

## Chapter IV

# Courses and Consequences

After India's independence, both the United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills district was created by merging the Mikir Hills areas, Nogoan and Sibsagar districts and the North Cachar sub-division of the Cachar District in 1951. In 1970, the North Cachar Hills areas were separated and North Cachar Hills District was created. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1970 the new District of North Cachar Hills was inaugurated by Shri Chattra Singh Teron, the then Minister of Tribal areas Department, Government of Assam. On this occasion, M.M. Choudhury, the then Acting Chief Minister and later Chief Minister of Assam, B.C. Bhagawati, the then President, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and all the M.L.A.s and leaders of Mikir Hills district visited Halflong.<sup>1</sup> At the instance of the Acting Chief Minister and President, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) an informal meeting with the above mentioned gentlemen and the local leaders was held at the Halflong Circuit House in the afternoon of that day. At that meeting, the Acting Chief Minister, the President of the APCC and the Minister of Tribal Areas persuaded that the Mikir and the North Cachar Hills should not join the proposed sub-state Meghalaya and declared in bold terms that if it would remain in Assam, it would be given equal facilities for developing their own areas as would be enjoyed by the outgoing districts.<sup>2</sup> On the following morning, a formal meeting was held in the local Congress Bhavan and the same assurance was reiterated. Relying on the promise made by the highest authorities of the State Government and the Ruling Party, the two District Councils refrained from exercising their right of option to join the proposed Meghalaya Sub-state. For all, what they wanted was scope for

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<sup>1</sup> P. S. Datta, *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

developing themselves while preserving their own separate entities as tribes. But very soon, they were disillusioned. The promise was forgotten and no serious attempt was made towards the development of their areas.<sup>3</sup> Rather, the central grants under Art. 275 have always been misused apart from uniform mismanagement and negligence in all the levels of administration. The per capita expenditure of these two hill districts was much less than other hill areas of this eastern region.

Government of Assam, however, failed to satisfy their desire with the result that the Dimasas and the Karbi people began to demand a separate Autonomous State for the North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. Their apprehension was based on reality. They had not forgotten that in 1960, the Government of Assam had declared Assamese as the official language of the State ignoring the multilingual and multiethnic character of the state of Assam.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that the North-East is a mosaic of various societies consisting of tribes and races who remained aloof by their languages, cultures, traditions and customs. Several tribes in the North-East Region are in close proximity to the international boundaries and have ethnic and cultural affinity with the tribes across the border. Even during the British regime the hill areas of the North-East were not completely integrated with the political and economic systems of India. It was the Inner Line Regulation of 1874 which had strengthened their separatist attitude by separating the tribal areas from the rest of India.<sup>5</sup> After independence, the emerging middle class and the educated section in the tribal society took the lead to preserve their identities at any cost. Those sections who were politically conscious enough, obtained their goal by carrying on political agitation but those who got political consciousness at a later stage, are still struggling hard with the rising economic and political aspiration of the tribal areas and with the increasing disillusionment with the successive Government. Some real

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> C. Singh, *North-East India – Politics & Insurgency*, Manas Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> S.J. George, 'The Demand for Autonomy/Statehood in N.C. Hill and Karbi-Anglong: An Overview', in B.C. Bhuyan, *Political Development of the North-East*, Omsons publications, New Delhi, 1989, p. 82

and apparent demands for autonomy/statehood have come to the fore once again – as a panacea to all the problems being faced by the people – in the plains and hill tribal areas of the State.<sup>6</sup>

Although the arrangements under the Sixth Schedule seemed to placate the Dimasa elite, specific resentments soon emerged out of administrative anomalies and malfunctioning of the two sub-districts. After several rounds of meetings with the Dimasa elite, in order to break this deadlock, on 2 February 1970, the state government separated the two sub-districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, and finally constituted them as two separate and full-fledged civil districts of the state<sup>7</sup>. This was obviously done as part of the appeasement policy to keep them in Assam.

#### **First Phase of the movement was based on Dimasa identity (1967-1977):**

The creation of the districts seemed to be too late and too little to assuage the claims for autonomy. In the meanwhile, the Dimasa and the Karbi leaders shifted their demands from an autonomous area to the creation of a separate hill state. Consequently, the leaders and political organizations of these two groups combined their efforts and mobilized actively to amalgamate the two districts, i.e. North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong into a state under Article 244(A) of the constitution. It would be an autonomous and separate state from Assam.<sup>8</sup> Despite ethno-cultural dissimilarities, historical enmity and suspicion between the two groups, the leaders of these two groups fused their ethnic differences into a common tribal identity, in accordance to which they chose to fight from a combined platform for greater autonomy. As a part of their combined endeavour, the Karbi Students' Association (KSA), the North Cachar Hills Students' Federation (NCHSF) and the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), the main political party of the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills, stood as the main champions for a separate autonomous state movement. Later, they rallied

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> P.S. Datta, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> P. Saikia, *Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India*, Rutledge, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 155-156.

under the banner of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHDCOM).

Political mobilization of these groups for autonomy continued unabated, and gradually became more intense. The increasing consciousness among the educated middle class of two hill districts, can be linked to at least two important political developments in Assam- the promulgation of the Assam Language Bill by the state government in the 1960s and, second, the proposal to reorganize the adjoining areas of the Khasi-Jaintia-Garo Hills into a state called Meghalaya which would be separate from Assam's existing territories.<sup>9</sup> Once the government recognized the stirring calls from the neighbouring Khasis and Garos, the Dimasas and the Karbis escalated their claims for the creation of an autonomous state on a markedly parallel basis. Being inspired by the success of the Khasis and the Garos, the Dimasas and Karbis issued a joint statement to the government, titled 'Reorganization of Assam- Injustice Done to Mikir and North Cachar Hills District.'<sup>10</sup> Instead of delivering the proposed autonomous structure to these groups, the government put forth an alternative plan-either to join the newly formed state of Meghalaya or to remain in Assam and look forward to government's decision on the future prospects of an autonomous state. In the meanwhile, to allay the concerns of the agitating groups, the government offered to extend further powers to the existing administrative councils of the two districts.

