

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

1.1 The problem

Identity politics, autonomy movements and ethnic conflicts are definitely not a new phenomenon. It had existed from the dawn of the history of communities; organized on “recognized” common tradition, and culture. Ethnicity is emerging as an important concern in the politics of identity formation which dominates the existing political and social discourse across the world. People’s demand for group’s particular rights, recognition, identity and the long search for a separate space are the major ground around which such identity struggles revolve.¹

In general, ethnic conflicts normally involve a clash of interest or a struggle for rights, such as for land, education, political representation, preservation of ethnic identity, to autonomy, majority-minority relationship and so forth. Most important and challenging issues are concentrated on the problem of ethnicity, language, and cultural tradition, which is mostly linked up with ethnic identity. Ethnic conflict not only affected the competing groups but also affects the common masses as a whole. The effect of ethnic conflict is worth mentioning as it deals with the socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of an individual and groups as a whole.

1.ParagMoniSharma,Ethnicity,Identity,Cartography:Possession/Dispossession,Homecoming /Homelessness in contemporary Assam”, *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, Volume3, Issue 3,2011,p.1.

2.1 Ethnic Complexity: North East and Dima Hasao District

The North-East of India surrounded in contemporary aggressive problems of different ethnic groups for autonomous territories under the Indian Union is the worst affected by ethnic conflict and has become a persistent phenomenon. Ethnic conflict in this region not only affected the territorial and political sovereignty of the Indian state, but also the lives of the various people living in the region in an incomprehensible and inexplicable term.²

The term ethnic conflicts and its impact highlighting the Hmars are the main key words of the Research. In the light of this phenomenon the research studies the problem of conflict specifically among the Hmars and the Dimasas and its impact in Dima Hasao district which is located in the North East of India. In the history of North East India, Dima Hasao (old name: North Cachar Hills) district have faced untold conflicts within different tribes and the impact of ethnic conflicts needs to be analysed as it is concerned not only among the Hmars but also among the masses and the government and as a result transformation is needed as a whole.

North East India is often identified as a flash point in the subversive politics of the Indian nation, emerging as an area which assumes the question of internal ethnicity and multiculturalism or cultural pluralism. Each ethnic group has its own basic interests or expectations which may or may not come in contact with those of other ethnic communities. Speaking of the diverse ethnic and cultural features of the North- East, the impact of colonial principle of divide and rule along with the impact of the recent introduction

² Kumar B.B, "North East India: Crisis of Perception and Credible Action", *Dialogue: (Quarterly), a Journal of Astha Bharati*, Vol.1, No.2, New Delhi, Oct-Dec, 1999, p.2.

of multi-party politics has annoyed the region, and as such there is an urgent need to examine the potential problems of inter-ethnic hostility that has been expressed in this country.³

Mention may be made of the Hmars who historically, are a group of hill tribes in North East India and Myanmar (then Burma), living in the states of Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and Upper Burma. On the origin and meaning of the term 'Hmar' there are two theories, whereby the first theory suggests that the term might have originated from the word 'Hmar' which means 'North'. The second theory opines that the term was originally derived from 'Hmarh' or 'Tukbemsawm' which means "tying of one's hair in a knot on the nape of one's head" Whatever be the truth, this much is true that the term 'Hmar' as a common nomenclature gained popularity and wider acceptance among the Hmar ethnic group living in different parts of North-East India only with the dawn of political consciousness by the beginning of the 20th century.⁴

As stated, Dima Hasao (old name: North Cachar Hills) district is the home for diverse ethnic communities. Like the Hmars, the Dimasas are one such tribe consisting of the major population of the district. History reveals that the Dimasas are part of the greater Kachari group, who mostly lived in the Northern half of Dima Hasao district. The name 'Dimasa' most probably implies 'children of the big rivers', referring to river Bhramaputra. They are the most independent tribal communities seen in the region.⁵

3. Parag Moni Sharma, Ethnicity, Identity, Cartography: Possession/Dispossession, Homecoming /Homelessness in contemporary Assam", *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, Volume 3, Issue 3, 2011, p.1.

4 Lal Dena, *In Search of Identity: Hmars of North-East India*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, India, 2008, pp 5-8.

5 Barpujari S.K, *History of the Dimasas* (Autonomous Council, N.C. Hills District), Haflong, 1997.

Apart from Dima Hasao, the Dimasas have a sizeable population in Nogaon and Cachar district of Assam. The Dimasas belong to the Indo-Mongloid group of people and have similarities with other members of Bodo group such as Garos, Kachari, Mech and Rabhas. The Dimasas ruled the vast tract with Dimapur (now in Nagaland state) as their capital. They shifted their capital to Maibang in North Cachar Hills in mid sixteenth century. Until 1961, the Dimasas were treated as a sub-tribe of the Kachari tribes. In the 1961 census, they were classified as a separate tribe.⁶

Before the introduction of the District Council, the Dimasas were not much concerned of the national political situation. But with the growth of population and development, they have become assertive of their political right and started movement for adequate share of political power in order to maintain their distinct identities. The case of the Dimasas is not an exception to the problems faced by the Hmars of Dima Hasao district.⁷

The Cachar and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam, witnessed the worst ever-ethnic mayhem between the Dimasa and Hmar tribes, rattling the age-old cordial relationship. Dima Hasao (old name: North Cachar Hills) district like other plural societies has multi-ethnic and multi-cultural characteristics which pose a great challenge in the expression of public interest that is surrounded in contemporary hostile issue of different ethnic groups. It is also necessary to understand the tentative and regulatory mechanisms of the various challenges of ethnic conflict. Therefore, ethnic conflicts and its impact serve both to illustrate the traditional, political, social, cultural and economic general character of the marginalised tribes.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Misra P.S, "Identity Consciousness among the Dimasas of Assam" in B. Pakem (Ed.) *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in Northeast India*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1990), p.192.

