

CHAPTER III

RISE OF IDENTITY POLITICS

AMONG THE ETHNIC

MINORITIES IN DIMA HASAO

DISTRICT

RISE OF IDENTITY POLITICS AMONG THE ETHNIC MINORITIES IN DIMA HASAO DISTRICT

In the previous chapter mention has been made of the rise of identity politics in the district of Dima Hasao emphasising on India and the North East Region in general and some of the diverse problems confronting the people in the regions. Identity politics among the ethnic minorities has become an issue of concern in the otherwise peaceful district of Dima Hasao. This chapter provides the event that had forced the participants in identity politics. It has also provided an essential context to understand the causes for the growth of such identity politics among the ethnic minorities.

Many communities in North East have its own history which precipitated its identity crisis and led it to the path of movement. The ethnic minorities in Dima Hasao district are no exception to that. Identity politics in Dima Hasao district has gained a significant amount of attention over the years. This attention appears to increase the trend of hostile interaction among ethnic groups which sometimes threaten the very political, social and economic foundation of the society. The long standing history of conflict among themselves resulted in outbreaks of violence and the politics and socio-economic biases consequently produce identity consciousness. Ethnic consciousness of a group often encourages other to protect and reconstruct their identities.

Over the years there occurred differences in socio-economic and political lives of this group with the majority Dimasa community in the district. The emerging ethnic autonomy demand movements of different ethnic groups on the basis of ethnic identity has been observed as a socio-economic, political reality of contemporary democracy of North East India as well as of Assam and minority is a central component of identity politics. Rise of identity politics among the minorities in the district will be studied under the experiences shared by the various ethnic minorities in the three developmental blocks in the district which has served as a central component of identity amongst them. Beginning with the modest attempt to protect the rights of the ethnic minorities, the present demand of the ethnic minorities' movement is a separate administrative unit. In this backdrop, the present chapter intends to understand the roots and causes of the long drawn identity movement which will throw light on the nature of ethnic minorities' movement.

3.1 Dima Hasao: A Backdrop

Dima Hasao district, formally called North Cachar Hills district is an administrative district in the state of Assam in North East India. As of 2011 census, it is the least populous district of Assam. The district headquarter is located at Haflong. Dima Hasao district occupies an area of 4,890 square kilometres. It is the third largest district of Assam after Karbi Anglong and Sonitpur district. Dima Hasao is surrounded by East of Karbi Anglong district and Nagaland on the North East, Manipur on East, Nagaon on North, West of Karbi Anglong on North West, Meghalaya on West and Cachar district on South.

It is difficult to predict the first settlers tribes of Dima Hasao in the absence of written records but the Dimasa Kacharis are usually considered as the first settlers while the Zeme Naga also claimed to be the first settlers. After their expulsion from the plains of Brahmaputra valley and later on from their capital Dimapur, the Kachari chief probably arrived at the present Dima Hasao areas in search of land and security around 1586 AD set up their capital at Maibang. According to the oral accounts of the Zeme Nagas and also supported by the manuscript of the Zeliangrong Student Union on 'Zeliangrong Tribes in Cachar and North Cachar Hills', the Zeme Naga are the first settlers of the area. As such Elwin (1969) also mention that the Nagas are the earliest inhabitants of the soil and probably the first settlers of Haflong area, the district headquarter. According to B. Pakem the Biates settled in the district in the 13th century and a large body of Thadao Kuki entered Dima Hasao from the same direction. By about 1536, Dima Hasao district became a part of the Dimasa Kachari kingdom till 1832. The kingdom was extended from Jamuna in the North of the foothills of Lushai hills in the South and from the Kopili in the West to the Angami and Kacha Naga hills beyond the Dhansiri in the East.

The Dimasa Kachari kings had their capitals successively at Kachomari, Dimapur, Maibang, Kashpur and latly at Haridikkhor or Horitikor (near Badarpu in Karimganj district). The Dimasa king Gobindra Chandra Hasnusa was assassinated by his own general Gambhir Singh in 1830, after that the British annexed the southern part of the kingdom on 14th August, 1832 under the Doctrine of Lapse. The rest was ruled by the Dimasa King Tularam Hasnusa. In 1837, a portion of Tularam's kingdom was further annexed to the British Empire and constituted into a sub-division of Nagaon district in 1837, with its headquarter at Asalu, a Zeme Naga village in 1854,

on the death of Senapati Tularam Hasnusa, the remaining portion of his kingdom was finally annexed to the British Empire and added to the Asalu sub-division.

This sub-division was abolished and apportioned into three parts among the districts Cachar, Kashi and Jaintia Hills and Nagaon in 1867. The present Dima Hasao district was included in the old Cachar district with Asalu being the only police outpost. In 1880, this portion was constituted into a sub-division with headquarter at Gunjung under Cachar District. This headquarter was shifted to Haflong in 1895 and Haflong still continues to be the head quarter of the District.

In 1951, after commencement of the Constitution of India, Dima Hasao as specified under paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, it ceased to be a part of Cachar district. This part along with Mikir Hills constituted a new civil district namely 'United district of North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills' with effect from 17 November 1951. According to the provision of Sixth Schedule, two different Councils were constituted later on namely North Cachar Hills District Council and Karbi Anglong District Council within the geographical boundary of that district. North Cachar Hills District Council was inaugurated on 19th April 1952. In 2nd February 1970, Government declared an independent administrative district, viz., North Cachar Hills District Council. It may be mentioned here that at present this autonomous council possesses administrative control over almost all departments of the district except law and order, administrative and treasury department.

3.1.1 Demography

(Source- Directorate of Information and Public Relations Assam)

According to the 2011 census, Dima Hasao district has a population of 213,529. The district has a population density of 44 inhabitants per square kilometre. Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 13.53%. Dima Hasao has a sex ratio of 931 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 77.99%. The major tribes inhabiting the district are Dimasa, Zeme Naga, Kuki, Hmar etc. Other significant ethnic groups included the Biate, Hrangkhoh, Vaiphei, Karbi, Khasi Pnar and Khelma. Dimasas are the most highly populated and major tribe of the district.

Average literacy rate of Dima Hasao in 2011 was 77.54 % as compared to 67.62% in 2001. All schools of Dima Hasao are run either by the state government or by private organisations. Mostly English is the primary languages of instruction in

most of the schools. The schools are recognised by Board of Secondary Education (SEBA) and Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (ASHEC). All colleges of Dima Hasao are affiliated to Assam University, a Central University, which imparts education in general as well as professional streams.

Dima Hasao district is an Autonomous District (Lok Sabha Constituency) enjoying the Sixth Schedule status granted by the Constitution of India. The Dima Hasao district is administered by North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC). Members of the Autonomous Council (MAC) are elected by people of Dima Hasao. The Autonomous Council is a powerful body and almost all the departments of government are under its control except the police and law and order which is under Assam government. Dima Hasao has two sub-division administrative units namely Haflong and Maibang and five development blocks. They are Harangajao I.T.D (Integrated Tribal Development) Block, Jatinga Development Block, Diyung Valley Development Block, Diyungbra I.T.D (Integrated Tribal Development) Block and New Sangbar Development Block.

3.1.2 Languages

Major languages spoken in the district are the Dimas, Zeme, Hmar, Hrangkhoh, Kuki, Biate, Khelma and few languages of Indo-Aryan like Haflong Hindi (a speech form of Hindi) and Bengali. Dimas and Hindi are the lingua franca in the Dima Hasao district.

3.1.3 Festivals

The people of Dima Hasao district, being agrarian people, celebrated various agriculture festivals in different ways and at different times. Festivals form an essential aspect of socio-cultural life of the people of Dima Hasao. The festivals of Dima Hasao reflect the real culture and tradition of the people of Dima Hasao. Most of the festivals in Dima Hasao revolve around agriculture, which is still the main occupation of the tribal society. All the tribes celebrate their distinct seasonal festivals with pageantry of color and a feast of music. The festivals of Dima Hasao speak of its rich cultural and traditional background. The colourful festivals are an integral part of every people of Dima Hasao. Every community celebrates their festivals according to their own customs and rituals. Some of the important festivals of Dima Hasao are Busu, Chavang Kut, Siphui Ruoi, Nulding Kut etc which are the

gayest and the most important community festival of the various ethnic communities. The festival is usually celebrated in the month of January, when the works of jhum are completed.

