

**A Historical Perspective of Ethnic
Conflict in North East India with Special
Reference to Karbi Anglong and
North Cachar Hills Districts**

MRP Report under XII Plan

(Vide Letter No. F-5-275/2013-14 MRP/NERO/17940)

Submitted by
Dr. Nityananda Kalita
HOD, History
Suren Das College, Hajo

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DECLARATION

I Dr. Nityananda Kalita solemnly declare here that the project work as entitled "*A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARBI ANGLONG AND NORTH CACHAR HILLS DISTRICTS*" is the result of my own investigation and this research work is submitted by me to UGC-NCR. This is also submitted to Gauhati University for my Ph. D. Degree.



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Date :

Place :

(Nityananda Kalita)

CONTENTS

TITLE	Page No
<i>DECLARATION</i>	
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</i>	
CHAPTER I	1-24
<i>ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST INDIA</i>	
CHAPTER II	25-46
<i>FROM "DEFENSIVE" SIXTH SCHEDULE TO "OFFENSIVE" ETHNO-NATIONALISM</i>	
CHAPTER III	47-66
<i>ISSUES OF CONFLICT IN KARBI ANGLONG AND</i>	
CHAPTER IV	67-77
<i>ISSUES OF CONFLICT IN KARBI ANGLONG AND</i>	

CHAPTER – I

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST INDIA

Eight states comprise India's North East - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland Tripura and Sikkim. These states cover a combined area of over 255,088 sq. km. (7.7 per cent of the country's territory) and, according to the 2011 Census of India, a population of 4,55,87,982 persons (3.74 per cent of national population). The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes and a large and diverse non-tribal population as well. The 'Scheduled Tribes' only refer to the tribes listed in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, and do not reflect the actual complexity of the ethnic mosaic of the region. It has not less than 475 ethnic groups and almost 400 languages/ dialects are spoken here.¹

The term, 'North East' was formalized through the British colonial administration as a frontier region. It is linked with Indian heartland through the 21 km. wide Siliguri Corridor, which is commonly known as the chicken neck, created by the Radcliff line, the boundary drawn by the British colonial administration before they departed from India in 1947. The corridor is flanked by Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The North East India borders on four countries, namely, China and Bhutan on its North; Myanmar on its East; and Bangladesh on its South and West.

The North Eastern part of India is mired in ethnic conflict. Such conflicts have not only disturbed the peace and tranquility in the region but have also violated all norms of humanity by perpetuating brutal atrocities and violence upon innocent people. Such violence has led to the loss of lives of innumerable people and destruction of property worth crores of rupees.

Such a situation has arisen out of the reality that various ethnic groups in the region have started asserting their identity based on ethnic loyalties – be it cultural, linguistic or religious. The limited success or failure of the mass movements for

¹. Provisional Census Report released on March 31, 2011

'autonomy', 'land', 'separate state within or outside Indian union' or 'demand for SC/ ST status' and their transmutation into insurgent groups have not only transformed the whole of the north eastern part into a potent platform for waging war against the nation state but has also led to an unprecedented and interminable violent conflicts between different groups of people in the region.

An Overview of Recent Conflict:

The numerous ethnic groups of India's North Eastern states, many of them with a long history as independent or autonomous regions, have demanded greater autonomy or independence from India ever since regional incorporation (at times through military invasion and occupation as in the case of the Nagaland) into the Indian federal state during the 1950s. A large influx of Bengalis and other political refugees into the seven relatively less populated states of the North East region of India during both the creation of Pakistan and the 1971 secession of Bangladesh, as well as subsequent influx of refugees for economic gains, further aggravated tensions with indigenous ethnic groups. Demands for independence arose from a sense that the indigenous population was losing cultural identity and political power and not receiving its share of the region's resources. These feelings were fuelled by various Indian governments that sought to suppress indigenous cultures through assimilation into the majority Hindu culture and carried out discriminatory economic and political policies. Ethnic-based independent groups, such as the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), founded in 1979, the Bodo Security Force, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the All Tripura Tiger Force led the insurgency against the Indian government.

Throughout the last six decades, as successive Indian governments tried to nationalize the political space in the North East India by pushing ahead with mainstreaming efforts, the struggling ethnicities of the region continued to challenge the nation building process. Despite recurring themes in rebel narratives such as political autonomy, economic justice, and cultural rights, any understanding of rebel group in the North East India must come to terms with multiplicity of voices, and the tensions that often exist between competing rebel agendas. A rebel group with a particular ethnic constituency may be at war with another rebel group, and indeed its

primary opposition may not be with the Indian state at all. It might even cooperate with government security agencies in fighting rival group.

The national security–centric discourse about the North East India shaped mostly by former bureaucrats and retired army, police and intelligence officers is heavily pro–state and insensitive to the vulnerabilities of the common man and dismissive of the frequent transgression of rights of its own citizens by the state. It is of significance that North East India has become the natural habitat of retired military, paramilitary persons, police, and intelligence officers, whose physical and mental capabilities are on the wane, charged with responsibilities to run the affairs of the region.

When India became free, Assam was the *prima donna* of the North East India. The entire region except the erstwhile princely states of Manipur and Tripura was tied to the state in some form or the other. As India faced one tribal insurgency after another and demand for separate tribal states increased, Delhi alienated Assam by politically reorganizing the North East India region in 1972. From the womb of Assam the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland were created. Now, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is demanding a separate state from Assam. To achieve this end it attacked the Adivasis, Bengali Muslims and other communities to drive them out from the area of their claim. The Adivasis soon set up their own militant group the Adivasi Cobra Militants of Assam (ACMA) and Bengal Liberation Tigers (BLT) joined hands with them and attacked several Bodo villages after the massive Bodo sponsored violence in May–June, 1996.

In May 1996, the ethnic violence between Bodos and Santhals badly affected the day to day life of the thousands of the people in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon areas in Lower Assam. As per the report submitted by the S.D.O., Gosaingaon 34 no. of village (Bodos-7, Santhal-27), 1508 no. of families (Bodos-231, Santhal-1277), were affected and 20 persons (Bodos-3, Santhal-17) were killed in this violent ethnic conflict.²

². Letter No. GMT-1/96/183 dated 9 Sept. 1997 submitted to S. Haque Inquiry Commission, Guwahati

Another Bodo group, Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) is also fighting for a separate Bodo state. Further Dima Halan Daogah (DHD) is fighting for a homeland of Dimasas while the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) is fighting for a separate homeland for Karbis in Assam. All of them have come for peace talk at present.

In Tripura, The Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) emerged in 1978 sustained by the politics of tribalism promoted by the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) and raised voice against Bengali settlers and their domination and entered into an accord with Government of India in 1988. All-Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Force of Tripura (NFLT) emerged with same voice accompanied by strong evangelist overtones. They regard the acceptance of Christianity by the tribesmen as the one and only way to break away from the dominant Hindu-Bengali culture.³

In Manipur, Hijam Irabot Singh started revolutionary movement opposing Manipur's merger with India and proposed a Purbanchal state which was to include Manipur, Tripura, Cachar and Mizo hills. He advocated later that Manipur should be a republic with a responsible form of government. The public of Manipur, particularly the youths, resented the annexation of Manipur to Indian Union and demanded restoration to Manipur of the Kabaw Valley, which was given away by Nehru to Burma. It felt humiliated by the way the state was put as a Part-C state after the merger. Till almost the end of the fifth five-year plan very paltry sums were allocated to the state for development purposes. The agreement of merger, which the Maharaja of Manipur allegedly signed under duress, contains no clause to benefit the state and its people. Feeling slighted and deeply hurt some groups of Meiteis took up arms to fight for restoration of pre-merger status of Manipur. In 1964 state's first separatist group United National Liberation Front (UNLF) was formed. In 1978 another outfit called Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) came into existence. Another insurgent group that surfaced around the same time was the Peoples Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK). By mid 1979 the three groups unleashed a fierce spell of urban and semi-urban guerrilla warfare in the Imphal valley. New rebel

³. Sahni Ajay, *Survey of Conflict and Resolution in India's North East*, www.satp.org, accessed in 20.7.2009

groups like Kangleipak Communists Party (KCP) and Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) also appeared on the horizon some years later. KYKL was formed after a split in the UNLF. Many smaller outfits mushroomed in the valley in the last one decade including an outfit of Manipuri Muslims (Meitei Pangals) under the name of Peoples United Liberation Front (PULF). Since 2003 the Manipuri rebel groups, especially UNLF have grown stronger and have done what even the Naga army could not do at its peak, that is, to hold on to its base areas in the face of determined Indian military offensive. In the hill areas of Manipur the Kukis formed many rebel groups under the acronyms of KNA, KNF, KLA, etc. In 2008 the Indian army signed a Suspension of Operation (SoO) with eight Kuki groups in an effort to use them against other insurgent groups. Presently, in Manipur, both in the valley and the hills, there are more than two–dozen rebel outfits. Objectives of quite many of these outfits are obscure.

