

## **Chapter II**

# **Demand for Dimaraji: Nature and Genesis**

The identity assertion of various ethnic groups has been articulated through language, culture, region, religion, caste and race. This problem is very much acute in Assam. The different groups inhabiting this state have been pressing either for the creation of separate or autonomous state on the basis of their cultural identities or for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities. At the beginning, they started their assertion with non-political issues such as the development of their language and culture.<sup>1</sup> The unresolved economic apprehensions gave it a political direction in the subsequent period. In the subsequent period they became assertive of their political right and started pleading for adequate share of political power in order to maintain their respective identities. Dimasa Kachari is one of them. Now the Dimasas have been demanding the creation of a separate state for Dimasas within India. In this chapter an attempt has been made to understand the nature and genesis of the Dimasas Demand for Dimaraji state.

Assam has been the meeting place of different races. At different period of history it has been a refuge for many people belonging to the diverse stocks of human race such as Austriacs, Aryans, Dravidians, Mongoloid and Tibeto – Burman. They carried with them different

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<sup>1</sup> G. Phukon, *Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1996, p. 131.

languages, cultures, traditions, religions and so on.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, there were a large number of ethnic groups residing in Assam. But the process of ethnic assimilation remained incomplete. This was so because the policy pursued by the king of Kamrupa could neither succeed in bringing more areas under cultivation nor could convert the tribal socio-economic structure of the country into a feudal one. The process of conversion did not operate in Assam and therefore, the tribals were not incorporated within the fold of Brahminical Hinduism nor in the plough based system of production.<sup>3</sup>

The advent of Ahoms in the early thirteenth century brought about significant changes in the socio-political scenario of Assam. Before the advent of Ahom, the state power patronised Brahminism. The Ahoms conquered Assam on the basis of their tribal solidarity and in the state policy they retained most of their tribal traits. Even after seven hundred years of state formation, the Ahom could not shed off its semi tribal legacy in the sphere of administration, social organization as well as economy.<sup>4</sup>

The Ahom rule was followed by the British colonial rule. The British Government, before reaching Assam, had consolidated its rule and administration in Bengal, Bihar and Orisa. The Government had preferred Calcutta as the headquarters to control these provinces. In Assam, the British landed at the request of Gaurinath Singh, the Ahom ruler, to settle the peace in his disturbed kingdom. It was Lord Cornwallis who had decided to send British troops in the Valley of Brahmaputra with a view to repulsing the Burmese forces back from the territory of Assam. The Treaty of Yandabo (1826) paved the way for stability of the British rule in Assam. Thereafter, the British officials posted to Assam came in contact with the hill tribes, and the Government following the policy of gradual extension of its rule into the interior of Assam annexed the hill tracts one after another using

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Guwahati, 1926, pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> D. Bhattacharjee, 'Hmar – Dimasa Conflict in Assam: A Historical-Perspective' in G. Phukan (ed.), *Inter Ethnic Conflict in Northeast India*, South Asia Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> S. Choudhury, 'Assam: Genesis of the Present Ethnic Crisis (An Occasional Paper)', *North East Centre for Advanced Studies*, Silchar, 1990.

various tricks. Now the problem before the Government was to decide what sort of rules and administration should be imposed over the various semi-civilized tribes of Northeast India.<sup>5</sup>

After the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), the British authorities in India had become alert and conscious of their interests in Assam. The Government had fully realized that the interests of the British in India were not safe till effective administration was established in Assam and the areas adjacent to it. Hence the Government appointed David Scott, the most experienced British officer, as an Agent to the Governor General over the whole of Assam except the Sadiya and Muttak districts. In fact, the appointment of David Scott as an Agent to look after the affairs of Assam was the beginning of the British rule in the territory of Assam. The government, in the beginning, had no interest in Upper Assam which was mostly hill areas occupied by different native tribes. Hence Upper Assam was put under the rule of Purandhar Singh, an Ahom King. In fact, Purandhar Singh was nothing but a vassal king of the British.<sup>6</sup>

During the British rule the territory of Assam was divided into two categories plains area and hill area. The British kept entire plain area under its direct control and influence while local chiefs were appointed as the vassal kings for the hill areas. In 1833, David Scott was appointed as Commissioner of the plains area of Assam. The territories of Purandar Singh and vassal kings were soon incorporated into the British territory when the Government had established its firm rule in the plains area. Thereafter, Assam was declared 'Non-regulated' territory. Muttak and Sadiya which were put under the system of vassalage were also annexed to the British rule with the result that the British rule extended towards the hills of Assam.<sup>7</sup> After the death of its ruler (Kachari Kingdom) Kachar was annexed to the British rule in 1832 which brought the British very much near to the Naga tribes. Thereafter, in 1833, the Khasi state and in 1836 the Jaintia Hills were brought under the British administration by conducting numerous treaties and

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<sup>5</sup> C. Singh, *North-East India – Politics & Insurgency*, Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.110.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp.110-111.

agreements with the native rulers and chiefs of these areas. The Lushai Hills and the Garo Hills were brought under the British rule by 1872 and 1873 respectively. The British conquered the tribes of the frontier areas with the result that the British territories in Northeast India would increase in size and strength.

Before the arrival of the British in the North-Eastern frontier, the tribes living in these areas were in the state of isolation and separation. They had a little idea about the outer world except their own. So far their knowledge about rule and administration is concerned; they were quite ignorant of modern way of rule and administration. However, they maintained their own rule based on customary laws and practices. In fact, the internal feuds and head-hunting wars were the general feature of their life which kept them away from each other. However, the tribes of the Khasi and Jaintia hills, being closed to the plains people had some sorts of notable political and social practices.

The traditional tribal leadership had its own specific features which were different from those of the plains people. The tribes had their traditional social structure, traditional values and institutions and satisfying various traditional needs of the tradition oriented tribal society. All the tribal leaders operate within the traditional social structure and fulfilling the religious needs which are traditionally created and are of traditional importance. The main feature of the Indian tribal society is that it is based on customary practices and strict leadership where the leading clan or dynasty possessed absolute authority. The authority was vested in persons belonging to certain privileged strata of society. The tribal Leaders were invariably drawn from among the higher caste groups and in most of the cases leadership was an aspect of the hereditary and family functions.<sup>8</sup>

As far as the traditional society and the institutions of hill tribes of the North-East India are concerned, there is no much variation. In case of Naga tribes, different groups came to the present territory of Nagaland crossing the Irawadi and Chandwin rivers of Burma and established their respective tiny sovereign village

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<sup>8</sup> L.S. Gassah, 'Traditional and Emerging Leadership Pattern in Khasi-Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya', in B.C. Bhuyan (ed.), *Political Development of North-East India*, Part II, New Delhi, 1992, p.62.

states. The Naga people of ancient time earmarked their territories with stones, rivers and mountains and began jhum cultivation. They established their rule on the basis of Greek city-states in the sense that a village state contained an organized political community. The customary laws and traditions were their code of conduct. Same was the case with Meiteis, Kacharis, Garos, Khasis and Koches.

The tribal kings and chieftains were given some special privileges and they were treated with loyalty and respect. They were responsible for maintaining order in the society and to protect the people from foreign aggressions. Any stranger or foreign visitor was brought before the chieftain and it was the chieftain who had the power to deal with outsiders. Every village council played important role to assist the ruler or to help him in taking appropriate decision. The members of village council also availed some privileges and respect.<sup>9</sup> The Council not only dealt with the relations with other foreign village states but also had the power to declare war and conclude peace. It decided even criminal and civil disputes. The customs played great role in the traditional hill tribes' society.

Thus the hill tribes of the North-East Frontier had their respective set of traditional administrative set up, no doubt, but they lacked civilization. They all preferred isolation and confinement to the mountainous rides which they had occupied. They never tried to form a single administrative system. Perhaps it was not possible for them because they did not have any idea of modern administration and systematic rule.<sup>10</sup> Their political consciousness was minimal. It was the British contact with the hill tribes which opened a new chapter in the political and economic history of the tribes of the North-East India. The British were well aware of the traditional tribal society and their customary ways of life. Hence while determining the pattern of administration for the hill tribes, the British Government always kept in mind their traditional practices. That is why the pattern of administration adopted by the British Government for the hill people was quite dissimilar to that of the people of the plains area.

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<sup>9</sup> C. Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 115.

Segregation was the initial British policy for the frontiers. Section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 made it lawful for the government to prescribe and from time to time alter by notification, a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein. The Inner Line, according to Mackenzie, was defined merely for the purpose of jurisdiction and did not decide the sovereignty beyond. The active control of the district officer need not necessarily extend up to the boundary, but it must, under no circumstances, be carried further. Beyond this line the tribes are left to manage their own affairs with only such interference on the part of the frontier officers in their political capacity as may be considered advisable with the view to establishing a personal influence among the chiefs and the tribes. Till 1882 it covered only the Himalayan frontiers and the eastern part of the Naga Hills. However, by 1942, when North Cachar was Inner Lined, all the hills except the Khasi, the Garo and the Mikir were encircled.<sup>11</sup> No British subject or foreigner was permitted to cross the Inner Line without permission and rules were laid down for trade and acquisition of lands beyond. The Inner Line was a territorial frame to capital. The communities staying beyond the Line were seen as belonging to a different time regime, where slavery, headhunting and nomadism could be allowed to exist. The Inner Line was expected to enact a sharp split between what were understood as the contending worlds of capital and pre-capital, of the modern and the primitive.<sup>12</sup> The Inner Line Regulation was the first law promulgated in Assam under the authority conferred by the Statute 33, Chapter 3, which gives to the executive government of India a power of summary legislation for backward tracts.<sup>13</sup>

Although the British started large commercial ventures in Assam in tea, oil and coal and invested heavily in the province's infrastructure, they remained satisfied with token acceptance of suzerainty from the tribes living beyond the Inner Line and did little to develop their economics. The kingdoms of Manipur and

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<sup>11</sup> S.K. Chaube, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Subir Baumik, *Troubled Periphery – Crisis of India's Northeast*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Gait, op. cit., p. 317.