3.1.4 Autonomous District

The Dima Hasao District (formerly known as N. C. Hills) is an Autonomous District constituted under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The N. C. Hills Autonomous Council may be described as a “State in miniature” having all the paraphernalia of the Govt. like Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. It has full autonomy to legislate and administer the subjects like land, revenue, primary education, customary laws etc. assigned to it under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The Deputy Commissioner who on the other hand runs the Civil Administration including the law and order is the head of the District.

On the 29th April, 1952, the District Council, as an autonomous body came into being which marked a new era in the history of Dima Hasao, initially the District Council got on the saddle of autonomy with 12 elected members, 4 nominated members and a Secretary; with the provision of Chief Executive Member and its 2 Executive Members. The sub-Divisional Officer (civil), Dima Hasao Sub Division occupied as Ex-Officio chairman of the N. C. Hills Autonomous District Council at that time for six 6 years as per provision of Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of Districts Council) Rules 1951.

Since then it went through a process of tremendous expansion in both in its structure and content. During the second District Council 1957-1962 and the third District Council 1962-1968, many shapes of administrative set up to the machineries of Council establishment have been moulded by creating different departments in the Council, such as PWD, Forest, Primary Education, Planning and development (now rural development), Market, Transport and Workshop etc.; though Revenue, judicial, legislative department were initially started during the first District Council as envisaged under Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

In the Fourth District Council, 1968-1973, the strength of public representatives to the Council was increased to 24 from 16 including 4 nominated members. And one more seat of Executive Member of the Council had been raised to 4 in 1970.

Again, during the Fifth District Council in 1974-1980, the Provision of Rule 19(1) of Assam Autonomous Districts (constitution of Districts Council) Rules 1951 was amended and increased the numbers of Executive Members in the N. C. Hills Autonomous District Council from 4 to 7.

In the Sixth District Council 1980-87, the strength of the Council was further enhanced from 24 to 27 members including 4 nominations in the Council.

The Seventh District Council 1987-1996 was termed as the longest District Council life, which lasted for almost 9 years. Within that period, the Provision of Rule 19(1) of the Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of Districts Council) Rules 1951 was again amended, and increased the post of Executive Member from 7 to 9.

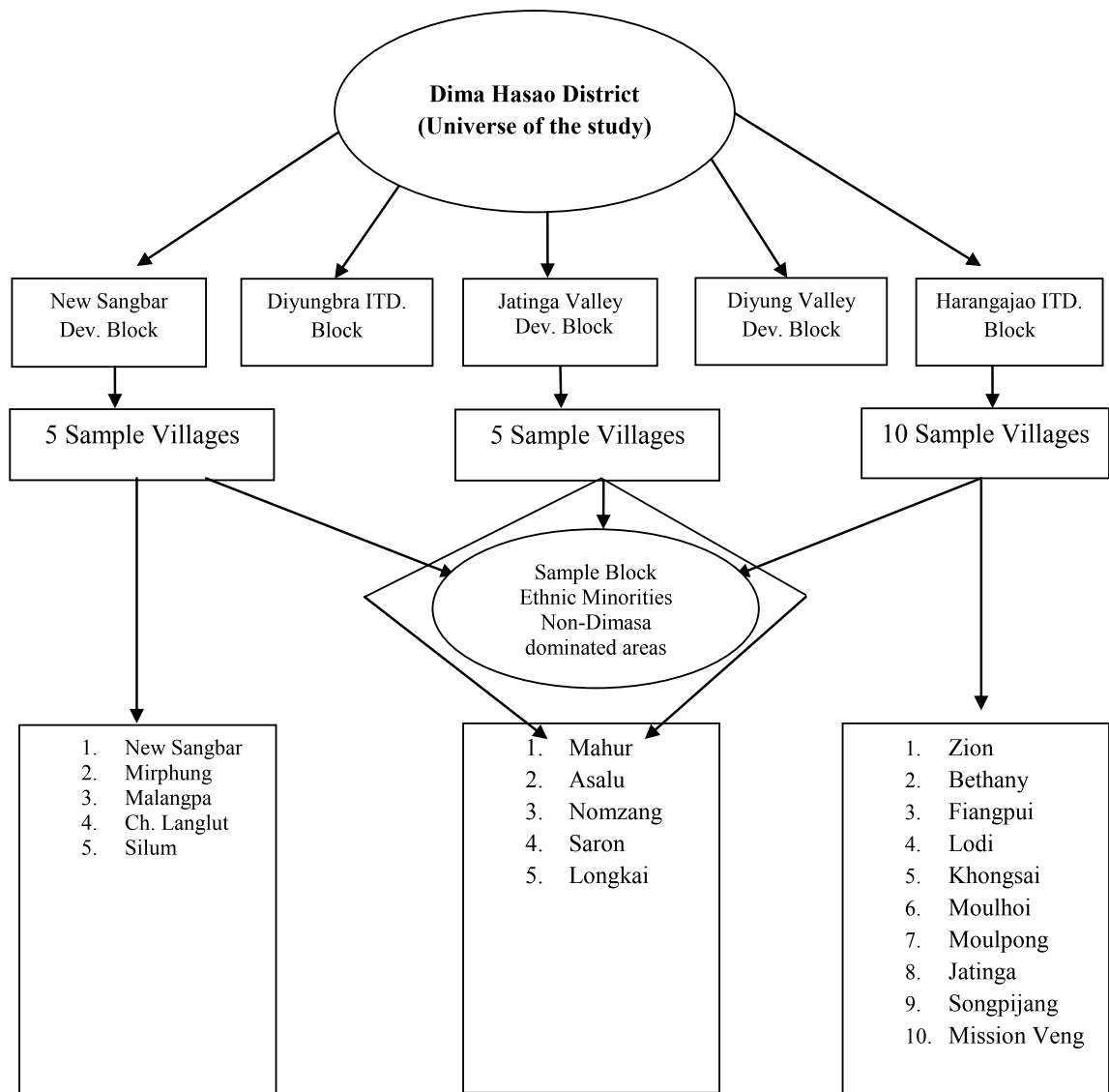
The term of the Eight Autonomous Council was from 1996 to 2001. One of the great landmark achievements of the Council was major entrustment of Government Departments to the Council, which was a long standing demand of the Council. Under Para 6(2) of the sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India altogether 30 development Departments are placed under the direct control of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council Departments under the administrative control of N. C. Hills Autonomous Council are: Industry, Animal husbandry and veterinary, Forest ,Agriculture, P.W.D, Sericulture, Education: (A) Primary education upto the level of Higher secondary education.(B) Adult education, Cultural affairs, Soil conservation, Co-operation, Fisheries, Panchayat and rural development including DRDA, Handloom and textiles, Health and family welfare, Public Health Engineering, Irrigation ,Social Welfare, Flood Control Department, Sports and Youth Welfare, Weight & Measure, Food & Civil Supplies, Town Country Planning, College Education(General), including library services, District Museum & Archaeology, Land reform, Publicity/Public Relation, Printing & Stationary, Tourism, Transport, Excise ,Finance including sales tax on purchase of goods other than newspapers, Excise, Professional Tax.

The Ninth Autonomous Council began from 21-12-2001 with formation of Executive Committee in January, 2002. During the period, the post of Executive Members was increased from 9 to 12. And as per the amendment in the Constitution of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council (Thirty fourth) Amendment Act, 2007, the numbers of the Council Constituency was also increased from 23 to 28 with the

inclusion of Hamri, Lower Kharthong, Dolong, Diger and Semkhor constituency. The term of the 10th Executive Committee of N. C. Hills Autonomous Council began from 09-01-2008 followed by 11th Executive Council from 2012 till date. The study of the research has been conducted under the administrative units of Haflong and Maibang sub-divisions taking twenty villages from the three developmental blocks namely:

1. Jatinga valley development block, Mahur.
2. Harangajao ITD block, Harangajao.
3. New Sangbar development block, New Sangbar.

Sample Chart



3.2 The colourful people of Dima Hasao: A Backdrop

A spectrum of people representing a number of district ethnic groups reside within a small geographical periphery like N.C.Hills (now Dima Hasao) underlines an inner harmony in the sphere of emotional integration in the previous past. The different tribes as colourful as they are in their attires, customs and traditions, though they speak in their respective dialect, have adopted a common link language called as “Haflong Hindi” with peculiar overtones of phonetics for communicating among themselves. On the other hand, most of the urban based people like Dimasa, Hmar, Jeme Naga and Karbi etc. understand Assamese and Bengali and can carry on conversations in their own characteristic styles.

