

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL IMPLICATION OF

IDENTITY POLITICS ON

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN DIMA

HASAO DISTRICT

POLITICAL IMPLICATION OF IDENTITY POLITICS ON ETHNIC MINORITIES IN DIMA HASAO DISTRICT

The district of Dima Hasao had faced much turmoil within the existing diverse communities. Communal incompatibility is seen in the district and each group tries to expose its distinct identity on the basis of their culture, tradition custom and ethnicity for political gains. Identity politics had not only affected a particular community but had great impact on the masses and the authority concern of the district. The society in India is exceedingly complex. People assume large numbers of identities and operate with multiple identities like political actors.

The political implications of identity politics can be best understood by understanding its huge impact among the ethnic minorities. The chapter will focus on three major aspects of identity politics among ethnic minorities in the district. We will analyse the social origin of marginalisation shaping the new political order. We will also examine the changing pattern of political representation which caused resentment among the ethnic minority groups. We will also analyse the political impact of identity politics among the minority groups.

The greatest political impact was seen with the formation of Indigenous Peoples Forum formed by the ethnic minorities with an aim to articulate their grievances. The deep rooted grievances were compounded with the change of the district's nomenclature against the wishes of the ethnic minorities. The change of the district's nomenclature from North Cachar Hills to Dima Hasao (meaning: land of the Dimasas) by the Government of Assam in 2010, ultimately compelled the ethnic minorities to take the step of demanding the creation of a separate administrative unit and consequently demanded bifurcation of the district under Article 244(2) of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution which will comprise of the Non Dimasa community. The formation of the Indigenous Peoples Forum has recreated identity consciousness among the marginalized ethnic minorities. The IPF with the support of its wings as Indigenous Students Forum, Indigenous Village Chiefs Forum and Indigenous Women Forum placed their demand for bifurcation of the district into two districts one for the Dimasas and the other for the Non Dimasas i.e. Dima Hasao district and N.C. Hills district respectively.

5.1 Constitutional Factor

According to the claims of the respondents the change of the district nomenclature requires to follow some Constitutional norms. The ethnic minorities made allegations upon the procedure and agreement of the government to change the name of the district. The rights of the citizens of India are guaranteed and protected by part III of the Constitution of India. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule was applied to the administration of the tribal areas in the State of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram as indicated in Article 244(2) of the constitution of India.

On the creation of a new State, namely, the State of Meghalaya on the strength of the Assam reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (Act No.55 of 1969) certain changes were made in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Section 74 of the said Act provides that the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India shall stand amended as specified in the Fourth Schedule of the Act. By the said amendment clause namely “(ff) alter the name of any autonomous district was added to the sub paragraph 3 of paragraph 1 of the Sixth Schedule. The Governor was not originally invested with the power of altering the name of any Autonomous District. However in the context of the creation of the State of Meghalaya, the Governor of Assam had been empowered to alter the name of any Autonomous District Councils of newly created State of Meghalaya, which were earlier parts of the State of Assam. The provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India had undergone various changes in recent years. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment Act 1995) (Act No. 42 of 1995) was enacted with a view to make a certain further amendment to the Sixth Schedule including the relevant amendment.

After the present amendment of the Sixth Schedule the North Cachar Hills District Council came to be known as North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council. Amendment Act No. 42 of 1995 had also added one more paragraph, namely, 20-BA to the Sixth Schedule, after paragraph 20-B, which was originally not there in the Sixth Schedule. According to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram and its Autonomous districts and autonomous regions, the Governor may, by public notification can: (a) Include any area in any parts of the said table, (b) Exclude any area from any of the parts of the said table, (c) Create a new autonomous district, (d) Increase the area of any autonomous district, (e) Diminish the area of any autonomous

district, (f) Unite two or more autonomous districts or parts thereof so as to form one autonomous district, and by the said amendment act clause (ff) it can also alter the name of any autonomous district.

Provided that no order shall be made by the Governor under clauses (c), (d),(e) and (f) of this sub- paragraph except after consideration of the report of a Commission appointed under sub- paragraph (1) of paragraph 14 of this Schedule. Provided further that any order made by the Governor under this sub-paragraph may contain such incidental and consequential provisions including any amendment of paragraph 20 and of any item in any of the Parts of the said table as appear to the Governor to be necessary for giving effect to the provisions of the order.

The provision contained in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution mandates that the name of an Autonomous Council can be changed only under the discretionary of the Governor. This provision was made in the Sixth Schedule for the purpose of assimilation of different tribes and to give them a sense of belongingness to the Autonomous Council. The Governor has been vested with special responsibility under the Sixth Schedule applicable to the North Eastern states. The paragraph 20 BA of the Sixth Schedule brought by 95th amendment to the Sixth Schedule clearly stipulates as to what are the powers which shall be exercised by the Governor in his discretion.

According to the ethnic minorities the record reveal that the Governor has not exercised his powers under sub-para 1 (Pt.) of Para-2 of the Sixth Schedule but has acted upon the aid and exercise of Council of Ministers. To them if such power is permitted to be exercised on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, the same is likely to be influenced as happened in the case of the district of Dima Hasao, by political consideration.

The Autonomous Council of N.C. Hills in question is undisputedly inhabited by different tribes. To the respondents the Constitution Makers were aware of the fact that each tribe inhabiting the hills have their own socio-political affinity and the democratic Government cannot be seen as promoting one tribe in preference to other. In fact sub-para 2 of paragraph 1 of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution empowered the Governor to act in his discretion and divide the area of Autonomous District inhabited by different Schedule Tribes into different Autonomous Region. Clearly this provision was intended to address political aspirations of different Schedule Tribes.

Government order has been passed to sub-serve narrow political ends of the party in power and therefore the exercise of such power was considered colourable and taken as fraud on the constitution by them. It was observed that the members of the Ministers Committee, on whose recommendations the Hon'ble Governor has exercised powers, were all members of the Congress Party.

