

Ethnicity, Language and Process of Nation Building in Assam

Dr. Pranjit Saikia, Asstt. Professor

Department of Political Science, DoomDooma College

Language has been the most important marker of identity of an ethnic community or group. AshutoshVarshney claimed 'ethnic' groups mean 'racial' or 'linguistic' groups.¹ Moreover, the language issue cannot be discussed in aloof from the issues of nationality formation. It was argued that in the early 19th century nationalism in India has been developing at two levels – one all India, on the basis of pan-India cultural homogeneities and an anti-imperialism shared in common; and another regional, on the basis of regional-cultural homogeneities. During that period both the nationalisms were found intertwined and dovetailed. But in the post-colonial India, it seems that the later form of nationalism has somehow overshadowed the pan-Indian form nationalism where language has played a more critical role. Moreover, language has also been one of the most controversial issues in shaping the political structure of India because violent expression of the issues had not only influenced the political spectrum in a big way but also forced the central government to pursue the policy of reorganization of states on the basis language. So, language is one the central questions of wider socio-political discourse in India. The proposed research paper will solely revolve around the language issue in Assam. The language question in Assam will be examine in the context of: a) Rise of ethnic consciousness lead to struggle for power among various groups in the post-colonial India, and c) Future of India as a viable nation-state in such competitive atmosphere of interests among various ethnic groups.

¹AshutoshVarshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond" in Carolyn M. Elliott (ed) *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 427

(I)

The Beginning of Language Syndrome

Assam was annexed to the British India nearly after hundred years that it had come into contact with Bengal. Though they proclaimed not to come here for quench their thirst by conquering this kingdom, but by 1850s the colonial ruler had firmly established their foot on this province. Till now numerous changes had been made by the colonial authority to consolidate their control. As a part of it the Imperialist rulers had kept changing the Boundaries frequently for their administrative convenience and thereby caused serious setback to Assamese socio-cultural and geographic environment.

As a part of this policy, in 1874 when Assam was made a Chief Commissioners province by including a portion of Bengali speaking areas of Cachar and Sylhet into it, this change of boundaries had not only changed the geographical structure of Assam, but also completely altered Assam's socio-cultural destiny. The mood of public intellectuals had reflected sharply against it. Such exasperating views of Assamese towards Bengalis did not develop overnight, but could be dated back to 1836 when the British had introduced Bengali language in the schools and law courts in Assam which reduced "the Assamese speaking people into a minority in their own home land."²The official authorities had an unrealistic view on such sensitive issue who believe that "Assamese was only patois of the Bengalee language and had no literature of its own."³The decision on the language question had been a severe blow to the Assamese nationalism which testifies the first Gellner's categorizations on nationalism – "feeling of anger aroused by the violence of principle give rise nationalism."⁴The feeling of agony among Assamese across all stratum people was so intense that a section of Assamese intellectuals had demanded secession from India to "save the Assamese race"⁵; though this demand unable to attract much people but reflected the Assamese nationalism taking a fury shape.

² A.K. Baruah, *op. cite.*, 1991, p. 26.

³ H.K. Barpujari, *Political History of Assam*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1999 (Second Edition), p. 139.

⁴ Gellner, *op. cite.*, , p. 1.

⁵ Amalendu Guha, *op. cite.*, 1977, p. 257.