Tripura were also left alone, as long as they paid tributes. A British political resident was stationed in both the princely states to ensure suzerainty and monitor any political activity considered detrimental to British interests. British money and development targeted only areas that yielded large returns on investment. The Assam plains were seen as the only part of the North East where investment would bring forth adequate returns.<sup>14</sup>

The foothills of the Brahmaputra and the Barak Valleys marked the limits of regular administration – the hill beyond and the tribes, people living there were largely left alone. The Inner Line became a frontier within a frontier adding to the seclusion of the hills and enhancing the cultural and political distance between them and the plains. Assam, however, continued to grow as a province, both in size and population, and its demographic diversity increased. Under the British administration, its boundaries were extended steadily to include most areas of what is now India's North East. Initially, Assam's administration was placed under the lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and the Assamese were forced to accept Bengali as the official language of their province.<sup>15</sup> In 1874, however, a year after the promulgation of the Inner Line Regulations for the hill areas, Assam was reconstituted as a province. The Bengali dominated Sylhet and Cachar districts, the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Naga Hills and the district of Goalpara were all brought within Assam. Between 1895 and 1898, the north and south Lushai Hills and a portion of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were detached from Bengal and added to Assam. With a population of nearly 5 million and a territory close to 60,000 square miles, Assam emerged as one of the largest provinces in British India.

Greater Assam, first under the British and then in the first 25 years after Indian independence, remained a heterogeneous entity and troubled one. The Assamese and the Bengalis were involved in a fierce competition to control the province, both sidestepping the aspirations of the numerous tribes whose homelands were incorporated into Assam and thus into the British Indian empire

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Subir Baumik, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

for the first time in their history.<sup>16</sup> The British found it administratively useful to group together the totally diverse areas on Bengal's North Eastern frontier into Assam. Later, this exercise was followed by an attempt to integrate the frontier marches on the North East of Bengal with the hill regions of upper Burma in what came to be known as the Crown Colony proposal. This was not because the vast multitude of tribal people in this long border stretch had anything in common except their Mongoloid racial features, but because the British saw in their antipathy to the plains people of India and Burma an opportunity to forge together a political entity that would tolerate the limited presence of British power even after it was forced to retreat from India after the Second World War.<sup>17</sup>

So, the British were only too keen to exacerbate the hills – plains divide. The Government of India Act of 1919, (Montagu –Chelmsford reforms) provided powers to the Governor –General to declare any tract a 'Backward Area' and bar the application of normal provincial legislation there. Within a decade, the Garo Hills, the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Mikir Hills, the North Cachar Hills, the Naga and the Lushai hills districts and the three frontier tracts of Balipara, Lakhimpur and Sadiya were all designated as Backward Areas. The Simon Commission recommended designating these Backward Areas as Excluded Areas and the 1935 Government of India Act reorganizing the Backward Areas of Assam into the Excluded Areas of the North East Frontier Tract (now Arunachal Pradesh), Naga Hills District (now Nagaland), Lushai Hills District (now Mizoram) and North Cachar Hills District, while the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills and the Khasi-Jaintia Hills were reconstituted as 'Partially Excluded Areas'.<sup>18</sup> As princely states, Tripura and Manipur remained beyond the scope of this reorganization.

On November 8, 1927 the British Government announced the appointment of the Indian Statutory Commission on constitutional reforms. Sir John Simon was the Chairman with six other members. No Indian was included in the Commission which sparked off a tremendous amount of resentment. Public opinion was aroused

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.8.



against the commission in the country. On arrival to India on February 3, 1928 Simon Commission received demonstration by public on rejection of the Commission. Assam too witnessed demonstration by anti-Simon Commission parties in many places.<sup>19</sup> However, the Assam Government proposed on April 3, 1928 to constitute a seven-member Committee for purpose of co-operating with the Statutory Commission on Constitutional reforms.

The Commission arrived at Shillong on January 2, 1929. However, even in such a general atmosphere of boycott, the Syiem of Myllem erected a welcome arch at Shillong in honour of the Commission and the Commission received about twenty seven memoranda from various groups and organizations of the province in addition to the one submitted by the Assam Government. The list of Memoranda submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission by associations in Assam, makes an interesting reading as follows : (1) Assam and Surma Valley Branches, Indian Tea Association, (2) Assam Provincial Committee, European Association, (3) Assam Civil Service Association, (4) Assam Junior Civil Service Association, (5) Assam Provincial Mulim League, (6) Goalpara Zamindars' Association, (7) Surma valley Sanmilani, (8) Bodo Community of Goalpara District, (9) Assam Kachari Yubok Sanmilani, (10) Anjuman-Islamia, (11) Mahishya Samiti, Sunamganj, Sylhet, (12) Pragjyotishpur Brahman Samaj (13) Assam Subordinate Educational Services Union, (14) Non-Muhammadan voters of Nowgong District, (15) Bodos and Rabhas of Goalpara District, (16) Nagas of Mokokchung Sub-Division, (17) Naga Club of Kohima, (18) Non-Assamese Indian Domiciled Settlers, (20) Pro-Assam League, Sylhet, (21) Bengal and Assam Fishermen's Association, (22) Goalpara District Association, (23) Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Gauhati, (24) Goalpara Prantik kshatriya Samiti, (25) Khasi National Durbar, (26) Depressed People of Assam Valley, and (27) Representatives of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.<sup>20</sup>

Out of the above twenty-seven memoranda, four were submitted by Bodos and other plains tribes of Assam. The point to be noted here is that when mainland India and mainstream Assam thought it proper to boycott the Commission,

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<sup>19</sup> P.S. Datta, *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

peripheries of territorial Assam and of mainstream societies of Assam thought it necessary to present their cases to the Commission. The autonomy aspiration of at least the Bodos in particular and the plains tribals in general may easily be traced back (in a nascent form) to January 4, 1929, the day four different memoranda were submitted by their representatives to the Indian Statutory Commission at Shillong.<sup>21</sup>

The Government of Assam submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission recommending that with the exception of the Shillong Municipality, the typically backward tracts should be excluded from the Province of Assam. It was pleaded that the Backward Tracts had nothing in common with the people living in the plains area. It was further stated that the plains people had no sympathy for the backward hill tribes and they feared that their own political growth and material development was being thwarted by their being yoked with the Backward Hills Tracts.<sup>22</sup> Hence the Commission was suggested that the Backward Hills Tracts should be kept away from the Province of Assam and the Tribal people should be given opportunity to develop in their own way and should be protected from exploitation and subversion of their rules and customs by the people of the plains who totally differed from them in culture, race, language and religion. The recommendation was also made that the Backward Tracts should be administered by the officers of the British origin because the tribes did not want to be ruled by the Indian officers. Therefore, the tribal people should be governed by the Governor himself as the Agent of the Governor-General of India and the cost of their administration should be borne by the Government of India itself.<sup>23</sup>

Tribal people did not like to be governed by the officers of the Indian origin. Because the tribal people of the North-East India had no contact with the people of the plains, so far the administration was concerned. It is also a fact that their culture, behaviour, dialects and traditions totally differed from that of the people of the plains. The British also did not want that the national culture which was

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> V.V. Rao, *A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India-1874-1974*, S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1975, pp. 57-58.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

emerging in India because of the freedom movement should have any effect on the tribal people of the North-East India. The Christian missionaries were actively engaged in these areas to cultivate English culture among these people. That is why they never hesitated to fill up their mind with the ideas that they would not be happy and prosperous, if the officers of the plains Indian were allowed to administer the tribal zone. For this reason, the Supreme Government was fed with the idea that the Hill Tracts must be separated from the Province of Assam.<sup>24</sup> The British wanted a safe and secure frontier. It was not possible until the hills tracts such as the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts were kept under the direct control of the Central Government.<sup>25</sup> The Central Government did not want to keep these frontier areas under the control of the Province of Assam.

J. H. Hutton's representation on behalf of the Assam government was indicative of British thinking on how to administer the North Eastern frontier region. It also gave enough indication of the conscious attempt the British were to make subsequently to split up the huge province of Assam between its rich plains and remote hills. Hutton opposed joining the 'backward hills' with the 'advanced plains' because the irreconcilable culture of the two could only produce an unnatural union.<sup>26</sup> J. H. Hutton's key recommendation was the gradual creation of self-governing communities, semi-independent in nature, secured by treaties on the lines of the Shat States in Burma, for whose external relations alone the Governor of the province would be ultimately responsible. Given self-determination to that extent, it would always be open to a functioning hill state to apply for amalgamation if so desired and satisfy the other party of the advantage of its incorporation.<sup>27</sup>

The Simon Commission got convinced with the logic of the Assam Government and recommended that the typically backward tracts of Assam should be excluded from the general administration, and these areas including the Sadiya and the Balipara Tracts should be administered through the Agency of the

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<sup>24</sup> C. Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> V.V. Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> S. Baumik, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

Governor General. Further, the Commission recommended that the backward tracts would be classified into two parts the excluded and partially excluded areas. The typically backward tracts should be put under the former category, while the areas except the excluded one should be brought under the partially excluded area.<sup>28</sup> Regarding finance, the Commission said that the Central Government should bear the expenditure for the administration of these excluded and partially excluded areas.

After getting recommendation from the Secretary of State, the British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, 1935, wherein provisions were made for the excluded and the partially excluded areas of the North East India. The Act authorized His Majesty Government to declare the areas excluded or partially excluded by Order-in-Council. Part 92 Clause 1 of the Act mentioned that ‘notwithstanding any thing in this Act, no Act, of the Federal Legislature or Provincial Legislature, shall apply to an Excluded Area or Partially Excluded Area unless the Governor in giving such a direction with respect to any Act may direct that the Act shall in its application to the area, or to any specified part thereof, have effects subject to such exception or modifications as he thinks fit.’<sup>29</sup> The Act authorized the Governor to make regulations for the peace and good Government of any area in Province which is for the time being an Excluded Area or Partially Excluded Area.