The Dimasa and the Karbi leaders finally decided to disapprove of the idea of joining Meghalaya. Instead, they preferred to accept the other alternative, to remain as a part of Assam while accepting the proposal of further devolution of powers. The leaders believed that they would benefit from the provisions of district-level autonomy and till they waited for the ultimate decision of the state on the envisaged plan. Several other reasons were cited in a joint memorandum for considering the option to remain in Assam. The first and foremost concern raised by the leaders was related to relative socio-economic disadvantages of the Dimasas as well as the Karbis in comparison to the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. The

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.156.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.157.

literacy indices of these groups revealed that the percentage of literacy of the Khasis and Jaintias (27 percent approximately in 1961) weighed higher than that of the percentage of combined literacy rate of the Dimasas and Mikirs in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District (17 per cent approximately).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it appeared that by joining new hill state 'Meghalaya' the latter groups would not be in a better position than their present status of remaining as an autonomous unit within Assam. Moreover, the leaders were apprehensive about the inherent dangers of being culturally overwhelmed and dominated by the more numerous Khasis and the Garos, whom they felt would be more privileged with respect to entitlement of public employment and other opportunities. Cultural dissimilarities and political dominance of the Khasis and the Garos augmented the fears of the Dimasas and Karbis of being ethnically swamped.<sup>12</sup> Except for some shared Indo-Mongoloid physical traits, the latter two groups differ a lot from the Khasis and the Garos in terms of religion, social customs, traditional beliefs, and language. Khasis and Garos are mostly converted Christians (although they still retain earlier tribal beliefs), while the Dimasas and the Karbis are by and large followers of a syncretism, a mixture of Hinduism and traditional tribal beliefs.

In the early 1970s, the state government transferred the jurisdiction and control of several departments, including agriculture, public works, flood control, irrigation, and infrastructure, to the District Councils. Yet, ironically, this provision did not guarantee greater local autonomy, particularly political and financial autonomy. As an example, important personnel of the North Cachar Hills district council were to be appointed by the ruling party of the state government. This virtually meant that these officers would owe their loyalty to the state legislature and the ruling party in control of the levers of power at the state level, rather than being accountable to the people at the District Council.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the nomination of these officers, the state government had the power to appoint a bureaucrat to look after the affairs of the District Council. His rank was higher than the Secretary as well as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the council.

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<sup>11</sup> Census 1961.

<sup>12</sup> P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

Although this was greatly resented by then (1970) acting Secretary N.L. Daulaguphu and other members of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, the government felt that it was necessary to keep an eye on the Council's day to day affairs through its trusted employees.

With regard to financial autonomy, although the council was made liable to manage the funds allotted for various developmental purposes in North Cachar Hills, the former was hardly entrusted with the authority to plan or to reach at a decision on the required budgetary shares to meet its annual objectives. Section 13 of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution says that the estimated receipts and expenditures pertaining to an autonomous district which are to be credited to, or is to be made from the consolidated fund of the state, shall be first placed before the District Council for discussion and then after such discussion, be shown separately in the financial statement of the state to be laid before the legislature of the state. In reality, the stipulated condition in the constitution, its interpretation and actual implementation have been a matter of serious contention between the state government and the District Councils. Persistent complaints had been raised by members of the District Councils that most of the time they don't get a chance to discuss and deliberate on the financial budget before it gets formally presented each year during the annual budget session of the Assam State Assembly. They further claimed that this practice hardly left any room for them to deliberate on the issues laid out in the budget and finally take a decision that would serve the socio-economic interests of the local people of two hill districts of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. Regular functioning of the Autonomous Council had since been inseparable from the whims and caprices of the member's of the state's ruling parties. In essence, rather than serving as an institution of benefit distribution and empowerment of the Dimasa society, the Council was functioning more as a subordinate organ of the state government, with less power over policy-making and financial autonomy. The institution had become an arena of petty power politics between the local leaders and state paternalism with entrenched patronage links between the Council personnel and the ruling government.

### **Dimasa Students Activism -1977 onwards:**

The sequence of events following the malfunctioning of the District Councils in the late 70s is crucial to understanding the rise of a new set of tribal leaders, the student activists. Much as the Bodos and Misings, the Dimasa and the Karbi students' leaders found the 80s as the high time to concretize their demands and respond to the state with radical politics. Rising frenzy of the Dimasas and Karbis at this point was stimulated by the decisive weight of majority identity politics after the anti-foreigners agitation of the 80s.

In December 1985, the Peoples' Democratic Front (PDF), a political party of the Karbis, fought the elections to the State Legislative Assembly of Assam in alliance with the AGP, the party dominated by the majority Assamese. One of the candidates of the PDF, Haliram Terong, won the elections and was chosen as a representative of Karbi Anglong district. Mr. Terang served in the AGP government as the Minister of State for Agriculture and Irrigation.<sup>14</sup> Barely six months after the elections, the delicate balance between the PDF and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was severely offset by AGP's allegedly growing anti-minority leanings and its espousal of ethnic policies on behalf of the Assamese-speaking majority. In the wake of this rising acerbity, the partnership between the tribal and non-tribal students' leadership ended. In January 1987, as a first reactionary move, the Karbi Anglong Students' Association and Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), Dimasa Students' Union started their protests and called for a 100 hour strike in the hill district of Karbi Anglong.<sup>15</sup> The strike was followed by small-scale and isolated incidents of attacks on Assamese-speaking inhabitants in the district and disruption of major roads communication connecting the hill districts and the rest of the Assam. As a mark of protest against the AGP government's political latitude, the agitators also pledged to boycott the visit of the Chief Minister, Prafulla Kr. Mahanta, to North Cachar Hills District that was scheduled on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 1987.

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<sup>14</sup> P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 159.

After a year of abortive attempts, in March 1988, two tribal leaders, including Terang, resigned from the government, showing immense dissidence on state's refusal to give serious consideration to their growing problems. The proximate cause of these resignations was, however, stated to be the refusal of the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Council, Jayanta Rongpi, to discuss the terms of the budget in front of the Council Members.<sup>16</sup> In an open criticism of the AGP government, Terang revealed the state of their (minority leaders') standing in the ministry and remarked thus, 'I do not recall taking a single executive decision in my six months as minister in the government of AGP'.<sup>17</sup>

Towards the late 80s and early 90s, after several years of activism and a few rounds of discussions with the AGP government and later with the Congress ministry, a section of ASDC, Karbi Students Association (KSA), North Cachar Hills Students Front and Dimasa Students Union (DSU) showed signs of withdrawing the agitation in July 1992. The decision was taken in the wake of a series of deliberations and Hiteswar Saikia's assumption of office as the Chief Minister of the newly formed Congress government. Despite these initiatives, the Congress government took an abrupt decision in November 1992 to dissolve the District Council of Karbi Anglong. This decision placed the movement leaders in an ambivalent position.<sup>18</sup> Conflicting propositions prevailed on the dissolution of the Council. While the government lashed out at the Council for mismanagement of funds and corruption, the ASDC chided the government for its inability to release the funds at the appropriate time, as a result of which their proper utilization was prevented. Contrary to the state's accusations of misuse of the unexpended portion of the financial resources by the Council members, the latter disputed these allegations and finally filed a petition against the state government in the court. Simultaneously, the leaders decided to revive the movement by another sequence of protest calls in early 1993.