Unnerved by the language policy the British authority, a section of newly educated Assamese youth had taken the herculean task of bringing back the pride of their language. These youth had taken some serious steps to restore the Assamese language in the schools and law courts. One young Assamese youth AnandaramDhakialPhukan who claimed to be the harbinger of the Modern Age, in his polemical work 'A Few Remarks on Assamese Language' had fervently opposed the imposition of the Bengali language in place of Assamese. He petitioned to Moffat Mills in 1852 against the instruction in the "Vernacular schools" being "imparted in a foreign language" that is Bengali⁶ and reaffirm the separate identity of the Assamese language by exposing the expansionist attitude of Bengali people. Looking at the sluggish development in education, during his visit in 1853 Moffat Mills had commented "an English youth is not taught Latin until he well grounded in English, and in the same manner an Assamese should not taught a foreign language until he knows his own."⁷ "We made a great mistake" candid Mills confessed "in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengalee, and that Assamese must acquire."⁸ Apart from him there were some other British rulers like A.H. Danforth who had raised their voices in opposition of imposing Bengali which in their view had an injurious effect on Assamese society and education system. Furthermore, whatever might be their intentions, but the American Baptists had also vehemently opposed the imposition of Bengali in place of Assamese but also strongly urged the Lieutenant General of revoke the decision to place Assamese in rightful place in the schools in Assam.⁹ Apart from these contrary views on the issue within the colonial authority and American Baptist "the Native" DhakiyalPhukan in his another piece of remarkable work *AamiyaLorarMitra* in two parts in 1859, DhakiyalPhukan dispelled "the belief the belief that Assamese people were incapable of writing reading materials for schools."¹⁰ In the meantime, the process standardization of the Assamese language had started with the writing of Assamese grammar and dictionary. Due to their relentless efforts the Assamese language was reinstalled in the schools and judicial proceedings in 1873. The formation of the AxomiyaBhaxaUnnatiXadhiniXobha (Association of the Development of Assamese language) in 1888 had further carried forwarded the linguistic nationalism in Assam.

⁶SanjibBaruah, *op. cite.*, 2001, p. 71.

⁷ Moffat Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, Publication Board, Guwahati, Assam, 1984 (1854), Appendix I, para, 29.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 28, para. 92.

⁹*ibid*, 'Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam', by AnandaramDhakiyalPhukan, Appendix J., p. XLIV.

¹⁰ H.K. Borpujari, *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1993, p. 219.

Language Question in Post-Independence Era: The Impasse Continued

Differentiating on the two types of nationalism – the Western and the Eastern, Plamenatz argued “the Western type of nationalism were acting on behalf of well-developed high cultures, normally centralized and endowed with a fairly well-defined folk clientele” whereas “the Eastern nationalism did not operate on behalf of an already existing, well-defined and codified high culture”¹¹ as these population still “locked into complex multiple loyalties of kinship, territory and religion.”¹² Due to such ardent loyalties towards their culture, the language question has been destined to be most controversial issue for Assamese society. The uproar over the issue has not been in a decreasing mood even in the post-Independence era. In this new horizon of history, the issues of the controversy may be different but the nature and the context has been same.

After independence, the Assamese middle class had become increasingly assertive of their socio-cultural and linguistic rights. Refuting the sheer heterogeneity of Assamese society, they had aspired to redefine the norms and traditions of this society by transforming it into a homogenous society; and imposition of Assamese language through various means has been a part of their broader objective. The Assamese middle class had pursued this objective so eloquently because they thought, if they were not assertive of their socio-cultural and linguistic rights, sometimes in future once again the Assamese identity may fall into the trap of some expansionist forces. But some credible leftist voices from Assam viewed such over-sensitivity of Assamese people on the question of socio-cultural and linguistic rights had aroused out of their inability to compete with the outsiders. HirenGohain in one of his remarkable piece of writing argued “to defend its interest in competition with outsiders who possessed greater financial resources and more advanced skill”¹³ the Assamese middle class developed chauvinistic tendencies. Another celebrated writer A.K. Baruah pointed out that the fear of the outsiders noticed in Assam was the result of the bitter conflict over jobs, land and cultural

¹¹John Plamenatz, “Two Types of Nationalism”, E. Kmenka (ed.), *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea*, London, 1973; quoted from Gellner, *op. cite*, p. 100.

¹²Gellner, *op. cite*, p. 100.