The Government of India under the authority of the aforesaid Act passed the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Area) Order, 1936, which declared and specified the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas of the Province of Assam. The first Part of the Schedule to the order consisted of the Excluded Areas and Part 11 contained the Partially Excluded Areas. The Northeast frontier consisting of the Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur Tracts were brought under Part 1. As a result, the administration of these Tracts remained out of the purview of Central and State legislatures. The Governor of Assam got full responsibility to administer these areas with the help of the Political Officers and the Deputy

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<sup>28</sup> C. Singh, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

Commissioner of Lakhimpur. Rest of the hill districts of Assam were put under the partially excluded Area.<sup>30</sup>

There was a difference between the Excluded Area and Partially Excluded Area. The Excluded Area consisted of the Tracts which were mostly backward and there was no possibility at all to practice advanced form of administration. Hence it was thought that these areas should be governed in rude manner by the Governor himself. That is why neither any minister nor any legislature was empowered or authorized to have any say in the affairs of the totally backward areas. In the case of Partially Excluded Area where people were not as backward as that of the former, the legislative assembly was not debarred from discussing their matters. With previous permission of the Governor of Assam, it could discuss the tribal matters and pass an Act in this regard. But it was up to the discretion of the Governor whether he should allow implementation of the Act passed by the legislature in the Partially Excluded Areas or not. The Governor had the authority to decide whether a Provincial Act should or should not be applied or should be applied with the certain modifications in it in the tribal belt of the Partially Excluded Areas.<sup>31</sup> The real intention of the Government of India behind carving out the Excluded and Partially Excluded areas was to keep these people away from the mainstream of Indian nationalism. The freedom movement in India was on full swing at that time. The British Government seems to have an undue sympathy with the hill tribes of Northeast India. According to J.C. Johari, the British masters designed their intriguing policy of saving the hill people scattered over Tirap and Tuensang Divisions of the Northeast Frontier Agency, who had been living in their tribal isolation with little contact with the outside world, from the growing impact of the freedom movement under the Congress leadership by means of seeking their gradual but steady proselytisation as the best way to make them the loyal members of their misconceived 'Crown Colony'.<sup>32</sup> The plan of the Crown Colony was proposed by the Governor of Assam, Robert Reid, who wanted to bring the Naga

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pp. 157-158.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

<sup>32</sup> J.C. Johari, 'Creation of Nagaland: Triumph of Imbuillient Infra-Nationalism', *The Indian Journal of Political Science Association*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1. January-March, 1975, pp. 13-14.

Hills, Northeast Frontier Tracts and Chittagong Hill Tract of East Bengal under his proposed Crown Colony. It is a different matter that the Home Government declined to consider the Reid's proposal for Crown Colony. However, it encouraged the hill people of Assam to have their separate political identity. Kritinidhi Hazarika, a writer of Assam, too, noted that the British officers began to work secretly with a view to carrying out the separatist policy in Northeast India.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, no efforts were made by the British officials in Assam to bring the hill people closer to the plains people. Rather the British knowingly created a gulf between the plains and the hills people. This is evident from the statement of Robert Reid the Governor of Assam. He mentioned "we have no right to allow this great body of non-Indian animistic and Christians to be drawn into the struggle between Hindus and Muslims which is now and will be in future, with ever increasing intensity, the dominating factor of politics in India proper".<sup>34</sup> Hence these simple hills people felt that their salvation lay in keeping aloof and independent of India with the result that some of the Hill tribes came ahead with separatist demands soon after the country got independence.

In 1941, the question to give the backward tribes of Northeast India a separate political status was once more raised by some leading British officials who were working in the area. A proposal was given to carve out a new Province which would comprise all the hill fringes from Lushai land on the south, right round to Balipara Frontier Tract on the north, embracing on the way. Chittagong Hill Tract of Bengal and the Nagas and Chins of Burma. The Governor of Assam, Robert Reid, further said "I will put this under a Chief Commissioner and in turn would, I imagine, have to be divorced, as in Burma, from the control of the Government of India and put perhaps under some appropriate department at White Hall. The members of this Federation shall not be subject to constitutional changes introduced in the Provinces of India".<sup>35</sup> Thus it is quite obvious that the British officials working in the Northeast India had a master plan to separate the Hill

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<sup>33</sup> K. Hazarika, 'The Nebula of the Northeast Frontier', in Shri Prag Chaliha's (ed.), *The Outlook of NEFA*, Assam Sahitya Sabha, Calcutta, 1958, p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> V.V. Rao, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> C. Singh, op. cit., p. 160.

people from the rest of India. Fortunately, despite Churchill's approval to the plan of Robert Reid for creation of the North-Eastern Hill Province, the Labour Government rejected it in the British Parliament.

Meanwhile a new Tract known as the Tirap Frontier Tract comprising some territories of Lakhimpur and Sadiya Frontier Tracts was constituted with its headquarters at Margherita. For the administrative conveniences the Balipara Frontier Tracts was divided into two parts- Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area in 1946. In 1945, Sir Andrew Clow was contemplating that Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts and the territories up to the MacMahon Line and the Naga tribal areas should be constituted into a separate Agency and the Governor should be responsible for the administration of this area. Though the view of Andrew Clow could not be incorporated during the rule of the British in India, it was adopted by the Government of India after Independence with the result that the birth of the North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) took place in 1954.<sup>36</sup> Before independence, the Indian Independence Act, 1947 provided that all Provinces of excluded and partially excluded areas should be governed as nearly as might be in accordance with the Government of India Act, 1935, the Orders-in-Council and other instruments made thereunder. As a result, the special responsibility of the Governor disappeared. Hence from 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, the administration of Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas was entrusted to the Government of India.<sup>37</sup> Due to separatist tendency among the hill tribes ingrained by the British Indian Government some of the leaders of the hill tribes such as the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills began to demand a separate political status for them separating their territories from the Province of Assam with the result that a new chapter in the political history of North-East India has started.

Along with the separatist tendency among the different ethnic groups of Assam there emerged identity consciousness. Identity consciousnesses among different ethnic groups in Assam, it appears, were destined to emerge. In fact many such cases may even be traced much before the days of Indian Statutory

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 160-161.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

Commission (Simon Commission, constituted in 1927) which submitted its report in 1930. The emergence of a 'middle class' through expansion of modern education and their entry in to jobs under colonial administration, seeds of identity consciousness were sown.<sup>38</sup> The sense of a distinct identity and a self perception about that distinct identity were not new at least to the hills people. This holds good to a considerable extent for the plains people of mongoloid origin as well. For the hills people it was more manifest as neither the Ahom rulers nor the Britishers disturbed the basic fabric of their economic, political, cultural arrangements. Plainsmen of mongoloid origin were of course not so fortunate to have the same opportunity of being left alone, though they could manage to maintain certain elements of their tradition sufficient enough to provide material push towards an identity.<sup>39</sup> Hence, even if there was no expansion of modern education or no emergence of a modern middle class, at least, the hills people in particular and plains people also, to some extent, would have continued to have their identity consciousness and tried to maintain their traditions and customs. The major contribution of the modern middle class was that they could provide a definite direction to their identity through articulations in tune with the changed rational legal framework.

The emergence of the middle class in the hills was mostly the result of western education, changed economy and Christianity.<sup>40</sup> Christianity came into the lives of the people of the region as a consequence of and link with British colonization of India and the region in particular is well documented. It should be borne in mind that long before the English East India Company was to acquire the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and the hill periphery in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>41</sup> Catholic congregations and the English Baptists of Serampore were at work in ministering and evangelizing small groups of people. Christian missions

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<sup>38</sup> P.S. Datta, op. cit., p. 10

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> H.K. Barpujari, *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Volume IV, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2007, p. 370.

<sup>41</sup> David R. Syimlieh, 'Christianity in the Hills of North East India: Education for Change and Development' in D. Nath (ed.), *Religion and Society in North East India*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2011, p. 230.



first came into Assam and its hill periphery in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were looked with suspicion and concern by the tribes and communities of the region.<sup>42</sup> Within a century and half of the start of mission activity, Christianity had evidently made its mark and impact on the lives of a large population of the region and more particularly among the tribal people in the hills.

Though colonial administration was never expected to provide a people-oriented education system yet with the introduction of modern education the number of literate and educated people started increasing not only in the relatively advanced core Assamese society but also in the non-Assamese indigenous societies of Assam. Number of government employees also kept on increasing over the years. With the spread of Christianity, expansion of education and increased scope for jobs in government establishments, the tradition-bound smaller societies, later on named 'tribes', became paralyzed of an untraditional segment- 'the middle class'. The middle class of tribal people played a pioneering role in unfolding, consolidating and then spreading an identity-consciousness among the members of their own societies.<sup>43</sup> In the initial stage of blossoming, areas of contradiction between the 'middle class' elements of core Assamese and peripheral Assamese societies were naturally very much minimal. But with the increase in their volume in both types of societies, members of this 'middle class' stood exposed to a hitherto unknown competition as placement opportunities leading to an advancement in various economic spheres were not expanding at an identical pace.

As a result, the middle class among the tribal found the road to their prosperity full of hurdles which was not exactly the case in the initial phase. The social discriminations, alleged superiority complex of the caste-Hindu Assamese and the caste-based social equations gradually started pushing them away from whatever proximity might have been achieved with the Assamese society. Gradually the unresolved economic apprehensions started getting a political direction. The atmosphere of neglect and indifference expedited the withdrawal process still further. The hurt sentiments of the 'middle class' realized that without

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

<sup>43</sup> P.S. Datta, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

political power, no development is possible and as a result bargaining for political power began. But no effective mechanism was evolved which could satisfy the legitimate aspirations of this tribal middle class.<sup>44</sup> Instead, the deliberate attempt at projecting them as mere show pieces in different political organizations without giving them any real power further damaged the situation. They were never taken into confidence and the governing caste-Hindu Assamese elite, in fact never seriously thought of sharing power with them. This stubborn situation was potential enough to provide motivation for them to start thinking in terms of their own political boundary.<sup>45</sup> Their leadership was already established in all spheres of their respective societies and as such it was not a very difficult task for them to arouse the identity consciousness among their own people and direct it towards the aspiration of self-determination.

Due to specific historical and administrative traditions, the self-determination aspiration in the hills, has been from the beginning political in nature. The Nagas, the Mizos, the Khasi-Jaintias- Garos, the Karbis and the Dimasas all began their assertions with a more or less definite political idiom. The middle class was able to mobilize the people of their respective societies. There also developed a sense of deprivation and negligence among the tribal people. With the spread of this perceived sense of deprivation and discrimination, the tribal people became conscious of their identity and started asserting for the protection of their distinct identity.