According to the ethnic minorities the Committee in order to attain an electoral victory, has side stepped the protection provided under the Sixth Schedule and has recommended the change in the name. It is stated by the respondents that a sizeable population of the area belongs to the "Dimasa Community" and to appease their demands, to sub-serve their narrow political gains, the said Committee has made its recommendations. To them the recommendations clearly show that it was done to 'appease' a sizeable section of the population only to attain electoral victory. To the ethnic minorities such an approach is antithetical to the harmonious working of the Constitution and signifies the trampling of the Constitutional rights of the ethnic groups of the North Cachar Hills District. Since time immemorial, the ethnic groups of the North Cachar Hills have been administering themselves in the said area.

The Sixth Schedule seeks to achieve a delicate balance between autonomous administration and the participation of the various tribes in a particular Autonomous District. In order to preserve this delicate balance, the Sixth Schedule has deliberately not provided Regional Council within an autonomous District on the basis of tribes and has sought for a single District Council. The Government order by which the District itself is named after a particular Tribe upsets this delicate balance and therefore violates the mandate and purpose of forging unity amongst the various Tribes of an Autonomous District.

The Government order, by which the North Cachar Hills District has been renamed as "Dima Hasao District", gives precedence to a particular tribe (i.e., Dimasa) out of the conglomeration of tribes such as the Nagas, Karbis, Kuki, Mikir, Khasi, Zeme, Hmar and Synteng according to the minorities. It was also claimed by the IPF that the Government order violates the spirit and mandate of the Sixth Schedule and the delicate balance sought to be achieved by it. The petition by IPF would decide the course of history and the political, social and economic future of the ethnic minority groups of the North Cachar Hills. The implementation of the

Government order was taken to be the death knell of the political aspirations of the ethnic minorities of the district.

The International covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been signed by India, recognize that all people have the right to self-determination and the right that they can freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. This important principle has been recognized by the Preamble of the Constitution also. At present, the Dimasa population of the North Cachar Hills is around 43% of the total population of the District and by naming the District after the Dimasa tribe, the political aspirations of the ethnic minorities who constitutes 57% of the population will be severely affected. Further, the rights to self determine and the right to pursue their economic and social pursuit of the Indigenous People, both of which are Fundamental Rights guaranteed and protected by Part III of the constitution, would be seriously whittled down.

The fulfilment of such political aspirations is a Constitutional goal in a Democratic Country and has been the fulcrum of the freedom struggle of India. The issues raised are considered vexed, and has been the bases of intense debate in the entire State of Assam and more particularly the North Cachar Hills District. The announcement of Government Order has led to a series of protest, rallies and bandhs called by various entities and bodies. It is also important to point out that in one of such rallies 5 persons have been injured by bullets in police firing and several hundreds have been injured due to lathi charge on the picketers and the then President of the Indigenous Womens Forum had to be taken by the halipat in Guwahati for treatment because of the severe injuries caused by bullet during the rally.

5.2 Historical Factor

In Gait's History of Assam, it was recorded that the Brahmaputra Valley, in the state of Assam was conquered by the Kachari's as early as 3000 B.C. and it continued under them for a substantial period of time. In pages 247 to 249 of the said book, it recorded that in the 13th century; the Kachari Kingdom extended along the South Bank of Brahmaputra, from the Dikhu to the Kallang or beyond and included also the valley of the Dhansiri and the tract which now forms the North Cachar Sub Divisions. It further records that in 1531 there were hostilities between the Kachari and the Ahoms and the Kacharis were defeated in the said war. From 1531 till the

First part of 19th Century, the North Cachar Sub-Divisions was ruled by the Ahoms. It is important to point out that during this period various tribes settled in the said area. In Tanmoy Bhattacharjee's book of Sociology of the Karbis, it is recorded that the North Cachar Hills for a long time acted as a halting station for tribal migration. It also recorded that before the Dimasas settled therein, it was the abode of the Karbis and a large number of others tribes and sub-tribes. It also recorded that when the Dimasas came to the North Cachar Hills, the Nagas and the Kukis were already settled therein.

Historically in the last part of the 18th Century, the Burmese army invaded Teh Kingdom of the Ahoms and setup a Ahom King. Thereafter, in between 1824 to 1826, the first Anglo Burmese war took place. The Burmese were defeated by the British thereby resulting in the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. By virtue of the said Treaty, the Burmese agreed to cede to the British Assam including Cachar. In the year 1829, the administrative Unit of North Cachar Hills got its identity. At that point of time, the North Cachar Hills was the abode of different hill tribes like the Kukis, the Nagas, the Mikirs, the Hmars, the Hrangkhols, the Jaintias and the Biates apart from the Dimasas. The term 'North Cachar Hills' has been used and recognized as an Administrative Unit for almost 200 years. It is important to point out that the British occupied 'North Cachar Hills' after they occupied Cachar. In the year 1829, the name of the Administrative Unit was coined as the hills were North of Cachar. It is also important to point out that in the year 1844, a military post was established at Asalao (a Zeme village situated at 38 km from Haflong which was the District Head Quarter) and named it as a Asalao Sub-Division. In 1852, Asalao military post was upgraded to a Civil Administrative Station. Again in 1868, the Civil Administrative Head Quarter of Asalao was shifted to Gunjung (which is also a Zeme village at that time). Again in 1883, the British finally shifted the Gunjung Administrative Head Quarter to Haflong and it remains there till date.