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<sup>16</sup> Terang's Charge against AGP Government, *The Hindu*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> According to Sub-Para 2 of Para 16, *Sixth Schedule*, Governor can dismiss if he is satisfied. These powers were earlier exercised by the AGP in 1986.

In the meanwhile, the High Court declared its order which went in favour of the movement leaders. Consequently, the State Government, the Union Government and the movement leaders struck a deal in April 1995. Although the memorandum fell far short of the statehood demand, it was envisaged as a design that would assign more powers to the existing Council members. Accordingly, the government amended the Sixth Schedule, extended some of the district's legislative as well as executive powers to the Council, and proposed to transfer the administration of nearly 30 additional departments to the District Councils. The agreement specifically mentioned that 'the state government will, before the beginning of the financial year, give an indication to the Councils regarding the overall financial resources allocated to each district. Thereafter, the Councils were authorized to prepare and pass their own budget and forward it to the government. This practically meant that the councils would be duly consulted if there was any need of change to the initial budgetary proposals. In sum, in the mid-1990s, the government offered what the Karbis and the Dimasas had been asking for since the 1950s.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Phase of Rising Militancy in Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills) and Karbi Anglong (1985-2009):**

Paradoxically, the lag between the government's 1995 declaration to provide more powers to the Autonomous Councils of two districts and their genuine execution made the efforts at settlement futile because, in the meanwhile, the Dimasa and Karbi activists shifted their demands from an autonomous area to separate federal units for the two groups. The period also witnessed a nascent form of militant nationalism engineered by student leaders in the mid-90s.<sup>20</sup> Organizations like the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) were formed by these leaders and they escalated their demands for separate states exclusively meeting the interests of the Dimasas and the Karbis. The proximate causes of their radicalization and armed opposition had to do with the changing political circumstances in the state politics after Asom

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<sup>19</sup> P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Gana Parishad came to power in 1985<sup>21</sup> and the failure of the decentralized institutions in the hill districts of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. Inadequate infrastructural development, poor telecommunication facilities, lack of industrial growth in the region were some of the glaring issues that gradually fed into the accumulated grievances of the Dimasas and played a role in radicalization. Formation of states like Mizoram in the 80s also set the precedent for other minority groups in the region to push for their radical demands.

The unified platform of resistance by the Dimasas and the Karbis was, however, denounced in the late 80s and more avowedly in the 90s, when Dimasa ethno-political organizations, such as the All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU), the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee (DRDC), Dimaraji Mahila Samaj (DMS) and their Karbi counterparts Karbi Students' Association (KSA) moved away from their past partnership and advocated their separate ethno-nationalist doctrines. At this point, the Dimasas and Karbis interpreted their movements not in terms of just autonomy, but as requiring absolute separation of North Cachar Hills District and Karbi Anglong District from Assam's territory, as two different entities. At first the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) and later Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) served as powerful instruments of the rebel movements of the Dimasas.

One of the reasons for the Dimasas and the Karbis parting their way is the ideology. In 1990s the situation took a violent turn with the emergence of armed groups. In the mid-1990s two armed outfits viz. the Karbi People's Front and Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) were formed with the demand for the creation of a separate state. In 1999 these two groups merged to form the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) with a demand to create a separate state covering Karbi Anglong and the contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Assam and Meghalaya under Article 371 of the constitution. They demanded the expulsion of those who came to Karbi Anglong after 1951, issuance of domicile certificates to

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<sup>21</sup> H.C. Kalita, *Regional Politics: The Role of Asom Gana Parishad*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, 2011, p. 166.

non-Karbis who have arrived to Karbi Anglong before 1951 and introduction of inner line permit and economic package for the region.<sup>22</sup>

Simultaneously, in mid 90s North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong became the operation ground of another militant outfit the Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) demanding the creation of Dimaraji comprising the Dimasa inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Cachar district, parts of Nagaon district and parts of Dimapur district of Nagaland.<sup>23</sup> Other militant organizations such as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Issac Muivah (NSCN- IM) were also active in Karbi Anglong. These militant groups are not only opposed to the non-tribals, but were also challenging each other over issues ranging from territory and ancestral homeland for a larger political space in the district.

Second reason was the demand of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). The Dimasas as a whole are living in and around the regions of Barak Valley, North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Cachar, Hailakandi, Nagaon in Assam and the Dhansiri area in Nagaland State. These areas were not included in the demand of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). The ASDC demand included only the North Cachar Hills and the Karbi Anglong districts. Apart from that there is lot of dissimilarities between the Dimasas and the Karbis. The Karbis “belong to the Kuki-Chin group of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. Their original habitat was somewhere in north-western China near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and the Howang-ho-rivers.”<sup>24</sup> Chatterjee classified the Karbis with those tribes, which formed the connecting link between the Nagas and the Kuki clans. The preponderance of their affinities lies with the latter, that is, with the Kukis.<sup>25</sup> It is,

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<sup>22</sup> Uttam Bathari, ‘Land, Laws, Alienation and Conflict: Changing Land Relations among the Karbis in Karbi Anglong District’, in Walter Fernandes and Sanay Barbora (eds.), *Land, People and politics Contest over Tribal Land in Northeast India*, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, 2009. p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 157.

<sup>24</sup> G.N. Das, *Traditional Tribal Institutions of the Hill Areas of Assam*, District Research Officer, Diphu, 1993. p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> S. K. Chatterjee, as quoted by S.T. Das in *Tribal Life of North-Eastern India: Habitate-Economy-Customs-Traditions*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi, 1986, p. 164.

therefore, assumed that the Karbis belong to the Kuki-Chin group of the Mongoloid stock.

