Chapter 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter introduces the research study and therefore discusses the problem, objectives, theoretical perspective and rationale of the study. It also reviews the literature on inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India and contains a detailed description of the method of data collection; vi., sources and types of data, universe and units of the study, selection of units and tools for data collection. Besides, significance of the study, the organization of the research work is also given in the last portion of the chapter.

I.   STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Conflict is a dissociative social process and is the opposite of cooperation. Conflict is a type of social interaction involving two or more individuals, groups or communities consciously attempting to oppose, defeat, injure or even destroy the opponent. Conflict is a highly intense type of competition. Conflict also leads to direct confrontation, fight, quarrel, enmity, disagreement etc. Therefore conflict is regarded to be a dissociative social process by the sociologists. Sociologists do not regard the innate biological nature of human beings as responsible for the outbreak of ethnic conflict. They rather attribute it to the socio-political, economic conditions that lead to the outbreak of ethnic conflict.

The "conflict model" developed by Karl Marx suggests that in almost every society, subordination of some groups to others is taken for granted and social harmony is regarded to be the result of the imposition of the will of those in power through education and mass media. But when conflict occurs between these groups, power moves from one group to another and consequently a major social change takes place. Most sociologists accept many of these ideas. Specific examples of conflict are creditors versus debtors, buyers versus sellers, ruled versus rulers, and the like. In Israel, the so-called Black Panthers, a group of Oriental Jews, are in conflict with the majority. The Russian Revolution of 1870-1905 was due to poverty among the peasants, starvation wages, humiliating working conditions, denial of fundamental rights, the political weakness of the bourgeoisie, and the absolutism of the Tsar. In ancient Rome, Spartacus, a Thracian shepherd, managed to organize 90,000 slaves, brigands, and dissidents, and captured most of southern Italy (73 B.C.). Throughout

history, conflict has been discussed in mythology, religion, philosophy and literature (Encyclopedia of Sociology 2000; Vol. 1: 414; Bardis 1979; White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012).

William Sumner (1840- 1910) attributed conflict to the distinction between the "ingroup" (us) and the "outgroup" (all others). Conflict mostly arises due to the consciousness that the **'Other'** is there, an opposite or opponent. It claims the existence of another who is separate from his/her selfhood. This binary of the 'self' and 'other' is basically responsible for the awareness of intense racism – the members of one ethnic group identify themselves to be separate from the other ethnic groups and in some cases this self/other binary gives birth to intense form of hatred for the other and this hatred in due course of time takes the shape of conflict, violence or ethnic unrest between two or more ethnic groups (Sami Schalk 2011:205). Georg Simmel (1858-1918), in his *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations*, which influenced Robert Park, developed a dualistic theory of conflict. He spoke of pairs of forces opposing each other: change versus continuity, non-conformity versus conformity, hostility versus sympathy and conflict versus cooperation. He also conceived of conflict as universal and attributed some of its forms to innate aggression. Inter-group conflict, Simmel further stated, often leads to intra-group cooperation. Robert Park regarded conflict as one of the most important types of interaction which may generate relative social unity (Park and Burgess 1921). He also thought that conflict develops from unconscious competition and determines the social status of both individuals and groups. Race conflict, he said, is due to cultural and colour differences. As for war, it is the most destructive form of conflict and occurs when three conditions are present: aggression in human nature, tradition (e.g., Italian nationalism), and specific situation, such as the assassination of an ambassador. George Lundberg considered conflict as the termination of communication (The Foundations of Sociology, 1939), while Ralf Dahrendorf has revised the Marxist theory of conflict that stressed power and authority as the most important cause of conflict in a society. This creates opposition between groups that enjoy power and groups that lack power, conflict thus being inescapable. Anatol Rapaport describes three kinds of conflict: fight, whose goal is to injure the enemy; game, whose objective is merely to win over the opponent and debate, which is aimed at convincing the other side of the value of a point. Max Gluckman sees conflict as a

series of oppositions generated by the very structure of social organization. Coser defines conflict as strife over values or claims to power, status, and limited resources, in which the goals of the opponents are both to gain the desired values and neutralize, injure, or eliminate one another. Some of the causes of conflict are egoism, or the tendency to satisfy one's needs at the expense of other human beings; the scarcity of resources (power, material goods and services); different interests and values; and economic changes, industrialization, urbanization, etc. which create new life styles that lead to strife. Conflict, which is universal, may occur at the physical, spiritual or intellectual level. It may involve any group, from the family to the nation, and may manifest itself within or between groups. It may be organized or unorganized, and temporary or enduring. Its degrees also vary considerably. Having begun with ancient feuds and tribal struggles, it later took the shape of strike, riot, revolution, civil war, and world war (Bardis 1979; White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012).

Ethnic conflict is a recurring phenomenon. Historically ethnic conflict between two or more groups of people is an old phenomenon. It would perhaps be not wrong to say that ethnic conflict commenced with the dawn of human civilization (when people started to live in groups) and is sill extant. In the recent world scenario, fragmentation, constriction of identity, intense regionalism, socio-cultural hegemony, inter-ethnic antagonism has often resulted in the evolution of ethnic violence or conflict that have taken a heavy toll on human life and property. Conflict has become part and parcel of human existence in this world and, as such, permanent solution to this problem seems to be almost an impossible task. Conflict is a universally acclaimed phenomenon that poses threat to human existence in almost every part of the world. India, especially its Northeastern region is not an exception to this reality. India is the abode of diverse cultures, ethnicity, religion, castes and creeds and its Northeastern region is a multi-ethnic world that provides home to various tribes, communities, religious and linguistic groups. Therefore, this region is highly sensitive to ethnic unrest. The Garo-Rabha conflict that took place a few years ago is one of the several conflicts that wounded the Northeastern region. It was ignited by a small incident on 31st December 2010 and took a violent shape from January 2011 resulting in massive bloodshed and displacement of people. The violence resulted in the killing of 20 people, torching of about 1,500 houses and rendering about 50,000 people of 38 villages' homeless. In this conflict Rabhas were more affected particularly those

living in the state of Meghalaya (CNN 2011). This conflict which is a very recent unfortunate happening in the Northeastern region has been investigated in the study.

II.   SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

The ethnic studies which constitute an emerging area in the contemporary literature of sociology and social anthropology have their antecedents in the ethnographic studies initiated in the late 15th century. By their historical emergence and development these are classified into three different eras; namely, the early ethnography, the ethnography before World War II and the ethnography after 1950 (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences 1972: 173-75).

The ethnographic era began in the late 15th century and continued till the early 20th century. It was the era of the limited cultural studies, principally connected with the concept of race and race relations implying an ideology developed by Gobineau and Chamberlain (1853, 1899). These cultural studies emerged as a consequence of geographical explorations, religious missionizing and establishment of colonial governments and outposts (Howell 1642; Rowe 1964). Notwithstanding, there were some historical reports such as Pigafetta's observations on Cebu (1525) and the Mexican texts recorded by Sahagun in the 16th century. But the ethnographically impressive studies started only in the 19th century when the writings of natural historians, travelers and museum collectors emerged on the basis of missionary, official and many other historical documents (Lewis 1814; British Association 1852; Neumayer 1875). The initiative of the Europe and United States for developing ethnography includes the main contributions such as Morgan's reports on Seneta Culture (1851), the reports of field research on Toda (1906) and Barton's study of Ifugao Law (1919). Besides, some scholars such as Boas had begun to work deeply on particular linguistic and other cultural problems (Jackobson 1959; Smith 1959). By the year 1925, the ethnographic fieldwork had become a professional activity and it started to reflect a distinct shift from a dominant concern of data accumulation to the deeper analysis of particular cultural patterns in some significant works; viz., Malinowski's reports on Trobriand Islanders (1922, 1935) and the works of Mauss (1947), Mead (1947) and Osgood (1940). After World War II the ethnographers who had begun to work more on theoretical and methodological issues (Needham 1963) laid an increased emphasis on communication and structural models (Levi-Strauss

1958), structural linguistic descriptions (Goodenough 1951), detailed study on cultural sub-system (Conklin 1957; Frake 1964; Pospisil 1958), qualitative and quatitative comparisons of field observations (Leach 1961) and development of cultural and personal variables in empirical situations (Condominan 1966).