¹³HirenGohain, “Origins of the Assamese Middle Class”, *Assam: A Burning Question*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1985, p 70.

hegemony.¹⁴ But refuting such leftist disposition of analysis SanjibBaruah argued that “immigration into Assam on a scale that has few parallels anywhere in the world, within a relatively short period of time, has hopelessly tangled Assam’s nationality question.” For Baruah such continued influx to Assam did not develop “a composite society of peoples who mingle with one another, but a plural society of separate communities.” That is why the chauvinistic tendencies that develop within the Assamese community are because of the “structuring effect of sudden demographic change rather than “the cultural weakness of the Assamese ruling elites.”

The language policy in Assam in the post-colonial period had also been the corollary of India’s partition in 1947. Immediately after Independence heavy flow of immigrants from the East Pakistan had made the situation alarming. Looking at the intensity of immigration, the alarmist Assamese community had sought government’s intervention on the issue, but the government of India was unconcerned about the fate of Assam. Various civil society organizations had also expressed their concern on the issue. These sections of Assamese had vociferously argued in favour of making Assamese as the Official language of Assam. Going ahead a step, the AxomXahityaXobha, the literary organization of the state who had ardently supported the cause set the deadline for the government that within 1960 the Assamese language should be declared as the state language of the state.¹⁵ With the change in the power structure in the state after Independence, the Assamese middle class could hold the key positions in administration which gave leverage to their demands. Initially though the ruling political class in the state had tried adopted a mid-way, but intense pressure from of Assamese civil society, they had to change their stance and adopted a resolution supporting the cause of making Assamese as the Official Language. This political victory on the issue had undoubtedly increased the strength of the supporters who started campaigning for the issue much enthusiastically. But the change of political stance over the issue had an adverse opinion among Bengali settlers and other hill tribes. They viewed it as the increasing hegemony of Assamese culture over their cultural identity and economic opportunity. Such views were echoed among various hill tribes’ organizations who assumed it as a process of depriving them from getting jobs.

¹⁴ A.K. Baruah, “Assamese Middle Classes and the Xenophobic Tendencies in Assamese Society”, *Frontier*, October, 13, 1981, pp. 3-6.

¹⁵ Maheswar Neog, *Assam's Language Question*, Jorhat, 1961, pp. 29-30.

But bowing down to the pressure from Assamese civil society, the government had made its mind to introduce the Assam Official Language Bill in 1960. The government's decision to introduce the bill in the Legislative Assembly had erupted violent protests in various parts of the state. There were allegations and counter allegations among communities which made the environment tense. The sporadic violent activities that took place in different parts of the state had inevitably taken toll on the law and order situation. After immense pull and pressure the Bill was introduced and got the nod of the Assembly. The Act provides "Assamese shall be used for all or any official purposes of the state of Assam. Further the Act provided that the English language, so long as the use thereof is permissible and thereafter Hindi in place of English, shall be used for such official purposes of the Secretariat and the offices of the head of the departments of the state government."¹⁶ In a bid to safeguard their linguistic identity, the Bengali people in Barak Valley had left no stone unturned. In 1972 when the Gauhati University had decided to introduce the Assamese as the medium of instruction in the colleges under its jurisdiction, the question of language once again surfaced in the public domain which had erupted heavy uproar among the people of both the valleys – the Bahmaputra and the Barak.

(II)

Language and the Ethnic Uprisings: Process of Detachment from Assamesization

In the post-Independence era, Assam had witnessed the systematic assertion of identity by various hitherto suppressed communities. These communities had often whined for not getting proper access to the resources that required for socio-political and economic upliftment. The rejection of Assamese language, they viewed as an end of long drawn socio-cultural subjugation of these smaller ethnic groups who believed the "so called Assamese" had "illegally occupied" the state of Assam. As the Assamese had viewed Bengalis as the alien in their country, likewise the Bodos has also alleged Assamese as immigrants from the Northern part of India who dominated local Assamese and aboriginals with the progress of time. So they have attempted to changeover from Assamese identity

