communities under Article 275 of the constitution. However, the Sixth Schedule provides creation of autonomous districts and autonomous regions in the tribal area and constitution of district councils and regional councils for the proper administration and decentralization of powers.⁹⁰ Part X of the Indian constitution contains the provision for the administration of the scheduled and tribal areas and formation of local legislature or council of ministers in the autonomous districts. Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution formulated by the Indian Constituent Assembly created the Autonomous district Council (ADC) for the hill tribes in the region to administrate their own affairs. Autonomous district means an area deemed as such under paragraph 1(1) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Rules and laws were made for the formation of autonomous district councils, rules for election, terms of Executive Members, and different rules of the councils by Assam Autonomous Districts Rules 1951. The Assam Autonomous Districts Rules of 1951 provided different rules and division of power and functions for the autonomous councils.⁹¹ The autonomous tribal districts of Assam were namely the Garo Hills, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Mikir Hills, North-Cachar Hills, Lushai Hills and the Naga Hills. The administrative system operative in the autonomous districts was laid down under the provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The constitution with regards to the administration of the tribal areas was to develop and strengthen the indigenous political institutions where tribal people can continue and promote their traditional

⁹⁰ See, Constitution of India.

⁹¹ See, Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951.

administrative practices. The constitution under paragraph 8 of the Sixth Schedule provided that the council has the power to collect land revenues within the autonomous districts.⁹² But more demand was put forward by the Members of the Legislative Assembly from the autonomous districts to empower the councils to assess certain sources of revenue such as sales tax, revenues from reserved forests, betting and amusement tax, taxes on liquor and agricultural income tax. To access revenues and resources from the autonomous councils, the Finance Act, 1951 and the Assam Forest Products (Acquisition) Act, 1950 were implemented. Certain autonomous councils did not approve the implementation of such Acts in the tribal areas.⁹³ Autonomous councils wanted to have a different taxation structure and rules compared to other areas because their administrative structures were primitive and granted separate administrative structure since the British period.

The process of creation of autonomous councils and decentralization of administration for the tribal areas of Northeast India had a history since the colonial period. The areas that were decentralized under the federal structure were earlier known as “backward tracts” in the colonial period. During the colonial administration, different legal orders were maintained in the “backward tracts” compared to other plain areas of Assam. We can draw examples from the Garo Hills Act, 1869, which excluded these areas from the general administrative setup. According to the Act, Garo Hills were removed from the general jurisdiction of the Courts of Criminal and Civil Judicature and from the control of revenue rules under Bengal. The Act further provided that the provisions of the Act could be implemented by the Lt. Governor of Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills and Khasi hills. The Garo Hills

⁹² See, Report on Autonomous Districts- Problems of their Administration and Development- District Council, their Financial Position and Problems- Potentialities of Taxation, Printed at the Assam Government Press, Shillong, 1954.

⁹³ See, The Finance Act, 1951 (XXIII of 1951) and The Assam Forest Product (Acquisition) Act, 1950, Assam Act XXXI of 1950.

Act can be said to have paved the way for a separate administrative mechanism of criminal and civil justice in such areas. In the year 1874 Assam was put under a Chief Commissioner and the Scheduled Districts Act was also enacted. Schedule Districts were those remote or backward tracts which had never been brought within or under the operation of the general Act and Regulations. So far as the frontier tracts of Assam were concerned, power had been granted to the Chief Commissioner in 1880, by the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, 1880 to remove certain parts of backward tracts (Chaube, 1999). The power of administration of these regions was bestowed on the Governor. People living in these areas were considered to be primitive in nature and no political institutions existed to govern them. The Government of India Act, 1919 inserted section 52A for the declaration of the backward tracts. According to section 52A (2) states, “the Governor-General in Council may declare any territory in British India to be a backward tract. By a notification issued under Section 52A (2), the Governor-General declared certain areas as backward tracts, such as the Garo Hills Districts, the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment, the Mikir Hills, the North Cachar Hills, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, the Sadiya Frontier Tract, the Balipara Frontier Tract and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract.”⁹⁴

These areas were designated as Tribal Areas and later on, Sixth Schedule was enacted in these areas. The colonial policies of exclusion and discrimination persisted in the postcolonial nature of modern Indian state. Some of these areas were administered by the provisions contained in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order 1936. The territories which were earlier named as backward tracts under the

⁹⁴ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1.

Government of India Act, 1919, were later categorized as Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas (Hansaria, 1983). Some of the provisions for the administration of tribal areas in the Government of India Act, 1935 were taken up in the Indian (Provisional Constitutional) Order, 1947. The provisions which existed for these regions on the eve of the framing of Constitution did not apply ipso facto to these areas. Secondly, the mechanism of applying these laws with or without modification was granted to the Governor for governing the territories. The tribal leaders and the people were not much concerned with self-determination in the colonial period, but for the security of land tenure, freedom to practice their traditional ways of livelihood and customs (Hansaria, 1983).

Post-independence political history of Assam

The India Independence Act stated, “An Act to make provision for the setting up in India of two independent Dominions, to substitute other provisions for certain provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935, which apply outside those Dominions, and to provide for other matters consequential on or connected with the setting up of those Dominions.”⁹⁵ Indian independence act modifies the provisions of Government of India Act, 1935 to meet the conditions of a newly formed state. It made provisions to reconstitute the province of Assam as a new province. After independence, the Constitution of India adopted strong democratic institutions at the grassroots for the welfare of the tribal communities.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ See, Indian Independence Act, 1947 (Chapter 30), Government of India (10 & 11 Geo. 6. Ch. 30), 18th July, 1947.

⁹⁶ The establishment of local self government in the form of *Panchayati Raj* institutions became one of the important initiatives taken which was incorporated in Part IV of the Constitution of India. But, for the tribal areas, especially in the North-East India, certain specific provisions were made under the Constitution of India. The Constitution tried to provide the areas with different political and administrative structures for the hill areas for the undivided province of Assam creating Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which in other words also known as process of political decentralization.

A former Chief Minister of Assam, B. R. Medhi stated in 1950 on tribal areas and autonomous districts,

“A sub-committee (consisting of Shri Gopinath Bardoloi, Shri J. J. M. Nichols Roy, Shri Rupnath Brahma and Shri A. V. Thakkar) appointed by the Constituent Assembly to recommend the lines of constitutional advance for the tribal areas of Assam, recognized the distinctive factors governing the Part B Tribal Areas (that is the North East Frontier Agency) and therefore they expressed the opinion (para 21 of the report) that so far as the frontier tracts tribal areas are concerned, they have no representation, and the circumstances are such that until it is declared that an area is or can be brought under regular administration, representation cannot be provided.”

He also stated that, as there is no proper representation from tribal communities Part B and Paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was included to provide representation of the tribal communities.⁹⁷ In a report by the Assam Disturbances Inquiry Commission, it was argued that the Tribal Belts and Line system were created for the betterment of the tribal people. The names of Belts and Blocks included Goalpara, Darrang (Mangaldoi and Tezpur Sub-Divisions), Kamrup, Lakhimpur, and Nowgong. The report also stated that according to Para 156 of the Line System which was introduced in 1920 was to restrict the unending flow of Bengal Immigrants and their settlements in Assam.⁹⁸

Tribal areas which fall under the Sixth Schedule Areas are the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, Garo Hills District, Lushai Hills District, Naga Hills District, North Cachar Hills, Mikir Hills, Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor Hills District

⁹⁷ See, Paper retaining to Tribal Areas and Autonomous Districts, Note by Hon. B. R. Medhi, Chief Minister, Assam, September 9, 1950.

⁹⁸ See, Report of the Assam Disturbances Inquiry Commission- regarding Tribal Belts and the Line System, Assam, 1950.

and Mishmi Hills District.⁹⁹ By a regulation, Mikir Hills, and the North Cachar Hills were constituted to a new administrative district which was known as the United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills.¹⁰⁰ Tribal people who lived in these areas were divided into the schedule of three parts, i.e. the autonomous district, the tribal areas other than the autonomous district and population excluding the tribal areas. There were ten tribal communities under the autonomous districts which were scheduled as Dimasa (Kachari), Garo, Hajong, Khasi and Jaintia, Kuki tribes, Lakher, Lushai (Mizo) tribes, Mikir, any Naga tribes and Synteng. Tribal people who lived in the tribal areas other than the autonomous districts were Abor, Aka, Apatani, Dafla, Galong, Khampti, Mishmi, any Naga tribes, Singpho, Momba and Sherdukpen. Other tribal people who lived in the excluded tribal areas were the Boro- Borokacharis, Deoris, Hojais, Kacharis, Lalungs, Mechs, Miris, and Rabhas.¹⁰¹ However, the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1956 tried to provide for the inclusion and the exclusion of groups from the list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. An amendment of Scheduled Castes Order, 1950 was made. The main focus of this amendment was to re-determine the population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for Section 42 of the States Reorganization Act, 1956.¹⁰² According to the States Reorganization Act 1956, state boundaries were created which were divided on the basis of languages.

Apart from policies of tribal administration, the years that followed independence, witnessed conflicts on reorganization of territories in Assam as well as in the rest of India. According to some scholars, reorganization of states can be understood in three phases, i.e.

⁹⁹ See, Report of Tribal Areas under the Sixth Schedule Areas, Government of Assam, February 11, 1950.

¹⁰⁰ See, Regulation No. X 1951 of The Assam United District of Mikir and North Cachar Hills (Administration) Regulation, 1951.

¹⁰¹ See, Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950.

¹⁰² See, The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act, 1956.

1956-1971, 1971-1987 and till 1999 (Chadda, 2002). In the second phase of reorganization, Assam was split up in different states. What was the reason behind such internal remapping and fragmentation of the areas (Chadda, 2002)? Was it for the proper administration of the areas, or for other issues related to security of the country? The constitution of India gave importance to the creation of different administrative units on the basis of geography, demography, administrative convenience, language or culture. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a three-member State Reorganization Commission (SRC). The purpose of forming SRC was to create more states for administrative effectiveness. An amendment was made in the First Schedule to the constitution of India dividing the states into different parts.¹⁰³ Second federal reorganization during 1971 to 1987 focused on re-division of Assam. Tripura and Manipur were created as Union Territories in 1956, and were declared as states within India in 1972. The state of Meghalaya was an autonomous state and in 1972 it was recognized as a full-fledged state. Creation of states in the Northeast was essential primarily for two reasons; first, it was because of the boundary issues with neighboring China and second, because of the parliamentary elections and assembly elections of 1972 and 1973 respectively (Chadda, 2002). The electoral incentives of the government forced the Indian political elites to take the initiative of reorganizing the states in the Northeast India. As per the provisions of the North Eastern (Reorganization Areas) Act in 1971, Meghalaya became the full-fledged state. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh also followed the trend of getting statehood. Earlier Shillong was the joint capital of both Assam and Meghalaya till 1972 before the formation of the state of Meghalaya. But, in that year, the Government of Assam decided to shift the capital to Dispur, Guwahati as Shillong became the state capital

¹⁰³ See, The States Reorganization Act, 1956 (37 of 1956): An act to provide for the reorganization of the states of India and for matters connected therewith, Government of India.

of Meghalaya in 1972.¹⁰⁴ In the next section, the process of state formation will be discussed in detail.

State formation in Northeast India

The States Reorganization Commission (SRC), during their visit to Northeast India, received many memorandums and demands to form a common state and, on the other hand, the hill districts wanted to form a hill state. Demand for Hill state was laid down in the Tura Conference by the tribal leaders in October 1954. The Tura conference made a platform for unification of all the hill districts that is mentioned in part A of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Naga Hills districts also supported the cause of the formation of a separate hill state. The demand for the creation of a combined Hill State of the Northeast was not considered by the SRC. The Commission came to a conclusion that the creation of a separate Hill State was not feasible for the people and so the hill districts should continue to be a part of Assam. But, Nagas continued to demand independence and separation from Assam and India. On August 1, 1960, the Government of India decided to create the state of Nagaland within India.¹⁰⁵ Nagaland was formed as a new state with an area of 6,366 sq. miles just before the census of 1961. Assam at that time consisted of about 47,091 sq. miles according to the Surveyor General of India and 47,257.2 sq. miles according to the Director of Assam Survey.¹⁰⁶ According to Census of India, 1961, there were eleven districts in Assam that were divided into 23 subdivisions and 108 police stations and *mauzas*. United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district were formed between 1951 and 1961 by carving out

¹⁰⁴ Internet document published by Assam Legislative Assembly, titled "A Brief Historical Profile of Assam Legislative Assembly". URL: www.assamassembly.gov.in/history.html. Accessed on: 05/02/2014, 11:24 AM.

¹⁰⁵ See, Assam State Gazetteer, 1999, Vol. 1. Violence took place to create a separate state for the Naga tribal community. Power was devolve and separate state was created to contain violence in the Nagaland. Different scholars examined power devolution and creation of state in the Northeast India (Kikon, 2005; Hussain, 1987).

¹⁰⁶ See, Census of India 1961, Assam, Vol. III, Part I-A, Government of India Press, Calcutta, 1964.

territories from Nowgong and Sibsagar districts. The earlier districts were: Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Cachar, Garo Hills, United Khasi-Jaintia Hills, United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, and Mizo Hills. About 32.8 square miles land were also transferred to the Government of Bhutan on 1st September 1951 under the Assam (Allocation of Boundaries) Act, 1951 from Kamrup district.¹⁰⁷

At the same time, there was a demand for the declaration of Assamese as the official language. Different organizations including the Assam Sahitya Sabha raised their voices in favor of the demand. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) recommended that while Assamese should be made an official language, it should not be imposed on the non-Assamese districts. Chief Minister of Assam, Bimal Prasad Chaliha accepted the recommendation. There were criticisms from Cachar and the Hill districts for accepting the demands to declare Assamese as the official language. In spite of criticisms, the bill was introduced in the Assembly on 10th October 1960. Assam Language Act of 1960 was enacted which further fueled the demand for a separate Hill State as Assamese language was not accepted by the communities living in the hill districts. As a result of mobilization of the Hill leaders, the North East Reorganization Act of 1972 divided Assam into several parts, creating Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh as separate states.

The reorganization of Assam was followed by other events. An important development took place in Assam on the issue of illegal migration from Bangladesh. The problem of foreign nationals took a serious turn in 1979 when the Assam Movement was launched by the All Assam Students' Union from June 1979 to 14th August 1985 against illegal migration from Bangladesh. The Assam Movement was led by AASU with the help

¹⁰⁷ See, Census of India 1961.

of Assam Gana Sangram Parishad and was supported by different tribal organizations. On 15th August 1985, Assam Accord was signed to facilitate provisions to Assamese people and at the same time to check the illegal migration of foreign nationals. But, it could not meet the desired demands as it was not fully implemented. Along with that, Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act (IMDT) which was passed by the parliament in 1983 also aggravated the violent situation.

But, post-Accord the tribal communities had their own grievances which they felt was not met in the Accord. All the tribal communities felt that they were deprived in the interest of larger composite identity of being 'Assamese'. As a result, there were demands from tribal communities for their political and territorial space. Different tribal communities demanded separation and decentralized structure of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution to retain their culture, tradition and tribal administrative structures.

Sixth Schedule in Northeast India: Amendments and implementation

The creation of the autonomous State of Meghalaya with effect from 2nd April 1970 provided the first occasion of an amendment. The Fourth Schedule of the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 bestowed more power to the autonomous regions and states created under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This Schedule deals with the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya and the Union Territories of Mizoram (Hansaria, 1983). The North East Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971 transferred the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District to the state of Meghalaya.¹⁰⁸ When Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District acquired the status of a separate state, North Cachar and Mikir Hills decided to stay with Assam because they were

¹⁰⁸ See, North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971.

also demanding a separate state for the two hill districts. Their demand for a separate state was not successful after the formation of the state of Meghalaya. Therefore, in 1985 People's Democratic Front (PDF) was formed in Karbi Anglong (earlier known as Mikir Hills). In 1987 PDF was renamed as the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). ASDC demanded more autonomy for the two hill districts and to form an autonomous state as a 'state within the state'.¹⁰⁹ Various students' organizations including Karbi Students' Association (KSA) and Dimasa Students' Unions (DSU) joined hands with ASDC to demand an autonomous state under the provision of 244 (A) of Indian Constitution. During this movement, ASDC organized themselves as a strong political party in both the hill districts.

Similarly, in the 1960s there were demands for a separate state of Mizoland under the Mizo National Front (MNF). When Meghalaya got statehood, MNF used violence in the Lushai hills and mobilized people for decentralized institutions. Union Territory of Mizoram was created which comprised of the former Lushai Hills district. Mizoram District Council Order, 1972 came into effect on 29th April 1972 included Chakma District, the Lakher District and the Pawi District.¹¹⁰ The Sixth Schedule was also amended by the Constitution (Twenty-Second) Amendment Act, 1969 which inserted Article 244A, 275 (IA) and 371B by section 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

Apart from Assam and Mizoram, Tripura also achieved its autonomous structure as the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) to administer the tribal areas within the state by the TTAADC Act 1979. The council came into effect on 18th

¹⁰⁹ Interview conducted in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao between October and December, 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹¹⁰ See, Mizoram District Council's (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order, 1972.

January 1982 under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India. Later, it was incorporated into the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India under the Constitution (Forty-Ninth amendment) Act, 1984 after a resolution was passed by the Tripura Legislative Assembly on March 19, 1982 and February 11, 1983. The Government of India was requested to provide Sixth Schedule as far the Constitution of India to certain areas in Tripura.¹¹¹ Accordingly, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was extended to TTAADC from 1st April 1985 providing more power and responsibilities. In Assam, Karbi and Dimasaland areas got their own District Councils which came into existence in 1952. North Cachar Hill District Council came into effect on 29th April 1952 and the Mikir Hills District Council on 23rd June 1952. In 1976, North Cachar and Mikir Hills were separated and Mikir Hill district was later known as Karbi Anglong in 1976. In the 1990s due to protests of different organizations Karbi Anglong district was renamed as Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council by incorporating greater autonomy under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1995. The local elites sought for autonomy/political decentralization for electoral incentives in these councils. The local elites tried to create platforms to contest the elections in the decentralized regions if they were granted the territorial autonomy. For instance, the Karbi ethnic leaders mobilized people to demand a separate state for the Karbi community. The Dima Hasao also followed the same trend. Dima Hasao, which was earlier known as the North Cachar Hills District also got more autonomy (political decentralization) by the amendment of the Constitution. But, the violent movement in NC Hills continued after 1995 which was led by different insurgent groups like United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dima Halim Daoga (DHD) for Karbiland and Dimasaland respectively.

¹¹¹ See, Statement of Objects and Reasons appended to the Constitution (Fifty-first Amendment) Bill, 1984 which was enacted as the Constitution (Forty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1984.

In 2003, North Cachar witnessed violence for the demand of Dimasaland which was carried out by a newly formed extremist group known as Black Widow. In 2009 DHD-Jewel group (Bland Widow) surrendered and came to a ceasefire and in 2012 an agreement was signed between the state government, central government and two DHD groups.¹¹² In Karbi Anglong, Karbi Langri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) and Karbi Peoples Liberation Tigers (KPLT) were active in the armed movement. Karbi students' organizations resumed their movement in 1995 when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) formed Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chattisgarh as separate states in India in 2000. Most recently in 2013, when Congress government agreed to form Telangana, the Karbi organizations mobilized once again under the banner of the 'July Revolution' in demand for separate state for the Karbi people. Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS) led the movement for the demand of an autonomous state under the constitutional provision of 244 (A).¹¹³

Though Sixth Schedule was implemented, there are criticisms about the implementation of the schedule. Critics (few members of Constituent Assembly) argued that policies of the British are a part of legacy and creates separation in the minds of tribal leaders. Critics like Misra and Mangattuthazhe also argue that the Sixth Schedule remained a myth because the autonomous regions are very much dependent on the state governments. The powers granted to the autonomous councils are not sufficient to have self-determination because councils have to depend on the state government for funds (Misra, 2012; Mangattuthazhe, 2008). Therefore, the autonomous councils are still demanding separation

¹¹² Interviews conducted in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao between October and December, 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹¹³ *ibid*

of their territories. Different demands and counter demands by other communities led to conflict among communities which may have led to ethnic violence in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam. The failure to faithfully devolve and implement powers to the autonomous councils is often reason for continued political violence in Sixth Schedule areas as argued by Misra. The failed attempts in Assam to construct a civil identity/civil sub-nationalism cutting across ethnicities also might have contributed to ethnic violence in Assam. The regional student organization (AASU) and revolutionary group of Assam (ULFA) tried to build a composite identity of the Assamese population as a whole and wanted to have separation from mainland India (Saikia, 2015). The initiatives actually failed after the Assam Movement (signing of Assam Accord and difference emerged among different ethnic communities) which may also be a contributing factor for ethnic violence.

To summarize this part, the process of political decentralization was implemented to accommodate ethnic tribes and to reduce feeling of ethnic separatism in Northeast India. But, political decentralization failed to reduce separatism in the decentralized areas under the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam and other parts of the Northeast. Granting of political decentralization created political spaces for electoral incentives for the political elites of the decentralized regions which created the grounds for conflict and violence in these regions. The political elites claim that they will continue to demand for separate homelands for their particular ethnic identities in the decentralized regions. As a result, conflict and contestation continues. Other minority ethnic groups in these decentralized regions also demand their rights for separate territorial spaces which further leads to ethnic tensions and violence in the territorially decentralized regions of Northeast India. In 2003 the Government of India made amendments to the Constitution of India and included the plain areas of tribal people in

Assam within the ambit of the Sixth Schedule. The Sixth Schedule was implemented to grant territorial space and to accommodate the aggrieved Bodos in Assam. What has been the impact of these amendments on the inter-group relations and ethnic mobilization of Bodos, need further discussion. The next section discusses the implementation of Sixth Schedule in the plain areas of Assam, particularly in the Bodo areas.