The Hmars of Dima Hasao have also claimed to have a number of grievances be it political, social and economical and these are all said to be the result of the long neglect by the central government in spite of their repeated demands for various development. The major problems faced by the Hmars were during the conflict with the Dimasas of Dima Hasao (North Cachar hills) district of Assam and this point out the structure of minority and majority relationship whereby the minority are often discriminated. The demand for land and the demand for Dimaraji or Dima Hasao Raji (meaning Hill kingdom of the Dimasas) and the intention of changing the name of the district since 2002 result in the 'Hmar ethnic cleansing operation since 1988. The main outcome of the conflict in 2003 was related to the kidnapping of the Dima Halam Daogah cadres in Ditokcherra (P.Zoar) in the North Cachar Hills district by NSCN in which the Hmars were held responsible by the Dimasas.⁸

The Dima Halam Daogah then loose reign of terror in the Cachar bordering the North Cachar Hills resulting to the outcome of many atrocities by the Hmars as well but with the adoption of the P.C. Phukan Commission (an inquiry under justice P.C. Phukan probing the ethnic clashes between Hmars and Dimasas of 2003) there have been no cases of violent incident so far.⁹

But unfortunately, the data and information on the region is not sufficiently analyzed and communicated between the region and the centre, contributing to misinformation, mismanagement and alienation. In a drastic and dreaded sense, there is a culture of conflict and unfortunately, people have submitted to such an existence.

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

In Assam, cultural differences and incompatibility sharpened the ethnic boundaries and generated cleavages along ethnic self-importance, leading to inter-ethnic discord specifically in the Hill district. Ethnic unrest in North East India is as old as the country's independence. The factors of social exclusion, minority-syndrome and ethnic rivalry remained the driving force for protests demanding autonomy in the shape of homeland, state or autonomous district council, within the constitutional framework. Some of the movements followed the violent paths. While the former opted for constitutional path, the later sought the violent path.

Ever increasing evidences, however, now indicate that most of the ethnic groups in North-East have now transformed themselves into radical formation by building up ethnocentrism to fulfil their objectives and ideologies. In spite of the peace processes, ethnic conflict has still taken its form in the region. Ethnic conflict management, especially in ethnically diverse societies has not yet assumed its proper role in justifying development planning.

Therefore implementing socio-economic, political and cultural reforms and transformation in a diverse ethnic society is necessary to redress the grievances of the masses as a whole. It is with these points in mind the research aimed at studying issues concerning ethnic conflict and its impact in Assam by taking the specific case of conflict between the Hmars and Dimasas in Dima Hasao district(old name: North Cachar Hills).

1.3 Objectives and Scope of the Study

As already stated above, ethnicity has become a focal consideration of conflict and as such certain viewpoint has to be manifested to understand the mechanism of ethnic conflict. As a matter of

concern, the problem of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and their impact have to be studied and analysed very carefully so that further possible initiative can be suggested. Therefore the aims, objectives and scope are necessary to highlights the problems that are to be put down for analysis. Keeping this in mind certain objectives and scope of the study are taken into account:

- 1) To study the factors that led to ethnic conflicts between the Hmars and the Dimasas in Dima Hasao district.
- 2) To study the effects of ethnic conflicts on the socio-political and economic lives of marginalised ethnic communities in the region.
- 3) To analyze the existing forms of settlement and institutional arrangement to mitigate crisis of ethnicity in the region.
- 4) To provide suggestive measures for addressing the problems of ethnic conflict in the region.

Importance of the Study

Many studies have been undertaken regarding ethnic conflict in Dima Hasao district of Assam, but not much has been done to examine the consequences faced by the ethnic groups in the district. Therefore the study of ethnic conflict along with its consequences is necessary to promote peace and further protect the marginalised ethnic groups. The present study attempts to focus on this aspect and provide suggestive measure to prevent ethnic conflict in the district.

1.4 Research Question

In order to explore the issues of ethnic conflict and its impact, some research questions are made. The reason for including this

research question is to focus on the impact of ethnic conflict on the marginalised communities of Dima Hasao district. The research questions are as below:

- 1) What are the factors that led to ethnic conflict in the Dima Hasao district of Assam?
- 2) What are and what would be the effects of ethnic conflicts?
- 3) Why is it often assumed that the worst consequences are faced by the marginalised communities in a conflict situation?
- 4) What are the existing form of institutional settlement and arrangement?
- 5) Can this existing institution adequately address the problems of diversity in the region?
- 6) What are the limitations (if any) with the existing institutional arrangements?
- 7) What would be the possible new initiatives to be taken in order to address the problems of marginalised communities as well as the problems of ethnic conflict?

These research questions are necessary to explain whether and how the population is able to voice their opinion and contribute to genuine change and improve their situations. The question are also used to identify the condition of the ethnic groups to reach through changes in the society, but also how social structures are adapted in order to achieve an improved position for claiming their rights. Most important of all this research question aims at exploring the problems faced by the people affected by ethnic violence. The exploration of the study would be impossible without these research questions and as such necessary to comprehend with the related issues.

1.5 Research Methodology

The proposed research work employs both historical and empirical method to study ethnic conflict and its impact with the objective of achieving a broader but concrete aspect. The former serves to explain the prospect of the study while the later serves to illustrate the information so that it can further be analysed. However, amidst the widespread sense of helplessness, there is also an overwhelming desire and force to be free from such a situation of conflict which cripples the people from all sides. Therefore, a cluster sampling frame is made to study the causes and impacts of the ethnic conflict that has taken place in the different parts of Dima Hasao district of Assam.

