

**CHAPTER II**

**IDENTITY POLITICS IN THE**

**DISTRICT OF DIMA HASAO**

## **IDENTITY POLITICS IN DIMA HASAO DISTRICT**

The historical background of identity politics has been analysed in the first chapter and considering its historical background, an attempt is made to look at the rise of identity politics specifically in Dima Hasao district in this chapter. The political discourses on the Country of India, relating to Identity politics have gradually shaped the articulation of political aspirations of various groups in the region. The focus of the study in this chapter is broad and includes issues like caste, religion, language, ethnic identity which acts as a determining factor for identity politics. It focus on issues such as inter-group relationship, the management of groups, the operation of their collective decision making processes and implementation and enforcement of decisions. The emerging ethnic autonomy demand movements of different ethnic groups on the basis of ethnic identity has been observed as a socio-political reality of contemporary democracy of North East India as well as of Dima Hasao district in Assam and minority is a central component of identity politics in the districts.

### **2.1 Identity Politics in India**

The significance of Identity politics started with the rise of low castes, linguistic groups, religious conflicts and ethnic conflicts in the country. Identity politics in India got its moments after its independence. After the independence of India the fragmentation in the Indian Communities were seen .The collective identities have remained powerful and continued to claim recognition. Many scholars believe that state institutions and its process are responsible for creating a new kind of politics of identity. Identity politics in India is mainly based on languages, religion, caste, ethnicity or tribal identity. However as India is a homogeneous country with class, caste, language and religion so the confusion and complexities are still perceived among the communities. Identity politics thus attempts to attain recognition, empowerment and representation of the social groups in the Country making identity politics a prominent subject in the Indian Politics in the past few years.

#### **2.1.1 Caste System**

The caste system it is one of the oldest systems in India and is one of the active institutions. Caste represented the core of India; it was not merely institution

that characterised the structure of social stratification. It is the predominant feature of the social structure in India. Castes are unequal not merely in the ritual domain. Their inequalities are far more pervasive. Discrimination and oppression based on caste had been a pernicious feature in Indian society. In most of mainland rural India where caste seemingly matters more, it is also a reality that conditions social and economic relations (Chakravarti, 2001). The caste system in India was originally based on work division of labour but now it is based on birth resulting in creation of upper and lower caste in the society. The upper caste acquired superior position becoming superior class and considered lower caste as a class inferior to them. So the upper caste through their predominant position occupied positions of strength in the political and economic systems for economic and political gains. The oppression of one class by another led to development of conflict between them.

The rise of middle-level class during the 1960s changed the political landscape of India. Regional politics began to acquire increasing significance. The political behaviour of the people of the members of different political parties and of the members of the Government is caste-oriented or is influenced by the caste considerations. Their attitudes are caste-based and their values are the values of the caste society (Fadia, 2014, p.875). The political parties of India took the benefit and resulted in parties based on caste system like BSP (Bahujan Samajwadi Party), Samajwadi Party etc. which were formed by lower caste group and the upper caste dominated groups with BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). The emergence of political parties made people conscious towards caste system leading to many conflicts. The question of caste and politics began to be articulated in the language of identity politics by Dalit groups in different parts of the country when the question of gender rights was articulated more or less at the global level.

During 1990s a transition was seen from subservience to negotiation amongst the lower caste group. The caste which traditionally occupied the middle caste, backward caste and other backward caste have been drawn into the political arena all across India. Over the years Dalit middle class grew in number and they felt more confident in articulating their experiences of discrimination at the workplace and the continued class based prejudice against their communities in their societies. They began to form separate groups like OBC, SC communities and mobilised themselves during events of discrimination suffered by their caste fellows. Those in the upper

segments of the rural economy began to look towards cities for further mobility (Jodhka, 2006).

Caste is a determining factors at all the levels of government structure in India i.e. Central, State and local. Nam Sudra movement was launched in eastern district of Bengal to obliterate social backwardness and stigma imposed by the upper caste. This movement was against the Bhadrals i.e. the upper caste oppression of the lower caste that were known as chhotoloks. Caste considerations play a decisive role in the formation of the Central cabinet. It has been a convention to include atleast one or two ministers from communities like Harijans (Schedule Caste), Tribals (Schedule Tribe), Sikhs, Muslims, Kayasthas, Brahmins, Rajputs, Jats, Reddis and so on (Fadia, 2014,p.876). Self-Respect movement was started in Tamil Nadu to protest the Brahmin orthodoxy who were deadly against any well change to the social structure and to fight against inequality which had become the order the of the day. The majority groaning under ignorance, poverty and illiteracy while exploitation were made in the most ruthless manner by a greedy minority i.e. the Brahmins. The society had been so structured that they perpetuate their domination over the whole society. According to Dr. Ambedkar the Hindu religion was to be found as one which is not intended to established liberty, equality and fraternity. It is a gospel which proclaims the worship of the superman – the Brahmins by rest of the society. But in Central India especially the caste system became very strong and rigorous. Any one disobeying caste may be victim of honour killing. The Khap Panchayat in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh many times imposed their decision over other irrespective of government law and order. The clashes between the villages are common issue in such areas. The political changes and the redistribution of power among a diversity of political institutions which has resulted from this dispersal of power have enabled the changes in the democratic process (Kothari, 2010).

### **2.1.2 Religion**

Religion is another complex issue in the country of India. Religion is the bond which constructed social identity irrespective of language, caste, race etc. Religion as one of the identity movement comes into limelight with the Hindu revivalist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Slowly the movement separated the two basic religion of India (Hindu and Muslim). Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) formed was founded in 1925 in reaction to what was perceived as aggressive pan-Islamism on the

part of the Muslim minority. The division and clash for identity became more visible when demand for Pakistan as a Muslim state was started.

The partition of India claimed thousands of people dead and missing and millions of people homeless. The conflict became not only religious but hidden political agenda, local politics also made the worst of all things. In search of political strategy RSS formed a political party by Jana Sangh (Peoples Association) and the political wing of RSS rechristened Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Jayal, Mehta.ed.,2010). Religious mobilisation for electoral purpose was seen during the 1980s-90s. The religious fundamentalist conflict became a challenge to the secular framework of India under the leadership Jagjit Singh Chauhan. The movement took a violent turn which resulted in counter-militancy operations led by the Indian Security Forces. Operation Blue Star and Operation Black Thunder were launched in 1984 and 1988 respectively where a ban was imposed on the use of religious shrines for political and military purposes as they believed that the Sikh separatists were hidden in the Golden Temple of Amritsar. Penalties for the possession and use of illegal weapons to fight in extremism in Punjab region were increased (The New York Times, 29-02-1988). Secessionist movement was launched in Pakistan to create a new country. The communalisation of politics led to the erosion of secularism. Sikh movement, the Ram Mandir - Babri Masjid Case, the Bombay Riot, Godhra incident made religion vulnerable and a cause of concern. Religion thus leads to identity crisis as minority religious groups felt they are deprived in the hands of major groups. The submission – dominance attitude of groups can lead to major complex issues in the near future.

### **2.1.3 Language**

Language is also said to have a collective effort on its people irrespective of class, caste, groups. The people from the same linguistic groups share the same kind of sentiments towards their languages. The language as a movement for identity politics started during the early parts of the 1950s when the Government of India tried to reorganize the states in the name of languages and wanted to impose Hindi as the national language of India. Sanskritisation of Hindi was taken as a threat to their political status by groups outside the Hindi region. Indian languages were set up to counter this movement. There was a demand chiefly from South India for the retention of English (Fadia, 2014, p.890). From 1953 to 1956 the language played an important role in the politics of India.

The recommendations of the Official Language Bill led to more serious developments in Assam. The language problem of 1960s in Assam is all about the language difference and fear of dominance of Bengali language over Assamese language. The anthropologists and social scientists felt that dominance of majority speaking language over minority speaking language created identity crisis in the minority group. As the states of India are based on language heterogeneity it faced a new dilemma each day because each state has more than one dialect. In some states like the states of north east, it has more than fifty speaking dialect all over the region.

The creation of linguistic States has reinforced regionalism. Language continued to be a live issue in bi-lingual or multi-lingual states such as Assam and violent demonstrations and disorders occurred from time to time. Linguistic minorities in certain States and regions became the object of physical assault and violence and the majority community formed the concept of son of the soil as a factor. The reorganisation of states on the basis of their language has made the people conscious of the importance of their own language. This was followed by a tremendous upsurge of regional languages and cultures. Because of language dimension the feeling of regionalism is becoming more predictable. Language in India has become the accepted basis for establishing state boundaries and determining their official language and identity.