5.3 Population Factor

The data collected from the respondents reveal that the Kacharis, the Kukis and the Nagas constituted the majority of the population of the North Cachar Hills. In fact, till 1854, there was only a miniscule population of the Dimasas in the said area. The population data, as provided in A.J. Muffet Mills Report and the Allen's Report for the years 1854 and 1859 respectively are given herein below. They are as follows

Table 5.1

| Sl.No. | Name of the Tribes | Mills Report in 1854 | Allen's Report in 1859 |
|--------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Hill Kacharis | 3940 | 6735 |
| 2. | Hojai Kacharis | 1170 | 3260 |
| 3. | Kukis (including those old Kukis) | 10910 | 8472 |
| 4. | Mikirs (Karbis) | 1820 | 5078 |
| 5. | Nagas | 3505 | 5885 |
| | Total | 21345 | 29430 |

The above population data shows that in 1854 the Dimasas (Hill Kacharis and Hojai Kacharis) were 5110 while other hill tribal groups were 16,435 and in 1859 the Dimasas were 9,995 while other hill tribal groups were 19,435. The population increase in a period of 76 years from 1875 to 1951 was negligible as it increased only by 1888. The population of other original hill tribal people formed the bulk of population in N.C.Hills in the earlier period till 1952 during which the Autonomous District Council under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution was constituted in 1952. Since then, the population of North Cachar Hills increased leaps and bounds mainly that of the Dimasas which have over taken the growth rate of population of all the original hill tribal groups in later period. The growth of the population of North Cachar Hills during this period is as follows:

Table 5.2

| Sl. No. | Year | Population |
|---------|------|------------|
| 1. | 1856 | 24,369 |
| 2. | 1857 | 29,482 |
| 3. | 1875 | 37,775 |
| 4. | 1951 | 39,663 |
| 5. | 1961 | 54,390 |
| 6. | 1971 | 76,047 |
| 7. | 1981 | 1,07,089 |
| 8. | 1991 | 1,50,801 |
| 9. | 2001 | 1,88,079 |

The high growth rate of the Dimasa population in the later period is considered not only due to biological factor but a large-scale migration from plain areas like Hojai, Cachar, Lanka, Dimapur, Karbi Anglong etc.

The Dimasas were said to constitute only around 37% of the total population. As an illustrative indicator of the proportion of the population, it is important to point out that in terms of the electoral rolls for the year 2005 the minority communities together constituted around 57% of the total population and the Dimasas constituted around 43% of the same. In this regard, the population break up, as per the 2005 electoral roll of the District is as follows:

Table 5.3

| Sl. No. | Tribes | Population as per the Electoral Rolls 2005 |
|----------------|---------------|---|
| 1. | Dimasas | 44270 |
| 2. | Nagas | 14521 |
| 3. | Hmar | 11571 |
| 4. | Kuki | 8300 |
| 5. | Karbi | 5988 |
| 6. | Biate | 3813 |
| 7. | Khasi | 2389 |
| 8. | Hrangkhoh | 1753 |
| 9. | Khelma | 1126 |
| 10. | Vaiphei | 690 |
| 11. | Mizo | 244 |
| | Total | 95115 |

Serial No. 2 to 11 constitute the Indigenous People of the North Cachar Hills. They constitute the 50,395 out of the total 95,115. i.e. around 53% of the total population. Etymologically, the expression 'Dimasa' means son of the Great River'. Further, the expression 'Kachari' which has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kochchar' means area in the foot of the hills or valley. The etymological meaning clearly shows and established that the Dimasas were always residents of the plains and not of the hills. Historically also, the Dimasas always settled in the river sides.

The ethnic minority's population together constitutes an overwhelming majority in terms of the total population. Till 1952, the North Cachar Hills was a Sub

Division of Cachar. In the year 1872, the Viceroy and the Governor General in the Council was pleased to extend the Government of India Act.1870 to the Assam Valley, Hill Districts and Cachar. Thereafter, the Government of India Act 1915 came into force. In terms of Section 52 of the said Act, the Governor General in Council declared any territory as the 'Backward Tract' and thereby directed that the Government of India Act shall apply to the territory subject to exceptions and modifications. In terms thereof, the Governor General in Council issued a notification in 1929 whereby the North Cachar Hills were declared to be Backward Tract Area. This position continued till the Government of India Act 1935. Section 91 of the Government of India Act 1935, his Majesty could declare certain areas as 'Excluded Areas' or Partially Excluded Areas'.

In terms of Section 91, the King passed the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936. In terms of the said Order, the North Cachar Sub- Division of the Cachar District was defined as an excluded area. The administration of the North Cachar Hills was always separate from the Cachar District. The administration of the said area was largely left to be done in an autonomous manner by the various tribes on the basis of principles laid down by them. In short, the various tribes conducted local self Government. It is of relevance to point out that during this period there was a considerable frictions between the various tribes.

5.4 Bordoloi sub-committee

In the meantime, the Indian independence Act, 1947 was passed. In order to draft the Constitution of India, the Constituent Assembly appointed an Advisory Committee on the Rights of Citizens, Minorities and Tribals and excluded areas. The Advisory committee accordingly constituted three Sub-Committees. One of the Sub Committee was on the North –East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas. The Bardoloi Committee submitted its report on 28th July, 1947. Along with the report, the present Sixth Schedule was formulated.

The committee examined in great detail the conditions etc. prevalent in the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. In the said report, the Committee stated that the North Cachar Hills provides sanctuary for the Kacharis, Nagas, Kukis, Mikirs and the Khasis. In relation to the development in the said hills, the Committee reported

that the development in this area was not impressive and that the Sub-Division is more backward than other areas. In paragraph 18 of the said report the committee opined that since the North Cachar Hills is constituted by various tribes therefore there is a need to establish separate Sub-Councils for the different tribes.

The recommendation of the Bardoloi Committee was to ensure the participation of all the tribes in the North Cachar Hills by creation of various Regional Councils and their ultimate participation in the District Council. The North Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council was constituted in the year 1952 in terms of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Initially, the ethnic minority tribal groups and the Dimasas equally shared the representation of the Council. However, over a period of time the Dimasas became more politically prevalent. This was due to the accepted fact that the Dimasas started migrating from various places of Assam like Hojai, Cachar, Lanka, Dimapur, Karbi Anglong etc. to take advantage of the Autonomous District Council.

5.5 Disproportionate allocation of seats in the Council

Participatory political system has proved to be most effective modality for peaceful management of social cleavages. But the disproportionate representation of various groups in the district has let loose a reign of fear to result in conflict situation in the process of demanding their political rights. The division of representation in the Council between the Dimasas and the ethnic minorities are provided below.

The study reveals that number of Dimasa representatives have increase by 11 (eleven) from 6 to 17 while those of the Non-Dimasa communities have increased by only 5 (five) from 6 to 1. Over an above, the Dimasa have always claimed the nominated seats except in the 5th and 10th Council. The table showed the manipulation and systemetic deprivation of the Non Dimasa communities before the renaming of the district. With a change of the district nomenclature as Dima Hasao (Hill District of the Dimasas), the survival and future of the non-Dimasa communities in the district is filled with uncertainty.

