

Tai Ahom Identity Assertion in Assam: The Role of the Emerging Middle Class

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Abstract

The Tai Ahoms, one of the foremost ethnic communities in the Northeast India are an integral part of the great Tai stock of South East Asia. Originally, they migrated from Yunnan of China through upper Burma (Myanmar) where they established a group of small kingdoms. The Ahoms are the first Tai branch who came to Assam under the leadership of Sukapha in 1228 A.D. and subjugating the local tribes, founded a kingdom in 1253 A. D. and their first capital at Charaideo. The ethnic Tai Ahoms of Assam has been asserting their ethnic identity more than a century ago. The Ahoms who once ruled over Assam presently strive to maintain their distinct identity within the larger Assamese society. With the growth of their numerical strength, democratisation of political system, and universalisation of education, there emerged the class of educated elite among them who realised the community's general backwardness and underdevelopment. These elites, with the growing consciousness and organisational strength began to urge upon the government to fulfil their demands to establish the community strongly in the contemporary socio-economic scenario of the state. As a means of maintaining distinct identity, they demanded the constitutional safeguards. The present study intends to understand different phases of identity assertion movements by the Tai Ahoms with respect to the role of emerging middle class of this community.

Keywords: Identity Assertion, Middle class, Assamese Society, Ethnic Identity, Democratisation

1.0 Introduction

The Northeast India occupies a unique position in India politics. The region has been very sensitive and conflict ridden due to the growing consciousness and assertion of distinct ethno-cultural identity of each of the numerous ethnic groups. The cultural fabric and the demographic pattern of the Northeast India have always provided a congenial atmosphere for the growth of ethnic and identity politics of the region. It is found that the process of identity formation becomes very active in those areas where multi-ethnic groups exist within a political boundary. Mention may be made that the Northeast India is the homeland of numerous ethnic groups living

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in the plains as well as in the hills (Hatiboruah 2022:151). Each ethnic group has its distinct culture, heritage, tradition, history, literature (oral or written) and identity. Assertion of identity by various groups has been articulated through language, culture, religion, caste and it has been found that there are variations in the nature of assertion among them (Dhanaraju 2016:7-8 and Nag 2016:19). The demands and movements include Scheduled Tribe status¹, separate state within the Indian Union², and even autonomous council under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution³. Some of these demands have been resolved⁴ and some are yet to be fulfilled. Preservation of ethno-cultural identity and development of communities remain at the core of demands and movements (Saikia 2004; cf. Datta 1993; Hatiboruah 2018 and Bhusan 2007).

There was a general sense of identity crisis and several distinct tribal and non-tribal groups in the region made efforts of rediscovering their original identity through several movements both peaceful and violent. This ultimately resulted in the creation of several new states in the Northeast India like Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1971), Mizoram (1986), and Arunachal Pradesh (1986), all of which were once part and parcel of Assam. What added fuel to the fire was the role of the ruling elites. They preferred to use the ethno-cultural consciousness and sentiments of various communities of the Northeast to reap political dividends. People were mobilised and several movements took birth in the Northeast. The example of Assam movement may be cited in this regard. Many believe that the Anti-Foreigners Agitation in Assam during late 1970s and early 1980s was, to a great extent, orchestrated by the Assamese elites (Baruah 1986). The slogan that *Asamiyas* are in danger in Assam which the Assam movement took forcefully to the Assamese masses, and mobilised them politically to the streets by organising various protests under the leadership of the Asamiya ruling class (Boruah 1980), was not then a real issue. Though it pleads a national cause, it represents only its own limited class interests (Gohain 1980). The Assam movement against foreign nationals failed to accommodate the aspirations of various smaller nationalist groups of Assam. The identity assertion of the different ethnic groups has emerged as a strong force in Assam through which different ethnic groups try to fulfil their aspirations, demands, rights, and to protect ancestral soil or ethnic homeland, safeguard and maintain their distinct ethnic identity as well as want to create a political space for all round development for themselves within the existing polity (Nag 2016).