#### **2.1.4 Majority and Minority Issue**

The categories of majority and minority are enormously complex. The Indian Constitution contains several provisions that are meant to protect the distinct cultural or linguistic or religious identity of the minority communities. The issue of minority rights are subjected too much discussions and controversies. In the context of the Indian Constitution, there are two categories of minorities-Linguistic minorities and Religious minorities. India was made secular to response to India's plural social order. However in spite of all these, the minorities in India have expressed their feeling of alienation. Minority groups suffered the most during the communal violence in the past many decades in India. The notion of minority right becomes a highly contested doctrine. The India's eroding capacity to engage the religious minorities in the Country contributed to the worsening of communal situation in the Country. There are occasions in which minority groups want autonomy as the best ways of protecting their collective existence.

Indian state strategy to deal with territorially-confined linguistic minorities within the constitutional framework has been quite successful. Within the confines of the state the minority groups attain the status of majority and this is quite evident from creation of new provinces like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand. Some minorities speaking unrecognised languages have demanded statehood. This demand is often made by those linguistic groups concentrated in the particular region of a state of its own distinctive identity (Fadia, 2014, p.847). A large number of people belonging to the marginal sections of the Indian society finally arrived to stake their claims and assert their rights in the polity. Ethnic minorities are demanding the benefits of reservations. Muslim leaders have called for reservations on the grounds that they are too backward in employment and education (Akbar, 1985, p.310). This has brought the politics of minorities directly into the domain of Indian Democracy. The articulation of Dalit-Christians and lower caste Muslims also opened new possibilities in the realm of inter-community relationship and electoral politics.

#### **2.1.5 Ethnic Identity**

Another crucial dimension of identity politics is ethnic identity. In India in the name of ethnic identity many bloodshed has been witnessed till now. There are lakhs of people who become homeless due to ethnic politics. The ethnicity in India is a very complex issue as it is multi layered and borderless based on similar culture, rituals and customs. There are both major and minor ethnic groups in India. However the issue began as the minor groups started to believe that their originality and identity will be perished and extinct in the hands of larger community. Hence the political identity movement like the Bodoland Movement, Karbi Movement and Telengana Movement is nothing but protection of ethnic identity of their concerned communities. The Nagas are still fighting for their identity; the North East India's people struggle to make their identity in the greater Indian perspective thus creating tensions in the society.

#### **2.2 Identity Movement in North East India**

North East India inhabited by people of diverse races, religion, culture, language and dialect, has many specific features, which distinguish it from the rest of India professing different religions. After the British take over, Assam witnessed rapid changes. The British capital penetrated into Assam and the necessary

infrastructure was built to facilitate the imperialist exploitation. Many traders, lawyers, bankers and clerks came from other provinces to sub-serve the colonial masters. Many poor and hardworking Bengali Muslims were allowed by the Asamese Zamindars to settle and cultivate the land. Besides them many workers, mostly from Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal were brought to work in the tea plantations. For the first time people of Assam region got an opportunity to interact with different sections of people belonging to other regions. Although these developments caused hardship, they also helped the people of the region to get exposed to modern liberal, nationalist ideas. Many Assamese who had opportunity to study in Calcutta were influenced by anti-imperialist struggle and they actively participated in the nationalist movement of Assam.

### **2.2.1 Assamese Nationality Consciousness**

Through Inner Line Regulations Act of 1873 and the Schedule District Act of 1874, the British Government regulated the flow of non-tribal and allowed them to live as they like. The integration of Assam valley within the Indian sub-continent did create pan Indian consciousness among the Assamese. But at the same time, rapid demographic changes, monopolization of trade, government jobs and other important professions by the immigrants and the big brotherly attitude of the Bengalis made the Assamese demand for a separate state for themselves. The government imposed Bengali as the official language of Assam. Such measures and attitude created bitter anti Bengali feelings among the Assamese and the educated Assamese middle class took the initiative to rouse the Assamese nationality consciousness among the people. The Assamese leaders in the Congress party while working for Indian freedom started voicing the aspirations of Assamese nationality as well. Later they carved out separate zones for each of the leading hill tribes and made them settle in respective hill areas.

The withdrawal of British and subsequent partition of the sub-continent into India and Pakistan has serious repercussions in North-East India. The Muslim dominated areas of Sylhet district and opted to join Pakistan and consequently the Bengali dominated areas in Assam got truncated and the Bengalis population in Assam, despite immigration of many Bengali Hindu families from East Pakistan, reduced considerably. For the first time the Assamese were placed numerically in an advantageous position vis-a-vis Bengalis. The Assamese leaders were anxious to utilize this opportunity to promote Assamese language and culture. In the hilly areas



of Assam, which were left un-administered earlier, the Nagas and Mizos were reluctant to join India. The legendary Iraiwat who led the leftist uprising in Manipur also demanded a sovereign socialist Manipur. They felt that racially, culturally and linguistically they were different from the mainland Indians. Recognising their unique socio-economic status the constitution of India also made special provision for the administration of hilly tribes in the North-East by incorporating the Sixth Schedule where provisions were made for the constitution of autonomous district and autonomous region were placed under democratically elected district councils or regional councils. To avoid exploitation by the people of other areas the council were given real powers administrative, legal and financial even appointments and succession of chiefs. In all five zones, except in the Naga Hills of Autonomous District Council started functioning from 1952 (Srikanth, 2000).

### **2.2.2 Assamization and its impact**

In its course of development, different tribes like Deuris, Tiwas, Sonowals Kacharis, Mech Kacharis etc, got Assamized. This process of formation of Assamese nationality which was retarded earlier due to limited means of communication and transport and later due to numerical dominance of more powerful Bengali got more favourable conditions for its development after India became independent. Assamese leaders did not have great insights into the complexity of Assam and were so blinded by anti-Bengali sentiments the congress leaders in Assam started talking about Assamization which covert threats, the Assam govt could make lakhs of Bengali Muslims peasants and tea garden workers enlist themselves as Assamese. The first impact of such was the language movement of 1960s. It was about demanding of the Assamese language to be more applicable in case of Assam rather than that of Bengali language. That even led to later on development of many literary organisations for the development of their own language like Mishing Sahitya Sabha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Karbi Sahitya Sabha and so on. The attempt to impose Assamese language in hill district created a feeling that they would be next targets of Assamese chauvinism. This fear combined other factors, like negligence of development process in the Hill dist, the big brotherly attitude of the Assamese and the growing aspiration of the rising middle class within the tribes etc. and ultimately the political map of North East had to be reorganized by forming separate hill states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Only Karbis and Dimasas in N. C. Hills could be convinced to remain

within Assam (Srikanth, 2000). The advocates of Assamese nationalism found it difficult to reconcile the fact that Assam was basically a multi-national multi-ethnic region. The growth of left movement in the seventies made the upcoming Assamese bourgeoisie turn against the Bengalis.

In case of Nagaland the proposal of Crown Colony by the British was rejected by the Nagas. Naga National Council (NCC) was formed to unite all Nagas and to achieve a common political aspiration of the people. The Nagas demanded independence from India under the leadership of A. Z. Phizo. Regulations like Naga Hills-Tuensang area Administration Regulation 1957, Nagaland Transitional Regulation 1961 were passed and finally in 1962 the Nagaland Act by the Parliament in 1962 paved the way for formation of Nagaland in 1963 (Kumar,2007).

