

Chapter III

Social Base of the Demand

The North Eastern region of India, comprising seven states, has been occupying a unique position in Indian politics. The hill region of North East India can be called the home of various tribes. Northeast India, inhabited by the people of diverse races, religions, cultures, languages and dialects, has many specific features, which distinguish it from rest of India. Each of the tribal groups has cultural diversities, although some of them belong to the same linguistic group. Each of them has its own historical background and mode of living. The people of Assam and Tripura live mainly in the valleys, whereas most people in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya live in the hilly areas.

Before the British rule the hill tribes of the North East remained totally unexposed to the other cultures of the country. They had little contact with plains peoples. The British administration also followed the policy of secluding of these tribes from the plains by adopting the Inner Line Permit system. The system debarred the plains people from entering the hill areas, without proper permission from the district administration, which was a difficult proposition. Some Christian Missionary workers, however, went to some areas of present day Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland and spread education and Christianity among the tribes.¹ It may be pointed out that in those days Manipur and Tripura were not parts of British India, But Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland were districts of Assam. Arunachal Pradesh was a centrally administered area. So, in those days hill tribes of Assam meant the tribes of present, North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Councils and the present state of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland.

¹ Kusumbar Bhuyan, *Sixth Schedule in North-East India – A Case Study of Karbi Anglong District*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2008, pp. 1-2.

The British Government learnt from experience that the policies that appeared to be beneficial and profitable to the plains were often perceived by the hill tribes as threats to their existence. It became clear to the British that as long as encroachment of tribal lands by the planters and cultivators continued, it was impossible to ward off tribal attacks on British subjects and property. Knowledge of the cultural and racial differences also made the British officials believe in the irreconcilability of the interests of the hill tribes and the plainsmen. In a way, all these factors contributed to the pursuit of the colonial policy of segregation through the enactment of the Inner Line Regulations in 1872-73. The Inner Line Regulations gave powers to the Lieutenant-Governor to prescribe a line, to be called 'the inner line', in the frontier districts beyond which no British subject or foreign residents can pass without a licence. The pass, even when given, would be subject to such conditions as may appear necessary. The regulations prescribed rules regarding trade, possession of land and other matters. The planters, both Indians and British, were not allowed to acquire land beyond the Inner Line, either from the Government or from any local chief or tribe. It was left to the authorities to decide as to what part of the districts comes under the regulations.²

The Inner Line Regulations were invoked in the North East Frontier Tracts of Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur and in the Naga and Lushai Hills. In the areas coming under the Inner Line, the British administered only politically. Later, following the Schedule District Act of 1874, the frontier areas were exempted from normal administrative procedures and legal codes applied in other parts of the country. Instead of imposing direct rule, the British considered it wise to use the services of the traditional heads to consolidate their hold over the frontier tribes. In order to mediate between the conflicting tribes and to communicate with them, the British created the office of Dubashis in the Naga Hills or the Circle Interpreters in the Mizo Hills. The administrative arrangements were devised in such a way that the ordinary tribal people need not encounter the British officers for day to day needs.³ It

² Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 55-56.

³ H. Srikanth, 'British Colonialism and the Hill Tribes of Composite Assam', *Man and Society, A Journal of North East Studies*, Indian Council of Social Science Research North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, Vol. III, 2006, pp. 91-92.

was only in extreme cases involving acts of murder and sedition that the Deputy Commissioner intervened. Though such regulations and acts set limits to the operation of the jurisdiction of the civil officers and gave considerable amount of internal autonomy to the native tribes in the frontier hills, the British Government made it clear that the Inner Line should not be construed as the borders. The British government reserved the right to intervene in the territories coming under the Inner Line area at any time to establish its authority and to maintain law and order.⁴

The policy of segregation pursued through the Inner Line Regulations helped the colonial administration in so many ways. By halting encroachment of the tribal lands, by pursuing the policy of least interference and by allowing the hill tribes to govern themselves according to their own traditions and customs, the British Government created a sense of security among them and contributed to the mitigation of tensions between the frontier tribes and the plainsmen. The policy relieved the British Government of the burden of setting up and running highly structured legal and administrative institutions in economically and socially underdeveloped areas. By making the tribes settle down in particular hills and restricting their movements into the plains, the British Government made the tribal communities feel that they belonged to the hill areas and the hill areas belonged to them.⁵ At a later date this policy of segregation lent a hand to the British to keep the frontier tribes away from the influence of the Indian national movement. By precluding even positive interactions with the people of the rest of India, the Inner Line Policy helped the British officials and the Christian missionaries in convincing the hill tribes that racially, culturally and historically they had nothing to do with the rest of India and the Indians.⁶

It should be mentioned here that the Inner Line Regulation Policy were not invoked in all the hill areas of Assam. The British Government took direct control of the administration of the Garo and Jaintia Hills. In the Khasi Hills they took control of thirty one villages and left other areas under the control of the traditional rulers. For

⁴ J.N. Chowdhury, *Arunachal Pradesh: From Frontier to Union Territory*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1983, p. 230.

⁵ H. Srikanth, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-93.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 92-93.

many years Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills used to be the centre of British civil and military authority in the hills. Later in 1861 the Deputy Commissioner's establishment in the Khasi Hills was shifted to Shillong, which the British built by acquiring land from the Syiem of Myllem. After Assam became Chief Commissionership in 1874, Shillong became the capital of Assam. Being the provincial capital of Assam, several Bengalese, Assamese and Marwaris came and settled in Shillong as bureaucrats, professionals and businessmen. Because of Shillong's status, the British Government refrained from imposing the Inner Line regulations in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Like it, the Garo Hills, surrounded by a settled economy was also found unsuitable for extending the Inner Line Regulations. Although from the point of view of social and economic development, the Garo Hills were no different from the frontier hills, the British officers chose not to invoke the Inner Line in the hills as they felt it would disturb the ongoing trade between the Garo Hills and the adjoining plains.⁷ Because of the non-imposition of the Inner Line in the hills inhabited by the native communities such as the Khasi-Pnars and the Garos, both positive and negative interactions took place between the native hill tribes and the immigrant non-tribal people. The native tribes inhabiting these areas, especially the educated among them, kept themselves abreast of the political developments and movements taking shape in the rest of India. Consequently, despite the development of ethnic identities even in the hills inhabited by the communities like the Khasi-Pnars and the Garos, anti-Indian feelings did not emerge among them. That seems to be the case even in the Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills wherein the native tribes had close interactions with the valley people of Assam.

By the beginning of the 20th century, partly because of the British Government's efforts and partly because of missionary activities, the British Government to a large extent consolidated their authority in the hill areas adjoining the plains of Assam. Although there were many revolts here and there, by and large the British Government succeeded in restoring peace and order in the region. After engaging in violent confrontations for about five decades, the native hill tribes started reconciling themselves to the changes that had been thrust upon them and started exploring possibilities of development within the constraints imposed by colonial

⁷ Ibid, p. 93.

rule.⁸ Factors like development of local languages, growth of modern education, spread of Christianity etc., initiated significant changes in the native tribal societies. Although traditional institutions and leadership were allowed to function in the hills, their significance began to decline slowly and gradually under the colonial influence. While the administrative measures compelled the native communities to settle down within particular areas, the schools and the churches established by the missionaries emerged as new places of interactions among the tribes. New bonds that emerged out of the interactions did contribute to the decline of clan identities and led to the development of broader tribal ethnic identities as Nagas, Mizos, Khasis and Garos.⁹ From within each of the tribes, there developed a middle class, which had their base neither in land nor in business. This class comprised newly educated members working in modern professions and closely associated with the Church.

The Church plays very important role in the tribal's society of Northeast India. Because of the Church, it has been found that Christianity has emerged as the strongest factor of modernization, and has given the tribals as it has done elsewhere a strong sense of identity to the North Eastern tribals.¹⁰ Access to modern education and interaction with British officials and the missionaries gave them knowledge about the world around and implanted in them new ideas and aspirations. This class, either in collaboration with the traditional chiefs as in the case of the Nagas, or as in the case of the Mizos, in confrontation with their own chiefs, began to organize different sub-tribes and articulate the collective interests of their respective ethnic communities.¹¹ The newly emerging educated tribal leaders started socio-cultural organizations for the uplift of their communities and contributed considerably to the construction of ethnic identities, by differentiating themselves from the people in the plains and also from other native hill communities. They played a key role in shaping the attitudes of their members to the political developments taking place in the subcontinent during the last three decades of British rule in India.

⁸ Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginalities: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North-East India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2002, p. 107.

⁹ Ibid, p. 107.

¹⁰ K.S. Singh, *Tribal Movements in India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, p. 11.