Political decentralization and implementation of Sixth Schedule in plains tribes areas of Assam

Political decentralization in the form of the Sixth Schedule was implemented in the plains tribe's areas of Assam to reduce ethnic/separatist violence of the Bodos. The Bodos, which is the largest plain tribes of Assam, started their movement since the 1980s for a separate political and territorial unit for self-determination. The Bodos were granted political decentralization in 2003 after amending the Sixth Schedule which was actually meant for the administration of hill areas of Northeast India. Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India came into the purview of the Indian constitutional framework after several rounds of debates in the Constituent Assembly. Bordoloi Committee recommended the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to retain tribal administrative structures of the hill areas of undivided Assam. Division of Assam into several parts shaped the provisions to implement these provisions in hill areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. But further development and quest for the autonomy of the tribal communities in the plain areas forced the Indian government to implement the Sixth Schedule in plain areas after amendment.

An amendment was made in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India in the year 2003 to meet the demands of the plain of Assam, which is known as the Sixth Schedule

to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2003. It was amended when the Government of India signed the Memorandum of Settlement with ex-BLT leaders to form (Bodoland Territorial Council) BTC. The Sixth Schedule which was structured for the hill administration was amended because of rising demands of the Bodo-community for their self-determination and demands for their homeland. By this amendment, the political powers were decentralized to the lower levels of the politico-administrative setup. Autonomous district councils were thus formed under the Sixth schedule on ethnic lines in post independent India. Bodos were granted the Sixth schedule, although far short of their statehood demand, after almost two decades of violent mobilization (Saikia, 2011).

The objective under these provisions was to provide cultural, socio-economic and political aspirations of the community along with land rights and infrastructural development of the region. According to the provisions more than three thousand villages were included in the BTC area and this area was divided into four districts. Powers those were granted includes the political representation for the council with forty six members, out of which thirty seats have been reserved for Scheduled Tribes, five for non-Scheduled Tribes, five as open seats and other six seats for nominated members of BTC. Settlement, transfer, and inheritance of property of non-tribal people were granted under Para 3 of the amended schedule. Moreover, the council got the power to change the medium of instruction in lower level in educational institutions. The powers which were bestowed to Panchayats were also included in the power and provisions under the amended Sixth Schedule. The

amendment and implementation of the schedule to the plain areas facilitated the development of plain areas inhabited by the tribal communities.¹¹⁴

Though implementation of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in plain (Bodo dominated) areas helped in the development of infrastructure and other facilities, it also increased competition for more autonomy and the statehood demand by the Bodo leaders. It has also increased demands for autonomy and decentralization of power by other communities living in the plains thus promoting more ethnic violence in the region.

Summary

This chapter examined political decentralization from a historical perspective and argued that ad hoc policies of the Indian government intensified violence and separatism in the Northeast. After independence, Tripura and Manipur joined India as centrally administered territories after a period of resistance. Cooch Behar joined West Bengal and Khasi Hills joined Assam. Naga movement led by Naga Nationalist Council (NNC) was the first armed rebellion in post-independent India, followed by Manipur (1956), Assam and Mizoram in the 1960s. There were demands for autonomy by different ethnic groups even after the creation of states. Despite political decentralization (granting Sixth Schedule) of many areas in the Northeast region, violence continued.

Cline argued that, ‘the competing demands of various ethnic groups for greater autonomy created conflicts not only between the insurgents and the government but also between ethnic groups’ (Cline, 2006). Political decentralization which is treated as conflict prevention mechanism has therefore led to contrary outcomes in some areas. Why and under

¹¹⁴ Document of “Memorandum of Understanding (Bodoland Territorial Council Accord),” 2003, collected from BPF office Kokrajhar.

what conditions political decentralization in Sixth Schedule Areas in BTC led to violence is discussed in the next chapter.





Chapter Four

Nature of ethno-political demands, political decentralization and violence in Bodoland

Introduction

Ethnic and separatist violence have been prevalent in some territorially autonomous regions in the developing world. The demands for a separate homeland by different ethnic groups resulted to granting of territorial autonomy to the aggrieved groups. Devolution of power to sub-national groups was made on the basis of cultural distinctiveness and territorial concentration of ethnic groups. This also happened in the case of Bodos in Assam. On the basis of a demand for a separate homeland, Bodos were granted territorial autonomy in the form of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam. The creation of BTC, however, did not end the conflict. Violence recurred between Bodos and non-Bodos. In Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) violence occurred in 2008, 2012 and 2014 after the autonomous structure was created. This chapter tries to examine the probable causes of ethnic violence in the politically decentralized BTAD. While examining the probable causes of ethnic violence, this chapter argues that elite competition is one of the conditions of discontentment and ethnic violence in territorial autonomous areas of BTAD.

In the post-colonial period, the process of homogenization and policies taken to integrate tribal communities into the ambit of composite Assamese identity evoked differences among tribal communities. Different tribal ethnic groups pursued ethnonationalist movements in Northeast India against the disparities and alienation

experienced historically as the excluded groups.¹¹⁵ The moves for assimilating those groups after independence created differences between Assamese speaking and non-Assamese speaking tribal groups.¹¹⁶ State building in the post-independence period and adopting one language policy in Assam created anxiety among the non-Assamese speaking people.¹¹⁷ The non-Assamese speaking population especially the ethnic tribal groups and Bengali population of Assam started their ethnonationalist movement against the dominating Assamese speaking group.¹¹⁸ Bodos being the largest plains tribe of Assam criticized the growing dominance of Assamese speaking group and started a movement for their own territorial space. The movement started by Bodos in demand for a separate state for the largest plain tribe in Assam.

This chapter tries to understand the politics of Bodo nationalism, the Bodoland movement, phases of political decentralization and ethnic violence in the BTAD area.¹¹⁹ While doing so, the chapter tries to examine the violent movement led by Bodos and to understand why after two sets of political decentralization, violence recurred in the Bodo-

¹¹⁵ Excluded group means the groups which experienced relative deprivation, challenges in opportunities and ethnic preferences for one group at the exclusion of others. Examples can be drawn from the preferential treatment given to *bhumiputeras* in Malaysia and implementation of Sinhala-only Act in Sri Lanka (DeVotta, 2003). In the case of Assam, implementation of Assamese as the sole official language and signing of Assam Accord of 1985 which had no provisions for the tribal communities of Assam made themselves to think as excluded group compared to Assamese speaking population.

¹¹⁶ There were many moves by the government to assimilate earlier excluded groups, such as rule under the same constitutional framework and equal law and order for all the communities.

¹¹⁷ Assam Official Language was adopted after the Assam Language Act of 1960 which insisted that Assamese would be the only official language in parts of Assam. This development however created conflicting situation between Assamese speaking population and non-Assamese speaking people living in Assam who thought that their languages will be in a deprived position and these will gradually die away by imposition of Assamese as the single official language (Weiner, 1978).

¹¹⁸ Ethnonationalism means cultural and ethnic consciousness, for claims to acquire the right of self-determination. Ethnic groups strive for the formation of separate states or preserve historical territories, to protect their political integrity or to maintain internal order (Connor, 1967).

¹¹⁹ Bodo nationalism is the feeling of oneness among Bodo people for their demand of self determination and a separate state.

dominated areas.¹²⁰ This chapter tries to understand ethnic violence in Bodoland using elite competition as one of the primary factors promoting ethnic violence in the region. This chapter also addresses the question; does political decentralization reduce ethnic violence or intensify violence. What are the conditions under which political decentralization may foster ethnic violence? To understand the relation between violence and political decentralization, the chapter will focus on ethnonationalism of Bodos and phases of ethnic mobilization and violence that took place in the decentralized Bodo areas.

This chapter tries to understand the history of mobilization, the movement for autonomy, the process of decentralization and violence in Bodoland.¹²¹ The chapter also tries to understand the probable factors responsible for ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of Bodoland.

Ethnopolitical mobilization of Bodos and demands for political decentralization

The Bodos are known as the earliest inhabitants in Assam.¹²² They first settled in the Brahmaputra Valley extending westward to the districts of Koch Bihar, Rangpur and Dinajpur in North Bengal.¹²³ History suggests that in the Brahmaputra valley, Bodo-Kacharis were the first natives of the region and they claimed themselves to be the indigenous people or ‘Sons of the Soil’ (Hussain, 1987; Weiner, 1978).¹²⁴ The Bodos are of

¹²⁰ Bodo dominated areas are the four districts which were created after the signing of BTC Accord. The four districts are Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar and Udalguri.

¹²¹ The term movement for autonomy is understood as a movement both peaceful and violent for the autonomous structure or for an autonomous state (Hussain, 1987).

¹²² The Bodos, known as Bodo-Kachari, is an ethnic group of Assam. Bodos speak Tibeto-Burman language and are of Indo-Mongoloid origin. They are said to have migrated to India through Patkai hills (Endle, 1911).

¹²³ See, Assam State Gazetteer, Vol. 1, 1999.

¹²⁴ Indigenous people are the original inhabitants with first occupancy or first inhabitants with prior occupancy as described by Jeremy Waldron (Waldron, 2003). In Assam, the debate exists on ‘who is indigenous’, and

the Mongolian origin and as described by Endle, “Bodos are the inhabitants of a country north of the Himalaya and West of China (Endle, 1911). This land was known as *Bod* which meant homeland. It is also said that there were many parts of the region known as *Hor Bod*, *Kur Bod*, and inhabitants of *Bod* country were known as Bodo-Ficha, where Bodo means land and Ficha means children (Endle, 1911).” Later on, these names were known as Boddobodo-Boro (Brahma, 2008). About the origin of the Bodo S. Endle mentioned,

“The origin of the Kachari race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. As remarked above, in feature and general appearance they approximate very closely to the Mongolian type, and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race”

(Endle, 1911).

According to the Economic Survey of Assam 2010-11 and the census report of 2001, it is claimed that the Bodo-speaking population constituted of 1296162 people, which was 5.29 percent of the total population of Assam.¹²⁵ However, scholar like George claimed that during the period of independence half of the population was constituted of the Bodos (George, 1994). Most of them were dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

Bodos are one of the tribes of Northeast India. They are the inhabitant of the plains of lower Assam in the Brahmaputra valley. As Gait observed, Bodos are the similar group of people known as Mech in Goalpara and in parts of North Bengal. In the history of Assam, the long duration of domination by the Bodos is shown by the frequent occurrence of their

claims are made by all the communities as the original settler or the indigenous population of Assam. Based on such claims, there are demands for tribal status by many communities and autonomous regions.

¹²⁵ See, Government of Assam Report of (2010-11) of *Economic Survey of Assam 2010-11*, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Assam, Guwahati: Planning and Development Department.

languages in the present names of the rivers. Rivers like Dibru, Dikhu, Dihing, Dihong, Dibong, Disang, Diphang, Dimla, with the use of prefix *di* or *ti* is the Bodo word for water (Gait, 1906). In the course of time, Aryan and Bodo languages completely wiped out the earlier Mon-Khmer groups that are found mostly in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

There were instances of ‘detrribalization’ of tribal or indigenous communities of Assam, a term used to denote embracing other religious beliefs from earlier animist beliefs. A small section of Bodos adopted the religion preached by Sankardeva who were later known as Saranias.¹²⁶ Christianity also influenced the Bodo society and some also converted to Christianity. According to 2011 census, there are approximately 9.4% Christians in the four districts of Bodoland.¹²⁷ Efforts were made by Kalicharan Brahma to bring changes in the politics, society, local economy and education among the Bodos. He organized the ‘Bodo Maha Sanmilan’ for the eradication of social evils; which were later followed by Dwarendra Basumatary, Pramod Brahma, Ishan Mushahary, Rupnath Brahma, Satish Basumatary, Sitanath Brahma Choudhury (Hazarika, 2005). The newly emerging middle class tried to protect the Bodo society and worked for the socio-political consciousness of the Bodo community. They also worked for collective rights, against injustice, discrimination and alienation of Bodos by the caste-Hindu Assamese speaking group in the matter of political and economic development. They tried to mobilize the ethnic group through the formation of Kachari Youth Association/ Kachari Yubak Sanmilan (KYA) in 1920s. In 1929 KYA sent a memorandum to the Simon Commission for separate electorates for the Bodos. KYA demanded protection of the Kachari tribes (Chaudhuri, 1992; Saikia,

¹²⁶ Sarania Kacharis are the Bodo-Kacharis in origin but they were later influenced by Hinduism and Vaishnavism.

¹²⁷ See, Religious Census, Census of India 2011.

2011). The ethnic movement led by the Bodos for a separate state was based on political, economic and cultural grievances of the Bodo people. In the pre-colonial and pre-Ahom period, Bodo-Kacharis formed the Bodo-Kachari kingdom in major parts of Assam and North Bengal. But the invasion of the Brahmaputra valley by the Ahoms and frequent wars with Ahoms in the 16th century led to loss of control of the Bodo-Kachari rulers on the territories. After the Treaty of Yandaboo these territories were taken over by the British (Gait, 1906). When the British took over the territories, they tried to categorize the communities and formed the excluded areas (for the hill tribes) and the partially excluded areas (for plains tribes) formulating indirect rule to control these territories and giving charge to the local tribal chiefs to administer their region in exchange of tributes to the British administration at regular intervals.¹²⁸ It was also under the provision of the Inner Line Regulation Act of 1873 and Assam Land Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 that non-tribal communities were restricted to enter these areas allowing promotion and preservation of land and culture of the tribal communities.¹²⁹

Ethnopolitical mobilization and identity politics of Bodos (1920s- 1940s)

Ethnopolitical mobilization of the Bodos can be traced back to 1920s. The claims are based on control over the Brahmaputra Valley in the pre-Ahom period. Consciousness among the rising middle class of the Bodo-Kacharis helped the formation of the All Assam Plain Tribal League (AAPTL) in 1933 and many other organizations after post-independence. The organization led the ethnic mobilization of the Bodos.¹³⁰ Among them,

¹²⁸ See, Government of India Act, 1935 (Chapter V) which was adopted on 2nd August 1935 [26 Geo. 5. Ch. 2].

¹²⁹ See, The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, Government of Assam.

¹³⁰ Middle class plays an important role in building consciousness and uplifting the society. The emergence of new middle class among the Blacks in America uplifted them in class structure (Landry, 1987). In the same way, a middle class within Chile emerged for reform movement which expressed their fears, hopes and ideas

Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) which was formed in 1952, the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) formed in 1967 reflected the desire of Bodo people for political power and self-determination (Saikia, 2011; Basumatary, 2014). The newly emerging Bodo middle class took lead to preserve their culture and to protect their socio-political rights.

The question of identity of the Bodos became prominent when Simon Commission visited Assam in 1929. Various Bodo organizations submitted a memorandum to the commission about the situation and perceived exploitation of the tribal communities by upper Hindu caste-Assamese speaking group (Saikia, 2011). Subsequently, in the 1920s there were demands for proper representation and rights for the tribal communities. The rise of a small section of educated middle class among the Bodos led the process of the movement for their rights. In 1933, a meeting of the all tribal communities was held in Nagaon to mobilize the tribal communities. The outcome of the meeting was the formation of All Assam Tribal League (AATL) which was later known as Tribal League (Datta, 1993). Memorandums for a separate electorate were put forwarded by Bodo leaders so that there would be proper political representation of the Bodos. The Simon Commission accepted the proposal and granted four reserved seats and political status to the plains tribes under the Government of India Act, 1935 (Datta, 1993). Along with that, there was a demand for a separate homeland for the tribal communities living in Assam.

about liberal democracy and democratization and about the “Chilean race” (Barr-Melej, 2001). The rise of such middle class brought consciousness among the groups for mobilization forming different organizations and groups to pressurize the government for social and political reforms. Even in Assam, the emergence of Assamese middle class after independence set the platform for mobilization against the dominance of Bengali language and increasing migration to Assam (Weiner, 1978).

Land issues played a crucial role in the demand for a separate homeland for the Bodos. In the Assam legislative Assembly, there were debates on land rights of tribal communities and demands were made by immigrants to withdraw the Line System (Misra, 2012; Weiner, 1978).¹³¹ In 1937, a committee was formed by the Assam assembly headed by F. W. Hockenull to assess the issue of land (Weiner, 1978). In the report, he insisted that Line System should continue and the government should take concrete steps to reduce alienation of tribal land. Gopinath Bordoloi took measures for protecting tribal lands from encroachers, but permission was granted for the settlement of landless farmers, Assamese and immigrants. In 1939, Bordoloi ministry resigned and Syed Mohammad Saadulla came into power under the banner of Muslim League. Though Saadulla signed an agreement with the Assam Tribal League, he tried to accommodate more immigrants from East Bengal in the wastelands of Assam. During his second term, Saadulla Ministry took a new resolution for opening up the grazing grounds in the districts of Nowgong, Darrang and Kamrup to accommodate the immigrants to grow more food in Assam (Misra, 2012). The justification was that for a booming economy and to grow more food, Assam needs cheap labor which could be brought in from East Bengal. Tribal communities were not satisfied with the move made by the government to accommodate immigrants in the lands occupied by them though those lands were non-cultivable lands. To quote Weiner on this issue,

“The 1937 elections produced a minority Muslim League government under Mohammad Saadulla which, except for a one-year interlude of Congress rule, governed the state until the close of World War II. The Saadulla ministry had

¹³¹ Before independence of India, labor force to the state of Assam was migrated from present Bangladesh and other parts of India. However, in the British colonialism line system was imposed to restrict migration of other communities to tribal areas, especially in the hill areas. The line system/inner line also restricts other communities to settle in the areas inhabited by tribal communities to reduce violence in such areas. However, the workforce which was brought from other parts of India demanded withdraw of the line system so that migrants can work and settle in the unused lands in the tribal inhabited areas.

aroused fears among Assamese that the entire province might be incorporated into the Muslim state of Pakistan, a fear made more credible by the increasing influx of Bengali Muslim migrants into the state in the late thirties and early forties.”

(Weiner, 1978)

Thus 1920-30s witnessed the rise of socio-political consciousness and political mobilization of the Bodos. The next section discusses ethnonationalism and identity politics of Bodos in the post-independence period.

Ethnonationalism and identity politics of Bodos: (1947- 1993)

Identity formation of the Bodos has to be understood from the perspective of grievances, under-development and influx of immigrants. Gurr explained that inequalities among different ethnic groups and grievances of an ethnic group may create a strong sense of ethnic identity in a definite territory (Gurr, 1993; Gurr, 1994). Bodos felt ignored because hill tribes were granted a protective arrangement under the Sixth Schedule whereas other tribes of rest of India were accommodated under the Fifth Schedule and protected belts under the constitution of India. The plains tribes of Assam did not get a special provision unlike the hill tribes of undivided Assam. Moreover, Assam experienced migration from different parts of India and across the border before independence during the Saadulla's regime. Inner Line and other restrictions were implemented in the hill areas to stop migration to the tribal areas, but the plains tribes faced the impact of immigration.

Right after independence, the Indian Government constituted a sub-committee known as the Northeast Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi to examine the status of the tribal communities and to recommend on tribal communities. The Bordoloi Committee recommended classification of

the Bodo inhabited areas as ‘tribal belts and blocks’ under Chapter X of Indian Constitution.¹³² Under such classification, it was provided that there would be restrictions on the possession and transfer of lands from the tribal communities to non-tribal communities. Those provisions were meant for protection of land of the tribal communities.¹³³ These also ensured the safeguard of tradition, customs, distinct culture and identity of the tribal communities. Despite these provisions, Bodos mobilized. Saikia argued, “Politicization of ethnic identities and cultural activism in the 1960s provided a strong foundation for the subsequent phases of Bodo ethnonationalism (Saikia, 2011: p. 65).”

Ethnonationalism of the Bodos intensified when Assamese as the official language was institutionalized in Assam. During independence, Bengali was the official language of Assam. The language movement was launched in the 1960s to replace the Bengali language with Assamese which later became the official language of Assam. The Assamese educated middle class played a remarkable role in the establishment of Assamese as the official language in Assam which later led to ‘Bongal Kheda’ agitation in the 1960s (Chakravarti, 1960; Guha, 2012). The Assam language movement was led by Assam Jatiya Mahasabha (Assam National Assembly, formed in 1936) and Assam Sahitya Sabha (Weiner, 1978). There were calls for public meetings, protests and road blockades. Counter protests were organized by Bengalis to include as the second and alternative language. A large number of

¹³² See, Report of Tribal Areas under the Sixth Schedule Areas, Government of Assam, February 11, 1950 and see, Report of the Assam Disturbances Inquiry Commission- regarding Tribal Belts and the Line System, Assam, 1950.