Identity consciousness among the tribal communities was, thus, the result of modern education, and the emergence of middle class among different tribes. However, identity consciousness alone was not sufficient to protect them from the alleged onslaught of a political economy of which they were compelled to be partners. Necessarily there arose the need for identity assertion to provide their communities some space or room within the existing political system. Thus consciousness of a few became consciousness of the larger society and identity assertion developed into a demand for autonomy or separate state.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

Identity consciousness was, however, not the only reason for the tribal demand for self-determination. It is related to their land too. The tribal leaders were not only afraid of the dominant section of the Assamese, but also apprehensive of the possible danger from the non-Assamese Indians of the province. It is often complained that the cultivators, particularly from Bengal, had been allowed to occupy lands within the tribal belts. In fact, they were critical of the immigration policy of the Muslim League Government in Assam (1939-1941) which they characterized as a policy of invitation to landless peasants.<sup>46</sup> It appeared to them that increasing number of immigrants in the tribal belts was posing a threat to their identity and created a fear among tribal people that one day they may lose their land to the plains people. Thus, land alienation was one of the important reasons for the tribal demand for self-determination.

After independence of India (1947), the Indian political leaders inherited numerous problems as a legacy of the British colonial rule. Now, the Government of independent India had to initiate measures to give a new direction to the people and lead them towards the path of progress and prosperity. But this required mutual cooperation, broad understanding and stable peace. The problem which was not the economic prosperity of the millions of poor people, but was to protect the unity and integrity of the nation which had been left in lurch by the British Government. They divided the Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan and encouraged various Indian principalities ruled by native princes and Nawabs and also the tribal peoples of the North-East India to maintain their separate independent status. The sinister design of some rulers of the Princely states of India posed serious danger to the integrity of the country.<sup>47</sup> There was no lack of shrewd politicians in North East India who preferred a sovereign independent status for their respective territories which had been granted special status during the British rule.

Since the tribal of North-East India differ from the plains people of India in respect of their culture, customary behaviour, faith and race, their main anxiety was how to preserve their cultural and racial identity. The Government of India was

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<sup>46</sup> G. Phukon, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>47</sup> C. Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

alert to this problem. The country, in fact, required a new kind of readjustment, because the setting up of the boundary lines by the British had been keeping in view of their colonial interest and administrative conveniences. But the situation changed with independence. In conformity with the changed situation, arrangement had to be made after independence. Thus, proposing for the setting up of a constituent Assembly the Cabinet Mission had also proposed that there should be an Advisory Committee on the rights of the citizens, minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas. Sir Stafford Cripps, the Chairman of the Cabinet Mission, was of the view that a powerful committee should be set up to make proposals for the administration of the tribal areas. Following this suggestion the Constituent Assembly set up an Advisory Committee on the Tribal Areas under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel with a view to considering the problems of Assam as well as of the tribal people of India. The Advisory Committee, for its convenience, further constituted a Sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bardoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam, with a purpose to assess and advise the Constituent Assembly on the future administration of the Tribal and Excluded Areas inhabited by the hill tribes.<sup>48</sup> The other members of the Sub-Committee were Rev. J.J. Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma and A.V. Thakkar. The Committee visited the different tribal areas of Assam.<sup>49</sup>

The members of the Bordoloi Sub-Committee took the trouble to make hectic tours to different places of the hill areas of Assam and met the leaders of the tribal people to study their view-points about future administration of India.<sup>50</sup> In course of its visit the Committee received a number of representations from different hill tribes.<sup>51</sup> The members while discussing the problems with the hill tribal leaders patiently heard their opinions. The hill leaders submitted petitions and memorandums to the Sub-Committee enlisting a number of demands concerning their economic, political, administrative, cultural and educational matters. Some of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>49</sup> Kusumbar Bhuyan, *Sixth Schedule in North-East India – A Case Study of Karbi Anglong District*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2008, p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> C. Singh, op. cit., p. 167.

<sup>51</sup> V.V. Rao, op. cit., p. 158.

the hill leaders, particularly from the Naga Hills, expressing their doubts about the attitude of the plains people towards the hill men, demanded separation of their hill districts from the Province of Assam.<sup>52</sup> Most of the hill tribes of North-East India wanted to have their separate administrative unit, so that they would have not been subjected to exploitation by the people of the plains. For instance, the Naga leaders placed the demand before the Sub-Committee stating that the Naga should be given a separate state under the Republic of India at least for ten years, and after the expiry of the period the Nagas would be free to decide the future political status of the country.<sup>53</sup>

The people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills expressed their wishes or demands to be separated from Assam. When the members of the Sub-Committee met the leaders of the Frontier Tracts (NEFA), they, too, came ahead with several demands including their separate administrative status under the Republic of India. They gave importance on the economic development of their land and people. The Khasi suggested to the Sub-Committee that a new state should be constituted for them comprising the areas of the Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Sardarship.<sup>54</sup> It could be called as the Jaintia Federated State. This State should have been federated with the Province of Assam.

When the members of Bordoloi Sub-Committee visited the Lushai Hills, they noted that the Mizo people had no unity in regard to the future political status of their territory. The Mizo Union was a divided house and separated into two factions. The first group was led by the Pachhunga and the second one by the Dengthuama. Both the factions appeared before the members of the Sub-Committee where the former was in favour of having a District Conference while the latter opposed such proposal. In fact, the Mizos wanted more autonomy for their internal administration and more financial support from the Government of India, but no interference in their internal affairs. The anxiety of the Mizo leaders was how to protect the Lushais from exploitation by the plains people.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

<sup>53</sup> *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Report of the Sub-Committee on the North-Eastern Frontier, Assam Tribal and Excluded Areas, Part III, Delhi, 1948, pp. 109-110.

<sup>54</sup> C. Singh, op. cit., p. 168.

In Mikir Hills when the members of the Sub-Committee visited, Khorsing Terang and S.S. Ingti were co-opted by Bardoloi Committee to represent the Mikir Hills. The Karbi-a-Dorbar, the only public organization of the Karbis in those days (formed in 1946) submitted a memorandum on May 18<sup>th</sup> 1947 to the Bardoloi Sub-Committee.<sup>55</sup> The Karbi leaders of the Mikir Hills demanded to form a separate district of their own so that all the Mikirs should be placed under a single administrative unit. Hence they suggested to the members of the Sub-Committee that the Mikir portion of the Nowgong, Sibsager, North Kachar Hills and the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills comprising the Mikirs should be put under a new district of the Mikirs. They further expressed the desire that the Central and the Provincial legislations could be introduced in the district only with the consent of the local council of the Mikir. The Mikir Hill District should be represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly at the rate of the one member from every fifty thousand population. They also demanded that all the posts within the Mikir Hills District should be reserved for the Mikirs only.

The people of North Cachar Hills and the people of Garo Hills sent their representatives to meet the Bardoloi Sub-Committee and put forward their demands. The people of North Cachar Hills and the people of Garo Hills did not like to be separated from the main current of the nation. But they also demanded autonomy in their local affairs and customary laws. The Tribal Council of the North Cachar Hills demanded that forced labour and begari should be abolished and the right to follow one's own customs and usages should be guaranteed. There should not be any outside interference in their day to day life and local administration and the local officers must be appointed from among the local people. The Garo National Council representing the case of the Garo people, demanded that the boundaries of the hill district should be so adjusted as to include all the Garos living in other districts contiguous to the Garo Hills such as Goalpara, Kamrup and Mymensing. It also demanded to abolish the Zamindari system from the state.

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<sup>55</sup> Kusumbar Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

When the members of the Bardoloi Sub-Committee met with the tribal people of the frontier tracts, they also put forward several demands. The Kachins of the Tirap Frontier Tract demanded educational facilities, roads, hospitals etc. for their economic development and prosperity. The Khamtis, the Mishmis and the Abors expressed their desire that they should be represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Miniyonga and the Padama desired separate representation in the Hill Council and also in the Legislative Assembly of Assam. Moreover, they wanted a separate Tribal Council for each tribe and expressed the view that there should not be any outside interference in their culture, social and religious practices.

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee, after understanding the Backwardness of the tribal peoples and their attitudes, suggested that all the tribes of Assam whether living in the plains or in the partially excluded tracts, should as a whole be treated as minority. In Assam, conditions in Hills Districts of which the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hill and the North Kachar Hills have been excluded are on a totally different footing and the atmosphere, partially excluded areas, is one which is not be found elsewhere. These areas should be treated separately from the rest.<sup>56</sup> The Sub-Committee also suggested that the areas of the North-East Frontier should be classified into two regions: (1). Autonomous Region, and (2). Non-Autonomous Region.

The Khasi and the Jaintia Hills, the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Mikir Hills and the North-Kachar Hills should be put under the Autonomous Region while the Sadiya, Balipara and Tirap Frontier Tracts and the Naga tribal area (Tuensang) should be brought under the Non-Autonomous Region. For the administration of Autonomous Region, it was recommended that an Autonomous District should be formed for each Hill District. Comprehensive political and administrative authorities should be given to the Autonomous District Councils.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Report of the Sub-Committee on the North-Eastern Frontier, Assam, Tribal and Excluded Areas, Part III, Delhi, 1948, pp. 132-133.

<sup>57</sup> C. Singh, op. cit, p. 173.

Regarding the control of immigration and allocation of land to outsiders, the Sub-Committee suggested that the District Council should have power of legislation over the occupation and use of land, other than land comprising reserved forests. The control of jhumming was left to the local councils. The hill people should have full powers of administering their own social laws, codifying and modifying them. The management of primary schools and dispensaries should be given to the Autonomous District Council.<sup>58</sup> The District Council should be endowed with legislative powers over the use of land, village forests, agriculture and village and town management in addition to the administration of the tribal and local laws.

As far as Mikir Hills (present Karbi Anglong) and North Cachar Hills (present Dima Hasao) is concerned the Bordoloi Sub-Committee had recommended that the Deputy Commissioner or the Sub-Divisional officer should be the ex-officio President or chairman of the District Council on the ground that the two areas were backward. The Chairman of other District Councils should be elected by their respective members.<sup>59</sup>

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee did not accept the demand for all powers of taxation to be vested in the Autonomous District Council on the ground that in that case, the provincial and the central governments would be deprived of the power of taxation in those areas. The Sub-Committee, however, suggested for certain taxes and financial powers to the council. They should have also the powers of taxation which the plain districts enjoyed. The Assam Government should also prepare a development programme for the hill areas and it should be financed both by the central and provincial governments.<sup>60</sup> To empower the Autonomous District Council to control the money lenders and traders with a view to protect the hill tribal communities from exploitation by the non-tribal people. According to the suggestion of the Bardoloi Sub-Committee the State Governor should have the power to declare an act or resolution of the District Council null and void if he

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<sup>58</sup> Kusumbar Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 99-100.



comes to the conclusion that the safety of the country was threatened by such act or resolution. The Bardoloi Sub-Committee went to the extent of saying that the Governor should have the power to dissolve the District Council if necessary. In other words, the Autonomous District would have to function to the satisfaction of the State Government of Assam.