¹⁶The Assam Official Language Act, 1960.

and rediscover their past in every possible way. An Official document has stated that “Although the perception of the Assamese was that they had attained an Assamese personality with coming together of different ethnic, religious and language groups this was not quite the picture. An identity crisis prevailed demanding the individual expression. This process instigated sub-groups to rediscover their own past identities”.¹⁷ M.S. Prabhakar is also concerned about the unequal terms of assimilation of the Bodos into Assamese formation. He argued their assimilation into Assamese society has been very much related to their acceptance of Hinduism. In this process, they lost their native language and moreover, “the acceptance of Assamese language as the mother tongue was the *sine quo non* of entry into Assamese society”.¹⁸ Initially an illusion was created that the new entrants were equal to the cast Hindu people, but in reality they were admitted in sufferance. The material benefits which meant for the Bodos were “in fact being almost exclusively cornered by the non-Bodo people.”¹⁹ So such chronic exploitation of Assamese middle class had forced them to search for their past distinctive traditions and customs.

One of such suppressed communities is Bodocommunity which has developed its consciousness in the pre-Independence period, but after Independence the expressions became more concrete and systematic. The earliest expression of consciousness in a concretized form of this community was the demand for Roman script for Bodo language. This very demand implies the rejection of the Assamese identity by yet another group which concerned the Assamese community most.

By forming its own XahityaXobha as early as in 1952, the Bodo community had raised voices for Roman script for Bodo language. There were serious thinking prevailing in the political circle to accommodate the aspirations of different ethnic groups. In February 1969, the Script Sub-committee of the BodoXahityaXobha submitted its final report on the script issue. Almost immediately, the BodoXahityaXobha adopted the report that recommended the abolition of the Assamese script and its replacement with the Roman script.²⁰ In 1974, when the Roman script was introduced for the Bodo

¹⁷Anuradha Dutta, “Bodo Movement in Assam: An Overview” in GirinPhukan and N.L. Dutta (ed.), *Politics of Identity and Nation Building in Northeast India*, South Asian Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1997, p. 179.

¹⁸Prabhakara, *op. cit*, 1974, p. 2100.

¹⁹*ibid*

²⁰SubirBhaumik, *Troubled Periphery: The Crisis of India's North East*, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2009, p. 76.

language, the state government had stopped government's fund to the Bodo primary schools to pressurize them to back to Assamese language. The Bodo community viewed it as nothing but the hegemonic attitude on the part of the Assam government and forcefully opposed such parochial initiatives. In a bid to carrying forward the demands, the Bodo leadership had approached to the Central government and sought its interference on the issue. The shrewd Indira Gandhi government instead of conceding their demands had put forwarded their own agenda and suggested the Devnagari script – the script has a pan-Indian character, for the Bodo language. This move was nothing but the expansionism and exploitative character of the Indian nation-state to weaken the popular ethnic movements and to forcefully integrate them into Indian mainstream. The Bodo leadership found itself “between a lion and a crocodile”²¹ as described by a Bodo parliamentarian Dharanidhar Basumatary. But as their struggle was against the Assamese language, they rather decided to adopt Devnagari script for the Bodo language. But the decision to go with Devnagari had serious implications within the Bodo society.

As each fraction of Bodo community viewed the issue from religious perspective, the script movement for Bodo language had interestingly poised. Christian Bodos vociferously supported the use of Roman script because “they see in the Roman script a way of identifying closely with the West, with Christianity, with modern education. They believe that use of traditional scripts like Assamese and Bengali will keep them tied to dominant ethnic groups and hinder the creation of an independent identity, with its attendant political and economic consequences.”²² In a rejoinder to such approach, groups like All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) stridently opposed the Roman script and wanted to continue with the Hinduism. The contradiction over the language issue had threatened the cohesion of the Bodo society and generated intra-community conflicts. At the same time, the other ethnic communities have also raised their voice of dissent against the Assamese supremacy and demanded their rightful share in the society. Various socio-cultural organizations have crept up representing the interests of their respective communities.