¹³³ The classification of ‘tribal belts and blocks’ was based on the provisions of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act of 1886 which came into effect in Cachar, Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong (presently Nagaon), Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. The provisions of the Land and Revenue act seek to protect the backward classes who live in their primitive conditions and are deprived of material advantages. The regions inhabited by people of those classes were included in tribal belts and blocks for the protection of their land and non-interference of other classes. Rules were made to evict any person who encroach the land without legal authority. According to the act and classification of ‘tribal belts and blocks’, no tribal land can be transferred to other communities and transfer is possible only within the classes of people.

tribal communities supported the move made by Bengali people because they were more comfortable with the Bengali language rather than Assamese (Weiner, 1978). Despite resistance from the non-Assamese population, the government in power implemented Assamese as the official language by the Assam Official Language Act of 1960 (Weiner, 1978). Implementation of language policy widened the gap between the Assamese speaking and non-Assamese speaking tribal population creating more distrust towards each other. In the same period, Bodo language movement was also organized by the Bodo Literary Society (Bodo Sahitya Sabha) which was formed in 1952 by J. N. Basumatary, Prasenjit Brahma, Shailendra Brahma and others to uplift the Bodo language and culture (Saikia, 2011). Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) opposed the move of the government to assimilate tribal groups under one language policy. The main motive of BSS was to promote the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools. A memorandum was put forward to the Assam government for considering their demand and in 1960 a mass campaign was initiated in support of the demand made by BSS. Bodo problems and demands were however not responded by the government till late 1960s.

When the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) took control of the movement leadership, Bodo nationalism transformed itself from a relatively passive form of resistance to one that was characterized as more open, highly organized and aggressive nationalism (George, 1994). They combined their cultural concerns with their demands for a separate homeland, which the activists felt could be achieved only if the group attained regional autonomy by creating a distinct federal territory that will be completely separate from Assam. The activists argued that the establishment of a separate state will allow them to maintain the Bodo language as a main official language, a federal arrangement that will

fulfill their long-cherished ethnolinguistic aspirations. This meant that by creating their own state, the group will have more independence and power in the processes of political decision-making, increased access and right to retain finances, and other economic benefits generated within their territory (George, 1994). ABSU was successful in organizing the rebellion because of its unique methods of forming alliances and working in close cooperation with other ethnic organization like the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC), All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) and the All Bodo Employees' Federation (ABEF) (Saikia, 2011).

In the post-independence period, in the 1970s, Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) pushed for the creation of an autonomous territorial unit called Udayachal (George, 1994). The plains tribal movement comprised of nine tribal groups including the Bodos, the Mishings, the Deoris, the Rabhas, the Lalungs, the Mechs, the Hojais, the Sonowal Kacharis, and the Barmans of Cachar (Dash, 1989). The PTCA was a Bodo dominated regional political party which was formed at the initiative of ABSU on 27th February 1967. After independence, plains tribal communities compared the constitutional safeguard of the plain tribes with Scheduled Tribes in the hills of Assam and those living in other parts of India. The hills tribes enjoyed the benefit of the Sixth Schedule and the Scheduled Tribes in other parts of India enjoyed the benefit of Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. On the other hand, tribals living in the plain areas of Assam enjoyed none of the two provisions. PTCA made it clear that the struggle of the plains tribals was not for any political benefits, but its main aim was to secure the protection of the plains tribals in all respects. On 20th May 1967, the PTCA submitted a memorandum to the then President of India for the formation of an 'Autonomous Region' for the tribes inhabiting the plain areas

of Assam, so that they could have constitutional safeguards and protection of the rights of tribal communities (Hazarika, 2005). However, efforts made by PTCA to create an autonomous territorial unit called Udayachal reduced when the party members entered power politics in the state. The organization emerged as a full-fledged political party to contest the election in state legislative assembly of 1977. PTCA won the elections and formed an alliance with Janata Party to form the government. After winning the first elections, PTCA contested elections in 1983 and 1985 and made a coalition with the Congress ministry (Day, 2002). Their efforts failed to accommodate the interests of the Bodos and support shifted to ABSU which insisted on radical goals and a separate state for Bodos.

Ethno-nationalism of the community emerges out of the discrimination and dominance by other ethnically dominant communities. As Castells argued, “The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory, from power apparatuses and religious revelations (Castells, 2010, p. 7).” Castells also argued, “Ethnicity has always been a basic attribute of self-identification, not only because of shared historical practice, but also because ‘others’ remind them of ‘otherness’ by external attributes, color, language and biology. This ethnicity has become a major source of self-organization, confrontation and often, hatred and violence (Castells, 2010).” Castells argues that, identities constructed on the basis of cultural attributes are given priority over others. Ethnicity is a basis for social differentiation, recognition and discrimination, in many contemporary societies (Castells, 2010). In the same way, Northeast India’s ethnic movements are based on discrimination of ethnic minorities on the basis of different ethnic identities. The

emergence of such movements can be understood against the background of historical changes from colonialism to popular democratic forces and the absence of appropriate political space. With the changing of identity and interests, there has been a transition of ethno-political movements to armed militancies.

The 1980s witnessed a movement in Assam which was led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) for the detection and eviction of foreign nationals from the state and the granting of greater autonomy. This movement was supported by various tribal groups among which Bodo youth were in majority who worked along with AASU. Besides Bodos, Karbis and Dimasas also joined the Assam movement to expel the 'foreigners' and 'infiltrators' from Assam (Bhaumik, 1998). The movement ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, and the AASU leaders formed the new AGP government in Assam in 1986 which raised the hopes of the Bodos for the fulfillment of their longstanding demands. However, after the settlements with Indian government and signing of the accord, tribal communities felt that there was nothing for the tribals in the accord. The result was a fresh round of agitation for homelands (Shekhawat, 2007; Bhaumik, 2004). Different tribal ethnic organizations demanded self-determination and territorial space. The Bodos claimed that they are the sons of the soil and territorial space is their birthright (Weiner, 1978).

ABSU led the movement from 2nd March 1987. Their demands included 92 points for their homeland. Later, they dropped 89 non-political demands from the 92 point charters and submitted a memorandum with 3 political demands after the four-day annual conference. The three political demands were "(1) Creation of a separate state called "Bodoland" on the north banks of the Brahmaputra, (2) Creation of a district council in the

tribal dominated contiguous areas of south bank and (3) inclusion of Bodo-Kacharies of Karbi Anglong in the Sixth Schedule of the constitution” (Dash, 1989; Misra, 1989).

Why did the Bodos intensify the movement for a separate state in 1980s? As discussed earlier, Bodo movement emerged due to historical alienation and political and cultural domination by the Assamese speaking population. None of the leaders from Assam proposed a feasible solution to the Bodo problem and Bodo leaders could not see a common future for the tribals and non-tribals of Assam. Secondly, the State Reorganization Act and article 244A was applicable only in the hill districts of Assam, granting autonomy to different tribes excluding the plain tribals from the purview of article 244A. After amending the Sixth Schedule on November 29 1988, the amended schedule left out the plain tribals once again. Fear for loss of identity because of non-recognition forced them to resort to unrest demanding for their indigenous rights (Dash, 1989). On the other hand, Misra examines a different factor for the radicalization of the Bodoland movement. He argued that in the tribal blocks and belts, tribal land has been usurped by middle-class non-tribal population. The encroachment was not only limited to the farming land, but also extended to the state’s reserved forests where Nepalis, former tea garden workers and immigrant Muslims formed a sizable number of the settlers (Misra, 1989). Land issue therefore played a crucial role in the Bodoland movement. At the initial phase, ABSU strategized the movements by bandhs, road blockade and mass mobilization which were the tactics borrowed from AASU. But, gradually the movement took another shape when it was no longer a peaceful form of movement. There were ‘quit notices’ against the other communities especially in Kokrajhar district and Udalguri sub-division to make Bodo a majority in the area (Misra, 1989). Attacks were made on school buildings, market place

and government buildings to support their movement and for their cause. PTCA also became suspicious about the violent moves of ABSU. Emerging differences between PTCA and ABSU led to joining of PTCA in the ministry with Janata rule in 1978-79. But, when ABSU could not bring all the tribes under one roof, they demanded a full-fledged state of 'Bodoland'. Violent tactics taken by ABSU led to the alienation of a large section of Bodos from people who were the supporters of PTCA (Misra, 1989).

Accordingly, on 12 June 1987, ABSU under the leadership of U.N. Brahma also known as Bodofa (father of Bodos) organized a peace rally at Judges Field for the creation of Bodoland. The demand was to Divide Assam 50:50. Arguments and demands in the rally were made to convert the northern part of the Brahmaputra to Bodoland which was mostly populated by the Bodos.¹³⁴ The more radical strategies were adopted by National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) whose goal was separation of the Bodos from India. NDFB had links with other militant organization such as ULFA and NSCN.¹³⁵ The demand for Bodoland was first raised by the Bodo Security Force (BdSF) in 1988. Later, the BdSF was renamed as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) under the leadership of Ranjan Daimari (Dash, 1989). In the early 1990s, Congress government sat for a dialogue with the ABSU leaders which led to series of talks with leaders of different organizations. Finally, the first accord of settlement was signed in 1993.

¹³⁴ Interview conducted in Kokrajhar between December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹³⁵ Interview conducted in Kokrajhar between December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

Bodo Accord and beyond (1993-2003)

After series of talks with the Congress government, the first phase of decentralization took place after the first Bodo Accord signed in February 20, 1993. The agreement was made between the ABSU, BPAC, state government and the central government. Objectives of the Bodo Accord were to provide maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution of India through the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC).¹³⁶ There were many provisions and powers delegated to the autonomous council. The accord stated that there will be a general council comprising of 40 members to make bye-laws, rules and orders for application within the region. Bodoland Executive Council (BEC) will be formed to implement laws within the BAC area. There were 23 subjects and Departments over which BAC will have control. Some special powers were also granted to the BAC for socio-economic development of the region. Comprising of 2,570 villages and several small towns, the BAC included 25 tea plantations.¹³⁷ The finance for BAC was allotted by the state government under a separate budget-head. The BAC would also receive grant-in-aid from time to time within the principles and policies enunciated by the Government of India. The grant-in-aid was to be managed exclusively by the General Council which had the powers to raise finances from levies/fees/taxes etc. Certain special provisions were made in the Accord for seat reservations where Election Commission of India will be requested by the BAC both for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly. It also provided for setting up of Special Court in

¹³⁶ Document of "Memorandum of Settlement (Bodo Accord)," 1993, collected from ABSU office Kokrajhar.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, Bodo Accord.

accordance with the tribal customary laws and procedure in consultation with the Gauhati High Court.¹³⁸

The signatories hoped that signing of the memorandum of settlement will terminate the long-standing conflict. But, before the first election of the council to select the Executive Members, the signatories failed to agree on the boundaries that were to include in the proposed BAC area. There were serious disagreements about the demarcation of geographical areas between the government and Bodo leaders. Bodo leaders were demanding more 515 villages to be included as parts of BAC which were inhabited by both Bodos and non-Bodo communities (Saikia, 2011).¹³⁹ However, the government refused to any other inclusion of villages in the list as the areas does not constitute more than the minimum requirement of 50% population of the Bodo community. Secondly, there was no support from the non-Bodo communities for the autonomous institution. There was opposition from the non-Bodos living in the Bodo areas for which the accord was prevented from implementation and the process of accommodating the Bodos was finally held up (Saikia, 2011). Non-implementation of the accord pushed the Bodo leaders as well as the extremist groups to fight for self-determination of the Bodos. In the process, extremist groups resorted to violence. Inter-communal violence was also witnessed during the movement. Peace was expected in Assam after signing of the Bodo Accord of 1993, but peace could not be restored. The Bodo leaders rejected the BAC as they considered that the accord was signed against the will and aspirations of the Bodo community. The Bodo extremist groups resorted to violence, killing of people in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Interview with Jiron Basumatary, the General Secretary of ABSU at Kokrajhar and BPPF Secretary, Mudaibari constituency (Udalguri) under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013 which is also already mentioned in Saikia (2011).

districts during September and October 1993 (George, 1994).¹⁴⁰ Division and differences among the Bodos and the non-Bodos widened during the movement. BdSF (Bodo Security Force) which opposed BAC was engaged in violent acts in the demand for a separate Bodoland. When the BAC failed, BSF reorganized itself as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). At the same time, a rival insurgent group was also formed in 1996 named by Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) under Prem Singh Brahma (Lacina, 2009).¹⁴¹ BLT which emerged as the rival group of NDFB started their movement for a separate state. BLT along with NDFB emerged as an armed group, engaged in killing, extorting and kidnapping and demanding for a separate state of Bodoland. The armed group of the Bodoland movement was thus divided into two camps.

The competition between the two armed groups led to more violence in the proposed BAC areas. However, later in 1996, Bodo leadership tried to convince the two Bodo militant groups not to fight with each other and to concentrate on the separatist objective of the movement. But, the relation between the two rebel groups did not improve.¹⁴² Bodo accord which was signed in 1993 could not improve the situation of the Bodo areas and constant violent moves by the Bodo militant outfits threatened the security of the other ethnic communities. To counter the Bodo outfits, other non-Bodo communities living in the area formed their own militant outfits which resulted in more violence. The Santhals formed Birsa Commando Force (BCF) and Adivasi Cobra Militant Force (ACMF), the Koch Rajbanshis were organized under Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO), and the

¹⁴⁰ According to local newspapers, violence started after signing of the BAC accord because of conflict over inclusion and exclusion of villages from the designed areas of Bodoland.

¹⁴¹ Bhabiram Kachari, the NDFB intellectual cited that two Bodo militant groups NDFB and BLT formed with different ideologies, where one was keen on 'sovereignty' and other on a 'separate state' within India respectively. Interview conducted in August 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

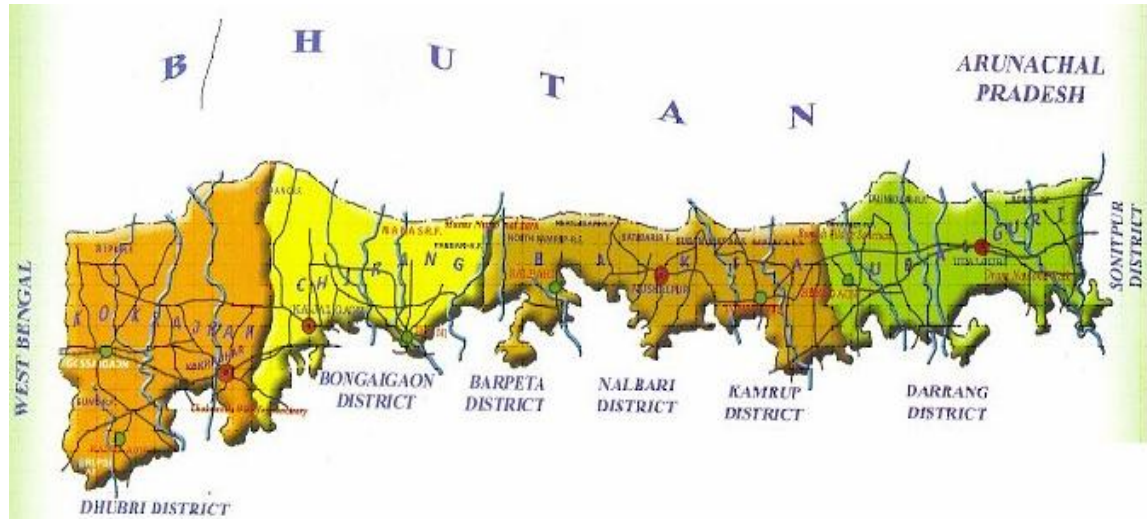
Bengalis living in the area formed the Bengali Tiger Force (BTF) (Basumatary, 2014). The government of India, however, took advantage of the internal differences between the BLT and NDFB, using repression towards NDFB and opening opportunities for negotiation to BLT (Saikia, Chima, & Baro, 2016).

BTC Accord and aftermath (2003-2016)

In 2001, BLT accepted the ceasefire offered by the government which granted them freedom to move freely and opportunities to negotiate their demands.¹⁴³ In 2003 there was a negotiation between the government of Assam, the central government and the BLT to create Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) as a second phase of decentralization in the area (Nath, 2003). It was known as the Second Bodo Accord creating BTC under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the plains tribe. BTC comprises of four districts of Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri. The detailed map of the BTC/BTAD is as follows:¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Interview with Jiron Basumatary, the General Secretary of ABSU at Kokrajhar and BPPF Secretary, Mudaibari constituency (Udalguri) under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁴⁴ BTC/BTAD is used interchangeably.



Source: BTC office, Kokrajhar

The four districts which were created by reorganizing existing districts later came to be known as Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD). The surrendered BLTs formed their own political party as Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) to represent themselves in the election process.¹⁴⁵ The newly formed political party continued to use violence as a tactic for political dominance in the region. Therefore, Bodoland Revolutionary Tiger Force (BRTF) was formed by the former BLT members to help the political party during the elections.¹⁴⁶

Soon after the first BTC elections, there was a split in the BPPF and subsequently two groups were formed, one by Hagrama known as BPPF (Hagrama) and other led by Rabiram known as BPPF (Rabiram). The split happened on the issue of leadership, the chief

¹⁴⁵ Interview conducted of Bodo elites in August 2013 (Udalguri) under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁴⁶ Interview conducted of police officials from Kokrajhar district in December 2012 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013. The police officials stated that BRTF is an unofficial armed organization of BPF (Hagrama) used during elections to increase the support the base and to help in other election process to BPF.

of BTC. Later, BPPF (H) was known as Bodoland People's Front.¹⁴⁷ The split between BPF and BPPF widened in the Assam Assembly elections of 2006 and 2011. Before the Lok Sabha election of 2009, in 2008 the areas experienced fratricidal killings of supporters of ABSU, NDFB and BPPF. On the other extreme, NDFB expressed that the formation of BTC was futile. They felt that decentralization failed to meet the aspirations of Bodo people living in the region. However, due to government pressure and other factors, NDFB announced a six-month long ceasefire in 2004. The consequence of talks and discussions between the outfits with the central and state government led to a ceasefire agreement on May 25, 2005. But, in the later part NDFB split into two groups, one led by Govinda Basumatary and the other by Ranjan Daimary. When Ranjan Daimary was arrested in 2011, I K Songbijit led the anti-talks faction of NDFB from Myanmar.¹⁴⁸

The moderate faction continued to embrace the accommodation process. The accommodation led to the formation of Bodo National Conference (BNC) in 2010 under the chairmanship of BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilari. The aim was to bring all Bodo organizations under one roof for the movement of separate Bodoland.¹⁴⁹ NDFB distanced itself in 2011 stating that BNC was not representative enough to claim the separate state of Bodoland. BNC was indicative of the political hegemony of the dominating political group. Nevertheless, BNC initiated the peace-making process in the Bodoland areas. The People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) was formed on 31st March

¹⁴⁷ Interview of BPPF Secretary, Mudaibari constituency (Udalguri) under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁴⁸ Interview of Bhabiram Kachari, the NDFB intellectual conducted in August 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Transcribed speeches of Bodo politicians and leaders (Mr. Sansuma Khwngwr Bwiswmuthiary, Anjali Daimary and Hagrama Mahilary) delivered in the 2nd Annual Bodo National Conference that was held on 17 and 18 December, 2012 at Bodofa Nwgwr, Kokrajhar. Data collected under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

2012 for a peaceful movement and solution to the demands of NDFB. The organization was formed with 45 tribal and non-tribal organizations representing different communities under the leadership of Jebra Ram Muchahary. The objectives of the PJACBM were to unite all the communities living in Bodoland areas to work for a peaceful solution to the problems of Bodoland and to work for peaceful co-existence of all communities in the area. The PJACBM claimed that they tried to build a consensus among communities in the Bodoland areas to bring peace in the region and to lead a democratic movement for Bodoland which was backed by the NDFB-Progressive group for a separate Bodoland state for Bodos and non-Bodos.

Different organizations of BTAD claimed that BTC failed to meet the aspirations of the Bodo people for which there have been continuous demands for a 'separate Bodoland'. ABSU demanded a division of Assam into '50-50' claiming northern part of Brahmaputra valley for a separate state. On the other hand, BPF also claimed that the party forwarded the demand of separate state of Bodoland for the Bodo people and negotiation is going on with the government of state and centre. Bodos under the leadership of BNC met the state and central governments to talk about their demands and to increase more power of BTC including the power of home affairs and finance.¹⁵⁰

Despite some differences, unlike the previous accord of 1993, the 2003 accord was successful in terms of implementation. The new model of decentralization was based on increased powers of self-governance and autonomy. The accord granted legislative, executive, administrative and financial powers for administration in the Bodo dominated territories. The executive body of BTC was provided with powers to formulate laws on

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

cultural matters and education policies especially in Bodo language in secondary school level education.¹⁵¹ The powers were granted under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India providing forty-six seats in BTC, out of which thirty were reserved for STs, five for non-STs, six to be nominated by the Governor of Assam and rest five seats for unrepresented ethnic groups in the region. The semi-autonomous structure under the Sixth Schedule was originally designed for the hill tribes of undivided Assam which was granted for the first time to plains tribes of Assam. However, non-Bodos showed concerns over under-representation of non-Bodo ethnic groups in the local decision-making process. Concerns were also raised on increasing corruption and mishandling of funds. Moreover, the implementation of the accord resulted in a wide gap between the Bodos and non-Bodos about the demarcation of boundary and accessibility of resources which spread more violence even after the implementation of the BTC accord.