¹¹ Sajal Nag, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

After the First World War, the British government came out with the Act of 1919 which introduced a system of diarchy and made provisions for legislative councils at the provincial level. Although all major concerns such as finance, industry, and defence remained reserved subjects, the provincial legislative councils were given limited powers over transferred subjects like local self-government, education, health, agriculture etc. With Assam becoming a Governor's province in 1921, a state legislative council also came into existence in the province of Assam. However, following the official recognition of all hill areas of Assam as backward tracts, the legislative council could not exercise its jurisdiction over the hills. Only the Shillong urban constituency enjoyed a legal representation in the state legislative council. Some members nominated to represent certain hill areas virtually played no role in the legislative council.¹² As per law, central and provincial legislation could be applied to the hills only with the approval of the Governor General or the Governor, with modifications as may be suggested. Since the legislative council had no authority over the hills, the council members from the valley often expressed opposition to shoulder the cost of expenditure involving the administration of the hill areas. During the period the hills witnessed the birth of different native associations of the emerging middle classes such as the Naga Club and the Young Mizo Association.¹³ When the Simon Commission was constituted to make recommendations for constitutional reforms to accommodate the growing national aspirations of the Indians across the country, the Naga Club with the support of the British officials submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission requesting them to exclude the Nagas from the political processes taking shape in the country. The hill tribes living in the North Eastern Hill Tracts remained unaware of the political developments taking place in the Indian subcontinent. But many educated middle class intellectuals of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills expressed their willingness to become a part of the new constitutional arrangement. The British government had to take into consideration differences in the level of political and educational development in the hills. Their realization that some hill areas were more developed than others, led them to come out with suggestions

¹² R. S. Lyngdoh, *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, 1996, pp.73-74.

¹³ H. Srikanth, op. cit., pp. 104.

for the reorganization of hill areas¹⁴. Accordingly, on the basis of indicators such as literacy and political development of the region, the Act of 1935 grouped the hills into two categories: excluded and partially excluded. The frontier areas such as the North Eastern Frontier Tracts, the Mizo Hills, the Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills and the Naga Hills were declared as Excluded Areas, where as the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, was designated as Partially Excluded Areas. Although there were differences over the inclusion of the Garo hills as a Partially Excluded Area, still the classification continued to guide the British in their administration. The administration of Excluded areas was out of the purview of the Assam provincial legislature. However, the Partially Excluded Areas had their representatives in the Assam legislature and the Assam legislature had powers to make laws with respect to these hill areas, subject to the approval of the Governor of Assam. Legally the Governor had overriding powers even with respect to the Partially Excluded Areas, although the Governor rarely exercised them in practice. The Inner Line Regulations were not enforced in the Partially Excluded Areas. The division of hills into Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas had contradictory effects on the subsequent political developments in the hills. In the Excluded Areas the natives lived isolated lives without any positive interaction with the people of the rest of India.¹⁵

Naturally the ethnic elite in the frontier districts remained either opposed to or divided over joining the Indian Union. In the North Eastern Frontier Tracts, which were left un-administered, the native hill tribes virtually had no knowledge of the political transition taking place in the Indian subcontinent. Unlike them, the native people and leaders in the Partially Excluded Areas interacted with the people from the plains and identified themselves with the political processes shaping the subcontinent. Naturally, in the Partially Excluded Areas the ethnic identity formation did not take an anti India colour.¹⁶

In North East India even before independence of India, the tribal communities have strong sense of distinct identity. To maintain their distinct identity some sections of tribal communities asserted jointly and some tribes have started assertions under

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 104-105.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 103-104.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 105.

the banner of their own tribal organizations.¹⁷ For instance, the Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed in April 1945 with a view to uniting the multilingual Nagas and engaging themselves in social activities. Later on, within a year this was recognized with the name and style, the Naga National Council (NNC), a federation of various tribal councils of the hills under the leadership of T. Aliba Imti Ao. At the initial stage, it demanded autonomy within Assam and opposed both the Crown Colony and the Grouping Plan under the Cabinet Mission Plan of 16 May, 1946.¹⁸ But suddenly in February 1947, it demanded an interim Government for the Nagas, initially for a period of ten years, after which the Nagas would be free to decide their own political status. This demand was formally placed before the Government in June of the same year. The NNC even gave an ultimatum to the Government of India on 4th November, 1947, giving thirty day's notice to the effect that if their demands were not conceded, the Naga people would not co-operate with the existing Government. This movement for autonomy was, however, transformed into one for the establishment of a sovereign independent Nagaland after Angami Zapu Phizo became the president of Naga National Council in November 1949. Later on, it virtually transformed itself into a parallel Government for the Nagas.¹⁹

Like the Nagas, a section of the Mizos too expressed centrifugal urges and demanded a sovereign 'Mizo State. In the late forties there were two political organizations of the Mizos, namely the 'Mizo Union' and the 'United Mizo freedom Organisation which came into existence in April 1946 and July 1947 respectively. Whereas the 'Mizo Union' was for the continuation of link with India on the basis of full local autonomy, the latter propagated secession of all contiguous Mizo areas from India and demanded their merger with Burma on the ground of racial affinity.²⁰ The Mizo Union submitted a Memorandum to the President, Constituent Assembly in April 1947 urging for the consolidation of all Mizo areas into a single administrative unit and its self-determination within Assam. But later on, in 1949 it demanded the amalgamation of the contiguous Mizo areas of Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and

¹⁷ Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977, p. 324.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 324.

¹⁹ Girin Phukon, *Politics of Regionalism in Northeast India*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1996, p. 2

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 2.

Cachar to form an autonomous greater Mizoram. In the subsequent period, however, the dominant elite of the Mizo Hills tended to produce a rebellious psyche among its people.²¹

In 1946, the Khasi-Jayantia Political Association was formed with the initiative of the Tribal Chiefs (syiems). It demanded a federation of the Khasi areas with adequate cultural and political autonomy within a sovereign Assam. In the Garo Hills, the Garo National Council came into existence in March 1946. It also put forward the claims for an autonomous Garo region. The Garo National Council however, wanted to maintain its link with the province of Assam as well as the Central Government. Similarly in the Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong) the Karbi Durbar, the first political organization of the Karbis was formed in early 1947. It emphasized on the protection of local customs, consolidation of Karbi areas into a single administrative unit and an extension of the franchise.²² Dimasas of Cachar formed 'Nihil Cachar Haidimba Barman Samity' in December 31, 1945 at Bijoypur, in the present Borkhola Constituency. It was the oldest organization of the Dimasa community, not only in Barak Valley but also among the Dimasa organizations in Assam.²³ Nihil Cachar Haidimba Barman Samiti, emphasized on the protection of Dimasa culture and religion.

Thus it appears that in the late forties of last century, there had been a strong sub-regional and even a separatist urge among a section of the people of the hills. One of the reasons for this was that these hill tribes had very little scope of mingling with the people of the plains during the British rule. The British administered them separately from the plains and they were not sufficiently integrated with the people of the plains. Whether this was done deliberately in consonance with the policy of divide and rule, as many local historians claim, or it was due to a policy of not disturbing susceptibilities of the hill people, it is difficult to assess accurately.²⁴ It may, however, be argued that although the British Government might not have made direct initiative to divide the people of the hills and the plains, indirectly their policy had this effect.

²¹ Ibid, p. 2.

²² Ibid, p. 2.

²³ *Souvenir*, Nihil Cachar Haidimba Barman Samiti, Biswajyoti Barman, Silchar, 2006, p. 56.

²⁴ Amalendu Guha, op. cit., p. 324.

As a result, the tribes of hill areas were afraid of the plainsmen more than they were afraid of the British Government. They even laboured under a suspicion that the rule of white people in the hitherto excluded areas would be replaced by their more advanced neighbours to exploit them on a more permanent basis. This feeling of the hills was mainly shared by the newly educated tribal middle class and the tribal chiefs. The tribes of hill areas thought that if the hill areas were completely integrated with the plains, they would lose their traditional privileges and socio-political dominance in the hills.²⁵

In addition to this, there were some other factors which also stood on the way of integration between the hills and the plains. The hills were not bound with the plains by any ties of religion and language. On the other hand, the Christian Missionaries, through the help of the British Administration, succeeded in converting a sizable section of the tribal community of hill people under the cover of certain philanthropic and welfare activities.²⁶ At the same time the people of the plains had failed to establish adequate political communication with the hills. This fact was even admitted by The Assam Tribune which generally championed the view of the Assamese elite. Thus one of its editorials maintained, the plains people and their leaders have hardly made in the past planned efforts to develop closer ties between the two sections of the population or devoted any of their time to the problems with which the hill people are confronted.²⁷

This attitude of the Assamese elite towards the hill people led the latter to believe that after the end of the British rule they would not get full scope for the development of hill culture on the lines of their own tradition if they did not remain aloof from the plains. The cause of this fear was again admitted by The Assam Tribune thus: “the fault is entirely ours, the plains people’s, for we have done absolutely nothing to earn their confidence to prove that we have no evil designs on our brothers and sisters in the hills.”²⁸

²⁵ Girin Phukon, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁶ *The Assam Tribune*, 4 December, 1947.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The Assam Tribune*, 28 October 1947.

During the British rule in the plains of Assam, the Ahoms had expressed remarkable separatist urges at the advent of independence. They had been the latest rulers of the Assam Valley and after six centuries of their rule in Assam, the British had taken over the country from them in 1826. It is interesting to note that the dominant elite in the Assamese society in the Pre-British period come from the Ahoms, they had also made a deep and indelible impress on Assamese society during their rule. Not only that they made formidable contribution in the consolidation of Assamese Society but they also were absorbed into the Hindu social structure. But it is strange that some of these people, after the advent of the British rule insisted on retaining their distinct identity from the larger Assamese society. Mention may be made that they opposed the proposed Scheme for tabulating the 'Ahoms' as Hindus in the census operation of 1941 and demanded that the word Ahom be retained in the census report. Under the British administration, this community became backward educationally, socially and even economically. As a result, the Ahoms failed to occupy prominent place in the British administration. Important positions were held either by the Bengalis or the Assamese caste Hindus who were of Aryan origin. The Ahom leaders felt that they were deprived of their legitimate share of administrative jobs and other privileges under the British Government.²⁹ Considering their contribution to the history of Assam and their numerical strength, they felt that they deserved much more than what they could achieve. Indeed, from a position of dominance, they sank to the position of backwardness. The Ahoms gradually began to organize themselves which culminated in the formation of the All Assam Association in 1893, later it was renamed as the Ahom Sabha. It stood for the preservation of distinct ethnic identity of the Ahoms.