Ethnic studies have emerged in the Western societies during the last sixty years. The central term 'ethnicity' may be applicable in two different senses; viz., positive and negative (Oommen 1990; Brass 1991). In the positive sense, ethnic groups have played an important role in nation-building (Brass 1991; Oommen 1990; Phadnis 1990). On the contrary, ethnicity is often used in negative sense to refer to the upsurge of ethnic identities in many multi-ethnic societies, attempting to rediscover their roots. In the Western societies such as UK and USA, the heterogeneity has been continuously increasing in contemporary times (Hutnik 1991). The observations show that most of the ethnic studies have focused on the race relations in Africa (Mac Crone 1937; Patterson 1953), the southern states of the United States (Dollard 1937), parts of Caribeans (Smith 1955, 1956), central and south America (Freyre 1933), and in the plural societies of former colonial areas of Asia (Furnivall 1942). The ethnic groups found in the countries like Switzerland and Nigeria form units in the political systems. Other types of multiracial and multi-cultural ethnic groups exist in Northern Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and India (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1972: 167-168).

But in contemporary times, ethnicity has gradually changed the world scenario which witnesses incessantly increasing ethnic consciousness, identity problems and ethnic conflicts. P.N. Rastogi (1989, 1993) informs that political insecurity, economic discrimination and economic, political and educational opportunities constitute the major issues of discord in North Ireland, Yugoslavia, Corsica and Cyprus. Economic despair, political deprivation and ethno-cultural aspirations are the focal issues behind the secessionist rebellions of Kurds in Iran, Iraq and Turkey; Tamils in Sri Lanka; Turks in Cyprus; Arabs in Israel and tribal groups in African nations. Thus, ethnically plural societies have been the situation more complicated and worsened due to the involvement of external forces. In contemporary era, particularly the global immigration from the developing societies to the developed societies has moulded many societies into increasingly diverse ethnic configurations. Consequently, many of the European societies have

undergone drastic changes. In the former Yugoslavia where Serbs, Croats and Muslims were engaged in most ferocious warfare since World War II and in Iraq where the US invasion and occupation starting in 2003 had ignited a deadly conflict among its major religious ethnic groups. Besides, several ethnic groups are engaged in secessionist movements such as Transnistria in Moldova, Armenians in Azerbaijan, Abkhaz and Ossetians in Georgia. The conflict between 'homeland' and 'diaspora' communities is an immature area of ethnic studies in recent world (Basu 1992; Jodhka 2001).

Ranjit Dwivedi has reported in his book *Conflict and Collective Action* (2006) that since the1980s and 1990s large infrastructural development projects have become the subject of major conflicts and controversies around the world. In the developing countries infrastructure projects in water and power sectors have generated political resistance over displacement and environmental despoliations as well as intellectual criticism over the ways resources are used and meanings produced. The Minority Risk Project (2002) provides the following empirical data about world level ethnic conflict:

(i)   239 wars took place between 1955-1996.

(ii)   60 ethnic and religious minorities were victimized between 1980 and1996.

(iii)   275 groups in 116 countries were at risk of violent repression by the government and other agencies.

The ethnographic studies that started in the pre-British period in India evolved through three phases; viz., the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial. In the pre-colonial India community identity was mostly defined in terms of territory, Varna, jati, sect and religion (Singh 1991). The major historical text, Ain-i-Akbari, tells about the location of communities or dominant communities and artisans in different parts of Mughal India (Ansari 1989: 166-325). The colonial ethnographic studies started in the early 19th century with their significant features of (i) the listing of castes from 1806 onwards and (ii) the first ethnographic survey of India in 1885 (Singh 1992; Bandopadhyay 1992). Focusing on caste and nation-building, Ashok Kumar Maiti (1992) classified the colonial studies as follows:

(i)   First study was conducted in the period before 1857, i.e. before the first War of Independence after which tribal questions came to the fore.

(ii)   Second study was conducted in the period between 1857 and 1891, i.e., the pre-census period when the British Government encouraged studies on tribals.

(iii)   Fifth study was conducted in the year 1931 when a special enquiry was held in order to properly classify some communities as tribal ones.

(iv)   Eighteenth study was conducted in the period between 1931 and 1947, i.e., in the time of National War of Independence.

(v)   Lastly, one hundred and eighth studies were conducted after 1947 (Maiti 1992: 61-62).

In the post-colonial ethnography in 1985 the anthropologists drew up another format of ethnographic survey as the colonial ethnography did not cover all the communities of Indian society. The survey known as the 'People of India Survey' was undertaken with a fourfold objective: (i) to generate a brief descriptive anthropological profile of all communities; (ii) to show their linkages; (iii) to ascertain the impact of change and development and (iv) to bridge the information gap (Singh 1987:232-249).

In the present studies of ethnicity in negative sense have continuously increased in the Indian society (Subha 1992; Oommen 1990; Rastogi 1986). Several scholars have contributed to the understanding of ethnic identity movements in India which are distinctly dynamic and demand-divergent in nature (Basu 1992, 1994; Rastogi 1986; Develle 1991; Panikkar 1893; Phadnis 1990; Tiwari 1990; Bhagabati 1992; Roy-Burman 1992). Terrorism or insurgency is another widespread, emerging ethnic phenomenon in the present world (Sehgal 1996; Sarma 2002; Tiwari 1990). The plural societies like India are characterized by large-scale violence, widespread insurgency and extensive civil war. The Hindu-Muslim communal violence in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir, conflict between tribals and non-tribals in Orissa, Bengali and Nepali in West Bengal, caste conflicts in the rural areas of several states, insurgency and violence in Jammu and Kashmir and 'Sons of the Soil' movements in various regions of the country and the secessionist movements by the Sikhs in Punjab, the Gurkhas in Darjeeling (Phadnis 1990; Hutnik 1991).

N.Jayaram and Satish Saberwal have opined in their book entitled *Social Conflict* (1996) that conflict is a vantage point for understanding the social system of

India. But conflict is still a marginal theme for sociological curricula in India. The causes of conflict may be interrelated. Even when conflict begins on a clear issue, the dispute once generated may be transformed by secondary issues. They have mentioned economic, social, political, symbolic, psychological and multiple causes.

Biswajeet Guha's book *Conflict and Violence in Indian Society* (1998) has discussed the issue of violence, its nature and its relation to conflict. Violence is subjective and relative in nature. The degree of violence and tolerance to violence varies from one society to the other and also from one period of time to the other. He talks about the genesis of separate statehood demand and ethnic conflict in India. According to the British colonial perspective, India was incapable of becoming a nation because of the presence of too much factionalism – the problems of unification in India is due to the divides based on religion, language, caste and community. He also said that regional antagonism was present in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Indian society. Nationalism in the developing world is a borrowed concept, a Western import and an outcome of "colonial dependence". The British policy of 'divide and rule' aggravated India's social divides. During the British rule, the tribal population enjoyed maximum autonomy. Therefore, after the departure of the Britishers, they (the Naga tribe for instance) refused to be under Indian Government and the consequence is the Naga insurgency in 1956 with a series of violent acts.

P.N. Rastogi in his book *Ethno-social Conflict and National Integration (1993)* says that the secessionist turbulence in Kashmir, 'sons of the soil' movement in various regions of India; the demand for Sikh extremism aimed to create an independent 'homeland' for Sikhs and insurgency fomented by fundamentalist Muslim groups in Kashmir is also centered on the demand for secession from the Indian nation. Insurgency or terrorism in Northeastern region and other parts of the country, specially, tribal inhabited areas also demand independent 'homeland', 'autonomous district council', etc. A big portion of these studies relates to ethnic conflict in Northeast India.

Ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India

The ethnographic studies in Northeast India began during the British period in the form of notes, accounts, descriptions, memoirs and documents of the British officials, travelers and missionaries. S.M. Dubey (1978) has categorized the

ethnographic studies of the British period into two categories. First, the general studies which deal with Assam and North-East Frontier Agency are generally accounts, monographs history and reports especially by Welsh (1794), Hamilton (1807-14), Wilcox (1832), Perberton (1835), Stevens (1836), Robinson (1841), Butler (1847), Dalton (1874), Beresford (1881), Michell (1883), Maekenzie (1884), Kennedy (1914), Shakespear (1914), Canning (1923), Callaghan (1923), Reid (1942), Bailey 91945), and Bower (1953). Second, the studies that deal with a particular tribe or community are somewhat systematically prepared reports, articles and monographs on various tribes such as Garo (J. Elliot 1792; Godwin 1872-73; Esme 1885; Playfair 1909), Koch, Bodo and Dhimal (Hodgson 1847), Kacha Naga (Abbot 1881-82), Tribes of North Cachar Hills (Damant 1875), Khasi (Yule 1844; Oldham 1854; Steel 1869; Gurdon 1914), Kuki (Macrae 1801; Soppitta 1887), Lushai (Bodgley 1873; Campbell 1874; Chambers 1889), Meithei (Hodson 1908), Mikir (Scat and Lyall 1908), Kachari (Endle 1911), the Naga tribes of Manipur (Hodson 1911), Lushai Kuki (Shakespear 1912), Angami Naga (Hutton 1921), Sema Naga (Hutton 1921), Lotha Naga (Mills 1922), Ao Naga (Mills 1926), Lakher (Parry 1932), the Naked Nagas-Konyok (Haimendorf 1932) and Rengma Naga (Mills 1937). Besides, there are hundreds of reports, notes, papers and articles scattered in different journals, particularly contributed during the British period (Dubey 1978).

The contemporary ethnic studies in Northeast India have taken note of the emergent dynamic situation of ethnic diversity. The region's history is full of ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts till the beginning of the 21st century. The earlier conflicts were based more on feelings of vengeance, customary obligations and tribal ethos of heroism whereas the recent conflicts appear to be guided by some specific interests (Subba 1992: 153-163). Now, the Northeastern region of India is often labeled by terms like *Troubled Zone, Landlocked Region*, *Paradise in Peril* etc. The ethnic conflicts in Northeast India started in 1950s when the ethnic identity movements were launched- sometimes, by tribal communities and, sometimes, by non-tribals on the issue of religion, language, 'sons of the soil' and foreign nationals, ethnic separatism, migration, etc. Non-tribal people are settled in the plains and the tribal people settled both in the plains and hills. Much of the scholars' attention has been confined to the issues like insurgency, foreign nationals, tribal uprisings, brutalities committed by Security Forces, involvement of foreign agencies in the area, political

horse-trading, language, etc (B.P. Singh 1987; K. Baruah 1980; S. Barua 1978). K.S. Singh (1992) has mentioned that out of the ten ethnic movements in India, the four movements were launched in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Assam as a result of the feeling of betrayal or the legacy of colonial rule. At the present, social tension in the region seems to be the outcome of the interaction between diverse historical, social, political and economic forces strangely combined into, integrative and disintegrative, constructive and destructive ways (Kumar 1995; Prakash 2008; Anand 1980; Bhattacharjee 1989, 1990; Sarin 1980). Ethnic community and identity are often found associated with conflict and more particularly with political struggles in various parts of Northeast India. The question of ethnic identity which has acquired prominence is facilitated by its history, geography, culture, religion and administration of the government of India. In the region the situation is getting more complex as each ethnic group trying to assert its identity and moves away from one another in pursuit of political power. There is also a form of protests against assimilation or integration of these communities with dominant communities (Bhagabati 1992). The tribal ethnicity is very much on the upswing in the Northeastern States in the wake of ethnic segregation increasing communalization of politics and regional cultures which make them a battle ground. From 1980s there is perceived a continuous increase the numbers of the armed terrorist groups in this part of the country (Phadnis 1990; Tarapot 1993; Deb Sarmah 2001; Sahadevan 2002). Even the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a series of inter-ethnic conflicts in different parts of the region such as Karbi-Kuki, Bodo-Muslims, Kuki-Naga etc. (Phukan 2005). In the last 40 years leading up to 2011, much has been written on ethnic conflict in Northeast India, containing both qualitative and quantitative data. A review of selected books and articles related to ethnicity and ethnic conflicts is given below:

Sanjay Barbora, in his article entitled 'Ethnic Politics and Land Use: Genesis of Conflict in India's North-East' (2002) says that ethnicity in Northeast India is not merely a matter of 'identity politics' and the notion of identity is not static; rather these are undergoing changes every now and then.

Biswajeet Guha (1998) finds conflict as an intense feeling for preservation of ethnic identity among the tribes or communities of Northeast India, which included: It could be termed as-(i) Cultural Issues – Cultural alienation from the mainstream India

is also a factor for conflict, (ii) Political Issues- In the pre-British period also the tribes of Northeast India remained free and after the colonial period also they wanted to be free, (iii) Economic Issues-Regarding economic development, the apathy shown by the central government has offended the Northeastern population; and unemployment also results in violent conflicts, (iv) Geo-strategic Issues-These areas the hilly and cut off the mainland make a topography favourable for hiding and attacking suddenly, a kind of guerilla action and (v) Role of foreign powers like Pakistan and Bangladesh instigating the insurgent groups of the region.

M.N.Karna in his article entitled 'Conflicts amid the Historical Experiences of Identity, Nation and the State in North Eastern India' (2008) observed that ethnic conflicts in Northeast India revolved around three major areas; namely, politics, economics and culture.

K.Debbarma (2004) in his article on 'Inter-ethnic Conflict in Tripura: Causes and Dimensions' studied that ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflict in North East India which make a serious concern are based on origin, culture, religion and language.

S.R.Bhattacharjee, in his two books '*Tribal Insurgency in Tripura'* (1989) and '*Genesis of Tribal Extremism in Tripura*' (1990) discussed various aspects of ethnic conflicts in Tripura-economic discrimination, sharing of political rights, the changing demographic profile, land alienation, cultural and political domination by non-tribals, immigration, urbanization etc. which are the root causes of ethnic conflict in Tripura.

G. Phukan, in his edited book entitled *'Inter-Ethnic Conflict in North East India'* (2004) writes, "the more society is modernized, more ethnic demands are manifested and, similarly, the more is economic development, the more is ethnic conflict. Tribal loyalties, religion, language, social discrimination on the basis of caste, sharing of political power and economic opportunities have been utilized for ethnic mobilization. Thus, growing sense of awareness and modernization have intensified ethnic assertion. Modernization increases the level of competition for jobs and other economic resources among ethnic groups. As a result, ethnic and social movements based on ethnic boundaries occur when ethnic competition increases**".**

Walter Fernandes (1999), in his article 'Conflict in North East: A Historical Perspective' assigned the cause of the political conflict in the Northeast India mainly

to the differences between the traditional leadership and the new emerging modern elite in the tribes regarding the nature of political freedom they desire. B.B. Kumar, in his book *Tension and Conflict in Northeast India* (1995) also focused on the creation of conflict situation between the traditional and new elites in the society.

Ratna Tikoo's article entitled 'Naga-Kuki Conflict in Manipur' (2004) traces the historical legacy of British/Colonial rule and the post-colonial causes of ethnic conflict.

Swarna Rajagopalan's (2008) article 'Peace Accords in North East India: Journey over Milestones' reports that in Northeast India-"integration without consent, colonial attitudes, nativism, legal and illegal immigration, relative deprivation, cultural nationalism, irredentism and in some places, increasing criminalization have sparked violent conflict in the region".

A.K.Nag (1984), in his article 'The Mizo Dilemma' explains how growing ethnic aspirations threatens national integration. It also focused on the role of the Church in an embarrassing situation.

K.S.Singh's edited book *Tribal Movements in India* (1983) encompasses all tribal movements in the Northeastern region during this period. Walter Fernandes and Sanjay Barbora's edited book entitled *Land, People and Politics: Contest Over Tribal Land in North East India* (2008) reveals that land is the major cause of conflicts in North East India as it plays an important role in the life of the people of the region, particularly its tribal communities.

S.K. Chaube, in his article *Hills Politics in North East India* (1973) studied the major factors and roots of ethnic conflict and the subsequent political turmoil going on in the Northeast India. According to him, the broader concept of nationalism which partially ignores the smaller ethnic identities and the process of industrialization which ignores traditional tribal economy are responsible for ethnic conflicts.