Therefore, as discussed in the previous section the process of political decentralization in the form of granting territorial council was considered to be a solution to violence in the area. However, in practice autonomy was not successful as far as reducing tensions between the Bodos and non-Bodos were concerned. Violence recurred in the region. The region experienced new episodes of violence in 2008, 2012 and in 2014. Despite, the signing of the new accord peace-building failed. NDFB rejected and stated that the accord was a failure. In other words, the process of political decentralization has not reduced ethnic violence, but it took a different pattern. What are the conditions under which political decentralization actually fostered ethnic violence in BTAD which was designed to

¹⁵¹ Document of “Memorandum of Understanding (Bodoland Territorial Council Accord),” 2003, collected from BPF office Kokrajhar.

prevent ethnic violence? The next section explains this question by analyzing the nature of violence in the BTAD areas.

Political decentralization and violence in Bodoland (2003-2017)

The process of political decentralization is considered as a conflict prevention measure by devolving powers to subnational units and aggrieved ethnic groups where sharing of power is essential between the centre and the local authorities. As discussed in the previous chapter some scholars argued that political decentralization can reduce ethnic violence by accommodating ethnic groups while giving political rights to the population. Yin and Lucas argued that the process of political decentralization can reduce the gap between the government and people bringing them closer and improve the relationship between the government and the local people. In the process of political decentralization when resources and powers are transferred to the local people, political decentralization reduces political isolation by associating citizens in political arrangements reducing distrust and sense of powerlessness and as a result, it reduces violence (Yin & Lucas, 1973). Moreover, scholars like Coakley argued that territorial autonomy and devolution of power to a lower level can reduce ethnic violence by granting power to the ethnic groups (Coakley, 2003). Political decentralization provides space to ethnic groups which may lead to resolution of differences and therefore may reduce ethnic violence based on ethnic lines. Local elites gain power and resources for a local administration which reduces ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas. Political decentralization as the chapter on literature review showed has been successful in places like Aland Islands, India and even Indonesia. However, in most other cases, political decentralization has shown a different outcome. While some of these countries have been successful in reducing ethnic violence

through political decentralization, there are instances where political decentralization has created conditions for ethnic violence. To illustrate, we can take the example of South Asia, particularly some parts of India, Sri Lanka, and northern regions of Bangladesh where political decentralization has created grounds for ethnic violence. Critics also argued that political decentralization sometimes may not reduce ethnic violence; rather conflicts may intensify and lead to more violence in the autonomous regions. Competition for resources among ethnic groups can promote more violence in the region. Struggle to possess government goods, services, infrastructural works make elites as well as an ethnic group to indulge in violence to show their dominance which leads to ethnic violence (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Therefore, the following section discusses the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in the case of politically decentralized areas of Bodoland.

Misra argued that violence in Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts was caused by conflicts on the issue of control over land. He also insisted that violence is a product of wrong policies taken by the government since independence such as marginalizing the plains tribes and denial of land rights to the plains tribes. The issue of lands, migration, demographic change and identity politics are the core issues of conflict since the 1930s (Misra, 2012). Moreover, he argued that the creation of a particular ethnic homeland without providing constitutional rights such as proper representation in the council for the other communities became an agenda for conflict in the region between Bodos and other communities, especially Santhals and the immigrant Muslims. Non-Bodo organizations claimed that there are discriminatory policies to other communities living in the area where government facilities are provided to Bodo community alone by the BTAD administration.

The violence that occurred in the area is the outcome of protests initiated by different non-Bodo organizations like *Onaboro Surakhsha Mancha* (Non-Bodo Protection Forum). It is claimed that intimidation and extortion against non-Bodo became a trend for some leaders of the Bodo community.¹⁵² When Bodo militants were very active, non-Bodos could not organize themselves for a common protest. Once the NDFB faction led by Ranjan Daimary went for ceasefire and were willing to talk with the government, other communities living in the territory organized and formed a Non-Bodo Protection Forum (NBPF) which included ABMSU, All Assam Koch-Rajbongshi Students Union, Bengali Students Federation, the All Assam Gorkha Students Union and the All Assam Tea Tribes Students Union. In 2012, the NBPF started protesting against the demands made by Bodo People's Front for a separate Bodoland state. Koch-Rajbongshi, a major non-Bodo community also demanded a separate state and tribal status. Koch-Rajbongshis conducted huge rallies at Bongaigaon for their cause.¹⁵³ At the same time, ABMSU called for a 24-hour Kokrajhar bandh on 29th May 2012 which led to widespread violence. Vehicles were burned injuring many people in the area. Different Bodo organizations responded to the incident by holding a mass rally on 30th March. In the month of June, there were massive protests and road blockades by the ABMSU and a rally was organized by Bodo People's Front for the demand of a separate state. The tension intensified between the two communities and on 6th July two members of ABMSU were shot dead in Kokrajhar. This resulted in the killing of four former BLT members in the Jaypur area of Kokrajhar on 20th July which resulted in violence. The violence spread to Chirang and Baksa districts. However, Udalguri district was not affected

¹⁵² Data collected at Kokrajhar between April 2013 and December 2015 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁵³ Interview conducted in BTAD as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

by the violence. Earlier Udalguri experienced violence and large-scale displacements in 2008.¹⁵⁴ Houses of both Bodos and Muslims were burnt during the violence. The displaced people took refuge in refugee camps.¹⁵⁵

To give a historical background to violence in the Bodoland region, the Bodoland movement which started in the 1980s took a violent turn. Violence intensified in the 1990s against the other communities living in the Bodo-dominated areas. Bodo activists demanded the other communities to leave the lands for the Bodo community. Bodos also claimed that lands were earlier grabbed by immigrants and non-Bodo settlers right after Indian independence. During independence, tribal land in the tribal belts and blocks were taken by non-Bodo middle-class peasants and encroached forest lands as well.¹⁵⁶ Violence intensified when militant armed groups led the movement. Violence intensified and promoted against other communities by United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) and later on by Bodo Security Force, BLT and NDFB. The first major violence took place between Bodos and Muslim settlers in October 1993 which was followed by another round of violence in 1994 by burning of houses of Muslim settlers in the district of Barpeta. Santhals were targeted in the month of May-June 1996 by the Bodos killing more than 200 people and many displaced. More clashes took place in 1998 and 1999 which affected not only other communities but also Bodos. In 2008 violence occurred in Udalguri and Darrang districts

¹⁵⁴ Information was collected from daily newspapers of Assam and interview conducted in Kokrajhar with government officers and police officials under the the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Interview taken in the relief camps in Kokrajhar district as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011-December 2013, where the inmates of refugee camps by both the communities insisted that houses were burnt down but no direct attack was made to kill people.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews conducted in different parts of BTAD areas shows that Bodo community accused that non-Bodo middle class peasants took over the land of the tribal people in a very less sum of money because of heavy debts taken by tribal people which they could not return.

between Bodos and Muslims displacing many. The affected communities were mostly Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims of the region.¹⁵⁷ The violence which took place in Udalguri district of BTAD in 2008 had a lot of casualties and displaced many. Report shows that the violence killed 41 people from both the communities. Curfew was imposed for 3-4 months.¹⁵⁸ Relief and rehabilitation branch confirmed that more than 3117 families were affected by the violence and took shelter in different relief camps. While rehabilitating the families, the rehabilitation branch distributed three bundles of Tin roof-sheet (*tinpat*) and Rs. 10500 as compensation to each family.

The violent clashes of 2008 in Darrang and Udalguri between Bodos and accused illegal migrants and the violence which occurred in July 2012 in Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Bongaigaon and Dhubri districts indicate that peace is fragile and political decentralization by way of granting autonomy could not reduce ethnic violence in the region.

Challenges to political decentralization

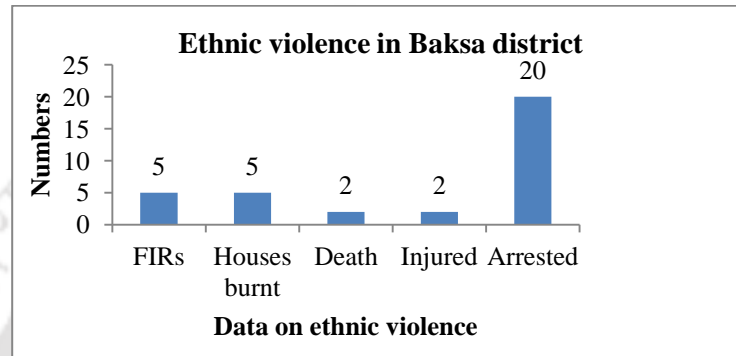
When BAC failed, Indian government tried for the second set of decentralization to reduce ethnic violence and separatist movement of Bodos by signing the BTC accord in 2003. The Sixth Schedule which was earlier meant for hill tribes in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram was created in BTAD by amending the constitution. The initiative taken by the Indian government shows the commitment towards peace-making in the violence-affected areas. As the analysis above showed, political decentralization could not bring all the aggrieved groups to an agreeable solution. Differences emerged between

¹⁵⁷ Interview conducted in Udalguri district as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Data collected from Relief and Rehabilitation branch, DC office Udalguri (April 2016).

different Bodo organizations on the issue of statehood which further led to unrest in the region. The following figures show the intensity of ethnic violence in different districts of BTAD.

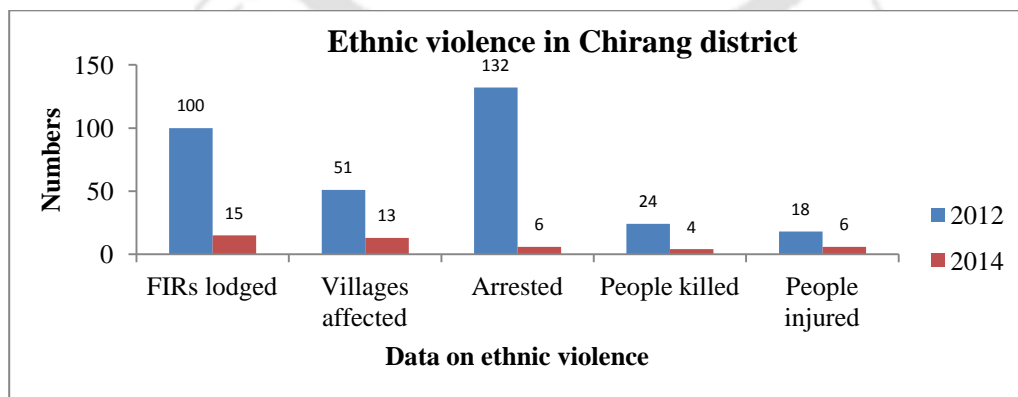
Figure 4.1: Ethnic violence in Baksa district 2012



Sources: SP office Baksa district, Assam (Data collected through RTI)

Figure 4.1 shows the violent incidents in Baksa district of BTAD area. Baksa district witnessed ethnic violence in 2012. Though violence spread to Baksa district, the intensity of ethnic violence was less compared to other districts of BTAD.

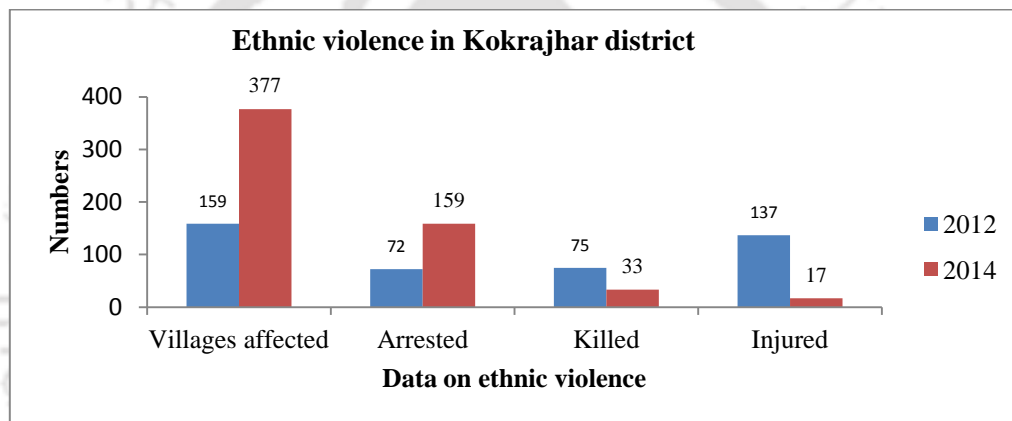
Figure 4.2: Ethnic violence in Chirang district of 2012 and 2014



Source: SP office Chirang district, Assam (Data collected through RTI)

Figure 4.2 shows the incidents of violence took place in Chirang district in 2012 and 2014. The figure shows that 2012 violence was more intense in Chirang district where more FIRs were lodged, people were arrested, killed and injured. In the incidents of violence 2012 and 2014, 2153 families and 134 families were affected respectively. Houses burnt in 2012 were 2077 and in 2014 were 130. So, it can be interpreted that 2012 ethnic violence which spread from Kokrajhar district was more intense compared to 2014 violence.

Figure 4.3: Ethnic violence in Kokrajhar district of 2012 and 2014

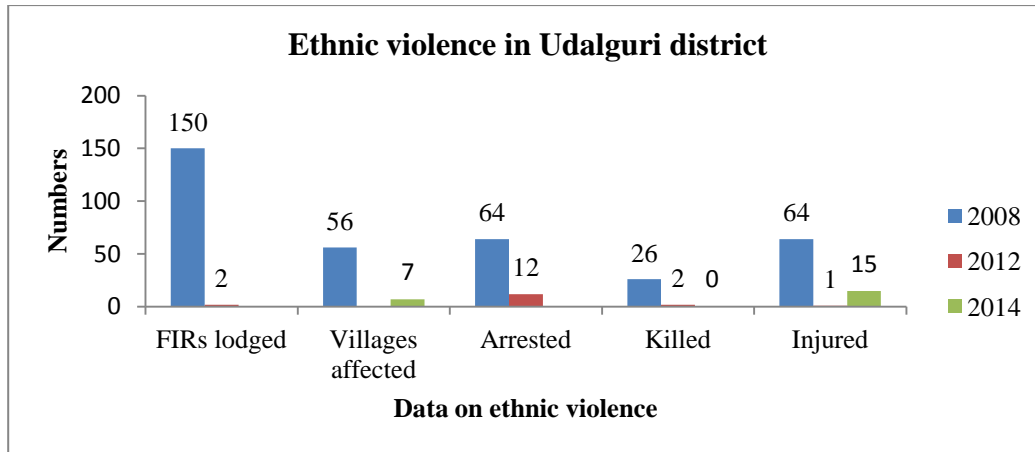


Source: SP and DC office Kokrajhar, Assam (Data collected through RTI)

Kokrajhar district experienced less violence in 2008 which started in Udalguri district. However, Kokrajhar was hugely affected by violence in 2012 and 2014. The 2014 violence affected a large number of villages and people arrested in relation to ethnic violence of 2012. However, 2012 showed a different pattern. More incidents of violence were reported between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims in Kokrajhar. A large number of people were affected in these two incidents of violence in Kokrajhar. In 2012, 216382 people were affected and in 2014, 235385 people were affected by the ethnic violence. Houses burnt in these two incidents of violence shows that a large number of Muslims lost

their property and houses. Houses of Bodo people that were burnt numbered to 863, Adivasi 339 and Muslims around 2208.

Figure 4.4: Ethnic violence in Udalguri district of 2008, 2012 and 2014



Sources: SP and DC office Udalguri, Assam (Data collected through RTI)

Figure 4.4 shows the violent incidents of 2008, 2012 and 2014 in Udalguri district. The 2008 ethnic violence between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims had the highest fatalities compared to the ethnic violence of 2012 and 2014. In other words, the violence of 2012 and 2014 which were started in Kokrajhar district did not spread to Udalguri district. However, the violence of 2008 which started in Udalguri district affected 4249 families in and around Udalguri district. Violent incident decreased in Udalguri district after 2008 but in Kokrajhar district it intensified. Therefore, it can be interpreted that political decentralization in the form of granting autonomous councils to contend ethnic violence was less successful and showed violent response/outcome. The possible explanations for recurring ethnic violence include, communal differences, politicization of identity and land.

As studies show, ethnic violence that took place in the areas was also the result of conflict over the issue of land. Tribal communities claimed that the arrangement of 'Tribal Belts and Blocks' was unable to protect the land rights of the tribal population. Scholars argued that large numbers of non-indigenous people entered and settled in BTAD during 1993 and 2003. Such settlements were backed by political agendas which created the grounds for ethnic violence (Banerjee, 2011). The next section explores and examines the causes of ethnic violence with the help of the explanatory propositions for the study. One of the propositions used to study ethnic violence is related to elite competition in the decentralized areas. The next section discusses and explains the case of Bodoland with reference to elite competition and ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of BTAD.

Proposition: *The process of political decentralization may foster ethnic violence if there is an intensive power struggle among **political elites** within the decentralized areas.*

Elite competition for power is an important aspect to understand ethnic violence in territorial autonomous regions. The struggle for power may be within the political elites of the same group or among political elites of different ethnic groups (Horowitz, 1985). The elites tend to seek more power in terms of elections and resources. Gurr explained that intensive competition and inequalities among different ethnic groups create more struggle for power among the elites which create the grounds for conflict (Gurr, 1994). In the process of struggle for power, elites try to create hatred against other ethnic groups using hate speeches (Brass, 2003). Elites can mobilize the society on the basis of competing religious sentiments. Klinken argued that in the case of Indonesia especially in Maluku, elites could mobilize masses because of religious differences in the region. Local elites played competitive blame games. While Muslims blamed Christians, Christians blamed the other

group. The elites were always quick to accuse each other for triggering violence (Klinken, 2001).

Power sharing among the elites of different ethnic groups became a concern in the territorially autonomous regions of BTAD. Wilkinson explained that, when power sharing among ethnic groups is inefficient and have unequal political representation, there will be ethnic violence. Elites of different ethnic groups seek more representation by depicting themselves as deprived sections of the society (Wilkinson, 2000). When territorial autonomy and power is granted to one ethnic group, small-scale indigenous ethnic groups are left with less representation. Non-representation of other ethnic groups creates conflict among competing ethnic groups which result into violence (Duncan, 2007). Using these perspectives the next section discusses the case of ethnic violence in territorially autonomous regions of Bodoland.

Electoral competition and ethnic violence in Bodoland

A satisfactory explanation to understand ethnic violence in BTAD after political decentralization is to consider elite competition in the region. The process of political decentralization granting direct election processes to BTC created space for the local elites. The direct election process to the council led to intense competition for political power and resources between political parties in BTAD. Political decentralization in the Bodoland areas created grounds for conflict between different political parties, especially between BPF and BPPF (R). When BTC was created there was only one regional party from Bodoland, i.e. BPPF. But, differences emerged before the election on the issue of leadership of BTC. Hagrama Mohilary offered Rabiram Narzary the post of Deputy Chief Executive

Member (CEM), but Rabiram denied the proposal. Another issue which led to conflict within the party was the selection of candidates for the forthcoming elections in 2005. Hagrama Mohilary supported Mono Brahma to contest the election from Banargaon constituency as a contestant to Rabiram Narzary, who was keen to contest the election from the same constituency. Because of conflict between the leaders for party position as well as emerging controversies about the selection of a candidate for Banargaon constituency, BPPF split into two groups BPPF (Hagrama) and BPPF (Rabiram).¹⁵⁹ Intra-elite competition between BPF and BPPF led to the practice of “ethnic outbidding”, where both the groups tried to prove as true defenders of the community.¹⁶⁰ After the first BTC elections differences emerged between Rabiram and Hagrama. Recent development in the politics of BTAD shows how BPPF split into parts. Rabiram Narzary joined hands with Hagrama to contest the Assembly elections and joined BPF in 2015. Other party members of BPPF joined the newly formed United Peoples’ Party (UPP). The newly formed UPP which was floated on August 5, 2015, under the leadership of U. G. Brahma was another competing Bodo ethnic party which was in opposition. The parties which formed the UPP are BPPF, United Democratic People’s Front (UPDF), and People’s Co-ordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR).¹⁶¹ For the Legislative Assembly Constituencies (LAC) election of 2016, UPP stated that they will take the demand of separate state of Bodoland forward if they

¹⁵⁹ Data collected in 2013 in Udalguri district as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁶⁰ Neil Devotta stated ‘Ethnic outbidding’ as an action by which different groups within same ethnic group try to depict as actual protector of the community. He draws example from imposition of Sinhala Only Act of Sri Lanka, where different party emerged within the Sinhala group. See Devotta, Neil, (2005) From Ethnic Outbidding to Ethnic Conflict: the institutional bases for Sri Lanka’s Separatist War. *Nation and Nationalism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 141-159.

¹⁶¹ U.G. Brahma, a former Member of Parliament and the former president of ABSU became the president of the party. Pradip Kumar Daimary, a former member of BTC was made the general secretary of the party. These positions were announced at a special convention of the People’s Co-ordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR) at Dotma. PCDR is a combination of various political and non-political parties.

could acquire more seats in BTAD.¹⁶² This showed a clear cut competition among the elites of same the ethnic group mobilizing people for their interest.