According to the report of the 2nd Administrative Reform Commission Manipur is currently the most insurgency ridden state. It is reported that militant organizations are virtually running a parallel government in many districts in the state and they are able to influence the decision of the state government in awarding contracts, supply orders and appointments in government service. It is also reported that militant organizations indulge in widespread extortion and hold ‘courts’ and dispense justice in their areas of influence. Such a situation results in erosion of faith of the people in the constitutional governance machinery. It is well documented that militants siphon off food grains meant for public distribution system. Similarly, the virtual extortion racket run by various militant groups at a number of points, collection of protection money from business and salaried classes have been extensively documented.⁴

A 2006 year–end assessment by the South Asia Intelligence Review⁵ described Manipur as the most violent state in India’s North East. Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh⁶ has already said that most of the troubles in the region came

⁴ Dept. of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, PG & Pensions, Govt. of India, <http://arc.gov.in/> accessed on 28/07/2008

⁵ *South Asia Intelligence Review, Weekly Assessments & Briefings*, Volume 10, No. 24, December 19, 2011, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/> accessed on 25/12/2011

⁶ *Ibid*

from Manipur. The rise in militant and state sponsored violence is palpable in Manipur as is the all-pervasive lawlessness that is exemplified by killing and kidnapping for money, large scale extortions and frequent blockade on its major highways by rebel groups for demand of money. Unless the scenario changes dramatically Manipur is heading to be India's Bosnia. The situation is compounded further by the demand of NSCN (I-M) to integrate Naga inhabited areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur to form what is being called the Nagalim (Greater Nagaland). This stirs up Meitei passion and is goading the Meitei insurgent groups into preparedness for a fight to finish. If and when that eventuality arrives at all, they would get a huge popular support. Manipur would then be a veritable inferno.

The first definite expression of the Naga desire for self determination goes back to the visit of the Simon Commission in 1929. The Naga Club, the first political group among the Nagas, told the Commission in a memorandum that the British should 'leave us (Nagas) alone once you leave so that we determine for ourselves as in ancient times'. In February, 1946 the Naga National Council (NNC) was formed with 29 members and two Central Councils, one based at Kohima and the other at Makokchung. In June, 1946 when the Cabinet Mission Plan was announced the NNC adopted the resolution supporting the demand for autonomy within Assam. However, Nehru insisted that Nagas should form a part of India and Assam. In 1947 when the Indian Advisory Committee on the Aboriginal Tribes visited Kohima, the NNC put forward a proposal that provided for i) a 10 – year interim government for the Naga people having full powers in respect of legislation, executive and judiciary; ii) full power for collection of revenue and expenditure; iii) an annual subvention by the guardian power to cover the revenue gap and iv) a force maintained by the guardian power for defence and to aid the civil power. But no agreement could be arrived at between the Advisory Committee and the NNC. The Assam Governor, Sir Akber Hydari's subsequent agreement with the NNC brought back the Nagas to the path of reconciliation. Though the NNC accepted the Hydari agreement, dispute arose on some provisions. Angami Zapu Phizo took over the organization of the NNC and declared Independence a day before India became free and set the Nagas on a path of conflict with India. In 1975 the NNC signed the Shillong Accord. In 1987 the NNC split and the breakaway faction, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)

emerged to give Naga rebel movement a fresh lease of life. In 1988 the NSCN also split into two factions, namely NSCN (Isaac– Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang). Both factions are now in negotiations with Government of India.

Coming to the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram insurgency activity is much comparatively less. Sikkim is completely free of insurgency.

Factors Aggravating Conflict :

1. Availability of Arms Sources :

One of the important factors that has contributed to the violent conflict in North East India region is the availability and passage of arms through the porous border from the neighboring countries.

The rebels receive financial support from expatriate Indians in other countries. Like other rebel groups in southern Asia, Assam rebels obtain weapons via the interwoven drug and illicit arms trade. In addition, some reports suggest that rebel groups steal large quantity of weapons from security forces. The Indian government has accused Bhutan and Bangladesh of providing arms to rebel groups. China has also been reported to have supplied small arms to Nagaland rebels.⁷

New reports of illegal arms smuggled to the rebel groups in India's North East India emerged in 2004 following the discovery of a large arms cache in Bangladesh, believed to be bound for India's North East. The cache included 10,000 weapons, 5000 grenades and 300,000 rounds of ammunition.⁸ Since this was one of many caches seized in Bangladesh this year, its discovery led to fears that the rebel groups were better armed than previously believed. "In New Delhi, it is felt that these arms were to be routed to the country's North Eastern state via Bangladesh, which has become a major gun-running point for shipments of arms routed by anti-India elements."⁹ In this context,

⁷. *South Asia Intelligence Review, 2002, Assessment for Nagas in India, Minorities At Risk Project, December 31, 2000*

⁸. *Opcit*

⁹. *Webindia, May 21, 2004*

"Thailand and India have held the first meeting of a new Joint Working Group on Security (JWGS) Bangkok and may initiate joint naval patrols aimed at interdicting smuggling and illicit arms shipments from southern Thailand ... The maritime traffic of weapons from Thailand's Andaman Sea coast to insurgent groups in India's troubled North East India was one issue on the agenda..."¹⁰

"A Tripura State Rifles official said the rebels had fled with a large quantity of captured weapons and ammunition."¹¹

2. Economic Grievances :

The groups fighting for Independence accuse the Central Indian Government of exploiting the region's rich mineral resources, neglecting its economy and flooding the state with migrant settlers.¹²

Oil is a major issue in the conflict in Nagaland since the region reportedly sits on a multi-billion dollar oil reserve. Tribes in Nagaland fear that when oil extraction begins they will be displaced and leaders insist that they will not allow their people to relocate before assurances are given that they would get new land, not just monetary payments. Nagas also want assurances that any oil development will not harm the environment. In this context it may be pointed out that ULFA repeatedly blames New Delhi for taking away the region's considerable oil resources without helping it to develop."¹³

"There has been limited economic development in the North East, despite the changes that have occurred in the rest of India. The Nagas are disadvantaged due to past and current political and economic discrimination, mostly from the majority community."¹⁴

If oil extraction begins without an agreement with the Naga people, an increase in violence in Nagaland appears likely. Economic discrimination against minorities in the region is widespread. "Naga leaders say the oil will stay in the

¹⁰ . *Janes's Defence Weekly*, June 11, 2003

¹¹ . *washingtonpost.com*, August 20, 2002

¹² . *Amnesty International*, 4 January 2001; *washingtonpost.com*, August 20, 2002

¹³ . 'Indian rebels blow up oil pipeline', Reuters, *Aljazeera.net*, Sunday 22 January 2006

¹⁴ . *Opcit*

ground until they have guarantees that anyone forced to move will get new land, not just cash. They also want assurances that their lush jungles, rivers and rice paddies will be protected against oil spills and other environmental hazards. And they want a share of the profit to go to tribal councils for local development."¹⁵

3. From nationalism to Ethno-Nationalism :

The Nagas first organized a movement for Independence from India in the 1940s and the 1950s; they employed the concept of a "nation", and named their organization the "Naga National Council." Similarly the Mizos named their organization "Mizo National Front." Other Small or big groups in the North East India region refer to their 'Convention' as 'national convention' R.A. Schermerhon, an American Scholar upholds that the Naga people do not qualify to call themselves a nation as the modern concept of nationalism is closely linked with the concept of nation-state. But outside the framework of a nation-state, he has described another prevailing notion of nationalism variously with expressions such as "cultural nationalism," "religious nationalism," and "ethnonationalism."¹⁶ The concept of "ethnonationalism" best defines the self-understanding of the ethnic groups in North East India in the various forms of their struggle for identity. North East India, can be easily included within the framework of ethnonationalism.