²¹*Ibid*

²²*Ibid*

As the smaller communities are facing growing insecurities, they have intensified their resistance and some of them even took militant path to protect community aspirations. Though the path of militancy has hardly been successful to fulfill the political aims, but these deviated fractions of the community assumed it to be a viable catalyst for solution of their predicament. Whatever may be the method for achieving goals, but one thing is clear that each community has risen up to achieve their community interests. Such juxtapositions of different interests have messed the society and hollowed the democratic design of India.

Nation-state and Ethnic Aspirations: the Indian Experiences

A prolific Indian scholar RamachandraGuha has stated that “linguistic reorganization . . . rather than leading to the Balkanization of India that many feared . . . seems rather to have consolidated the unity of India . . . and acted largely as a constructive channel for provincial pride.”²³ Undoubtedly an observation will definitely romanticized the hearts of many Indians. But if any one drags himself into reality, he will notice a quite contradictory picture. Even scholar like Guha unnoticed such a stark picture of Indian democracy which is also pretty interesting.

At the beginning of paper, it is claimed that the language has been the most controversial and influencing issue in shaping the political structure of post-colonial India. But before embarking upon the project of reorganization of states on the basis of language, the Linguistic Provinces Commission rejected the idea of “linguistic unity of area” should govern redistribution of provinces – the idea put forwarded by the Motilal Nehru Report in 1928 and warned that “the assertion of linguistic identity could jeopardize the unity of the Indian nation”²⁴. Such a sentiment had also echoed by Krishna Menon who warned, “We will Balkanize India if we further dismember the State instead of creating

²³RamachandraGuha, *India after Gandhi: the History of the World's Largest Democracy*, Harper Perennial, 2008 (Macmillan 2007).

²⁴Nivedita Menon and Aditya Nigam, *Power and Contestation: India since 1989*, Zed Books, London/New York, 2007, p. 136.

larger units.”²⁵ Yet succumbing to the prevailing popular sentiments, the Indian Parliament had passed the State Reorganization Act, 1956 to create states along the line of language. Since then there have been “new identity-based states created under pressure from mass movements.”²⁶

Such identity based states had to create due to the flawed nation-building process of India. Describing the process of Indian nation building, Nivedita Menon most realistically revealed “One of the significant achievements of the nation-building elite of what subsequently become India, was the incorporation these people and regions (independent in the pre-British period), at varying degrees of willingness. The hegemonic drive of anti-imperialist struggle as well as the coercive power of the Indian state after independence was deployed to enforce the idea of as a homogenous nation with shared culture.”²⁷ The position of Indian nationalist leadership qualifies the normative vision of a modern democratic state which believes that every state should a nation i.e. the nation-state. The concept of nation-state believes in one social-cultural identity. As it stands for a political-institutional approach that attemptsto match the political boundaries of the state with the presumed cultural boundaries of the nation, or vice versa, so it has become difficult for various ethnic communities to cultivate their own identities. Though India is not a French type nation-state where regional cultural differences were not recognized; butover the last sixty years of Indian independence, to create India a nation-state the nationalist leadership adopted a number of nation-state policies from relatively soft to downright brutal.

But vigorous persuasion of policies towards creating Indian nation-state had left communities in question to rethink about its future within such bigger national identity. They increasingly felt threatened about their cultural and linguistic identity. Such insecurity as some ethic communities felt within the nation-state system, they had initiated some measures to preserve their identity which sometimes took the violent form. Though they shared common Indian identity, equally also they

²⁵ A.G. Noorani, “Nehru and linguistic states,” *Frontline*, 19(16), August, pp. 3–16.