Although the Ahoms adopted the Assamese language as their mother tongue leaving their original Tai language and contributed a great deal to the formation of a greater Assamese society, they did not want that the Ahom identity should completely be submerged by the Assamese caste Hindu culture. They, however, asserted that the Ahoms were an inseparable part of the larger Assamese society and the uplift of the Ahoms would ultimately serve the greater interest of the Assamese society. Thus while endorsing this views, they argued that the rise of the Ahoms was essential for

²⁹ Girin Phukon, op. cit., p. 5.

the progress of the Assamese people as a whole. It, therefore, seems that the Ahom elite wanted to maintain their distinct identity within the Assamese society. As a measure of maintaining distinct identity and prosperity of the Ahoms, they demanded the recognition of Ahoms as a minority Community.³⁰ And more importantly, with the growing demand for Pakistan, they realized the necessity of maintaining the distinct Ahom identity of Assam as a whole. Eventually, they made a strong case for sovereign independent status for Assam and expressed considerable separatist sentiment. In several meeting of the All Assam Association, resolutions were adopted to the effect. For instance, in an Executive Committee meeting of the All Assam Ahom Association held on 29 September, 1944 at Sibsagar, it was resolved that : “In view of the peculiar position of Assam, both geographically and otherwise, and the great preponderance of the Mongolian races with their distinctive language, cultures and religions in the population of the province, Assam without Sylhet has a legitimate claim for free and independent existence in the event of India being divided territorially into Pakistan and Hindustan zones and that Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah should leave the question of Assam without Sylhet to the people of the soil to settle.”³¹

Like the Ahoms the plains tribals had also contradictions with the Assamese caste Hindus. The tribal leaders did not want that their distinct tribal identity be completely submerged by the Assamese cast Hindu culture. It needs to be mentioned that Assamese culture does not necessarily imply the culture of the Assamese caste Hindus alone, although they left an indelible impact on it. In fact, the Assamese culture is the result of a continuous process of socio-cultural fusion among diverse linguistic and ethnic traits for centuries. The tribal communities of Assam did not lag behind in this process. Many of them had already undergone a process of de-tribalisation through initiation into Hinduism and more importantly, through renunciation of their mother tongue in favour of the Assamese language. By and

³⁰ *All Assam Ahom Association: Proceeding of the Executive Committee, Sibsagar, and 29 September 1944.*

³¹ *Ibid,*

large, these people had contributed significantly towards the Assamese nation building process by assimilating with the mainstream of Assamese culture.³²

A group of the tribal educated middle class strongly felt that they were different from the Assamese caste Hindus. It appeared to them that they remained economically, educationally and even politically much more backward than the Assamese caste Hindus. They believed that the dominant upper caste elite of the province were mainly responsible for their backwardness.³³ Endorsing this view of the tribals, the Communist Party of India alleged that the Assamese caste Hindus, the most advanced people of Assam had systematically neglected the tribal interest. A similar point was made by Sir Andrew Clow, the then Governor of Assam (1942-46) and he maintained that the Assamese both caste Hindus and the Muslims professed solicitude for the tribes, but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathy with the tribes.³⁴ The growing sense of negligence and deprivation among the tribal communities of Assam led to the formation of the All Assam Plains Tribal League in the thirties of the last century. The educated tribal middle class realized the necessity of such an organization to exert pressure on the Government and the national political parties so as to fulfill their needs and aspirations. In fact, the Congress did not try to synthesize the interests of the caste Hindus with those of the plains tribals and to bring them within the mainstream of the national movement. Moreover, no practical attempt was made to socialize the tribes in the emerging political culture of the state and to bring them into the mainstream of the Valley culture. In effect, it led the plains tribals to believe that though they were the original inhabitants of the province, the Assamese educated middle class had dispossessed them of their original rights. As a result, they became conscious of their distinct identity.³⁵ The educated tribal middle class or leaders were not only afraid of the dominance of Assamese caste Hindus, they were also apprehensive of the possible challenges from the non-Assamese Indians of the province. It was very often

³² Girin Phukon, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

³³ *A Memorandum issued by the Conference of Leaders of Tribal Communities of Assam*, Shillong, July, 1946, p.2.

³⁴ A.C. Bhuyan and S.P. De, *Political History of Assam*, Government of Assam, Calcutta, 1980, Vol. III, p. 311.

³⁵ Girin Phukon, op. cit., p. 7.

complained that the non-Assamese cultivators, particularly from Bengal, had been allowed to occupy lands within the tribal belts.³⁶

The miserable conditions of the tribal peoples of Assam were mainly due to two reasons. In the first place, there was no appreciable development of agriculture in this region during the period of Green Revolution. The modern methods of cultivation like, the use of better seeds, chemical fertilizers, insecticides etc. were not introduced in the northeastern region. The various schemes and programmes for the developments of tribal groups like, Tribal Sub-Plan, Tribal Development Corporation, Tribal Development Authority, Integrated Tribal Development Project, Welfare of Scheduled Tribes and Backward classes etc. did not improve the lots of the tribals.³⁷

Secondly, there is continuous transfer of land from the tribal groups to non-tribal groups. A large number of former East Bengal immigrants started to pour into the tribal areas since the beginning of this century and permanently settle there. They adopted Asamiya as the language of communication. Besides, local non-tribal traders, money lenders had also occupied the lands of the tribes.

Even the British Government took certain measures to protect the lands of the tribes. In 1886 the Government, by the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, tried to stop eviction and alienation of land. But the Act was not sufficient to safeguard the interests of the plains tribes. Hence it was amended in 1947. The objective of the amended act known as Assam Act XV of 1947 is to protect the interests of certain classes. One of the measures of this scheme was the constitution of compact areas into belts and blocks. Accordingly 45 Blocks and Belts were created. In these Blocks and Belts non-tribals were not permitted to purchase land from the tribes.³⁸

Another way to protect the tribes from the onslaught of the non-tribes was the creation of a line system that divides the tribal and non tribal areas. In the year 1938, the Tribal League entered into an agreement with the Assam Pradesh Congress

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ Snehamoy Chaklader, *Sub-Regional Movement in India*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Kolkata, 2004, p. 51.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 52

Committee. According to this agreement a line was drawn dividing the areas occupied by the tribals from other non-tribal areas and the immigrants from East Bengal were debarred from settling in tribal areas inside the line.

The Muslim League Ministry in 1940 accepted the line system as a means to ensure the protection of the tribal interests. In 1946 the Congress Party again came to power. The Tribal League came to an agreement with the Assam Government led by the Congress Party. According to this agreement Tribal Blocks and Belts were created. It was stipulated that non-tribal people would not be allowed to settle there permanently.

The reason for the creation of Tribal Blocks and Belts was explained in an article entitled, 'Land Reforms in Assam' published in Assam Information by the Director of Information and Publicity in 1958. It reads, "In 1947, following the land settlement policy laid in the 1945 July Resolution, an Act was passed to form what is known as tribal belts and blocks to give adequate protection to the backward tribal communities from the onslaught of the more advanced, aggressive and speculative elements of the society."³⁹

But its claim that this step has enormously benefited the tribal people is contested by the Plains Tribal Council. According to them this step had not served the purpose for which it was created. Even the Dhebar Commission observed that the constitution of tribal blocks and belts did not provide adequate protection to the tribal people from the pressure of the non-tribes.

The Assam Government, particularly the non-tribal officers were reluctant to implement the scheme. It was alleged that the government officers encouraged the immigrants to settle in block and belts areas. The then, Revenue Minister of Assam, Thanesar Boro, admitted that about 2 lakh 13 thousand and 40 bighas of land in the tribal areas were under the illegal occupation of non-tribal groups.⁴⁰

According to the Plains Tribal Council there is a lot of difference between the policy and its implementation. Underneath the declared policy the real intention of the

³⁹ Ibid, p. 52.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 52.

Assam Government is to destroy the compactness of the plains tribal areas and thereby weaken them as a political force.