And to make it more concise, a purposive random sampling was adopted. Personal one to one interview and distribution of questionnaire was applied for collecting proper information and data analysis was conducted. The collected information was also properly analysed. In the light of these issues of conflicts the study is made on the various aspects of cultural diversity and conflicts with a special focus on the problems and challenges faced by marginalised ethnic communities like the Hmars of Dima Hasao district in a conflict situation.

The research also serves to illustrate the problem faced by the ethnic groups as transformation is needed as a whole. Published and unpublished documents on the Hmars' and Dimasas' ethnic institutional arrangement in Dima Hasao district are also consulted.

The major impacts regarding the socio-economic and political life of the Hmars are taken into account. Extensive field work and data collection through interviews, questionnaire and secondary source are made to examine the consequences of ethnic violence.

Data were collected in three ways: 1) questionnaires, 2) interviews and observation. Data from each method were analyzed separately and then thoroughly studied to arrive at common themes. A Field note is also used as a spontaneous method to document the reactions, thoughts, experiences and feelings.

The study on the impact of ethnic conflicts is to motivate for further disclosure of the sponsored measures that are needed to be deployed in tackling the problem faced by the affected number of people and help in initiating the Government to further worked on the problem that are being faced by the masses, so that steps can be laid down for further prevention.

The research based itself on the analytical summary of the multi-dimensional resurgence of ethnic conflict and its impact on the marginalized communities that has taken place in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. A theoretical framework is also put into account to further understand the complexities of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and includes contextual factors such as cultural, historical, political, and economic conditions that led to the causes of ethnic conflict and the impact it have on the masses outcomes. The knowledge derived from this study will enhance the understanding of the experience of ethnic conflict affected groups and help to uncover and identify influences to prevent further conflict for the well-being of the population.

Study Area

The study has been confined to Dima Hasao district of Assam. The research area covers the villages that were purposively used for sampling to collect information in the Dima Hasao (old name: North Cachar Hills) district of Assam. It also covers some of the

villages of Cachar district and some parts of the Hmar refugee inhabitant area of Mizoram.

Primary and Secondary Sources

In order to search answers to the research question, different primary sources in addition to a variety of secondary sources were used for data collection. The main research methods for primary data collection during the fieldwork as already mentioned were interviews and questionnaire. In addition to the methods applied during fieldwork in Dima Hasao, a wide range of secondary sources have been studied to supplement the analysis of the inconsistency between Primary data and information from Oral-interviews, and Questionnaire. The sources may be categorized as follows:

- 1) The most important primary sources of the study were gathered from the Oral interviews and Questionnaires.
- 2) Besides oral interviews, proceedings of various departments, Public departments, Revenue department, Home department, Public health department were consulted.
- 3) First hand unpublished Annual reports of Public department, Local- self-government, Gazetteers were also consulted.
- 4) All related books, articles and journals were consulted for collecting secondary data.
- 5) Newspaper Reports and articles were also used to gather the required information.

1.6 Review of Literature

In Search of identity: Hmars of North East India by Lal Dena is an innovative analysis of the Hmar tribe of India in which he broadly discussed the origin of the Hmars, including their so-called Israelite origin, socio-political development, leadership pattern, literary development, position of Hmar (Mizo) women, interaction with Indo-Japanese soldiers during the World War II, the impact of Christianity, the Mizo integration movement, their conflict with the Kukis in 1958-1960, and with the Dimasas in 2003-2004, and the history of their political movements including the HPC movement in Mizoram. He deals with some of the pressing issues and problems faced by the tribal, generally in North East India. He also explains about the marginalization of hill people and the issue of tribalism and detribalization of the Hmars.

The controversial Tipaimukh High Dam, the question of survival and the roots of alienation in North East is also seen in his work. His works demonstrate the originality and the search for the Hmar's identity that dwelled in various ends of the states. Dena has discussed about the socio-political, economic and cultural position of the Hmars and how they have survived since time immemorial. The grievances faced by the Hmars and the roles played by various organization and movements is also highlighted by the author as well. Most importantly Lal Dena tries to bring out the problems that have been faced not only by the Hmars but by the minority tribes in general which are importantly connected with the study of the research.

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities, Reflection on the origin and spread of Nationalism* evaluates the main causes of nationalism and the creation of an imagined community as the reduction of privileged access to particular script languages (eg.

Latin) which was a movement to abolish the ideas of divine rule and monarchy and the emergence of printing press under a system of capitalism. He locates the root of the idea of 'nation' at the end of the 18th century and distinguishes the communities not by their falsity and genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined. He contends the European nation state coming into being as a response to nationalism in the European Diaspora beyond the ocean, in colonies, namely in both the Americas. He considers nation state building as an 'imitative' action in which new political entities were pirating the model of the nation state.

Anderson importantly tries to bring out some tentative suggestion for a more satisfactory interpretation of nationalism and views that nationality and nationless are the cultural artefact of a particular kind thus trying to show why these cultural artefacts have aroused such deep attachment. Anderson has depicted his views and ideas based on nationalism as an imagined community stressing the new world and try to make us understand how nation, nationalism and nationless came into being and how their meaning has changed from time to time.

In *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, Will Kymlicka identifies 'Liberalism' is often viewed as being primarily concerned with the relationship between the individuals and the state and in particular of the individual's membership in a community and culture. Kymlicka evaluates 'Community' comprising of 'Communitarians and the Self' whereby it look at the criticism of the liberal account of the self and its interest. Most importantly Kymlicka explains Liberalism in culturally plural societies where a single country contains more than one cultural community. The value of cultural membership, equality for minority culture, minority rights and liberal tradition are broadly signified.