Ethnonationalism refers to the phenomenon of political movements launched on the basis of ethnic identity. Carmen Abubakar defines ethnonationalism as

"Ethnic groups claiming to be [or to possess] nations and states in the past or that have the potential of becoming [nations or states and] are now demanding and asserting these claims as (historic) rights to self determination for local autonomy or independence."¹⁷

Stanley Tambiah speaks of 'two models of nationalism'. One of these is "ethnonationalism" and the other is "nationalism of the nation state."¹⁸

¹⁵. *Loss Angels Times*, September 16, 2004

¹⁶. Schermerhon, R.A., *Ethnic Plurality in India*, P. 86

¹⁷. A Ghosh and R. Chakraborty (eds.) *Ethnonationalism : An Indian Experience*, P. 109

¹⁸. Stanely J. Tambiah, 'The Nation State in Crisis and Rise of Ethnonationalism' cited in *The Politics of Difference : Ethnic Premises in the World of Power*. eds. by E.N. Wilmsen and P. Mc. Alister, Chicago and London, P. 124

Broadly speaking, what Schemerhon refers to as "religious nationalism" and "cultural nationalism" can be encapsulated within the concept of ethnonationalism. Tambiah helpfully delineates the political history of most of the Third World countries into three phases. The first phase is the "decolonization" period, and the second phase, which began in the 1950s and lasted up to the 1960s, is "the phase of optimistic nation-building." The stress on nation-building, he says, "down played . . . internal diversity and cleavages [within the new nations] in favor of the primacy of nation state." The optimism and suppressive characters of nation-building in the second phase came to be challenged "and even reversed . . . by the eruption of ethnic conflicts".¹⁹ In the present phase of ethnonationalism, he says, is characterized by "regional or subnational reactions and resistances to what is seen as an over-centralized and hegemonic state."²⁰ In the case of the Nagas, the Mizos and others in the Northeast, the very notion as well as the movement of ethnonationalism clearly reflects a crisis of identity. The ethnonational self-understanding displays the experience of being pulled between the notion of ethnic identity and national identity.

4. Identity Crisis :

The multiethnic and multicultural horizon of India and India's struggle to define its nationhood since the nationalist movement provided a fertile soil for the development of ethnonationalism and other forms of identity-quest. Closely linked to and in some way encapsulated in the idea of ethnonationalism is a more popular political terminology called "regionalism", which is prevalent in many parts of India. It can be said that India is pulled asunder by regional and ethnonational feelings and movements in all parts of the country because it has not settled the notion of its identity in a manner convincing to all the people-groups within. India as a "nation" also suffers from an acute identity crisis. While the dominant Indic culture at the centre continues its quest for self-identity on the basis of its religious and cultural identity, those in the periphery react to such potentially hegemonic and oppressive movement as a threat to their distinctive existence.. Although existing as a nation-state for the last fifty years, India has been struggling to find the central integrative

¹⁹. *Ibid*, P. 127

²⁰. *Ibid*, P. 127

force that can bind us together as a nation. The present day Hindutva movement can be understood to be a continuation in the attempt to find the religio-cultural basis of the nation of India. The crisis of identity at the periphery is especially grievous today. When the centre itself displays its uncertainty with regard to the integrative force by shifting its allegiance from secularism to the religious nationalism of Hindutva, the identity of those in the periphery are felt to be extremely vulnerable. Such an intensifying of identity crisis is most evident in the North East India than elsewhere.

Geographically and racially, the region we now call North East India is situated between the two great Traditions of the Indic Asia and the Mongoloid Asia. This geographical-cultural condition of "in-between-ness" is an important factor for the crisis of identity. It was only since the British period that the entire region came to be associated with India politically. Many leaders of the present day "underground outfits" of the region may argue that the political integration of the region to India was done without the approval of the people themselves.²¹ The lack of cultural relatedness, especially of the "tribal" culture, weakens the new political association and the racial and cultural difference thus came to play vital role in defining the self-identity.

The inward-looking self definition of identity as an ethnonational entity now not only affect the people's relation's with "the outsiders," but also the inter-ethnic groups' relations within the region. The expectations to achieve economic and political liberation on the basis of ethnic groups have led to feuds between the people groups within the region. Although a common enemy is still strongly felt to be "the outsiders," in the attempts to define one's ethnonationality, and in the struggle for "autonomy" and liberation, the more powerful neighbouring ethnic groups came to be identified as obstacles. The Naga-Kuki clash in recent years is a good example. If the trend continues as it is, we may expect to see more feuds among the ethnic groups.

²¹. Personal interview with P. Dilli, Chairman KLNLF, on 28 November 2010, advocates the invocation of Article 3 of Geneva Declaration

5. Cultural Differences :

The North East India shares little or no commonality in its traditional culture with the rest of India. To address the identity crisis in the region, one has to bear in mind the cultural plurality of the North East India in general and the sharp difference between the people assimilated into Indic culture and the unassimilated "tribal" people in particular. Out of constant interactions, cultures influenced each other and developed commonalities. While the Indic-anskritic culture of India is a foreign culture for a large part of the region, there are also areas where it has been at home for centuries. The assimilation of people into the Indic culture became a defining factor for what is "tribal" and "not tribal" in the identity of the people of the region today.

A.C. Bhagabati opines that "geo-ethnic character" of the North East India is helpful in clarifying the multicultural nature and the cultural differences between the people. About three quarters of the region are covered by hilly terrain and one quarter is made up of the four plain areas of Assam's Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, the Tripura plains, and the Manipur plateau. Those in the thinly-populated hill areas are the people we now call "tribals," and in the fertile plains and plateau live mainly the "non-tribal" people who comprise more than 80% of the total population. In recognising the cultural foreignness of the "tribal" people of the hill regions, we should have in mind that the Sanskritization of the plain areas have been going on for centuries. Before the coming of the British, the entire region was never linked politically with any major Indian political power. The cultural link of some plain areas with the Indic culture dates back to centuries. But when the British came in 1826 after Yandaboo treaty, the hills were preserved from the contact of the Sanskritization process. Their cultural foreignness to the Indic cultural system clearly marks off the hill "tribes" from the rest of Indians. The non-Indic-ness is the mark of "tribal" identity in the North East India.

Parties Involved in Conflict:

Broadly, the parties involved in conflict may be identified as follows-

- 1) Government of India: (a) Indian Army, (b) Indian Central Para-Military Forces (CPMFs)
- 2) Respective North East India State governments i.e. Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura),

(a) State police and Special Forces play some part in counter-insurgency fighting but it is national forces that mostly engage with rebel groups.

“Counter-insurgency operations have primarily been led by the Army and central para-military forces (CPMFs), with the [Manipur] State Police playing only a subsidiary and marginal role.”²²

- 3) Neighbouring countries, i.e. Myanmar, Bhutan, and Bangladesh assisted by attacking rebel camps on their territory.

“Cooperation between the security forces of India and Myanmar in countering anti-India rebels based in Myanmar is poised to enter a bold new phase, with the countries discussing joint counter-insurgency operations in Myanmar – a move fraught with pitfalls.”²³

“The 6,000-strong army of the isolated Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan launched the first offensive in its history yesterday, attacking Indian separatist rebels with camps in the country. ... King Jigme ... said there were about 20 militant camps in his kingdom, which shares a long frontier with the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal. Bhutanese officials estimate that about 3,000 rebels belonging to three groups ... operate from the thickly forested border regions.”²⁴

²² . *Manipur Assessment – Year 2009*, South Asia Terrorism Portal
²³ . Sudha Ramachandran, *Asia Times Online*, July 21, 2005
²⁴ . *telegraph.co.uk*, December 16, 2003

- 4) Rebels - There are dozens of armed groups operating in North-Eastern India, many of which are ethnically-based. While many of the groups are seeking outright Independence for their region from India, others are fighting to gain increased autonomy.

Impact of Conflict :

1. Internal Displacement :

Impact of insurgency activities on society, development and politics in the North East India is deep, wide and complex. One of the serious negative impacts is Internal displacement of population. The North East India has witnessed eight major cases of conflict-induced internal displacements in recent years: a) displacement of Hindus and Muslims of Bengali descent from and within Assam; b) displacement of Adivasis (Tea Tribes) and Bodos within and from Western Assam; c) displacement of Bengalis from Meghalaya, particularly Shillong; d) the displacement of Bengalis from and within Tripura; e) displacement of Nagas, Kukis and Paites in Manipur; f) displacement of the Reangs from Mizoram; g) the displacement of the Chakmas from Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram; h) displacement of Karbis and Dimasas.

North East India particularly has also witnessed large internal displacement since the signing of the Bodoland Accord in 1993. In addition to displacement due to ethnic conflicts in Karbi Anglong areas, there are about 1.25 lakh internally displaced persons belonging to 23,742 families in 130 camps in Dhubri, Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar districts who are yet to be rehabilitated. Belonging to Bodo, Adivasi and Rabha communities, they were displaced after the Bodo-Adivasi ethnic violence during 1996-1998 in Bodoland areas.