Nature has showered her blessing with unwithdrawing hands on the Dima Hasao district and the colourful and warm-hearted inhabitants have contributed much to the State’s brilliant socio-cultural mosaic. The district is the home of several diverse tribes, each with its own rich social and cultural traditions. The inherent genius of the beautiful people blossoms into a wide range of crafts while their zest for life finds its echo on their heart-warming songs and soul-stirring dances which are marked by the unalloyed honesty and spontaneity of pastoral life. As a people they are generally soft-spoken, simple and peace-loving in nature. Hospitality is the key-note of their character. All the ethnic groups are proud of their culture and heritage.

The main constituents of the hilly tribes living in the district are the Dimasas, the Zeme Nagas, the Hmars, the Kukis, the Biates, the Karbis, the Khasis, the Hrangkhols, the Vaipheis, the Khelmas and the Rongmeis. Besides, a sizeable number of other non-tribals like Bengali, Assamese, Nepali, Manipuri, Deswali and others have also chosen Dima Hasao as their abode.

3.3 The ethnic minority communities in the district

The district comprise of many ethnic groups with Dimasa community as the largest in terms of population. The land is inhabited by various ethnic groups who share different socio- cultural traditions. To make an indepth study of the research it becomes essential to study the historical background of the ethnic minorities.

3.3.1 The Zeme Nagas

The Zeme Nagas are distributed in Dima Hasao (formerly North Cachar Hills) and parts of adjoining Manipur and Nagaland states. The word Zeme is derived from

the word 'Zemena' or 'Nzeme' which mean man or people or dwellers of the semi plain area and warm land (Lalsim, 2005). The Zeme Nagas are an indigenous group belonging to Mongoloid Race and they are one of the sub-groups of the greater Naga community. They are classified by the anthropologist as one of the sub-tribe of the Kacha Nagas. They share same ethnic origin with Liangmei, Rongmei and Puimei. They share common culture, social structure and linguistic roots (Nriame, 2012). The Zemes living in Nagaland themselves Zeliang and those of the Manipur borders are known as Zeliangrong. Originally they migrated from Nagaland via Manipur and settled down in the north-eastern part of N. C. Hills and south of Maibang, the ancient capital of the Kachari Kings. They also settled as far as the bank of the river Kopili, with the decline of Kachari power, the Zemes became easy victim of depredations of the mighty Angami Nagas in the neighbourhood. As a result some of the Zemes migrated to the west and settled in the hills beyond the Diyung valley. They speak their own Zemi dialect and are living peacefully along with the other tribes like Dimasa Kachari, Kuki and Hmar for than two centuries. The Zeme are well built, strong and healthy with black hair and a fair complexion.

The Zemes have six clans- Npame, Nkuame, Heneume, Nriame, Sogame and Panme. Of them Napame and Nkuame are considered as belonging to the same clan and marriage between these two clans is not encouraged. The clans are exogamous. The Zeme villages are on the breezy hill-tops. Each village has dormitories for young boys and girls. The boy's dormitories are called Hangseuki and the girls are known as Langseuki. All the young unmarried boys and girls spent the night in their respective dormitories. Of the folk dances of the Zemes the popular ones are- Haripivelim, johumpeselim, kanguibelim, kerapsaplim, hakalim, nbzchuinelim etc.

3.3.2 The Hmars

The Hmars are a fairly large group of tribes, sub-tribes, clans and sub-clans forming a scattered section of the tribal groups living in NE India, they form a part of the great Mongolian race found all over South East Asia. According to anthropologist, they belong to the Tibeto-Burma stock of the Tibeto-Chinese race. Linguistically they belong to the Lushai-Kuki-Chin family. They are a distinct tribe having their own culture and language.

There are no written records of their past history. However, their traditions strongly maintained that they originated from Sinlung which is believed to be located somewhere in South-Central China. The re-organisation of States Even after long years of migration from their original abode, the Hmars still adhere to their traditional festivals connecting with the agricultural cycle and other community rites and practices. Their cultural traditions are best reflected in their folk songs and dances.

3.3.3 The Kukis

The Kuki is a generic term for a number of mixed groups of people who have migrated into India through Burma and Central Asia. In Burma they are called Chin and in Indian frontier States they are best identified as Kukis.

Being of Mongoloid stock the Kukis are strongly built in features and are stout. They are patriarchal in social organisation and the sons inherit the property. Marriage among the Kukis is monogamous and cross-cousins marriage is preferred. Though the Kukis are described as animists by religion and sacrificed animals to propitiate different spirits at the time of sickness and calamities, now a great majority of them have embraced Christianity as their prime faith.

Though Christianity have brought considerable changes in the socio-economic life of the Kukis, yet the Kukis still adhere to their old customs, laws and habits, which their illustrious forefathers adopted from time immemorial.

3.3.4 The Karbis

The Karbis belong to the great Tibeto-Burman race. They are divided into three groups called Chinthong, Ronghang and Karbi. These names in all probability refer to their habitat. Amri seems to be a Khasi river named and Ronghang is the legendary site of the Sotreacho capital. The real tribal exogamous division is called Kur (a Khasi word). The five principles Kur are- Ingti, Teron, Lekhte, Timung and Terang. Each of these Kur is further sub-divided into a number of sub-groups. All the KURS are socially in an equal status.

In religious beliefs and practice they have borrowed much from the Hindu mythology. The Karbi villages are small and scattered. They build their houses on stilts on the hill top. Villages are generally named after the Sarthey (Headman). The Karbis are known for their migratory character. They are prone to shift from place to

place on pretexts like outbreak of diseases, failure of crops and mauling of village by tiger and in search of new pastures for jhumming.

3.3.5 The Biates

Believed to be an offshoot of the Lushai-Kuki-Chin group, the Biates migrated from Central China and entered India to settle in northern part of Mizoram from where they were pushed by later immigrants to present day North Cachar Hills. They are regarded as one of the earliest settlers in Assam.

The Biates, have their own dialect and cultural traits which are expressed through many a festival in different occasion. Among them the agricultural festival likes Chemchoi Kut, Pamchar Kut, and Lebang Kut: harvest festival Favang Kut: and a minor festival observed by families separately Jolsuak and Salulam to honour the brave hunter of ferocious animals. They are peace loving in nature.

3.3.6 The Hrangkhols

Differently described by the ethnographers as Hrangkhawl, Romngkhol or Hrongkhol, this tiny group of people of the great Kuki tribe is scattered thriving in the North Cachar Hills. Mainly agriculturists, they practices jhum cultivation and build their houses on wooden stilt and use bamboo profusely for the floor as well as the walls and thatch for the roofs. The Hrangkhols observe the harvest festival called Rualsafak and invite the spring season through Parangat festival.

3.3.7 The Sakachep (Khelmas)

Among the inhabitants of N.C.Hills district, the Sakachep also known as Khelmas are one of the smallest communities. Racially, the Sakachep have close resemblances to the Hrangkhawls and the Biates. This community is entirely dependent on agriculture, which is the age old traditional shifting jhum cultivation. The Khelmas bear close resemblance to the Hrangkhawls and the Biates in language, customs and traditions. The Khelmas cremate the dead like the Vedic Hindus.

The Khelmas also celebrate different festivals, which are connected with worship of different Gods and Goddesses during a year. Rabu-khat, Parsem, Inmathung, Rabuthum are such festivals. Rabuthum is the most important of all the ceremonies of Khelmas.

3.3.8 The Vaipheis

The Vaipheis are small communities in N.C.Hills district. They mostly inhabit in the Ditochera-Kai-Eng river valley, consisting of about eight(8) villages. Though small in respect of their population, yet the Vaiphei are good in the field of Arts and Crafts so as in education too.

The family of the Vaipheis is Patriarchal family, every Vaiphei villages has a youth organisation known as 'Laem' which means a labour co-operative organisation of the youth. Like the other hill tribe, the agrarian Vaiphei tribes have festivals mostly connected cycle year long cultivation. The festival namely 'Gawichawkik' is one of them. Besides this, Lawnzunek, Lawmisaltha, Khawhaosa are the other festivals celebrated by the Vaipheis. The Vaipheis have a large collection of folk songs which they sing during their different respective festivals.

3.3.9 The Khasi-Pnar

The Pnar or Jaintia tribes of N. C. Hills popularly known as Khasis mainly inhabit the valley of the river Jatinga. The Khasi-Pnar follows the matrilineal system, which means that their descendants carry on the family's name after the mother's title. The Khasi-Pnars of N. C. Hills are mostly agriculturists. Unlike other hill tribes of N. C. Hills, their cultivation is permanent, it does not comprise of the old method of shifting cultivation. Their main agricultural products are orange, pineapple, ginger, litchi, lemon, plum etc. They have made fame and name specially by producing oranges. Khasi-Pnars are not only hardworking people but are skilful horticulturists.