Will Kymlicka suggests that minority rights should be compared and defended by the communitarian and argues for the protection of the collective rights of minority cultures. Most importantly he tries to show the complex relationship between liberalism and minority rights and also tried to show Liberalism in its most attractive form by offering a very plausible and compelling account of Community and Culture.

Brian Barry critically analyses the frequently made claim that the negative and positive public policies that can be justified by an appeal to the value of equal treatment in his book *Culture and Equality, an Egalitarian critique of Multiculturalism*. He focused from individuals to groups and identified that politics of difference are destructive of the independence of associations and communities that are the bearers of minority cultures. Barry also made a broader significance of multiculturalism and its success in getting the policies adopted, but at the same time he highlights that it will not shed the light on the working of the liberal democratic institution as it does little help to the target groups.

Overall Barry's mainly discusses the theme which comprises of the strategy of privatization, the dynamics of identity, assimilation, acculturation and differences, theories of group rights, liberal states and illiberal religions, public stake in Arts and Education, and the abuse of culture and the politics of multiculturalism.

Monirul Hussain's in *Interrogating Development State, Displacement and Popular Resistance in North East India* has put an endeavour to comprehend the complex relationship between state sponsored development projects and the consequent massive displacement of population in North East India in general and Assam in particular. It also aims at understanding the response of

people who are facing the threat of displacement with the commissioning of mega dam projects and analyzes more at the interrogating post-colonial development process, raising questions and situating people at the centre of the research rather than providing solutions.

Hussain tries to bring out that various developments in Assam that has led to the introduction of displacement and this are basically seen with the establishment of Power sector, Oil sector, Paper Mills, Communication Network and Urbanization. Development has its own network of vested interests and in many cases the state too has condoned them and proposes to stress on this aspect of development that has degraded the socio- economic, cultural and political lives of several groups of marginalized ethnic communities.

Unbalanced economic development has obviously contributed towards unbalancing human lives and community structure. North East India being a part of the larger political economy of India cannot escape the consequences of a globalized economy and are likely to be marginalized as a result of globalization and the author has generally analyse the brutal aspect of development, besides understanding the nature, direction and quality of social change in North East India as a part of India's post-colonial project of modernity and nation building.

In *Ethnicity and Nation building in South Asia*, Urmila Phadnis and Rajat Ganguly examine the dynamics of ethnic identities and movements and nation building strategies of South Asian states in a comparative framework. Consequently a number of pertinent ethnic movements are made and a comparative perspective is made on the wider issues of theoretical concern. The phenomenon of ethnicity is an intrusive component of the socio political realities of

multi ethnic states in South Asia as well as in most of the countries of the world.

Phadnis and Ganguly have demonstrated about the ethnic mosaic of South Asian states and highlight the potential and possibilities to cope with the challenge of social diversities and economic disparities. Analysis is also made of the autonomist and secessionist manifestation of ethnic nationalism and evaluates the major strands of the relationship between government, society and economy, focusing on the causes which lead to the causes of ethnicity in some cases and its exacerbation in others.

C.R. Mitchell in *The Structure of International Conflict* evaluates conflicts between different groups, organization or countries and examines the common structures and processes found in human conflicts in many settings. Mitchell demonstrates the common features in conflict and highlights the ideas and insights that are drawn from a wide variety of discipline. Particular emphasis is laid upon the complex and interlocking structure of conflicts and the way in which internal differences affect the ability of adversaries to prosecute conflicts successfully, or conclude a compromise peace satisfactorily.

Mitchell also explains the attention towards the psychology of being in conflict and how it had affect the adversaries' view of others, the behavior used in the conflict and the range of outcomes considered feasible and acceptable. Mitchell's work also includes the problem of peace making for third parties, and analyses the type of actions open to potential intermediaries attempting to manage or end disruptive disputes.

In his article *North East India: Crisis of perception and Credible Action*, B.B Kumar explains and examines the country suffering due to crisis of perception and lack of credible action in the North-

Eastern region. According to him the British have misinterpreted the society and culture; gave colonial bias to our history and we uncritically accepted their ideas; followed their footsteps; promoted all round social, cultural, ethnic and religious divide and introduced the racist thinking in the society; and made assertion of separate identity and social distancing' profitable and most alluring.

Kumar argues that Ethnocentrism occupied the central stage and certain sections developed vested interest in generating sense of alienation among the people and that no serious attempt have been made by the Central and the State Governments to solve the problem. The North-Eastern states get most favored treatment from the Central Government in the matter of allotment of funds and yet deliberate propaganda is carried out that the Central Government neglects the region. The people of the region are thus allowed to be misinformed and misled resulting in anger and alienation.

Kumar examines that paradoxically, insurgency, and secessionist demands with a lone exception, and upsurge of ethnocentrism is post-independence phenomena. He also evaluates the mind-set which refuses updating and creating problems throughout the country, but more acutely in this region, as if that is not enough, attempts are made consciously or unconsciously to divide the people on racial, ethnic and religious grounds.

Kumar explained that a close examination of the lexeme reveals that linguistic plurality is not the result of lexical plurality but the permutation and combination of limited sets of lexemes have given birth to vast linguistic differences. He analyzed that living together, free from isolation, is essential for the same and shows the misplaced anger, much of which is the result of the misgivings and misperception. A large number of the people have

such misgivings and misperceptions and they are sulking that in aggravating the sense of alienation and in many cases the outward expression of the sense of alienation is the violence in the society. Most importantly he says that steps should be taken to resolve the crisis of perception so that the genuine grievances of the people need immediate remedial action.