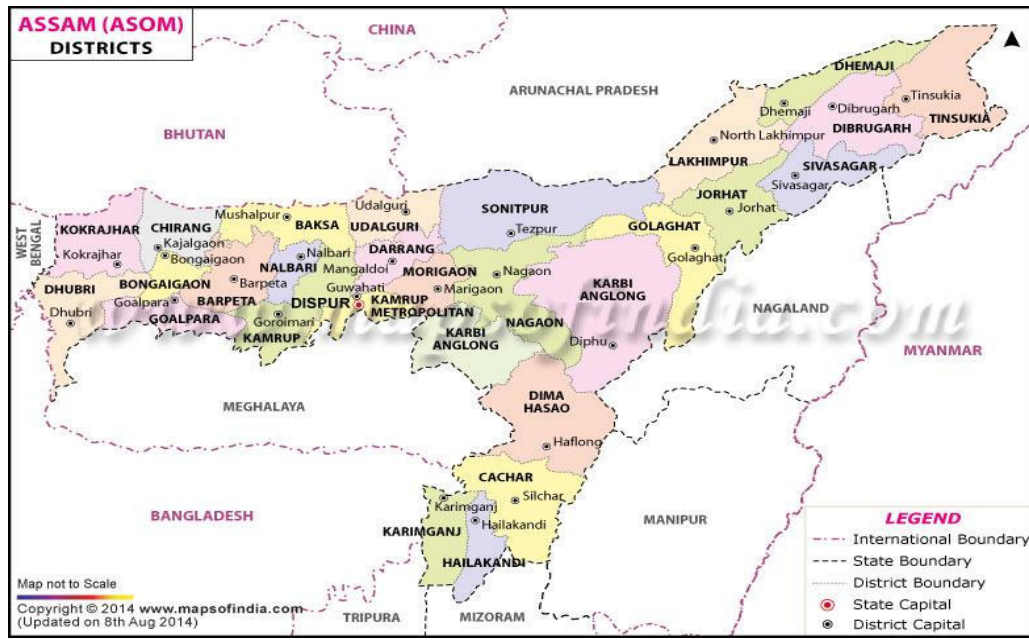
### **2.2.3 Anti Foreigner Agitation**

After the independence of Bangladesh the people from that part illegally entered Assam and settled down. The issue of foreigner in 1978 elections suddenly invented the existence of 20 to 40 lakhs of refugees from Bangladesh in Assam. When the problem became more accurate than in 1980s especially during 1983 the movement against illegal migrants got its peak point. Massive mobilization of youths and students and the Gandhian tactics attracted the attention of many. Thus support to the movement helped in giving a progressive colour to the anti foreigner agitation. The movement received tremendous response from the Assamese people. Finally this came to an end with a signing of Assam Accord in 1985. The Assam agitation threw lights on the many unaddressed problems and fears of the people of this region. Issues like underdevelopment of the region, illegal immigrants and the Centre's neglect of North East have come to receive national attention for the first time. The Assam Accord was signed and the leaders later formed Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGP) and took the reigns of running govt. in Assam in a subsequent election. But the Assamese did not gain anything substantial from the agitation. The victory of congress and BJP in parliamentary election in 1999 and the failure of AGP party prompted a radical section within the Assam movement formed United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) showed the way for the Bodos and some other tribes to organise themselves into different militant outfit and fight for separate statehood for themselves in the name of protecting their language and culture. This development

has started encouraging autonomy movement in Karbi Anglong, N. C. Hills and Barak Valley (Phookan, 2000).

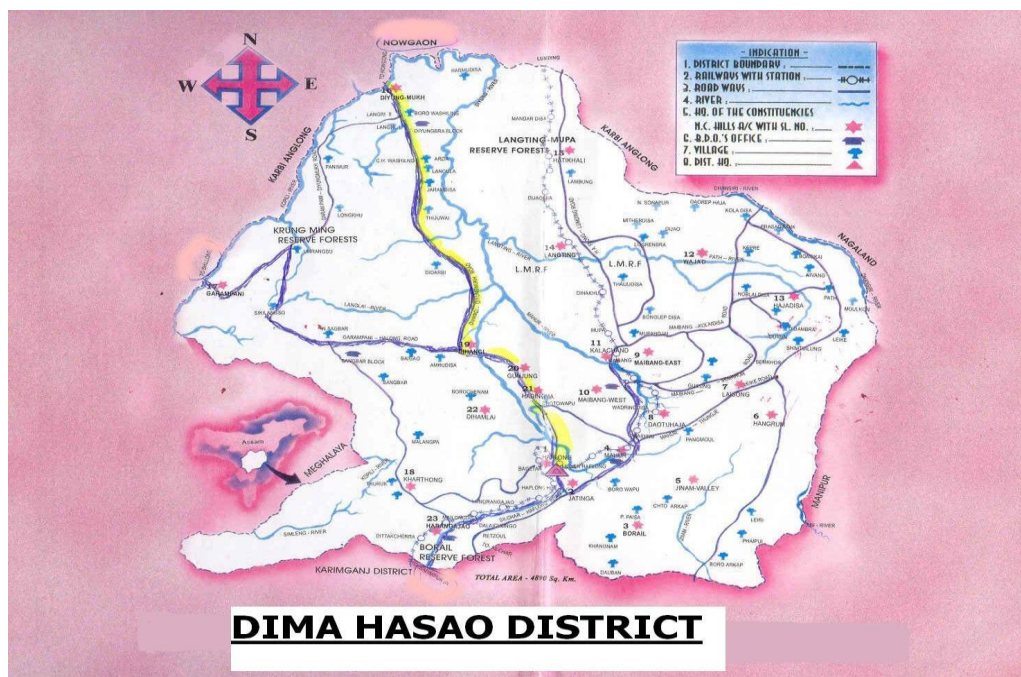
The smaller ethnic groups in order to protect their identity started to form their own organisation and demanded more freedom and autonomy for the Assam. As the Assam is amalgamation of many tribes the tribes like Bodos, Mishings, Sonowal Kacharis started to protect their identity. As time passes the conflict started to show. The rebel groups started to emerge. The groups like Bodo Security Force (BDSF), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Dima Halam Daogah (DHD), Rabha National Security Force (RNSF), Karbi Peoples Liberation Tiger (KPLT) etc. this particular object leads to lots of confrontation among the groups as everyone tried to protect their identity.

### MAP OF ASSAM



Map 1.1 (Courtesy – Map of India)

## MAP OF DIMA HASAO



*Map 1.2 (Courtesy – nchills.gov.in)*

### 2.3 Tribals' identity movement in Assam

Northeast India, with its diverse ethnic communities, has been witnessing many social movements since the beginning of the present century. In the context of Assam, it is important to know and understand the societies and the social formations to come to grip with issues of ethnicity and the rising tide of identity movements among tribal as well as non-tribal communities.

The tribal became very conscious of their position and gradually started building up their movement based on their ethnic identity. The increasing political mobilisation was mainly aimed at overcoming their socio-economic oppression and cultural backwardness and attaining more political power and economy within the present system. The 23 tribal communities so classified in Assam are grouped under two broad heads; hill tribes, comprising 14 communities, the two hills districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills district (now Dima Hasao) and nine plains tribal communities inhabiting the plains of Brahmaputra valley.

Autonomy movements were started by various tribes demanding either separate state within Indian Union or separate autonomous districts or states within

the state. Thus, the Bodoland Movement, Karbi, Mishing Autonomous District Movement, Karbi Anglong Separate State Demand (ASDC/KSA), were engaged in movements for the same demands with some variations in the ultimate political states of the states demanded.

### **2.3.1 Bodoland Movement**

The emergence of political consciousness among the Bodos may be traced back to the submission of a memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission in 1929 by the Bodo community of Goalpara and the Kachari Juvak Sanmiloni demanding independent identity and a separate Kachari Regiment.

The Bodos are the largest of the nine scheduled plain tribes of Assam in terms of population, 1.35 crores (2001 census). The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in 1986, launched a 'do or die' movement for a separate state on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The movement was for creation of autonomous districts in tribal areas on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, and inclusion of Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong and other tribes in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution with the non fulfilment of the charter of 92 demands. The first Bodo Accord was signed in 1993 and that led to the creation of the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) through state legislation and constituting a 40 member Bodoland Autonomy Council (BAC). But because of the insufficient financial power and overwhelming domination of the state government, the Bodos were reviving the demand for a separate state.

The Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT) was formed on 18 June 1996 and demanded separate state of Bodoland on the north bank of Brahmaputra which took a violent shape. But July 1999, BLT declared unilateral ceasefire in response to the Union government's appeal for talks and on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2001, BLT gave up its demand for a separate state of Bodoland. Finally, Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) was signed for the creation of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) on February 10, 2003 between the representatives of Union Government, Assam Government and a BLT delegation. The main provisions of the MoS relate to creation of the BTC, an autonomous self-governing body within the state of Assam and under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos. Dissatisfied with the provisions of the BTC the demand for a separate state is still pursued by the people.