Sanjay Borbora, in his article 'Ethnic Politics and Land Use: Genesis of Conflicts in India's Northeast' (2002) posits that the presence of 'Autonomous District Councils' is the best possible way to regulate conflict and therefore it is to ensure that provisions of the Sixth Schedule are applied uniformly to tribal area.

The importance of land in the tribal society and way of life has been recognized in the last few decades. The three studies made in 1970s; namely, (i) *The Problems of Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam* (1974) (unpublished); (ii) *Tribal Belts and Blocks and Forest Land* (1976); and (iii) *Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Relating to Land and Revenue* (1979) (Report) (B. P. Singh 1987: 272).

Susmita Sengupta's article 'Inter-ethnic Conflict in Arunachal Pradesh' (2004) examines that the cause of inter-ethnic conflict in Arunachal Pradesh and says that it is the competition over resources among the ethnic groups.

B.P.Singh's article 'North East India: Demography, Culture and Identity Crisis' (1987) reveals that the economic, cultural and demographic factors need to be understood in respect of conflicts in the Northeastern societies.

H.K.Barpujari's work *North East India: Problems, Policies and Prospect-Since Independence* (1998) informs that a growing sense of alienation created by geographical isolation, community gap and all forms of neglect or apathy leads to secessionism, militancy and insurgency.

In the book *Uncivil Wars-Pathology of Terrorism in India* (1995) Ved Marwah says that the roots of insurgency in the North East lie deeply embedded in its history and geography. The geo-strategic system of the region has encouraged secessionist movement and insurgency.

Subir Bhaumik (2004), in his study *Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India's North East*, mentioned that by the early 1980s the whole region was ridden by large-scale violence. The separatist movements of the Nagas and the Mizos had challenged federal authority. The recent insurgencies of the Bodos, the Hmars, the Karbis and Dimasas directly confront the regional power centers- the new states of Northeast. If the Nagas and the Mizos fought for a separate nation or state, the smaller ethnic groups such as the Bodos or the Hmars fight for Autonomous Region/Homeland.

H.K.Sarin, in his work *Insurgency in North East India: A Study of Sino-American Role* (1980) states that the Northeast will continue to remain open to foreign pulls and pressures because of its geographic location. Subir Bhaumik (2007)

in his article *Insurgencies in India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-operation and Change* stated that during 1950s insurgency born violence was basically targeted towards Indian security forces and communities from 'mainland' Indian states.

V.I.K. Sarin, in his book *India's North East in Flames* (1980) stressed the geo-political importance of the region and clearly stated that transition from traditional barter economy to modern economy created an upheaval in the tribal societies and some groups have selected the path of insurgency with the help from foreign powers.

V.K. Anand, in his article *Conflict in Nagaland* (1980) analyzed how psychological factors are involved in the geo-political context, becoming mainly responsible for ethnic conflicts in Nagaland. Thus, insurgency groups acted as an effective instrument to fulfill their demands.

Col. Ved Prakash in his book *Terrorism in India's Northeast-A Gathering Storm* (2008) investigates the roots of insurgency in North East India. Udayan Misra, in his article 'The Naga National Question' (1978 highlights that the Naga National Council (NNC) has consistently maintained that the Naga constitute a separate and independent nation. According to NNC, except for a century of the British rule, the Nagas had never been subjugated and ruled by other people and had never been part of what today constitutes the "Indian Union".

B.Datta Ray also analyzed the tribal identity and inter-ethnic tensions in his article entitled 'Tribal Identity and Tension in North East India' (1989). During 1980s Udayan Misra studied two sensational issues in Northeast India; namely, Naga nationalism and Assamese nationalism in his article 'Northeast India: Quest for Identity' (1988).

LT. Gen. N.S. Narahari in his book *Security Threats to North-East India-The Socio-ethnic Tensions* (2007) says that the Northeastern region is geographically and historically connected more with Bangladesh than with mainland of India.

Besides, there are several studies of ethnicity and ethnic conflict on Northeastern region; namely, B. Pakem's edited book *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North East India (1990).* Sajal Nag, in his book *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North East India* (1990). Phanjoubam Tarapot's book entitled *Insurgency Movement in North East India (1993).*Tanka B. Subba's

article Interethnic Relationship in North East India and the 'Negative Solidarity *(1992)*.Ajit K. Danda's article 'Ethnicity and Social Transformation in North East India' (1992.) Amal Datta's article 'Land and Ethnicity in Sikkim' (1992). N.K.Das's book *Ethnic Identity and Social Stratification in North East India* (1987). B.N. Bordoloi's book *Transfer and Alienation of Tribal Land in Assam with Special Reference to the Karbis of Karbi Anglong District*.

Studies on the Ethnic Conflicts in Assam

The state has witnessed various ethnic conflicts such as the conflict between the Assamese and the Bengali speaking groups existing since 19th century, the Anti-foreigners movement in the period 1979-85, the long-standing Assam-Nagaland border conflict, the Bodo and the Muslim conflict in 1993, 1996, 2008 and 2012, the Karbi-Kuki conflict in 2003-04, the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005, the Dimasa-Naga (Hmar) conflict in 2009, the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005 (Kabui 1992; Nag 1990; Roy Burman 1998; Majumdar 1992; Kumar 1995, Samanta 1994).

Hiren Gohain (1985) attributes the beginning of community consciousness in Assam to the colonial decisions which generated a fear among the Assamese that they would be eventually marginalised in their own homeland (Madhumita Sengupta 2006:123).

Apurba Baruah who studied the middle class politics in Assam, blamed the 'elite of the Bengali society and their patrons in Bengal' not only for the imposition of the Bengali language on Assam but also for the growth of anti-Bengali sentiments among the local people. Referring to Guha's statement that the migration of tea-garden labourers and Nepalis did not create any problem because they did not compete with the Assamese for jobs (1991: 37-38). It is necessary to note here that the Assamese middle class leadership which emerged by the first decades of the 20th century, while making occasional emotive appeals for tribal/non-tribal unity within the broader fabric of the Assamese community, did little to assuage tribal fears of being outnumbered and of being dispossessed of their land by immigrants. Moreover, little conscious effort was made to psychologically accommodate the plains tribal communities within the Assamese fold, while at the same time accepting the autonomous life patterns of these people (Udayon Misra 1999:1266).

Sanjib Baruah's study *Immigration, Ethnic Conflict and Political Turmoil -Assam 1979-1984* reports that language, religion and immigration are the major issues of ethnic conflicts and the educated Assamese people became a major social force in Assam during 1970s and 80s.

Asghar Ali Engineer in his book *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (1991) stated that the Assam state is the worst model of national disintegration. The cause of ethnic conflict in Assam is neither purely cultural nor linguistic nor that of emerging nationality, nor can it be reduced to the communal category. All these factors together constitute a complex ethnic structure.

Sandhya Barua in her article entitled 'Language Problem in Assam' (1978) explained that the language issue is entangled with the national question. She tried to examine the language problem by taking into account three aspects; namely, (i) the different historical stages through which the national problem in India has evolved; (ii) the multi-national character of the Indian Union and (iii) the uneven development of regions inhabited by various nationalities.

Meeta Deka's book *Student Movements in Assam* (1996) discusses the language conflict between the Assamese and the Bengali speaking people that took place in 1960-61 and1972 and the anti-outsiders movement in Assam during 1979-84.

Kaustavmoni Boruah's article 'Foreigners in Assam and Assamese Middle Class' (1980) concludes that the Assam movement was due to the presence of "foreign nationals" and the inclusion of their names in the voters' list.

Amalendu Guha's (1980) article 'Little Nationalism Turned Chauvinist: Assam's Anti-foreigners Upsurge, 1979-80' stressed that the Assam movements was ideological and its organizational roots were in the Asamiya upper classes which controlled the state's powerful local press.

Devabrata Sharma's edited book *Migration and Assimilation: Society, Economy, Politics of Assam* (2009), explores the fear of the Assamese people of becoming minority or being marginalized in their own land due to the continuous immigration from neighboring countries, especially from Bangladesh and the fear assumes the form of a xenophobia leading to movements and massacres in Assam.

Immigrant groups in Assam are broadly categorized into four on the basis of their engagement/occupations which are as follows:

(i)   "Adivasi" were engaged in tea plantation related manual labour,

(ii)   Bengali Muslim emigration (mostly occupying agriculture),

(iii)   Hindu Bengali migration (mostly occupying service sector), and

(iv)   Marwari migration in trading sector (N.K.Das, 2009).