On the other hand, the Dimasas, a section of the Bodos, now popularly known as the Kacharis.<sup>26</sup> The term 'Kachari' is usually used to denote a large number of tribal communities originally belonging to the same stock of people, living both in the hills and the plains of Assam. The people whom we commonly designate as 'Kachari' are not known by any common name, but by their own tribal designations.<sup>27</sup> The Dimasa and the Karbi language is also different from one another. Thus, if the demand of separate state for the Dimasas and the Karbis comes true, then what would be the official language of the state was also a big question. Both the Dimasas and the Karbis might like to have their own language to be the official language of state.

Third reason is the numerical strength of both the communities. The Karbis of Karbi Anglong outnumber the Dimasas of Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills) and Karbi Anglong districts taken together. According to 2001 census the Karbi population in Karbi Anglong is 353,513, whereas the Dimasa population in Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong together only 110,976<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the Dimasas in general were apprehensive of Karbi domination in the proposed autonomous state comprising NC Hills and Karbi Anglong. It was, perhaps, the most important factor for the two groups parting their ways.

However, before the emergence of rebel organizations like Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) and Dima Haram Daogah (DHD), the All Assam Dimasa Students' Union and Dimaraji Demand Revival Committee led an unarmed struggle and used less disruptive methods of protest. To reiterate, the late 1960s witnessed ethnic mobilization led by the Dimasa leaders for a kind of redistributive justice that would enhance their existing power and collective status. Mobilisation became quite intense in the 1970s and 1980s when some prominent leaders of the

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<sup>26</sup>J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North East India*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 4-5.

<sup>27</sup> S.K. Barpujari, *History of the Dimasas*, Autonomous Council, Haflong, 1977, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> 2001 Census.

Tribal Conference, like Daulagaphu, Langthasa, Rongpi were joined by an increasingly large number of young and enterprising student leaders belonging to organizations like the All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU), Karbi Students' Association (KSA) and Autonomous State Demand Committee.<sup>29</sup> The Dimasa and the Karbi leaders denounced the existing structures of power devolution, and intensified their campaign for early deliverance of extended autonomy. Since the late 1980s, ADSU and DRDC submitted a number of petitions and memorandums to the Assam government and the union ministry. The All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU) and the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee (DRDC) jointly submitted a memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, New Delhi in 1996, demanding a separate homeland for the Dimasas.<sup>30</sup>

Dimaraji is a long cherished aspiration of the Dimasa Indigenous People, one of the Indigenous Peoples in the North East India, the earliest known community in the region. It has been mentioned in previous chapter that as a consequence of numerous divisions of the Dimasa-Kachari territories, the Dimasas have been made a minority in several districts including Cachar, Karimganj (Barak Valley), Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, and Dimapur (Nagaland), all contiguous to North Cachar Hills. Although the Dimasas living in these areas share the same language, culture and religion, their constitutional status and recognition have widely varied.<sup>31</sup> While the Dimasas living in North Cachar Hills and Nagaland are recognized as Scheduled Tribe (Hills), those residing in Nagaon district, known as 'Hojai Kacharis' and Cachar district they are referred to as 'Barmans' have been enumerated as Scheduled Tribe (Plains). The very backbone of the glorious Dimasa nation has since been broken, displaced and ruined. The only way out for the existence of the Dimasas is to grant a full-fledged state called Dimaraji, to be created by carving out all the Dimasa inhabited areas from the districts of Cachar, Nagaon, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills and some portions of Dimapur.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> P. Saikia, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

<sup>30</sup> *A memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India*, submitted by the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee & the All Dimasa Students' Union, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> *ADSU memorandum submitted to the Home Minister*, Shivraj Patil, in 2005.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

The situation in Dima Hasao became worse after the rise of Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) an insurgent group of Dimasas. Armed resistance in the early 1990 manifested their disillusionment with the peaceful strategies adopted by their predecessors. In the beginning of the Dimaraji movement, the All Dimasa Students' Union has adopted the constitutional path of movement. Their movement strategy basically was submission of memorandums, rallies, dharnas, road strike, rail-roko, mass hunger strike. Initially they used to call for a bandh of 12 hour, 24 hour and 36 hour. By adopting these strategies they could not create any pressure on both state and central government for their autonomy demand. Due to the no response from both the state and the central government, the All Dimasa Students' Union has decided to form an insurgent group to pressurize the government. After three years of armed initiatives, DNSF's efforts were crushed by the security forces of the state. Dimasa National Security Force surrendered in 1994. As a result, most of the members, except its self-proclaimed commander-in-chief, Jewel Garlosa, relinquished their arms in 1995; barely a few months after their operation began in the 1990s. A few months later in the same year, the militants, however, reappeared. After much debate and deliberations within the Dimasa leadership, former rebel Jewel Garlosa and other prominent student leaders like Dilip Nunisa, Pranab Nunisa, including others, rejuvenated the rebel organizations and tried to absorb more young members into a newly formed armed organization called the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD).

Although the group was numerically small, with a cadre base of hardly a few hundred active members, this time, the rebel group was better armed and launched its militant activities more vigorously. The DHD operated primarily in North Cachar Hills. Material aid from Naga militant organizations like NSCN (IM) is considered to be one of the most important reasons for DHD's return to militancy also indicated that the rebel group had some amount of sympathy and support of the people of North Cachar Hills. Some people supported the DHD rebels because they believed in their ideas and their cause.<sup>33</sup> Ethno-nationalist ideology based on economic and cultural development, increased political power

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<sup>33</sup> P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

and representation of the Dimasas motivated some local Dimasas to support the rebellion. These issues had remained unfulfilled so far due to inefficient functioning of the North Cachar District Council. The DHD's promises generated some expectations for a better future. However, unlike the Bodos, the DHD rebels had a low level of support from the local people.<sup>34</sup> Previous wave of mobilization by the DSU activists seemed to be ineffective. These activists failed to engage in effective protest repertoires like huge mass demonstrations, widespread propaganda or establishing direct contacts like the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) activists, as a consequence of which the movement could gather moderate support and participation of the non-combatant population. Even the minimum level of support acquired by the movement activists seemed to have waned by early 2000. People were discontented with the shaky goals of the movement, particularly due to growing rivalries within the leadership during the second phase of the rebellion.

By the first few months of the year 2000, noticeable divergences of opinion developed between the top leaders of the militant outfit on the issue of top leadership positions. Conflict emerged when Pranab Nunisa, the former commander-in-chief of the insurgent organization, became the president after replacing Jewel Garlosa, a former founding member, who was otherwise deemed to have been in control of the organisation.