This situation is well summarized by Udayon Misra in his article, 'Bodo Stir Complex Issues, Unattainable Demands'. He states, "In the struggle for land the tribals have not only been edged out by the non-tribal Assamese but also by immigrant Hindu and Muslim settlers and the Nepalis. In the tribal blocks and belts tribal land has over generations been usurped by rich and middle non-tribal peasants. Even in the state's reserved forests, Nepalis, former tea garden workers as well as Muslims form a sizeable section of the settlers. As per figures released by the state government, in 1986 the Nepalis, immigrant Muslims, former tea garden workers and non-tribal Assamese constituted almost half of the total number of settlers in the twenty-five forest divisions of the state where some 1,74,489 hectares are under occupation."⁴¹

While being conscious of their distinct identity and anxious to preserve and develop their own socio-cultural heritage some of the tribal leaders even thought to make their homeland (Assam) a sovereign independent state outside the Indian union in the event of India being divided into Hindustan and Pakistan. A group of the tribal leaders did not want that Assam should be a part either of Hindustan or of Pakistan and they desired that it should maintain sovereign status. The tribal leaders believe that if Assam became free, the influx of non-Assamese Indians particularly into the tribal belt of Assam could be checked and the tribal peoples would be in a better position within a sovereign Assam to protect their distinct identity and interest.⁴²

In the middle of the forties of last century, a feeling grew among the leaders of plains tribal in favour of an independent political existence for Assam as a means of safeguarding their distinct identity. Thus Bhimor Deori, the General Secretary of the Assam Plains Tribal League, in an official statement released their demand to the press that Assam proper and its hills should be constituted into a separate sovereign

⁴¹ Udayaon Misra, 'Bodo Stir Complex Issues, Unattainable Demands', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 24, May 27, 1989, P. 1148.

⁴² Girin Phukon, op. cit., p. 8.

state. Assam and its hill areas should not be made a part of province of any Indian federation- Hindustan or Pakistan without the consent of its people.⁴³

The educated tribal middle class or leaders believed that if the Muslim could claim a separate state on the basis of their distinct religious identity, the tribes and races of Assam could also definitely put forward a similar claim on the basis of their history, culture and distinct ethnic identity. Since they were not completely assimilated with the mainstream of Indian culture till then, they found no reason why they should become a part of the rest of the country. Moreover, it was very much in their mind that they were never a part of India prior to the British rule in this region. In fact, only in a sovereign Assam a section of the Mongoloid and other non-Aryan leaders felt that they would be able to maintain their dominant position and also their tradition and culture would be well protected. The tribal leaders apprehended that if Assam was not separated from India, their future destiny would be controlled either by the Hindus or the Muslims.⁴⁴ The tribal leaders believed that if Assam became a unit of Indian federation, the numerical strength of the Assamese Hindus and the Muslims would, in due course, increase in Assam through the influx of people from other parts of India which would ultimately create the problem of crisis of identity for the non-Aryan and Mongoloid Communities.⁴⁵

The Case of the Dimasas is not an exception. The content of ethnic grievances held by the Dimasas had much to do with special powers of autonomy that were granted to them by the Indian state. Special autonomous provisions, however, seemed to provide benefit only to a small section of the Dimasa elite as they gained from their political alliances with the ruling parties of the regional government. By large, people were disgruntled by the status that the group was enjoying within the existing institutional structures, increasing powerlessness and, above all, the administrative anomalies of the council.⁴⁶ Even after special decentralization arrangements were made, the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council (erstwhile North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council) remained highly dependent on the state government. Therefore,

⁴³ *The Assam Tribune*, 23 March, 1944.

⁴⁴ Girin Phukon, op. cit., pp. 9-10

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 10.

⁴⁶ Pahi Saikiya, *Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India*, Routledge, New Delhi, 2011. pp. 171-172.

the term of the autonomy arrangements became highly controversial. Ethnic rebellion of the Dimasas was an expression of their grievances over the encroachment of their local autonomy that the group had achieved on the basis of social distinctiveness and separateness in Assam's political history. Comparative disadvantage of the Dimasas and increasing rivalry with the dominant state increased the salience of Dimasa identity.⁴⁷ Progressive marginalization of their autonomous powers led to the emergence of reactionary forces, the radical Dimasa nationalities. These nationalities prompted their separatist goals for Dimaraji by mobilizing on historical narratives and collective action frame that underlined the entitlements- grandeur and past autonomy and actual discrepancies experienced by the Dimasas.⁴⁸

The Dimasas belong to the Indo-mongoloid group of people and have similarities with other members of Bodo group such as Garos, Kachari, Mech and Rabhas. The Dimasa peoples are the inhabitants of Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Cachar and Nagaon District and the Dhansiri region of Nagaland State. The Dimasas ruled this vast tract with Dimapur (now in Nagaland state) as their capital. They shifted their capital to Maibang in Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills) in mid sixteenth century. The Dimasa kingdom during this period included North Cachar Hills and the greater part of Nagaon district. Finally, the Dimasas shifted their capital to Khaspur in the plains of Cachar district. The present district of Dima Hasao (earlier it was known as -North Cachar Hills District) formed a part of ancient Kamarupa and later in the medieval period, it formed the northern part of the Kachari kingdom known as Herambarajya. In comparatively recent times following the death of Govinda Chandra Narayana, (1813-1830 A.D) the Raja (king) of Cachar, the British annexed the district of Cachar to the East India Company's territory on 14th August 1832 by a Proclamation. Between 1832 and 1881 distribution and redistribution of old Dimasa territory took place and in 1881 North Cachar Hills was made a subdivision of Cachar. In 1951 North Cachar Hills was separated from Cachar and it became a subdivision of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District. It was only in 1971 that Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills) was made a full-fledged district of Assam with its headquarters at Haflong with one Autonomous Council. At present the

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 172.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 172.

Dimasas are not concentrated only in one place. They are scattered in different place of Assam known by different names. They are known as:

- Dimasa Kachari Schedule Tribe (Hills), in Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills District) and Karbi Anglong District.
- Barman in Cachar, Schedule Tribe (Plains), in Cachar District.
- Hojai Kachari, Schedule Tribe (Plains), in Nagaon District.
- Kachari, Schedule Tribe (Hills) in Nagaland state.

The Barman Kachari is one of the tribal communities of Assam who belong to the Bodo race. They are mainly concentrated in the Cachar District of Assam. Linguistically Barmans belong to the Tibeto-Burman family. According to their own version the aristocratic families who accompanied the fugitive Kachari king from Maibang to Khaspur are the Barmans of Cachar.⁴⁹

B. N. Bordoloi (1988) mentioned that the Dimasa Kacharis who live in the plains of the Barak Valley are known as the Barman Kacharis. According to U.C. Guha the Dimasas who consider themselves to be the descendents of Bhima, the second Pandava of the Mahabharata, and follow the Hindu religious principles and wear sacred threads like the Kshatriyas are called Barman. The Kacharis who consider themselves to be the descendents of Hidimba and follow traditional religion are known as Dimasa. J. B. Bhattacharjee says that in the plains the Dimasas were known as Barman who follows the system of wearing sacred thread like the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas.⁵⁰

According to 2001 census Barman population in Cachar District is 18,232.⁵¹ They have their own traditional dress. A man wears a risha about a metre breadth as dhoti. Women wear a skirt like mekhela called Rigu. It is either made of cotton or eri-silk. The Barman Kacharis have 40 (forty) male clans called Sengphong and 4(forty two) female clans called Julu. Bordoloi observes that existence of female clans along with the male clans is the most outstanding feature of the social life of the Dimasas

⁴⁹ Sipra Sen, *Tribes and Castes of Assam*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999, p. 124.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 123.

⁵¹ Census 2001.

and such a division of clans on the basis of sex is very rare among the tribal societies.⁵² From the point of view of marriage, these clans are strictly endogamous. In stead of clan-names the converted section now uses 'Barman' as their surname. Tribal endogamy and clan (Sengphong, Julu) exogamy is the general rule. Boys usually marry between the ages of 22 to 30 years and girls between 18 to 25years. The usual mode of acquiring mates is through negotiation but marriage by mutual consent and elopement is also practiced. Though polygamy is permitted, exogamy is the general rule. The system of bride price (Kalti) exists among them. In Barman society though divorce is allowed, it is infrequent. Remarriage of a widow or widower is permissible in their society.⁵³

Numerically among the Barmans the nuclear family is more common than the joint family. The father is the head of the family and his authority is supreme. The position of women is lower than that of men. The women participate in agricultural operations, and contribute to the family income through weaving and fishing. They have no say in the political affairs of the village. According to their customary laws, they can inherit from their mother items of property like jewellery, clothes, etc.

The Barman cremates the dead. Before the dead body is taken the cremation ground called mangklong the body is bathed ceremonially and then placed on a bier made of split bamboos. Before taking the body to the cremation ground, new clothes are put on according to the sex. Death in the family is considered unholy and some purification rituals are customarily performed. On 13th day they perform funeral ceremony *harath*, with the help of Brahman priest.

Agriculture is the principal occupation and main source of livelihood of the people. They practice wet cultivation. Besides paddy, they also cultivate maize, cotton, chilies, pumpkins, gourd, ginger, pineapples, oranges etc. Those who live in hilly areas, practice jhum to a smaller extent. Livestock also play an important role in their economy. Their women are weavers.⁵⁴ Most of the domestic requirement of cloth is met from the family looms. Rearing of endi silkworms is another important

⁵² K.S. Singh, *People of India-Assam*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 2003, p.323.

⁵³ Ibid, p.323.

⁵⁴ Sipra Sen, op. cit., p. 124.

cottage industry, as is the manufacture of bamboo and cane goods. They have direct links with the market, although they have very little surplus to sell.