C.K.Sharma in his article *The Issue of Illegal Immigration in Assam and the State* (2009) stated that the issue of immigration and especially of the Bangladeshis is one of the most conscientious political issues in Assam.

P.N. Rastogi's book *Ethno-social Conflict and National Integration* (1993) discusses that insurgency and terrorism in Assam by extremist Assamese Hindus, accelerated by the demand for an independent 'homeland'. A militant political agitation by this insurgency group began in late 1970s against the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. They perceived serious threats to Assamese language and culture from Bengali domination. They also feared their loss of political power, the loss of control over their state's economic resources like land, oil, tea, and timber, and the pre-empting of economic opportunities as a consequence of the unchecked immigration of outsiders in the state.

H.Srikanth's article *Militancy and Identity Politics in Assam* (2000) concludes that without an understanding of the material and ideological roots that give birth to militancy, restoring peace in Assam would be an uphill task.

V.K.Daimary's paper 'Boro Movement since Independence' (1986), focuses on demands for a separate state from Assam. P.C. Bhuyan's edited book *Political Development of the North East* (1989) discusses the autonomy movements launched by tribal groups in Assam. P.S Datta's edited book *Ethnic Movements in Polycultural Assam* (1990) writes about the Mongoloid people and the question of their identity crisis in Assam. M. Hussain's book *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity* (1993) discusses the linguistic and cultural regionalism in Assam. Walter Fernandes in his article 'IMDT Act and Immigration in North Eastern India' (2005) states that even after withdrawal of the IMDT Act, the immigration problem in Assam persists. Besides these, there are many other contributors on ethnic conflicts in

Assam, such as Das and De (1992), Singh (1992) and Hussain (1993), Rastogi (1986), Bhagabati (1992), Kar (1990), Ali Engineer (1991), Deka (1996), Tiwari (1990), Phadnis (1990), Tarapot (1993), Danda (1922), Subha (1992), Bhadra and Mondel (1991), Das (1987), Barua and Sharma (1991), Kalita (1991), Bora (1991), Nath (1991), etc.

Studies on the Ethnic Conflicts in Meghalaya

Historically ethnic conflicts in Meghalaya have been very rare. Only a language feud occurred, when Assamese leaders wanted to dismiss the tribal languages around 1950s and 1960s, and wanted to introduce Assamese into the school curriculum of the hill districts (Robins Burling 2003). This was one of the chief grievances that Garo and Khasi leaders rebelled against and demanded separation of their districts from Assam. The result was the state of Meghalaya.

L.S. Gassah, in his article of 'Maintenance of Ethnic Identity and Administration Framework: The Jaintia Sequence' (1990) revealed that with the advent of the Britishers the inhabitants of different ethnic groups were separated into various administrative units for the smooth running of administration. In due course of time, these administrative units took the shape of intense identity consciousness and it generated the uncomfortability of co-existence between the Jaintias and Khasis. Except some administration related protests between the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia and protest against Assamese language during 1970s, there is no major ethnic clash in Meghalaya till the beginning of the 21st century.

Sanjeeva Kumar (2005) in his article 'State 'Simplification' Garo Protest in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Assam' stated that "the protest of the Garos was a result of their dissatisfaction with colonial natural resource management practices, which were based on expropriation of resources long seen as customary rights. The resistance against the colonial order and the Zamindars soon transformed itself into a broad-based struggle for a homeland, a demand that figured in similar protest movements during the colonial period. These movements were largely unsuccessful, yet their legacy lives on. This is because natural resource management in the post-colonial period is still marked by some continuity with an earlier period. This is especially true with regard to the centralized framework of forest management introduced by the British, which still remains in place".

P. Biswas, in his article 'The Khasi-Pnar and Karbi Conflict' (2004) shows the displacement of Khasi-Pnar families due to life threats given by a section of Karbi militants in 2003. 'Border' and "otherness' is the issues of this displacement. But in the recent years, some serious ethnic conflicts have occurred since 2005 such as the conflict between the Khasi and Garo in 2005, between the Khasi and Nepali in 2010 and between the Garo and Rabha in 2011.

H. Srikanth's article 'Resolving Ethnic Conflict in Northeast: Need for a Radical Civil Forum' talks about the five types of ethnic conflicts in Northeast India: (i) the conflict of indigenous communities for secession, (ii) the movement for statehood and regional autonomy within the Indian territory, (iii) the movements related to culture and language, (iv) the conflict against the 'outsiders' or 'foreigners', and (v) the conflicts occurred within the indigenous ethnic groups.

Lazar Jeyaseelan's edited book *Conflict Mapping and Peace Processes in Northeast India* (2008) brings out that there have been various conflicts in Northeast India such as inter-state border disputes (Assam-Nagaland border dispute), identity related conflicts (like Karbi-Kuki conflict in Karbianglong), (iii) conflicts related to religion (like Kuki-Paite conflict). It also explains how religion or religious dominance plays a vital role in initiating ethnic conflicts among various tribes.

For conflict resolution, management or transformation, several methods have been used by many organizations through accommodation, assimilation, acculturation, population transfer, etc. But it is generally not corresponding to the circumstances found in conflict situations. S.K. Das's article 'Conflict and Peace in India's Northeast: The Role of Civil Society' (2007) analyzes why the peace process and conflict resolution frameworks employed in Assam have not worked in the expected way. Das has mentioned two kinds of peace process in Northeast India: first, the government is involved in talks with the insurgency groups in the region and second, the process is at the local level. Peace is accordingly negotiated by groups and communities within neighborhoods and localities. These peace processes can be called "official" and "unofficial".

The foregoing survey of the literature reveals three broad classes of inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India on the basis of their demographic and geographical

characteristics; namely, (i) conflicts among tribal communities, (ii) conflicts among non-tribal communities and (iii) conflicts between tribal and non-tribal.

The issues of inter-ethnic conflicts in Assam are primarily concerned with issues related to language, religion, immigration, tribal and non-tribal, autonomous regions, inter-state border dispute, land and other resources.

The issues of inter-ethnic conflicts in Meghalaya are based on 'administrative arrangement', 'border issues', etc.

These studies show that (i) the ethnic studies have their roots in the ethnographic tradition which deals with races and racial relations, cultural accounts by geographical explorers, religious missionaries and colonial rulers, and historical reports in Europe and USA since 15th century onwards. (ii) Ethnicity studies first emerged in the Western societies in the second half of the 20th century in both positive and negative sense. The negative sense of ethnicity refers to the upsurges of ethnic identities and inter-ethnic conflicts. (iii) North East India displays a rather more complex matrix of ethnic and inter-ethnic formations in view of the multi-ethnic elements such as tribe, race, caste, language, region, descent, religion and culture. (iv) The ethnic conflicts have taken place between the tribal and non-tribal as well as hills and plains ethnic groups in Northeast India. In the hilly regions, the land and other related resources (including demands for autonomous regions) are the common issues of ethnic conflicts. On the contrary, religion, language, tribal and non-tribal, immigrants, border dispute, land and other related resources, etc. are the major issues of ethnic conflict in plain regions, especially in the state of Assam. (v) The insurgency groups are treated as effective forces to fulfill their demands in Northeast India and therefore, with almost all the outbreaks of ethnic conflicts the name of one or the other insurgency group is always noticed. (vi) Insurgency groups are involved in inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India, (vii) The inter-ethnic conflicts have gradually been increasing among the native communities, particularly in tribal areas in comparison to non-tribal areas since 1992, for example, the Naga-Kuki conflict in 1992-2000, Meitei-Pangal conflict in 1993, Arunachalese and Chakmas conflict in 1994-95, Zeme-Kuki conflict in 1997-98, Hmar- Dimasa conflict in 2003, Khasi-Pnar and Karbi conflict in 2003, and others. (viii) Separate nation, state, autonomous region, Sixth Schedule status, separate revenue circle, etc. are noticed as the major

demands of ethnic groups in Northeastern region of India. (ix) The causes of the inter-ethnic conflicts are various; namely, immigration, economic discrimination, changing demographic scenario, land alienation, dominant and subordinate relationship between larger and minor ethnic groups, emergence of new nationalism, inter-state border dispute, political and cultural domination by non-tribal/migrants communities, etc. and (x) the governments have adopted the peace framework of engaging insurgency groups through talks to maintain peace in Northeast India.