Table 5.4

| Term of the council | Elected | | Nominated | | Dimasa | Non-Dimasa | Total |
|--------------------------------|---------|------------|-----------|------------|--------|------------|----------------------|
| | Diamsa | Non-Dimasa | Dimasa | Non-Dimasa | | | |
| 1st Council | 06 | 06 | 02 | 02 | 08 | 08 | 16+1 (Non Tribal) |
| 2nd Council | 07 | 05 | 02 | 02 | 09 | 07 | 16 |
| 3rd Council | 07 | 05 | 01 | 03 | 08 | 08 | 16 |
| 4th Council | 13 | 07 | 03 | 01 | 14 | 10 | 24 |
| 5th Council | 13 | 07 | 00 | 04 | 13 | 11 | 24 |
| 6th Council | 15 | 08 | 02 | 02 | 17 | 10 | 27 |
| 7th Council | 14 | 09 | 01 | 03 | 15 | 11 | 26 |
| 8th Council | 15 | 08 | 00 | 04 | 15 | 12 | 27 |
| 9th Council | 15 | 08 | 01 | 03 | 16 | 11 | 27 |
| 10th Council | 17 | 01 | - | - | 17 | 11 | 28 |

The increase in the political dominance of the Dimasas in the North Cachar Hills created an anomalous situation. There is no proportional representation of the ethnic minorities in the district. With the drastic increase in the number of population of the majorities who are said to have migrated from the plains by the respondents in the recent past the allocation of seats and powers in the Council has also started deteriorating. Desired changes did not take place in the Autonomous election in the district. The seats for the majority community was increased from six to fifteen whereas for other non- Dimasa ethnic minorities the seats was increased from six to eight only which did not fulfil the aspirations of the ethnic minorities. The misallocation of seats in the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council has divided the animosity among the majority and the minority. This very reason has led lose the stability of the political condition.

Table 5.5

| Year | District Autonomous Council | Number of women representation in the council | Constituency |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 1952 | 1 st Council | Nil | |
| 1957 | 2 nd Council | Nil | |
| 1962 | 3 rd Council | Nil | |
| 1968 | 4 th Council | One | Haflong |
| 1973 | 5 th Council | One | Hadingma |
| 1980 | 6 th Council | Nil | |
| 1987 | 7 th Council | One | Mahur |
| 1996 | 8 th Council | Nil | |
| 2001 | 9 th Council | Nil | |
| 2007 | 10 th Council | One | Semkhor |
| 2012 | 11 th Council | One | Semkhor |

The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council has started to be dominated by the Dimasa tribes. This is also evident from the representation of women from the ethnic minorities in the Council. One Naga lady from the ethnic minorities was represented in the 7th Council in the year 1987. The table shows the representation of Dimasa women from the 4th Council and 5th Council. Political domination of women from majority community was seen with the continuous representation in the Council in two consequent Council elections in 2007 to 2012 till date. Consequently, the Autonomous Council is said to have strayed from its democratic path by promoting vested interest of the Dimasa Community. It is pointed out that on all governmental appointments, contracts with various departments of the District Council and its Development schemes which were meant for the entire population of the Autonomous District, has been cornered by the Dimasa tribe. They believe that Dimasa Community has been promoted at the cost of the other minority population is startling and requires investigation by appropriate authority.

Factors such as a desire for self-expression, perceived discrimination and injustice, aspirations of the ethnic groups to share equal role in the political system, better economic development by any majority resulted in the politics of identity. The

Autonomous Council was formed on the basis of political dispensation to appease the sentiments of the majority community which created great discontentment among the ethnic minorities compelling them to fight for their rights in the political domain.

The ethnic minorities of the North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao) feeling deprived said that they have been side lined by large scale migration and their consequent political domination by the Dimasa Community. This is further aggravated by the political aspirations and the rights to determine the economic and social future of the minorities of the district has been severely affected.

5.6 Representation made to the authorities

The research findings through the field visit reveal that many representations were made to the Government. On 22nd January, 2003, the leaders of Indigenous Tribal Groups of the North Cachar Hills, Assam made a representation to the Hon'ble Governor of the State of Assam. In the said representation it was specifically pointed out that the North Cachar Hills was not initially inhabited by the Dimasa Community. The Dimasa Community has migrated from other districts only recently. It was also pointed out that in case the proposal for renaming the district was accepted the communal violence would erupt in the North Cachar Hills. In the early part of 2008, the members of the Congress Party who were in power in Teh State of Assam sought for various methods by which the political dominance of the ASDC Party in the North Cachar Hills be restricted. One of the ways sought for was the appeasement of the Dimasa Community according to the respondents.

In pursuance thereof, an understanding was entered into by the members of the Congress Party with the Dimasa Apex Body (JNH) (Jadikhe Naisho Hashom) to change the nomenclature from 'North Cachar Hills to 'Dima Hasao Raji'. In this regard, the minority non-Dimasas made a representation on 29.05.2008 to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State of Assam. In the said representation it was pointed out that the proposal for changing of name does not find favour with the ethnic minorities. The Indigenous People's Forum of the North Cachar Hills has made several representations to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of the State and various other authorities including the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, and New Delhi. All the representations clearly bring out that the Dimasa tribe did not constitute the Indigenous People of the said district. It also pointed out that the

proposed changing of the name of district would severely affect the political aspirations and the rights to self determine the economic and the social future. To secure their demands it was further pointed out that at present, the majority of the population of the North Cachar Hills consist of indigenous people i.e. the ethnic minorities.

5.7 Formation of Group of Ministers Committee (GoMC)

The study also reveals that a committee was constituted by a of group of Ministers headed by Shri D.P.Goala, Hon'ble Minister for Urban Development & Housing with the following members to look into the issue of renaming of N.C.Hills district and to make appropriate recommendation. The constitution of the said Committee is as under:

1. Shri D.P.Gaola, Minister of Urban Development and Housing-CHAIRMAN
2. Shri Khorsing Engti, Minister, Hill Areas Department,etc. –MEMBER
3. Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Minister, Health and Family Welfare Department, etc. –MEMBER
4. Shri Rockybul Hussain, Minister, Forest and Environment, etc. –MEMBER
5. Commissioner and Secretary, Home and Political Department-CONVENOR.