Table 4.1: *Election result of BTC election 2005*

Political Parties	Seat Contested	Seat Won
BPPF	40	35
AGP	13	01
BJP	16	0
CPI(M)	05	0
CPI(ML)	01	0
IND	177	04
Total	252	40

Source: Assam State Election Commission & local newspapers

The above table shows that BPPF won a majority of seats in the 2005 BTC elections. However, different newspapers of Assam reported that 2005 election was marked by rigging and use of undemocratic means to acquire power by dominating ethnic groups. BPPF which was floated on April 12, 2005, under the leadership of Rabiram Narzary comprised of Hagrama Mahilary, SK Bwiswimuthiary and UG Brahma. These leaders tried to bring the Bodo community under one ambit of a single political party. However, rifts among the political leaders over the issue of BTC chief made competition stiff within the leaders of Bodo ethnic groups. This led to factional violence and repollings in over 100 booths, particularly in Dotma and Banargaon constituencies. The Banargaon constituency was the initial issue of conflict in the BPPF party as Rabiram Narzary was supposed to contest from Banargaon in 2005, but Hagrama supported Mono Brahma to contest election from that

¹⁶² Interview conducted with party members of UPP and BPF in Udalguri District (April 2016).

constituency. The difference between leaders finally led to the breakup of the party to two different parties after the local elections of 2005.

It is also claimed that BLT (later formed BPF) while surrendering before the BTC accord retained some of the arms that they used during the insurgency. Those former BLT leaders formed a small armed group to help in the election of BTC. The small armed group formed by surrendered BLT was apparently named as Bodoland Royal Tiger Force or Bodo Revolutionary Tiger Force (BRTF).¹⁶³ According to some reports, a small armed group like BRTF became active only during elections. The existence of such armed groups and the split between BPF and BPPF widened the scope of violence in the region. In 2008, right before the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, BTAD experienced violence. The violence was marked by killing of ABSU, NDFB and BPPF ideologues and supporters. At the same time, NDFB continued with its opposition. Because of ideological differences, NDFB split into two groups in 2008: one led by Govinda Basumatary and the other led by Ranjan Daimary. When Ranjan Daimary was arrested in 2011, I K Songbijit took the leadership of NDFB. The NDFB group led by Songbijit is still active with demands for sovereignty for the Bodos.

The 2010 BTC election also shows that competition among the Bodo elites which possibly led to election-related violence. The next table shows that there was a stiff competition among the leaders of the Bodos. The dominating BPF party under the leadership of Hagrama Mahilary could get the majority votes in the election; however, they faced competition from other Bodo political parties that were contesting as independent candidates. The opposition party BPPF was led by Rabiram Narzary and United Democratic

¹⁶³ Data collected between April 2013 and December 2015 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011-December 2013.

People's Front (UDPF). Other Bodo ethnic political parties could not overpower the dominating BPF party.

Table 4.2: *Election result of BTC election 2010*

Political Parties	Seat Contested	Seat Won
BPF	40	31
BPPF	--	01
UPDF	--	01
AGP	09	0
BJP	08	0
CPI(M)	05	0
AITC	03	0
INC	23	03
IND	110	04
Total	198	40

Source: Assam State Election Commission & local newspapers

Increasing number of political parties of the ethnic Bodo groups created more competition among the elites within the group. At the same time, Bodo National Conference (BNC) was formed in 2010 to bring Bodo organizations and other communities under one roof for the development and peace in the region. The common platform was formed on November 19, 2010, by 41 organizations under the chairmanship of Hagrama Mohilary. The primary agenda of the organization was to ensure peace and unity in the BTAD areas and to bring NDFB group to come for talks. However, NDFB distanced from the organization stating that the agenda of BNC was not for a separate state, but for the interest of the dominating political parties/organizations. People's Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement (PJACBM) was also formed on 31st March 2012 for a peaceful movement. They criticized Hagrama led BTC government for not fulfilling the aspirations of the people and not acting to achieve a separate state of Bodoland. The creation of different political and non-political parties within the ethnic Bodos led to confusion among the people of the

community. The confusion within the Bodos led to competition for intra-group support for different political parties. This competition created grounds for factional violence within the community, especially before the 2010 BTAD elections. The violence took place between the unofficial armed bands like BRTF and different party supporters of Bodo-led parties in BTAD.

The 2015 BTC election (Table 3) shows stiff electoral competition among the leaders of the Bodo community. People's Co-ordination for Democratic Rights (PCDR) which is the conglomeration of 18 political and non-political parties of BTAD under the banner of ABSU, gave a tough contest to the ruling BPF party in the BTC election 2015. The Bodo ethnic political parties tried to depict themselves as the true nationalists for the ethnic group and tried to convince that only they will fight for the interest of the Bodo community. Due to contested ideas among the Bodo political elites, violence broke out between political parties. The pre-poll violence occurred at Haltugaon in Kokrajhar district between political parties. The incident killed 1 person and injured 6 people who were from BPF party. It is alleged that PCDR sponsored the violence and in this regard, 22 people were arrested.¹⁶⁴ Such type of violence is common among the different political parties in the election period.

The 2015 BTC elections showed a new political development. The AIUDF emerged as a new non-Bodo political party representing the minority communities under the leadership of Badaruddin Ajmal. AIUDF remained a tough opposition in the BTC election and in the state elections as well. Independent candidates backed by *Sanmilito Jonogosthiyo*

¹⁶⁴ The Assam Tribune, April 6 2015 "One killed in pre-poll violence". According to the news published, a group of unidentified miscreants attacked the Aluparam Youth BPF camp situated at Haltugaon on April 5 2016. BPF president Hagrama Mohilary blamed the PCDR for the attack. However, ABSU general secretary Lorence Islary rejected Mohilary's charge.

Oikyo Moncho and *Oboro Suraksha Samiti* won six seats in the elections while the independent candidates got two seats.¹⁶⁵

Table 4.3: *Election result of BTC election 2015*

Political Parties	Seat Contested	Seat Won
BPF	40	20
PCDR	40	07
AGP	06	0
BJP	40	01
CPI(M)	07	0
CPI	01	0
AIUDF	08	04
INC	40	0
IND	151	08
Total	333	40

Source: Assam State Election Commission & local newspapers

After looking at the trend of elections of decentralized areas, this study also draws from state-level elections to know competition among the elites. In the Assam Legislative Assembly election as well BPF remained a dominating political party acquiring most of the seats in the BTC area and gained political importance in the state as well. AIUDF which stands as an opposition party also influenced the politics of Assam since early 2000s. BJP made a coalition with AGP and BPF in the last state Assembly election of 2016. AGP-BJP-BPF combined to fight election against INC and AIUDF. A table of election results of Assembly elections is as follows:

¹⁶⁵ The Telegraph, April 13 2015 “BPF stakes claim to BTC- Mohilary sets sights on 2016 polls.

Table 4.4: *Election results of Assam Legislative Assembly election 2006, 2011 and 2016*

Political Parties	2006	2011	2016
BPF	11	12	12
INC	53	78	26
AGP	24	10	14
AGP (P)	01	--	--
BJP	10	05	60
CPI	01	--	--
CPI(ML)	02	--	--
LKS	01	--	--
NCP	01	--	--
IND	22	03	01
AIUDF	--	18	13
Total	126	126	126

Source: Election Commission of India

In the recent elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly 2016, a stiff competition was witnessed between BPF and newly formed UPP for votes of Bodos and to garner support from other communities as well. An interesting transition could be witnessed in the recent elections in terms of people's support and the campaigning process. People from Muslim and Adivasi villages supported the agendas of BPF which was in coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The Bodo political parties played the development card to gain support and votes from both Bodo and non-Bodo voters. One of the party workers from Muslim community insisted "I am from 'M' caste and our community is very underdeveloped because of lack of education and superstition. Our community believed in 'Jhar Fuk' which is the strategy of 'Chacha' [means uncle (Badaruddin Azmal)]. Earlier, the party support was based on communities, but in the present context people are more conscious and they can understand the need of the society." The Bodo ethnic political parties played the 'development card'. BPF claimed that, the party developed the infrastructure of the area and will continue to develop the region if they get elected. However, other Bodo

political parties claimed that BPF is indulging in corruption. They claimed that if they could form the next government, development of the region would be a priority.¹⁶⁶ However, UPP was keen to receive support from the Bodo voters because they took up the issue of a separate state for Bodoland. UPP claimed that if they come to power, the party will forward the issue of a separate state and fulfill the aspiration of the Bodo community.¹⁶⁷

The electoral competition is visible in the general election as well. Saikia, Chima and Baro argued,

“The BPF’s success in the three consecutive BTAD elections (2005, 2010, and recently in April 2015), along with its share of political power in the Assam state assembly, created further space for identity politics and the development of parochial political patronage networks. The sixteen general election in May 2014 exemplified this trend. For example, in the Kokrajhar parliamentary constituency, non-Bodo organizations including the All Bodoland Muslim Student Union (ABMSU), Koch Rajbonshis, and other non-Bodo groups supported their preferred candidate, former ULFA leader Naba Kumar Sarania (also popularly known as Hira Sarania). He fought independently of any political party, claimed to represent the preferences of non-Bodos. Sarania won the seat by capitalizing on the resentments of non-Bodo communities that constitute a majority of the population in the Kokrajhar parliamentary constituency, but remained underrepresented in BTAD. Non-Bodos supported Sarania, whose election campaign revolved around issues that were integral to the choices of non-Bodo communities. These communities aimed to undermine the majoritarian policies. For their part, the BPF and BPPF(R) leaders used anti-Muslim rhetoric and community chauvinism in many areas of the BTAD in the attempt to consolidate the factionalized Bodo constituency.”

(Saikia, Chima, & Baro, 2016)

¹⁶⁶ Interview conducted with party members of BPF in Kokrajhar District (April 2016).

¹⁶⁷ Interview conducted with party members of UPP and BPF in Udalguri District (April 2016).

The electoral competition among political elites of the Bodos shows characteristics of 'ethnic outbidding' and chauvinistic ethnic appeals to receive Bodo votes in different constituencies (Saikia S., 2015). BPF mostly used the strategy of ethnic card for electoral incentives and other Bodo ethnic groups accused BPF of using radical ethnic practices and violence against the non-Bodo population living in Bodoland. One of the important issues taken by ethnic parties to garner support is the issue of separate statehood. The elites of Bodo ethnic groups tried to outbid each other by showing that they can extract benefits from both the state and central government for the Bodo community.¹⁶⁸ Fractionalization within the same ethnic group, therefore, led to elite competition for electoral incentives which further led to ethnic violence in the BTAD. Reference can be drawn from recent works of Zuber (2013) and Tronconi (2006) to support the argument laid in this chapter. Zuber argued, "the ethnic parties adopt radical actions to maximize support among the voters of an ethnic group and parties try to depict themselves as the true defender of the ethnic party (Zuber, 2013)." He further argued that the outbidders emerge as vote-seeking elites who mobilize the ethnic group to garner support for the political party (Zuber, 2013). Tronconi also argued that emergence of multiple ethnoregional parties increases the chance of political competition among the ethnic political parties and shows different outcomes (Tronconi, 2006).

The competition among elites took place not only within Bodos but also between Bodos and non-Bodo political elites. Promotion of communal politics and different demands from non-Bodo people intensified competition among the elites (Saikia, Chima, & Baro, 2016). The creation of BTAD has formed a new form of a minority in the area which is

¹⁶⁸ Interview conducted in BTAD areas.

known as non-Bodo or *Onaboro*. Non-Bodo people formed their own political and non-political organizations to pose their demands against their feeling of insecurity in the new political structure. For instance, there are different political parties and student's Union groups who tried to mobilize people to garner their support. Parties like the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), All Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU) representing the Muslim population of BTAD took an active part in the politics of Bodoland. As shown earlier, AIUDF stood as a strong opponent to BPF in the elections of BTC council. Moreover, the popularity of Badaruddin Ajmal, the leader of AIUDF has strengthened the party (Saikia, Chima, & Baro, 2016). The interference of various Muslim organizations in the Muslim-dominated areas led to more concerns for the Bodo elites. The active involvement of the groups in the interior villages during the Bodo-Muslim violence widened the gap between the two communities. Post-violence, these groups along with Assam State *Jamiat-i-Ulema-e-Hind* actively supplied reliefs to the camps inhabited by the Muslim community. The groups were more active than the state authorities (Saikia, Chima, & Baro). In some interviews conducted in BTAD areas post 2012 violence, people from the relief camps of the Muslim community argued that there were no reliefs from the state side and no minister turned out. But, it is their '*brother groups*' who turned out to help in all necessary things in the relief camps. The organizations which were very active in the Muslim dominated areas of BTAD are seen from a suspicious point of view and cited as groups who promote hatred towards other groups. The Bodo political elites suspect that the groups who cited themselves as welfare groups, actually played politics of promoting suspicion and mistrust on the basis of religious identities.¹⁶⁹ Muslim communities claimed that they were

¹⁶⁹ Interview conducted of Bodo elites at Kokrajhar between December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT

being discriminated in the process of governance by the BTAD council and that is one of the reasons why they believe and trust the brother Muslim organizations who worked better for the benefit of the community.¹⁷⁰ The working of such organizations in the Muslim dominated areas created mistrust among the Muslim community and other communities living in the area. Bodo people claimed that these groups created mistrust overemphasizing on discriminatory policies governed by Bodo leaders. Therefore, a small spark or rumor led to violence between Bodo and Muslim communities.

The formation of an autonomous council of BTAD provided space for non-Bodo elites as well in the local politics. They formed political parties to contest elections in the BTAD area. However, no proper representation of the other ethnic communities exists in the council as most of the seats for the executive council are reserved for the tribes. Among the 46 seats of BTC, 30 are reserved for STs. But only 5 for non-STs and 5 open for all whereas other 6 are nominated by the Governor of Assam.¹⁷¹ As a result, different demands were made by the other communities for exclusion from the BTAD area and even communities like Koch-Rajbonghis demanded their own territorial space. There are formations of different armed groups by the non-Bodo communities living in the BTAD region. The creation of different groups on the basis of ethnicity intensified more competition among the elites of different groups as well. The minority non-Bodo communities in the BTAD believed that violence created by Bodo extremist groups can be restrained only by creating a similar organization. Therefore, different armed groups were formed by non-Bodo

Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Interview conducted in different relief camps and Muslim dominated villages in December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁷¹ Document of “Memorandum of Understanding (Bodoland Territorial Council Accord),” 2003, collected from BPF office Kokrajhar.

communities living in the BTAD areas. These armed groups, especially Adivasi and Koch Rajbonshi groups supported the demand made for the status of ST under the constitution of India. If they can attain ST status, they can contest election from the seats which are reserved for ST candidates.

The demand for Kamatapur (demand of autonomy by Koch Rajbonshis) has been a debatable issue between the Bodos and Koch Rajbonshis. If Kamatapur is granted to Koch Rajbonshis, BTAD will be further divided into another territory which has a population of Koch Rajbonshi ethnic community. In the demand for Kamatampur, Koch Rajbonshis claimed that Kokrajhar belongs to Koch Rajbonshis and therefore, it is a contested territory for both the communities. However, as it is in the administrative territory of Bodoland, the dominant community sought to dominate and tried to undermine the demands made by other communities living in the area which further intensified conflict and violence between the rival/opposing communities. To support the demands made by Koch Rajbonshi community, their armed group also supported the cause by violent mobilization.

According to senior police officers of BTAD, rumor (*Hawa*) plays a crucial role in ethnic violence, where no one knows about the violent incident and rumor starts spreading and contributes to violence which may be termed ethnic or communal. Elites of different groups take initiatives to spread the rumors for their political interests.¹⁷² Therefore, it can be stated that communal politics and feeling of insecurity among the non-Bodo minorities intensified distrust among different communities living in the decentralized political regions. For example, the increasing influence of AIUDF and other political organizations widened

¹⁷² Interview conducted with senior police officers in Baksa District, Mushalpur (February 2016)

the gap between the Bodos and non-Bodos which resulted in conflict and violence in many parts of BTAD.

Political decentralization therefore embraced only a small section of the Bodo community to administer the region neglecting demands of the other organizations. The regions experienced active involvement of groups like NDFB after the political decentralization. When NDFB was formed, they demanded sovereignty of the region and separation from India. Internal conflict and differences of ideas within the organizations led to split the group into parts of NDFB (Ranjan), NDFB (Progressive), and NDFB (Songbhijit). The active group of NDFB (Songbhijit) still demands the creation of separate territory for the Bodo community. While faction of Ranjan Daimary is over-ground and peace talk continues with NDFB (Progressive), the other faction led by Songbhijit is still involved in violence against the state and against the other ethnic group.

Competition for resources and ethnic violence

The conflict over power between the different Bodo political parties intensified since the creation of BTAD. Political decentralization provided power to the Bodos, but the benefit of decentralization was enjoyed only by a small sections of Bodo elites especially the dominating political elites and the ex-BLT leaders. The negotiation of 2003 undermined the separatist demands made by other Bodo organizations such as NDFB. Therefore, conflict over power within the Bodo ethnic group remained after political decentralization as well. Lack of power sharing among the Bodo leadership and increasing competition created conditions for violence in Bodoland.

Lake and Rothchild insisted that competition for resources is a major influencing factor in ethnic violence. Competition for possession of goods, services, schooling, construction works and growth allotment have to do with the benefit of individuals and groups which influence to indulge in the violent activities (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). In the case of Bodoland, self-governance and political decentralization provided material gains to only a handful of Bodo political elites which increased militarization of local Bodo politics. The pre-agreement competition of BLT and NDFB and their contrasting demands sharpened when BLT signed an agreement to form BTAD. While one group laid down their arms to form a political party, others continued their armed struggle creating more conditions for violence in the Bodoland areas. Land issues played a crucial role in the process of competition of elites and mobilizing the masses for violence. Different Bodo elite groups tried to depict themselves as true defenders of the community and voiced against the illegal migrants from Bangladesh. It is found in the field research that there are feeling of ethnic differentiation and segmentation in Bodoland areas where land and illegal migrants commonly known as '*miyas*' are politicized by the local elites for their own benefit. Group relations were constructed by polarized identities which lead to further violence. The intra-group fractionalization and differentiation led to a different pattern of elite competition and changes in the politics of BTAD which may have influenced the ethnic violence in BTAD.¹⁷³

In Bodoland, land played a crucial role in the process of ethnic violence. Misra argued that alienation of tribal land to non-Bodo "immigrants" may have shifted the demography which enhanced violence in the area (Misra, 2012). The Muslim respondents

¹⁷³ Interview conducted in BTAD.

from Kokrajhar district claimed that Bodo leaders have politicized the land issue and depicted the Muslims as illegal settlers. Because of such claims people from both the communities developed feelings of hatred. Bodo community inherited a feeling of hatred towards Muslim community and non-Bodo minority communities felt insecure in the region because of such politicization of identity.¹⁷⁴ Bodo elites claimed that continuous infiltration of Muslim migrants created a demographic imbalance in the region and loss of tribal land to immigrants.¹⁷⁵ So, elites manufacture identities on the issue of citizenship and acquisition of tribal land. Bodo political elites claimed that tribal lands are encroached by illegal migrants. On the other hand, elites of other communities claimed that their land will be taken away by the Bodo people under the newly decentralized regions of BTAD. This created a situation of ‘security dilemma’ where minority communities feared that all resources and services will go to the dominating community and rights and livelihood of minorities will be at stake (Posen, 1993). The sense of ‘security dilemma’ intensified suspicion against the group about the security and existence of the other ethnic groups in the BTAD region which may have led to ethnic violence in decentralized areas of Bodoland. A small spark and rumor spread by elites may have spread ethnic violence in the other regions of the decentralized areas. Secondly, the dominance of the BTAD region’s politics and resources by a small section of Bodo elites at the expense of ‘others’, intensified competition among elites which may have led to ethnic violence in the BTAD areas.

¹⁷⁴ Interview conducted in different relief camps and Muslim dominated villages in December 2012 and April 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁷⁵ Jiron Basumatary, the General Secretary of ABSU stated that land encroachment by the illegal migrants is the primary source of ethnic violence in July 2012. Jiron Basumatary was interviewed in December, 2012.