### **2.3.2 The Karbi Anglong Autonomous State movement**

Karbi Anglong which was formerly known as Mikir Hills is one of the two Autonomous Hill Districts of present Assam – the other being the North Cachar Hill District (now Dima Hasao), under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and the Karbi Students' Union (KSU) launched a movement for creation of autonomous state under Article 244A of the Indian Constitution. The ASDC was formed in 1986 for the purpose of demanding an autonomous state which would comprise the territory of Karbi Anglong, North Cachar, and the contiguous areas of Assam inhabited by tribals. The ASDC as a political organisation initiated its demand for a separate state. The Karbi Anglong Movement has also emerged due to factors of economic backwardness, social injustice, and the fear of losing cultural identity in the ocean of Indian culture.

Furthermore, with the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), three plains tribal communities – the Mishing, the Rabha and the Tiwa – which have their respective autonomous councils have begun demanding the up gradation of their Councils to that of Territorial Council. It is a matter of time before the Sonowal Kachari and the Deori, which have respective autonomous councils (created in 2005), follow suit. The BTC has, thus, served to open a Pandora's Box for very small plains tribal communities to seek special status under the provision of the Sixth Schedule.

### **2.3.3 Cultural Identity Movement: Language Movement**

The official imposition of Assamiya language backed by powerful social movements led by the Assamiya bourgeoisie has made the tribals suspicious about the motives of the relatively advanced high castes. The tribals too have become conscious of their distinct identity, have started reviving their dormant language and advancing it as their ethnic symbol to assert their rights in their historical homeland through political mobilization.

The Mishing who were formerly known as the 'Miris' were originally a hill tribe inhabiting Siang and Subanshree districts of Arunachal Pradesh and are the second largest group of the scheduled tribes of Assam. They have been maintaining their traditional way of life including language. Their language does not have a script of its own. In order to develop its language, the Mishing Agam Kebang (MAK) that is Mishing Language Association was formed in 1968. The MAK, resolved to adopt

Roman script for Mishng language. But this was not welcomed by the government. Thus the movement for Mishng language was started to pressurize the government to recognize Roman script as the Script of Mishng language and also to introduce Mishng language as medium of instruction at primary stage in the schools established in the Mishng villages so that the language could gradually develop. The movement is still continuing although the government of Assam has recognized Roman script for Mishng language and agreed to appoint Mishng language teachers at the primary schools where majority of the pupils belong to Mishng community. The failure of the Government to appoint a sufficient number of Mishng language teachers in the school levels added to their discontentment. Moreover, the other Schedule Tribes of Assam like Tiwa, Deuri, Rabha, etc. are also demanding for government recognition and introducing their languages at the primary school levels. The tribals have perpetually experienced the problems of land alienation, poverty indebtedness, severe unemployment, economic exploitation and cultural and political oppression.

#### **2.4 Identity Politics in Dima Hasao District (N.C. Hills)**

The rise of Identity politics in Dima Hasao District of Assam though has specificity of its own cannot be studied in isolation. The territorial boundary of Assam got extended during the colonial rule through the inclusion of hill areas and the districts of Sylhet, Cachar and Goalpara to Assam. Though the British included the hill areas to Assam, they followed a policy of non-interference towards the tribes of the hills (Bhattacharjee, 2004:120). Between 1874 and 1934, the tribal population in the region were administered under a succession of extra ordinary provisions that segregated them into categories called “non-regulated”, “backward”, or “excluded areas”. The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 prohibited access to these areas to all outsiders except those who obtained special permission from the government. This regulation was extended to most of hill areas and thus created a frontier within a frontier, accentuating the political and cultural schism between the tribal areas and the plain.

##### **2.4.1 Political background**

Prior to the commencement of the constitution of India, the Hill areas of Assam were administered as excluded and partially excluded areas. Administration was vested in the Deputy Commissioner/S.D.O. under the control of the Governor

acting in his discretion. The hill areas were never placed under the full administrative purview of the State of Assam.

After independence and the commencement of the Constitution of India, the Hill Districts were brought directly under the Assam State administration but subject to the special provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The Naga Hills, however, right from the beginning rejected the local autonomy as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule. The other hill people initially agreed to the administrative merger with Assam with high hopes of being co-partners with the plains people for greater economic and other advantages which a larger administrative set up could offer. After a period of years, it was experience of the hill people that their hopes were denied and being disillusioned and frustrated they found no other alternative than to demand the creation of a Separate Hill State to determine their future according to their own genius.

N.C. Hills District (now Dima Hasao District) like other Plural societies is the abode of diverse ethnic groups and posed great challenge in the articulation of public interest. The ignorance of ethnic and cultural specificities and the process of delineation of shared boundaries gave rise to discontentment and assertion of one's identity. The different ethnic groups co-existed in a relatively peaceful manner for a long time with no record of conflict between the ethnic groups for the last 250 years. After a memorandum was submitted to the Bordoloi committee to fix the boundaries of N.C. Hills, the first vocal political assertion of the identity consciousness of the Dimasas along with other tribals started.

Accordingly, in pursuance of the Government of India's decision to reorganize the states of India in 1953, the Hill people submitted memoranda to the States Reorganisation Commission demanding the creation of a Separate State. The State Reorganisation Commission however could not be persuaded to recommend to the Government of India for the creation of a separate state though it appreciated the political aspirations of the Hill people and realized the importance of having a stable administration in the hill areas based on the goodwill of the tribal people and primarily concerned with their well-being.



#### **2.4.1.1 Eastern India Tribal Union:**

The hill people including the hill tribes of N.C. Hills continued to struggle to achieve their political objective spearheaded by the new political party- The Eastern India Tribal Union(E.I.T.U). This party fought the 1957 general elections on the basis of the Hill State demand and swept the polls. The situation was such that the late Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, the then Union Home Minister had to intervene. The bigoted Assamese Chief Minister, Sri Bishnuram Medhi, was asked to go and Shri Bimala Prasad Chaliha, who was then considered to be a liberal leader and was asked to take over as Chief Minister.

Pandit Pant succeeded in persuading the E.I.T.U. to associate itself with the government of Sri Chaliha by putting the Department of Tribal affairs under the charge of one of the representatives as a member of the Cabinet. But this arrangement was neither an easy nor a happy one and Captain Sangma the E.I.T.U. minister in charge of Tribal Affairs was confronted with indifference, non-cooperation and even hostility from some of his colleagues and the whole arrangement failed. Hitches were created and intensified and the situation reached a climax when in 1960 Assamese dominated State government pushed through a Bill in Assam Legislature declaring Assamese as sole official language of the state, in the teeth of united opposition from the hills. The negligence of the development process in the hill district, big brotherly attitude of the Assamese and the growing aspirations of the tribal leaders resulted in the demand for separate hill state. The discontentment raised the demand for ethnic representation by communities like Ahoms, Kacharis, Khasis and the Nagas (Das, 2008).

#### **2.4.1.2 All Party Hill Leaders Conference**

Captain Williamson Sangma and his EITU associates resigned from the ministry. It was then the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) party was formed. Under the leadership of APHLC the hill state movement gained further impetus and massive proportions. This marked the significant period of the rise of identity politics in the district. The political leaders in the district of N. C. Hills (now Dima Hasao) joined the APHLC in the joint venture of separate state for the hill people.

Between 1960 and 1966 the Government of India tinkered with the problems of the hills by one proposal after another. The first was a committee formed with Shri Asoka Mehta as Chairman to study the problems of the hill people and to submit reports for solution of the hill problem. The report was rejected by the hill leaders as the report was merely the rubber stamp of what the Assam Congress party dictated. The report proposed merely administrative changes through certain modifications in the composition and functioning of the District Councils that already existed in the districts.

The Government of India stated that the Asoka Mehta Committee's report was only a report of a Committee and did not reflect the Government's thinking and there upon took the decision to refer the question to the 'National Forum' by taking counsel with the leaders of the opposition parties in parliament. With this decision of the Government the question of the reorganisation of Assam and of the Congress party became a national question of immediate urgency.

#### **2.4.1.3 Asoka Mehta Committee's report**

On its decision to refer the question of Assam's reorganization to the 'national forum' the Government of India, on September 25, 1967, issued the statement which followed on the joint discussions at Delhi in July and the Government had appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri Asoka Mehta. The representatives of the APHLC did not participate in the working of the Committee and therefore it became necessary that the proposals made by the Committee should be placed before and discussed with the hill leaders. As the APHLC leaders did not see usefulness in discussing the Ashok Mehta Committee's proposals even with a view to improving upon them as necessary, the stage then reached was that the whole question goes to a national forum. Any legislative proposals for the reorganization of Assam have to be placed before Parliament and for this purpose it is necessary to consult with leaders of opposition parties in Parliament. The Government has assured to do it early during the next session and also assured the opposition leaders to furnish with all the relevant documents for effective consultation. Government tried to finalize the proposals in the course of the next session of Parliament.