The traditional village headman who leads the village administration is called khunang. He has both executive and judicial powers. According to the traditional custom the khunang is to be elected by the village elders at a formal meeting. In discharging his duties he is assisted by dilek (assistant headman). In addition to his duties of maintaining law and order, he is also responsible for collecting house tax, agricultural tax and for maintenance of birth and death registers of the village. The Barmans consider themselves Hindus although they have their traditional gods and goddesses. The kachari king Krishna Chandra and his brother Govind Chandra formally accepted Hinduism in the year 1790 at Khaspur. The Hindu goddesses Lakshmi and Sarawati have already made a place for themselves in the Barman religion. The Barman Kacharis are the Hinduised section of the Dimasa tribe. They are living mainly with the Bengali, Manipuris and Muslims in Cachar District.⁵⁵

The Hojai is a Scheduled Plains Tribe of Assam. According to S. Endle the Hojai belong to the Bodo linguistic group of Assam. At present the people who identify themselves as Hojai in Nagaon District, in fact, belong to Dimasa Kachari, which is a Scheduled Tribe in autonomous Hills District of Assam (Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong), while its counterpart in Cachar District is known as Barman. Thus, these three groups –Dimasa, Hojai and Barman though they are treated separately in the lists of scheduled tribes of Assam, refer to the same stock of people i.e. Dimasa Kacharis. The origin of the term Hojai is difficult to trace. In their language the word Hojai means priest. It may however, be mentioned that Hojai is one of their 40 (forty) male clans.

The Hojai people believe that they originated from the union of Bangla Raja (a male) and Akhiridima (a female bird). They have their own dialect called Dimasa. A good number of them also know Assamese and Bengali. Some persons also converse in English and Hindi. However, they do not have any script of their own and have adopted the Assamese script to communicate with their kin group as well as others. The medium of instruction in schools is Assamese. Traditional costume is no longer

⁵⁵ K.S. Singh, op. cit., p. 324.

in vogue. During festivals the old women still wear a skirt like mekhla called rigu and a piece of cloth as scarf called jamphai. Nowadays, only elderly men wear dhoti like rural Assamese menfolk. In the past, scarf (rimsao) and dhoti (rishia) usually green in colour, were traditionally worn. The young men wear trousers, and shirts while women wear mekhela, chadar, sari etc.

They are broadly divided into two sections. The people who abandoned their traditional faith is known as asanskari or adi. Inter-marriage between these two sections is allowed. The Hojai are divided into 40 male clans (sengphong) and 42 female clans (julu). These clans are exogamous. A person receives necessary co-operation from neighbours, but the clan ties are strong. No hierarchy or status among the clans could be ascertained. Earlier it was customary to use the sengphong as a surname but recently instead of writing the julu (female clan) as surname, the married woman use the sengphong (male clan) as surname. A revivalistic trend with regard to surname is observed since the common surname 'Barman' is slowly being discarded. Some of them have changed their surnames from Barman to their respective sengphong (male clan).

Inter-marriages with Dimasas, Barmans and Hojai are allowed. They usually marry between 22 to 30 years of age and girls between 18 to 25 years. The usual mode of acquiring a mate is through negotiation but marriage by mutual consent and elopement is also frequent in the community. The women of the Hinduised section use vermilion in their parting of the hair which is a recent trend. The system of bride price (kalti) like Barmans, also exists among the Hojai Kacharis. The amount is paid in cash. Though divorce (Siran) is allowed, incidence is not frequent. Maladjustment and adultery are the main reasons. Formerly the traditional village headman (khunang) was the judge to decide divorce cases but now samaj (gathering of elders of village) settles the issue. The compensation (usually repayment of bride price) depends upon the nature of the case. i.e. guilt of the person concerned. When divorce is granted, the male children, if any, are the liability of the father (or sengphong members) while the female children are the liability of the mother (or julu members). The Hojai society does not prohibit the remarriage of a widow and a divorced woman. In recent years their marriage system has undergone some changes. The educated

youth makes sincere efforts to abolish the bride price (kalti) system. In a large number of marriages in the Hojai and Jugjiaan area, the people have shown a liberal attitude towards the bride price system. The attitude towards inter-community marriages has also changed. Nowadays such marriages have been recognized by the society after organising a feast, and performing of some rituals.

Numerically the nuclear family dominates over the joint family. The father is the head of the family and his authority is supreme in all matters concerning the family. Extended family is also found to be prevalent among them. Avoidance is maintained between husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife, and a man and his younger brother's wife. They are patrilineal in descent and all the male children get an equal share after the death of the father. According to their customary law, a daughter can also inherit the property of her mother. Since the parents generally stay with the youngest son during their old age, he inherits a larger share (generally the house) of the property.

Regarding the position of women in society in general and the family in particular, it is apparent that the male dominates over the female. The females are very hard working. In addition to the usual domestic chores, women also participate in agricultural operations. They contribute to the family income through weaving, rearing duck, and fowl, rearing of endi silk worms etc. In political activities, however, the woman's role is negligible.

The Hojai Kacharis cremate in the case of natural death of an adult as well as bury in case of infant or new born and accidental death. In many areas, there is no fixed cremation ground (mangphlang) and cremation ground takes place by the side of a river or near any water source. The period of pollution continues for seven days amongst the asangskari. On this day a ceremony called joo mangsa kinba is performed. The day for performing the final purificatory death rite is the thirteenth day after the death. The guests are entertained with a grand feast. They believe in rebirth and call the land of dead dambra.

Like Barmans agriculture is the main occupation and the land is their main economic resource of Hojai kacharis. They practice wet paddy cultivation. The land is

owned individually. Among the subsidiary economic resources, mention may be made of weaving, livestock, rearing of silkworm (endi and muga) bamboo and cane products etc. besides weekly market they also visit the daily market of Hojai, Lanka which are located within a radius of six to twelve kms. In these markets members of different castes, tribes and communities assemble for different purposes. Therefore this market plays a significant role in the socio-cultural life of the people besides having economic implications.

Hojai folk tales and folk songs depict their original abode, place name, god-goddess and origin of the clan of the community. The folktales of snemduri, johaya, harifa are very popular. The boys and girls participate in folk dances together. Suphin (flute), and khram (drum) are some of the main folk musical instruments. The women are expert weavers. Both floral and geometric designs are popular among them. They are also expert in bamboo and cane work. The Hojai Kacharis are still linked with the Dimasa and the Barmans through traditions and rituals.⁵⁶ As of 2001 census, Hojai Kachari have a population of 35,722. Males constitute 53% of the population and females 47%.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Dimasas of Nagaland, are known as Kachari. Their customs and traditions are same as the Dimasas of Dima Hasao District (N.C. Hills). According to 2001 census of India, in Nagaland Kachari had a population of 7,807.⁵⁸

All these tribes belong to same community. i.e. Dimasa. Recognition of Dimasa community by different names in different districts and states as mentioned earlier created troubles, misunderstandings, and disintegrations within the Dimasa society. It has been discussed in the previous chapter in detail that why the All Dimasa Students Union has been demanding the recognition of the Barmans, the Hojai Kachari and the Kacharis, as the 'Dimasa Kachari' with Hills or Plains where necessary through constitutional amendment for the proper identification of the Dimasa Kachari.

⁵⁶ K. S. Singh, op. cit., p. 340.

⁵⁷ Census, 2001.

⁵⁸ Ibid,

The Dimasa society is based on strong community networks. In the rural areas, which comprise more than 80 percent of the Dimasa population, the families are held by very tightly knit links. Each village in the Dimasa society is structured along the lines of clan or lineage. The Dimasa society is divided along forty (40) patrilineal clans or male clans (In Dimasa language it is called Sengphong) and forty two (42) matrilineal clans or female clans (Julu).⁵⁹ However, unlike many stratified and vertically structured clan system it is based on structures that are non-hierarchical and egalitarian in nature, which means there is equality across clans. Contrary to many findings in the context of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, clan-based divisions in the Dimasa society has not led to inter-clan competition or the distribution of socio-economic goods or political offices and loyalty based on such affiliation. To view it differently, instead of creating sub-ethnic cleavages, the lack of political significance of clan based networks allows intra-group coherence on solid foundations of a strong Dimasa identity.⁶⁰

Since a majority of the Dimasa people resides in villages, community networks are the significant basis of organizing contentious actions. Local institutions are headed by an elected village Chief (Headman). The Chief have powers to regulate day-to-day activities of the village. The Headman acts as a link between the villagers and the district council. Such a form of institution provides a tertiary level of governance well suited in these areas where the state system seems to be totally constrained in terms of providing access to collective goods and privileges. Like other tribal areas in Assam, the state has not been able to penetrate much into the remote margins of these hilly regions, and not many attempts have been made to develop these areas. In such a situation, village institutions are governed by traditional and unwritten codes of conduct without much state interference. Where government agencies have repeatedly failed to deliver public goods, these institutions have guaranteed the benefits and services insofar as minimum subsistence niches of resources are concerned. For instance, except for extremely serious criminal offences, the village institution is authorized to decide and give judgment on matters related to local affairs of the village such as land-related disputes, marriage, divorce, petty

⁵⁹ Pahi Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 168.

crimes, etc. People look towards these institutions to address the distribution of basic resources concerning agricultural land, basic infrastructure like village roads, their security and other day-to-day needs. To cite another simple example of such an institution, the Dimasa Kachari villages have an informal institution called the Hangseu, which consists of unmarried youths living in the villages. Hangseu is a locally organized institution where young male members are involved in conducting small-scale menial tasks in the village, such as construction of village roads and other agricultural works like harvesting, weeding, etc. Members of the Hangseu also serve as defenders to provide protection and security to the villages. While acknowledging the beneficial impact of such relationships, village-based networks and institutions have lessened the cost of governance at the local level as well as maintaining intra-group relationships.