Thus, granting of territorial autonomy to the Bodo ethnic group could not solve the issue and reduce ethnic violence. Rather than that, it intensified violence not only against the state but towards other ethnic groups as well. To sum up this section in the words of Weiner:

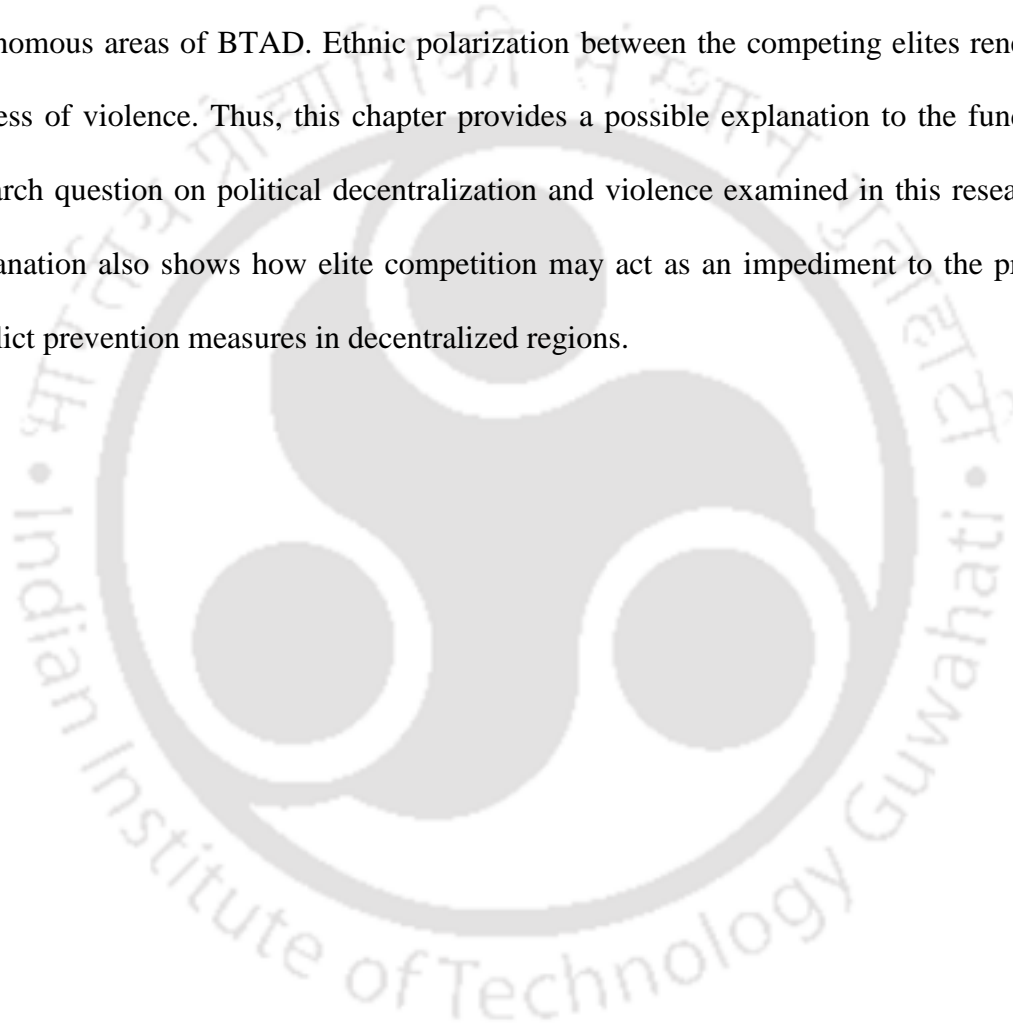
“It is not inequalities between ethnic groups that generate conflicts, but competition. Inequalities, real or perceived, are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for ethnic conflict; there must also be competition for control over or access to economic wealth, political power, or social status.”

(Weiner, 1978)

Summary

This chapter analyzed the Bodo movement for territorial space and granting of autonomy to the Bodo-dominated areas. However, the autonomy has not been successful in reducing violence as it was designed for. The first phase of political decentralization which was granted in 1993 failed because of disagreement on the inclusion of villages into the designed territory. This failure created more disturbances in the Bodo dominated areas when BLT was created and there were series of violence in the demand for a separate state. In 2003, when BLT surrendered, the second phase of political decentralization was granted under the amended Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India, devolving power to the lower levels. The creation of BTC was aimed to mitigate violence in the Bodo dominated areas; however, it could not reduce violence in the areas. After devolution of power, a series of violence occurred in 2008, 2012 and 2014. Therefore, it can be stated that territorial autonomy or devolution of power as a conflict prevention mechanism has failed to mitigate violence in the Bodoland area.

It has been argued in this chapter that creation of autonomous structure has not been successful in reducing ethnic violence in the region. Competition for further autonomy by non-Bodos in the region created further divisions and grounds for more violence on the basis of ethnicity. In this chapter, it is argued that elite competition for power and resources may have been one of the major conditions for discontent and ethnic violence in the territorially autonomous areas of BTAD. Ethnic polarization between the competing elites renewed the process of violence. Thus, this chapter provides a possible explanation to the fundamental research question on political decentralization and violence examined in this research. The explanation also shows how elite competition may act as an impediment to the process of conflict prevention measures in decentralized regions.





Chapter Five

Political decentralization and ethnic violence: A comparative analysis of BTAD, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in Assam

Introduction

Northeast India has experienced a number of violent ethnic movements. The previous chapter has discussed Bodo ethnic nationalism, ethnic mobilization and violence since the post-colonial period. Tribal communities started ethno-political movements demanding recognition of ethnic identities and political space in Northeast India in the post-colonial period (Hussain, 2006). Ethnic conflicts have drawn attention not only because of violence and displacement but also because of the impact on the politics of decentralization in the Northeast. To fulfill the demands of tribal communities in Northeast India, Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was implemented while granting autonomy to the aggrieved ethnic groups and giving them political and territorial space. But, despite political and territorial space which is termed in this thesis as political decentralization, violence is enduring. In other words, political decentralization which is a conflict prevention mechanism has not been able to reduce ethnic violence in some politically decentralized areas. The previous chapter discussed the probable causes of ethnic violence in decentralized areas of BTAD. This chapter compares the process of political decentralization and the outcome of ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao in the politically decentralized areas of Assam that acquired Sixth Schedule and decentralization in the 1950s and 1990s. To understand the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic

violence, this chapter explains how elite competition and incentives in terms of possession of resources and electoral competition with regards to the decentralized institutions, the Sixth Schedule areas in Assam may lead to ethnic violence.

To provide an overview of political decentralization in the post-colonial period in entire Northeast region; the next section provides a table which illustrates the formation of Autonomous District Councils and the years of their formation.

Table 5.1: *Different autonomous councils of Northeast India*

Sl. No.	Name of councils	State	Year of formation
The Autonomous District Councils under Sixth Schedule			
1	Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council	Meghalaya	1952
2	Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council	Meghalaya	1952
3	Garo Hills Autonomous District Council	Meghalaya	1952
4	North Cachar Autonomous District Council	Assam	1952
5	Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council	Assam	1952
6	Lai Autonomous District Council	Mizoram	1972
7	Mara Autonomous District Council	Mizoram	1972
8	Chakma Autonomous District Council	Mizoram	1972
9	Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council	Tripura	1985
10	Bodoland Territorial Council	Assam	2003
Autonomous Councils other than Sixth Schedule			
11	Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council	Assam	1995
12	Lalung (TIWA) Autonomous Council	Assam	1995
13	Mising Autonomous Council	Assam	1995
14	Thengal Kachari Hill Council	Assam	2005
15	Sonowal Kachari Council	Assam	2005
16	Deori Council	Assam	2005
17	Sardar/Senapati Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973
18	Sardar Hills Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973
19	Churachandpur Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973
20	Ukhrul Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973
21	Tamenglong Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973
22	Chandel Autonomous District Council	Manipur	1973

The RHAC, LAC and MAC were constituted in 1995, whereas TKHC, SKC and DC were constituted in 2005 to empower the tribal communities of the Plain areas of Assam, but these administrative areas are not under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Administrative District Councils (ADCs) of Manipur were constituted under Article 371C under Manipur Hill Areas District Councils Act of 1971 and in 1973 six ADCs were constituted for the administration of the tribal areas of Manipur.¹⁷⁶

Understanding the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence

As discussed in the previous chapters, political decentralization is considered to reduce ethnic violence and demands for ethnic separatism by granting contending groups control over own affairs by means of granting political and territorial autonomy. However, political decentralization has been successful only in some cases and in most cases, it has shown varying responses. This chapter will address the questions, why political decentralization leads to varied outcomes and the conditions under which political decentralization may foster ethnic violence. The chapter tries to understand ethnic violence using elite incentives as an explanatory variable. The chapter argues that elite incentives may foster ethnic violence if there is an intensive power struggle among the political elites. The competition for elite incentives may be within an ethnic group or sometimes between two or more distinct ethnic groups. When it is within an ethnic group, each sub-group within

¹⁷⁶ Report submitted to Commission on Centre State Relations, Government of India by North-Eastern Hill University 2009, “*Study on Functioning, Structure of Local Governance in North Eastern Region with Special Reference to Autonomous District Councils/Autonomous Regional Councils*”. Data was also collected during visits to different autonomous councils of Northeast India as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

the ethnic group will try to outbid each other and may want to portray that they are the true defenders of ethnonationalism. Examples can be drawn from Sri Lanka and India as defined by Devotta and Chandra which is already discussed in chapter two. The intensive competition among the elites for political incentives widens the gap between communities creating mistrust and suspicion. In the longer run, this can lead to ethnic violence. The emergence of different ethnic parties may create the condition for extremist outbidding for electoral incentives among the political elites of an ethnic group.¹⁷⁷ The competition between the elites can take an extremist position where violence becomes inevitable (Mitchell, Evans, & O'Leary, 2009).

Competition for resources among political elites also plays a crucial role in politically decentralized areas which may lead to ethnic violence if land and other resources such as jobs and services are used as political symbols to mobilize the ethnic group on grounds of indigeneity. Politicization of the issue of land alienation is an important factor for ethnic violence which includes competition for resources and territorial space as well. The competition for resources such as land and other services may lead to ethnic violence. Different ethnic groups living in a decentralized region try to have dominance in the region and access over resources. Sometimes, other ethnic groups demand separate territory/autonomy from the decentralized areas. We can take the example of Bodoland, which is explained in the previous chapter. In Bodoland, claims are made by non-Bodo communities that all resources including jobs and services are taken away by Bodos. On the other hand, Bodos claim that their lands are being taken away by other communities living

¹⁷⁷ Ethnic party can be defined as party which is a champion of particular interests of one ethnic group. The ethnic parties seek to forward the agendas of the ethnic group to the government. In the way, they demand power and seek development of the ethnic group (Chandra, 2011).

in the area. The issue of land alienation and other resources play a crucial role in mobilizing and creating mistrust among the ethnic groups which led to ethnic violence.

We can take another example from Bodoland on the basis of interviews conducted at Bhakatpara in Udalguri. In Bhakatpara, Bodos allow Muslim tenants for sharecropping. However, in 2008 when violence broke out in Udalguri District, Bodo owners harvested the paddy field themselves claiming that Muslim farmers have taken their land which created tensions among the two groups and added to conflicts. In Northeast India, especially in Assam, migration is a contested issue. Claims are made by indigenous tribal communities that migrated communities have grabbed their agricultural land. Though under the Land Regulation Act of 1886, land possessed by tribal communities cannot be transferred to non-tribal communities, different ethnic groups claimed that their lands went to other communities because of heavy debt from other communities.¹⁷⁸ The land is used as a political symbol to mobilize groups for ethnic violence (Bennett, 2005).

The power struggle among the political elites has been a concern for politically decentralized institutions because the struggle for power and resources in the decentralized areas promotes violence. The intensive power struggle among political elites has been identified as one of the primary conditions for failure of political decentralization. The elites tend to acquire more power by the process of elections and dominating the resources. Elites try to mobilize ethnic group creating hatred to other ethnic groups by means of campaign and lecture (Brass, 2003). Elites can mobilize the society on the basis of their primordial sentiments. The next section discusses the relation between elite incentives and ethnic

¹⁷⁸ Interviews in different parts of Bodoland areas reveal that Bodos lost their land to other communities because of heavy debts from other communities. Because of heavy debt and poor economic conditions they have to sell their lands to repay the debt.

violence in different decentralized areas of Assam. The section will try and explain how the process of political decentralization may foster ethnic violence if there is an intensive power struggle among the political elites.

Bodoland Territorial Area Districts

Political decentralization was granted to the Bodos for accommodating the Bodos by means of devolving power to the sub-national units. The process of political decentralization was preceded by violent mobilization in demand of 'Bodoland'. The Bodoland movement resulted in the signing of two accords with the government in 1993 and in 2003. The 1993 accord which was known as the Bodo Accord was not implemented because the signatories and both the central and state governments could not come to a consensus about the inclusion of villages in the council. The failure of the agreement intensified more violence in the area by both militant groups as well as different ethnic groups residing in the area. The violent ethno-political movement forced the central and state governments to negotiate. As a result BTC agreement was signed in 2003. However, despite political decentralization, ethnic violence recurred. One of the probable conditions for ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas of BTAD is elite competition for political and economic power in the region which was already discussed in the previous chapter.

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council

History of implementation of Sixth Schedule

The third chapter already discussed the process of creation and implementation of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The Sixth Schedule was implemented after

many debates and discussions in the constituent assembly. Implementation of the Sixth Schedule has its historical legacy. The Government of India Act of 1935 classified the tribal areas of undivided Assam into Excluded, Partially Excluded and Frontier Areas. Later, under the Sub-Committee of North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded areas committee under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, these areas were included in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Sub-Committee recommended that the hill districts should be classified as autonomous and non-autonomous areas. The classified autonomous districts were the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Naga Hills, North Cachar and the Mikir hills which were included in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. North Cachar was later named as Dima Hasao and Mikir hills were named as Karbi Anlong. These districts were granted District Councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution on June 23rd, 1952 (Barbora, 2005).¹⁷⁹ The Mikir Hills was later upgraded and renamed as Mikir Hills district as a full-fledged District Council in 1971. In 1976, the district was renamed as Karbi Anlong. The District Council was granted more powers in 1995 after a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by agitating groups with the state and central government for Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) (Choudhury, 2013). A detailed map of the Karbi Anglong district is provided below:

¹⁷⁹ See, the Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951.



Source: KAAC office, Karbi Anglong

The process of political decentralization in the form of devolution of power as per the provisions of the Sixth Schedule granted powers to Karbi Anglong to accommodate the Karbis and allow their own administration. According to the agreement signed in 1995, legislative, executive and judiciary powers were granted to KAAC granting more powers to the decentralized institutions. However, mobilization continued for a separate autonomous state. Violence took place in Karbi Anglong in 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2013 in demand of a separate autonomous state. Targeted violence occurred against other communities living in Karbi Anglong.

To give a brief historical background, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was formed on 17th May 1986 and subsequently, the Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCASDCOM) were formed on 25th May 1986 (Das & Choudhury, 2015). The organizations demanded more power in the form of an autonomous state under the constitutional provision of Article 244(A). Rounds of

discussions were conducted between the agitators led by KANCASDCOM with the central and the state governments. On the basis of discussions, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the representatives of the agitating groups with the state and central government on 1st April 1995. According to the agreement, executive powers were provided with 30 departments along with legislative and financial powers. However, the agreement could not satisfy the aspirations of Karbis and demands for a separate state were continued by various organizations. On 25th November 2011, Karbi insurgent outfit United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) which was in ceasefire since 2006 signed the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with the central and state government for the formation of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council (KAATC) (Choudhury, 2013).¹⁸⁰ On the basis of the agreement, there were 50 members in the council out of which 44 would be elected and 6 would be nominated by the governor of Assam. Along with the increased representations, a special package of Rs. 350 crores were declared for 5 years by the government (Rs. 70 crores per year) (Choudhury, 2013). In Karbi Anglong, political decentralization led to more competition for resources. Resources in the Karbi Anglong district were made available in the form of government funds. Political positions in the council were important to acquire share of development related funds. Interviewees shared that there was a growing nexus between the ruling class with the contractors and extremist groups. The contractors and members of the extremist groups helped political elites in the process of elections by financing and garnering support for the party. Interviews conducted in different parts of the district shows that there is mismanagement of funds in the council due to a growing nexus between the ruling elites and the contractors which created frustration among the people of

¹⁸⁰ Interview conducted in Karbi Anglong in October 2013 and data collected from KAAC under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011-December 2013.

the autonomous district. In other words, the process of political decentralization intensified competition between elites in the region which further fostered ethnic violence in the region for the interest of the political elites.¹⁸¹ The next section makes an attempt to understand the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong.

Understanding the relationship between political Decentralization and ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong

In Karbi Anglong the nexus between the political elites and militant groups helped politicians to use the militant groups as personal security providers for electoral purposes and to conduct business (Mangattuthazhe, 2008). Increased competition and high levels of corruption reduced the support of the common people towards the authorities and discontentment increased against the decentralized institutions. Moreover, Karbi Anglong experienced the demands of many ethnic armed groups for the separate autonomous state to support the demands made by respective political elites. The main ethnic armed group includes UPDS which was formed on May 21, 1999 by the Karbi People's Force (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers (KNV). Other prominent armed groups of Karbi Anglong include Karbi Longri National Liberations Front (KLNLF), Dima Haram Daogah (DHD-J) and DHD-D, Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), some of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN). The UPDS split into two when H. E. Kathar opposed talks with the government and formed the KLNLF. The KLNLF demanded self-determination of the Karbi community under Article 3 of the constitution and powers under Article 371. They wanted a full-fledged state. Later, DHD

¹⁸¹ Interview conducted in Karbi Anglong in October 2013 with former EM and other officials as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

was formed in 1995 which also split into DHD-J (Jewel) commonly known as Black Widow and DHD-D (Dilip). DHD-D demanded a separate Dimasa kingdom. In 2001, Kukis also demanded a separate homeland under the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) which was formed in 2001 (Mangattuthazhe, 2008). These armed ethnic groups used violent tactics to support their demands for their separate homelands.

The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), another political organization was formed on May 17, 1986 to demand statehood for Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. Though an MoU was signed in 1995 to create KAAC, this failed to reduce the demand for an autonomous state. Because of overlapping demands of territories, violence recurred between the militant outfits where more than 200000 people become homeless between 2001 and 2006. Ethnic violence took place in Karbi Anglong in 2005 between Dimasas and Karbis, and in July 2013 in Diphu.¹⁸² There was another set of ethnic violence between the ethnic insurgent group KPLT and the Rengma Naga Hills Protection Force (RNHPF) in late December 2013. The next section will try to understand the patterns of ethnic violence from the perspective of elite incentives.

Electoral competition and ethnic violence

Intra-elite competition for electoral incentives played a crucial role in ethnic mobilization in Karbi Anglong district. There was a demand for a separate state when Assamese was implemented as an official language in Assam. There were cases of violence between communities in 2003 and 2005. The fight was between Kukis and Karbis on the control over the business of ginger. Later, the extremist groups of both the communities

¹⁸² Interview with President, Karbi Cultural Society in October 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*

were involved in violent conflict. Secondly, violence occurred between Dimasas and Karbis in 2005. The immediate trigger which caused the violence was the killing of a Dimasa auto driver in Karbi Anglong. Dimasas thought that it is the Karbis who killed the driver. The violence between the two groups was caused by the rumor spread by elites creating mistrust in the minds of the communities.¹⁸³ The nexus between the political elites and the extremist groups helped the elites to mobilize people for violence. By means of violence, the dominating Karbi ethnic group tried to strengthen their demand for a separate state. Violence which occurred on July 31, 2013 was the result of mobilization against the government. Frustrated people burned government offices.¹⁸⁴ Student organizations were also a part of power politics in the decentralized areas of KAAC. In Karbi Anglong, there are more than 20 active students' organizations that joined the activists in the demand for the autonomous state. On August 1, 2013 the Joint Action Committee for Autonomous State (JACAS) was formed by combining 20 local organizations. JACAS blamed the ruling Congress party for the violence which occurred in 2013 for their involvement in corruption and underdevelopment of the region. As a mark of frustration against the ruling government, people burned down the government offices along with the office of the Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee.¹⁸⁵ Another part of the interpretation stated that, though it was the frustration of the people against the government, it was politically motivated. One of the respondents stated:

¹⁸³ Interview conducted in Karbi Anglong in October 2013 with former EM and other officials under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

¹⁸⁴ Interview conducted of Deputy Commissioner of Karbi Anglong under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

¹⁸⁵ Interview conducted of different student organizations and elites of Karbi Anglong under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

“The main culprit behind the scenario was the Congress party. As you know that, there were many cases of corruption in the hill districts which could not be audited. The authorities of the council could not send the audit to the upper authorities, and they decided to play a dirty game during violence. The burning of government offices was done by the party members of the Congress. They have their personal motives behind the incident, which they can show to the world that is was the result of frustration among the common people. People involved in the burning of houses were the hired people. They were apparently given some amount of money and alcohol. Even JACAS is also responsible for the incident. JACAS, Congress and council members were aware of the incident that was going to take place. They showed no resistance because it will be in favor of them, burning up the evidence of their corruption.”¹⁸⁶

One of the interesting things to note in Karbi Anglong is the competition among the students’ leaders along with the competition of political elites. The Karbi Students’ Union (KSA), which is the leading students’ union, has many divisions and their divisions were not about the interest of the students’ organization but in the interest of the leader. The leader who goes out of the organization forms a new organization. KSA was originally formed on July 21, 1959 at Diphu Dilaiji School.¹⁸⁷ It was formed to retain culture, economy and traditions of the society and to gain access to political rights given by the constitution of India. The students’ organization had a split in 1985 about the debate of making of a permanent flag for the organization. Albert Bey, who was the office secretary of the time, formed an organization called as Representative of the Karbi Mass Student (RKMS) on 25th May 1986. But, people did not support the move made by Bey. So, a new KSA was formed which also unable to gather support from the common people which was later known as Congress KSA. The organization experienced further division at the 24th General

¹⁸⁶ Interview extract from President of Karbi Students’ Association (KSA), Laichan Englung taken on 28th November 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

¹⁸⁷ Interview conducted of different KSA organization from Karbi Anglong under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

Conference from 7th to 10th January 2000. The organization split again on 9th September 2000 to form new groups of KSA. The students' organizations are closely linked with different political organizations to help the political parties during the time of election to garner the support for the parties. Thus, the collaboration which is prevalent between students' organizations and political parties politicized the movement led by students' organizations.¹⁸⁸

Ethnic violence that has been experienced by Karbi Anglong is the outcome of minor incidents. Interviews conducted in Karbi Anglong reveal that tensions started among the communities on the issue of turning the autonomous hill district to an autonomous state of Karbi Anglong. However, problems occurred due to contesting voices of the Nagas in neighboring areas of Nagaland. Nagas have been demanding a 'Greater Nagalim'. 'Greater Nagalim' proposed to include certain areas of Karbi Anglong which led to conflicting demands between the elites of the Karbis and the Nagas in Karbi Anglong. The existence of different political and non-political parties within the Karbi community tries to depict themselves as the party which would fulfill the demands for a separate autonomous state for the Karbi community. When there are few institutional means to express the political demands, local elites try to control the resources or dominate creating mistrust among ethnic groups (Lacina, 2009). Elites try to mobilize their ethnic groups to garner the support for the demands they make (separate autonomous state) for the ethnic groups. In the case of Karbi Anglong, different political and non-political organizations mobilized groups to support the demands made by different organizations. However, in garnering the support for the parties, conflict emerged among the different Karbi dominated parties. Different organizations took

¹⁸⁸ Interview with different communities under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

the help of extremist groups to show their dominance in local level politics for the elections. Therefore, the autonomous regions of Karbi Anglong experienced conflict among the political parties resulting in ethnic violence.¹⁸⁹

In the elections of KAAC, election-related violence has been very prominent. In the last election of 2012, Indian National Congress (INC) formed the council with 15 elected members; however, People's Alliance for Peace Agreement (PAPA) which is a conglomeration of 53 political parties won 8 seats and independent candidates could secure only 3 seats.¹⁹⁰ However, UPDS members and joint secretary Surjya Rongpher insisted that the party received very less time for the election after signing the memorandum of settlement with central and the state governments. However, the Congress-ruled state government bestowed very less time to organize themselves for the election and let the people know about their initiative. The PAPA also blamed the state government of Assam for political conspiracy against the ethnic political parties of the region. Right after the UPDS surrendered, election dates were announced by the state government to retain power in the decentralized regions of Karbi Anglong. The UPDS signed the agreement on 25th November 2011 and the election was held on 4th January. It shows that the competition of elites to retain power in the hands of Congress representatives was prevalent. The state government provided very less time to the surrendered UPDS to organize into a political organization. Few members of the militant group claimed that the political elites enjoyed the privilege which is the outcome of continuous movements by the militant groups and the common people. It is also claimed by different interviewees that the KAAC deteriorated because of corruption where politicians misused the money of the common people. Money

¹⁸⁹ Interviews conducted in different parts of Karbi Anglong during November-December 2013.