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee also suggested that both the partially and completely excluded areas should be represented on the basis of adult franchise in the State Legislative Assembly and also in the federal legislature and the representatives must be hill tribes from the district. It had also recommended that there should be at least one hill member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the Provincial Cabinet. The case of the non-tribal people was also looked into by the Bardoloi Sub-Committee. While it did not permit them to contest elections to the provincial legislature, it was however suggested that they might be represented in the District Councils.

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee after systematic deliberations submitted its report on 28.07.1947 to the chairman, Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Shri Ballabbai Patel. The report dealt in details with various aspects relating to administration of the tribal areas. These aspects include thoughts on development, special features of these areas, land, forest, jhuming, courts, finance, control of immigration, mines, legislation, representation, services, etc. The Advisory Committee discussed the matter on December 7, 1947 and February 24, 1948 and forwarded the same to the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly on March 4, 1948.<sup>61</sup> The suggestion put forwarded by the Bordoloi Committee was adopted by Constituent Assembly in the form of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

The idea of the scheme contained in the Sixth Schedule was to provide the tribal people with simple and expensive administration of their own which would safeguard their customs and ways of life and assure their maximum autonomy in the management of their own affairs. The Bardoloi Sub-Committee felt that tribal

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<sup>61</sup> B.L. Hansaria, *The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India –A Study*, G. Hansaria Publications, Guwahati, 1983, p. 10.

areas occupied a geo-politically important position and, therefore, these people living in these areas should be free from the exploitation and domination by the more advanced section of the people from the plains. The Sub-Committee was aware of the fact that the tribal people were sensitive about their land, forest and system of justice.<sup>62</sup> The whole issue of tribal autonomy through District Council was being debated in the constituent Assembly. When Mr. G. Bordoloi forwarded the background of Tribal autonomy as-‘as it is not unknown to you that the role of British Government and activities of the Foreign Missions always went together. These areas were formerly entirely excluded areas in the sense that none from the plains could go there and contact them. That was the position till 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947, when India became independent. The foreign rulers till then had in these areas power to send out place anyone they desired within 24 hours. Again, Sir, some of these areas were war zones.<sup>63</sup> During war, the then rulers and officers developed in the minds of these tribal people a sense of separation and isolation and they were assured that at the end of war they will be independent states managing their affairs in their own way. They were lead to believe that the entire Hill areas would be constituted into a province and put under the administration of Governor’.

In the course of debate, when the report was submitted by the Bordoloi Sub-Committee, some members of the Constituent Assembly opposed the idea of creating Autonomous District and Regional Councils on the ground that they might ultimately lead to the establishment of another Pakistan in the country. Rohini Kumar Choudhury one of the members of the Constituent Assembly was totally opposed to the formation of the Autonomous District Councils. R.K. Choudhury stated that if we want to assimilate the tribal people and educate them in the art of self-government, why not introduce the Municipal Act. If you want to keep them separate they will combine with Tibet, they will combine with Burma, and they will never combine with the rest of India.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> V.V. Rao, op. cit., pp. 194-195.

<sup>63</sup> *Constituent Assembly Debate*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Report of the Sub-Committee on the North-Eastern Frontier, Assam Tribal and Excluded Areas, Part III, Delhi, 1948, p. 137.

<sup>64</sup> V.V. Rao, op. cit., pp. 182-183.

Another member, Jaipal Singh, himself a tribal leader of repute, stated that of the two solutions 'power solution' and 'knowledge solution' the former was no solution at all, as that would bring about a further disintegration of India. He asked not to suspect the intention of the tribal people and desired the restoration of their confidence and to respect the understanding reached by the sub-Committee with the tribal people.<sup>65</sup>

In course of the debate, A.V. Thakkar, who was also a member of the sub-Committee said that best way to keep the frontier people satisfied was to give them certain measures of self-government so that they might develop, according to their own genius and culture. Advancement of the hill tribes could not be achieved by force and should not be deprived of things, which they considered to be good for them according their own way.

Participating in the debate Rev. J.J.M. Nechols Roy, one of the members of the Sub-Committee spoke that the hill districts inhabited by tribal people would under the Constitution of India be able to develop themselves in their own way without disturbing the main purpose of unity underlying the Constitution presented in the draft. He further said that these tribes had self-governing bodies, though small, from time immemorial.<sup>66</sup>

In defending the creation of the Autonomous District Councils, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that there were differences between the tribals in Assam and the tribals of other places. The tribal in places other than Assam were more or less followers of Hinduism and assimilated with the culture and civilization. The tribals of Assam did not adopt the model of life and manners of their neighbours. Their laws of inheritance and marriage system and the customs were different from those of others.<sup>67</sup>

However, after listening the views of the different members, the Constituent Assembly gave more importance to the views of the then premier of Assam, Shri

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<sup>65</sup> B.L. Hansaria, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 102.

<sup>67</sup> V.V. Rao, op. cit., p. 184.

Gopinath Bordoloi, not only because he was the Chairman of the Sub-Committee but because as stated by Shri Nichols Roy that Shri Bardoloi was known to be very kind and sympathetic to the hill people, had been respected by the hill tribes and had studied very closely the position of these tribal people.<sup>68</sup>

After a long debate on Sub-Committee report, the Constituent Assembly accepted the recommendation of Bordoloi Sub-Committee and adopted the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, which provides for creation of Autonomous District Council in the hill districts of the then Assam. While the proposal was drafted following facts were taken into consideration:

- (i) Recognition of distinctive culture of hill tribes in respect of their social customs, traditional organizations, religious beliefs, dialects/languages, mode of living and methods of cultivation etc. all of which can be termed as their ways of life.
- (ii) Adequate protective measures against exploitation of the people from the plains on account of their superior organization and experience in business.
- (iii) Assimilation cannot take place by sudden breaking of the traditional tribal institutions and by imposing on them a different and alien system. The evolution of growth must be based on old foundation.
- (iv) Adequate protection on the above quoted matters and such allied ones can only be achieved by transferring the management and administration of the matter entirely to the hands of the people. This can termed as self-governance.<sup>69</sup>

In accepting the recommendations of the sub-Committee, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India containing

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<sup>68</sup> K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>69</sup> B.N. Bordoloi, 'Tribal Development Plans and Programmes in the Sixth Schedule Areas of Assam with Special Reference to the Management of land-A Critical Appraisal' in *Bulletin of the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes*, Assam, Vol. 1. Number VII, 1990, p. 29.

provisions for creation of Autonomous District Councils and Autonomous Regional Councils for the tribals of hill areas of Assam. Accordingly, the following Autonomous District Council were created in 1951:

1. The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council (This was separated into two districts viz. the Khasi Hills District Council and the Jaintia Hills District Council in 1969),
2. The Garo Hills District Council,
3. The Lusai Hills District Council (This was renamed as Mizo Hills District),
4. The Naga Hill District Council (The Nagas, however rejected the concept of ADC; instead they demanded independent state of Nagaland. Therefore, ADC could not be established in Nagaland),
5. The North Cachar Hills District Council,
6. The Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong) District Council,

Though the constitution makers thought of putting all tribal areas of the North-East (Assam) under the Sixth Schedule, under the Article 244(2) and 275(1) the hill districts were covered by the Sixth Schedule as in below:

**Assam**

1. The North Cachar Hill District.
2. The Karbi Anglong (Mikir) Hills District.

**Meghalaya**

1. Khasi Hills District.
2. Jaintia Hills District.
3. The Garo Hills District.

## **Mizoram**

1. The Chakma District.
2. The Lakher District (Renamed as Mara District Council).
3. The Pawi District (Renamed as Lai District Council).

Thus Autonomous District Council was the outcome of the socio-political situation of the hill tribes of Assam in the pre-independence time. These situations may be briefly stated as follows:

(i) The hill tribes of North-East India had long tradition of their own way of life. They were economically and politically self-dependent and free from external rule or interference in their internal affairs. They were unexposed to India's mainstream of cultural life. Indian culture and civilization were alien to them.

(ii) Since the hill tribes were economically and politically too weak, they could be easily exploited by the more advanced section of the plains people. So, protective measure was necessary, and some measures of autonomy should be granted to them in the management of their affairs.

At the time of independence of India the hill tribes of Assam lived more or less primitive life. As such, special political arrangement was required to be set up to help these tribes to gradually develop within the framework of modern political system but retaining some elements of their traditional system of polity. The idea resulted into inclusion of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India under which provisions for the Autonomous District Councils for the hill tribes of Assam were created.<sup>70</sup>

With the commencement of the Constitution on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950, steps were taken to constitute the District Councils. Accordingly, the Government of Assam made rules viz. the Assam Autonomous District (Constitution of the District Councils) Rules, 1951 for the Constitution of the District Councils and for the

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<sup>70</sup> K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 106.

procedure and conduct of business of these District Councils and steps were taken for the holding of the first election to the District Council on the basis of adult suffrage.<sup>71</sup> The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides detailed frame about the working of the District Councils and Regional Councils-including their constitution, their powers to make laws, administration of justice in autonomous districts and regions.

In order to maintain continuity of some traditional element of local self government in the new system, the Sixth Schedule laid down that for the first constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils the Governor shall make rules in consultation with the existing tribal councils or other representative tribal organizations within the autonomous district. Such rules shall provide for composition of the District Council/Regional Councils and allocation of seats therein; delimitation of territorial constituencies for the purpose of elections to these councils, qualification for voting and contesting at such elections and preparation of electoral rolls, terms of office of members of such council, the procedure and the conduct of business in the District/Regional Council and appointment of officers and staff of the councils. The District and Regional Councils may after its first constitution make rules for the formation of subordinate Local Councils or Boards and all matters relating to the transaction of business pertaining to the administration of the district or the region.