Historically speaking, it may be said that the hill people' movement for a separate state had evolved through several stages. The first of this was the Scottish

Pattern offer which Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made to the APHLC towards the end of the year 1960 in the wake of passing of the Assam Official Language Act by the Assam Legislature.

#### **2.4.1.4 Nehru Plan for full autonomy**

The emergence of the Mizo National Front (MNF) caused Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to take a fresh look at the problem of the hill areas (Das, 2009). On October 5, 1963, at the end of a two days' discussion with a delegation of the APHLC, he improved upon the Scottish pattern offer and outlines what has been popularly known as the Nehru Plan of Full Autonomy. It provided the second stage in the developments and set ups of Autonomous Districts of Assam.

#### **2.5 Set up for the Autonomous District of Assam**

The Autonomous district of Assam comprised of three wings- Executive, Legislative and Judicial wing. The objective was to be kept in view of full autonomy for the hill districts subject to preservation of the unity of the state of Assam.

##### **2.5.1 Executive wing**

According to the plan the cabinet government of the accepted form should remain. There should be collective and joint responsibility to the state Assembly. There should, however, be a cabinet minister in-charge of the administration of the hill areas assisted, as far as may be necessary, by possibly a minister of state and one or two deputy ministers. In the appointment of the minister for hill areas, the Chief Minister shall be guided by the recommendations of the MLAs of the hill areas. A list of certain subject such as Education, Agriculture, Horticulture, Forest, Health and possible Roads would be drawn up. The administration of these subjects in the hill areas would be entirely in charge of the cabinet minister for the hill areas and his junior ministers.

There would be a separate wing or department of the Secretariat for the hill areas to be divided into necessary number of special department for the administration of the subjects allocated for separate administration in the hill areas. The necessary complement of staff shall have to be provided. The hill ministers shall have authority to determine the language or languages to be used in the separate wing or department of the hill areas and other offices in the hill areas dealing with subjects allocated for separate administration.

At the beginning of each financial year a separate complete budget allocation for the subjects allocated to the hill areas will be made. This would take form of an area budget under the subjects meant for separate administration. In regard to other subjects not transferred for separate administration the share of allocation of funds to be spent in the hill areas should be separately indicated under the budget heads. The hill ministers shall have complete power of expenditure control over the allocation for the departments to be separately administered. The hill wing or department of the Secretariat of the hill areas would have its own separate Financial Adviser for expenditure control.

### **2.5.2 Legislative Wing**

The MLAs of the autonomous hill districts shall form a Regional Committee of the Assam State Assembly. All proposals relating to the legislation concerning the hill areas would be referred by the State Assembly to the Regional Committee. This Committee may also initiate legislative proposals. Normally the recommendations of the Regional Committee would be accepted by the Legislature. In the event of a disagreement between the State Assembly, and the Regional Committee the matter will be referred to the Governor who acting in his discretion may take decisions, after obtaining directions from the President, where necessary. The portion of the Annual Financial Statement in so far as it relates to the hill areas shall be referred by the Assembly to the Regional Committee for consideration.

### **2.5.3 Judicial Wing**

The Nehru Plan also suggested that there shall be a common High Court for the whole of Assam. The Judicial set up in each of the autonomous district would be as provided in the Sixth Schedule. The Nehru Plan in no way measured up to the APHLCs' demand for a separate state. But the APHLC had the continuing state of emergency in the country as well as the failing health of the Prime Minister, which prevented it from having any further meeting with him, to consider. Moreover, it was impressed by the Prime Minister's sincerity in making the offer. So, at its 12<sup>th</sup> session on April 18, 1964 called to consider the plan and adopted several resolutions.

Having regard to the Prime Minister's sincere efforts as embodied in his offer and his other assurances, and to his state of health which prevented the APHLC delegation meeting him again, and to the situation prevailing in the country, this

Conference, while reiterating that the creation of the separate hill state would be the simplest, best and final solution of the problems of the hill people. Nevertheless, felt that the Prime Minister's offer of full autonomy be given a fair trial and requests the Prime Minister to proceed with the appointment of the Commission to work out details for implementing his offer of full autonomy. His various other assurances to the hill people; provided that if the Commission's report falls short of the Prime Minister's outline of full autonomy and his various assurances the Conference reserves the rights to revise its decision.

## **2.6 Pataskar Commission**

The Pataskar Commission was appointed to work out details for implementing the Nehru Plan of Full Autonomy. The report was submitted on March 31, 1966. The Pataskar Commission was intended to be a body of experts to recommend constitutional and legislative measures to give effect to the Nehru Plan. But the Commission acted as a Commission of inquiry and made its own study of the situation and made recommendations on the basis of its findings. The Pataskar Commission Report was not only short of but also at variance with the Nehru Plan. So, the hill leaders rejected it.

To study the Pataskar Commission report, the Government of India appointed a Cabinet Committee under the Chairmanship of the Home Minister Shri Gulzarilal Nanda. The Home Minister visited Shillong at the end of June, 1966. On his return to New Delhi, a meeting with the APHLC leaders and the Cabinet Committee was held in August, 1966. The outcome of the new offer of a Sub-State under which the hill areas would have a separate legislature and council of ministers would continue to remain in Assam. The idea of continuing as a subordinate of Assam under Sub-State was unaccepted to the hill people. The APHLC declined the offer, decided to boycott the 1967 general elections, and prepared to launch its programme of non-violent direct action by the end of the year.

It was under these circumstances that the Smti Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, took a decision to visit Shillong and meet with the hill people herself. She kept her promise and on December 27, 1966 when at a mammoth public meeting of the hill people she said that she was conscious that the present set-up does not provide satisfaction to the hill people and appreciated their desire for a set-up which would

give them requisite dignity and status, Government has decided that there should be some suitable reorganization and this should be done as early as might be practicable. According to her the board suggestion was that political freedom should be provided for the hill people to promote their essential economic development and administer those for the welfare of the people inhabiting these districts. However to her this should be consistent with some minimum and essential links of overall unity at the top. She felt that it was a matter of much interest to the hill people and the hill areas themselves as it is for the people of the rest of the state. According to her a final decision could be reached after thorough discussion with her colleagues, the Chief Minister and the concerned leaders.

Series of meetings were held in New Delhi on January 11, 12 and 13, 1967 in which the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and other Union Ministers, the Chief minister of Assam and some of his colleagues, the President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, and the APHLC leaders participated and at the end of which the Government of India announced its conclusions. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister have held detailed discussion with the leaders of APHLC. The Government of India appreciated the political aspirations of the people of the hill areas and had decided to reorganize the state of Assam.

Bearing in mind the geography and the imperative needs of security and coordinated development of this region as a whole, the Home Minister discussed with the APHLC leaders. The proposal suggest a federal structure composed of federating units having equal status, not subordinate to one another, but should provide the basis for this reorganization. Under this arrangement, a limited number of essential subjects of common interest were assigned to the regional federation, leaving the rest of the state functions to the federal units, which provide their own legislative assemblies, councils of ministers, etc. Details of the scheme included the subjects to be allocated to the regional federation, which would be worked out within six months by a committee on which all concerned interests would be represented. At a later stage, other administrative units in the eastern region also join the regional federation.

For the first time the Government of India announced its decision to reorganize the State of Assam. So long, all offers that were made, whether the Scottish Pattern or the Nehru Plan of Full Autonomy or the Sub-State, were merely proposals for administrative rearrangement within the state of Assam. On January 13,

before the announcement was made, a question was posed to Shri Y.B. Chavan, Home Minister, as to what would happen if the Assam politicians refused to cooperate in implementing the federal structure proposal. His reply was that in that event it would simplify the situation and make it easier for the Government of India to go ahead with what the APHLC wanted, as the alternative was clear. The result of the Prime Minister's visit was followed by the announcement of the Government of India on September 11, 1968 to constitute autonomous state by reorganizing Assam. The Autonomous districts of Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills will be given the option to join the Autonomous state.