III.   RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

It found that scholars have not adequately addressed the role of religious differences in the inter-ethnic conflicts in the hill areas as well as the issue of conflict between the plain and hill tribes which have been recently witnessed in the case of the sudden outbreak of conflict between Garos and Rabhas who have lived together peacefully for a long time. Besides, this case also reveals that, now a days, conflicts are more frequent in the tribal areas than in the non-tribal areas and Meghalaya is the burning example of it. The Garo-Rabha conflict involves these new dimensions of inter-ethnic conflicts, and this conflict has not been studied so far. Therefore a question is posed: *What kinds of conflict are perceived in the Northeast India, specially in the relationship between the Garo and Rabha communities in the Assam-Maghalaya border area?*

IV. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There are available multiple theoretical perspectives that explain ethnic or inter-ethnic conflict. These are presented here with a view to assess their utility for understanding the conflicts in Northeast India.

The cultural pluralist approach focuses on the dominant-subordinate pattern of interaction among various ethnic groups. The approach was initially evolved by Furnivall and was further developed by M.G. Smith and others (G. Sheffer 2003). The cultural pluralism encompasses a single society constituted by the co-existence of various groups having their social structures, value system and belief patterns which are 'mutually incompatible'. In such a culturally divergent situation, the structural requisites of political order lead to the subordination of one group by the other (G. Sheffer 2003).

According to the Marxist perspective, economic and political discrimination is the prime cause of ethnic conflicts. In Northeast India some ethnic insurgency groups justify their struggles by highlighting political and economic injustice done to them at various points of time by the dominant ethnic groups. The ethnic settlement of North-East India is extremely diverse and hence it is a culturally plural society. It encompasses a single society constituted by the co-existence of various groups having their respective social structures, value systems and belief patterns which are 'mutually incompatible' (G. Sheffer 2003).

The primordial approach to ethnicity basically focuses on the roles of biological factors, physical signs like skin, colour and facial features, cultural attributes such as language, tradition, history, myths, legends and folk elements that construct the identities of ethnic groups. At various points of time the outbreak of conflict in Northeast has taken place due to issues related to linguistic differences in Assam. The region is an abode of more than 300 culturally distinct communities based on religion, language, caste, race, clan, sect, tribe, non-tribe, immigrants, 'aboriginal', etc. The situation becomes more complex in Northeast India because of the competition of the groups with each other regarding limited land and other resources (G. Sheffer 2003).

The constructionist approach advocates that nations are essentially modern social constructs of cultural engineers and elites who attempt to organize common masses in a way so as to form new communities. Benedict Anderson one of the highly influential constructionist regards nations and nationalism as modern cultural constructs that started to appear towards the end of 18th century (G. Sheffer 2003). In India, especially in its Northeastern region, the phenomenon of intense nationalism could be seen as an aftermath of the British colonial rule. The 'nation' is therefore regarded as a borrowed concept and a modern cultural construct. For example, after the colonial period intense form of nationalism has often appeared in the form of ethnic violence and demand for separate 'nationhood' or 'statehood' in India as a whole and Northeast India in particular (G. Sheffer 2003).

The instrumentalist approach emphasizes the maintenance of collective identity of ethnic groups which includes migrant communities in order to achieve practical individual and group goals. In Northeast India there is case of the

Bangladeshi immigrants who use identity to demand citizenship and establish political hold in Assam (G. Sheffer 2003).

Amidst such situations, some ethnic groups are socio-economically, politically and culturally developed and some are underdeveloped. These differences give rise to deprivation and frustration and then conflict emerges among the ethnic groups. According to R.K. Merton (1957) and Ted Gurr (1980) it is called relative deprivation. It is a gap between expectations and perceived capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power and social status in relation to others (G. Sheffer 2003).

Another interesting phenomenon discussed by the postcolonial critic and theorist Aijaz Ahmad is that members belonging to diverse ethnic groups get united by assuming an umbrella identity while fighting against a common enemy, but after the departure of the common enemy, a constriction of identity occurs and consequently the various ethnic groups start to think about their separate ethnic homelands. This theoretical stance could be analyzed in the light of the demographic and political scenario of colonial and post-colonial India. India is a poly-phonic nation from the perspective of its demographic structure. India is inhabited by several ethnic communities and almost all the communities were united under the umbrella identity 'Indian' and fought against their common enemy, i.e, the Britishers. But after the attainment of India's Independence and the departure of the common enemy, the umbrella identity 'Indian' or pan Indian identity started to break down into pieces since a constriction of identity occurred among the communities of India on the basis of race, culture, religion, language and other such identity markers. Several tribes and communities started to concentrate on their smaller ethnic identity by abandoning the larger identity called 'Indian' assumed during the colonial period. Due to this constriction of identity as well as due to the self/ other binary several communities especially of North-East India are creating conflict situations in order to materialize their dream of their own "ethnic homeland" (Aijaz Ahmed 1992).

The concept of 'homeland' or 'nationhood' could better be visualized as one of the new concept that was developed in the later stage of human history. Anderson's Imagined Community (1983) stands against the primordialist who believes that nation and nationalism had its existence in the initial stages of human history. Another

theorist Anthony D.Smith (1996:371-388) puts forward the notion that even when nations are the products of modernity, we can witness the survival of ethnic elements in modern nations. Ethnic groups are quite separate from nations because in spite of living within the umbrella identity of nation, the members of some ethnic group may desire to form their own ethnic homeland and in order to materialize this dream they are often seen to choose the path of violence, strikes, protests etc which results in the outbreak of ethnic conflict within a nation. For instance, in Northeast India, tribes are not satisfied with the identity of 'Indian' and consequently they are often found to be struggling to gain their own ethnic identities with a vision of their own discrete homeland.

Ethnic identity or **'consciousness of kind'** is also a major factor behind ethnic unrest. Conflict or tension appears to be a permanent form of socio-cultural and political struggle in the modern world, particularly in plural societies. The ethnic groups are characterized by a high level of 'consciousness of kind' regarding their identification in social life in terms of language, religion, caste, community, race, tribe, region, sect, sub-culture, symbols, traditions, common historical experience, creed, national minority groups, ritual, dress, diet, boundary, national origin or some combination of these factors. An ethnic group shares the common elements regarding socio-cultural or religious infrastructure and their common identification with such elements differentiates or distinguishes them from people belonging to other ethnic groups. Socio-cultural practices are found to be varying from one group to another as a consequence of particularistic socialization in an ethnic group. The significant conflicts that have emerged in nations worldwide are the conflicts between the Whites and Blacks in South Africa, the Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iran, the Christians and Muslim Arabs in Lebanon, the Catholics and Protestant in North Ireland etc. Ethnic conflict in India has become a serious problem and it has been growing in the recent years. It threatens the unity and integrity of the nation. For example, frequent occurrence of Hindu-Muslim communal conflict in different parts of the country, insurgency and violence in Northeastern states, Naxalites movement in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Bihar and West Bengal, etc. Compared to the other parts of India the Northeastern region of India has demonstrated intense case of

ethnic conflict or unrest that has occurred frequently and has taken a heavy toll of human life and property.

The social structure of North-East India that accommodates diverse ethnic groups is responsible for such unrests. The North-Eastern region of India is a multi-coloured world, where we can find people belonging to diverse languages, castes, religions and communities. The tribes of North-East India harbour a sense of alienation with the rest of (mainstream) Indian socio-cultural milieu. Since they have been staying with a separate socio-cultural and political identity before the colonial period and during the colonial period (with minimal interference from British), they want to retain their autonomy after the departure of the British. The Naga agitation of 1956 could be seen as an instance of such sentiments. Several other socio-economic and political reasons are also there behind the rise of ethnic unrest in North-East India.

The North-eastern region of India has witnessed several ethnic conflicts in the last two decades such as conflicts between the Naga and Kuki in 1992-2000, Meitei and Pangal in 1993, Arunachalese and Chakmas in 1994-95, Zeme-Kuki in 1997-98, Mizos and Brus in 1997, and others.