Garlosa was accused of being involved in anti-DHD activities, which was referred to as the prime reason why he was denied the leadership of the organization. In 2003, DHD disintegrated into two different militant outfits, whose command structures were centered on local elites who seemed to be rather disoriented from the original goals. Jewel Garlosa drifted from DHD and formed a dissenting clique under the banner of 'Black Widow' or DHD (Jewel Garlosa), on 31 March 2003, and continued skirmishes with the rival group and the state armed forces till June 2009, when two prominent leaders of the organization, Jewel Garlosa and his closest associate F. Dimasa, were arrested by the Indian security forces.<sup>35</sup> The other group DHD (Dilip Nunisa) entered into a ceasefire agreement

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

<sup>35</sup> *The Hindu*, Top Assam Militants Arrested in Bangalore, 5 June, 2009.

with the state and union governments in 2003. Its striking capabilities were extremely weak. The organization operated with cadre strength of barely 200 recruits. Some Council members were covertly linked with Garlosa and assisted the group with material support. The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the North Cachar Hills District Council, Mohit Hojai, former CEM Depolal Hojai and the Joint Director of the Social Welfare Department, R.H. Khan, had alleged links with the Black Widow. They supported Garlosa with financial assistance to maintain the outfit. Covert support provided by these Council officials arose out of personal motives. The Council members maintained good relations with Garlosa as it served their purpose to polarize and further undermine the cause of earlier activists' organizations. Black Widow was, therefore, used as a counter-force against the DHD (Dilip Nunisa). Jewel Garlosa, on the other hand, used violence more as a survival tactic and to indicate his presence in the valley. The group faced immense problems of receiving even the minimum assistance and supply of basic necessities from the local people. Consequently, the DHD –Jewel Garlosa group or Black Widow was engaged in high levels of extortions, kidnappings and random killings of local Dimasas, government officials and the members of the rival group, DHD (Dilip Nunisa). These methods were primarily used to forcibly collect funds, terrorize and coerce people to collaborate with the outfit. These tactics, however, proved to be extremely counter-productive as people felt more alienated and outraged by the coercive methods used by the DHD -Jewel Garlosa group to garner support of the local people.

Internal rivalries thus undermined the morale, military effectiveness and cohesiveness of the movement. The competition between DHD -Dilip Nunisa group and the DHD-Jewel Garlosa group was to maintain each group's sphere of influence within the local Dimasa community by means of coercion rather than by persuasion or ideational beliefs. This exhibited wavering commitment of the rebel groups to the original cause of the movement and, as a result, the leaders lost credibility and trust of the local people. Thus, the movement could not be a common people supported popular movement

The DHD, an armed organisation of Dimasas had problems of recruitment and thus operated with a relatively small group of cadres, probably less than 200 recruits, most of whom were earlier activists involved in the students' organization. Dima Halam Daogah's emergence was largely possible because of immense material support provided by National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), the main militant organization operating in Nagaland. Despite these external alliances, the organization could not withstand severe repression by the government.<sup>36</sup> Following their clandestine political activities to rebuild the organization by establishing closer links not only with National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) but also several other rebel outfits that were operating in the northeastern region. Although Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) managed to recruit approximately 400 local Dimasas, the organization could not develop into a strong and large, armed force.

In its second phase of rebellion, DHD tried to establish its ties with the common Dimasa people of Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills District), Karbi Anglong, Naogaon, Cachar and Dimapur (Dimapur is situated in Nagaland State). These efforts proved to be less effective to develop immense participation, primarily because of fragile vertical links that pre-existed since Dimasa Students' Union (DSU) mobilization in the 80s. Lack of good networks and weak communication with the common Dimasa people, weak strategies adopted by activist organizations reduced the capabilities of DHD to achieve a burgeoning support from the local people, an important asset that would have otherwise facilitated a relatively broad-based support for DHD's insurgent operations.

Apart from these factors, consistent flow of logistical support from local Dimasas for insurgent violence was prevented by intra group conflict. The DHD's internal politics was marked by outright conflict among the leaders and in turn proved to be organisationally disruptive. Internal factionalism that arose on the question of leadership became worse by the early part of 2000. Fight within the organization acted as a hindrance to provide credible guarantees to the people.

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<sup>36</sup> P. Saikia, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Ordinary people were often caught in the cross-fire of internecine conflict between the two wings of DHD- DHD (Dilip Nunisa) and DHD (Jewel Garlosa) or Black Widow.<sup>37</sup> Stiff competition emerged between these organizations to recruit local Dimasa youths (both male and female) and increase the organizational strength of each faction. This often led to forced recruitment of local Dimasa boys and girls into the guerrilla armies. Escalating differences nevertheless proved to be counter-productive for the movement and the rebel organizations, and, in turn, a relative triumph for the counter-mobilisation forces, the state. These organizations drifted away from the original goals of the movement of ‘Dimaraji state’ and instead engaged in a bitter and violent conflict with each other. In the face of intense fights within the same groups, the issue of separate Dimaraji seemed to have taken a backseat.

The state security forces on their part used this situation most strategically to carry out its counter-insurgency operations. Members of each faction were tactically used by the state agents to arrest or demobilize the actions of their counterparts in the rival group of the DHD-Dilip Nunisa versus the DHD-Jewel Garlosa. As leadership coherence visibly weakened, high levels of uncertainty and a crisis of legitimacy of the movement came to the fore. People’s perceptions, their attitudes and collective behaviour were largely shaped by these internal conflicts. No matter how strong the village networks were, lack of cohesion and conflict within the core leadership demotivated people to provide relentless support and cooperation to the rebel group.

In Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong autonomous councils some local Dimasas pointed out that initially they had some faith in the insurgent groups. However, substantial section of the Dimasa population was disgruntled by the fight between the two factions of Dima Haram Daogah (DHD). People of two autonomous councils condemned their actions and some clearly noted, people’s ‘hearts and minds for Dimaraji cannot be achieved by force and terror for long. If the leaders themselves are confused about their goals and fight for their own lives

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 176.

we have no reasons to relentlessly loyal to these organizations. What do we get in return from Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) ? How can they guarantee security to the whole community when they are struggling to save their lives from each other? Even if the District Council is flawed, we have no other alternative but to maintain good relations with the Council members and the government for small business contracts, local jobs, etc.’<sup>38</sup> Dissatisfaction with both the factions of DHD and the absence of alternatives also produced secret collaborations of some local Dimasas with pro-government security forces.