In the Dimasa society the presence of strong societal networks partly increased the likelihood of people supporting the movement in huge numbers. After the language issue in Assam, most of the tribal leaders were busy in opposing the official language act of 1960. Some of the tribal leaders joined together under an All Party Hills Leaders Conference (1960) and they launched a movement opposing Assamese Official Language Bill (1960) and also demanded the creation of a separate hill state consisting of the Hill Districts inhabited by different tribal groups. In fact, the demand for autonomous hill district was raised as early as in 1923 when the Khasi National Darbar was formed for the purpose. Separate hill state demand was also raised by the hill leaders before Independence in different forms. Even after independence the 'Eastern Indian Tribal Union (EITU) formed by the tribal leaders of the hill areas submitted a demand for creation of 'Eastern Frontier State' before the State Reorganisation Committee in 1954. The demand was, however, not accepted. When the Bill on Assamese Language was placed in the Assam Assembly in 1960, the hill leaders, irrespective of their individual political party affiliations, formed the APHLC and started the movement more vigorously for a separate hill state. The demand was ultimately accepted by the government of India and the full-fledged state of Meghalaya comprising the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hill Districts of Assam was

created in 1971.⁶¹ The Dimasas of North Cachar Hills and Karbis of Karbi Anglong had a option to join a newly created state 'Meghalaya', the Dimasas did not join the new state because of some assurances by the government of Assam. When assurances were not fulfilled, the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills and Karbis of Karbi Anglong have started demanding a separate autonomous state comprising the two hill districts of Assam i.e. North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong.

Even before the autonomous state movement by the Dimasas and Karbis, the enlightened Dimasas heard of the impending constitutional changes in 1947 and they joined hands with the other tribal leaders of North Cachar Hills and formed the Tribal Council under leadership of Mr. H.M. Haflongbar, a prominent leader of Dimasa. Mr. Haflongbar and other members of the Dimasa community who joined this Tribal Council represented the emerging middle class interest of the society. Many of them had come into contact with the traders and contractors coming from the plains and had started their career as petty contractors, suppliers or as business partners with the plains people. The responsibility of safeguarding the Dimasa interest naturally fell on them and they submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi committee and demanded the appointment of a boundary commission to fix the boundaries of N.C. Hills in such a way that all the Dimasas living in the adjoining areas could be brought together.⁶² The Tribal Council also demanded that only bonafide inhabitants of the area should be permitted to participate in the political life of the sub-division and law and regulation passed by the Central or Provincial Legislature should not be applied to the hill areas without the consent of the M.L.A.s from the area concerned. Along with these political demands, the Tribal Council also demanded that there should not be any interference with the cultural life of the tribes. Thus the first vocal assertion of the identity of the Dimasas and other tribal communities of N.C. Hills dates back to the memorandum of the Tribal Council. During this transitional period the vast

⁶¹ D. Doley, 'Tribal Movements in the North-Eastern Region', in K.S. Singh (ed.), *Tribal Studies of India Series T 185- Antiquity to Modernity In Tribal India*, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 1998, pp.39-40.

⁶² P.S. Misra, 'Identity Consciousness among the Dimasas of Assam' in B. Pakem (ed.), *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in Northeast India*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990, pp.192-193.

majority of the Dimasas were in the dark about the political developments taking place in the country.⁶³

During British rule, the Dimasas living in this excluded area of N.C. Hills and Mikir hills had no connection with the people outside the district. Geographical and political isolation of the district had its impact on the Dimasas and they remained untouched by the wind of change blowing elsewhere. The origin of modern N.C. Hills dates back to 29th April, 1952 when N.C. Hills District Council was inaugurated.⁶⁴ This process of initiation by the beginning of the fifties germinated a modern outlook among the Dimasa elites. But the District Council was not able to perform and implement programmes for the socio-economic development of the Dimasas of North Cachar Hills.

The relations between the people of Assam plains and the hill-men have always been one of obligatory convenience. Politically, culturally and also economically the thickly populated and more advanced plains of Assam have always dominated the ignorant, poverty stricken and very thinly populated Assam hills. The people of the Assam plain have always felt and acted superior to the hill-men and the hill men having been looked down upon are obliged to feel neglected, distant and inferior. This complex being the traditional trait of the larger Indian communities, their attitudes towards the Indo-Mongoloid tribes are allowed to develop and nurture their genius in their own way and win the respect of the larger Indian communities.⁶⁵ The pre-conceived notion that the tribals need to be looked after and their traditions and cultures assimilated to the traditions and cultures of the majority Indian or the so called 'national mainstream' is a national blunder which only kills the drives and initiatives of the tribals. The traditions and cultures of the Indo-Mongoloid tribes are Indian and they must be allowed to develop unhindered. This is the cry of the Dimasas of Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills), Karbi Anglong, Nagaon and Cachar District.

⁶³ Ibid, p.193.

⁶⁴ P. S. Misra, *Sequences of Development in North East India*, op. cit., p.142.

⁶⁵ P.S. Datta, *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p. 70.

Inequality between different tribal groups or culturally distinct regions does not by itself spur the development of communal or national consciousness. Most of the tribal communities are remote from urban lifestyles and only marginally affected by new educational opportunities and new means of mass communication and transportation. The locally powerful economic, religious, and political elites find it to their advantage to cooperate with external authorities and adopt the language and culture of the dominant ethnic group in order to maintain or enhance their own power.⁶⁶ But a section of educated middle class Dimasa youths were interested to work for the development of community.

At present, educated middle class Dimasa youths are trying hard to adjust themselves to the new socio-economic order of the day. In their traditional set up, life was without any competition and tension. But the process of modernization has exposed them to complicated and competitive world order. The complexities of a changed socio-economic set up have generated social tension and apprehension. The norms of the traditional Dimasa society are being shattered every day by the onslaught of modernization.⁶⁷

Though language has all along remained a mobilizing symbol of nationality formation of the Dimasas, Dimasa leaders could not make much headway in convincing the authorities to give due place to their language. On 12 May, 1985 a goodwill mission financed by the State Government and arranged by the Bodo-Dimasa languages was held with Sri S.C. Hojai, the chairman of the District Council in the chair. Prominent Dimasa leaders and intellectuals and writers participated in the deliberations of the Seminar and the Dimasa leaders agreed to evolve common Bodo text books for the Dimasa speaking learners of North Cachar Hills.⁶⁸ The representative from the Dimasa community unanimously agreed to introduce Bodo as additional subject in primary stage, Bodo as third language in Secondary Stage from the current session and Bodo as medium of instruction from 1986.

⁶⁶ Ibid, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁷ P. S. Misra, *Sequences of Development in North East India*, op. cit., p.147.

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp.146-147.

Dimasa leaders who had been demanding the introduction of Dimasa in the primary schools suddenly in 1986 have opted for Bodo. The Bodos and the Dimasas originally belong to the same race and there are some similarities in their language. Due to slow development of Dimasa language, the Dimasa leaders decided to introduce Bodo as the medium of instruction from 1986. But due to strong opposed from the common Dimasa people, Bodo language was not introduced in the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council as a medium of instruction. Dimasa as a language is not yet developed enough to be used as medium of instruction at the Secondary level.

Due to the absence of powerful educated leaders, a handful of Dimasa power elites could play havoc in the political and social life of the community. But the scenario changed in the beginning of the seventies and a group of educated, first generation graduates have come forward to mould the destiny of the Dimasas. These educated middle class are not involved in District Council politics. Rather they were critical of the achievements of the District council for the socio-economic development of the Dimasa community.

These new educated middle class has taken many initiatives for the unity and development of community. The publication of first Dimasa newspaper, 'Waimijing' in 1979 is one of the landmark in the history of Dimasa social transformation. Right from the very first issue published on 24 June, 1979 this paper started championing the cause of the Dimasas. Dimasa educated middle class are very critical of the present form of industrial development of the district. They think that industrialization will not benefit the local people. On 24 May, 1980 'Waimijing' published the following news: "NEEPCO malaini hatani subungse hamlailai lab sguba, erani subung muchibo rijaoya." (People coming from outside have derived all benefits from NEEPCO and the people of this district got nothing.) Referring to the proposed cement factory at Garampani, the newspaper feared that it would also go the NEEPCO way. Dimasa elites favour industrialization of their district but dislike the idea that outsiders should come in to grab jobs. There is acute dearth of trained personnel among the Dimasas and other tribal groups of N.C. Hills and hence the Fruit Preservation Centre at Boro Haflong and NEEPCO at Umrangshu had to recruit

people from other places. It is a pity that the lone Junior Technical School started by the Government of Assam at Haflong had to be closed due to the non-availability of students. In the session 1980-81 the teachers of the school outnumbered the students.⁶⁹

The Dimasa educated middle class also resent the flow of raw materials from North Cachar Hills to other districts. When N.C. Hills District Council agreed to lease the bamboos of the district to Hindustan Paper Corporation in 1980 there was a strong public resentment and the Dimasa youths mobilized the village people against the agreement. The youths pressurized the Executive Committee of the District Council to cancel the agreement. On 24 July, 1980 'Waimijing', the local newspaper published the following news item: "N.C. Hills ni wabon serenee" (who owns the bamboos of N.C. Hills?) and deplored the supply of bamboos to the paper mills situated outside the district.⁷⁰

As members of a newly conscious ethnic group educated Dimasa middle class are faced with the crisis of identity, and being confronted by such a challenge, they have harked back to the past. Dimasa Jalairaoni Hoshom (Dimasa Youth Organisation), a non-political forum of educated Dimasa youth was formed in 1972.⁷¹ It is a cultural organisation with its headquarter at Haflong. Since its inception it has been demanding the preservation of Dimasa historical monuments and the adoption of Dimasa language at the primary level in N.C. Hills. Dimasa historical monuments of Dimapur and Maibong are in a deplorable condition and the educated Dimasa youths are very agitated on this point. In 1978, the District Council gave some new settlements to a few non-tribals which caused resentment among the Dimasas. In its annual general meeting on 24-6-79 'Dimasa Jalairaoni Hosom' passed a resolution urging upon the authority to stop giving undesirable settlement to outsiders¹⁰. The annual conference of this organisation is organised in various places of the district, and besides intellectual deliberations, it provides a common platform to the Dimasa youths to voice their hopes, aspirations and apprehension. Branches of this organisation are found in almost all the Dimasa villages and they arrange

⁶⁹ P.S. Misra, *Sequences of Development in North East India*, op. cit., p.145.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.146.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 146.

traditional cultural programmes to revive the traditional folk art and culture of the Dimasas. The publication of first Dimasa news paper Waimijing in 1979, received active patronage from this youth organisation.