The committee held several sittings with members and also met organisations and individuals of different ethnic communities belonging to N.C.Hills district at Haflong and in Guwahati with a view to eliciting their views.

The committee visited Haflong on 23-02-2009, and met the Apex bodies of different tribal communities and individuals and received memorandum and held discussions on the demand for the change of nomenclature of N.C.Hills district. During the discussion, several Apex Bodies including those of the three main non-Dimasa tribes i.e. (1) Zeme Council (2) Kuki Inpi (3) Hmar Peoples' Union submitted memorandum and articulated their views on the issue. The Apex Bodies of these three tribes opposed the proposed new nomenclature mainly on account of their apprehension that the majority Dimasa ethnic group may exploit the other indigenous non-Dimasa tribes. They expressed the view that non-Dimasas have been neglected and deprived of their due share in all sphere of life and such a move in favour of one particular community would lead to political unrest.

Jadikhe Naisho Hoshom, the Dimasa Apex body also submitted a memorandum and stated that they are the single largest tribal community and that N.C.Hills has been traditionally known as Hasao Raji from the beginning of Dimasa dominance of the district. The N.C.Hills district should be accordingly named Dima Hasao Raji because of the fact that this area is covered with high hills and the word ‘Raji’ means a particular administrative area of habitation. The N.C.Hills Autonomous Council also passed a resolution dated 07-03-2008 and 11-02-2009 seeking change in the nomenclature of the district from N.C. Hills district to Dima Hasao Raji.

Another meeting of the Group of Ministers Committee was held on 18-09-2009 in the office chamber of Shri D.P.Gaola, Hon’ble Minister, Urban Development & Housing at Dispur in which the following Apex bodies of different tribal communities participated.

1. Dimasa Apex Body
2. Zeme Council
3. Hmar Apex Body
4. Hrangkhoh Apex Body
5. Kuki Apex Body

In the aforesaid meeting, the stand of the Apex Bodies remained the same. It is seen that people of tribal communities other than Dimasa feared the deprivation of their due share of development and other welfare measures undertaken by the Autonomous Council dominated by the Dimasas. In view of such state of affairs, Development Councils within the Autonomous Council should be constituted so that the minority tribal communities including non-tribal communities get their due share of development and other opportunities in the district.

5.7.1 Recommendations of Group of Ministers

After threadbare deliberations on the matter, the Group of Minister’s Committee are of the view that the Dimasas are the largest tribe in the District which has had dominance over the region. Moreover, even existing nomenclature of “North Cachar” is based on the dominant presence of Kacharis or Dimasa Kacharis. History also revealed that the Dimasas were the rulers and kings prior to annexation of

kingdom of Raja Gobinda Chandra Hasnu in 1832 by the British. Historical monuments lying in the area bears testimony to Dimasa's dominance over the N.C.Hills district which is bounded by Nagaland and Manipur in each side. Other than the Dimasas, population wise Zeme Nagas and Kukis, are the two major tribes.

Further, they added that perceptible improvement in the law and order scenario has, in the meantime, taken place in N.C.Hills district after the surrender of arms by members of DHD (J) on 2nd October 2009.

The earlier demands of various Dimasa organisations were that there should be a change in nomenclature for N.C.Hills to "Dima Hasao Raji". The local Dimasas and militant elements after detailed deliberations amongst themselves have decided to accept the nomenclature as "Dima Hasao District" in place of "Dima Hasao Raji" as the word "Raji" has a communal overtone, which if given effect to, some communities like Zeme Nagas, Kukis and Hmars may resort to protest or agitation. However, despite the nomenclature now proposed to be "Dima Hasao District" instead of Dima Hasao Raji, it expected that there could be some protest or agitation which can be controlled by the Law and Order enforcing agencies. Further, the Group of Minister also recommended that the State Government as well as N.C.Hills Autonomous Council Authorities should ensure that-

The Dimasa language will be introduced as vernacular in primary school of Dimasa inhabited villages only. The Autonomous Council should also simultaneously take steps to establish primary school for teaching in the mother tongue in non-Dimasa tribe inhabited villages, is so desired by these tribes. Appointments in Government jobs as well as Council jobs within the N.C. Hills district should reflect the population pattern tribes and after the demise of council employees, qualified Next of Kins (NOK) will be considered for employment on compassionate ground as per Govt. Norms.

No restriction on the sale or ownership of land and properties will apply to the tribal communities and member of any tribal community can purchase land from any non-tribal or other tribes. The change of nomenclature of the District will in no way affect the existing rights on land and other properties of the individuals or communities of different tribal and non-tribal communities living in the district.

No change of any nomenclature for name of any kind will be taken up in future by the council within the district.

Nothing should be done by any tribe which may hurt the sentiments of any other tribe or disturb the communal harmony among different communities living in the district.

In view of the above, Group of Ministers Committee recommend that the nomenclature of the N. C. Hills District be changed to Dima Hasao District and to allay the apprehensions of other ethnic groups of deprivation or of unbridled dominance by the majority Dimasas, Development Councils for each ethnic group within the Autonomous Councils and also for other non tribal communities inhabiting in the district may be constituted. The State Govt may also issue necessary instruction to the Autonomous Council for entering into an understanding with all the Apex Bodies of the tribes as regards the points mentioned in the above paragraph.

5.7.2 Discontentment on the revision of Cabinet sub-committee's decision

The Indigenous Forum were not contented with the revision of the cabinet. The Constitution of the Group of Ministers and the consequent impugned Government Order were part of the long drawn political strategy ruling the state of Assam according to the ethnic minorities. Therefore, no amount of reasoning or historical, social, political or economic consideration could ever weigh with the Ministers Committee. The conclusion and the recommendations were always drawn and the Constitution of the Ministers Committee was only to show to the world at large that due consideration has been given. The Indigenous People's Forum, the Kuki Inpi, Assam and various organisations including the Biaste Students Association, the Hmar People's Union, the Vaiphei People's Council, the Jaintia-Khasi apex body made various representations to the members of the Ministers Community and various other authorities including the Hon'ble Governor and Hon'ble Prime Minister of India.