The Tai Ahom is one of such ethnic groups of Assam who have been asserting their ethnic identity throughout colonial period and thereafter. The Ahoms have their own culture, tradition, religion, language, etc, and thereby form a distinct community in Assam (Phukon 2019:65). In fact, they don't want to merge their culture completely with the dominant Assamese caste Hindu culture and for this purpose, they want to preserve their customs, tradition, religion and language. As a means of maintaining distinct identity, they demanded the constitutional safeguards. The Ahom elites, with the growing consciousness and organisational strength began to urge upon the government to fulfil their demands of identity preservation. More importantly the Tai Ahoms, who made immense contribution in the formation of greater Assamese society, have been struggling for maintaining distinct Ahom identity. The Tai Ahom movement is both a socio-cultural and religion-political movement that claims an identity different from the generic Assamese (Saikia 2004:68). They have been struggling to place their community at par with other forwarded section of the population in the state. For this purpose the Tai Ahoms felt that certain constitutional status is indispensable. They focused on the demands such as introduction of Tai language, preservation and protection of historical monuments, granting of Scheduled

Tribe status and even creation of an autonomous state comprising the upper Assam districts like Ahom land (2004).

The study formulates two general objectives. These are

- i. to examine the phases of identity assertion movement by the Tai Ahoms of the Northeast India; and
- ii. to explore the role of emerging middle class from among the Tai Ahoms in the movement.

To achieve these objectives data were collected from secondary sources consisting of books, journals, and memorandums. Therefore, the approach to the study is historical in nature. The historical data have been supported by field data which the author, being an Ahom herself, has collected by participating in meetings, conferences, and seminars organised by societies such as The Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam (THCSA), All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmillon (AAMDBS), All Assam Phuralong Sangha, Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai, Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha (PTSS), and Society for Tai Ahom Resurgence (STAR). Though there are studies on various movements no specific study is available to examine the role of the Ahom middle class in organising them. This study is an attempt to fill in the gap.

1.1 The Concept of Middle Class

In general, middle class (Jodhka & Prakash 2016, chapt-1)⁵ consists of the people in a society who is not working class or upper class. The middle class represents a class which is in a state of transition from lower to higher socio-economic status (Mahajan 2011:50). Scholars acknowledge that factors such as income range, having health care, education beyond high school, or having some assets after retirement are indicators of middle class status (Pressman 2015:2). Those who can afford three meals a day, have a place to live, can access to public transportation, basic healthcare, education, and some extra cash to purchase comparatively more luxuries like a TV or cell phone, are considered to be in the middle class (see Mahajan 2011:50). The middle class has an important impact on the socio-economic and political processes in the country as well as the community (Jodhka & Prakash 2016; Misra 1994 and Ahalya & Paul 2024.)

The term middle class was in common use in some parts of the world by the 1840s (Fingard 1987) when it came to be viewed as basically consisting of various social groups which occupy an intermediary position between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; the term petty bourgeoisie was more familiar than middle class in Marxist literature based on mode of production (*see* Bottomore & Rubel 1990). Non-Marxist scholars have been using the term in the Weberian sense of 'status' (Gerth & Mills 1946) in contrast to Marx's economic definition (Walton 1971). Though these two different approaches⁶ to the use of the term middle class have crucial theoretical implications, yet the term is commonly used in social science literature to refer to upward social mobilisation from lower socio-economic stratum of the society or community.

The middle classes in Assam have recently started taking an active role in politics. The goals and desires of this class have a direct impact on the political process and the formulation of public policy. The middle classes make up the majority of the key participants in the political

decision-making process, which includes activists, educated elites, civil society, the media, and several of the sorts. Middle class is used here to refer to an elite group in the Ahom community.

1.2 Analysis

The Tai is a race of the people of the Mongoloid origin (Phukon 2019:1) and displays characteristics of a rich civilisation of south-east Asia with distinct language, literature, unique heritage, advanced agricultural practice and stratified society. There are eight Tai families living in the Northeast India namely Tai Ahom, Khamti, Phake, Khamiyang, Aiton, and Turung. The Tai Ahoms occupy a rather exceptional position amongst the Tai peoples. They founded a kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley in the early part of the thirteenth century and ruled Assam for nearly six hundred years (Sarma 1986). They are the first Tai bunch who came to Assam under the leadership of Sukapha in 1228 A.D. and subjugating the local tribes, founded a kingdom in 1253 A.D. and established their capital at Charaideo in the same year (Gait 1963:79)⁷. By 17th century, this small kingdom covered almost the entire Brahmaputra valley excluding Goalpara. By defeating the mighty Mughals in the battle of Saraighat fought near Guwahati in 1671; they consolidated their power as the most powerful state in the entire Northeast (Gait 1963). During the rule, the Ahom kings laid down the foundations of an Assamese nationality. The rule lasted six centuries and could successfully withstand the onslaught of different forces including those of Mughal imperialism (Handique 2014:76). From the very beginning of their reign, the Ahoms followed a policy of assimilation and peaceful co-existence with Moran, Mottock, Barahi, Kachari, Chutiya and other indigenous communities of Assam whom they conquered. The people of the different communities were made part of a greater societal framework. It was in this way that the Ahom kings from the time of Sukapha worked to unify various tribes and communities of Assam to form an Assamese nation. They were very advanced in culture and literature and for the first times in Assam the Ahoms started writing history. The 1912 census of India enumerated approximately 197,000 people identifying as Ahom in Brahmaputra valley of Assam. At present Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Tinisukia, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji that comprise upper Assam have the concentration of Ahom population (Buragohain 1996:4). Tai Ahoms are also found in Lohit District of Arunachal Pradesh.