The educated middle class youths of Dimasa has formed one more organization to work for the interest of the Dimasas. Dimasa National Organisation which was formed in 1979.⁷² The organisation in its first general session held in March 11, 1979 passed a resolution demanding the preservation of ancient relics and monuments of the Kachari Kings lying in various places of Assam and other parts of North Eastern States especially at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur. The executive committee of this organisation consists of Dimasas belonging to the plains and the hills. Important Dimasa leaders like Sri Nandamohan Barman (President), Sri Brojendra Langthasa (General Secretary) were connected with this organisation and this was the first attempt to unite all the Dimasa living in different areas under a common umbrella.⁷³ Dimasa lawyers like Sri Anil Kumar Barman of Cachar, the then Minister of Assam Sri Sonaram Thaoson of North Cachar Hills and the delegates from Nagaland pledged to work for a cultural and social unification of all the Dimasas.

In the plains Cachar District of Assam, the Dimasas of Cachar (Barmans of Cachar) formed 'Nikhil Cachar Haidimba Barman Samity' in December 31, 1945. The Nikhil Cachar Haidimba Barman Samiti, put forward a political demand in 1980 for the reorganisation of the Dimasa speaking areas of the North East. This organisation believes in the concept of greater Dimasa nationality and opines that the existence of the Dimasas will be in danger unless all the Dimasas are brought under a single administrative unit. Consequently, basing upon geographical facts and historical evidence, the organisation demands that the southern part of Nagaon district including Howraghat, Jamunamukh, Dabaka, Lanka, Hojai, Namti, Jogijan and the area from Dimapur to Dhansiri should be included in the proposed administrative unit. It also threatened prolonged agitation in the event of the non-fulfillment of its demand. Though in practice the organisation, did not take the path of agitation, its demand

⁷² Ibid, p.143.

⁷³ P.S. Misra, *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North-East India*. op. cit., p. 195.

for the reorganisation of the Dimasa speaking areas has once again revived the urge for political and cultural supremacy among the Dimasas of Assam.⁷⁴

The Dimasas of Cachar also formed 'Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad' in 1975 to promote the cultural life of the Dimasas of Cachar. It also proposed to build a 'Dimasa Sanskriti Bhavan' at Silchar which would be a center for the promotion of Dimasa art and culture. It was due to the persistent endeavour of this Parishad that the Archaeological Survey of India took necessary action for the preservation of the 'Bishnu Mandir' of Borkhola 'Barohali Pukur' in Bihara and the two 'Shibtilas' of Haritkar and Sonai in Cachar.⁷⁵ Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad also demanded for the introduction and accommodation of Dimasa Programme in the Silchar Doordarshan Kendra. Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad claims that the Dimasas are indigenous community of Cachar District and was the ruler of erstwhile princely state of Cachar. The remains of ancient monuments at different places of the districts are its evidences. In consideration of the above facts, programmes in Dimasa language was introduced in the All India Radio, Silchar at the time of its inception in 1972.⁷⁶ And since then the programme at Silchar Radio Station has been continuing and nicely covering the areas of Barak Valley including N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong District. The Silchar Doordarshan Kendra was established in 1992, but the programmes of Dimasa community are yet to be introduced and accommodated. As a result, Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad demanded to initiate action for introduction and accommodation of Dimasa programme to the Station Director, Silchar Doordarshan Kendra, on 7th August, 2003.

Under the leadership of Sri Surech Chandra Barman, Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad also submitted a memorandum to Sri Tarun Gogoi, the Chief Minister of Assam, vehemently opposing the naming of third Barak Bridge at Ranighat (in cachar district), after late Altaf Hussain Mazumder Ex. Minister, P.W.D. Assam. Ranighat is a historical place where queen Induprova built a temporary palace and lived there after the assassination of her husband Raja Govindachandra, the last Dimasa king of

⁷⁴ P.S. Misra, *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North-East India*. op. cit., p.196.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.196

⁷⁶ *Memorandum to the Station Director, Silchar Doordarshan Kendra, Submitted by Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad, 07/08/ 2003.*

the erstwhile princely state of cachar. The ‘Rani’(queen) used the ghat for which the place still goes by the name of Ranighat. For this reason the Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad has been demanding for naming the bridge as Rani Induprova Bridge since the laying of foundation stone of the bridge.⁷⁷

There are various associations among the Dimasa community which have been working to maintain the distinct identity of the Dimasas. In Karbi Anglong ‘Karbi Anglong District Dimasa Association’ with its headquarter at Diphu was formed in 1975. It has a Dimasa cultural club at Diphu where meetings and cultural programmes are held to promote the cultural identity of the Dimasas.⁷⁸ In Nagaon district, ‘Bordolong Hiramba Club’ established in 1979 plays a significant role in promoting the cultural identity of the Dimasas living in the Lanka area of the Nagaon district. Its publication, Hiramba Khurang, a monthly journal published from Bordolong, Nagaon promotes the literary pursuits of the Dimasas living in Nagaon. The Dimasas refer to the Lanka region as Dembra. In October, 18th, 1979 a ‘Dembra Dimasa Hosom’ styled as ‘Bordolong Lankabhata Anchalik Tribal League’ was formed to protect the interest of tribals in general and of the Dimasas in particular. Shri Bhagya Dibragede and Shri Umesh Karigapsa, both belonging to the Dimasa community of Nagaon were elected the President and the Secretary respectively of this Tribal League. One of the objectives of this League was to forge an alliance with other tribal organisations of the neighbouring districts.⁷⁹ But none of these organizations demanded separate unit or autonomy for the Dimasas.

In the early nineties, the leaders tried to raise one student organization All Dimasa Students Union (ADSU) as a counterpoise to the growing influence of the mainstream students’ organization among the Dimasas, ‘Dimasa Students Union’ (DSU) which aligned with the ASDC movement. That student’s outfit could not prevent the DSU taking the centre stage in the Karbi politics. However, the instance of Karbi Students Association in Karbi Anglong provided an inspiration to the Dimasa Youth to repeat the same in North Cachar Hills too. In 1996, they won

⁷⁷ *Memorandum to Shri Tarun Gogoi*, Chief Minister of Assam, submitted by Dimasa Sanskriti Parishad, 2004.

⁷⁸ P.S. Misra, *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North-East India*. op. cit., p. 196.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.196

elections in the Council winning almost all seats in the Dimasa dominated areas.⁸⁰ The Maibang Valley, the heartland of the Dimasa political resurgence returned members to the Council under the banner of the ASDC.

From the early nineties, it became clear that the Congress leaders in the hills were alarmed to see the rise of the alternative base of power in the hills opposing the long rule of the leaders. The district council election was deferred on some unsustainable grounds from 1992 to 1996. Among many one plea was that the electoral roll was not finalized. The other plea was that the law and order situation was not conducive to hold election.⁸¹ It was, in fact, an attempt to arrest the growth of the opposing forces in the hills. Even their patronization for Dimaraji could not prevent their decimation in the District Council election held in 1996. The ASDC came to power and Prakanta Warisa, a young man barely out of the college, became the new Chief Executive Member of the Council. The Dimasa political opinion in the hills was then veering round the young leadership that came to power sweeping aside the deeply entrenched old leadership from power. The general feeling of the observes is that the ASDC demand for the Autonomous State was answered with demand for the Dimaraji, meaning the Dimasa state.⁸²

During the early period Dimasa youths adopted the constitutional path for the fulfillment of their demands. Under the banner of the All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) they launched the movement for a separate state 'Dimaraji'. To fulfill their demand of a separate state i.e. 'Dimaraji', the ADSU tried to get support from common Dimasa people. Leaders believed that without the support of common Dimasa people, the 'Dimaraji' movement could not be a successful movement. Therefore, the ADSU leaders used to communicate with the Kunang (village Headman) of Dimasa villages of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaland, Hailakandi and Cachar Districts to get support in favour of a separate state movement. It has been found that in most of the cases, Khunang of Dimasa villages did not know about the programmes and goals of the movement, they supported.