Parag Moni Sharma in *Ethnicity, Identity, and Cartography: Possession/ Dispossession, Homecoming/ Homelessness* in contemporary Assam, tries to bring out the identity formation that dominates the contemporary political and social discourse in the North East of India. According to the Sharma, ethnic assertion, revivalism, and quests for a separate space are the major trajectories around which such identity struggles revolve. Most resistant and resurgent idioms are concentrated on the issue of language, which is linked up with ethnic identity and is also linked to the reorganization of states on the basis of language in India after independence. The present centrifugal trends that celebrate differences and ethnic uniqueness in Assam are the indication of a radical rearrangement and realigning of political and cultural dynamics states were carved out around the identity of Major Indian creating a homeland also entails the simultaneous creation of homelessness.

Sharma evaluates the non contiguous heterotrophic ethno-linguistic mosaic that Assam and the North East are, the creation of ethnic homelands through acts of mapping, creates ethnic enclaves where the other-ethnic and the non-ethnic is rendered politically and culturally homeless in a space that they have perhaps been located in for ages.

Thus, he identifies cultural subtexts like Bodo Nationalism emerging from larger nationalistic cultural texts like Assamese

nationalism and imbibed a centripetal striving for a greater cultural text, it spawned newer cultural subtexts. Most importantly Sharma examines the present centrifugal trends in Assam becoming the symptoms of a radical rearrangement and re-aligning the proliferation of stock and clichéd rhetorical categories such as linguistic oppression, unequal development, and marginalization. These are entering into relationships with socio-historical and political specificities of mutual transformation through ethno-political encounters, and are witness as a continuous process of new identities being created, and new demands being articulated. The writer thinks that perhaps, only after the process of fragmentation reaches an untenable and dead end, which is the reverse dynamics of consolidation and a truly federal set up will be set in motion.

N.K Das in *Identity Politics and Social Exclusion in India's North East: The Case for Re-distributive Justice* examines how various brands of identity politics since the colonial days have served to create the basis of exclusion of groups, resulting in various forms of rifts, often envisaged in dual terms: such as majority-minority; sons'-immigrants; local-outsiders; tribal-non-tribal; hills-plains; inter-tribal; and intra-tribal. He basically analyzes the seven states of North East India, the inhabiting tribes and explains the division of Assam into the other six states. Das vehemently tries to bring out the ethnic-linguistic-ecological-sociological and historical origin. The lack of intense inter-ethnic contacts had witnessed the problem of in-group-out-group, perceived marginalization and 'minority consciousness' thereby surfacing as a key factor to ethnic unrest which grew essentially through primordial affiliations.

Along with this ethnic unrest, Linguistic and Revivalist Movements arose among the various ethnic tribes, on the other

hand regionalism, democratic struggle for self rule, greater autonomy and militant action erupted as a result of ethnic conflict. Aftermath Insurgency and Terrorism flooded the North East and during 1960's and 70's peace initiatives through Cease Fire and Peace Accords were undertaken and there was reconciliation for self rule and autonomy. N.K Das most importantly tries to analyze and explain the resurgence of ethnic identity and persistence of ethnicised politics does not indicate repudiation of the political state, rather their aspirations should be seen as pre requisite for distributive justice, which no nation can neglect.

In *Minority Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Assam, India*, Robert G Gosselink upholds the political necessity that India has always been committed to unity through diversity. Although India is a diverse country yet cultural differences, communal separation and completion among ethnic groups have resulted in violent struggles. Especially depicting of Assam, Gosselink opines that conflicts in this states are compounded by immigration problems and demographic changes.

He also examines the Assamese search for identity, the nature of immigration and internal migration in North East India and the problems that are created by Assam's increasing population. Analysis is also made by the writer about the minority rights within Assam's ever changing demography and discusses the value of rights in Assam with its changing economic and political situation. Gosselink explains the grass root movements that were initiated to drive foreigners out from Assam and he most importantly speaks about the Assam Movement.

Ethnic conflict in Assam concerning the deportation of the Bengal Muslims illegal immigrants encouraged the formation of an opposition coalition ,therefore the conflict no longer remain

majority- minority but has become a minority- minority struggle for rights. With the Assam Accord (1985), conflicts was resolved to a limited extent and Gosselink believes that conflicts in Assam will be solved only when no group feels its language and identity is threatened and this is possible only greater rights are granted to all of Assam's minorities to ensure the protection and preservation of their ethnic identities.

In the article *State, conflict and India's North East*, A. Choudhury brings out a diagnostics perspective which identifies the existence of internal colonialism in respect to the policy approach of the Indian state towards the North Eastern part of it. Choudhury basically speaks about India's North East which had witnessed an increasing frequency of the movements of identity assertions on the part of diverse ethnic groups in the region. These communities had been pressing for different demands like independent territorial space, within and sometimes outside, special constitutional or political safeguard for their respective identities.

The imagined nation or nationhood in India's North East speaks of the various socio-cultural and political expectations on the part of various ethnic communities like the Nagas, Mizos, Asomiyas, Bodos etc to the formation of their independent geographical territories leading to the formation of the nations. According to the writer the state's response to the entire issue of ethnic assertions in the North East is so insensitive that it has converted many a democratic movements of the region into a violent conversation between the state and the society and therefore needs a proper transformation.

History of the Hmars in North East India with special reference to Assam by Rev. Hrilrokhum Thiek is considered by himself a

history as it consist in itself the different account of the Hmars based on their tradition and culture. He has clearly explained about the origin, classification of the Hmars tribe along with their entry to Assam specifically the North Cachar hills and Cachar district. In his book Rev. Thiek has also acknowledge the various problems faced by the Hmars concerning their name and identity. Apart from the problem that they have faced the Hmars have also struggled much to establish their name and identity.