The consciousness about the distinct identity of the Tai Ahoms of Assam is not a new phenomenon; it could be traced from the British era. Tai Ahoms felt a sense of deprivation during the British rule and for the reason they became increasingly conscious of their distinct identity. The elite Tai Ahom people like Padmanath Gohain Boruah, Panindranath Gogoi, Ghinaram Gohain Boruah, Suchendra Salal Borgohain, Malbhug Buragohain, Lileswar Singha Buragohain, Kanak Chandra Gogoi, Ghinloga Buragohain, Padmeswar Gohain Phukon, and few others increasingly felt the need of organising their community on the basis of their ethnic distinctiveness⁸. The first major articulation of the identity assertion was visible in the constitution of the Ahom Sabha on 13 May 1893 under the leadership of the noted Assamese litterateur Padmanath Gohain Baruah (who also happened to be first President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha) (Bora 1994:8). The chief aim of the Ahom Sabha was to demand for privilege for the Ahoms in the British administration and to revive their traditional religion, language, and social customs, thereby re-establishing cultural identity of the Ahoms. The Sabha also demanded for providing opportunities to the Ahoms by considering them as separate community in terms of

economic and educational backwardness. The Ahom Sabha was subsequently renamed as All Assam Ahom Association (AAAA) in 1910 (ibid.). The All Assam Ahom Association was only articulating organisation in the Brahmaputra valley to fight the election battle against the congress till independence. The Ahom elites felt the need for participating in the electoral politics of the state to protect, what they called the interest of the community. In fact, they desired to have their own representatives in the legislature to safeguard their interests. For this purpose, the AAAA started involving in electoral politics since the late thirties of 20th century. Radha Kanta Handique, Surendranath Buragohain, Girindranath Gogoi, Ghana Kanta Gogoi, Daulat Chandra Gohain, Jogesh Chandra Gohain, Promode Chandra Gogoi and several other Ahom leaders represented in the legislature to safeguard the community. Gradually, the AAAA merged itself with the congress. But sooner the leaders of the All Assam Ahom Association were disillusioned since they failed to secure the rightful place in the political set up of Assam (Lahon2001:100-101).

Considering the backwardness of the Ahom, provisions were made in the Act of 1909 and 1919 to recognise them as a minority community which was however abolished in the subsequent Act of 1935 (Phukon 2010:x). Therefore, during the thirties and forties the frontline leadership of the organisation was vigorously pursuing the cause of minority status and separate electorate for the Ahom. They pleaded for separate electorate for the Ahoms in a bid to maintain distinct identity. They decided upon the form of the legitimate struggle which may be necessitated to secure the acceptance of the demand of separate electorate for the community. In view of these aspirations of the Ahoms, Surendranath Buragohain moved a private member's Resolution in the Assam Legislative Assembly on 20th November 1943 urging inclusion of the Ahoms among the recognised minorities in the new constitution of India. But resolution failed to evoke sympathetic response in the House, as the Ahom elite complained, due to stiff opposition of the ruling party which was dominated by the caste Hindus (*see* Phukon 2010 and The Tai Ahom Development Council 2023) Thus the Ahom elite did not see any of hope for protecting the interest of their community in the new constitution of India.