As far as the Dimasas of Assam are concerned they have Autonomous District Council from the time of establishment of autonomous District Councils in Assam. The Dimasas have Autonomous District Council but from the beginning, the functioning of the District Council was not satisfactory to all concerned. The District Councils could not initiate developmental works due to lack of resources and also could not work with autonomy in its limited areas. Under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution the Governor of Assam was authorized to suspend, annul, dissolve or supersede a district council. And this power was exercised in most of the cases on political consideration making Autonomous District Councils

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid, 106-107.

to resemble municipal boards. Therefore, the provisions of the Sixth Schedule could never satisfy the different tribal political leaders of North East.

In 1960, the committee appointed by the Governor of Assam to examine the financial conditions and working of each district and regional council reported that 'the financial condition of most of the District Councils and of the Regional Council is not satisfactory. The council suffered from an excess of clerical over field staff and even spent government subsidy meant for development purposes on administrative expenses. There was no adequate effort to increase revenue, no inspection of offices and coordination with the state government. There was a great deal of compartmentalization in the council's offices, whereas the village councils were ineffective.'<sup>72</sup>

In 1966, the Pataskar Commission found the performance of the councils generally unsatisfactory and regretted that no inquiry into their administration had been undertaken although there had been complaints about their unsatisfactory working. There were serious complaints against accounts of the District Councils. The achievements of the councils were no better than their working. The commission observed, that in the sphere of social legislation these Councils have not gone beyond Christian marriages and divorces.<sup>73</sup> The social customs of the people have not yet been codified, though the Mizo District Council had made much progress in legislation. In the administrative sphere, the Mizo District Council activities have mostly been the establishment and management of the primary schools. By 1 April 1964, the government primary schools were transferred to the council's management. Other constructive programmes undertaken by the District Council relate to local development work such as rural communications, rural water supply, construction of school buildings, etc. The performance of District Council, however, has not been satisfactory.<sup>74</sup>

In the judicial sphere, while the Garo Hills, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills and the Mizo Hills have set up Courts at all levels, the North Cachar Hills District

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<sup>72</sup> S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>73</sup> Pataskar Commission Report on the Hill Areas of Assam, 1965-66, Delhi, 1966, pp. 64-65.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.



Council has set up only a district council court and a subordinate district council court but no village courts. The Mikir Hills District Council has not yet taken over the administration of justice although it has enacted the Mikir Hills (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1954.

The rules for administration of justice of 1937, which continued to operate after the transfer of power, provided that the administration of a district was vested in the Governor of Assam, the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and his assistants, and the traditional village authorities recognized by the government. When the Assam High Court was established in 1948, the judicial authority, except in the frontier tracts, of the Governor and of the commissioner was transferred to that court. The Sixth Schedule, in paragraph 2, sub-paragraph 4, vested the administration of justice in the district court and the regional councils, except for certain kinds of civil and criminal disputes. Paragraph 4, sub-paragraph 4 of the Sixth Schedule earmarked the executive and legislative functions of the district and regional councils, and gave them the power to make rules regulating the constitution of village councils and courts and the powers to be exercised by them, their procedure and the procedure to be followed by any appellate body above them.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the district councils formulated their own rules for administration of justice within the limits of the rules formulated by the Governor. The Sixth Schedule thus created two sets of authorities not clearly distinguished. In the administrative sphere, the deputy commissioners had no *locus standi* in the district councils, and they could exercise authority in the autonomous districts only to the extent that the district councils did not. The Deputy Commissioner's former appellate judicial authority was lost.<sup>76</sup>

On 25 January 1950, the Governor of Assam, in exercise of the extra provincial jurisdiction of the Government of India as delegated to him, issued the Khasi Siemships (Administration of Justice). Order of 1950 which, in clause 1-A, defined the Siem as the customary head of the Khasi tribal institution of an administrative area of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District known as Khasi State

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<sup>75</sup> S.K. Chaube, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 106-107.

prior to the commencement of the constitution of India recognized as such by the Governor of Assam. A court of the Siem was defined as a court established under the customary law of the Khasi Siemship and recognized as such by the Governor of Assam.<sup>77</sup> According to the Sixth Schedule the appointment and succession of chiefs became a power of the district council. The social customs having come under the powers of the district and regional councils, the Siem in no time turned to a subordinate position to that of the district council. In the Jormanik Siem's case, the Supreme Court confirmed that the Siem was an official of the district council. The district council conferred the status of an additional district council court on the Siem's durbar. Besides this judicial authority, delegated by the district council, the Siem owned some customary rights over the clan lands, the unreserved forests belonging to the clan, and the markets. Frequent accusations against the Siems, of appropriating substantial parts of their revenues, meanwhile led to litigation. In no time, the conflict between the district council and the chiefs became the central feature of Khasi politics.<sup>78</sup> The district council in the Khasi Hills, as a result, failed to frame rules for constituting the village councils.

In the Mizo Hills (now Mizoram) Chiefship was altogether abolished and the village councils were democratized. Subsequently all the hill areas other than the Khasi (in Meghalaya) and the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills Districts (in Assam) had village councils according to the rules framed by the district councils. In some of them a compromise has been reached with the traditional leaders. These village councils are chosen according to the customary practices. The district councils were never favoured by the traditional authorities in the hills. Towards the end of the British rule, organizations like tribal councils, the Lushai District Conference and the Federation of Khasi Siems had come into being with official blessings. The emerging middle class, on the other hand sought the fulfillment of its aspirations through organizations. The district councils could perhaps have gone a long way in bringing about more social dynamism if:

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

1. The Sixth Schedule had fulfilled at least a part of the people's political aspirations aroused since the independence of India.

2. They had been ready to utilize sincerely the limited opportunity for development afforded by the Sixth Schedule;

These conditions were partly satisfied only in the Mizo District where the district council worked for some time with some success. In all other autonomous districts compromises were made with the traditional institutions and everywhere they failed in a general way. This created problems in all the hill districts where public awareness was high enough to generate resentment. A partial endorsement of the view that the demand for a hill state was a somewhat opportunistic device to divert popular resentment against the remote Assamese dominated state government.

The Assam Government's controversial language bill of 1960 which proposed Assamese as the only state language in Assam further created more resentment among the different communities of Assam. This language bill of Assam deeply disturbed the Bengalis, tribal peoples and linguistic minorities living in Assam. It was taken by them as a move to establish a permanent monopoly of power in the state for Assamese, and consequently, it fanned the flames of separatism of different hues. Most of the tribal groups started to reconstruct their past to constitute a national heritage or identity of their own.<sup>79</sup>

Assam was one of those states where linguistic issue has emerged as dominant issue in the post-independent period. The two successive language movements indicate that how dominant was the language issue in Assam. The first language movement started in 1960's, demanding Assamese as official Language and the second was in 1970's, which demanded Assamese as a medium of instruction up to University level.

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<sup>79</sup> Hiren Gohain, 'Ethnic Unrest in North East India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXII, No. 8, Feb, 22-28, 1997, p. 61.

The language issue of Assam was, however, somewhat different from that of the other parts of the country. (a) Like the language movements of other parts of the country, the language movement of Assam did not demand for reorganization of states on the basis of language. Rather, the demand of the supporters of language movement in Assam concentrated only for the recognition of Assamese as official language and as medium of instruction. (b) The language movement of Assam was born out of the fear of losing the linguistic identity, whereas the language movements of other parts of the country were the reaction against Hindi as national language. (c) Most of the language movements of other parts of the country ended with the formation of political party; Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh being the best examples where the language based political parties came into existence because of their history of language movement. But in Assam the language movement did not lead to the emergence of any such language based political party, although some organizations played vital role in the language movement.<sup>80</sup>

The language movement of Assam got its momentum after independence. In April 1959, when the Assam Sahitya Sabha set the year 1960 as deadline to implement their demands of making Assamese as the official language of the state. Meanwhile, incidents and counter incidents of violence began to take place between the Assamese and Bengalis at the different parts of the state. Under such a situation, the then chief minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha felt it necessary to introduce the official language Bill in the state legislature.<sup>81</sup>

Accordingly the Assam Official Language Bill, 1960 was introduced and it provided for its application to the whole of the State of Assam.<sup>82</sup> Mr. Bimala Prasad Chaliha in his speech in Assam Legislative Assembly said “during the last few years several states in India have decided upon their respective official language and therefore, this question naturally has assumed some urgency and importance in Assam also. Meanwhile public opinion grew in intensity and volume and the matter was again raised in all seriousness in the last Budget session of the

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<sup>80</sup> Narayan Konwar, *Society and Politics in Assam*, Book Land, Guwahati, 2006, p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>82</sup> S.K. Sharma and Usha Sharma, *Documents on North-East India, An exhaustive survey, (1958 to Modern Times)*, Vol. 5, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, p. 71.

Assembly. The situation prevailing in the state today is no longer desirable to postpone a decision on this question. Emotions have been raised and sentiments played up and the state has passed through some unfortunate and tragic happenings.<sup>83</sup> Thus, for Mr. Chaliha, it was imperative to introduce official language Bill keeping in mind the developments of other parts of the country and also the emotions of Assamese people.

However, while introducing the language Bill, Mr. Bimala Prasad Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam, kept in mind only about the sentiments and emotions of the Assamese speaking people and not about the discontent of other linguistic minorities which was no less significant. As a result a statewide reaction was noticed, particularly among the Bengali community. As a protest against the Assam official language Act the Nikhil Assam Banga Bhasa Samiti had submitted a memorandum to the president of India demanding recognition of Bengali for all official purposes throughout the state. The Bengali speaking people were so dissented that they started a movement, particularly under the guidance of Sangram Parishad and Bhasa Andolon Samiti.<sup>84</sup>

The tribal peoples, particularly the hill tribes also expressed their discontent over the action of the government on language issue. This was reflected in the speech of hill tribal leader Williamson Sangma. While debating on official language Bill Sangma said, “it is already known to the people of the entire state that we, hill people, are vehemently opposed to the introduction of the Bill. We opposed to declaring Assamese as the official Language of the State. However, our stand is considered to be not justified. As you personally know Sir, ever since 1960 when the move for declaring Assamese as the state language the hill leaders including myself expressed our strong opposition to the proposal. Ever since that time the Hill leaders’ mode is very clear that they were not prepared to accept Assamese as the state language of Assam. It was not because we disliked Assamese or we had ill feeling against our Assamese brothers and sisters. But we consider

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<sup>83</sup> Narayan Konwar, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

that by accepting Assamese as the official language we shall be handicapped”.<sup>85</sup> Regarding the negotiating committee, Sangma mentioned that the negotiating committee was nothing but a mere show. The committee had already determined to dominate the tribal peoples. Sangma also mentioned that the official language Bill has destroyed all the endeavors of the leaders to build a united Assam by bringing the people of the Hills and the plains into closer relationship and understanding. It was because of the linguistic chauvinism that the tribes of Assam started their separatist tendency.