The Ministers Group, were not amenable to reason and the historical facts and the socio economic positions of the North Cachar Hills. They were said to be prejudiced by their narrow political desires. The Ministers Groups went so far as in rewriting history by stating that the Dimasa were the rulers of North Cachar Hills prior to annexation by the British in 1932. It was also submitted that the Ministers

Committee's recommendations was unconstitutional in so far as it seeks to change the name of the District only to 'thwart the designs of NSCN for greater Nagalim'. It is submitted that the recommendations are patently illegal, contrary to the structure of the Sixth Schedule and to sub serve the narrow political demands of the Ministers who constituted the Ministers Group.

The ethnic minorities express their discontentment as they were totally shocked and aghast at the intention of the Government of India to review the discussion of sub committee with regard to the change in nomenclature of N. C. Hills and the ethnic minorities were overwhelmed with the feeling of apprehension for fear of adverse decision of the cabinet sub-committee comprising of high ranking political leaders of the Assam Government. To them the decision in favour of Fima Hasao Raji showed the Government insecurity and lackadaisical attitude to bring peace in the trouble torn district of Assam.

To the ethnic minority surrendering of arms by DHD (J) militants and their willingness to come to the mainstream can be regarded as the positive gesture towards restoration of peace and normalcy in trouble torn district but attend to accept the demands of the Dimasa militants. As a settlement to peace settlement will rather aggravate the grim situation instead of bettering it. The showed sighted and unsettling of the Government will ironically encourage the other militants group to follow the same tactic that the DHD took to get the attention of the Government. Thus, leading to an uncontrollable and worsen situation of mayhem and chaos, the like of which has never been seen in the Hill district. Such action taken by the Government will drastically lower the credibility of the Government and its principles. This has seed of hatred and distrust among the ethnic groups of the region. According to the minorities the attempt to solve the issue of land and territory in isolation without the prior with consent of ethnic group of N. C. Hills showed hatred and increase tension.

The unjustly changing of the district nomenclature from N. C. Hills to Dima Hasao on 30th March 2010 after the dialect of a single community was regented by the ethnic minority. The Group of Ministers Committee (GoMC) which was constituted on 26th July 2010 but the believed and faith on the democratic progress to achieve just and legitimate objectives has been considerably ground down. Initially group of

ministers had not taken any tangible steps in initiating any dialogue. In spite of the strong opposition the nomenclature was changed.

On 16th February 2010 the Indigenous People's Forum made a representation to the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam. In terms of the said representation, the Indigenous People's Forum proposed that the North Cachar Hills Autonomous District be bifurcated into two parts in case the proposal for changing the name accepted. The proposal made by the Indigenous People's Forum did not subserve the political interest of the Ministers Group and therefore the said proposal was never considered. The Hon'ble Governor thereafter passed an order to rename the existing North Cachar Hills District as '*Dima Hasao District*'. This order of the Governor was notified in the Gazette of the State of Assam on 30th March, 2010.

In terms of paragraph 1(3) (ff) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, the Governor can alter the name of any autonomous district according to the claims of the minorities. The Governor while exercising its power under the said paragraph has to apply the mind independently to the facts and circumstances of the case. The independent exercise of such discretion is mandated by the Sixth Schedule. The Hon'ble Governor proceeded on the recommendations of the Ministers Group as forwarded by the Cabinet of the State. The enactment of the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India is a special provision to govern and administer the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. The Sixth Schedule covers all the fields of administration of the tribal areas within the framework of the Constitution of India.

All the Autonomous Councils included under the Sixth Schedule are both administrative and legislative bodies. The provisions of Sixth Schedule are not controlled by the rest of the provisions of the Constitution of India. Therefore it is a Constitution within a Constitution (The Constitution of India) and accordingly Article 244(2) of the Constitution of India mandates that the areas under the Sixth Schedule are to be administered by the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. The provisions of the Sixth Schedule are specially made with a view to maintain and preserve the homogeneity, heritage, customs and culture of the tribal people, being away from the heterogeneous life and culture of other parts of India.

In the Sixth Schedule, Governor has been given a place of primacy in respect of administering and exercising executive power in the tribal areas. The State

Government have no role to play in the administration of tribal areas under Sixth Schedule, except in certain limited sphere. Governor notification has been brought about to subserve the narrow political interests of the ruling party. The Hon'ble Governor, had not considered the representation made by the Indigenous People's Forum on 16th February, 2010.

The political dominance of the Dimasas has increased over a period of time due to the increasing migration in the district of Dima Hasao. The tribe has begun to dominate politically and has also cornered the benefits of all welfare and developmental schemes of the District Council. In these Circumstances, the change in the name of the district will establish and cement their position of dominance and thereby the political aspirations and the right to self determine, and the right to decide the social and economic future of the Indigenous People will be stifled according to the minorities.

The North Cachar Hills District inhabited by various tribes like Nagas, Karbis, Kuki, Khasi, Biata, Hmar, Dimasa and many communities has to be administered keeping in view the fabric of various customs and cultures of those tribal people without hurting their sentiments and aspirations. According to the respondents the Governor of Assam by changing the name of the existing North Cachar Hills District as "Dima Hasao District" by passing the aforesaid notification, had created discrimination between the ethnic minority tribes and the Dimasa tribe which violates the Article 14 of the Constitution of India. Renaming the existing North Cachar Hills District after the name of Dimasa tribe the Governor of Assam has given a place of primacy to the Dimasa tribe which is one of the tribes living in the North Cachar Hills District.

To the ethnic minorities it will not only affect the delicate balance between the relationship of the Dimasa tribe and the other minority and important tribes but also create disharmony, bitterness and discrimination between them which is certainly not the purpose and objective of making the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India meant for the purpose of administering the tribal areas of Assam smoothly and cohesively. They allege that the Governor of Assam mechanically changed the name of the North Cachar Hills District to 'Dima Hasao District' as suggested by the group of Ministers in the aforesaid recommendation.