The Hmars have greatly developed in literature and as such in spite of the various socio-economic and political problems, they have gained momentum. Rev. Thiek has also explained about the demographic problems faced by the Hmars and the political awakening that have erupted among them. The development of the Hmars common language in Assam is well identified and analysed by the author and he also talks about the formation of various associations among the Hmars for uplifting the Hmar tradition, culture and identity. The author has also highlighted the various conflict faced by the Hmars since 1960 and the peace efforts that were maintained between the Hmars and the competent ethnic tribes. Most importantly the author has elaborated the manners, customs, religion, amusements, festivals and the organisation of the village system that are relevant in the Hmar traditional society.

Sanjib Baruah's in *Durable Disorder understanding the Politics of North East India* explores the prolonged conflict that has taken place in the North East India. Baruah argues that as the region has experienced various ethnic conflicts, the system of democracy and governmental institutions have been worn out from their places. The problem of ethnic homeland demanded by the different tribal groups is also demonstrated by the author with the perspective of understanding the cost and consequences of conflict.

The consequence of insurgency and counter insurgency that has erupted with the demand for a separate statehood in North East India is well analysed and explained. Baruah has also depicted the independent militancy that has rocked Assam in the late 1960 and the role of ULFA and the Assamese mainstream. The author has also explores the economic incorporation and the resultant conflict between the global and the local regimes. Most importantly Baruah has argued for the economic integration of the region with South East Asia through the pursuit of a dynamic Look East policy.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Ethnic conflict has been a major problem that has overcome contemporary India, spreading across the nation. Often various tribes and ethnic groups have long standing histories of conflict amongst themselves that may perhaps explain these outbreaks of violence; however, far too often ethnic conflict has generated from politics and socio-economic bias, rather than simply cultural issues. Considering Ethnic conflict and its consequences, the thesis is organised into six main chapters which manifest the issues of the Hmars of Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Chapter-I: Introduction

The first chapter is the introduction itself and consists of the main arrangement of the thesis. The introductory chapter deals with the background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, the methodology, description of the study area, and the underlying principle for selecting the study area. A brief review of literature has also been made as well. It also highlights and outlines the themes of the organization of the chapters in the thesis.

Chapter-II: Ethnic Conflict and Multiculturalism: A Theoretical Analysis

The second chapter mainly focuses on the theoretical and conceptual aspect of ethnic conflicts and multiculturalism by examining and analyzing it through different perspectives.

Ethnicity can be viewed both as a structural variable, where villages are composed and a behavioural variable in which ethnicity and identity are manifested, and is most closely associated with the issue of boundaries and determines who is a member and who is not and designate which ethnic categories are available for individual's identification at a particular time and place.

Two closely-related propositions are explained. The first proposition is that the character of ethnicity changes along with time, both within the lifetime of individuals and in terms of wider communal ideas. In other words individuals and communities put more importance to ethnic identities in certain periods than in others and sometimes no importance at all. Debates over the placement of ethnic boundaries and social significance of ethnic groups are the essential formation for ethnic construction.¹⁰ Ethnic conflicts are often the expression of underlying social and political conflicts between classes, population segments, or interest groups within the wider society.

Ethnic conflict takes different forms with a nature substantially ranging from peaceful expression of grievances to outright use of physical force or violence. This means depending on the prevailing circumstance, the parties involved in the conflict and the means preferred to settle the dispute, ethnic conflict varies

¹⁰Nagel.Joane, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture, Social Problems, *Special Issue on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*," University of California Press, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1994, p.3

from peaceful reflection of conflict of interests to a violent struggle and civil war.

Chapter-III: Ethnic Diversity and the Modalities of Managing Diversities in Assam

As such, the theoretical aspect of multiculturalism also tries to demonstrate the contesting multi diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Multiculturalism is the first and foremost aspects to develop the ethnic relation by overcoming the entrenched relationship between diverse ethnic groups. Over time, the ease with which ethnic tradition have become powerful political instruments give evidence to the strength and flexibility of ethnic identities as an essential expression of human harmony and social integration. The social and economic policies of state can only ignore these forces at their own threat. Therefore it is important to understand the theoretical perspective of ethnic conflict and multiculturalism.

The third chapter explains about ethnic diversity and the system of managing diversity as it is becoming as one of the most pervasive and problematic issues in contemporary globalised world. Ethnic diversity on one hand is persistent with the increased interactions and mobility of the people and almost all societies are becoming more and more ethnically diverse. On the other hand, it is problematic since ethnic diversity appears in a variety of forms, contexts and social conditions.

Despite the many excellent studies on ethnic diversity and on how to manage in divided societies, particularly Assam, there remains a dearth of practical suggestions for policymakers on how to design and implement democratic force that can make inter-community

peace endure, even as times change and new stimuli energize the communities.

The North-East Indian state of Assam, bordering China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal offers classic cases of identity struggle as it is full of myriad of ethnic groups. In the long history of this region the feelings of in-group-out-group, identity consciousness, perceived marginalization, and minority-consciousness have variously surfaced as the key factors for causing ethnic unrest. Depending on the varied influences of marginality and ethnicity some movements remained more explicit and specific than others, in articulating and defining their objectives.

In Assam, cultural differences and clash has sharpened the ethnic boundaries and has generated cleavages along ethnic self-importance, leading to inter-ethnic conflict. Ethnic unrest in northeast is as old as the country's independence. The Indian independence along with the partition, influx of emigrants, language issue, economic negligence, and failure to worth approaching political institutions variously incepts in the minds of the ethnic communities a sense of self-awareness.