Thus, the declaration of Assamese as official language in Assam, has widened the gap in relation between the tribal people and plains people. The tribal people developed an apprehension that their cultural identity is going to be eliminated and submerged.<sup>86</sup> It gave a serious jolt to the process of unity and integrity among the people of hills and plains that was initiated by Gopinath Bordoloi and his contemporaries. The people from hill areas could not absorb the declaration of Assamese as official language.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the tribal leader formed the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC) in 1960, which consisted of the tribal leaders of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills. The immediate demand of the APHLC was, however, not for a separate State but for the withdrawal of the proposed Assam Official Language Bill (1960) which sought to declare Assamese as the official Language of the whole of Assam. The hill leaders considered this as a threat to the separate identity of the tribal peoples because they feared that such a step would ‘lead to the assimilation of all the hills people in the Assamese community. All the constituent members of the APHLC shared such apprehension that the Assamese were trying to play a hegemonic role.’<sup>88</sup> The District Congress Committee of the hill districts joined with the

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>86</sup> H.K. Barpujari, *Uttar Purbanchalor Samasya Aru Rajniti*, G.L. Publication, Guwahati, 1999, p.15.

<sup>87</sup> Narayan Konwar, op. cit., pp. 86-87.

<sup>88</sup> T. Misra and U. Misra, ‘Movements for Autonomy in India’s North-East’ in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.), *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996, p. 132

APHLC.<sup>89</sup> Their demand was not for a hill state but for the dropping of the Language Bill, which according to the resolution anticipated that:

(a) The position and conditions of the Hills people in Assam are such that the acceptance of the Assamese language, now or at any time, which would place the Assamese in a more dominant position, will lead to the assimilation of all the Hills people in the Assamese community, thereby gradually leading to the disintegration of their identity as distinct communities in India, which identity has been given recognition and protection under the Constitution.

(b) The imposition of the Assamese Language will over burden the Hills people with too many languages (Hindi, the Vernacular, English and Assamese) in different scripts.

(c) The adoption of Assamese as the official language of the State will adversely affect the opportunities and prospects of the Hills people in the Government services and other avocations notwithstanding any amount of safeguards which can always be circumvented.

(d) There is no justification for the declaration of Assamese as the official language even from the population point of view, as less than fifty per cent of the population has Assamese as the mother tongue.

(e) The move has already created discord, disruption and violence among the different language groups of the State, thereby defeating the very purpose which an official language is intended to serve.

(f) Assam being India in miniature, inhabited by people of diverse races, cultures and languages, the proper official language should be Hindi. Meanwhile, English should continue as the official language until such time as the people of the state are ready to adopt Hindi as the official language.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> S.K. Chaube, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>90</sup> S.K. Chaube, op. cit., pp. 131-132.

The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) in their first conference set up a Council of Action with representatives of the local parties and the Congress as members and a young Khasi representative of the newly formed Swatantra Party as its convener. Representatives of the council met the Prime Minister and submitted a memorandum to the President of India on 21 August 1960. But the state government was determined to see the Language Bill through the legislature. The second All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) met in Shillong on 22 and 23 August 1960, approved of the memorandum, and authorized the Council of Action to prepare a plan of separation, to submit the same to all Political Parties and District Councils in the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam and at last to present it before the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference for final approval.<sup>91</sup> The conference assured the non-tribal people residents of the hills of the protection of their rights and interests.

Thus, the language issue in Assam has provided the ground for the hill state movement but not its substance. The substance of the movement was the hill people's desire for equal status with the Assamese plains people. The hill people did not fight for their language but chose the continuation of English. English in Assam, as elsewhere, continues to be the language of transactions among the upper classes. The Assam Language Act formally recognized the special position of English in the hill areas and of Bengali in the district of Cachar.<sup>92</sup>

In September 1960, however, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference Council of Action issued an ultimatum to the Assam Chief Minister. In October, when Sangma resigned his cabinet post, the action was welcomed enthusiastically and his personal image improved. On 24 October 1960, APHLC staged a hartal (public strike) and a massive demonstration in Shillong. The same night the Assembly had a special sitting and adopted the Bill.<sup>93</sup> From 16 to 18 November 1960, the third All Party Hill Leaders' Conference met at Haflong in North Cachar Hills, under the chairmanship of a Congress member of parliament, J. B. Hagjer,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, pp. 132-133.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 133.



and resolved that the passage of the Language Bill was a clear proof of unfair attitude and firm determination of the Assamese community to avail themselves of undue advantages and thereby enhance their domination over the hills people and the rest of the people of the State of Assam. Hence, it demanded solution of the immediate creation of a separate Hill State.

The demand for creation of a separate Hill State by the APHLC could not be materialized at that point of time because the government of Assam and the Government of India were not ready to divide Assam and to create another separate state. But after a long struggle for the separate Hill State, ultimately the Government of India announced its decision to reorganize Assam by constituting an autonomous state within the state of Assam.<sup>94</sup> Following the 22<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the Indian Constitution, on 24 December 1969 parliament created history by passing the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Bill simultaneously in the two Houses in order to create an Autonomous State to be known as 'Meghalaya' within the State of Assam by incorporating the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo hills District as defined in the Sixth Schedule. The executive power of the new unit was vested in the Governor of Assam, aided and advised by the Council of Ministers of Meghalaya, in relation to the autonomous state.<sup>95</sup> The Government of India undertook a further reorganization of the North-Eastern Region and on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1972, the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971 was brought into force which led to the formation of the full-fledged state of Meghalaya.<sup>96</sup>

When the proposal for the reorganization of Assam and the creation of an autonomous state of Meghalaya within the state of Assam was in the process of finalization, the Karbi and Dimasa leadership was on tenterhooks whether to join the proposed autonomous state or to remain in Assam. At this juncture, the government of Assam realized that in case the Mikir and North Cachar Hills districts opted for Meghalaya, Assam would lose its geographical link with

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<sup>94</sup> S.K. Agnihotri, 'Constitutional Development in North-East India since 1947' in B. Datta Roy & S.P. Agrawal (ed.), *Reorganisation of North East India Since 1947*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1996, pp. 64-65.

<sup>95</sup> S.K. Chaube, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>96</sup> S.K. Agnihotri, op. cit., p. 65.

Cachar where the movement for separation was gearing up. This prompted the government to persuade the leaders of Mikir and North Cachar Hills not to opt for Meghalaya and assured them that if Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills would remain in Assam, it would be given equal facilities for developing their own areas as would be enjoyed by the outgoing districts.<sup>97</sup> The Karbis of Mikir and the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills leaders decided to remain in Assam and not to opt for Meghalaya, partly because of the assurance given to them by the government and partly because of their apprehension that they would be dominated by the Khasi-Jaintia-Garo leaders in Meghalaya.

However, the expectations generated by the assurance of the government and also by the transfer of certain more subjects to the District Councils of these hill areas were frustrated mainly because of the absence of coordination between the State Government and the District Councils. The unwillingness of the State Government to prepare the budget of the tribal areas in consultation with the concerned District Councils had made it difficult for the District Councils to act as the catalyst of socio-economic development. There have been constant tussles for administrative and judicial powers between the two sets of authorities. Legislation passed by the District Councils was sometimes invalidated by the High Court of Assam. There was also confusion and difference of opinion over the dispensation of 'tribal justice' in these areas. Thus, the District Councils could neither satisfy middle class aspirations for the effective sharing of power in the state government, nor could they effectively contribute to the development of the District Councils under the sixth schedule of the constitution of India.<sup>98</sup> The persistent neglect of development activities in the backward tribal regions by the political leadership in Assam and at the Centre, led to growing dissatisfaction amongst a conscious section of educated tribals of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts and the feeling began to take root that it was a mistake to have agreed to remain in Assam.<sup>99</sup> Comparing the pace of development with those Districts which have

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<sup>97</sup> P.S. Datta, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>98</sup> T. Misra and U. Misra, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

opted for separate state, the people of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills (now known as 'Dima Hasao') began to develop a sense of frustration.

Dr. Jayanta Rongpi stated: "The Sixth Schedule has failed in India. One of the basic problems of the Sixth Schedule Autonomous Councils is that the funding from the Government of India is through the State Government. Most of the State Governments are burdened with overdraft problem. So, the funds meant for the tribal areas do not reach the tribal Autonomous Councils. The second issue is the personnel, the bureaucracy. There should be a separate cadre for the tribal Autonomous Councils."<sup>100</sup> If you post the same cadre officers to the tribal areas, then nobody will go there. This is the experience of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts. They treat the tribal areas as a dumping ground, as a punishment to the officers. The next is the elections. It is at the whims of the State government whether they will hold the election or not. If the Council is ruled by an Opposition Party, then they will not hold election. So, after five years it will go directly under the Governor's rule. That means it will indirectly be ruled by the Ruling Party in the State. The ASDC leaders argued that, even under the Sixth Schedule, the two tribal councils do not enjoy financial autonomy. For development projects, they remained at the mercy of the state government. The councils also had to depend on the changing political relations with the state leadership. As a result, the councils' dependence on the state government continued and the very purpose of the Sixth Schedule could not be achieved.

As a result of that the Dimasas of Assam has started movement for a separate state 'Dimaraji' within the territory of India. The Dimasa people have since been living in minority in the districts of Cachar, Karimganj, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong of Assam, and Dhansiripar- Dimapur areas of Kohima district of Nagaland. All their inhabited and occupied lands of the above-mentioned districts and states are situated surrounding the North Cachar hills district of Assam and contiguous to its border. The Joipur Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) of Cachar and the Lanka Bheta Tribal Belt, bordolong of Nagaon

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<sup>100</sup> Quote in Lok Sabha debate on consideration and passing of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2003 on August 1, 2003.

district are fully populated by the Dimasa (Barman / Hojai Kacharis) people. Though the Tribal Belt and Blocks were constituted to provide protection and better facilities to tribals by the Government, it has completely failed to do so throughout Assam. There are ample evidences of such administrative failures. There are huge infiltration and encroachment by outsiders, foreigners, non-tribals into the lands of the Belts and Blocks.