The ethnic minorities accused the Governor of abdicating his Constitutional duty and obligation in favour of the wishes of the Government of Assam, which is clearly prohibited by the role as specially envisaged for the Governor in the Sixth Schedule in respect of the administration of the tribal areas of North Cachar Hill district, Assam. Renaming the said District as “Dima Hasao District” has placed the Dimasa tribe in a place primacy and importance which caused de-stability, tension and bad blood among the other tribes living in the said district.

Governor of Assam is believed by the minority communities to have dual role to play in exercising his power as constitutional Governor in the State of Assam and in exercising his discretionary power in respect of tribal areas of the State of Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. He has acted in aid and advice of the Council of Ministers of State of Assam while discharging his constitutional duty, responsibility and power as the Constitutional Governor of Assam. The Governor of Assam is the final authority under the Sixth Schedule in administration of tribal areas like North Cachar Hills District.

5.8 Political Mobilisation and Ethnic Minorities in Dima Hasao District

Political mobilisations are shaped by the perceptions of the actors, in a given situation of the problems and values confronting them and the range and variance of the larger social reality within which the confrontation takes place (Kothari, Rajni .ed Bhatt Anil 2010). The case study we present here seeks to underline the factors that shaped the organisation and mobilisation of the ethnic minorities in Dima Hasao District. The study deal with the background history of IPF movement with the role played by the IPF, which is the association of diverse ethnic minorities in the district. The ethnic minorities in the district were faced with a dilemma. The issues they faced related to many social and political changes.

5.8.1 Group identity and party affiliations

The political functioning of the state became more complex and the deep rooted political consciousness among the ethnic minorities has without any ambiguity encouraged the political leadership and strengthened the politics of identity among them. To assert their unaddressed problem in the region the ethnic minorities took part in the political domain. The IPF formed a political party by the name of Indigenous Peoples’ Party(IPP).The head office of the party is located at Mahadev Tilla, Haflong,

N. C. Hills P.O./P.S Haflong. The area of jurisdiction shall be confined in all the indigenous people inhabitant area of N. C. Hills.

The Indigenous People's Party (IPP) visualizes the community in which peace, love and justice prevails and where equality of all mankind is maintained and dignity of all persons is equally upheld. The Indigenous Peoples Party (IPP) strives to get people's involvement in the process of the bifurcation movement at different capacities and in the process of over all development.

The Indigenous Peoples' Party is committed to protect and safeguard the democratic right of the Indigenous People. It is committed to protect the land and it resources. The IPF is committed to promote the culture, custom and traditional practices of the Indigenous People of the District. It is also committed to work together for the interest of Indigenous People particularly for the creation of a separate district for Indigenous People living in N.C.Hills.

5.8.2 Objectives of Indigenous Peoples' Party

The main objective of the IPP is to strive for the bifurcation of a separate district with an autonomous council under Article 244(2) and 275(1).

It aims to promote to live together peacefully with bio-diversity of the different ethnic groups irrespective of different caste, creed and religion and to preserve and promote unity, harmony and solidarity among the Indigenous communities of this district.

To promote the aspirations of the people IPP contested in the MAC election in the District of Dima Hasao where the candidates of IPP won elections in four Constituencies of the District in the year 2012. The ethnic minorities have the grievances that they have not got democracy, liberty and justice in the true sense of the term as they have been deprived of equality. The IPP did not get anything substantial in the election but has been successful in gaining politics of recognition for the deprived minorities. The people showed little support for the existing political institution and form this IPF where they demanded more redistribution by virtue of their deprived economic circumstances. The social realities of inequality accounts for large difference between the non-Dimasa ethnic minorities and Dimasa majority.

5.9 Formation of Task Force

The IPF continued its demand manifested through various Memorandums to the Prime Minister of India, Union Ministers, Chief Ministers, the Governor of Assam and many high authorities for its demand for separate district for the ethnic minorities. Government of Assam constituted a Task Force on 17-08-2010 to examine the recommendations of the Group of Ministers Committee (GoMC) regarding safeguard for minority tribes in Dima Hasao District and issues raised by Indigenous Peoples' Forum.

The task force studied the report of the group of minister's committee which was submitted to the Government on 5th February 2010. The salient observation/recommendation as revealed from these report are as follows-

1. Dimasas are the largest tribe in the district and have dominance over the region.
2. Renaming of the district as Dima Hasao District will thwart the design of N.S.C.N for greater Nagaland.
3. Dimasa language will be introduced as vernacular in primary schools of Dimasa inhabited villages only.
4. Appointment in the Government/ Council jobs should reflect the population pattern of different tribes.
5. No restriction on the sale or ownership of the land and property will apply to the tribal communities and the change in the district name will in no way affect the existing right on land and property.
6. No further change in the name of the district would be considered in future by the council.

The Task Force, after taking note of the recommendation of the GoMC decided to visit Haflong and meet the organisation of different minority tribes in the district. Accordingly a visit was made on 2nd September, 2010 to Haflong and meetings were held with the members of IPF, ISF, IWF, IBC Forum, JNH, Dimasa Mothers Association, and ASDC. The Task Force receive memorandum from JNH and the IPF and other organisation.

The groups representing Dimasa population of the District made strong submission against the creation of any regional council in the district. They highlighted the fact that the existing Council arrangement gives fair representation to various minority groups and that the political, economic, and social concerns of all communities are taken care of by the Council Authorities. They submitted details of the distribution of seats in the Council for every group, employment benefits given to various groups etc. in support of their contention.

The representatives of the non-Dimasa tribal groups submitted, in their memorandum highlighted that in 1952 there were only 6 Dimasa elected members in the Council out of 12 seats while as on today 17 seats are held by Dimasas out of the 28 seats. The population of Dimasa community is only 35% and inspite of this they have been able to change the name of the district as Dima Hasao which is an attempt to enforce their will on the other groups of people. They also pointed out that Dimasas are not the hill tribes and they are not well conversant of the culture, custom, rights and interests of the hill tribals living in the district. They demanded bifurcation of the district into two autonomous districts viz. one for the Dimasas and other for the non-Dimasas.