3.3.10 Mizo-Lushei

The Mizo-Lushei tribe a small community in the district is said to have their origin Chinlung in China. The Lushais were original inhabitants of the Kingdom of Tripura and also to the adjoining hilly areas. Majority of the Lushais are in Mizoram. The tribe choose mountain tops as their abode. The Lushai are traditionally animism but the Lushai people in the district are adherent to Christian faith. They celebrate various festivals like Chapchar Kut, Mimkut and Palkut. Among them the Chapchar Kut is celebrated with prom and grandeur by organising traditional sports and games.

3.3.11 The Rongmei Nagas

The Rongmeis, one of the Naga tribes from a small community in Dima Hasao district. This tribe is found in the district only in proper Haflong under the jurisdiction of Haflong town. They are mainly concentrated in Kaphunlong (Hagjer Nagar) Bazaar area. The Rongmeis of this Hagjer Nagar is said to be among the old inhabitants of the Haflong Bazaar. Ethnically, the Rongmei belong to the Tibeto-Burma group having considerable similarities of language and cultural traits to those of the Zeme tribes of N.C.Hills district.

The village council of Rongmei is called Paikai and the young man's house is called Khangchu. The house of young girls is called Kailu. There is a highest authority council called Agangmai pai. Gaan ngai is the biggest festival of the Rongmei Nagas. It is generally celebrated in the month of December or January, which is the season when all the crops and paddy had been gathered.

The historical background of the ethnic groups reveal that majority of the communities share the same historical background and common origin with exceptions to Karbi and Khasi Pnar ethnic communities in the district.

3.4 Identity politics and ethnic minorities

Identity politics among the ethnic minorities in Dima Hasao district involves the complex interplay of several ethnic groups which is marked by diversity of group autonomy with a desire to safeguard their identity and rights from the attack of dominant majority. Some ethnic groups have articulated their problems which took the shape of ethnic conflicts in the district. But cultural ethics and socio-economic and political aspects of ethnic minority communities directly into conflict with the majority's wishes. These changes have introduced certain incompatibilities in many aspects of the minority's society. The articulation of the people's grievances has pushed the politics of Dima Hasao towards radicalisation and protest.

3.4.1 Historical Grievances

According to Verrier Elwin and the oral accounts recorded, the Nagas were probably the earliest inhabitants of Haflong area which now constitute the district headquarters. Historians like Tanmoy Bhattacharjee also asserted that the Zeme, Karbi, the 'Old' and 'New' Kukis like the Hmars (the Hmar group includes sub-groups like Hrangkhol, Biate, Sakechep etc) already settled in North Cachar Hills

long before the arrival of the Dimasas. These facts are supported by figures of the population as recorded in Mill's Report 1854. In the words of H.K. Barpujari, a noted Historian, Lt. Fisher noticed that the '*principal inhabitants*' of the area were also averse to the rule of the Kachari Chief and they 'universally expressed' a desire to be brought under the British Government. (Assam in the days of the Company: H.K. Barpujari, p.110). The existence of Dimasa community was known only to some before the Dimasa King Gobinda Chandra was assassinated by his own General Gambhir Singh in 1830.

From historical times the ethnic minority people have respected and upheld the principles of consultation, fair justice and consent before any collective undertaking. It is claimed by them in this land that their great-grand fathers; the principal inhabitants of N.C. Hills have worked hard, stand in the frontline of the Dimasa and the British raids. The first troops raised from the area called the 'Kuki Levy' were 600 strong belonging to the non-Dimasa tribesmen; the Indigenous minority groups of the district never submitted to the rule and will of the Kachari Kings. Alexander Mackenzie recorded that Tularam protested earnestly that he had no control over the Nagas. The plain areas around Harangajao were allotted to the Kachari Dimasas by Hmar men Vangpa (mispronounced as Bompa) on the request made by the Dimsas. The Bompa Mauza was among the first created revenue circle and it remains to be known as the name of the original land-lord Vangpa (Thiek, 2013).

At the formation of the Autonomous District Council in 1952, the first C.E.M. was Shri C.H. Khotlang, a Hmar tribesmen and representation of all tribes in the council was ensured through a '*gentlemen agreement*'. However, such agreements were throttle by the covert policy and hostile design of the Dimasas resulting in the disproportionate representation from late 50's onwards. Since then, the autonomous council is headed by the Dimasa community as the Chief Executive Member (C.E.M.) and much higher number the council Executive Members from the Dimasa communities till today, while their population is much lesser than the total population of other communities.

In spite of such known historical facts, the Dimasa people claim the District as their land of original settlement. Thus, the change of N.C. Hills district as 'Dima Hasao district' is a form of discrimination and negation of the Fundamental Rights of

the indigenous groups in favour of the Dimasas. The demand for 90% reservation of jobs for the Dimasas and the slogan announced for Cachar for Kacharis and N C Hills for Dimasas has created great resentment among the ethnic minorities (Sentinel, 2002). The change of the district nomenclature did not take into consideration the existence of the principle inhabitants in the district. It is regarded as a covert policy and hostile design by the marginalised groups to eliminate the indigenous hills peoples from their ancestral land.

An attempt to create Dimasa homeland in N. C. Hills district during the past several years has disturbed life on N. C. Hills with infighting between the Dimasas and the principal inhabitants.

3.4.2 Ethnic Conflict and its implications on ethnic minorities

Northeast India is the abode of different ethnic groups with a variety of cultures speaking different languages and dialects Inter-ethnic conflicts and struggle for identity among the ethnic groups in Assam are common and all pervading at present. We will analyse the identity movement among the ethnic minorities considering consequences of ethnic conflict, the socio-economic and political deprivation of the ethnic minorities in Dima Hasao district.

Ethnic conflicts in Dima Hasao lead to serious consequences. The district witnessed the most destructive incident during these conflicts. Dima Hasao district has been confronted with ethnic conflict among the various ethnic communities disrupting the peaceful district and turning it into inter-ethnic conflict zone among various ethnic groups inhabiting the district. Socio-economic biases, long standing histories of conflict amongst themselves explain these outbreaks of identity movement among the minority communities.

The field study reveals that magnitude of the persecution, suffering, and loss were experienced by the people in the district during the conflict. It brought economic crisis in the land, the people witnessed breakdown of law and order which brought insecurity amongst them. An alarming increase was observed in the migration of people and the people also experienced unwanted displacements during the conflicts. There was increasing unemployment in the district and the district also experienced disruption in the economic activities which adversely affected the development stability in the district.

The ethnic conflict was faced with many serious implications and the social consequences of ethnic conflict in the district cannot be quantified. Research findings revealed the miseries of the people have reached its zenith with increasing death rates during the conflict. Many lost their lives including their family members, friends and relatives. The worst victims during the ethnic conflict in the district were women, children, old aged people and the disabled. The entire district saw the unexpected loss of both men and material rendering many homeless.

The attack upon the ethnic minorities on the basis of ethnic background resulted in the strong feeling of resentment which ultimately gave shape to the development of strong bond amongst them. Many victims could not comprehend the incalculable losses inflicted upon them. The economic impacts of ethnic violence in the study area reveal that the ethnic minorities felt that they were overtaken economically by the majority community.

The research findings also revealed that many students suffered from academic struggles and adjustment during the conflict and thereafter as some students had their academic certificates lost or burnt during the conflict, which created great difficulties in pursuing their higher education. Many Schools were converted into refugee camps during the ethnic conflict as they were completely shut down because of the tensed situation prevailing in the district. The respondents reported the high increase in the number of drop outs in many schools. The respondents also argue that forced change of schools have de-motivated the students as they always were in a state of insecurity. This undoubtedly compromised the quality of education in the district which further added to the resentment among the ethnic minorities

The Research also reveals that created dependency among many victims as there has been loss of income for many individuals and families. Previously, they would engage in agricultural cultivation and farming but many youth have lost the means of earning with the destruction of forests and in the process of resettlement. This disruption of agricultural activities led to poor yields and consequently results into low income badly affecting the ethnic groups.