²⁶ Menon & Nigam, *op.cit.*: pp. 136-37

²⁷ Nivedita Menon, “Thinking through the Postnation”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 7, 2009, p. 74

carry their regional or community based identity. Such regional or community based identities were not given due importance rather nationalist leadership viewed it as threatening to India's unity and integrity and used a number of coercive measures to subside these identities. The inability of successive Indian national governments to understand these diversities itself created crisis of Indian nation-state.

In Assam it came out from the above discussion that in the post independence era consciousnesses among various communities have erupted which challenged the Indian nation-state project. The issues and movements embroiled around the question of language in Assam testify the claim. Byquestioning the Indian identity,such community consciousnesses haveostensibly proclaimed to nurture their own identity. In Assam itself, the communities like the Bodo, the Mising, the Karbi, the Moran etc. are struggling for long to foster their own identity rather than strengthening Indian identity. Moreover different separatist movements of the Northeastern region have also challenged the Indian identity. Such endless festering conflicts, which have spread to newareas of the region, leading to sustained deployment of the Indianarmy and federal paramilitary forces on 'internal security duties',that, in turn, has militarized rather than democratized the social andpolitical space in the North East.Moreover, draconian laws like Arms Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which is meant for counter-terrorism operations are still a major cause of indiscriminate human rights abuses in the region. The developmentalistdiscourses of the region are also guided by the internal and security perspectives. As these states of the Northeast were mainly created to contain the ethnic and separatist uprisings without giving due importance in the economic sustenance of them, so these states have to largely depend on the Central government's financial assistance. This is why the policy frameworks are being made at Delhi without taking the people of this region into confidence. For example, the recently signed land pact between India and Bangladesh where land resources of Assam had surrendered to the neighbouring country without giving due respect to the sentiments of the people of Assam had done at the behest of the Central government. Moreover, the struggle against big dams which are constructing in Arunachal Pradesh is also one of the major irritants of the people of Assam. The popular democratic sentiments growing against the issue conveniently ignored

by the Central government which would undoubtedly be a negative precedent of a democratic country like India for its future. Such imposition of New Delhi's authority over almost every walk of life in the region to maintain the sovereignty of India has proved to be a fraught idea which otherwise created a kind of crisis for greater Indian identity.

Possibilities of being a State-nation

Acknowledging such unequal cultural differences and the idea of nation-state has had to pass through contested terrain in this robustly multinational state, a section of scholars looked into the other possibilities of nation building projects in India. In their work Stephen, Linz and Yadav²⁸ have claimed India to be a state-nation and argued that the idea “stand(s) for a political-institutional approach that respects and protects *multiple but complementary* sociocultural identities. State-nation policies recognize the legitimate public and even political expression of active sociocultural cleavages, and they include mechanisms to accommodate competing or conflicting claims made on behalf of those divisions without imposing or privileging, in a discriminatory way, any one claim.” They further argued that “State-nation policies involve crafting a sense of belonging (or “we-feeling”) with respect to the statewide political community, while simultaneously creating institutional safeguards for respecting and protecting politically salient sociocultural diversities.” In other words, this system of governance facilitates diverse socio-cultural and ethnic communities to articulate their voices and tries to accommodate their demands. They further argued that to accommodate such diverse interests, certain institutional safeguards have been carved out in the form of federalism. “These polities, in order to “hold together” their great diversity in one democratic system,” they argued “had to embed in the constitution special cultural and historical prerogatives for some of the member units, prerogatives that respond to their somewhat different linguistic or cultural aspirations, demands, and historical identities.”²⁹

²⁸ Alfred Stephen, Juan J. Linz and Yogendra Yadav, *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*, the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2011, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