The Dimasa people of North East India are recognized by the deferent names in different districts and states as per Scheduled list to the Constitution of India. They are- Dimasa, Scheduled Tribe (Hills) in the two hills districts of Assam, i.e. N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong, Hojai Kachari Scheduled Tribe (Plains) in the plain district of Nagaon, Barmans, Scheduled Tribe (Plains) in Cachar District, Tangmi or Rukhini Barmans, Scheduled Tribe (Plains) in Karimganj districts of Assam, and Kachari, S.T. (Hills) in Nagaland state.

Recognition of Dimasa community by different names in different districts as mentioned above which further created troubles, misunderstandings, and disintegrations within the Dimasa society. The All Dimasa Students Union has been demanding the recognition of the Barmans in Cachar, Scheduled Tribe (Plains) community of Cachar District, the Tangmi or Rukhini Barmans, Scheduled Tribe. (Plains) community of Karimganj District, the Hojai Kachari Scheduled Tribe (Plains) community of Nagaon District of Assam and the Kacharis, Scheduled Tribe (Hills) community of Nagaland as the 'Dimasa Kachari' with Hills or Plains where necessary through constitutional amendment for the proper identification of the community of same language and culture.<sup>101</sup> It is one of the important demands of the All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) that to recognize their community all over the North East India is to be recognised as 'Dimasa' by amending the constitution. As far as the provision of Schedule Tribe Hills and Plains facility is concerned, let them enjoy the ST (Hills) and ST (Pains) facility as they are enjoying at present in different districts of Assam and Nagaland. But the whole Dimasa community should be recognized by one name viz. Dimasa.

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<sup>101</sup> A memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India, submitted by The Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee & The All Dimasa Student's Union, in 1996, p. 6.

The Dimasas have also another complain that till date the Dimasa people have never been provided with the opportunity to send a member-representative from their community either to the House of State Assembly or to the Parliament from any constituency of a district of any state other than Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills) to ventilate their problems and grievances for remedies. But the non-tribals who migrated to their ancestral homeland and over-populated them have been freely enjoying such benefits and all other economic rights and facilities ever since the British rule. The Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills) has now been spared with only one seat in the State Assembly of Assam. No Dimasa people of other districts either of the State of Nagaland or of Assam has been provided with such opportunities.<sup>102</sup> The re-organization of districts and states has resulted in dividing the Dimasas from their own ancestral homeland. The identity, integrity, language and culture of the Dimasa people are now threatened.

Thus, the Dimasas became politically restive since 1972. All the expectations generated by the assurance of the Assamese leadership as well as by the creation of North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council were belied by the decision taken in 1972 by the Academic Council of Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction in collegiate education. This decision was to come into effect from the academic year 1972-73 and students entering the Pre-University classes that year were to be able to study Assamese.<sup>103</sup>

The decision of the Academic Council of Gauhati and Dibrugarh University created a lot of resentment among the non-Assamese People. The Mikir (presently called Karbi Anglong) and North-Cachar Hill leaders Conference submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister in 1973 explaining how they were persuaded to remain in Assam, how the promises made were forgotten, how the central grants have always been misused and how the Assamese leadership were determined to Assamise them.<sup>104</sup> Besides, a sense of frustration started to set in

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>103</sup> P.S. Datta, op. cit., pp. 59.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, pp. 59-60.

among the Dimasas and the Karbis when they compared them with the people of those districts that have opted for going out of Assam. They felt that the people of those districts that have opted out of Assam could have not only their political aspiration fulfilled, but could also enjoy a much larger share of national resources for their development. The Dimasas and the Karbis considered them lagging behind.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, they demanded separation. They demanded separation from Assam not only for the fear of losing their identity but also to have their own separate homeland like Nagaland and Mizoram, so that they can have their development within sovereign India.

The Autonomous District Councils, according to the leaders of the two hill districts, could not ensure autonomy to the tribals. Therefore, the Autonomous State Demand Committee came into being in 1986 and since then the Karbi and the Dimasa people have been jointly demanding for the creation of an Autonomous State under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India. It was the new language circular of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government that has emerged as one of the important factor of the demand for autonomous statehood by the two hill districts of Assam.<sup>106</sup> The new circular mentioned two important changes, which has sensitized the people of the two hill districts.

Firstly, the Secondary Education Board of Assam's Circular No. SEBA/AB/Sy11. 11/85-86/1, dated 28 February 1986, provided that Assamese was to be introduced as a compulsory third Language, which the non-Assamese sections contended as the violation of article three and five of the Assam Language Act of 1960 and also the violation of the constitutional provisions and recommendations of the State Re-organization commission.<sup>107</sup>

Secondly, it provided for making the knowledge of Assamese mandatory for all recruitment to the government service. This was again the violation of Bimala Prasad Chaliha's Commitment of not making the knowledge of Assamese

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p.60.

<sup>106</sup> Narayan Konwar, op. cit., p. 92.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, P. 92.

compulsory for recruitment to government services.<sup>108</sup> Bimala Prasad Chaliha, ex-Chief Minister of Assam, stated on June 6, 1961 “The Assam Official Language Act, 1960 was based on two basic principles, namely, (1) Assamese will not be imposed in any of the non-Assamese speaking districts, and (2) no non-Assamese speaking people of the State would be made to suffer any disability for employment, service, etc, because of his lack of knowledge of the Assamese Language.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, the movement for autonomy by two hill districts was driven by some basic factors. The language policy of the government, economic backwardness of the tribal areas, identity crisis, the government’s negligence of the tribal people in the post-Independence period, the recruitment policy of the government and the dissolution of the duly elected District Council and the formation of a new body in its place.

Initially, both the hill districts carried out the movement for autonomy jointly and it was Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), which provided the common platform for both North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts. The ASDC was represented by the leaders of Dimasas and Karbis. As a step towards demanding autonomy, the ASDC submitted memorandum to Rajib Gandhi on 9 May, 1986 demanding autonomous State under the Article 244(A) of the constitution. Thus, the leaders of two hill districts demanded for the autonomous State which would comprise the two districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills. Apart from ASDC, All North Cachar Hills Students Union (ANCHSU) was another important organization supporting the autonomy movement. The ANCHSU also demanded for –(a) withdrawal of the SEBA circular, (b) revision of recruitment policy and (c) restoration of democracy in the North Cachar Hills District. Against the Assam Government recruitment policy and the circular of the SEBA the Karbi Anglong Autonomous state Demand committee (KAASDCOM)

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>109</sup> Quote in Sanat Kumar Kairi, *Vasha Sangramer Purnanga Itihas*, published by Bimala Kairi, Silchar, Assam, 2008, p. 89.

observed a Karbi Anglong State demand day on 17 June 1986.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, the ASDC also claimed to have observed a parallel Independence Day programme on 15th August, 1986 to fulfill their demand for the creation of an autonomous state. Thus, the ASDC flag was unfurled by Bharat Kumer Timung, convener, the ASDC along with the National Flag and parallel Independence Day was observed all over the district. However, the leaders of the movement made it clear that by holding the separate Independence Day they showed no disrespect to the National Flag rather, their intension was to draw the attention of the people in the rest of the country to their demands and to pressurize the government to initiate the process of granting an autonomous State which in their view, was essential to ensure all round development of hill people.

Although the Dimasa and the Karbis have been jointly demanding an Autonomous State from 1986 under the leadership of Autonomous State Demand Committee, in 1991 the Dimasa Students organised themselves under All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU). After 1991 the All Dimasa Students Union has been demanding for creation of a separate full fledged state 'Dimaraji' by incorporating all the territories that were included in the ancient Dimasa Kachari Kingdom and the Heramba Kingdom so as to enable them to enjoy all constitutional rights and privileges to bring all round development. The All Dimasa Students Union and the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee jointly submitted a memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, New Delhi in 1996, demanding a separate homeland for the Dimasas.<sup>111</sup> As a result, the relation between the Dimasas and the Karbis came under stress.

However, to press their demand the All Dimasa Students Union has been adopting the techniques of organising bandh, dharnas, road blockade, rally, etc. The All Dimasa Students Union are getting support from other organisations. When ADSU called for 36 hour Dimaraji bandh/strike on 6th November 2007, the organisations of different communities in Barak Valley that have come forward

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<sup>110</sup> Narayan Kanwar, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>111</sup> A memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India, submitted by The Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee & The All Dimasa Student's Union, in 1996.



to support the Dimaraji bandh, included Barak Valley Khasi Jaintia Welfare Association, Bishnupriya Gona Sangram Parishad, Barak Valley Tribal Rights Protection Front, All Barak Valley Tribal Students Federation, Cachar Tea Tribes Union, All Manipuri Students Union and also from Bihara Young Bengali Association and Nepali Union of Cachar.<sup>112</sup>

Besides the constitutional path, a violent or so called militant path surfaced with the formation of Dimasa National Security Force (surrendered in 1994) and Dima Halam Daoga (DHD) in early nineties and added a new dimension to the politics of identity of the Dimasas. The emergence of these militant outfits can be ascribed partly to the no-responsive attitude of the government to the constitutional agitational path followed by the Dimasas and partly to the politics of expediency of the dominant class. The DHD was created with the support of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isak Muivah group (NSCN -IM), a militant outfit operating in Nagaland.

The DHD came into being with the vow to create 'Dimaraji', i.e., a Dimasa State comprising the districts of Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills), Karbi Anglong and Cachar and part of the district of Nagaon in Assam and also part of Dimapur in Nagaland. But within a short time, differences developed among the DHD cadres centering mainly on the techniques to be followed to pursue the demand. This ultimately resulted in a split. A faction led by Dilip Nunisa signed Ceasefire Agreement with the Government of India on January 1, 2003 and thereafter abjured violence. Another faction led Jowel Garlosa was not a party to the Ceasefire Agreement and continued their violent up to 2009. The later group came to be known as DHD (Jowel) or Black Widow. Both the groups of the DHD claim to be struggling for 'Dimaraji', they believe that separate state 'Dimaraji' is the only solution to the problem of the Dimasas.

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<sup>112</sup> *The Dainik Jugasankha*, News paper, Silchar, Assam, 7/11/2007, p. 8.