Violence disrupted the local economy and feeling of insecurity ruled the district. The lost of means of earning an income by the youths increased their frustrations. Loss of income and the problem of unemployment compelled many

victims to depend on other family members for their basic needs and many took up arms and use illegal means to extort money from the people to run their living. The worst consequence was that many of the youths were misled taking the wrong path of violence. The ethnic conflict has proved to be one of the most destructive one causing massive destruction of both men and material in the district. The government did not give them much financial support during the resettlement exercise and many youths have to depend upon their parents for basic amenities and the unemployment problem further strengthened their frustration. Most of the property owners were bound to relocate or reconstruct villages to other places. This resulted in the illegitimate process of transfer of property among the shifted people to make a new beginning.

3.4.3 Problems of Displacement

Internal displacement has been quite high among the ethnic minorities in comparison to the majority Dimasa community. An alarming increase was observed in the migration of people and many people in the district experienced unwanted displacements during the conflicts. Many of the population almost a quarter of the population of the district got displaced. Being displaced from their gutted down villages, they had to take shelter in many relief centres with poor provisions of toilet, bathroom and improper dwelling. The unhygienic environment further affected their lives and made their life more pathetic. Many of the families were evicted from their homes rendering most of them homeless. They sought refuge at different villages some as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Ethnic clash between the majority ethnic group with the other ethnic minorities played a big role in the current state of poverty by creating tension, insecurity, forced migration and time wastage which would have been otherwise directed towards productive activities. Because of displacement the prospects for local economic recovery became worse with the displacement of farmers, and business people, as the lands that were given to them were not fertile which adversely affected the economy of the land and resulted in the economic slowdown. Production was not enough to meet their daily ends and the condition of the people became more deplorable. The economic condition of the people was greatly affected due to poor rate of production.

Ethnic conflict has given a dimension of ethnic unrest in the region with less chance of drastic change in the near future and as such security has become an issue

of concern for the ethnic community in the district. It also involves serious costs and consequence and it was very destructive. The situation is made complex but the fact is that civic education has not been disseminated to the general citizenship as a pre-requisite to peaceful co-existence.

3.4.4 Issue of Representation

With Autonomous Council in the district twelve seats were created where six seats were for the majority tribe comprising of the Dimasas and other six seats for the other minority tribes in the beginning. This delimitation of seats continued for the third Council election, but from the fourth election the seats were increased from twelve to twenty, where seven seats were added for the Dimasa and one seat for the Non Dimasas. Again in the next election it was increased to twenty four where sixteen seats were given to the Dimasa and eight seats to the Non Dimasa. Ever since the minority ethnic groups were feeling a sense of deprivation against their counter tribe (Thiek, 2013). Majority minority syndrome was created since time immemorial.

Deprivation in the political administration has a created an identity consciousness among the marginalized ethnic groups taking the shape of identity politics. Dominant ethnic groups have been on the forefront in fighting for political power and the Autonomous Council which was established to administer the ethnic groups was also under contravention. The conflict has let loose the system of administration in the district and this has also resulted to a large scale political instability. Political consequences has brought forth problems challenging the political life which they faced during elections as they could not produce The worst political consequences of ethnic conflict was analysed with the change of nomenclature of North Cachar Hills district to Dima Hasao (meaning: the land of the Dimasa) in 2011. This affected both economic and political reform in the district which added more to the grievances of the people.

3.4.5 Formation of Indigenous Peoples Forum (IPF)

The fight for protecting the rights of the ethnic minorities started during the early 1980s when the slogan was made by Dimasa Students Union demanding Cachar for Kacharis and N.C. Hills for Dimasas also raising the demand for 90% job facilities reserved for Dimasas. To fight for the cause of the ethnic minorities Peoples Democratic Forum (PDF) was formed in 1981. It was formed to counter the

movement but it later subsided. The fight for the protection of the ethnic minorities continued with the formation of United Tribals Forum in 1996. In the same year ASDC came to power and it was observed by the minorities that the leaders in power worked exclusively for the Dimasas and the non-Dimasa minorities apprehended the target. The Forum could not prove substantial result. The proposal for the change of the District nomenclature as Dima Halali in the year 2001 was taken as a violation of the rights of the ethnic minorities in the district as it was clearly resented by them. To counter the attempt of the change of the district nomenclature the ethnic minorities formed Indigenous Tribals Forum (ITF).

According to the respondents, theoretically it was difficult to change the name of the district, so it adopted the ethnic cleansing operation. The three major ethnic cleansing policy unleashed by the armed groups of Dima Halam Daogah-Nunisa(DHD-N) and Dima Halam Daogah-Jewel (DHD-J) in the year 2003, 2005 and 2009 respectively, claimed many innocent lives and displacing hundreds of the indigenous minority groups like the Hmars, Karbis and Zeme Nagas.

In spite of such known historical facts and the vehement protest of the Non-Dimasa organisation against the change of the District nomenclature, the Tarun Gogoi-led coalition government of Assam renamed North Cachar Hills the District as Dima Hasao Rajee, the word '*Rajee*' later admitted as it point to kingdom or small country.

The renaming of the District has brought in a new era of unrest and injustice to the indigenous hills people of N. C. Hills district. The people showed little support for the existing political institution and IPF formed by the ethnic minorities demanded more redistribution by virtue of their deprived economic circumstances. With a view to uphold and protect the rights of the non-Dimasa communities, the Indigenous People's Forum (IPF) was formed on 15th May 2008. It is an umbrella organisation for all the indigenous hill tribes who are 'natives' of the North Cachar Hills since time immemorial. The Indigenous Peoples' Forum (IPF) is an umbrella organisation and a common platform for all indigenous hill tribes who are original and principal inhabitants of the district of North Cachar Hills. IPF was formed to uphold and protect the cause of the non-Dimasa communities. It is an organisation functioning among the ethnic minorities in Dima Hasao district. It stands for the development and progress of the ethnic groups. The IPF is not a secessionist organisation. It always attempt to

solve problems within the framework of the Indian Constitution as provided under 3(c) of Article 244(2) and 275(1) of the Sixth Schedule. It aims to resort to democratic and peaceful means of voicing the concerns and highlighting the demands of the tribal population in the District till such times as necessary.

It looks forward to an all-out support together with single minded determination to promote and champion the cause of the down-trodden and exploited non-Dimasa communities of the North Cachar Hills District. To strengthen the organisation, under its umbrella, organisations like Indigenous Students Forum (ISF), Indigenous Women Forum (IWF), and Indigenous Village Chiefs Forum (IVCF) have been formed in the year 2010. The jurisdiction of the Forum stands over all the area inhabited by any of the Indigenous Communities in N. C. Hills Assam and made Haflong as the headquarter of the Forum. The Forum consists of all Apex bodies of the indigenous ethnic minorities where the president of the Apex body is the member of the Forum.

3.4.5.1 Aims and Objectives of the Indigenous Peoples Forum

The Forum shall strive to protect and to uplift the Indigenous tribes in social, economic, cultural, political and educational fields, and shall Endeavour.

1. To strengthen unity and solidarity of the values and cultural heritage.
2. To protect and preserve the traditional values and cultural heritage.
3. To extend help to all the members and work together for the greater interest of Indigenous people of N. C. Hills, Assam particularly for the creation/ bifurcation of District for Indigenous People.
4. To maintain good or cordial relation among the members and other communities living in N. C. Hills, Assam.

The movement is supported by various student organisations. The entire youth organisations function on the frame work of their own written constitution. Each organization has its own emblem and flag and a central executive body with a president and general secretary and other office bearers for maintaining co-ordination and systematic functioning of the organisation. Most of the students' organisation fights against exploitation, corruptions and struggle for just constitutional rights through democratic process. The main aim of IPF was to secure protection of the

ethnic groups. The organisations sought to co-operate with the government for solutions of their problems.

3.4.5.2 Manifestation of demands

The detail of demand has been manifested in the memorandum submitted to the Government. It highlighted the main problem and also its demand for bifurcation. The ethnic minorities believe that only separate district can redress grievances. The change of nomenclature of the district affected their interest. The basic question for survival, preservation and growth of ethnic identity of Non-Dimasas is one of the important factors for demanding a separate district. Acute unemployment problem among the youths of the ethnic minorities push them to think of a separate district. The existing political system could not satisfy the requirement as there is no adequate representation of the ethnic minorities.

The ethnic minorities say that they have not fully availed the provision of 6th schedule and have not got democracy, liberty and justice in the true sense of the term and have been deprived of equality of status and of opportunity in its share of unemployment in services. Relative deprivation and presence of large lower income groups among the ethnic minorities in economic terms seems to be conducive to creating feelings of relative deprivation among ethnic minorities.