⁸⁰ Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Political Economy of North-East India*, T. Bhattacharjee, Silchar, 2004, p. 181.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 182.

⁸² Ibid, p. 182.

Dimasa activist organizations failed to utilize societal endowments and turn these networks into a hotbed of support as efficaciously as their Bodo counterparts could do during Bodoland movement. Two important reasons may be cited to explain the limited capabilities of the Dimasa Students' Union (DSU) to establish strong movement-supporter networks. First, the organization like All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU),⁸³ Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee, the protagonists of the Dimaraji movement, functioned mostly as centralized bodies. Ever since its emergence in the 90s, Dimasa Students Union remained numerically small, weak and centralized with membership of a few hundred activists and volunteers across the district of North Cachar Hills. Majority members of Dimasa Students Union were organized into a single unit with an executive committee, consisting of the president, general secretary and the spokesperson, which operated mainly from a central office located in Haflong (North Cachar Hills).⁸⁴ The central committee was assisted by student activists and volunteers, responsible for all kinds of mobilization activities related to local organization and information campaigns, propaganda, publication and communication of movement ideologies and the overall program of the organization during the agitation. The centralized structure, however, prevented All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) from organizing a mass-based rebellion. Absence of decentralized units at the grassroots level limited the scope of All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) to dispense its mobilization activities beyond the district-level unit. This also hindered the prospects of the organization to forge alliances with the local people across a wider geographical range of the Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills District).

Geographical factors and the settlement pattern of the Dimasas had also influenced the mobilization for autonomous state, i.e. 'Dimaraji'. The Dimasas are mostly concentrated in Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills) of Assam. High degree of concentration of the group in contiguous areas, however, did not facilitate the spread of popular mobilization, because large parts of this region are hilly and difficult to access easily.

⁸³ Pahi Saikia, op. cit., p.170.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 170.

The geographical conditions of the Dima Hasao District, posed challenges for All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) to develop a significant following amongst the local Dimasas. The geographical condition was one of the major obstacles that paralyzed the ADSU when the organization leaders tried to articulate their political agenda, spread the movement ideas and seize the opportunities to create strong vertical networks. As a result, All Dimasa Students' Union failed to garner enough logistical support of the people to launch a mass-based campaign.

Dimasa identity based on these ethno-cultural symbols was, therefore, used as a collective action frame by Dimasa nationalists, and was propagated as incompatible or rather antithetical in relation to the identity of the Assamese. Cultural differences and past autonomy of the Dimasas were consistently used to organize around a collective action frame to regain autonomous political status. Ethnic appeals of the Dimasa activists along these lines appeared to have a mixed impact on mobilization. All Dimasa Students' Union began its orientation in a language that people could understand: the advantages of supporting the new set of political leaders in their fight for the common good and improving their current socio-economic situation in the proposed political setup.⁸⁵ The activists, however, failed to mobilize people in huge numbers by using such rhetoric. Political campaigns (demonstrations, protest marches, strike etc.) organized during the movement remained relatively focused in selected areas of North Cachar Hills, particularly Haflong, the administrative headquarters of the district. In general, there was much less mobilization in areas like Maibong in the southern part of the district. Even the demonstrations that took place in Haflong failed to have a large following of the local Dimasa population. One of the most important reasons that explain such limited effectiveness of ADSU's activist campaign as compared to All Bodo Students Union was its centralized organizational structure and lack of decentralized communicative networks. This posed a major challenge to the ADSU to spread its ideologies or to muster immense support or collaboration of the civilian population.

After 1993 the ADSU leaders like, Dhiraj Kanti Barman, Sanjay Barman, Sanmoni Kemrai, Lajo Daolaguphu, Genga Lapthaisa has started meeting with the

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 175.

mass Dimasa people to seek their support for separate state movement. The ADSU did not have access to all Dimasa inhabited areas. To communicate with the mass people and for mobilization in some such areas it was dependent on the Khunag (Headman) of Dimasa villages. The remote areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and Cachar District, ADSU leader Mr. Sanmoni Kemprai and Lojo Daolaguphu considered foot march as the best way to mobilize people and in the beginning of the movement mobilization was attempted through this medium. The ADSU leaders- Sanmoni Kemprai, Lojo Daolaguphu, Dhiraj Kanti Barman had covered a vast area of North Cachar Hills on foot. In all such programmes the village Khunang had played a significant role.

The leaders of the Dimaraji movement is generally drawn from the educated middle class family. At the initial stage, the movement was led by the intellectuals like writers, teachers, journalists, and leaders of different cultural associations of Dimasa community. But with the intensification of the movement the composition of the leadership gradually underwent changes. The students, the unemployed educated youths and petty business men came to the leadership of the Dimaraji movement.

The founding member of ADSU like, Dhiraj Kanti Barman was a newly B.E. pass out from NIT, Silchar, Sanajay Barman was just completed graduation from G.C. College, Silchar, Tridip Barman was a commerce graduate from Cachar College, Silchar, Lojo Daolagupu and Sanmony Kemprai was also a graduate from Gauhati University and other founding members of ADSU was college going students. Among these founding members of ADSU one thing is common that they are all educated and from middle class family.

But the mass Dimasa peoples of Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills), Karbi Anglong, Nagoan, Cachar and Dimapur (a place of Nagaland state) educationally, economically were very backward and they don't have the capacity to understand the goals of the movement and these mass peoples unconsciously participated in different mass rally, dharnas and strike in support of the separate state movement of 'Dimaraji'. These mass Dimasa people participated in various mass rally, dharnas and strike when they were asked to join in such activities.

An examination of the movement for Dimaraji reveals that the presence of integrated and localized networks that existed within the community were to some facilitated in influencing mobilization and recruitment of non-combatants for political action. Informal societal networks presumably served as important facilitators for movement participation. More precisely, community-based allegiances in the Dimasa society served as the basic infrastructure for collective actions where common grievances and strategies of resistance and protest networks were constructed and coordinated by activist organizations during the agitation. It has been discussed earlier that people joined the movement activities like demonstrations, public rallies and meetings, mostly because they were tied to each other through pre-existing community (horizontal) affiliations at the most local level, in the villages and urban areas, as a result of which group members were subject to a mix of persuasion (neighbours, friends, leaders), fear of social sanctions, genuine political preferences and sympathy for the activist organizations.

The ADSU leaders believe that for the success of the movement, there must participation of common men. They also highlighted the necessity of a women's organization. In the beginning of the movement, the Dimasa women's participation was very less. After 1993 the All Dimasa Students Union and Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee carried out numerous activities for the Dimaraji movement. They have given the priority to form a women's organization. Generally the Dimasa women are backward. So, it is difficult to approach and organize them. This task had to be accomplished by educated women. The founding member of ADSU Mr. Dhiraj Kanti Barman said that the ADSU movement would not be successful without the participation of women. He highlighted the importance of women in family and in society. Therefore, students union initiated and formed a women association 'Dhimaraji Mahila Samaj' (DMS) in 2nd May, 1993, at Dhansiri, Karbi Anglong and Miss Nijudi Diphusa was selected as President and Mrs Konika Jidung was selected the secretary of the organization. From the day of its formation the DMS members had remarkable contribution to organise the mass people in support of the Dimaraji movement.

Although women's participation in the Dimaraji movement was less in comparison to men, we can not ignore some of the women's effort in the movement. While leaders were delivering speeches in public meetings, women were engaged in refreshment and reception committees arranging food, water etc. Cooking food for the guests was one of their regular duties at the time of conferences and public meetings. The Dimasa women used to perform such duties at the back of the public glare.. Prior to the formation of the Dimaraji Mahila Somaj, there were hardly any women in leadership position. The Dimaraji Mahila Somaj was the first women organization in which a large number of women participated.

It has already been pointed out earlier that after 1994 a section of educated Dimasa youths adopted violent method under the banner of Dima Halam Daogah (DHD), to fulfill their demand for separate state 'Dimaraji'. So, they were need of supporters and cadres. Without dedicated cadres violent movement would not be successful one. So the organization leaders, like Pronob Nunisa, Dilip Nunisa and Joel Garlosa have started recruitment of cadres for the organization. Presence of strong societal networks partly increased the likelihood of people supporting the violent movement in large numbers. Considerable evidence to show that only a small minority of Dimasas actively joined as committed rebels or supporters of the movement. Most of the ordinary people are seems to be have been not well aware of the movement. The common people seems to have very little support to the movement. Some of the younger generation are reported to have joined the violent path because of their embittered feelings against the state. Some were motivated to join the rebel groups out of the effective ties to their co-ethnics, some for material gains, and the case of others there was a combination of both these motivations. Most of the common Dimasa people supported the movement without knowing the programmes and goals of the movement. They supported the movement just to be a part of the flow. Leaders of the movement used common Dimasas emotion and sentiment as an instrument to get their support for the movement of separate state i.e. 'Dimaraji'

The common people of Dimasa community like working class, farmers and peasantry remain passive or inert unless they are affected by ethnic conflict or ethnic

cleansing operations. Thus the demand for Dimaraji is mainly a demand of the newly educated middle class with which mass people do not have any direct contact nor their opinion has been sought. Thus, the demand for Dimaraji is mainly the demand of the educated middle class. The leaders of the movement have hardly any action plan for effecting any change in the life of the masses in case the demand for Dimaraji is ever fulfilled.