The issue of social exclusion, minority-syndrome and ethnic rivalry remained the driving force for protests demanding autonomy in the shape of homeland, state, district or autonomous district council, within the constitutional framework. Management of diversities is more critical and urgent and is a useful effort to defuse potential tensions before they begin. Peaceful management needs approaches that recognize the importance of building sustainable internal political structures. This means that today, issues about a state's internal political organization are more important in managing conflicts and accordingly, there has to be a

greater focus on domestic political actors, most of all the state itself.

Managing ethnic diversity is a difficult task both in societies with an ethnic diversity tradition, which already have an institutional setup meant to accommodate diversity. In societies that have only recently faced the issue of multi-ethnicity are trying to develop an institutional model for managing ethnic minority-majority relationship. Therefore, it has become a contemporary and often controversial subject that aroused much policy and academic debate especially around multiculturalism as a means to control multi-ethnic societies.

Participatory political systems have proven to be the most effective modality for peaceful management of social cleavages in general, and ethnic conflicts in particular. Members of the ethnic groups are considered as a substitute or at least another form of ethnic group's protection, and improvement of legitimate rights and needs.

Managing Ethnic Diversity contributes to the ongoing debate about the outcomes of multiculturalism offering a comprehensive study, which incorporates insights from a wide range of traditional and new multi-ethnic societies around the world. Three main issues appear to be of primary importance for the development of policy strategies to manage diversities, and are therefore our primary concern here first is the type of diversity in a region, past or present, secondly the potential causes for conflict between and among the diverse ethnic groups and lastly the possible type and range of considered approaches to manage diversities.

Chapter-IV: Ethnic Conflict in Dima Hasao District

The fourth chapter consists of the study of ethnic conflicts in Dima Hasao district, which is extensively analysed among the different multi ethnic community and the main study is on the Hmar-Dimasa conflict. Ethnic conflict has become a shorthand way to discuss almost all violent confrontation between communities living in the same nation-state. But such an uncritical view misrepresents the reality of the shared past of these communities, evolving cooperative and sustainable community living condition and bring in images of ancient tribal hatreds.

While some of the current conflicts may have clear ethnic or cultural dimensions, the core issues are about gaining more power, land and other resources. Another equally respectable intellectual tradition is based on an opposing vision of society.

Ethnic conflicts are often based on non-negotiable character and values and therefore tend to be of a longer duration than other conflict, as the tension between parties is likely to be deeply entrenched resulting in the outcome for long-drawn-out conflicts. Mention may be made that, after India's partition so many people have been killed and uprooted as a result of ethnic or communal violence and till today Assam has seen ethnic conflict time and again. Dima Hasao like any other district of Assam has faced ethnic conflicts since time immemorial and has become a kind of untold problems.

Conflicts between inter- ethnic tribes in Dima Hasao resulted in many alleged cases of human rights violation. Three major ethnic conflicts: Dimasa-Hmar conflict (2003), Dimasa-Karbi conflict (2005) and Dimasa-Zeme Naga conflict (2009) respectively

are seen in Dima Hasao (old name: N.C. Hills) district of Assam.¹¹ The three conflicts has taken many innocent lives, displaced hundreds of families and threatened the prospect of the democratic and citizenship rights of the different ethnic tribes. Although ethnic conflict has been resolved in the district, permanent long term peace policy is not yet implemented and as such minor ethnic clashes are often seen thereby depicting the instable conditions of the various ethnic groups of Dima Hasao district of Assam.

Chapter-V: Consequences of Ethnic Conflict in Dima Hasao District

Considering the ethnic conflict of Dima Hasao district of Assam, the fifth chapter mainly confine on the socio-political and economic effects of ethnic conflicts analyzing the prospect and retrospect of ethnic conflicts. Northeast India and specifically Assam is the homeland of different ethnic groups with a variety of cultures and speaking different languages and dialects is considered the melting pot of diverse races, castes, religions, languages and cultures. Inter-ethnic conflicts and struggle for identity among the ethnic groups too are not new but a frequently occurring phenomenon. However, such conflicts have become more common and all pervading at present.

Ethnic conflicts often involve serious costs and consequences. Many analysts fear that ethnic conflict is contagious under certain circumstances; and can produce ethnic dissimilation within one country by drawing in neighbours and outside opportunists, which in turn can heightens the role of ethnicity in successive extent, inevitably destabilizing the whole region.

¹¹Thiek.H, *History of the Hmars in North East India (With special reference to Assam)*,Bhabanii, 2013,pp 256- 257

Displacement of people is basically the outcome of ethnic conflict leading to insecurity and instability. Economic factors also weaken the political institutions that uphold the social contracts that provide social stability and this is mostly seen aftermath conflicts. Ethnic conflict can also weaken the institutions which repressed those cultural groups with political grievances.

Economic crisis and change always cause social disruption and radical dislocation of communities. When economic trends lead to low growth, debt crises, rising unemployment, and rising rates of immigration, and when resulting hardships and benefits are disproportionately allocated among various cultural groups, existing political cleavages based on cultural difference are deteriorated and new ones are created.

Chapter-VI: Conclusion

Finally the thesis has a concluding chapter which not only highlights a concise summary of the research but also highlights the Research Findings along with a concluding remark. An existing institutional framework is analysed and secondly a suggestion is also made to solve ethnic conflict in Dima Hasao district of Assam. Political conflicts take on ethnic forms when the resources of a modern state are unequally distributed along ethnic lines because the process of state formation takes place before a strong civil society could be established. Taking this perspective, we understand why it is precisely in recent years that we can observe a world-wide increase in ethnic conflicts.