The feeling of deprivation among the ethnic minorities provided a very strong means to unite them and the feeling worked as a major factor in building up a healthy network of the youth organisation irrespective of the ethnic group which they belong. The movement's political goals are defined in social and economic inequalities as well as political dependencies. The delay of the Government compelled the Indigenous People's Forum (Non-Dimasa) communities of N. C. Hills to take the extreme step of boycotting the Assembly election of Assam in the demand area under the 16 Haflong (ST) Assembly Constituency. They expressed their demands not only for equal civil, political and economic rights but also equal respect and recognition as indigenous tribes of the district. The non implement or half hearted implementation of the constitutional provision and other rule and regulation by the government has been considered as one of the cause of deprivation of ethnic groups.

The cabinet sub-committee headed by D. P. Gaola under the Tarun Gogoi- led Assam government submitted its reports on February 5, 2010, recommending the

formation of 'Dima Hasao District'. In fact, the Group of Ministers (GoMs) were fully aware that the Non-Dimasa Apex bodies were totally against the change of the District nomenclature through their memorandum. The non-Dimasa Apex bodies also articulated their views vehemently against the change of nomenclature in the discussion held at Haflong on February 23, 2009 and at the office chamber of Shri D.P.Gaola, Hon'ble Minister on September 18, 2009. The GoM's committee further stated that 'despite the nomenclature now proposed to "Dima Hasao District" instead of "Dima Hasao Raji" there could be some protest or agitation from some communities like the Zeme Nagas, Kukis and Hmars, which can be controlled by the law and order enforcing agencies. This statement clearly shows the biased attitude of the GoMs towards the non-Dimasa communities and its little concern for the inalienable rights of the indigenous hills tribal of the district. Therefore, the indigenous hills tribal people whose ancestral land across N. C. Hills have already been politically and economically exploited by the dominant Dimasas, question the ethics and logic behind the change of N. C. Hills district to Dima Hasao district.

The Indigenous Peoples' Forum (IPF) met and apprised the Home Minister P. Chidambaram in New Delhi and submitted their memorandum. The minister promised to look into their grievances and asked the chief minister of Assam to solve their problems at the earliest. Further, the Joint Action Committee and the Students' organisation of Non-Dimasa demanded to scrap the Group of Minister's Committee immediately and to declare their recommendations 'null' and 'void'. They also stated that the change of the district nomenclature in favour of one particular tribe is a clear abuse of the provision of *Article 244(A)* of the Indian Constitution. The change of the District nomenclature is, in fact, one of the causes of the conflict in the year 2009 leading to the death of 16 children amongst others in Missidui, a Jeme Hamlet at Haflong on 16 June 2009.

The renaming of the District on March 30, 2010 came amid protest and stiff opposition from the Indigenous Hills' Tribe such as the Zemes, Hmars, Kukis and other kindred hill's indigenous tribes. On April 5, 2010, the Indigenous Peoples' forum (IPF), an umbrella organisation of the indigenous Hills' Tribal took out a protest rally in Haflong and Mahur seeking immediate bifurcation of N.C.Hills District and in protest against the biased decision of the government of Assam to rename the district as Dima Hasao District.

On April 9, 2010 at least 10 to 20 students including girls were seriously injured in the police firing at Haflong during the 24 hrs bandh declared by the Indigenous students' bodies. The demonstrators, under the banner of N.C.Hills Indigenous Students' Forum (NCHISF) were vehemently opposing the change of N.C.Hills nomenclature and demanding bifurcation of the district. Later, the injured are admitted to Haflong Civil Hospital.

Amidst the ongoing stand of the IPF against the change of name of the District, the government of Assam has shown a step-motherly treatment thereby, threatening the existence of the indigenous minority groups from their own ancestral land. All the political rights and self-governance are already designed to be alienated; there is already shifting of power to one particular community who constitute only 43% of the district total population.

They feel that they have become the victims of the recommendations of the Group of Minister's Committee and the Tarun Gogoi-led coalition government changing of North Cachar Hills district as Dima Hasao district. The ethnic minorities feel segregated from exercising our democratic rights and considered being marginalised

3.5 Other issues complicating the lives of minorities in N. C. Hills (now Dima Hasao).

All interventions across social, political and economic issues need directives and legal support to operationalise the appropriate actions. These polities and legislations help to overcome the constraints and support administrator, implementer, community and individual in delivery of justice. In essence, the Sixth Schedule was to have autonomous legislative, executive and judicial institutions to promote democracy and blend into the local processes and adjudication. However, there seems to have a distortion and lack of acquiring the requirements for the full functioning and development of true democracy. Consequently, there is rampant in corruption and huge diversion of the district resources by the council ministers for their own benefit. The Dimasa armed groups with covert leaders one siphoned off an amount of Rs. 1000 crores meant for development of N. C. Hills.

In the backdrop of the three major conflicts, taking place in the district of N. C. Hills between the Dimasa-Hmar (2003), Dimasa-Karbi (2005) and Dimasa-Jeme

(2009), a mood of despondency, insecurity, helplessness and cynicism is cutting across all sections of the ethnic minorities. The people stand in the frontline of assimilation, discrimination and injustice. They realise that the state and its colluding partners are institutionalising injustice in the name of development and other benefits. The ethnic groups were concerned by problematic, half-truth political game plan and policies imposed in the name of development; in the interest of the district good. Hundreds of crore meant for development funds are continuously misused and diverted by the council machineries.

The District is not equally enjoying the economic development as compared to the other people of the Indian Republic even after decades of Independence. Lack of infrastructure, inefficient communication networks, poor road connections and shortage of power and water supply are the few major concerns of the people in the villages of N. C. Hills district. Problems and losses related to conflicts, communal or otherwise and the sense of insecurity is found to be high in the district. This area is even dubbed by some politician as soft pocket for game plan and siphoning off the development fund.

Acute shortage of water supply has become widespread in the district. Shortage of drinking water in Haflong town has now turned into the plight of the common people who could not afford to buy one (1) can of water at Rs. 40 for the past several years. Questions arose as to why would the N.C.H.A.C construct a huge swimming pool at the cost of 3 crores in Haflong when the town is suffering from acute water crisis? Overall, it is reflected that the district has poor provision of road and power infrastructure, which has impact on overall development performance of the district.

3.6 A reality Picture of the Autonomous Council

The District Council: The N. C. Hills district is an Autonomous District constituted under the provision of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The N. C. Hills Autonomous Council may be described as a “mini state” having all the paraphernalia of a Govt. Like Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. It has full autonomy to legislate and administer the subjects like land, revenue, primary education, customary laws etc. assigned to it under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

On the 29th April, 1952, the District Council, as an autonomous body came into being with 12 elected members, 4 nominated members and a Secretary; with the provision of Chief Executive Member and its 2 Executive Members. Since then it went through a process of tremendous expansion in both its structure and content. Many shapes of administrative set up to the machineries of Council establishment have been moulded by creating different departments in the Council, such as PWD, Forest, Primary education, Panning & development (now Rural Development), Market, and Transport & Workshop etc.

The total number of Executive Member of the Council had been raised subsequently one after the autonomous council election. The post of Executive Members in the present council is now increased from 12 to 13. In addition, as per the amended in the Constitution of the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council (Thirty Fourth) Amendment Act.2007, the numbers of Council constituency was increased from 23 to 28 with the inclusion of Hamri, Lower Kharthong, Dolong, Diger and Semkhor constituency.

However, the formation in the present council still reflects the domineering regime of the Dimasas defying the essence of the creation of N.C.Hills Autonomous Council and the ethics of 'proportionate representation' are agreed upon since its inception. The political, economic and social concerns of the non-Dimasa communities are not well established under the Council as it is engineered by the Chief Executive Member (CEM), a Dimasa tribe with the support of larger number Executive Members from the same tribes. The non-Dimasa tribals are now in the receiving end and are being slowly deprived off their historical, economic and political rights under the existing N. C. Hills Autonomous Council. The non-Dimasa groups were far from enjoying the employment benefits and other developmental schemes unlike the Dimasa who always have the lion share in the council.

In furtherance of their objective they have total control over the entire executive and legislative power of the council, an elected Member of Autonomous Council (MACs) other than the Dimasas are normally restraint by the council machineries to exercise their powers and functions. Ironically, the meeting decision of the Fdccc-1 and Council members allotted 80% share of the district development fund of the district development fund to the defeated congress members, where the independent or non-congress candidate had won in the last autonomous election 2013.