### **State Repression:**

The Indian state resorted to repression to deal with ethno- nationalist movements in the northeastern region based on the idea that only the dominant state and its armed representatives are capable of providing security to the people and handling the disorder emerging out of ethnic insurgencies. Implementation of centralized policies and employment of repressive strategies moulded the pattern of resistance of the Dimasas. Quite similar to the Bodo agitation, the government showed little inclination to accommodate the demands for Dimaraji state. It has been mentioned that by 1995, state armed forces had crushed the DNSF and virtually forced the rebels to surrender en masse. The rebel group seemed to have been almost eliminated. However, when DHD (offshoot of DNSF) re-emerged in its second phase of rebellion, state security forces increased their presence and became overwhelmingly visible in the region. Constant presence of the armed forces and their involvement in indiscriminate search operations in the valley were perceived by many as an ‘act of intrusion into the tranquil domains of the Dimasa community. For some, the sight of established barracks in the valley sensitized the notion that the region was a militarized zone.

Policing tactics to control the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) militants in North Cachar Hills District were highly influenced by counter-insurgency laws that had already been in use in Assam. Extraordinary legal rights to arrest and detain individuals without any warrant and on mere suspicion of being involved in any

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<sup>38</sup> This view was expressed by local villagers of N.C. Hills, Karbi Anglong and Cachar District.

disruptive or a terrorist act, prohibiting assemblage of five or more individuals, to carry firearms, ammunition or any other explosive substances, applying physical force on any individual considered to have violated social norms or involved in a cognizable offence, had been the quintessence of institutional policing methods employed by the state. Repression was marked by excessive intolerance and absence of any communication or accommodative intent between the security forces and the movement activists.

The state repression has influenced the patterns of Dimasa rebellion. There were two important effects—first, in the outcome of the movement and second, on the pattern of rebel violence. The state security forces changed their methods of repression from indiscriminate methods to careful selection of Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) rebels and their collaborators. Cases of indiscriminate methods of repression significantly lowered down as the state faced fewer constraints in identifying the rebels. Diminishing movement-supporter networks and internecine conflict between the two rival groups DHD-Nunisa and DHD-Garlosa or Black Widows significantly lowered the costs of rebel identification. The rank and file arrested from time to time and the detainees in police custody were invariably subjected to some amount of physical torture and violence. However, the type of arrests, forced surrender and state killings in this case was relatively calculated and selective. Targeted selection of the core members of Dima Haram Daogah (DHD), the intermediate supporters and sympathizers enabled the state security forces to coerce the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) to surrender and finally de-radicalize the movement.

Second effect of state repression was on the pattern of rebel violence itself. On 30 June 2000, Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) rebels staged a bold attack on state security forces in North Cachar Hills District, resulting in the deaths of six police personnel and injuries to two others. On 8 February 2001, Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) militants killed nine security personnel and injured three more in Dehangi, North Cachar Hills. On 9 December 2002, Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) carried out another daring attack on the assistant superintendent of police, two railway policemen and two other officials in North Cachar Hills. This pattern of violence

targeted on state agents continued throughout the rebellion, but the magnitude and intensities of these attacks remained considerably low.

In the violent movement for Dimaraji, the non-Dimasas were taken as the potential targets by Dima Haram Daogah (DHD). Targeted state repression weakened the ability of the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) rebels to attack state officials directly. Targeted repression is generally considered to be costly for the state agents, because it involves enormous efforts to obtain precise information about the rebels and their hideouts, especially if the latter are engaged in severe guerrilla tactics and if they blend in well with the civilian population. In the instant case, the process of identification was relatively easier. Information obtained from the rival groups of DHD facilitated precision in identifying, arresting and killing the rebels and their core associates during counter-insurgency operations. The rebels, in turn, exhibited defiance by changing their tactics of violence. Instead of directly confronting the security personnel, the rebel group began targeting non-combatants, particularly non-Dimasas living in North Cachar Hills. The next section presents the evidence of some of the selected incidents of targeted attacks on non-Dimasas, the Hmars.

### **Consequences of the Movement:**

The violent movement for 'Dimaraji' resulted in making other ethnic groups, the Zeme Nagas, the Hmars and the Nepalis living in the district of North Cachar Hills suspicious. They apprehended that if the DHD succeed in getting its demand for 'Dimaraji', fulfilled, they would be marginalized and would come under Dimasa domination. Consequently, they opposed the demand. Their opposition strained their relationship with the Dimasas. This strained relationship ultimately resulted in ethnic conflict in the districts of North Cachar Hills, and in some areas of Cachar District. Ethnic violence or conflict always has disastrous consequences. It often leads to the destruction of assets, loss of lives, breakdown of social order and norms, uprooting of the communities and finally displacement of large number of people from their original habitat. The innocent people lose lives, suffer injuries, their properties are looted. General atmosphere of insecurity among

the people prevail in conflict areas. The poor among the tribes suffered as the automatic guns roared in the hills. In this regard, the Hmar-Dimasa conflict is no exception. In the early part of 2003, the North Cachar Hills district and the district of Cachar witnessed one of the worst and longest spells of ethnic violence in Assam resulting in unquantifiable loss to these two districts of Assam.

On 5<sup>th</sup> March 2003, DHD extremists launched a massive and sporadic attack on two villages in Dima Hasao District (North Cachar Hills) where the Hmars lived. The attack forced nearly 800 Hmars to flee their villages and take shelter at a place called Lakhipur (Cachar District), which lies at the border of Assam and Manipur. Following this incident, on 26 March, Dimasas made fresh attacks on other Hmar villages in the vicinity and threatened them to leave these areas failing which the Hmars would face disastrous consequences.<sup>39</sup>

The Hmar-Dimasa conflict led to the loss of as many as 84 lives, which includes 35 Hmars and 49 Dimasas.<sup>40</sup> Two people from other Communities-one Nepali and one Kuki also lost their lives in the conflict. The conflict had resulted in burning of as many as 1146 houses (of which 429 of the Dimasas, 710 of the Hmars, 5 of the kukis and 2 of the Beharis). Of 1146 houses burnt, 737 houses fall under the North Cachar Hills District and 409 houses fall under the jurisdiction of Cachar district. It also resulted in the displacement of about 6619 persons in both the districts namely, North Cachar Hills and Cachar. There were 25 relief camps altogether. Of these relief camps, 13 were in Cachar, 4 were in North Cachar Hills district, 6 were in neighbouring state of Mizoram, 1 was in Manipur state and 1 was in the state of Meghalaya.<sup>41</sup> Besides, a large number of people from both the communities took shelter in the houses of their relatives. The Hmar-Dimasa conflict forced the people of both the communities to live in the relief camps in the most deplorable conditions.