The North Cachar Hills District Council was desirous of opting for Meghalaya autonomous state, but the Assamese leaders in Assam government and the leaders of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee misled the leaders of N.C. Hills district into believing that North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council would be given the same powers and functions that would be given to the autonomous state of Meghalaya if they remain in Assam. That they would be given equal status with what Meghalaya government gets. Accordingly having confidence in the promises of the leaders of Assam, the Autonomous District Council of North Cachar opted to remain in Assam in 1970. But all these promises were belied.

In 1970, the State government of Assam entrusted some state subjects to the District Council functions in relation to the development schemes of the district as provided in paragraph 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, as amended. The District Council accepted the entrustment of the subjects on trial basis with the reservation that they would demand for separation if it is not workable. The Autonomous State of Meghalaya was upgraded to fully fledged state. Article 244A provides formation of Autonomous State for North Cachar Hills or Karbi Anglong separately. But this did not materialise. It is assumed by the people of the district of N.C. Hills that if the North Cachar Hills District Council opted to join the Meghalaya State, North Cachar Hills would have been separated from Assam a long time back.

In the formation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya the consent of the Assam Government was taken. The matter was taken up at the "National Forum" and the Central Government took decisions as it thinks best. In the last meeting the leaders of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills had with the late Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, she assured to consider the demand for Autonomous State

when the Assam agitation of foreigner's issue subsided. As a result, the movement for autonomous state was kept in abeyance. Unfortunately, Indira Gandhi was assassinated and the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills were greatly shocked as it was a great loss to them. Late Indira Gandhi was a champion for the cause of the tribal people in the North- East.

With the passing and implementation of the Assam Official language Act, 1960 all official correspondences are conducted in Assamese. The hill people of North Cachar Hills are facing great hardships as they have no working knowledge of Assamese. Assamese being made official language, proficiency in Assamese is a pre-requisite qualification for a job in Assam. The hill people of North Cachar Hills having no working knowledge of Assamese were deprived of getting jobs in Assam. The people of Karbi Anglong have no such problems because they are studying in Assamese medium. Moreover backward people of North Cachar Hills cannot compete with the advanced plains people of Assam in competition for services. This has frustrated the educated youth of the hill districts and having no other way out they took to arms for separation from Assam.

The hill leaders of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills intensified the movement of autonomous state and consequently a Memorandum Of Understanding was signed on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1995 in New Delhi. The Congress party of North Cachar Hills was not a signatory in the signing of MOU with reservation that it would accept in on trial basis and that if the MOU is not workable it would continue the movement for autonomous state. It is now found that the MOU is not workable as the state government did not cooperate for full implementation of the MOU.

The problem of the hill people in Assam including N. C. Hills was not merely economic but primarily political and it requires not an economic but a political solution. While the hill people of N. C. Hills also wanted a political solution which would give requisite dignity and status. The hill people in Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram who had been separated from Assam are living in dignity and status. The progresses of developments in their states are discernable. So a movement for Autonomous state under Article 244A of the Constitution of India was intensified (Das, 2009).



## **2.7 Assam Accord and aftermath**

The Assam Accord was signed during the Prime Ministership of late Rajiv Gandhi. When Assam came to normalcy, the demand for creation of autonomous state was re-iterated. The leaders met late Rajiv Gandhi, who was then the Prime Minister of India, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1986 and submitted the memorandum demanding for creation of autonomous state.

The urgency of immediate creation of autonomous state was greatly felt after the signing of the Assam Accord. As a result, movement of Autonomous State under Article 244A of the Constitution of India was intensified (Das, 2009). The policy of the Assamese people is development of Assamese culture, customs, identity and language, forgetting totally the interest of the hill people. The condition of the people of North Cachar Hills who did not study in Assamese medium will be very bad if the Assam Accord was fully implemented. Therefore the North Cachar Hills as demanded by the people should be given an Autonomous State separately as provided in Article 244A of the Constitution of India or a Union Territory under the administration of the Government of India in the greater interest of the hill people of North Cachar Hills.

At the time of creation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya, paragraph 6 of the Sixth Schedule was amended. In pursuance to amendment of paragraph 6 of the Sixth Schedule, 15(fifteen) subjects were entrusted to the District Councils. But this entrustment was a failure because the State government did not cooperate with the Councils. The rising demand for state started with the All People Hills Leaders Conference movement in 1970's. As a result, the movement for Autonomous state under Article. 244A of the Constitution of India was intensified. They agitated for a separate Hill State under the banner of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) (Kumar, 2005). The memorandum of understanding which between the Chief Minister of Assam and the Autonomous State Demand Committee, Karbi Students Association, North Cachar Hills Students Federation and Dimasa Students Union on the first of April 1995 in New Delhi in the presence of Union Home Minister, Governor of Assam, in exercise of powers conferred by the sixth schedule of India. The representatives of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Districts held a series of discussions with then Union Home Minister and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1995 in New Delhi.

In pursuance of the MOU signed, a bill was introduced for amendment of the Sixth Schedule. The memorandum of understanding, reached on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1995 referred to above and the House resolved further that the jurisdiction of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council for the exercise of executive powers would extend to the 30 (thirty) subjects/departments listed in Annexure-I of the Memorandum of Understanding and to that extent, the executive powers of the State shall stand entrusted and delegated to the above mentioned Councils.

And whereas the Governor of Assam has been pleased to entrust and delegate the functions relating to thirty subjects/departments to which the executive powers of the state of Assam extends, with the consent of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council and in exercise of the powers conferred under sub-para (2) of paragraph of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

The following administrative changes and modalities were adopted for observance by the State Government and the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council for management of the subjects mentioned in the MOU dated 1.4.1995.

## **2.8 Modalities and administrative changes in the District**

In order to enable the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council to finance the expenditure of the entrusted and delegated function of the thirty subjects/departments without difficulty. The administrative Departments of the State Government shall release the funds on a six monthly basis in April and October of each financial year. It shall be the duty of the Council to submit separate detailed accounts every month of the Accountant General, Assam to make necessary adjustment by debit to the appropriate Head of account of the State Budget.

It shall be the responsibility of the Council to ensure that the existing Rules, instructions, norm, guidelines etc of the Government of India and the State Government, governing the implementation of the plan schemes relating to the entrusted subjects/departments and other matters including the Non-Plan matters relating to the entrusted subjects/departments are followed strictly till the Council frames rules on the same in terms of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, it being understood that the Rules, directions etc of the

Government of India, Comptroller and Auditor General of India and other sound financial management/principles shall always be followed.

The council shall be competent to sanction re-appropriation of funds from one scheme to another within the same Major Head of Account. The State Government shall move for transfer of funds from one Major Head of Account to another Major Head of Account in respect of any of the thirty entrusted subjects/departments only on receipt of proposal to this effect from the Council.

The Council shall be fully responsible to the State Legislature in all matters relating to the funds transferred to the Council and for this purpose, the Principal Secretary and other Secretaries to the Executive Committee of the Council shall be made available for examination by the Public Accounts Committee and other Committees or the State Legislature.

The Council shall appoint a Principal Secretary of it in the rank of Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Assam and for this purpose; the Government of Assam will place the services of one IAS Officer of Assam cadre of this rank at the disposal of the Council. The State Government shall make available the services of two officers in the rank of Secretary to the Government of Assam (one of whom would be from a Technical Department) for appointment as secretaries of the Council. The State Government shall also make available three Deputy Secretaries (one of whom would be from a Technical Department and remaining ones from the Assam Civil Services) for appointment as Deputy Secretaries of the Council. All these Officers shall be on deputation from the State Government to the Council as per usual terms and conditions and their services shall be placed at the disposal of the Council with prior consultation with the Council.

The Zonal Heads of Departments from Hill Areas shall be withdrawn by the State Government. Officers in the rank of Additional Chief Engineer, PWD and its equivalent in all the entrusted Departments with all administrative, Financial and technical powers of the Head of Departments delegated by the State Government, shall be posted and placed under the administrative control of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council.

The Additional Chief Engineer, PWD and its equivalent Officers as mentioned above shall be posted within the 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1997. During the interim period the

existing Zonal Heads of Department Stationed in N. C. Hills District shall be placed under the Administrative Control of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council.