The living conditions in the relief camps are unhygienic and internally displaced persons starve for days due to irregular supply of rations. There are hardly any educational or health care facilities. The Assam government has not allotted any land to rehabilitate the IDPs. It has been providing a grant of Rs 10,000 per family for rehabilitation. About 9,200 Adivasi families were reportedly rehabilitated by 2003. On 8 February 2004, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi stated that the State Government had already made arrangement for the rehabilitation of 18,000 Adivasi

IDPs. After a meeting between an insurgent group i.e. Adivasi Cobra Military of Assam and the Chief Secretary of Assam on 9 June 2004, the state government had released Rs. 10 crores for rehabilitation of 10,000 IDP families. By September 2005, there were nearly 2,000 riot victim families in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Dhubri districts who were yet to receive Rs 10,000 rehabilitation grants.

4,500 Muslim families during this period around from Bengtol, Durgapur, Patabari, Anandabazar, Malivita, Jamunaguri, Bhawraguri, Amteka, Koilamoila and other villages of both Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon were also forced to take refuge in camps. On 5 March 2004, the government stated that it would rehabilitate them in Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Goalpara and Bongaigaon districts. However, these IDPs later on declined to accept a set of rehabilitation measures on the ground that the State government had not fulfilled its promise of providing genuine rehabilitation aid.²⁵

2. Loss of Human Lives :

The conflict in North East India region has led to the loss of thousands of lives in the region. The South Asia Terrorism Portal reports that over 13,000 people died in the other North Eastern states since 1992. Given the longevity of the conflict it is likely that overall at least 40,000 people have been killed since 1979.²⁶ According to media reports - "ULFA is just one of many separatist movements that have lead to the death of more than 50,000 people in India's seven North Eastern states since India won its Independence from Britain in 1947."²⁷

Nagaland is another violence affected state where -"About 20,000 people have died in the rebellion in Christian-dominated Nagaland since it began more than five decades ago."²⁸

Last 20 years have witnessed loss of innumerable human lives in the region. A year-wise look at the loss of human lives shows a grievous situation bearing out of ethnic conflict in North East India (1992- 2000).

²⁵ . *Lessons Not Learnt by Assam: Ethnic Cleansing and Internal Displacement in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills.* www.achrweb.org/reports/india/karbianglong05pdf accessed on 09-05- 2009

²⁶ . South Asia Intelligence Review, 2002, Assessment for Nagas in India, Minorities At Risk Project (MAR), December 31, 2000

²⁷ . *Times Online*, 6 April 2009

²⁸ . Das Biswajyoti, *Reuters*, May 11, 2005

Table 3.1 : Fatalities in insurgencies and terrorist conflicts in India's North East, 1992-2001²⁹

State/ Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
Assam	133	131	271	270	451	537	783	503	758	606	4443
Manipur	165	423	350	321	275	495	244	231	246	256	3006
Meghalaya	0	0	4	7	7	4	20	22	36	40	140
Mizoram	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	7	9	0	23
Nagaland	96	173	192	213	304	360	112	148	101	103	1802
Tripura	98	183	238	257	189	274	265	303	514	312	2633
AP	0	3	3	3	5	10	7	2	34	63	134
Total	492	913	1058	1071	1235	1680	1431	1216	1654	1380	12181

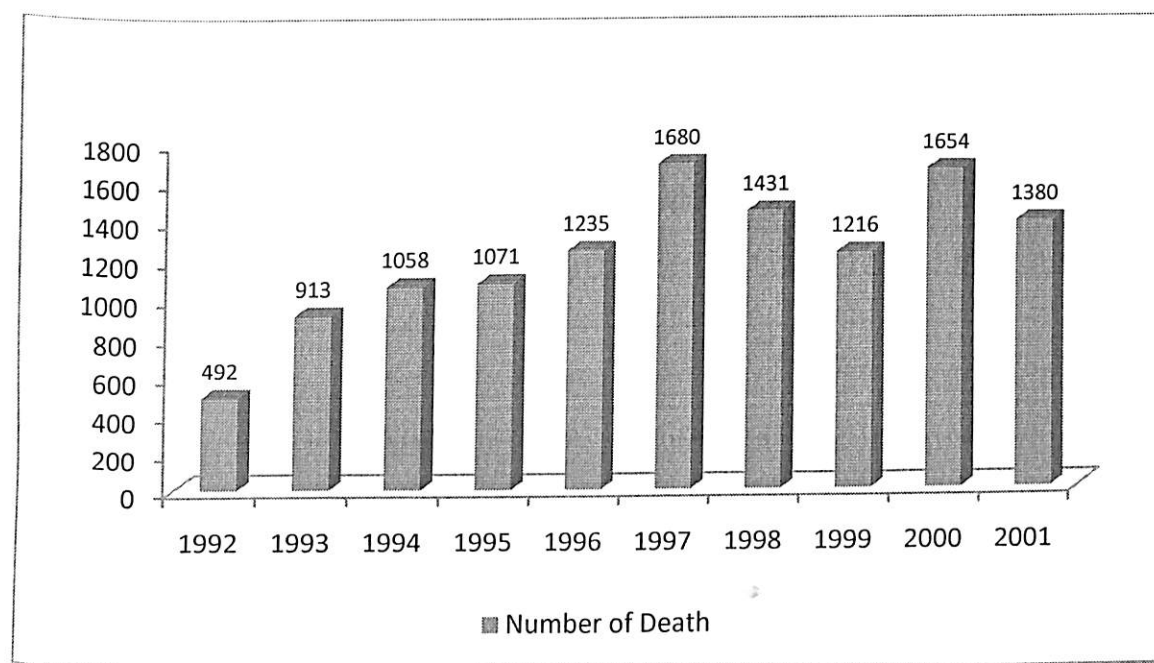


Fig. 3.1 : Number of Death in Ethnic Conflicts in North East India during 1992-2001

²⁹. South Asian Terrorism Portals Repot. Satp.org accessed on 22-7-2007

Table 3.2: Fatalities in insurgencies and terrorist conflicts in North East India, 2002-2009³⁰

State/Year	Number of Death								
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Assam	400				174	437	387	392	1790
Manipur	150				280	408	499	416	1753
Tripura	50							1	51
Nagaland	30					108	201	17	356
Others					173	47		17	237
Total	630	1000	800	700	627	1000	1087	843	6687

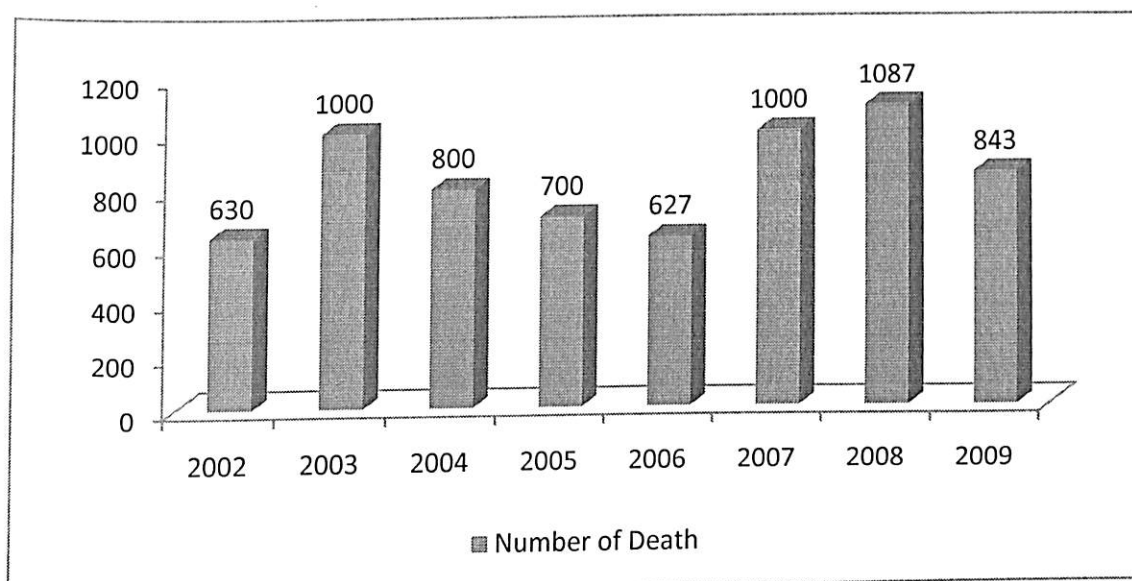


Fig. 3.2 : Number of Death in Ethnic Conflicts in North East India during 2002-2009

According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 843 deaths were reported in 2009 in North East. In Manipur, 416 deaths were reported including 164 civilian, 13 Security Forces and 292 militants. The state of Assam saw 392 fatalities; 167 of which were civilian, 21 Security Forces and 183 militants. A total of 17 deaths were recorded in Nagaland of which 7 were civilian and 10 militant. Tripura saw only one militant death.