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<sup>39</sup> P. Saikia, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>40</sup> *The Sentinel*, Thursday, dated-17<sup>th</sup> May, 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Biswajit Paul, *Ethnic Conflict and Displacement in North East India- A Case Study of Hmar – Dimasa Conflict*, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar, 2010, p. 65. (un-published thesis)

Again there was conflict between the Dimasas and the Karbis in Karbi Anglong District in 2005. This conflict was mainly a clash between DHD claiming to represent the Dimasas and the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) claiming to represent the Karbis. The clashes between these two groups in Karbi Anglong had spillover effects in the North Cachar Hills region. The Asian Centre for Human Rights estimated displacement of nearly 44,016 ethnic Karbis and Dimasas in Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills and Hojai sub-division under Nagaon district.<sup>42</sup>

To bring peace in the two hill districts, Peace Studies, has conducted a workshop which was held at Halflong, (Dima Hasao District) in December, 2005, providing a platform to all the stakeholders of peace in the district in voicing their grievances. Peace Studies brought together people from the administration like A.R. Laskar, S.P., N.C. Hills, Martin Teron, Ex-member, N.C. Hills Autonomous Council, J.K. Thaosen, Executive Member, N.C.Hills Autonomous Council, and Arun Chandra Halflongbar, Ex-EM, N.C.Hills Autonomous Council, student leaders like Prafulla Hafila, President, All Dimasa Students Union, insurgent outfits like B.C.Langthasa, President, Jadikhe Naisho Hosom (JNH) (Dimasa Apex Body), Debojit Thaosen, Legal Advisor and Spokesperson for JNH, Dilip Nunisa, Chairman, DHD, and from media like Diganta Das.<sup>43</sup> All these participated in the workshop put forward their opinion and came to the conclusion that if peace was to be maintained in Dima Hasao (N.C. Hills), what was necessary was that there should be a collective effort from all sections irrespective of their numerical strength whether majority or minority. Only a sustained effort toward peace building by all stakeholders can make Dima Hasao (N.C. Hills) prosper heralding all round development.

Although initiative was taken by the autonomous councils, peace eluded in Dima Hasao. In 2009 again, there was an ethnic clash between Zeme Nagas and Dimasas. Nearly 63 people belonging to both the communities were brutally killed

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<sup>42</sup> *Lessons Not Learnt by Assam: Ethnic Cleansing and Internal Displacement in Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills*, Asian Centre for Human Rights, 7 November 2005, p.2.

<sup>43</sup> A. Dutta and R. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 227.

between March and April 2009, out of which 39 were reported to be Nagas and 24 Dimasas.<sup>44</sup> These killings were accompanied by destruction to properties of the villagers, as nearly 228 houses owned by Nagas and almost 300 belonging to the Dimasa community were burnt down by suspected DHD and NSCN militants of the Dimasas and Nagas, respectively. The violence displaced approximately 11,737 people from their homes and property.<sup>45</sup> The displaced people took shelter in the relief camps provided by the Assam government. It appears that the ethnic clashes were engendered by the decision of the executive committee of North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council in February 2009 that the name of the district from North Cachar Hills be changed to Dima Hasao Raji, which means ‘Hill Kingdom of the Dimasas’. This was strongly resisted by the Zeme Nagas and other minority communities residing in the area, as they considered this move to be a calculative strategy used by the Dimasa leaders to consolidate power, homogenize the region and further legitimize their prevailing claims for a separate federal division in Dima Hasao (North Cachar Hills), called ‘Dimaraji’.

To normalize the situation in the hill district of Assam in Dima Hasao both the State Government and the Union Government of India took many initiatives to settle the problem of Dimasas by dialogue. As a result, the 22 year long militant struggle of the Dimasas insurgent group Dima Halam Daogah was brought to a satisfactory culmination when two rebel Dimasa groups signed a memorandum of settlement (MoS) with the Union Government in New Delhi on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2012 to create the Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in the Dima Hasao District (former North Cachar Hills District).<sup>46</sup> The formal Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signing ceremony held at North Block was attended by Union Home Minister, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, Centre’s interlocutor, P.C. Haldar, Union Home Secretary, R.K. Singh, State Chief Secretary, Naba

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<sup>44</sup> *Union Home Minister’s Statement on Situation in North Cachar Hills District* available at <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/India/states/assam/documents/papers/Nchills09.htm> (accessed October 2007)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> *The Sentinel*, Guwahati, 10 October, 2012, p.1.

Kumar Das, DGP, J.N. Choudhury, besides top leaders of rival factions of Dima Haram Daogah.<sup>47</sup>

The hour long signing ceremony was also attended by about 40 representatives of various tribal and non-tribal groups, village headman brought by the DHD (N) faction. The MoS was signed by Dilip Nunisa and Jewel Garlosa on behalf of DHD and Joint Secretary (North East), Shambhu Singh and Principal Secretary Home and Political, Shri Sailesh on behalf of the State Government.<sup>48</sup>

The demand for inclusion of additional 94 villages spread over adjoining districts was rejected. The demand for withdrawal of cases particularly those involving heinous crimes were not accepted either.<sup>49</sup>

### **Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) highlights:**

Signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with both factions of DHD marks the culmination of the peace overtures of the Government and it is expected that DHD (J) and DHD(N) shall join the peaceful democratic and political process as established by the law which will usher in a new era of hope and prosperity in Dima Hasao District.

A Committee, as envisaged in the Art.371B of the Constitution, in the Assam Legislative Assembly will be constituted to deal with the matters relating to the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule Councils.

The DHD shall dissolve itself as an organization within a reasonable time (six months) upon the signing of this Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) as a precursor to the Government initiating further process to implement the agreed decisions of this agreement.

As part of the restructuring and empowerment process, the existing North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) will be renamed as the Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council (DHATC).

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<sup>47</sup> *The Assam Tribune*, 9 October, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.1

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.1

The State Government has agreed to reorganize the existing Autonomous district under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution into 3 (three) Administrative units for better administrative and developmental administration, as per procedure established by law.

Increasing the number of members of the restructured council is agreed in principle.

39 (Thirty nine) subjects will be transferred to the DHATC under para 3A of the sixth Schedule of the Constitution, conferring legislative powers.