¹⁹⁰ Data collected from Assam State Election Commission and reference from local newspapers.

allotted for the development of the region was misused by the dominating elites. That is the reason, why the place is still underdeveloped without further employment and with inadequate roads and communication infrastructure.¹⁹¹

It can therefore be concluded that violence after the political decentralization may have occurred because of power politics among the leaders of the Karbi people. Violence was used as a means to acquire political incentives attached to the decentralized institutions. Intense elite competition between the Congress and non-Congress organizations reveals how the leadership within the Karbis and between the Karbi and non-Karbi elites used these institutions to attain benefits for personal gains. The demand for more autonomy and share of financial power was just the apparent outcome of such competitions.¹⁹² Elites tried to pressurize the government by means of violence against the other community. Even non-ruling parties blamed the present administration for their political interests and election alliances resulting in violence in many phases in Karbi Anglong. Ethnic elites of different political parties competed for the political benefits, and tried to depict that they are the true defenders of the community. In the case of Karbi Anglong leaders of national, regional and sub-regional political parties tried to depict that they can achieve the demands made by the people of the hill district. The demand for a separate state and a separate autonomous state was used as a mobilizing tool to defend the identity of the Karbi community. Elites tried to mobilize the community on the basis of identity creating thus a gap between the communities living in the area. In the process, Karbi Anglong experienced competition among the leaders of different political parties for electoral incentives. Emerging political

¹⁹¹ Interviews with KPLT members under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁹² Interviews conducted in Karbi Anglong under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

parties like PAPA, JACAS played the ethnic card for the community support of the group members for their movement and to get the political support for future elections. Fractional politics led to mistrust and suspicion among the communities which led to ethnic violence in the decentralized region. The KAAC also experienced intra-elite competition for electoral incentives which may have led to violence that took place in July 2013.

In the politics of Karbi Anglong ASDC backed by CPI (M-L) was in power in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council till 2001. However, ideological differences between two political parties led to split in their relation which made INC a strong party once again in the hill district. In 2001, assembly and district council seats were dominated by the Congress party. In the Lok Sabha election of 2004, the Congress candidate Birensing Engti defeated the ASDC candidate. The people of the region lost faith in the ASDC because of their frequent splits. However, in 2006 both ASDC (Progressive) and ASDC (Haliram) tried to merge to make an anti-Congress force in the hill districts.¹⁹³ In the KAAC election of 2007 the Congress formed the council with 21 elected members. However, 4 members of the ASDC later joined the Congress party. The 2012 KAAC election was held under tight vigilance as some Congress candidates were threatened by the KPLT members. Just before the elections, out of 555 polling stations, 264 were declared as sensitive, 98 as very sensitive and 36 as hyper-sensitive. Finally, 150 candidates contested for the 26 seats in the council.¹⁹⁴ On December 29, 2011, some Congress workers destroyed the election office of an independent candidate named Bajong Tisso in the Bithung constituency which created a ground for violence in Karbi Anglong district.

¹⁹³ The Telegraph, June 02, 2006, "ASDC factions inch towards merger".

¹⁹⁴ The Telegraph, January 04, 2012, "Karbi poll today amid tight vigil".

Electoral competition has been intense not only within the same community but also between the Karbi elites and the elites from other communities. *Okarbi Suraksha Manch* was formed in 2011 to resist the demand of the Karbis for a separate state for the ethnic Karbi people. *Okarbi Suraksha Manch* (OSM) also demanded the exclusion of non-Karbi villages from the Karbi dominated communities. There were incidents of violence between Karbis and Biharis in Kheroni and conflict arose between the Karbis and Adivasis in Bokajan.¹⁹⁵ People from other communities claimed that these incidents were the result of politicization of ethnic differences especially by the KSA for political gains. Karbi students' organizations wanted to continue their long lasting demands for an autonomous state and to oppose the exclusion of non-Karbi villages from the KAAC as demanded by OSM.

Bokajan District Demand Committee (BDDC) which is associated with *Okarbi Suraksha Manch* is led by Niranjana Karmakar, the General Secretary of the organization. BDDC was formed on July 25, 2011. The aim of this organization was to resist the demands of UPDS. Many protests were organized by the organization and memorandums were submitted to the state government to exclude Bokajan from KAAC and to recognize it as a new district. There are 696 villages in Bokajan, out of which more than 400 villages are inhabited by non-Karbi population. The non-Karbhis oppose the domination of Karbis in the political administration of KAAC. They claim that fewer development works have been done in the area.¹⁹⁶ Political elites of the non-Karbi groups used ethnic difference as a tool to mobilize their groups. This has led to suspicion and mistrust in the region between Karbis and non-Karbhis and contributed to violence. This pattern is similar to BTAD after political

¹⁹⁵ Interview with the people from Bokajan Sub-division under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Niranjana Karmakar (GS of BDDC) and other elites from Bokajan on 3rd December, 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

decentralization. In Karbi Anglong as well, different communities seek for their rights in the decentralized area where elites gained profit by mobilizing the groups to demand their rights which in the long run has resulted converts to violence between the contending groups.

The political parties that were active in 2001 KAAC elections were INC, BJP, ASDC, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and independent candidates. In the council elections of 2007, major political parties that floated candidates were the INC, BJP, ASDC (H), ASDC (J), Karbi Anlong Peoples Party (KAPP) and CPI (ML) and other independent candidates. In 2012 council election, Karbi ethnic political parties came together and formed PAPA to uproot the Congress political party from the district of Karbi Anglong. The Indian National Congress came to power because of stiff competition between the Peoples' Alliance for Peace Agreement (PAPA) Party, a conglomeration of 53 political parties and other opposing groups. The varying pattern of election results of Karbi Anglong shows that stiff competition exists between the political parties for political incentives of the ethnic leaders.

The recent violence in 2013 has to be traced back to 1985. ASDC was demanding for statehood of Karbi Anglong since 1985. But the movement leaders could not come to a consensus. The violence took place in 2013 destroyed about 62 government buildings and other properties by different organizations.¹⁹⁷ It was not an act of single party, but all parties consisting of Congress, ASDC, CPI-ML and others which contributed to the violence. By the act of such violence, different organizations tried to pressurize the central and state government to grant statehood to the Karbis. The respondents insisted that, all parties and organizations are moved by their personal interests. While Congress wanted to destroy the

¹⁹⁷ Data collected from DC office, Karbi Anglong.

documents with unaudited accounts, whereas others tried to pressurize the governments to give more power to the council or to upgrade it to an Autonomous State, so that elites can avail the power in the political structure of Karbi Anglong.¹⁹⁸ In other words, violence in Karbi Anglong is the result of political competition of some groups for the interest of different political elites in the region.

Resources and ethnic violence

It has been observed that competition for scarce resources acts as a probable cause of ethnic violence. In Karbi Anglong, resources were in abundance. Government funds poured into the region and were abundant. The flow of government funds, associated with corruption in the hill district of Karbi Anglong has been debated elsewhere. This is a similar kind of phenomenon in BTAD. The violence that took place between Dimasa and Karbi, Kukis and Karbis were politically motivated for the capture of available resources as far as government funds were concerned. In 2005, there were tensions between the Karbis and Khasis over the border issue of Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong. Media played an important role in spreading rumors and published inflammatory articles to create more controversy on the issue of the boundary between Karbi Anglong and Meghalaya. Moreover, in September 2005 the rumor was spread that people from Kuki community were killed by Karbi militants, which led to violent incidents between both the ethnic communities. This also led to violence between the Karbi and Dimasa communities when Dimasas were tortured in the district of Karbi Anglong. In addition to these events, Karbis (elites) wanted to maintain predominance of the community in the region whereas other communities want to maintain

¹⁹⁸ In-depth interview conducted of different people including elites in Karbi Anglong, Bokaja, Hamren under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

their autonomy from the jurisdiction of KAAC. The conflicting interests for territory and dominance over the resources created a situation for ethnic violence among different communities living in Karbi Anglong district.¹⁹⁹

To elaborate, the formation of ASDC in 1986 was a move against the Congress party to demand an autonomous state to get control over resources and development works. In the election of 1989, ASDC won 22 out of 26 seats and their objective was to achieve more decentralization. However, violence which started in June 2000 was motivated by UPDF primarily against the Hindi-speaking people in Hamren.²⁰⁰ These types of targeted violence also erupted 2001, 2002 and 2003. The violence that took place in 2002-03 also had links with the issue over control of business and land alienation of tribals. The Mikir Hill District (Transfer of Land) Act of 1959 stated that no land can be sold or transferred to non-tribes or between non-tribals. The land which falls under the jurisdiction includes forest lands, wetland and cultivable land.²⁰¹ Ethnic political parties and political elites mobilized the issue of land which contributed to violence. In 2004, Karbi militants killed 6 Kuki farmers who cultivated ginger and refused to give taxes to extremist groups. But, in retaliation Kuki militants attacked three Karbi villages and killed more than thirty farmers in the villages (Barbora S. , 2009). The conflict over land ownership and illegal transfer of lands to other communities created troubles. Interviewees argued that the newly settled non-Karbi populations are exploited by the dominating ethnic group (Karbi), demanding their lands back from other communities.

¹⁹⁹ Interview conducted in different parts of Karbi Anglong under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

²⁰⁰ Hamren is a sub-division of Karbi Anglong district.

²⁰¹ See, the Mikir Hill District (Transfer of Land) Act of 1959.

The violence that took place between the Karbis and the Rengma Nagas was highly motivated by competition over resources such as land. Violence also occurred due to controversies over the issue of boundary demarcation between Karbi Anglong and Nagaland and other resources like services, goods and facilities including forest resources in the border zones of Karbi Anglong district. KPLT tried to establish its dominance over Rengma Naga areas whereas NSCN (I-M) tried to establish its control over the two hill districts of Assam. The Rengma Nagas inhabiting in the hill district of Karbi Anglong fell prey to two groups because of the aspirations of KPLT for a 'Karbi State' and NSCN for 'Greater Nagalim'. The dispute over land was politicized by ethnic elites to gain full control over the lands driving out other communities from the hill district which created conditions for further ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of Karbi Anglong.

Although the land is one of the major issues, it is also claimed that the main problem in the district is corruption. Development related funds were diverted for funding insurgents for the 'Autonomous State'. Though the council opposes the statehood movement, in reality, the funding to insurgents takes place indirectly in the region. On the other hand, mistrust and mutual suspicion among the communities living in the autonomous council increased which contributed to organized ethnic violence for the interest of the political elites of the region.

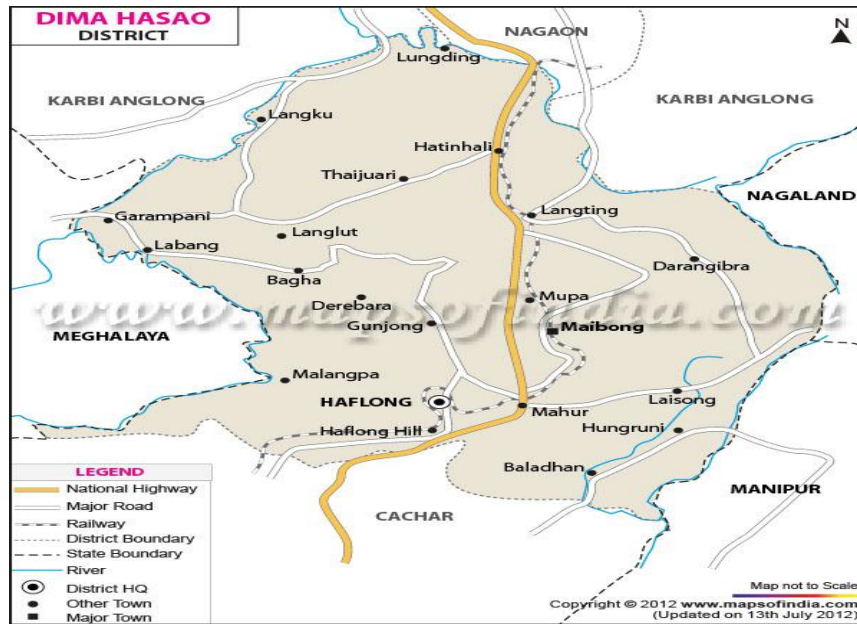
The above section argued that decentralization in Karbi Anglong showed violent responses. Elite competition and violence became predominant in the 1990s. Before 1990s Karbi Anglong experienced less violence between ethnic groups. Similar responses were observed in the Dima Hasao region. The next section discusses ethnic violence in the Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council of Assam.

The Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council

Dima Hasao Autonomous Council was earlier known as North Cachar Hills. The autonomous district council was administered under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India which was implemented in 1952. The aim of the Sixth Schedule was to protect the tribal communities from the control of the people of the plains. As a protection of the hill tribes, District Councils were formed in undivided Assam. The first District Council was formed as United Mikir and Cachar Hills of Assam which promoted self-government of the tribal people as a special administrative arrangement in the hill areas of Northeast India (Singh, 2014).²⁰² Accordingly, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council came into effect on 29th April 1952 with 12 elected members and 4 nominated members in the council. There were administrative modifications in 1969-70 during the creation of Meghalaya which bestowed more administrative powers on the council. The Sixth Schedule was implemented to enable a small section of the tribes living in the defined territory to exercise some degree of administrative power in the form of autonomous region or territorial council. But, the people of the hill district were not satisfied with the power granted to them and they started demanding more autonomy since 1986. Therefore, to meet the demands of the tribal communities, in 1996 the council was further entrusted with 30 departments under its jurisdiction.²⁰³ Contending demands among different communities still continues. A detailed map of the Dima Hasao is provided below:

²⁰² See, Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 and Constituent Assembly Debate relating to the Sixth Schedule on 5th to 7th September, 1949.

²⁰³ Report submitted to Commission on Centre State Relations, Government of India by North-Eastern Hill University 2009, “*Study on Functioning, Structure of Local Governance in North Eastern Region with Special Reference to Autonomous District Councils/Autonomous Regional Councils*”. Data is also collected by visiting different autonomous councils of Northeast India as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.



Source: Office of DHAC, Haflong

The contending interests and demands between different ethnic groups led to instances of violence among various ethnic groups living in Dima Hasao. To briefly discuss the politics of identity in Dima Hasao, politicization of Dimasa identity took place in 1970s and in the 1980s student activism emerged out of these developments which helped in the emergence of radical politics in Dima Hasao. During that period, most of the violent incidents were carried out by the militant groups formed in the area. Inter-group violence emerged in the region after the devolution of more powers to the council. From 2002 onwards inter-group violence increased in the decentralized areas of Dima Hasao between the Dimasas and the Hmars and the Dimasas and Karbis (Saikia, 2011). In 2003, violence emerged between the Hmars and Dimasas followed by violence between Karbis and Dimasas in 2005, and in 2009 between the Dimasas and the Zeme Naga. As claimed by the respondents from the non-Dimasa communities, Dimasas tried ethnic cleansing of ‘other’

communities from the Dima Hasao area.²⁰⁴ The fear of the non-Dimasas and insecurity of the communities intensified violence in the decentralized areas. The militant group (DHD) representing the Dimasa community contributed to violence in the autonomous council area.²⁰⁵ The important question, therefore, emerges: why did political decentralization in Dima Hasao prove to be ineffective? Instead of preventing conflict, why did political decentralization foster conditions for violence in the Dima Hasao areas? The next section discusses electoral competition as one of the primary conditions that may have led to ethnic violence in Dima Hasao.

Electoral competition and ethnic violence

Electoral incentives among the political elites played a crucial role in the politics of Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council. Violence in the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (DHAC) occurred because of emerging differences between the tribal communities living in the region and for the rising interests of the political elites. The Dimasas have been demanding for a separate Autonomous State along with Karbi Anglong. On the other hand, different ethnic organizations within Dima Hasao have been demanding bifurcation of Dima Hasao and creation of autonomous units for other tribal communities living in the council area. Indigenous People's Forum (IPF) was formed to oppose the steps taken by the Dimasa people and different leaders of the IPF claimed that Dimasa people were mobilizing for the

²⁰⁴ Interviews conducted of non-Dimasa community respondents in November, 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

²⁰⁵ Interviews conducted of non-Dimasa community respondents in November, 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

benefit of their community. Non-Dimasas claimed that other communities were being deprived politically, economically and socially.²⁰⁶

In Dima Hasao, political representation of the other ethnic communities in the council has been insignificant. Inadequate political representation of the minority ethnic communities is one of the reasons why the IPF was formed. IPF's role is to voice these concerns of the minority ethnic groups in Dima Hasao. Dimasa Students' Union (DSU) however insisted that demands made by the IPF are only based on the political interest of the leaders. Political purposes such as receiving a ticket for the elections rather than overall development of the minority ethnic communities motivated them to lead such movements against the Dimasas.²⁰⁷ This is comparable to the situation in BTAD.

Major political parties those are politically active in Dima Hasao since 1950s are Indian National Congress (INC), BJP, CPI (M-L), Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and Assam Gana Parishad (AGP). In 1985 the People's Democratic Front (PDF) was formed in Karbi Anglong. PDF is oriented with a leftist ideology. In 1987, PDF was renamed as ASDC. ASDC started demanding more autonomy for Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous Councils and later they demanded an Autonomous State within Assam. ASDC however split into two groups in 2000: (a) ASDC (United) led by Haliram Terang and (b) ASDC (Progressive) led by Jayanta Rongpi. After the agreement with the central and state governments in 1995, the movement for an autonomous state led by ASDC lost its momentum. Since then the militant organizations took up the movement for a separate state. Dima Halim Daoga (DHD) demanded a Dimaland/Dimaraji for the Dimasas. But, in 2004

²⁰⁶ Interviews conducted of the IPF leaders from Haflong, Dima Hasao in November, 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

²⁰⁷ Interviews of office bearers and members of the Dimasa Students' Union (DSU) conducted in November, under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

DHD also split into two groups, one led by Dilip Nunisa and the other by Jewel Garlosa. The group headed by Jewel was later known as 'The Black Widows'. Black Widow was involved in various incidents of violence in Dima Hasao. As Saikia argued, "Before the emergence of these rebel organizations, the All Assam Dimasas Students' Union and Dimaraji Demand Revival Committee led an unarmed struggle and used less disruptive methods of protest (Saikia, 2011)." In 1990s violence occurred because of conflict between the militant groups. The council members maintained good relations with DHD-J to counter DHD-D. Garlosa used violence as a survival tactic and to show his existence in the valley. Attacks were targeted against state police, government officials and towards other ethnic groups inhabiting the decentralized area (Saikia, 2011).

ASDC was later renamed as the Hill State Democratic Party (HSDP) in Dima Hasao. HSDP demanded more autonomy and statehood in the hill district. ASDC was in power between 1996 and 2001, but later power was transferred to the Congress. So, HSDP claimed that coming of Congress into power not only had an impact on socio-economic development in a negative way, but also intensified violence and created a divisive politics in the hill district.²⁰⁸

The tables for election results in the DHAC since 1996 area as follows:

²⁰⁸ Interview of the HSDP leaders in Haflong conducted in November, 2013 as a Research Assistant under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*, IIT Guwahati, December 2011- December 2013.