The Chief Executive Member/Executive Member/ Principal Secretary/ Secretary to the Executive Committee of the Council shall be competent to initiate/ review/ accept the Annual Confidential Reports (ACRs) of all the Officers and Staff placed under the administrative control of the Council. The administrative control of Council over the officers and Staff at its disposal shall be complete in all matters of intra Council transfer and posting. As regards disciplinary actions, against the Officers and staff to the entrusted subjects/departments, the Council shall exercise the powers as the Borrowing Authority and the State Government shall exercise the powers as the Lending Authority and both the State Government and the Council shall follow the relevant rules, regulations etc of the respective Service Rules (IAS/ACS, etc).

The State Government shall consult the Council, while posting and transferring the Officers of the entrusted subjects/departments in or out of the Council. Under no circumstances, the Officers and Staff, not released by the Council shall be accepted by the State Government. Before deputing any Officer or Staff the Government shall provide a panel of names, enabling the Council to select and accept the same. The State Government shall take necessary action under the relevant rules and procedure against the Officers and staff, found involved in an prima facie case of misconduct/derelection of duty etc, during the period of deputation to the Council, even after they are repatriated to the State Government.

The salary and allowances of the Principal Secretary and other Secretaries/ Deputy Secretaries as well as the Officers and Staff of the entrusted subjects/departments who are on deputation to the Council shall be paid by the Council and necessary funds for this purpose shall be made available to the Council by the State Government. In respect of Provident Fund, Group Insurance and other related matters, these officers and Staff continue to be controlled by the State Government. The Council shall not be liable to pay any leave salary, pension contribution etc, in respect of these Officers and Staff of the entrusted subjects/departments, placed under its administrative control.

The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council shall prepare the estimated receipts and expenditure pertaining to N. C. Hills Autonomous District in respect of entrusted subjects/Department as per the allocations, norms etc communicated by the State Government. The State Government shall prepare the estimated receipts and expenditure, pertaining to N. C. Hills Autonomous District in respect of non-entrusted subjects/departments and forward the same to the N. C. Hills Autonomous District.

The N. C. Hills Autonomous Council in their Council session shall consider the estimated receipts and expenditures pertaining to N. C. Hills Autonomous District in respect of both entrusted and non-entrusted subjects/Departments and send the same along with the synopsis of their consideration to the State Government within the stipulated time as provided for in paragraph 13 of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Ordinarily no changes were made in the estimated receipts and expenditures as considered by the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council in respect of the entrusted subjects/Department. However, for any reason, if it becomes necessary to do so, the Council shall be consulted and reason for the proposed changes shall be explained. The State Government shall then place the estimate receipts and expenditures as considered by the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council, along with the synopsis, before the State Legislature, as provided for in the paragraph 13 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

In respect of the entrusted subjects/departments, the Council shall prepare the Annual Plan by taking into account the special needs, physical resources, priorities, etc as per the Annual Plan allocation against each sector/sub-sector etc, by following the norms and guidelines of the Planning Commission of the Government of India. The Council shall send the Annual Plan in respect of the entrusted subjects/departments to the Development Commissioner for Hill Areas of the State Government for inclusion in the Hill Areas Sub-Plan of the State. The other plan activities such as evaluation, monitoring, compilation, quarterly review etc of the Hill Areas Sub-Plan shall be performed by the Development Commissioner for Hill Areas as usual. In the finalisation of the Hill Areas Sub-Plan of the State of Assam by the Planning Commission of the Government of India, the Officials of the Council shall be included in the State delegation.

There shall not be any 'common outlay' in respect of N. C. Hills District. The existing schemes under 'common outlay' shall be transferred to the Council as per

their geographical locations. All Centrally sponsored schemes, Central Sector schemes, NEC Schemes/Externally Aided schemes etc in respect of the entrusted subjects or departments for which funds shall be released by the State Government to the Council as per sanction and release by the Government of India to the State Government shall be implemented by the Council as per the norms and guidelines of the Government of India and Communicated by the State Government.

This office memorandum was issued after due consultation and with the consent of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council and it superseded the Office Memorandum issued earlier from time to time on this subjects and came into force with immediate effect. The Minister of State in the ministry of Home Affairs who moved the bill in Parliament stated that it has been agreed to transfer executive and legislative powers to the two Councils in respect of thirty subjects, these two councils will prepare and pass their Budgets and forward them to the State Government for inclusion in the overall State budget. It was further agreed to redefine the exercise discretionary powers of the Governor of Assam in respect of matters entrusted to the Councils. The Governor of Assam would also be required to consult the Autonomous Councils concerned before exercise of his discretionary powers. The Bill sought to give greater autonomy to the two Autonomous District Councils in Assam. It provided exercise of additional legislative powers by increasing fifteen subjects. Also making provisions for the tribals with funds to be provided from the Central government.

Accordingly, Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule was amended and provided additional powers to N.C. Hills Autonomous Council and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Paragraph 3A and the following to make laws with respect to 15 subjects in both the districts. The general condition of a segment of population in North East has been considerably improved, but a large section of the population i.e. the hill tribes remain regrettably poor (Phukan, 2000).

In 1970, the state Govt of Assam entrusted some State subjects i.e. thirty subjects or departments to the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council under paragraph 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The District Councils demanded that the entrustment of subjects should be given unconditionally as provided by the Sixth Schedule but the Government did not agree to that.

## **2.9 Identity politics and Dimasa Kacharis**

Cultural identity movement of Barman Kacharis started in South Assam. The Dimasas of Northeast India are known by different names in different areas they reside. They are known as Hojai Kacharis in Nagaon district, simply as Kacharis in Nagaland, Dimasa Kachari in Dima Hasao (erstwhile N.C. Hills) and Karbi Anglong and as Barman in Cachar in the Barak Valley region. In the medieval period, the Kachari tribe ruled over these lands and their kingdom flourished everywhere. The Barmans also maintain some of their pre-Hinduized customs and practices. This makes them separate from the caste Hindus although the Barman Kacharis claim themselves to be the Kshatriyas and second in status in the caste hierarchy. Yet, they are not admitted into anyone of the Hindu castes. Their socio-cultural position is in between the Dimasa Kachari and the caste Hindus. Socially and culturally they stand in between tribal and non-tribal groups. The Barman Kachari realise the need for maintaining social solidarity and cultural identity

Dimasas as a whole are living in the regions of the Barak Valley, North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon in Assam and the Dhansiri in Nagaland. The highest concentration of the Dimasas is in the autonomous district of North Cachar Hills (Misra, 1989:149). The tribe experiencing deprivation is looking for ways and means to regain their lost strength and glory by uniting together under one political umbrella. The region which was a mass of heterogeneous people before the advent of British rule retained basically the same character. There was not much change in the situation after independence. The policy of segregation was continued in the form of autonomous council and villages. State power and the fruits of developmental activities were monopolized by the elites. Tribals and other marginalized sections were kept out of the narrow field of employment. At this juncture the movement to install Assamese as the official language of the state deeply disturbed the Dimasa tribe and ethnic minorities living in the district. The official Language Bill of 1960 was perceived by the tribal groups as a barrier to their advancement and as an obstacle to get jobs in government offices. Further, it was apprehended that the domination of Assamese would adversely affect the future of their language and culture. The emerging middle class, the youths and the students of different ethnic group began to develop a sense of deprivation from what they call, legitimate share of political power. The middle class of these groups started

realizing that without political power they could not solve their problems. For this reason, they demanded autonomy or statehood and have been successful in mobilizing the people of their respective communities in support of their demand.

The Dimasa Kachari inhabited mainly the district of Dima Hasao. Economically and educationally they are backward. Except in North Cachar Hills, the Dimasa living in the plains have become small and isolated groups in the midst of various larger ethno-cultural groups of Assam and consequently they are exposed to various non-tribal cultures. Therefore, they are in the state of losing their cultural identity. Realizing the situation the educated section felt the need of organizing a movement to foster a sense of identity. Accordingly, an organization called 'Nikhil Hiramba Barman Samity' was formed in order to work for making Dimasas people including the Barmans of Cachar aware of their traditional culture.

In this situation the 'Solidarity Movement' of the Barmans emerged in the form of regional association called 'The Nikhil Cochar Hairamba Barman Society' in 1942 with the objective (a) to consolidate the socio-cultural position and (b) to safeguard the cultural identity and interests of the group under the social, political, and economic changes of the country. In 1980, the Samity also raised the demand for reorganization of the areas of North-East India inhabited largely by Dimasa tribe into a single political administrative unit. The Dimasas became politically restive since 1972. The decision of the Academic Council of Gauhati and Dibrugarh University (1972) created a lot of resentment among the non-Assamese People.