A special economic package of Rs 200 crore (Rs 40 crore per annum) over and above the Plan fund over the next five years will be provided to the Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council (DHATC) to undertake special projects by the Council.

The State Government has agreed in principle to set up a development council with a suitable package for preservation and promotion of culture and language of people belonging to tribes like Hojai (Nagaon District) and Barman (Cachar District), which would be decided by the state government, living outside the present Dima Hasao District.

The economic package of Rs 200 crore would benefit all communities including the non-tribals. The increase in the strength of the territorial council will ensure suitable representation to all communities. Besides, the provision for setting up village level councils for devolution of powers to the grassroots will benefit the non-Dimasa tribals, as much as the Dimasa tribals. The MoS specifically states that the heritage sties of non-Dimasa indigenous tribals are to be preserved and maintained.<sup>50</sup>

The Jewel Garlosa fection disbanded in November 2012 and from then on called itself the 'Jewel Welfare Society'. But a bitter vendetta earlier in 2012, ostensibly over financial issues, further split the outfit and the deputy commander-

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<sup>50</sup> *North East Sun*, New Delhi, April 1-15, 2013, Vol. XVIII. p. 17.

in-chief- of the outfit, Daniel Garlosa, formed his separate group called the ‘Hill Welfare Society’ with himself as the Finance Secretary and Piprang Dimasa (who was the Deputy Chairman in DHD-J) as the President.<sup>51</sup>

All eyes were on Dilip Nunisa and his faction (DHD- N) and the much awaited ‘Homecoming ceremony’ of the DHD-Nunisa (DHD-N) that was held at the District Sports Association ground in Haflong as the Nunisa group finally disbanded on 9 March 2013. As the DHD-N ceased to exist, the outfit got transformed into a democratic non-armed civil body called the ‘Halali Progressive Welfare Society’ (Halali stands for fertile land in the Dimasa language).

However, the turn off in the ‘Homecoming Ceremony’ was the absence of bigwigs like the Union Home Minister, the Chief Minister of Assam and the Governor, who were all scheduled to come on the occasion. However, their absence didn’t dampen the spirit of the 2009 odd DHD-Nunisa members to turn out and a large gathering of the Dimasa people welcomed them back to the mainstream.

The DHD-Nunisa group gave up from its possession 144 arms including LMG’s M-16 Rifles, AK-47 and AK-56 rifles, rockets, grenades, grenade launchers and other assorted weapons including 4, 408 bullets. There were 1,318 political cadres or PRO’s (as they are called in DHD-N parlance) who came out and 691 armed cadres including 37 female cadres in fatigues. All top DHD-N leaders including Chairman Dilip Nunisa, C-in-C Pranab Nunisa, Organising Secretary Ronsling Dimasa, GS Yathong Dimasa and Asst General Secretary, Rajesh Naiding were present and they took turns to hand over arms as token on behalf of the whole outfit.<sup>52</sup>

Dilip Nunisa (Chairman DHD-N), while addressing his cadres and public, summed up the speech saying it was an occasion to be sad as well as happy at the same time. Having led a movement and a body for so long, to see the day when it is being disbanded brings a tinge of sadness, particularly when we have left our

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

armed revolution on hope and faith and signed the MoS keeping the development of the area and people in mind. However, we have laid a charter of demands and we expect the Central and State government to reciprocate our gesture and fulfill our demands, he said. Nunisa said that it was a happy day to make a new beginning but he was categorical in pointing out that the ‘Halali Progressive Group’ will also keep alive the dream of a separate ‘Dimaraji state’ for the Dimasas. The only difference is that DHD’s armed revolution will turn into a democratic and civilian movement. But their objective will remain the same.

Originally ‘Halali Progressive Group’ was the name chosen for the outfit after disbanding and Chairman Dilip Nunisa had himself made the announcement at the ceremony itself. But just a couple of days later, Nunisa himself revealed that following a meeting held after the ‘Homecoming Ceremony’ it has been decided to change the name of the democratic civil body comprising the DHD-N cadres from ‘Halali Progressive Group’ to ‘Halali Progressive Welfare Society’. “The term ‘group’ may hold other connotations and create a vested image, so we decided to change the name,” was Nunisa’s explanation.<sup>53</sup> Without dropping names, Dilip Nunisa also said that some people had been trying to put up bottlenecks and even maligns his group in the run up to the ‘Homecoming ceremony’. But they were stayed positive against all odds and adversities and have carried on with the love and support of the people.

The two factions of the DHD being joint signatories of the MoS, may have disbanded according to the clause of the MoS, but no ground has been actually gained as far as coming closer of the two is concerned. It is also a fact that part of communities like Nagas and Hmars are still nowhere interested in the developments of the DHD. Despite assurances, the MoS holds no appeal to them, they are nowhere close at heart to the Dimasas at large and they stick to their demand that they will not be satisfied until they get an autonomous council of their own by bifurcating Dima Hasao District.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

The DHD-N, known to be close to the ruling Congress since its 2003 ceasefire, ruled out truce with any political formation. The DHD-N took the expected decision of joining the poll fray, forming a political party of its own. After signing of MoS, the DHD-N, (Nunisa group) formed a political party by the name 'Dima Hasao Dal' with Dilip Nunisa as the President and Yathong Dimasa (who was the general Secretary in the DHD-N and is now known by his original name, Slairing Sengyung) as the Secretary. Nunisa said that an 11 member ad hoc body has been formed and it would work out the modalities for full implementation of the MoS signed with the government on 8<sup>th</sup> October 2012, for protection of the Dimasa culture and identity, socio-economic development of the district, development of all the communities residing in the district in accordance with the Sixth Schedule and to build communal harmony. Creation of employment opportunities will be the main objectives of Nunisa's political party 'Dima Hasao Dal'.

If Dima Hasao can ever be expected to change, it has to be now with the reign of violence and turmoil a thing of the past. Differences have to be resolved for the cause of development of the general people and the area. The Central Government, the State Government, the Council Government and common man must co-operate each other for peace and harmony in the district.

In normal circumstances, one would expect a Memorandum of Settlement or an accord to mark the total cessation of militant activities and return to a peaceful and democratic mode of functioning in the territory concerned. There are indications that the former leaders of the DHD and the Black Widow will enter politics and contests elections. One fervently hopes that this would make them more responsible and responsive leaders of their people. They may play a vital role for the all round development of newly created Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council (DHATC).