The Task Force after having heard the various groups during its visit to Haflong on 2nd September, 2010 decided to examine and determine the issue which lies at the core of the problem. The Task Force held detail discussions on this matter on different occasions and felt that renaming of the district has caused quite a bit of apprehensions in the mind of the non-Dimasa population of the district. The Task Force also took note of the report submitted by the Deputy Commissioner, Dima Hasao district which was addressed to the Chief Secretary of the Govt. of Assam on 15th July.2010. This report throws light on the prevailing situation in the district after its re-nomenclature and highlights that the non-Dimasa communities have started agitation to demand bifurcation of the district.

The report mentions that the bifurcation claimed was aimed at converting the Haflong and the Maibong Sub-division of the district in two separate autonomous districts-Maibong Subdivision being proposed as Dima Hasao district for Dimasas and Haflong Subdivision to be named as N.C.Hills district for non-Dimasa people. The report hints at the escalation of tension on this issue and closer cooperation

among all the non-Dimasa groups with the possibility of militancy also joining the agitation.

The Task force also examined the issue relating to the population of various communities and their geographical distribution over the district. The report dated 15th July 2010 of the Deputy Commissioner indicates that, as per 2001 census, the population of the Dimasas was 63,146 against the total population of the district of 1,88,079 which is about 33% of the total population. On the other hand, the other major non-Dimasa groups having population more than 8000 include Bengalis (27,320), Nepalis (12,404), Hmar (14,158), Jeme Nagas (15,511), Karbis (8,890), Hindi speaking (8,720), Kukis (8,525). These groups together account for a population of 95,530 which is much higher than the population of the Dimasas.

The Council authorities were asked to submit the map of the district indicating the location of different community villages. They were also asked to verify the population pattern and location of the villages claimed by IPF as belonging to non-Dimasa tribal groups. Such information was received from the DC vide his letter No. NCH/CON/103/2010-118084 dated 29.12.2010 and was examined by Hill Area Department. The Task Force examined this information and took a broad view that the non-Dimasa population is by and large concentrated in areas which can be segregated from the area inhabited by the Dimasa population.

Attempts were also made by the Task Force to obtain information in respect of comparative development status of Dimasa dominated areas vis-a-vis areas dominated by non-Dimasa communities. However, such information could not be made available to the Task Force. On 6th June.2011, the President and General Secretary, IPF submitted a copy of representation submitted by them to the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Assam on the issue of bifurcation of the district. In this memorandum they highlighted one again the problem faced by the non-Dimasa people due to renaming of the district. They also pointed out the attempts of a section of Dimasas to start a campaign "Dima Hasao is for Dimasas".

They regretted that the Task Force constituted by the Government in spite of several round of discussions has not been able to achieve anything substantial. This has led to disillusionment among the youth who may no longer like to live under the dictate of Dimasas. In fact the memorandum stated that bifurcation will be achieved

by hook or by crook, through any means and with whatever price. They also pointed out to the news items appearing in the media about the creation of Dima Hasao Territorial Council and demanded that the area demanded by them should not be included in the said Territorial Council.

The Task Force took note of the development that have taken place in case of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and felt that the issues of development should be given precedence over the emotional issues of renaming of the district etc. It was appreciated by the members of the Task Force that the district of N.C.Hills as a whole is a backward district and a lot of work is yet to be done to bring the socio-economic status of the people to a reasonable level. The terrain in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts are undoubtedly very difficult and pose severe restrictions in the speedy development. In the last several years many districts in the State have bifurcated to speed up the pace of development and there is a strong case to help the situation in the hill districts also.

The Task Force noted that “United district of North Cachar and Mikir Hills” was constituted in November, 1951 and two separate councils namely North Cachar Hills District Council and Mikir Hills District Council within the geographical boundary of “United district of North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills” wer established in 1952. On 2.2.1970 the Govt. bifurcated the erstwhile “United North Cachar and Mikir Hills” into two district namely North Cachar Hills District and Mikir Hills District.

Having accepted the need for speeding up the development in the hill areas, the Task Force felt that the demand for 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. The Task Force also felt that once the development issues are allowed to be handled effectively by each of this council, the respective groups may not have any difficulty if the district is not further bifurcated or administrative organisation is not carried out as demanded by the non-Dimasa tribal groups.

The Task Force was of the opinion that for effective functioning of the two independent separate autonomous councils as suggested above, though it is necessary to have a well-defined area of jurisdiction for the two councils but it would not necessarily means that administrative reorganizations is a must. However if such

reorganization is insisted upon by the people, there would be need to consult with some other Government departments like General Administration, Finance, Home & Political etc. In such a situation, the Task Force felt it appropriate to refer this matter to a Commission to study the issues involved and make suitable recommendation for the purpose. Before the matter is referred to the Commission it would be appropriate that the issue discussed and considered at appropriate political level. They had talks with the Govt on the issue, submitted memorandum but the problem is still remaining in its original form.

Identity politics has given a comprehensive dimension to the unrest in the region with less chance for a drastic change in the near future. There has been a upsurge of tensions and instabilities in the district where security has become an issue of concern for the various ethnic groups inhabiting in the district. The emergence of minority movement is the consequence of social, economic and political changes have made ethnic identities seem more salient than other identity that is general in scope. A thorough and comprehensive analysis of the causes and conditions of identity politics taking all the different perceptions seriously should inform identity resolution activities. It must be properly analyse in order to avoid superficial and one-sided assumption which lead to counterproductive- interventions. Political mobilisation of different types of ethnic groups took various forms in the country in the past few years.

We have analysed in the chapter what impedes the political mobilisation of ethnic minorities in the district including the causes, strategies and consequences of identity politics. Ethnic identity consciousness is one of the important factors that instigates politics of identity and leads to identity movement. In the context of Dima Hasao District such identity movement has become a serious concern as a result the progress of national integration and economic development in the region are hampered. To resolve this crisis the government made attempts through various piecemeal arrangements like the creation of autonomous region and granting special status under this provision by the constitution. But such arrangement could not bring down the intensity and spread of identity movement in the region.