³⁰. Sahni Ajay, *Survey of Conflict and Resolution in India's North East*, www.satp.org. accessed in 20.7.2009

In 2008, more than 1130 conflict deaths have been reported across India's North Eastern states, a 13% increase over the 1,000 killed in 2007. Making up this total were 455 civilians, 46 security personnel, and 631 militants. Three states accounted for over 95% of the deaths, Assam with 387, Manipur with 499, and Nagaland with 201.³¹

In 2007 over 1,000 people were reported killed throughout India's North East India including 453 civilians, 65 security personnel, and 501 militants. Assam, Manipur and Nagaland continued to be the areas with the largest number of casualties with Assam recording 437 deaths, Manipur, 408, and Nagaland, 108.³²

"The number of violent incidents in the North Eastern states increased from 1,332 in 2003 to 1,489 in 2007. Civilian casualties recorded in 2003 were 494, 414 in 2005, 309 in 2006 and 498 in 2007. However, the number of security forces killed in action and extremists killed decreased between 2003 and 2007."³³

An estimated 627 were killed in clashes in the North East India in 2006. The provinces with the highest number of casualties were Manipur, 280, followed by 174 in Assam.³⁴

In 2005, Over 700 people were killed in rebel-government fighting, rebel attacks on political targets, inter-tribal and inter-rebel clashes and police suppression of street demonstrations across the North East.

In 2004, at least 800 people, a mixture of civilians and combatants, were killed. This number will climb after casualties from attacks on rebel bases in Burma, Bhutan, and Bangladesh become known.

In 2003, the North Eastern states of Assam, Tripura and Manipur experienced the most violence with approximately 1000 death, a direct result of the fighting.

³¹ . *South Asia Terrorism Portal 2009, Assessments for Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, accessed on 21-07-2009*

³² . *South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), accessed on 21-07-2009*

³³ . *United Press International, March 27, 2008*

³⁴ . *South Asia Terrorism Portal, www.satp.org, accessed January 2007*

Civilians and rebel fighters comprised 90 per cent of all reported deaths. A fourth state, Nagaland, also experienced insurgent violence and approximately 40 deaths.³⁵

In 2002, Assam continued to be the state most affected by violence in North Eastern India, though casualties declined from 606 in 2001 to slightly over 400 in 2002. By the end of the year, the death toll in Manipur reached 150 and over 30 people were killed in Nagaland. Media reports claimed that approximately 50 people were killed in Tripura.³⁶

The positive impact of insurgency is that it has woken up Government of India and made it acutely aware of the existence of a region of the country called North East India. India's ignorant mass is made aware of the extent of the country and has taught them that it is not only the face or the chest or the parts in the front that make a person. Back and other smaller limbs are also equally important

Peace Initiative :

The region of North East India has not only witnessed the disintegration and conflict but also seen efforts to contain violence and conflict. The conflicting groups have tried to bring about peace by joining hands with the state and central government agencies. Several insurgent groups namely – NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), ULFA, NDFB, UPDS, BLT, DHD, have come to ceasefire with the government and are trying to negotiate peace to resolve the crisis.

One of the main rebel groups NSCN (I-M) came to peace process with the central government and it had impact upon other rebel group in the region.

"On August 1, 1997, a cease-fire between the Government and the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN (NCSN-IM) entered into effect and largely has been observed by the Government and all insurgent groups in the state. During the latter part of the year, the cease-fire was extended through July 31, 2000."³⁷

³⁵ South Asian Intelligence Review, *Insurgency Related Killings 2003 - Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura*

³⁶ South Asian Intelligence Review, *Assam Assessment - Year 2002, Manipur Assessment - Year 2002, Nagaland Assessment - Year 2002*

³⁷ *India Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1999*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US State Department, 2000

The Indian Government's agreement with rebels to extend a cease fire beyond the state of Nagaland was opposed by the administrations and people of neighbouring states. Between May and July as many as 18 people were killed in demonstrations against the extension. By the end of July the government reversed its decision on the extended cease fire.

"The Indian Government has backed out of a controversial cease fire deal with separatist Naga rebels in the country's northeast. The government says the cease fire will now be restricted to Nagaland and will not include areas outside the state where the rebels operate. Delhi signed a deal with the separatist National Socialist Council of Nagaland to extend the cease fire beyond the boundaries of the state. But Delhi's move to broaden the cease fire was met with resistance in the neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh. Eighteen people were killed in violent protests in Manipur and homes and offices of politicians and officials were burnt down."

38

Peace talks between the Indian government and the NSCN-IM continued but remained stalled over the NSCN-IM's demand for the creation of a "greater Nagaland" state within India.

"Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Wednesday virtually ruled out the demand for a greater Nagaland saying there was no political consensus for changing the boundaries of states in the Northeast."³⁹

The main sticking point in talks has been New Delhi's refusal to accept the NSCN's (I-M) demand to merge Naga-dominated areas, including districts from neighbouring North Eastern states, into a 'Greater Nagaland.

The Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force, based in Assam, signed a peace agreement with the Indian government in January 2003.

"The Bodo Liberation Tiger Force ... announced a ceasefire on January 21. The BLTF, allegedly responsible for most of the major

³⁸ . CNN, July 27, 2001

³⁹ . rediff.com, October 29, 2003

incidents of violence in the State during the past one month, in a statement faxed to a few local newspaper offices, said the cease-fire had been announced in view of the appeals made by the Union Home Minister."⁴⁰

A leading separatist group in the North Eastern Indian state of Assam has signed a ceasefire agreement with the federal government. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) has been fighting for a separate homeland since 1986. Under the truce deal, the NDFB has agreed to give up violence and stay in special camps run by the police.

Many other groups followed the footsteps of NSCN and came to the peace process. Two factions of the Kuki National Front, a rebel group that operates throughout North Eastern India, agreed to co-operate with one another to continue peace negotiations with the Federal Government in 2002. One faction of the National Liberation Front of Tripura indicated willingness for peace talks with the government in 2004.

In 2000, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) said it would hold talks with Delhi under UN auspices only if Assam's Independence was discussed. Early in 2001, the Indian government proposed unconditional peace talks with the ULFA in an effort to end two decades of insurgency.

"Buragohain [the founder of ULFA] was shown by the Indian army in the North-Eastern state of Assam where he urged his supporters to lay down their arms and begin talks with the Indian government. ... 'Armed rebellion cannot bring Independence,' the 78-year-old rebel leader said. The Indian army says Buragohain was handed over to them by the Bhutanese Army on Thursday."⁴¹

While most of the leaders of ULFA including Chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa were on negotiating table, "commander in chief," Paresh Baruah of the UFLA's "Executive Council" remains at large. Another terrorist group, Black Widow, was forced to surrender in large numbers in September and October after the arrest of Jewel Gorlosa, the group's "commander in chief." In Assam, large numbers of the

⁴⁰ . *Assam Online*, Vol 1:82, January 13, 1997

⁴¹ . *BBC News*, December 26, 2003

United People's Democratic Solidarity militants surrendered in 2009. These developments signal that some of the most dangerous terrorist and insurgent outfits have undergone dramatic reverses. On 5 August 2011, the eight members' team of ULFA handed over the 12 point 'Charter of demand' to the home minister P. Chidambaram which was rejected by the Commander-in-Chief Paresh Barua calling it a 'black day' in the history of Assam.

In Tripura, relative peace was expected when the group was led by six top commanders of NLFT Biswamohyan faction – self-styled vice-president Kamini Debbarma, General Secretary Mantu Koloy, Finance Secretary Bishnuprasad Jamatia, Assistant Finance Secretary Dhanu Koloy, Chief of Army Staff Benoy Debbarma and Deputy Army Chief of the organization Sanjiv Debbarma surrendered before the Governor. "...the breakaway Biswamohan faction of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) today surrendered before the Tripura Governor DN Sahaya. A total of 72 militants including 22 women cadres laid down their firearms in a formal surrender ceremony held at Arundhutinagar Police-line'.⁴² When in January, 2004 another faction of NLFT led by Nayanbasi Jamatiya responded to the peace talk, this group refused to come to terms.

Parallel to negotiation effort, the Government undertook other efforts like granting of autonomy, sealing and enforcement of boarder with neighbouring countries and rehabilitation of the returned rebels. The Union Government introduced a Surrender and Rehabilitation Reimbursement programme in the provinces of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh.