This was considered totally ridiculous and gross violation of the constitution of India. Doubts arise in their minds of the people if a defeated candidate by virtue of his/ her being the member of district ruling congress party be given legal support and exercise the powers and functions of the elected representative(s) behalf.

Discontentment grew when they learnt from reliable sources that, the Executive Members of the NCHAC were found working in their private residences than in their office chambers during these days. Public works and other developmental schemes and were not executed fairly and accordingly. The Dimasa communities are always on top priority as far as works and development fund is concerned. It is said that, before other communities of the district could approach, the Dimasa EM would inform his/her community first for selection and work allotment under the council. They feared that the Dimasa leaders will always try to keep the district under their rule and dictates.

It was a great concern why the council under the Dimasas leadership could change or amend laws at any time, in their favour which was against the council ethics and essence of the Sixth schedule of the district council. All of these practices are carried out freely but to satiate the interest of the Dimasas people and their covert policy to make the district as their kingdom. One has to wonder why Shri Mohendro Kemprai, a new member from the Dimasa community is given the post of executive member while he is still the president of DCC-I at Haflong. M. Kemprai was defeated congress candidate from Hamri constituency. He was later declared elected when Daniel Dimasa who won two seats in 11th NCHAC election, 2013 has to surrender his seat from Hamri constituency.

As such, the fabric of the society and the propositions that the schedule would keep its people in satisfied condition and help them grow according to their culture and avoid being swallowed up by another culture and are slowly and gradually vaporising into thin air.

The ethnic minorities therefore, urged the government to immediately institute a commission for enquiry against misuse of the autonomous power by the council representatives and thereby, to dissolve or reinstate the present NCHAC for the district and national good.

3.7 Critical Review of the Applicability of Panchayati Raj Institution

The constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 have paved the way for a fundamental change in the way public goods are delivered in rural areas in India. Through the structure of the Panchayati Raj, local councils directly elected by the people are responsible for making decisions on the array of public good decisions (The impact of reservation in the Panchayati Raj; by Raghavenra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo). Panchayati Raj is a social revolution that is a founder in its present Constitutional shape and form, late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, one remarked it would take at least a generation to fully unfold.

Today, the Indigenous minority groups are frequently among the most marginalised and vulnerable segments of the population and are often distinct from dominant groups in their national societies. As a result, their economic, social, and legal status often limits their capacity to defend their interests and restricts their ability to participate in and benefit from development.

On the basis of the social assessment and in consultation with the affected Indigenous minority groups like Zeme Nagas, Hmars, Kukis, Karbis, Vaipheis etc. the ethnic groups, therefore, declare and reaffirm their need for a separate autonomous district where, the indigenous minority groups could ensure their political representations and self-governance free from all kinds of interference from the dominating group.

According to the ethnic minorities implementing the Panchayati Raj Institution (village, block and district level), in a hills area dominated by tribal will not be relevant especially taking into account the fact that, N. C. Hills is under an autonomous district council with the sixth schedule the essence of the district council.

3.8 Other Indigenous Issues and Concerns

While it is not within the power of any Indian citizens to deny another the democratic rights to demand certain privileges as magnanimously granted by the Indian Constitution, it is also within the power of any Indian citizen to freely express opinions and question the validity and consequences of such demands. It is therefore, on this premise that the ethnic non-Dimasa minorities started intervening.

The non-Dimasas claim not to ignore the affinities that exist between the hill tribals and the Dimasas. Centuries of close proximity and culture contact between the

tribals and the Dimasas have certainly resulted in enormous sharing, diffusion and borrowing of cultural traits. However, in juxtapose with this fact, the Dimasas are definitely do not resemble nor are, in any way, akin to the tribals in terms of history, religious beliefs civilization, thoughts and behaviours. If few and vague cultural affinities are to be yardstick in recognizing the Dimasas as a Tribe, then, it would become perfectly alright for Caucasoid Indians to call themselves Germans, Italians or Greeks and vice-versa as these people all have common Aryan origin and shared certain affinities.

They did not blindly reject the Dimasas as distant brethrens, but strongly and collectively they put forward, inter alia, some crucial socio-political, socio-economic and ethno-geographical realities for sober considerations by all concerned.

The Dimasas constitute 43% of the total population of North Cachar Hills while about other tribal communities constitute 52% of the population. Given this vast imbalance in population between the Dimasas and the tribals, the non-Dimasa tribals are in perpetual risks of being overwhelmed by the vast Dimsas population. However the Dimasas has continually committed actions with the intention of weakening the 'Hill tribals' hold and rights over their lands and territories thereby paving the way for the expansionist and domination policies of the Dimasas by covertly and insidiously manipulating legislations and legal mechanisms. Further, there have also been several instances of atrocities openly committed by the Dimasas through their clandestine armed groups against non-Dimasa tribals in North Cachar Hills. Even though the magnitude of such actions may not be that large, the impact has nevertheless been large and fills the non-Dimasa tribals with fear and premonitions against them. This fear is punctuated by the fact that the Dimasas control the Autonomous Council, bureaucracy or police force and that such agency are often behind such atrocities. The Dimasa have the manpower and resources to easily overwhelm the non-Dimasa tribal population if ever given the chance to do so. Illegal construction of private houses and force occupation of Government lands in Kalibari Lake near Haflong Government College by the Dimasas is one example of their overwhelming control over the district administration.

Another fact for the annihilation of the non-Dimasa tribal population in North Cachar Hills is that there is an alarming increase in the first place is in terms of employment and economic power. While the non-Dimasa tribals are just an

infinitesimal percentage in terms of employment, the Dimasas dominate every government department. Even in government departments where certain quotas are reserved for the non-Dimasa tribals, Dimasas still dominate through political clout and other covert means and tribal quotas left unfilled and appointments for such vacancies left in abeyance in order to maintain Dimasa dominance.

Another factor is the case of cultural, political and societal domination. Looking at the level of overall development and evolution in North Cachar Hills between the non-Dimasa tribals and Dimasas, there is also a vast sea of cause for concerns. It is common knowledge and a written fact that the Dimasa population are concentrated in and around Maibang areas. However, after the creation of district in 1952, thousands of Kachari Barmans (later as Dimasas) were migrated to the district for jobs and other benefits under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule absorbing completely or assimilating the weaker societies into oblivion- the cause of many societies to become extinct or endangered. As such, many tribal communities have already become highly endangered and at a point of assimilation by the Dimasas due to their unchecked and fast increasing population in the district. Yet, with special provisions given under the Indian Constitution and Acts such as SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, etc for safeguarding non-Dimasa tribal societies, the tribal communities of North Cachar Hills have been able to maintain their political, economical, cultural and societal elements and structures to a certain extent. However, this was viewed with suspicion with the Dimasa being given an overwhelming status in the district, legislations and acts would be ineffective if such acts of forceful or covert assimilations or absorptions are initiated by a highly advanced tribal society against a weaker one.

3.9 Reasons for opposing change of N. C. Hills District nomenclature to Dima Hasao Raji

A unanimous decision was taken to oppose both the formation of ethnic homeland or change of district nomenclature in the name of a particular tribe taking advantage on the constitutional provision of article 244(2). According to the ethnic minorities the proposed changing of district name of N.C.Hills to Dima Hasao Raji is to reflect socio-political shift from its earlier name unlike some changes of names of town district and states those happened earlier like Calcutta as Kolkata, Mikir Hills as Karbi Anglong, Assam as Asom and so on which did not affect the socio-political

interest of any other communities. The case in N. C. Hills is but an attempt to form an ethnic homeland for the Dimasas and not a mere change of district's name.

The existing boundaries of N. C. Hills encircled the ancestral lands of different indigenous hill tribes and any attempt to give new name to their land against their will is a crime and an act of human rights violation.

Even in the present name of the district of N.C.Hills, the Dimasas always enjoys supreme authority over the minority hill tribal peoples. Department land were encroached and gherroed aggressively and to them if no steps to check such inequalities is effectively taken, the future existence of other people will be in great danger and change of the district name to Dima Hasao Raji will be litmus test for them to become the sole owner of the land.

Leaders of the Dimasas were considered communal and lack the true principles of Non-violence and peaceful co-existence. To the ethnic minorities they are not happy with the welfare of their neighbouring tribes and the indigenous hill tribal peoples do not enjoy the fruit of liberty and equality as enshrined in the Constitution of India under their leadership. The North Cachar Hills even after 54 years of celebration under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is still lagging far behind the other district in all kinds of development under their leadership. The poor road condition in the proper town of Haflong, the poor link between different towns in the district, the frequent non-payment of salaries to employees are few self explanatory to their negligence towards the welfare of the society.