The issues of such conflicts are sons of the soil, foreign nationals, migration, religion, language etc. and conflicts emerge demanding of 'autonomous council', separate 'statehood', etc. to protect their 'homeland', and other resources. As a result the inter-ethnic relations and their structures have undergone drastic changes over time. The sense of relative deprivation is likely to emanate from a sub-group that acknowledges some degree of differences in terms of dialect and culture from the other sub-groups whom they believe to dominate their sub-group. When this sense of relative deprivation is sustained for long and becomes acute, the aggrieved sub-group will emerge with vocabularies and narratives of differences despite their earlier belief in common origin, language and culture. They feel threatened due to sustained domination by the larger sub-group (Kamei Samson 2013).

Assam, like the other parts of Northeast India, has endured several storms of ethnic unrest. Linguistic difference and predominance of one language over the other is one of the major causes of conflict in linguistically plural societies like Assam. In Assam, inter-ethnic conflict started in 1970s between the Assamese and the Bengali

speaking groups. The language conflict is the oldest issue covering a long period in Assam; it has been going on since 20th century.

Influx of immigrants is another important cause of ethnic conflict in this region of Northeast India. In Assam, the Anti-foreigners movement was initiated by the All Assam Student Union (AASU), popularly known as 'people's movement. Border dispute or battle for territory has also served as an issue of long lasting conflict. The Assam-Nagaland border conflict is another long-standing dispute. Due to this border issue a series of violence took place between Assamese and Nagas which has been jeopardizing human existence in the border areas since the remote past. The Assam- Nagaland border conflict involved: (a) The Chungajan violence- 5th January 1979, (b) Merapani violence- June 1985, (C) The Rajapukhuri violence- 7th April 1989 at Rajapukhuri village under Sarupathar P.S. in sector B of Dhansiri sub-division in Golaghat district.

Thus, there have been several conflicts in the Northeastern region owing to issues of language, immigration, border, religion, land and other related sentiments. For instance, conflict between the Bodo and the Muslim in BTAD areas in 1993, 1996, 2008 and 2012; the Karbi-Kuki conflict in 2003-04 in KarbiAnlong district; conflict between the Karbi and the Dimasa in 2005 in KarbiAnglong district and the Dimasa-Naga (Hmar) conflict in North Cacher Hills district in 2009.

But, in the state of Meghalaya the inter-ethnic conflicts has been less than in Assam. Language based unrest occurred between Assamese and Khasis in 1960s. With the advent of the Britishers the inhabitants of different ethnic groups were separated into various administrative units for smooth running of the administration. In due course of time these administrative units took the shape of intense identity consciousness and it generated the uncomfortability of co-existence between the Jaintias, Garos and Khasis. But in the beginning of the 21st century some serious inter-ethnic conflicts have emerged in Meghalaya. For instance, conflict between the Karbi militants and the Khasi-Pnar families in 2004, the conflict between the Khasi and Garos in 2005 and between the Khasi and Nepalis in 2010. Recently, in 2011 an inter-ethnic conflict occurred between the Garo and Rabha communities in East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and Goalpara district of Assam.

V.   THE KEY TERMS AND THEIR OPERATION

The term ethnic is derived from ancient Greek word *ethnikos* first used by David Riesman in 1953 makes its appearance in 1972 in the Oxford English Dictionary (Glazer and Moynihan 1975). The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1980) defines ethnic as *pertaining to nations*, *not Christian or Jewish*, ethnicism as *heathenism* or *paganism*, and ethnography as the *scientific description of nations or races of human beings, their customs, habits and differences.*

Sami Schalk (2011) discusses in this regard is that in ethnically plural societies, there seems to exist a constant tussle between self (symbolizes people sharing the same identity markers) and the other who bear different identity markers. The factor of alienating the self from the other often gives rise to ethnic violence and riots. Ethnic identity is a consciousness of kind in a group of people for their identification and labelling in social life in terms of language, religion, caste, community, race, tribe, region, sect, sub-culture, symbols, tradition, common historical experience, creed, national minority group, rituals, dress, diet, boundary, national origin or some combination of these factors. These factors individually, or in combination, define self-identity, i.e., ethnicity of members in a group (Hutnik 1991; Rastogi 1986). Like the term 'ethnic group', the usage of the term 'nation' also seems to be rooted in a variety of contexts. Generally it describes the inhabitants of a country. Notwithstanding, a certain degree of similarity does exist in the definitions of the two words- 'nation' and 'ethnic group'. But as regards the term 'nation' it has mainly the ideological premises of its relationship with the state (Phadnis 1989:20-21).

Ethnicity is often identified with the idea of primordialism based on descent, race, kinship, territory, language, history, etc. It is defined as "the sense of collective belonging to a named community of common myths or origin and shared memories, associated with an historic homeland" (Smith 1999: 262). Ethnicity also refers to some form of group identity related to a group of persons who accept and define themselves by a consciousness of common descent or origin, shared historical memories and connections (Chazan, Mortimer, Ravenhall and Rothchild 1988: 35). Socio-cultural, political, religious and economic phenomena contribute to dynamic characteristics of identities. Politics alone cannot make solution to identity or identity

related problems. It needs a more meaningful understanding of the complex process of identity formation and reorientation of identity formation. The sense of belonging to a group is based on belief in common origin, shared belief system, the same language and common cultural practices (Kamei Samson 2013:108).

The fluid nature of identity even within an ethnic group is still relevant for various reasons and for certain common goals shared by the sub-groups within the ethnic group. The need for survival is one of the primary goals for reorientation of group identity. And the question of survival becomes manifest in various forms; viz., ethnic conflict and race for access to Constitutional benefits (Kamei Samson 2013). In terms of constriction of Identity, development of one ethnic group of political, economic, cultural, educational and other terms leads to deprivation of other native communities. As a result, ethnicity based insurgency groups and other ethnic organizations start movements demanding autonomy. Some tribes who had earlier launched movements rushed to renew their agitations. Thus, the Ahom renewed the demand for their scheduled tribe status. In order to push forward the demand of a separate Ahom State, the Tai-Ahom Land Committee formed. In 1995 the Ahoms placed a 17- point charter of demands. Showing his concern for Ahoms, the then Ahom Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteshwar Saikia, highlighted the unique cultural heritage of the Ahom people. The Karbis have been conscious about their minority status vis-à-vis the majority of the Assamese. Notwithstanding the gradual incorporation of the Karbis into the Assamese society, culturally and linguistically their incorporation was never conceded. Moreover, the kinship based tribal political system, territorial affiliation (Mikir hills), survival of Karbi folksongs and fable of their distinct origin, tribal mortuary rituals, and tribal costumes which survive in vibrant manner helped the Karbis to put forward their autonomy demand (Das 1989:188-90). Though the Karbi National Council demanded in 1986 only an autonomous district, the last few decades have seen the growth of the Karbi Students Association and the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) spearheading a movement for creation of a separate Karbi state. Seeing ever growing demands of the minority tribes the administration has granted the Sixth Schedule status to some plains tribes, such as the Mising, Rabha and Tiwa (Das 2009).

The concept of Imagined Community is coined by Benedict Anderson in his book "Imagined Communities" in the year 1983. Anderson opines that 'nation' is

imagined as the members of a nation do not know their fellow members rather they carry in their mind the image of their communion. In the absence of a "true" ethnic homeland, the members of an ethnic group imagine their ethnic homeland, e.g., the dream of Nagalim, Greater Garo Land (GGL) etc. This idea of imagined homeland is mentioned with a territorial ethnic homeland.

VI. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives:

(i)   To understand the socio-historical background of the Garo-Rabha conflicts

(ii)   To probe the genesis of the Garo-Rabha conflict

(iii) To analyze the dynamics of the conflict

(iv)   To understand social impacts of the conflict

(v)   To develop a peace sustaining framework for the two groups

(vi)   To suggest an analytical framework for understanding inter-ethnic relations in Northeast India.

VII. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

(i)   Is economic underdevelopment a cause of the Garo-Rabha conflict?

(ii)   Is the community claim over common and private property resources a cause of the Garo-Rabha conflict?

(iii) Is any identity mobilization a cause of the Garo-Rabha conflict?