"The Union Government brings Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh under the Surrender and Rehabilitation Reimbursement scheme apart from the States of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura. The scheme, which will be retrospectively effective from April 2005, will provide a stipend of Rupees 2000 per month for three years to each surrendered militant and an immediate grant of Rupees 1.5 lakh."⁴³

The Mizoram government and the underground Bru National Liberation Front on April, 26 2005 signed a peace accord to end eight years of militancy following the exodus in late 1997 of Brus to neighbouring Tripura due to ethnic

⁴² . *Assam Tribune*, May 6, 2004

⁴³ . *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, February 10, 2006

tension with the Mizos. The MoU was to facilitate the repatriation of thousands of Bru refugees staying in six relief camps in neighbouring North Tripura district... As per the provisions of the MoU, the BNLF militants will lay down arms and come over ground to lead normal lives. The state government agreed to extend financial aid for the rehabilitation and resettlement of the militants and the refugees and 'Particularly will give a special development package for the Bru inhabited areas.'⁴⁴

"India's Prime Minister said on Saturday his government was ready to talk to any militant group, including those in Kashmir, abandoning previous preconditions that the rebels must first disarm. However Manmohan Singh, at his first press conference since taking office on May 22, added that he expected the militants to 'eschew the path of violence'."⁴⁵

The Central Government gave a conciliatory tone when they shifted the responsibility of conflict to the neighbouring countries to minimize the intensity of conflict and said, "New Delhi views the insurgencies in the North East not as expressions of local discontent but as part of wider efforts at destabilization by China and Pakistan. For New Delhi, the north-east is a hotbed of Pakistani intelligence activity."⁴⁶ "The improved security situation in Tripura was visible in the largely peaceful elections to the State Legislative Assembly on February 23, 2008. In earlier elections, militants had unleashed a reign of terror, significantly affecting voter participation."⁴⁷

Since post-colonial India has been ever willing to create new states or autonomous units to fulfill the aspirations of the battling ethnicities, the quest for an "ethnic homeland" and insurgent radicalism as a means to achieve it has become the familiar political grammar of the region.

Though the leaders and cadres of the insurgent groups have been surrendering or making a way into the mainstream it seems insurgency never to come to an end in the North East. Phizo faded away to make way for a Muivah in the Naga

⁴⁴ . *Outlook India*, April 26, 2005

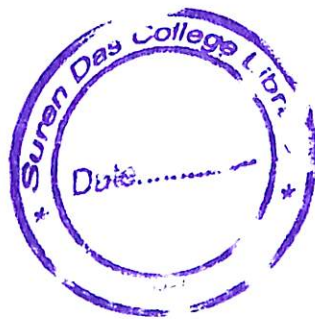
⁴⁵ . *Agence France Presse* September, 4, 2004

⁴⁶ . *Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Practice Network Report*, April 3, 20

⁴⁷ . *Tripura Assessment – Year 2009, South Asia Terrorism Portal*

rebel space, but soon there was a Khaplang to challenge Muivah. If Dasarath Dev walked straight into the Indian parliament from the tribal guerrilla bases in Tripura, there was a Bijoy Hrangawl to take his place in the jungle, alleging CPM betrayal of the tribal cause. After ten years of blood-letting of Hwrankhal, there was Ranjit Debbarma and Biswamohan Debbarma, ready to take his place. Even in Mizoram, where relative peace was witnessed after the 1986 accord, smaller ethnic groups like the Bruand the Hmars have taken to armed struggle in the last two decades.

Throughout the last six decades, similar activities and efforts have been repeated in state after state. As successive Indian government tries to nationalize the political space in the North East India by pushing ahead with mainstreaming efforts, the struggling ethnicities of the region continues to challenge the 'nation-building processes, stretching the limits of constitutional politics. But these ethnic groups also are fighting amongst themselves, often as viciously as they fought with India, drawing daggers over space, resources and conflicting visions of homelands.



CHAPTER – II

FROM “DEFENSIVE” SIXTH SCHEDULE TO “OFFENSIVE” ETHNO – NATIONALISM

Birth of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills:

The people of Assam saw the birth of a new district i.e. the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District on 17th November, 1951. The new district was formally created on the aforesaid date⁴⁸ with some parts of the districts of Sivasagar (now Golaghat), Nagaon, Cachar and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of present Meghalaya for all round development of the tribal folk of the Central Assam. This was followed by bifurcation of the erstwhile district of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district into two separate districts under banners of Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District in 1970. The Mikir Hills District was again rechristened as Karbi Anglong District⁴⁹. Thus, two districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills came into being as full-fledged separate districts in the map of Assam with their head quarter at Diphu and Halflong respectively. The districts enjoy autonomy under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

In terms of composition of ethnic groups Karbi Anglong with a geographical area of 10,434sq km territory is a miniature of Assam. The key ethnic groups residing in Karbi Anglong are the Dimasa in Dhansiri and Mohandijua area, Bodos in Langhin area, Kukis, Thoudous and Mhars in Singhason and Koilamati area, Tiwas in the areas bordering Nagaon and Morigaon district, Garos in Hamren sub-division, Man-tai speaking community inhabiting Bokajan sub-division, Khasis in Hamren sub-division, scattered population of Chakmas mostly in Barlangphar area and Rengma Nagas in Nilip Block area.

The administrative policy with regard to the Tribal Areas of the North Eastern region during the colonial period was born out of anxiety to retain distinct identities rather than historical necessity. Several Acts and Regulations- like the

⁴⁸ vide Govt. notification No. TAD/R.31/50/201 Dtd. the 3 November, 1951

⁴⁹ vide Govt. Notification No. TAD/R/115/74/47 Dated 14-10-1976

Inner Line Regulation of 1873, the Scheduled Districts Act 1874, the Government of India Acts, 1919 and 1935 were passed. Under the scheme of Provincial Autonomy, the hill areas of the then province of Assam fell into two categories, viz., the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, as scheduled in the Order-in-Council under the Government of India Act 1935.

“The British did everything possible to check the emotional integration between the tribals and non-tribals for the evolution of a part of common identity superseding ethnic diversities. There were even abortive attempts at keeping the Northeastern tribal areas outside the Indian Dominion when the Indian Independence Act of 1947 was being passed by the British Parliament.”⁵⁰

In post- Independence period the policy makers of modern India followed the policy of granting autonomy to the ‘tribals’ to shape the life as they desired for winning the confidence of the tribal people and promoting closer contacts and intercourses between the ‘tribals’ and ‘non-tribals’. The resolution of the Constituent Assembly, adopted on 22nd January 1947 said, “adequate safeguards shall be provided for the minorities, backward and tribal areas, depressed and other backward classes”.⁵¹

Though theoretically, the Indian Constitution envisaged strong democratic institutions at the grass root level as well as concerning the affairs of the tribal communities, practically it became a federal state with strong centralized tendency (discussed in the Chapter 2), Consequently, democratic decentralization and establishment of Panchayati Raj became one of the Directive Principles of State Policy. In the case of the Tribal Areas in the country especially those in the North East, there are certain specific provisions that are provided in the Constitution. The Constitution makers also recognized the necessity of a separate political and administrative structure for the Hill Tribal Areas of the erstwhile province of Assam by enacting the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

The Cabinet Mission Statement of May 16, 1946 suggested the constitution of an Advisory Committee on fundamental Rights of Minorities in Tribal areas by

⁵⁰ L. S. Gassah (ed), *The Autonomous District Council*, P. 2

⁵¹ *Ibid*, P. 2

virtue of its paragraph 20. One such Advisory Committee constituted on that basis was Northeast Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee, popularly known as Bordoloi Sub-Committee as it was under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. The Bordoloi Committee urged the need to safeguard the tribal customs and traditions in order to keep them free from exploitation, subjugation and oppression from the more advanced people of the plains.

Sixth Schedule:

The recommendations of the Sub-Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. The idea behind the Sixth Schedule was to provide the tribal people with a simple and inexpensive administration of their own, so that they could safeguard their own customs, traditions, culture, etc., and to provide them maximum autonomy in the management of their tribal affairs. The Sub-Committee in particular, appreciated that the tribal people were particularly sensitive about their land, forest, traditional system of justice and social customs.

In acceptance of the recommendations of this Sub-Committee, the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was adopted. This provided for the Constitution of the Autonomous District Councils (Autonomous District Councils) in certain hills districts of the then composite State of Assam.