Explaining the idea in Indian case Linz and Stephen vociferously rejected the idea of India being a nation-state³⁰ and stated that in the Nehruvian era India could manage such socio-cultural diversity to a certain extent through consociational maneuverings for what they believe India to be a state-nation in 1950s and 1960s. Experiencing India's northeast, such claim cannot be accepted thoroughly. If any one goes back to that period, one can see the Naga movement has started as early as in the 50's which has still been an unresolved problem in India. The irony of Nehruvian consensual policy was that in 1952 when five districts councils were created under Sixth schedule, this provision was not extended to the Naga Hills and reason were also not properly explained for which the Naga separatist movement intensified their struggle and at last to pursued the Naga rebellions the government had to break away some parts of Assam to create Nagaland, yet unable to contain the Naga separatist movement. The language impasse in Assam had got its momentum in the 50s and early 60s, but unable to find out a long-term and consensual solution for which the issue is yet another bone of contentions for many. The Bodo community had also made initial inroads for their demands in the early 50s, yet the Centre unnoticed the issue which has lasting influence on the state politics of Assam. Moreover the State Reorganization Commission (SRC) was created in 1953 to consider the question of reorganizing the states of the Union by giving 'greatest importance to language and culture'. This initiative can be consensual in the sense that every downtrodden community would get opportunity to raise voice in favour of their demands. From northeast also various communities had put forward their proposals for creation of new states³¹ through which their interests can be best protected. But instead of conceding their demands the SRC favoured the merger of Tripura with Assam and viewed need of "large and relatively resourceful state on the border rather than small and less resilient units"³² which they otherwise they mean to create northeast a single administrative unite from the security perspective. Such an obsession still prevails in the minds of mainstream Indian administrators for which entire northeastern states have been made nothing but a scapegoat to protect India's unity and integrity.

³⁰"Stateness, Nationalism, and Democratization," in Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, esp. p. 34 and figure 2.1.

³¹Bhawmick, *op. cite.*, 2009, p. 15.

³²Bhawmick, *op. cite.*, 2009, p. 15.

Going by their argument, it seems that asymmetrical federalism has been the focal component for being a state-nation. They stated India a historically asymmetrical state due to which it has been a longstanding and relatively peaceful contemporary democracy. But this argument can be contested looking at the policy of federalism pursued in northeast by New Delhi. In northeast India most of the state was created to contain the growing separatist movements without giving due consideration its economic viability. So due to too much of dependence of this region for its sustenance led to the compromise its autonomy. The formation of North Eastern Council at the central level to bring all seven northern states under single administrative unit in respect of policy-making mostly economic reflects New Delhi neither accepted the individual state autonomy nor the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of the region. What they are trying is, by such 'superficial federalism', to create a sense in the minds of people of northeast that they are being cheerfully incorporated into the mainstream India.

Concluding Remarks

The politics of language in Assam has been solely revolved around the Assamese language. Sometime due to its disadvantageous position and sometime due to its hegemonic tendency over relatively deprived languages. Looking at the trajectories of Assamese language, it is apparent that in the pre-independence period, the Assamese language was struggling to establish its supremacy within own land. In one sense, it was the period of the resurgence of modern Assamese language. Immediately after independence with some amount of political patronage, the Assamese elites were trying to impose the hegemony of Assamese language over nascent languages by which by which they expected to create a homogenizing/ composite Assamese society, what basically nation-policies aimed for. But strongly disapproving such a homogenized structure of Assamese society, these nascent groups were successfully established their identity. So, such utter rejection of homogeneity and troubled nation-building process implies clear challenge to the nation-state policies pursued by India. But objectively speaking, the nation-state policies had served the national security purpose instead of giving some room to various ethnic communities to flourish peacefully. The federal structure in Indian polity was created with an intention to fulfill the interests of various socio-cultural and linguistic communities. But Indian political elites apply this form of governance

structure mostly to fulfill the national security interests rather than settling down prevailing social dilemmas. Moreover, the consociational followed in the Nehruvian era had also unable to resolve the longstanding demands of various *imagined communities*. In this sense the pursuance of state-nation policies have also been half-hearted. But looking at the social structure of Assam in particular and India in general, such policies have the greater possibilities to coup with the socio-economic and cultural anxieties persisted in the Indian society. So it can be a viable and progressive alternative to employ in the nation-building process of India.