(iv)   Is religious mobilization responsible for the Garo-Rabha conflict?

(v)   Is identity assertion a cause of the Garo-Rabha conflict?

(vi)   Are insurgency groups responsible for inter-ethnic conflict between the Garo and the Rabha?

(vii) Is there any division between the Garo and the Rabhas on the basis of their residence in the hills and the plains, leading to the conflict?

(viii) Is there any division between the Garo and the Rabha on the basis of language difference, leading to the conflict?

(ix)   Is there any division between the Garo and the Rabha on the basis of in-migration of other groups, leading to the conflict?

(x)   Is the political "horse trading" a cause of the Garo-Rabha conflict?

VIII. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used to understand the nature, type, causes and impact of the Garo-Rabha conflict. Data and methodology used in the research are as follows:

(i)   Types and Sources of the Data

The data for the study consisted of field responses collected from the families of the conflict affected villages in the border areas during the period from 31st December 2010 to 6th January 2011.

(ii)   Universe and Units of the Study

Universe of the study comprises all the villages affected by the conflict in the border areas of the Goalpara district of Assam and the northern region of the East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The area of the conflict falls under six police stations; five police stations are in Assam; viz., Dhupdhora, Ranjuli, Dudhnoi, Krishnai and Agiya police station. Among these, the area under the Krishnai Police Station suffered a heavy loss. On the Meghalaya side, the violent incidents took place under one police station that is Mendipathar Police Station. The areas have three police outposts- 1.Resubelpara, 2. Dainadubi and 3. Bajengdoba. Violent incidents took place under Mendipathar and Krishnai Police Stations where maximum conflict affected villages are found. In the other four police stations mentioned here only relief camps were organized despite a few minor incidents. About 200 villages were found in the Assam-Meghalaya border area where conflict occurred.

Family has been taken as unit of the study for the collection of data. However, the primary data have also been collected from political leaders, student leaders, teachers, and popular personalities belonging to the neighbouring villages on the basis of interview schedule, informal interviews and case studies which were very helpful in revealing truth about the ethnic conflict that occurred between the Garos and the Rabhas.

(iii)   Selection of the Units

There are about 50,000 persons in 200 villages alternatively settled in the study area. Of these, 38 villages were most affected by this inter-ethnic conflict. Under the Dhupdhora, Ranjuli, Dudhnoi, Krishnai and Agiya police stations, 12 villages were affected in the district of Goalpara, out of which 5 villages belonged to Rabha community; viz., (1) Chitokona, (2) Rangchi (3) Bakhrapara, (4) Bamunepanikhuwa and (5) Belpara village. On the other hand, seven villages; namely, (1) Bherbari, (2) Khasbhanga, (3) Ginogre, (4) Puthimari, (5) Khamari Garopara, (6) Sigisim and (7) Khasi Ghagra belong to Garo community. The conflict affected villages falling under the Mendipathar Police Station in the East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya include (1) Mendimar, (2) Dangkhong, (3) Chitokona, (4) Khasrangsi, (5) Miyapara, (6) Manikganj, (7) Harinkata, (8) Mendipathar, (9) Ghenang, (10) Jamgaon, (11) Thapa, (12) Rompara, (13) Jonglapara, (14) Daram, (15) Noksar, (16) Bakenang, (17) Moranadi, (18) Rukhundap, (19) Dagal, (20) Rongdup, (21) Hatibasa, (22) Soinang, (23) Tharika, (24) Darakona,   (25) Zeddoba and (26) Teteliguri. These villages situated in Meghalaya are inhabited by only Rabha people.

Of these 38 villages, 31 are inhabited by the Rabhas and 7 by Garos and 13 villages (Belpara, Khamari and Ginogre, Daram, Jamgaon, Jonglapara, Mendipathar, Nokchar, Rompara, Soinang, Thapa, Resubelpara and Bongaon) were purposively selected as a sample for data collection on the basis of geographical location and severity of effect of the conflict. Of the 13 villages, 4 villages are selected from the rural area (3 from Rabhas; namely, Nokchar, Rompara and Soinang and 1 from Garos, i.e, Ginogre), 4 from the suburban area of Mendipathar and Resubelpara towns (3 from Rabhas; namely Jonglapara, Mendipathar and Daram, and 1 from Garos i.e, Resubelpara), 4 from the villages situated in the Assam-Meghalaya bordering line (3 from Rabhas; namely, Belpara, Bongaon and Jamgaon and 1 from Garos, i.e, Khamari) and 1 Rabha village (Thapa) which is situated in a remote area far away from the border in the Meghalayan side. Again, of these 13 villages, 9 (Daram, Jamgaon, Jonglapara, Mendipathar, Nokchar, Rompara, Soinang, Thapa and Resubelpara) belong to the East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and 4 (Belpara, Khamari, Bongaon and Ginogre) belong to the Goalpara district of Assam.

From the 13 villages, 260 families, (30.23% of 860 families) were purposively selected from different occupational and status groups like labourers, teachers, political leaders, defense personnel, etc. For the purpose of analysis there were used four categories of Garos and Rabhas; namely, the Garos of Assam, the Rabhas of Assam, the Rabhas of Meghalaya and the Garos of Meghalaya.

(iv) Tools for Data Collection

To collect the field data, a structured interview schedule has administered to the 30.23% families from the villages. Besides, informal interviews and case studies of well-informed persons, political leaders, student leaders, and police personnel have been used to derive understanding of the situation as well as a cross-sectional view.

(v) Method of Analysis

The study has used mostly the qualitative data. Therefore, it has followed the methods of qualitative and interpretative analyses. Besides, quantitative data collected from the field and documents is used to analyze by using percentage in comparative perspective. On the whole the data have been analyzed by the **cultural pluralist** approach. There are other theoretical perspectives such as Marxist perspective, primordial approach, constructionist approach, instrumentalist approach and relative deprivation that also help to understanding the conflicts in Northeast India.

IX. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

  (a) Statement of problem
  (b) Survey of the literature
  (c) Rationale of the study
  (d) Theoretical perspectives
  (e) The key terms and their operation
  (f) Objectives of the study
  (g) The research questions
  (h) Data and methodology
  (i) Chapterization

(j) Significance of the study

Chapter 2: Inter-ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India

(a) Inter-ethnic Conflicts in Northeast India

(b) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Assam

(c) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Manipur

(d) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Nagaland

(e) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Meghalaya

(f) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Tripura

(g) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Mizoram

(h) Inter-ethnic conflicts in Arunachal Pradesh

(i) Issues Related to Conflict

(j) Types of Conflict in Northeast India

Chapter 3: The Garo and Rabha Communities: Ethnic Identities

(a) The Rabha

(b) The Garo

(c) The ethnic identities

Chapter 4: Field of the Study

(a) The Goalpara and East Garo Hills district

(b) Socio-cultural and economic life in the study area

(c) The Garo and Rabha identity groups

Chapter 5: Sequences and Causes of the Garo-Rabha Conflict

(a) The Garo-Rabha Conflict

(b) Historical sequences of the Garo Rabha conflict

(c) Causes of the Garo-Rabha conflict

(d) conclusion

Chapter 6: Social Impacts of Garo-Rabha Conflict

(i) Immediate Impacts

(ii) Long Term Impacts

(iii) Problems of Rehabilitation

(iv) Problem of Peace among the Garo-Rabha Communities

(v) Conclusion

Chapter 7– Summary Findings and Conclusion

X.   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Ethnicity in plural, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies is a vital social phenomenon that is being seriously investigated in the social sciences of contemporary times. Yet there is no perspective which can explain the complex situations of inter-ethnic conflicts and relations. The study has deal with a case from a very dynamic and complex ethnic situation like Northeast India. Hence, the study will contribute theoretically and methodologically to the existing knowledge in the research area of inter-ethnic conflicts and relations. Besides, the ethnic problems of multi-ethnic societies like the Hindu-Muslim or Hindu-Christian conflicts, conflicts among indigenous tribes, conflicts between hill and plain people, caste conflicts, language clashes, inter-ethnic (regional) disputes, ethnic insurgency, etc. need to be diagnosed and solved. Therefore the present study is trying to contribute an overall understanding of the conflict situations in multi-ethnic societies as well makes a framework for resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northeast India.