The Constitution of India has officially recognized the 'tribal identity'. Article 342 says that the President of India can "specify the tribes or tribal communities... to be Scheduled Tribes" and the Parliament also has the power to include and exclude groups to and from the list. The government of India has fixed several criteria for the enlistment of groups under the "Scheduled Tribes." The list of criteria includes "tribal language, animism, primitivity, hunting and gathering, 'carnivorous in food habits,' 'naked or semi naked,' and fond of drinking and dance."⁵²

This is a paradox inherent in the logic of safeguarding the tribal people that it created a wide gap for future creating a notion of 'we' and 'they' because "not only that over 90 percent of the enlisted groups do not subscribe to these features, but also

⁵². The list of criteria is quoted from Jaganath Pathy, "The Idea of Tribe in the Indian Scene," *Tribal Transformation in India*, Vol. III, *Ethnopolitics and Identity Crisis*, ed., B. Chaudhuri, p. 49.

the criteria [itself] conveys the blatant prejudice of the dominant people."⁵³ Moreover, "Tribe" and "Tribal" are pejorative terms denoting the primitive stage—therefore, a temporary stage-in human evolution or development.⁵⁴

There is a wide gap between the "tribals" of North East India and the rest of India. The framers of the Constitution seem to be aware of the difference when they grouped the north East "tribals" separately under the Sixth Schedule and the rest of the "tribals" under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.⁵⁵ This grouping, however, seems to have been done merely to create separate administrative blocks for different administrative styles fitted to the context.

Even during the Ahom rule, these areas were never under the direct administration of the Ahoms, although military expeditions were sent from time to time to subdue them. The story of the N.C. Hills District presents a very chequered history and the district passed through periods of stress and strain before it acquired the present socio-political identity.

Before the British occupation, the North Cachar Hills district was a part of Dimasa Kingdom that included at the time the whole area of Cachar District, the present Karbi Anglong district, a major portion of Nagaon District and parts of Nagaland including Dimapur right upto Nichu Guard on Dimapur-Kohima Road. The Dimasa Kings had their capitals at Dimapur (Nagaland), Maibang (N C Hills), Khaspur and lastly at Haritakhar now in Cachar District. The Dimasa Kingdom was annexed to the British Empire under the Doctrine of Lapse on the 15th August, 1832 after the assassination of last Dimasa king Maharaja Govinda Chandra Narayan in 1830 AD.

Even after the death of the last Dimasa king, the territory North of Barail Hills was ruled by the last Dimasa General named Tularam. His sovereignty over the territory was also acknowledged by the Britishers. But with his death in 1854 AD,

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Lalsangkima Pachuau, "In Search of a Context for a Contextual Theology: The Socio-Political Realities of 'Tribal' Christians in Northeast India," *NCC Review* CXVII, December 1997, pp. 760-772

⁵⁵ Bose, P.K., "Congress and the Tribal Communities in India," in *Diversity and Dominance in India*, Vol. 2, quoted in *Division, Deprivation and the Congress*, eds. R. Roy and R. Sisson, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990, P. 64. P. K. Bose divides the whole tribal regions into "two territorial zones," namely, "the north-eastern or frontier zone and the non-frontier zone."

succession to this Kingdom by his son was denied and the entire territory was annexed to Nagaon District. Later on the portion now occupied by the North Cachar Hills District was attached to newly created Naga Hills district. In early eighties of the last century an administrative Unit with its headquarters at Asalu was established. Shortly after that, North Cachar Hills was separated from Naga Hills and tagged to District of Cachar as its Sub Division. In 1880 the Sub Divisional Headquarters was established at Gunjung. And finally in 1895 the sub Divisional Headquarters was again shifted to Haflong. Since then it has remained as Headquarters of North Cachar Hills.

Since its amalgamation with the District of Cachar, North Cachar Hills was a Sub Division of that District and was administered as an Excluded Area till India attained Independence in 1947. This is how the name of the district came to be known as North Cachar Hills. In 1952, it was amalgamated with Mikir Hills (Present Karbi Anglong District) and formed a separate Civil District of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. North Cachar Hills remained as a Sub Division of that district until February 2, 1970 on which date it attained its present status as a full-fledged Civil District

Reorganization of 1969 :

After 7 years of formation of the Sixth Schedule in 1952, the year 1959 marked an important event when Karbi students mobilized themselves into 'Karbi Students' Association' (KSA)⁵⁶ unhappy with the new District Council and its unimaginative leadership. A handful of students, drawn mostly from high schools here and there, comprised the first batch of KSA⁵⁷ leadership but they took courage to break ground for student activism, beginning from where Semson had left. They joined the 'Hill State' movement in 1960 when the tribal leaders in Assam Assebmly protested the imposition of the Assam Official Language Act, 1960, and formed the 'All Party Hills Leaders Conference' at Tura. KSA actively promoted the Hill State movement in the district and incurred the wrath of the ruling *Karbi Adorbar*, totally purged out of the ideals of Semson.

⁵⁶ . Barelong Terang mentioned of a 'Mikir Chatra Sanmilan' in 1943 in his 'Smriti Prabhah', 1991, p-32.

⁵⁷ . Pratap Chacndra Tokbi and late Gunadhiram Timung (1959-61) founded the KSA as President and General Secretary respectively.

In 1964, the ruling *Karbi Adorbar* organized its youth wing as *Karbi Riso Adorbar* (KRA) also known as *Asom Karbi Riso Adorbar* with the most impressive line up of educated Karbi youths of the time, including Birensing Ingti. KRA⁵⁸ opposed Hill State movement, called for 'closer political and cultural relationships with the plains people'⁵⁹ and attacked KSA. Birensing Ingti went on to become the first parliamentarian in 1971 from the newly bifurcated autonomous district (ST) parliamentary constituency following the creation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya, thereby directly benefitting from the redrawn boundaries. Ingti represented the constituency for a record six terms.

After the premature death of Khorsing, a new crop of youthful leaders took the reins of power. Chatrasing Teron (1924-1996), also a graduate from the reputed Cotton College who started his career with the 'Revolutionary Communist Party of India. (RCPI)⁶⁰ joined the *Karbi Adorbar* and took charge as Chairman of Ministry of Hills Area Development Council briefly between 1956 and 1957. Thereafter he became MLA for four consecutive terms between 1957 -1978 (He also served as Chief Executive Member in 1957 briefly while being MLA and latter becoming the first Karbi minister in the cabinet from 1962 onwards. He was instrumental in orchestrating the opposition to a Karbi autonomous state in the wake of creation of Meghalaya in 1970. He also opposed the 'Roman Script' movement led by KSA, arguing in public that Assamese was best suited for Karbis. When in 1962 the APHLC led movement was gaining momentum and spreading its influence in Karbi Anglong under the leadership of Raidang Ingti,⁶¹ John Kathar, Savidlong Ingti, Maniram Langne among others (incidentally all were Christians), the youthful leaders namely Bapuram Singnar, Longsodar Ingti Katharson, Dorsing Terang and other educated youth were beginning to join the fledgling 'hill state' movement. *Karbi Adorbar*, so long a socio-cultural organization⁶² converted itself into a full-fledged political party to face the APHLC challenge. During this time, Dhoniram

⁵⁸ . Karbi Anglongat Riso Dorbaror Bhumika, Samsing Hanse in 'Souvenir' of the Silver Jubilee Celebration of KADC, 1971, pp- 63-64.

⁵⁹ . Bhattacharyya Birendra Kumar- 'A Separate Hills State: What does it mean?', Economic and political Weekly, Vol-2 NO-9, March 4, 1967, pp. 491-94.

⁶⁰ . RCPI broke away from CPI in 1934 and was known as Communist League

⁶¹ . Lone MDC who voted out of 12 in favour of an autonomous state in the Special District Council Session of Mikir Hills Autonomous District Council held on 20th February 1970

⁶² . Souvenir, Samsing Hanse, opcit

Rongpi another youth leader who entered the MHADC as a nominated Member of District Council, was also chosen as CEM and continued in this post for a record one decade (1962-1971) without facing a single election. Election was deferred apparently to facilitate constituency delimitation (12 to 20 seats) but in reality it was clever but very unpopular cover to continue in power against the strong APHLC tide in the district. It was definitely a sad day for Mikir Hills and its people when the members of the Mikir Hill District Council, whose terms of office had already expired, were allowed to exercise the option in 1970 by prolonging its life. There was a huge protest and demand for seeking a fresh mandate of the electorate on the issue. 'Those members for their own vested interest and a misconceived socio-economic and political ideology however, preferred to remain in Assam against all public sentiments.'⁶³ The anti-tribal Assamese leadership handpicked Dhoniram Rongpi and Chatrasing Teron to suppress the autonomy movement while propagating a 'Christian conspiracy'⁶⁴ against APHLC's Karbi Anglong branch. The frontline youths namely Birensing Ingti Samsing Hanse, Rongbong Terang, Joysing Terang, Mohonsing Teron, Roland Ingti, Bronson Ingti etc. took active part against the hill state movement.⁶⁵ The confrontation took violent turn when Lunding Rongpi,⁶⁶ an active APHLC supporter, was murdered at Hongkram by those opposed to Hill state. In fact, Birensing Ingti began his political career by opposing Hill autonomy when in 1967 he, as general secretary of 'Asom Karbi Riso Darbar' called for opposing 'Hill State'⁶⁷ in presence of Chatrasing Teron (TAD minister) and Joysing Doloi (EM, MHADC) who presided over the open session.