Table 5.2: DHADC election 1996

Party	Seats contested	Seats won
AGP	10	NIL
ASDC	20	15
INC	21	2
Independent	32	6
Total	83	23

Sources: Department of Information & Public Relations, Dima Hasao District, Assam

Table 5.3: DHADC election 2001

Party	Seats contested	Seats won
BJP	9	NIL
ASDC	20	4
INC	23	14
Independent	49	5
Total	101	23

Sources: Department of Information & Public Relations, Dima Hasao District, Assam

Table 5.4: DHADC election 2007

Party	Seats won
BJP	9
ASDC	13
INC	3
Independent	3
Total	28

Sources: Department of Information & Public Relations, Dima Hasao District, Assam

Table 5.5: DHADC election 2013

Party	Seats won
INC	10
Independent	18
Total	28

Sources: Department of Information & Public Relations, Dima Hasao District, Assam

The pattern shows that ASDC had been a dominating political party in the politics of Dima Hasao, however, it is interesting to see that in the last council election of 2013 independent candidates secured more seats. Other non-recognized ethnic political parties contested as independent candidates and won most of the seats. So, it is argued that there exists stiff competition for election and resources among the political elites of the region.

In the politics of Dima Hasao, IPF became a strong political opposition. IPF earlier opposed the proposal made by the government of Assam to change the name of North Cachar Hills to Dima Hasao in 2011.²⁰⁹ This led to violent incidents in Dima Hasao.

Therefore, it can be stated that fear of losing ethnic identity in the hill district became a concern for non-Dimasa communities. Secondly, the leaders of every community played the blame game against each other instigating violence in Dima Hasao. Civilians fall prey to such violence instigated by elites for their personal interests. The ethnic violence that took place in such areas can therefore be considered to be politically motivated. At the same time, the students' organizations provided the political platform for the future elections in the council. Various student leaders became prospective political leaders who later joined local politics of contested the elections in the state Assembly.²¹⁰

Competition for resources and ethnic violence

Along with the electoral competition, competition for resources played a crucial role in violence that occurred in Dima Hasao. There are overlapping territorial demands made by different ethnic organizations. Certain parts of Dima Hasao have also been claimed by National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) (I-M) for a unified Nagalim. These claims exist along with the claim by DHD for Dimaraji, the UPDS for a Karbi State, and the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) for a Kuki Regional Council. The dominant Dimasa community sought for an autonomous state to meet the aspirations of the Dimasas. Despite the dominance of the Dimasas in the hill district, other communities including Kuki, Naga,

²⁰⁹ IPF, Indigenous Students' Forum and Indigenous Women Forum have been demanding a Non-Dimasa Autonomous Council. A separate movement led by non-Dimasa communities claimed for bifurcation of Dima Hasao to accommodate the non-Dimasas the hill district.

²¹⁰ Interview conducted in Haflong in November, 2013 under the project *Challenges of Building Capacities in Conflict Situations in Eastern India*.

Hmar and other minority communities wanted bifurcation of the hill district into two areas, where non-Dimasa community could have their own autonomous structures under clause 3 of Article 244(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Overlapping demands of various organizations created tensions over the years in the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council. IPF claimed that non-Dimasa communities are restricted from basic rights and treated differently by the dominating Dimasa community, for which they wanted the creation of a separate autonomous unit.²¹¹

As a mark of protest, bandhs were called and incidents of violence took place among the communities living in the area. On December 16, 2011, there was an attack on Gaijen village near Sontille where 16 houses in a Dimasa village were burnt. The violent attack was made by the Hills Tiger Force (HTF) against the proposed agreement between the Government and the DHD.²¹² In the incident, people lost their properties and lives. Similar incidents were carried out for the demand of bifurcation of Dima Hasao. Towards the end of February 2014, there were tensions when North Cachar Hills Indigenous Students Forum (NCHISF) called for 100 hours bandh demanding bifurcation of Dima Hasao. Violence broke out during the bandh and clashes occurred with the police when 15 persons were injured in Mahur railway station.²¹³

The issue of division, occupation and alienation of tribal land and contesting demands over land made by different ethnic groups ignited competition among elites of different ethnic groups and among the common people as well whose primary earning source and livelihood is dependent on agricultural land. The Dimasa and non-Dimasa elites

²¹¹ Interview conducted of different elites in Haflong town during November 2013.

²¹² 'Violence in Dima Hasao District', *Eastern Panorama*, November 2011.

²¹³ 'Violence mars Dima Hasao bandh', *The Hindu*, 1 March 2014.

have been fighting for control over land resources and dominance over the territory in Dima Hasao. The competition for resources among the elites of contending ethnic groups and their demands on the same territory intensified ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of Dima Hasao. Apart from land, other resources related to jobs, education have also led to competition. A combination of these factors has been a motivating factor mobilizing the communities.

Summary and comparing cases: Political decentralization and ethnic violence in Assam

The previous chapters discussed why and under what conditions the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India meant to safeguard the tribal communities living in the hills of Northeast India proved to be ineffective and created conditions for ethnic violence. Different tribal communities have been demanding more autonomy and statehood.

The data collected through field research in different decentralized areas of Assam revealed politicization of identities and ethnic tensions among ethnic groups. Ethnic violence in such regions may be understood to be the result of increasing fear, mistrust and suspicion among ethnic groups in the decentralized areas. The findings of the study suggest that competition among the political elites for electoral power and resources intensified ethnic violence in the politically decentralized regions of Assam. The study argued that the process of political decentralization used as a conflict prevention mechanism was less effective to reduce ethnic tensions in Assam. Granting autonomous councils to the aggrieved ethnic groups in a way created conditions for violence in the decentralized areas. Violence continued in BTAD, Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam.

If we examine the three cases from a comparative perspective, it can be argued that they have similarity in their origins. Ethnic origins and similar colonial conditions led to a process of preferential treatment in 1950s by the Government of India. Post-colonial developments led to ethnic movements, emergence of insurgencies and violence in the Sixth Schedule areas and plains inhabited by other tribes of Assam. The elites used the ethnic card to get the support of the people for further political decentralization and ethnic separation. The three cases have similarity in terms of their demands for separate states. Bodos, Dimasas and Karbis had to settle with some degree of territorial autonomy. These cases differ in terms of the timing of decentralization, the constitutional provisions and state responses. The Dimasas and Karbis acquired their share of autonomy in 1952 under the provision of the Sixth Schedule and more power was granted in 1996. Bodos came under the first round of decentralization in 1993 but the agreement failed. In 2003, Sixth Schedule was amended to grant autonomy and political decentralization to Bodos. Compared to DHAC and KAAC more power was bestowed to BTAD. The BTAD has 46 executive members and other powers whereas DHAC has 28 executive members and KAAC has 30 executive members in the council. Despite these differences the outcome of political decentralization is similar. Territorial autonomy or political decentralization was granted to these areas to reduce ethnic violence, however, competition for electoral incentives and resources in these politically decentralized areas further led to inter-group violence. Political decentralization proved less effective to control tensions in the territorially autonomous regions. Elites tried to polarize the group members for their electoral gains and to access political power in the region. Such elite incentives led to violence in BTAD, KAAC and DHAC.

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

The thesis aimed at understanding the factors responsible for ethnic violence in the politically decentralized areas of Assam. The thesis examined the conditions under which political decentralization may foster ethnic violence? To understand the research question, the thesis analyzed ‘elite incentives’ in the decentralized regions of Assam in Northeast India. There are a number of studies on the process of ethnic violence and movements for autonomy in Assam. However, few studies looked closely to understand how political decentralization may foster ethnic violence in the Northeast India. The aim of this thesis is to fill up the gap in the existing literature by investigating the causes of ethnic violence in the decentralized institutions of Northeast India, especially the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam. In the concluding chapter, the thesis argued that an elite incentive plays a crucial role in promoting ethnic violence in the politically decentralized regions particularly in Bodoland. The thesis also draws other examples of ethnic violence in other Sixth Schedule areas of Assam. This chapter provides a summary, the implication of the study and the future scope of research.

Political decentralization is the devolution of power which is used as a conflict prevention mechanism in many parts of the world. In defining the process of political decentralization the second chapter of the thesis explained how political decentralization can prevent or promote ethnic violence. The analysis in the literature review chapter shows that

though political decentralization is used as a conflict prevention mechanism, it is successful in some cases however in others political decentralization leads to intensified ethnic violence. The chapter discusses the debates on ethnicity, ethnonationalism, construction of identities and ethnic violence. The chapter discusses two sets of literature, one which argues that political decentralization can reduce ethnic violence by granting political and territorial autonomy to aggrieved ethnic groups. The other set of literature argued that political decentralization intensifies violence by creating the grounds for competition among the political elites in the decentralized areas. The chapter argued that these institutional arrangements often show different outcomes.

The literature on conflict prevention discussed in this chapter argued that there are structural and procedural arrangements used as prevention mechanisms. States usually use two different ways both repressive and accommodative policies to reduce ethnic violence. States use repressive action as short term measures and accommodative action as long-term solutions to ethnic violence (Ackermann, 2003). The process of political decentralization is explained in this chapter as a shift of authority towards local governments, where sharing of power is essential between the centre and the local authorities. The arrangement is made in governance by transferring authorities and resources from the centre to the peripheral governments (Rodden, 2004). The second set of literature explained how political decentralization fosters ethnic violence. Competition between elites for more power and control over resources are probable causes. Violence occurs due to competition for acquiring more wealth and services by one ethnic group leaving aside the 'others' (Lake & Rothchild, 1996). Minority ethnic communities fear that by doing so, all resources and services will go to the single dominating community, which Barry Posen termed as a situation of 'security

dilemma' (Posen, 1993). Fear of domination leads to suspicion against the other groups about the security and existence of the minority groups.

This chapter also discusses the methodology used for the research is qualitative and comparative with local level analysis. Some of the methods of inquiry used are observation and interviews of ethnic communities through representative and purposive sampling. Review of historical documents was made to understand the historical context. To access such relevant documents and archival documents, different libraries were visited. The chapter concluded with a brief research note and lesson learned in the field.

The third chapter explained the colonial history and the historical process of political decentralization in Northeast India. The chapter tried to analyze the historical legacy. British administration tried to implement different administrative structure for the hills and the plains of Assam. British administration left the backward tracts (classified by British administration) to be self-administered with their traditional administrative structures. The Assam Land and Revenue Regulation of 1886 sought to protect the backward classes who lived in primitive conditions and were deprived of material advantages. Rules were made that the regions inhabited by the people belonging to these classes were later included in the tribal belts and blocks. This allowed protection of their land and non-interference of other classes. The major policies that were taken for the administration of the tribal areas in the Northeast region were the Schedule District Act of 1874, Frontier Regulation II of 1880, Government of India Act 1919 and Government of India Act, 1935. Some of these acts and regulations were later incorporated in the Constitution of India with minor modifications. In the post-independence India, a sub-committee was formed to report on the Northeast Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas. Gopinath Bordoloi was made the chairman of the sub-

committee. The committee dealt with the details of various aspects relating to the administration of tribal areas. The committee recommended that hill people were concerned about the security of land and exploitation by more advanced people and the immigrants. After a lot of debates recommendations were made by the committee. Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India was framed for the administration of the hill areas of Northeast India. The idea behind the Sixth Schedule in the constitution was the administration of tribal areas of the undivided Assam and later in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura under articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) of the constitution. Accordingly, Sixth Schedule was implemented and autonomous councils were formed in Northeast India for the administration of tribal areas. The schedule which was meant for the administration of hill areas was later amended and implemented in 2003 in the plain areas for Bodos after two decades of violent mobilization by the Bodos for statehood demand. Chapter three argued that the present administrative structures in the hills of Northeast India have a British legacy.

The next chapter discussed the case study of Bodoland. The chapter discussed how Bodos started ethnic mobilization for their territorial space. It analyzed the nature of ethno-political demands, political decentralization and violence in Bodoland. The fourth chapter tried to understand the patterns of violence led by different sub-groups within the Bodos after two phases of political decentralization in the Bodo-dominated areas. The chapter explained that ethnic violence in Bodoland area is caused by elite competition for electoral gains and resources. The chapter four discusses why the first Bodo Accord signed in 1993 failed. The failure of the Bodo Accord led to more dissatisfaction among Bodo leaders. The failure of the accord also led to the formation of BLT, a militant group which became active in the late 1990s. NDFB and BLT intensified violence in the region for their separatist

demands of Bodoland. After a series of talks, BLT surrendered and signed an agreement in 2003 which is known as the BTC accord. Yet, the signing of the accord and the implementation of new autonomous structure in the Bodoland areas failed to bring down the tensions between the Bodos and non-Bodo communities. After signing of the accord, a series of violence recurred in 2008, 2012 and 2014. The electoral incentives among elites of the area fostered intra-ethnic divisions within Bodos. BPF and BPPF came in intense electoral competition in BTAD. AUIDF became another strong force of non-Bodos, representing Muslim minorities in the politics of Bodoland. This chapter discussed how resource competition and electoral incentives among the political elites of the Bodoland area led to intense episodes of violence. The chapter argued that ethnic polarization created by the competing elites renewed the process of violence and territorial autonomy or devolution of power as conflict prevention mechanism has failed to mitigate violence in the Bodoland area.

While understanding the process of political decentralization and ethnic violence in Bodoland area, the chapter of the thesis also gives a description of the history of excluded areas, political decentralization and Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India which came into effect in Northeast India in 1950s.

The fifth chapter took into account the concerns of other autonomous institutions in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. The chapter made a comparative study of BTAD, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. Ethnic violence in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao supports the evidence on political decentralization and its relation to ethnic violence. Different ethnic groups are still demanding for their territorial space and on the other hand minority communities are opposing the move made by the dominating parties in Karbi Anglong and

Dima Hasao. In both the ways elites played a crucial role in mobilizing the communities in the hill districts. In Karbi Anglong, a nexus between the political elites and militant groups is observed which helped politicians to use the militant groups to win the elections and garner supports for political purposes. The existence of different armed ethnic militant groups from different communities created conditions for contending demands. Mistrust and rumors spread by ethnic elites led to ethnic violence in 2003, 2005 and in 2013.

The Dima Hasao District Autonomous Council also experienced ethnic violence after decentralization. Dima Hasao Autonomous Council which was known as NC Hills shares the same history of political administration with Karbi Anglong. Both the districts came within the ambit of Sixth Schedule in 1952. In 1996, the council was further entrusted with more departments under its jurisdiction providing more autonomy to the aggrieved ethnic groups. Granting of territorial and administrative autonomy could not fulfill the aspirations of the Dimasas which resulted in violent mobilization in Dima Hasao. The contending interests and demands made by different communities led to ethnic violence in Dima Hasao in 2002, 2005, and in 2009. The competition of elites for incentives in the elections and resources created conditions for ethnic violence in the decentralized region. Dimasas have been demanding more autonomy and statehood and other minority ethnic communities sought bifurcation of territory for more autonomy. Mobilization by the ethnic leaders created mistrust and suspicion among the communities living in the autonomous regions which fostered ethnic violence in the politically decentralized regions of Dima Hasao.

While analyzing the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in the politically decentralized areas of Assam, the thesis argued that in the politically

decentralized Sixth Schedule areas, elite incentives played a crucial role in fostering ethnic violence. Elites tried to instigate violence to garner the support for the elections, where they tried to mobilize people on separatist demands. It is the intensive power struggle among the elites for electoral competition and competition for resources which led to violent outcome in the decentralized regions of Assam.

Limitation of the study

This study has certain limitations. First, the study is constrained by the availability of data on land. As discussed earlier, people were initially reluctant to talk about ethnic violence. While collecting data, few places were hard to reach and even building rapport was a difficult task. Collecting violence related data from police sources was a challenge. Few RTIs (Right to Information) were done, but the responses were inadequate. The land holding and transfer of land records, which were necessary for the study, could not be collected because of institutional constraints and unavailability of computerized data.

Second, the analysis made in empirical chapters of Chapter Four and Chapter Five is limited and could be developed further with hard data. In the thesis, elite incentives were taken as an important factor for ethnic violence, but the land issue may also play an important role in promoting ethnic violence. The thesis could not incorporate land issue for non-availability of land related data. Hence, future research can focus on land issues as an important factor for ethnic violence in politically decentralized areas.

Future scope of research

The thesis tried to address the relationship between political decentralization and ethnic violence in Assam of Northeast India. There is a future scope of research using other cases and attempts could be made to adopt a mixed method approach. Further studies can be conducted on other autonomous councils like the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) which was constituted by a secret ballot vote on January 15, 1982, and members were elected on January 18, 1982. Officially, the TTAADC was formed on 1st April 1985 by the 49th amendment of the constitution following mass movements by the tribal communities of Tripura. The objective behind the formation of TTAADC was to provide autonomy to the tribals within the framework of the Indian Constitution to safeguard their culture and traditions.²¹⁴ However, granting of territorial space and autonomy was not effective and successful to reduce ethnic violence in the region. Electoral competition and competition for resources may have instigated violence in the region. On the other hand, granting of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA) to Gorkhas for their long-standing demand for Gorkhaland reduced ethnic violence in the autonomous regions of Gorkhaland. However the recent development provides insights for future scope of research on GTA. Recently on June 8, 2017, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) supporters set ablaze vehicles in Darjeeling and called for indefinite bandh in demand of Gorkhaland.²¹⁵

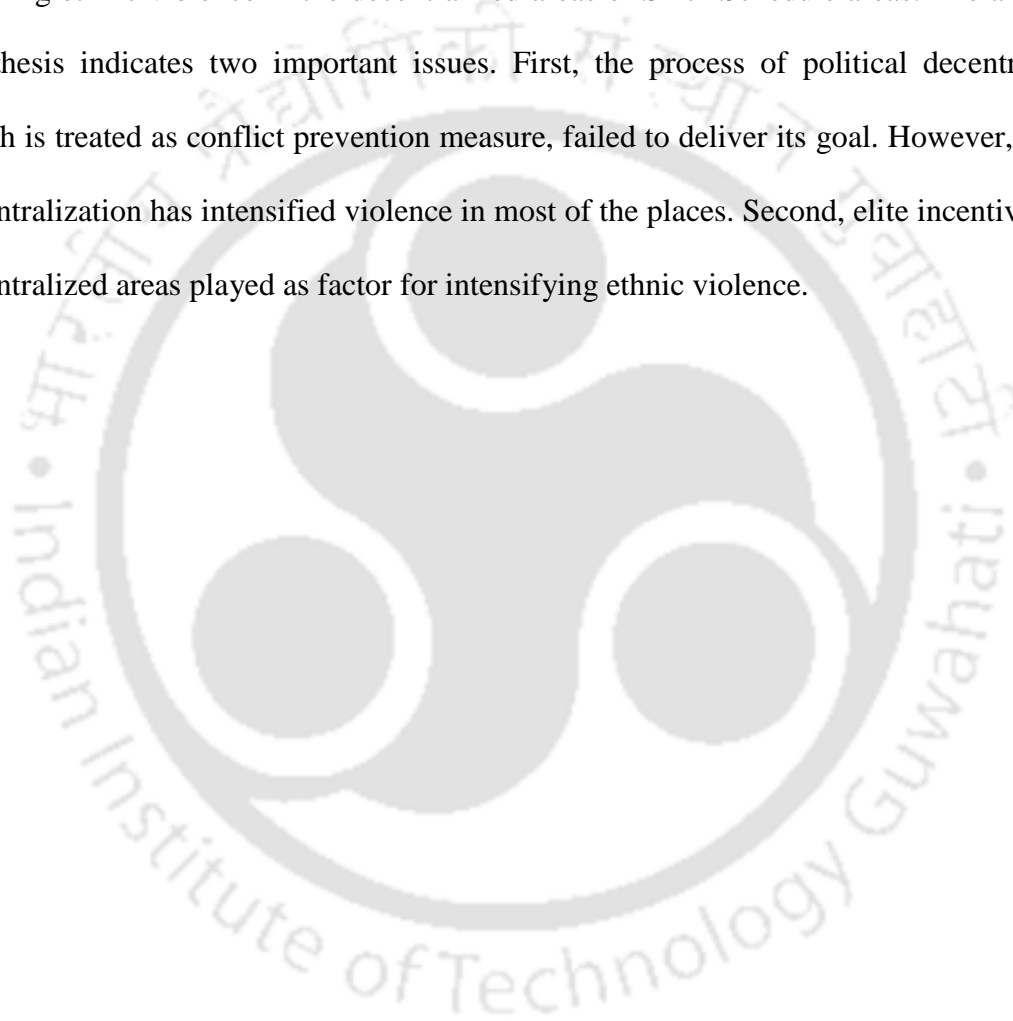
There are other non-territorial administrative autonomous structures which experienced mobilization and ethnic violence such as the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) and other autonomous areas such as parts of the autonomous districts of

²¹⁴ Extracted from the official website of Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council and interviews conducted of Chief Executive Member (CEM) and other officials of TTAADC during December 2014.

²¹⁵ 'Darjeeling crisis deepens: Hill parties unite to demand Gorkhaland', *Hindustan Times*, June 13, 2017.

Manipur. However, other regions such as the Mising Autonomous Council and other non-territorial autonomous councils have not experienced ethnic violence.

Thus, the analysis of the relation between political decentralization and ethnic violence in Northeast India region has shown elite incentives as one of the factors in fostering ethnic violence in the decentralized areas of Sixth Schedule areas. The analysis in the thesis indicates two important issues. First, the process of political decentralization which is treated as conflict prevention measure, failed to deliver its goal. However, political decentralization has intensified violence in most of the places. Second, elite incentives in the decentralized areas played as factor for intensifying ethnic violence.





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APPENDIX A

Selected photographs from field visits during 2013-2016