The Ahom Tai Mongoliya Rajya Parishad (ATMRP), established in 1967, was the first political organisation of the Ahom which demanded a separate state. The Tai Rajya Parishad was formed under the chairmanship of Khagen Saikia. The Parishad maintained that the problem of political stability in the North Eastern region would find its solution only when Assam was reorganised on a basis acceptable to all sections of its people. The Parishad supported the reorganisation of Assam on Federal basis provided that Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts were made a federating unit. In 1968, the Ahom Tai Mongoliya Rajya Parishad in its comprehensive memorandum forcefully claimed that the Ahom of Upper Assam have their own culture, language and distinct tradition which need to be preserved and developed. It claimed that the Ahom have a strong desire to save their socio-cultural institutions from political and cultural domination of outsiders. The ATMRP was rechristened as Ujoni Asom Rajya Parishad (UARP) in 1970. It contested the mid-term parliamentary election to the Lok Sabha in 1970 to back up the demand for a separate state (Lahon 2001:101 and The Tai Ahom Development Council 2023). This organisation virtually became extinct after its election alliance with the Janata party in 1970. Besides the basic demand of a separate state, the UARP also made some other demands for socio-economic development of the Tai Ahoms of the upper Assam. Some of these demands were, setting up of a refinery in upper Assam, extension of broad gauge railway line up to

Dibrugarh, a Board of secondary education for upper Assam, improvement of schools, colleges and other educational institutions of the region, introduction of Tai language in schools, and preservation of ancient monuments built by the Ahom kings (Phukan 2005:46). Quite a few of these demands have since been fulfilled. But the Parishad did not vigorously pursue its demand for the creation of a separate state. The demand for a separate state has also lost its strength in due course of time. However, the other unfulfilled demands are raised today.

The Tai Ahoms of Assam faced a lot of problems after independence in different fields. Moreover, though once their ancestors belonged to ruling race but today they have been squarely backward. They have been recognised as one of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category with some other aboriginal tribes of Assam in 1955 as per recommendations of Kaka Kalelkar Commission (ibid.:60). With the growth of their numerical strength, and democratisation of political system and universalisation of education, there emerged educated elite among the Tai Ahoms who realised their status of backwardness and underdevelopment. As a measure to solve their multi-fold and multi-faceted demands, the ethnic group Tai Ahoms have been struggling through their organisations. In the present time, All Tai Ahom Student Union (ATASU) founded in 1988 with Promod Boruah and Arun Gogoi as President and General Secretary respectively, is much concerned about the problems of Tai Ahom community. Number of Ahom elites like Prof. J. N. Phukan, Prof. Hrien Gohain, Dr. Puspa Gogoi, Hem Buragohain, Kiran Kumar Gogoi, Horen Phukon, Prodip Gogoi contributed a great deal in the emergence of All Tai Ahom Students Union. While struggling for the overall development of the Tai Ahom community, rightly or wrongly the All Tai Ahom Student Union has been raising political issues and thus has got involved in the politics of the state despite being a non-political organisation. From the very beginning, the ATASU has been raising a host of demands before the government of the state as well as the centre which are both non-political and political in nature. Some of such demands are to reserve seats for the Tai Ahom Students in higher educational institutions, to recognise Tai language and make it as an elective subject in educational institution, to include the Tai Ahoms in the list of Scheduled Tribes, to enumerate Tai Ahom population separately in the census, to give reservation in the government jobs according to the proportion of the total numerical strength, to reserve those seats of Assam Legislative Assembly where 25 per cent or more voters belonged to the Tai Ahom community, to create Legislative Council in Assam on the basis of equal representation of different communities, to create an autonomous region comprising the districts of upper Assam and so on. Now, ATASU is spearheading the demand for Scheduled Tribe status to the Tai Ahom people⁹. The ATASU has been using various forums and forms of protest and agitations such as road blockades, *bandhs*, strikes etc to demand the ST status for the Ahom people in the state. In 2006, Assam government proposed to change name of the State Assam to Asom. ATASU has been demanding that the renaming of Assam to Asom be cancelled on the grounds of historical claims that echo the pride of the Ahoms as a potent ethnic group¹⁰. All these inspire some people of the group to tend to search for an alternative to the label of Assamese. But by and large, the Ahoms are not deviating from what is known as Assam and Assamese culture even though they have a sense of injured pride (Hati Boruah 2018:47).

Like the All Tai Ahom Student Union, All Assam Tai Ahom Juba Parishad, Ahom Sena, Tai Ahom National Council, Ahom Students Federation also put forward similar demands now. They argue that since almost all other communities belonging to the Mongoloid stocks have

already been included into the Scheduled Tribes list there is every justification for the inclusion of the Tai Ahoms into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

The Ahoms show their concern of cultural and language preservation through various lingo-cultural organisations such as The Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam (THCSA), 1955; All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmillon (AAMDBS), 1962; All Assam Phuralong Sangha, 1975; Purbanchal Tai Sahitya Sabha (PTSS), 1981; Society for Tai Ahom Resurgence (STAR), 2014; and so on for establishing their community unto a rightful place. These organisations have been pursuing agendas that led to considerable awakening among the people with regard to Ahom revivalism. The methods adopted by these organisations are many and all contributing to the chief cause of creating a definite space for the Tai Ahoms. While doing so they have also been keeping in mind that the development of the Ahoms would ultimately enrich the composite Assamese culture and society.