With this in mind a description of an existing institution has been deployed consisting of the N.C Hills Autonomous Council (renamed Dima Hasao Autonomous Council) which was inaugurated on the 19th of April, 1952. Under the provisions of the sixth schedule to the constitution of India, this North Cachar Hills

Autonomous District Council (N.H.A.C) was mandated to administer this autonomous district with the provision of have three wings of administration, namely, legislature, judiciary and executive. North Cachar Hills also remained as a sub division of the district till 2nd February, 1970; the government created an independent administrative district namely North Cachar Hills district with the geographical boundary of North Cachar Hills District Council.¹² Although the Autonomous Council implemented in the district to administer the hill tribes has function effectively after its inception but with the growth of ethnic population and development it cannot wholly meet the demand of each and every ethnic groups. As such, instead of interpreting ethnic conflicts as an expression of uncontrolled human nature or as a necessary stage in common history, they have to be related to a specific form of administration and state-building.

As stated, the existing institutional framework cannot wholly administer the problems of the diverse ethnic communities as such new possible frameworks are also employed. Proper delimitations of seats in the existing institution of Autonomous District council should be properly arranged according to the numbers of the different ethnic groups in the district. Long term policies such as employment in private and government sectors should be made to curb the economic problem to reduce the factors of conflict. Funds should also be properly utilized for further management of the district administration. More representation should be given to the marginalized communities in socio-economic and political sphere.

There is also, a contending theory which can act as a possible framework for ethnic conflict, namely, Consociation's Perspective, which deals with issues of ethnic conflict resolution. Consociation's

¹²The autonomous district (constitution of district council) rules 1951 (as amended) published by NCHADC, Haflong, 2001

Theory assumes that it is possible to resolve ethnic conflict and promote interethnic solidarity under a democratic environment.¹³ They hold the opinion that where there exist democratic system and the rule of law, ethnic conflict may be resolved through negotiation, based on a political will to accommodate the interests of others.

But theories alone cannot be considered to be the best means of managing conflict as it differs with areas, space and time. The impact of ethnic-conflict on the security of the region and the nation is enormous and is adding to the problems of the North Eastern people. It has been a problem in limiting the conflict to specific geographical areas and multiplies in manifolds. In addition when the state and the central government are facing tough time in handling the situation due to communication gap, remoteness, less connectivity and other factors, ethnic-conflict in the region is posing a severe threat to the security of the district of Dima Hasao.

Ethnic conflict has also given a comprehensive dimension to the unrest in the region with less chance for a drastic change in the near future. Security has become an issue of concern for the ethnic groups inhabiting the hill district of Dima Hasao, and during the last decade there has been an upsurge of tensions and instabilities. Whenever we talk of security in the context of ethnic communities at the present scenario, the concept is needed to be well defined as it always remains as a contested issue.

Ethnic conflict is, however, not purely a matter of perception. The nature and intensity of ethnic conflict is also determined by the material conditions of the context within which it is taking place.

¹³ Crouch. Harold, "Malaysia: neither authoritarian nor democratic." K. Hewison (eds). *Southeast Asia in the 1990s: Authoritarianism, Democracy and Capitalism*, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993.p.20

As an issue of security is concern, the factors and the longevity of any ethnic conflict should be determined. If the conflict is sustained over a period of time the outcome will be obviously a danger for maintaining security. Violence cannot be simply considered as the solution for conflict as it may not result to die out the conflicts that are taking place among the diverse ethnic groups. Ethnic conflict can be violent or non violent, fundamental or accidental, manageable or unmanageable.

There are various methods of resolution and management of conflict but the issue is that every ethnic group tries to resolve it by protecting its own interest. It may be settled and managed by legal, organisational, arbitration, mediation negotiation, peace making and peace keeping. But as this methods are non violent in nature, it does not always works for every conflict. In spite of the violent and nonviolent resolution of conflict, the North Eastern states of India have a long history of conflict and her innate strength of openness and tolerance has largely assimilated different communities and has always remain a matter of concern.

The recent growth or revival of ethnic conflicts within several ethnic societies, leading to the emergence of minority or marginalised movements is the consequence of social, economic and political changes that have made ethnic identities seem more salient than other identities that are general in scope. A more widespread development has been the growth in influence of ethnic pressure groups claiming privileges of one kind or another for their groups.¹⁴

Any dominant ethnic group has major access to the valued socio-economic and political attributes of the society, which brings forth disadvantages and deprivation to the marginalised ethnic

¹⁴Birch Anthony. H, *The concept and theories of modern democracy*, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp.23-25.

communities. The dominant ethnic group, generally, sustains its control of power, and privileges through prejudice and discrimination thereby leading to different types of conflict.

Conflict are sometimes considered as non destructive, but a normal aspect of any vibrant community. But the point of viewing ethnic conflict as inherently negative is only an attempt to avoid or suppress it at all costs whereby it can be justified.

A thorough and comprehensive analysis of the causes and conditions of the conflict taking all the different perceptions seriously should inform conflict resolution activities. Superficial and one-sided assumptions invariably lead to counter-productive interventions and therefore it must be analysed properly. Under conditions of great insecurity and uncertainty an ethnic group might tend to exaggerate the potential threat of other ethnic groups to its own security and consequently adopt a worst-case scenario of the threat posed by opposing groups.

Therefore, the study of ethnic conflict and its impact serves both to illustrate the condition of the ethnic communities, specifically the Hmars, a hill tribe of Dima Hasao district; so that further prevention can be made for any future conflict and violence, as transformation is needed as a whole in the society as well as in the administration. For proper understanding of ethnic conflict, the underlying theories on the issues of ethnicity, ethnic conflict and multiculturalism or cultural pluralism has to be properly analysed. The contending theories related to these issues will can be studied and analysed in the second chapter.