Retrospecting their past and ancient history, to the minority community they are often found to be aggressive in nature and lack congenially for peaceful co-existence with their neighbours. They were dispersed from Kamrup their original kingdom due to the invasion of Pushya Varman the founder of Varman dynasty causing them to shift their kingdom to upper Assam and lived there for centuries till the Ahom King drove them to Dimapur and then to Khaspur of Cachar through Jaintia Hills where they set up their new kingdom. It was not an end for them of being invaded, there were Muslim invaders to drove them against towards N.C.Hills and lived there with very few of them who were already left behind on their way from Dimapur to Khaspur.

The present generation in N. C. Hills continues to show their wildness and aggressiveness in nature. Their underground militancy built up by diverting funds from the council exchequer aim to put the indigenous hill tribal people under the peril of their guns. This became the formidable foe to the indigenous people since 2003, when they unleashed an ethnic cleansing campaign to the Hmars on the issue of Dima Halali (the proposed new name of the district in their favour). They also waged war with the Karbis during 2005 and again with the Jeme Nagas on the issue of Dima Hasao Raji (another new proposed name to alter the name of the district in their favour) which is not yet settled since the beginning of 2009. The Kukis have also lost several lives on different occasion in the hand of their gun totting militants not for their own fault. Late J. T. Roia the president of Biate Devanpui (Biate Apex Body) was assassinated on his sick bed by armed DHD (J) militants on 16th May, 2008. Moreover, many leaders were threatened to death besides innumerable act of violence committed towards the innocence public.

Signature(s) in support of Dima Hasao Raji signed by some self styled leaders, Apex bodies like the Hmar-Inpui, Kuki-Inpi, etc. and NCHAC's EM/MAC, were withdrawn unanimously and a copy of these withdrawal support was submitted to the Cabinet Sub-Committee at Haflong in 2008. The IPF under the above conditions beseech their thorough consideration and wise counsel in this regard and promised to remain zealously dedicated to the cause of nation.

The research reveal that the indigenous minority hills tribal of N. C. Hills district who claimed that they were increasingly exposed to disease of the potentially adverse affects of the 'Dima Hasao district' under the dominant Dimasa groups would always strive for safeguarding their predominant rights in separate autonomous district.

3.9.1 Continued Demand for Bifurcation

Delhi Joint Action Committee on N. C. Hills issues was held in 2010 and announced in a press release about the demands of the Indegenous Peoples' Forum of separate districts for the ethnic minorities. The ethnic minorities demanded the bifurcation of N. C. Hills District one for the Dimasas and another for the indigenous minority groups bearing the name N. C. Hills.

They demanded that no corrupt and biased politician should be allowed to take part in any government decision-making process. They also demanded the government to take serious and concrete steps to prevent the re-occurrence of ethnic-conflict and unleash of a reign of terror by the Dimasa outfit in future. To instill peace and harmony in the district and protect and safeguard the indigenous rights, culture, custom and traditions.

In the backdrop of the proposal and recommendations submitted by the GoMs Committee, the Zeme Students' Union, Hmar Students' Association, Karbi Students' Association, Kuki Students' Organisation, Vaiphei Zillai Pawl, Biate Students' Association and Jaintia Youth Federation has submitted a joint memorandum and sought the intervention of the Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram into the matter. The memorandum has stated that the erstwhile corruption riddled BJP-ASDC alliance of N. C. Hills Autonomous Council with active backing of DHD (J) militants and support of JNH(Dimasa Apex Bodies) has passed unilateral decision on March 7,2009 to change the district nomenclature as Dima Hasao Raji.

To assert the rights of the indigenous hills tribe as the primary partner in any decision making process was totally ignored. It has failed to inform the threatened people about the possible adverse impacts and also to represent their free and prior informed consent. They demanded Group of Minister's Committee appointed for intervening in the issue should be scrapped immediately and their recommendations should be made null and void.

The IPF unanimously agreed that, the word 'Dima Hasao' itself is an attempt to alienate and evict the Indigenous peoples from their ancestral land. To them Dima Hasao District is nothing but a covert policies and sinister design to transform the district as Dimasa homeland gradually. The IPF's demand is aimed at separating Haflong and Maibong sub-divisions of the District in two Independent Autonomous Districts. The population pattern and location of the villages belonging to the non-Dimasa tribal groups is by and large concentrated in areas which according to them can be segregated from the areas inhabited by the Dimasa population.

In this light, the ethnic minorities reiterated that they do not want to be included in the so-called '*Dima Hasao District*' but wanted to be in a separate

autonomous district with an independent Autonomous Council and outside the proposed 'Dima Hasao Territorial Council.

For a long time the different ethnic groups coexisted in a relatively peaceful manner but ethnic tension emerge with the discontentment of the indigenous tribes after the revival of Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) further compounded changing the district's nomenclature which led to the bifurcation movement of the indigenous non Dimasas tribes headed by IPF. The attempt of changing the name of the district nomenclature as Dima Halali against the wishes of the minority members in the District in 2002 was a clear violation of the fundamental rights of minority group which also shook the basic democratic structure of Indian constitutions. The IPF which was formed to champion the cause of minority tribes in the district demanded bifurcation of the district.

The issue of bifurcation continued with continues bandh and indefinite curfews affecting the normal life of the people in the district. A series of bandhs, agitation programs was also supported by Indigenous Students' Forum (ISF), Indigenous Womens' Forum (IWF) and Indigenous Village Chiefs Forum (IVCF). But it triggered fresh tension in the district by large scale protest of Non Dimasa tribes in the district. Constant delay by the government towards addressing the rightful and democratic demand of IPF compelled the IPF to take the extreme step boycotting the assembly election of Assam in the demand area of Haflong assembly constituency. The minorities in the district realize that the central features of the ethnic minorities can best improve itself of education and employment by increasing the political power. To strengthen their group identity and improve their condition and achieve economic well being they have to choose the route to politics consequently. Party in the name of Indigenous Peoples' Party was formed to promote the political aspirations of the people, the social exclusion and deprivation of many have led to the identity politics among the minorities to preserve their identity.

Taking into account, the customary rights of the indigenous people, both individual and collective, pertaining to lands or territories that they traditionally owned and the need to protect such lands and resources against illegal intrusion or encroachment; the demand of the IPF for an autonomous district under 3(c) of Article 244(2) & 275(1) to the Indian constitution is regarded as the only solution for freedom of the indigenous minority groups living in the district. However, in the absence of the

government effectiveness and response to the IPF demand, they declared that they were all set and ready for all kinds of agitations and protest until this demand is met.

Based on the IPF bifurcation movement, the government of Assam constituted a Task Force on 17.08.2010 to examine the recommendations of the Group of Ministers Committee (GoMC) regarding safeguards for minority tribes in Dima Hasao District and issues raised by the Indigenous Peoples' Forum. On February 5, 2010, the Task Force submitted its report to the effect that the demand for the setting up two separate, independent autonomous district councils should be considered by the Government as a measure to solve the development issues faced by the Dimasa and non-Dimasa groups of people in the district. In the previously mentioned report, the government of Assam is also requested to take necessary steps for entering into an understanding with the non-Dimasa apex bodies. However, the Government of Assam is ignoring the reports and the IPF's memoranda for bifurcation. It is clear that the government of Assam did not take into consideration the possible adverse impact and negation of the Fundamental Rights of the indigenous minority groups which finally shaped the identity consciousness of the ethnic minorities.

Situation in North East India is a matter of great concern to the states as well as to the centre for more than six decades. One of the reasons for such concern is the growing assertion of ethnic minorities and its impact on the politics of the region. Many communities struggled for special constitutional safeguard or for creations of separate political entities on basis of their cultural identities but with the passage of time such demand has gone up to the demand for separate district and tried to secede from the main district on various identity questions. With a motto to preserve their distinct cultural identity many extremist groups become active in the region which leads to law and order problem in the region.

A thorough and comprehensive analysis of the causes and consequences of identity politics are necessary to inform identity resolution activities to further maintain and durable peace process in the district. Hereafter, the implications of identity politics and the socio-economic condition of the ethnic minorities will be studied in the next chapter so that further preventive measures can be adopted. The next chapter will analyse the various implications of identity politics on the ethnic minorities considering the social and economic conditions of the minorities.