The literary organisation of Tai Ahom, by the name of *Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai* (North Eastern Tai Literary Association) was established in 1981 with Dr. Puspa Gogoi as its founder Secretary for the promotion of Tai culture, language, and literature. These aspects are considered equally significant so far as their urge for distinct identity was concerned (Phukon 2010:xv). They are demanding for the protection of socio cultural and political rights of Tai Ahom people. Under the slogan of *we revive, we survive*, Ban Ok took the responsibility of collecting, discussing and discovering new *buranjis* (the Ahom chronicles) in order to write a history of the Ahoms as a living culture and community, which otherwise, was declared a dead community by colonial and post colonial historians (Dowarah 2016:127). On the demand of the Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai and some other demand by elite section, the ex-chief minister of Assam, Hiteshwar Saikia approved the appointment of two hundred Tai language teachers in elementary and middle school levels in upper Assam. This organisation has also been demanding separate census of the Tai Ahom population spreading over the Northeast region of India. They argue that the Tai Ahom population spreading over this Northeast region should be considered, in the true spirit of realisation of these people, as a separate and distinct ethnological and socio cultural group having its own time honoured rituals, language, script and culture. The Ban Ok Lik Mioung Tai took up the revival of the defunct Tai Academy at Patsaku in Charaideo district of Assam. Nomol Gogoi, a founder member of this organisation, compiled an Assamese-English-Tai Dictionary (1987) with the help of the old dictionaries and by collecting current words from Tai speaking groups. Besides, Ban Ok Pup Lik Mioung Tai has been demanding for financial and other aids to develop of Tai Ahom language education and cultural centres in Assam from central government. Further, the organisation envisions that it should not be identified as the organisation of the Tai Ahoms only, but as an organisation of all factions of Tai people such as Tai Phake, Tai Khamti, Tai-Turung, etc. who are living scattered all over the Northeast. At present the Ahom and other Tai tribes in Assam are very active in the study of Tai history and language. The government of Assam has a policy to teach the Tai language. A budget has been allocated by the Assam government to hire 200 Tai language teachers for elementary schools in upper Assam. The revival of the Tai language, both spoken and written and promotion of Tai culture has been going on forcefully in the upper Assam area. The spearhead of this movement is the Ban Ok Pup Lik Mung Tai. The Association arranges cultural meetings, conducts researches, and publishes books. Research on Tai History and Culture in Assam has

significance beyond its academic role. It ensures the Tai identity in India with the peoples' age-old heritage.

The Tai people of Assam also constituted a religious forum named the Buddhist Society of Phralong Culture (BSPC) in 1963. The BSPC tried to popularise religious rites and customs which the priestly class jealously guarded. In the subsequent period however, the BSPC was converted into another religious organisation: All Assam Phralung Sangha (AAPS) in 1975 with similar objectives. Now it is increasingly felt necessary to popularise the religious traits by performing their traditional rites like Om-Pha, Sai-Pha and Me-Dum Me Phi in an increasing scale. Thus, the Ahom elite seek to generate a religious sentiment for the purpose of uniting the community (Field data).

The All Assam Mohan Deodhai Bailung Sanmilon (AAMDBS) established in 1962 has been strongly pleading for the development of Tai Language and culture. As a measure of maintaining distinct identity they have started emphasising more on socio-cultural and linguistic demands in order to generate a sense of identity among the Ahoms. In view of this, the Ahom intellectuals constituted an academic forum under the name and style Tai Historical and Cultural Society of Assam (THCSA) in 1955. The THCSA organised seminars, symposia and talks on Tai Ahom and Tai culture. The THCSA organised a series of talks on the Treaty of Yandabu, 1826 at different parts of Assam. The main substance of the talks was that Assam was never conquered by the British, but she was strongly tagged by the Britishers with the rest of India under the pretext of the treaty. However, after a protracted agitation, the Ahoms along with six other ethnic groups—Matak, Moran, Koch-Rajbangshi, Chutiya, Gorkha, and Adivasi—who demanded Autonomous Council status under the framework of the Indian Constitution, were only given Development Council status. The primary objective was to provide maximum participation of the people belonging to the backward communities for their social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement. The Development council was intended to provide the people with the opportunity to make their own development plans and execute them. The Tai Ahom Development Council was constituted in 2010 along with 13 other such development councils for different communities in Assam by the Government of Assam under the framework of the Constitution of India¹¹. The primary objective of the Development Council was to provide maximum participation of the people belonging to the backward communities for their social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement in particular community¹². But it needs mention here that the Tai Ahom Development Council did not reflect the hopes and aspirations of the Tai Ahom populace of Assam. The student union had made it clear that the demand for Scheduled Tribes status and Autonomous council even after the formation of the Tai Ahom Development Council. They wanted constitutional safeguards to basic rights, and ensuring of their welfare and development (Hati Boruah 2018:48).