The Mikir (presently called Karbis) and North-Cachar Hill leaders Conference submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister in 1973 explaining how they were persuaded to remain in Assam, how the promises made were forgotten, how the central grants have always been misused and how the Assamese leadership were determined to Assamize them. Besides, a sense of frustration started to set in among the Dimasas and the Karbis when they compared themselves with the people of those districts that have opted for going out of Assam. They felt that the people of those districts that have opted out of Assam could have not only their political aspiration fulfilled, but could also enjoy a much larger share of national resources for their development. The Dimasas and the Karbis considered themselves lagging behind in all sphere of development. Therefore, they demanded separation. They demanded separation from Assam not only for the fear of losing their identity but also to have



their own separate homeland like Nagaland Mizoram and Meghalaya so that they can have their development within sovereign India.

The Dimasas demand for statehood can be traced to the formation of Autonomous State Demand Committee in 1986. Since then the Karbi and the Dimasa people of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong have been jointly demanding for the creation of an Autonomous State under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution of India. Although the Dimasas and the Karbis have been jointly demanding an Autonomous State under the leadership of Autonomous State Demand Committee, in 1991 the Dimasa Students organised themselves under All Dimasa Students Union (ADSU). The All Dimasa Students Union has been demanding for creation of a separate full fledged state 'Dimaraji' by incorporating all the territories that were included in the ancient Dimasa Kachari Kingdom so as to enable them to enjoy all constitutional rights and privileges to bring all round developments. The All Dimasa Students Union and the Dimaraji Revival Demand Committee jointly submitted a memorandum to Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, and New Delhi in 1996, demanding a separate homeland for the Dimasas (Memorandum, 1996:4). As a result, the relation between the Dimasas and the Karbis came under stress.

The All Dimasa Students Union organised bandh, dharnas, road blockade, rally, etc. to press their demand and fulfilling their aspirations. Besides the constitutional path, a violent or so called militant path surfaced with the formation of Dimasa National Security Force (surrendered in 1994) and Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) in early nineties adding a new dimension to the Dimaraji movement of the Dimasas. The emergence of these militant outfits can be ascribed partly to the non-responsive attitude of the government to the constitutional agitational path followed by the Dimasas and also to the politics of expediency of the dominant class. The desire for better autonomy resulted in the quest for separate space as a separate identity by the Dimasa community in N.C. Hills.

The region as a whole lags behind in all fields of socio-economic, education and political developments. An organisation Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) purporting to represent the Dimasa in their quest to create Dimaland or Dimaraji in Assam and Nagaland was started. It is a descendent of Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) which ceased operations in 1995. The DHD Commander-in- Chief refused to surrender and launched the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) demanding a separate

homeland for the Dimasas. The identity consciousness among the Dimasas grew with the formation of these outfits which was said to be formed for the cause of their people. The outfit grew in force by the support of the youths into the group. The movement started with the growing insecurity among the tribe regarding their identity and political future. The outcome was severe assertions in terms of ethnicity.

The Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) came into being with the vow to create 'Dimaraji', i.e., a Dimasa State comprising the districts of N. C. Hills, Karbi Anglong and Cachar and part of the district of Nagaon in Assam and also part of Dimapur in Nagaland. But within a short time, differences developed among the DHD cadres centering mainly on the techniques to be followed to pursue the demand. This ultimately resulted in a split. A faction led by Dilip Nunisa signed Ceasefire Agreement with the Government of India on January 1, 2003 and thereafter abjured violence till date. Another faction led by Jewel Garlosa which was formed a separate outfit on 31 March 2003. The later group came to be known as DHD (J) or Black Widow.

Black Widow or the DHD (J) is a breakaway group of the pro-talk Dima Haram Daogah (DHD), led by Dilip Nunisa, Chairman of the outfit. On January 1, 2003, Dilip Nunisa led DHD signed a "ceasefire" agreement with the Government of India. Jewel Gorlosa was the Commander-in-Chief of the DHD then. However, he was removed from his post and expelled for forming the "Black Widow" or the DHD (J) (Datta, 1993:59-60). The abduction of 23 Dimasa tribal men by other militant outfit from two villages Chakarcham and Jurukhal within Sonai Police Station in Cachar district torched about 450 dwellings on 31 March 2003 and were later killed. Among those killed 17 men had families and these 17 widows called themselves Black Widows (North East Sun, 2009, p.16). The Commander-in-Chief of the DHD then, Jewel Garlosa alias Mihir Barman secretly formed Black Widow symbolizing 17 widows of the Chakarcham massacre. Black Widow or DHD (J) has surrendered and sign ceasefire agreement with the government of India on 2<sup>nd</sup> Oct.2009, at Haflong in North Cachar Hills District (Sainjalee,2007,p.36-37).

Both the groups of the DHD claim to be struggling for 'Dimaraji' which according to them is the only solution to the problem of the Dimasas. But the 'Dimaraji' of their perception resulted in making other ethnic groups, especially the Hmars living in the district of North Cachar Hills and the Karbis living in the district

of Karbi Anglong, 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 the relationship between the Dimasas on the one hand, and the Hmars and the Karbis on the other. This strained relationship resulted in conflagration, especially in the districts of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong. There was violent clash between the Hmars and the Dimasas in 2003 and between the Karbis and the Dimasas in 2005, Zeme Nagas and Dimasas in 2009. These ethnic clashes resulted not only in the loss of hundreds of lives and properties worth crore of rupees, but gave birth to an uneasy relationship between the ethnic groups living in the Dima Hasao (erstwhile N. C. Hills) and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam.

To normalize the situation in the hill district of Assam in Dima Hasao (erstwhile North Cachar Hills) and Karbi Anglong districts 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 Haram 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> October 2012 to create the Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in the Dima Hasao District (former North Cachar Hills District). 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 Kumar Das, DGP, J.N. Choudhury, besides top leaders of rival factions of Dima Haram Daogah.

Peace agreement was signed between DHD and Central Government in 2003 but the disagreement between the group further broke out of DHD outfit and DHD(J) known as Black Widow was born which was led Jewel Gorlosa. The Black Widows declared objective was to create Dima Raji for the Dimasa people in Dima Hasao district only. However the objective of DHD (Nunisa Faction) was to include parts of Cachar, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon District in Assam and sections of Dimapur district in Nagaland. DHD strongly affirmed their demand for a separate Dimaraj as the ultimate aspirations of all Dimasas. An accord for unification of the Dimasa was made but actual bonding was still missing between the two outfits. The concern of

protecting their Identity and the reprisal of their grievances through Ethnic conflicts between the Dimasas with other ethnic groups within the district became a serious concern in the region. The movement was violent in nature leading to great loss of both men and material from all communities in the District. Problems of economic growth the central role of articulating hopes and fear of the Dimasa people have pushed them towards radicalisation and insurgency. Intoward incident in the district was witnessed in ethnic cleansing between Dimasas and non-Dimasa groups.

The most disastrous ethnic conflict took place in the district between the Dimasas and Hmar communities in 2003, Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005 and Dimasa –Naga conflict in 2009 in the articulation of grievances between the communities. Finally a settlement reached between the Govt of India and the DHD outfits through the memorandum of settlement signed between them. As a result it has been agreed to initiate time bound steps to bring about greater devolution of power to the grassroots in Dima Hasao while ensuring increased capacity building for developmental activities at all levels.

Despite the adoption of liberal democratic polity in India after its independence, communities and collective identities continue to claim recognition and remained powerful. Indian polity has consistently tried to negotiate the allegiance to a liberal (individual) spirit and the concerns and consciousness of community but identity politics of various hues abound in India. Among the most spectacular are those which are based on language, caste, religion, tribal identity and ethnicity. Each identity markers do not operate autonomously. Homogeneous linguistic group may be divided by caste affiliations that may be sub-divided by religious orientations and subsumed under a broader ethnic claim.

The studies on the movements suggest that the tribals in the district of Dima Hasao want security of their land and natural resources, their culture and language, whether it is the question of political autonomy or cultural identity the ethnic solidarity movement the problem is the same, that is the apprehension of losing their traditional economic base which means land, forest, and forest products, their customs and tradition, language, and also the fear of social and economic exploitation and political dominance by others in the changing social, political, and economic systems of the country. These are all reflected in the objective and issue of bifurcation by

various ethnic groups of the district of N.C. Hills (now Dima Hasao). The next chapter will analyse the growth of identity politics of ethnic minorities in the district.