1.3 Conclusion

In the Northeast India, both tribal and non-tribal ethnic groups have been suffering from identity crisis and thus they have become too much anxious about their identity which forces them to take the path of ethnic assertion. Socio-economic and political backwardness, encroachment of land by outsiders, and marginalisation of culture are the main basis of most of the ethnic movements of this region and the middle class or elites of most of the ethnic groups mobilise their distinct

ethno-cultural identities to gain economic and political benefits for the community and for their own. Throughout the colonial and post colonial periods, the Ahoms have been asserting their identity for various reasons. Different organisations of Tai Ahom have been pursuing agendas that led to considerable awakening among the people with regard to the Ahom revivalism. The methods adopted by these organisations are many and all contributing to the chief cause of creating a distinct space for the Tai Ahoms. The Assam government established the Tai Ahom Development Council (2010) in response to community demands. Despite being hailed as a turning point in the community's identity movement, it appears to serve the demands of an elite group at the expense of the requirements of the general public. Thus, their demands or aspirations have still remained unfulfilled. As a result, their efforts in this direction are still on.

Notes

1. Chutia, Koch-Rajbonshi, Matak, Moran, Tai-Ahom and Tea garden workers, also collectively known as Adivasis or Tea Tribes, demanded ST status.
2. The Barak Democratic Front (BDF) demands a new state in Barak Valley of Assam. The Bodos and the Karbis also initially demanded a separate state.
3. Non-Dimasa communities like Kuki, Zeme, Hmar, etc. who were part of the North Cachar Hills District before Dima Hasao district was created demand for autonomous district councils. There are autonomous councils of the Deori, Mising, Tiwa, Rabha, Sonowal Kachari and Thengal Kachari tribes in Assam constituted under State Act. These tribes demand Sixth Schedule status.
4. The demand for separate states by the Bodo and the Karbi have been resolved by the Bodoland Accord and the Karbi Accord by granting them territorial and autonomous councils respectively under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
5. For a clear understanding of the concept of middle class see Cole 1950 and Stearns 1979 and a comparison between middle class and elites see Perlmutter 1970. These three works will give the idea of middle class in a historical perspective.
6. For a clear understanding of the contrast between Weberian and Marxian approaches see Perlmutter (1970:17);Jodhka and Prakash 2016; Walton 1971; Bottomore&Rubel 1990; and Gerth & Mills 1946.
7. Charaideo is considered to be the first capital of the Ahom. Before Charaideo, Sukhapa however, stayed a few years each at Tipam, Abhoipur, Habung, and Song-Tak where he had established his seat of administration temporarily (Phukan 2016:53).
8. In India new elites have a root in traditional elites (*see* Misra 1994 and Desai 1959).“The new middle class are extracted from the 'old' middle class to serve as expected pillars of stability and progress” (Perlmutter1970:16). Further, he maintains that the “relationship between the new middle class strata is only another type of elite circulation within the old middle class, not a new class” (ibid.:18). The new elites in Assam undoubtedly indicate their traditional root as the tiles the origin from the old elites who belonged to army ranks of the Ahom king. This is evident from the titles of Tai elites like Gohain, Gohain Borauah, Borgohain, Gohin Phukon which were ranks in Ahom administration.
9. Memorandum Submitted to the Prime Minister of India Demanding Inclusion of the Tai Ahom in the Schedule Tribes under Article 342 of the Constitution of India, 26th August, 1997.
10. Memorandum submitted to CM of Assam by ATASU, 2007.
11. Vide govt. notification No. TAD/BC/491/07/120 dared.11/10/2010.

12. Vide letter No. TAD/BC/491/07/129, Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes & Backward Classes, Government of Assam, Guwahati, dated.30/11/2010

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