The search for the political solution for the Karbis and the Dimasas had begun during the reorganization of Assam in 1969 because their history is interlinked with that of the tribes of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. All these areas were under the "Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas."⁶⁸

⁶³ Borsing Rongfar's, *Karbi Anglongar Rjnoitik Itihas*, P. 339.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p-67

⁶⁵ Souvenir, Samsing Hanse, *opcit*, pp-63-64

⁶⁶ Souvenir, *opcit*, p-88

⁶⁷ Ovekimi, 2nd Annual Issue, (1967), editor in chief Rongbong Terang and assisted by Mr. Roland Ingti

⁶⁸ Robert Reid, *The Excluded Areas of Assam*, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 103, 1944, P. 18

Amalendu Guha has observed that the ethnic tribals had always been treated contemptuously, not as fellow Assamese, but as 'kha', meaning 'slave' or 'culturally inferior foreigner'.⁶⁹ The British had noted that 'the Assamese had always looked upon the Mikirs with contempt and dislike' and had always treated them as bondsmen. It was therefore, the British who tried to raise the social status of the Karbis by putting them on same fiscal platform as the Assamese of the plains in 1838.⁷⁰

As the 1944 map of Sir Robert Reid testifies, the Mikirs and Karbis had been administratively tagged to four districts, namely Sibsagar, Nowgaon, Khasi and Jayantia Hills and North Cachar Hills, although geographically, the Mikir Hill tract is a continuous hilly region. They were so even during the Ahom rule long before the British came.⁷¹ It was only after Independence that Karbi Anglong District was created by uniting all the contiguous Karbi inhabited areas of Sibsagar district, Nowgaon district and Khasi and Jayantia Hills district. Although they have been politically segregated from Meghalaya State, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills form parts of the geographical Meghalaya.⁷² So those who were in North Cachar Hills under the "Excluded Areas" and those in the British portion of the Khasi and Jayantia Hills under a "Partially Excluded Areas", had their representatives unknown to them and also those who were in the Nowgaon and Sibsagar districts. Sir Robert Reid sounded both sympathetic and disgusted in his note when he said "The poor Mikir member knew hardly any English and never opened his mouth and merely attached himself where his support seemed most likely to be profitable to himself."⁷³

So for centuries before Independence, the Karbis and Dimasas were left to themselves and had existed under diverse political situations and social circumstances. Essentially they were also subjected to diverse social and cultural influences which had developed diversity of attitude, social values and mode of life, depending on the proximity to where they lived. Immediately after independence

⁶⁹ Guha Amalendu, *The Ahom Political System, An inquiry into the state formation process in medieval Assam (1228-1714)*, Social Scientist, Vol. II, No 12, December 1983), P.12

⁷⁰ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, pp-213-214

⁷¹ Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations, A political study*, pp. 183-189

⁷² V.V. Rao, Barrister Pakem and Niru Hazarika, *A Century of Government and politics in North*

East India, Vol. II (Meghalaya), 1874-1983, P. 1

⁷³ Reid N. Robert, *The Excluded Areas of Assam*, The Geographical Journal, Vol.103, 1944,

P. 26

they strangely found themselves in a new but odd situation of political unification, in any case ignorant of the nitty-gritty of democratic politics.

It was in that nascent state political unity when the Karbis were just discovering themselves as a people together, that political churning in Assam which created the new states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh took place. During the political tug of war in 1960s involving the Assamese leadership motivated by the preservation of territorial integrity of composite Assam, and the hill people with the motivation of liberating themselves from the hegemonic control of the Assamese ruling class, the Karbis could not but remain ignorant bystanders. On the other hand the Karbi- Dimasa leadership was suspicious of Khasi-Garo leadership whose cultural inclination was fundamentally different from theirs and was dreading to put their stake with them as a part of Meghalaya. The Assamese leadership had viewed them as the chink in the armour of the APHLC leadership and had lost no time to enlist them as fronts of the Assamese defence.

So when the tribal leaders opposed the Assam Official Language Act, 1960, the Assam Government promptly attempted to placate and win over them by creating a wedge between the Hindu and Christian Karbis and also offering more power to the Council. When the Mehta Commission recommendation was rejected by the rest of the tribal leaders, the Assamese leaders prevailed upon the Karbi and Dimasa leaders to accept it,⁷⁴ although the large majority of the Karbi and Dimasa people were not aware of what actually transpired in that Halflong special meeting convened at the behest of the then Acting Chief Minister M.M. Choudhury on 3rd February, 1970.

However it was evident that in placing their trust on political prowess of the Assamese leadership, the Karbi and the Dimasa leaders had truly believed that the Assamese leaders were fully capable of bringing round the other tribal leaders as well into their fold and that no drastic political change was going to take place in the state. As "good boys" they hoped to earn the grateful patronage of Assam's powerful leaders. When it became clear that after all Assam was going to be recognized, the

⁷⁴. Dutta, P.S., *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, P. 48

fear of being stranded in Assam had impelled the four Karbi-Dimasa MLAs to immediately issue a joint statement saying that-

'Autonomy is desired by all, Khasis and the Garos have been favored and so will be the Mizos. It is only the Mikirs and the Dimasas who are regarded and have been "good boys" are denied the fruits of autonomy. From the point of view of development the need for the same was the greatest in the case of these people (and) therefore the solution of the reorganization of Assam can be complete, moral and expedient only by giving the Karbis and the Dimasas that which is proposed to be given to the Khasis, the Garo and the Mizos. Nothing short of this will solve our problem'.⁷⁵

In this hopeless situation of dreaded confusion and general ignorance, the Karbi and Dimasa people could not be expected to give a coherent, conscious and judicious response to the political churning during the reorganization of Assam in 1969-70.

Although the Karbi-Dimasa people were unsure of position then, the national leaders were fully alive to the political needs of the tribes as well as the active resistance launched by the Assamese leadership against Assam's reorganization; and that was why the Parliament, in fulfilling the wishes of the National Forum,⁷⁶ had offered option to the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills either to remain in Assam or not. And so, though they had failed to exercise their option positively, the provisions of article 244(A)⁷⁷ of the Constitution had been retained exclusively for them even after Meghalaya had been upgraded to a full-fledged state of the Union in 1971.

Youth Leadership :

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 44

⁷⁶ A platform of all political parties created during that time to consider the hill state demand issue of the hill tribals of Assam.

⁷⁷ Bakshi P.M., *The Constitution of India*, p. 217, This Article provides for the creation of a sub-state called "Autonomous State" comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills within the state of Assam.

The ethno- political movements in Karbi Anglong is a recent phenomenon. These movements have been spearheaded by the youth.⁷⁸ The history of these movements could be traced back to the era of freedom struggle, when India was fighting against foreign yoke. Youths in Karbi Anglong, though only a handful, were also beginning to mobilize themselves, realizing that the days of colonial rule were coming to an end.

The period of freedom struggle was the most volatile period both socially and politically. Individuals like Khorsing Terang(1906-1955) and Semsonsing Ingti (1910-1948) emerged during this period to represent the 'deplorable condition of Mikirs'⁷⁹ against 'perpetual subordination by their progressive neighbors'⁸⁰ to the British governor Sir Neil Reid in 1940 when he came calling to Mohomgdijua⁸¹ on 28th October. It was the period when the British rulers, before their impending departure from India were planning for the 'unification of the hill regions of the North East India and upper Burma'⁸² and convert the 'Mongloid fringes'⁸³ into a 'Crown colony'.⁸⁴

Khorsing Terang and Semsonsing Ingti were the most revered leaders, who guided the destiny of the people of Karbi Anglong district and mobilized the people particularly the youth section. Khorsing Terang⁸⁵ became the 'first Mikir representative in the Provincial Legislature' in 1937 at the age of 31. Khorsing's whose father was an influential 'Mauzadar' and a 'licensed opium vendor.'⁸⁶

⁷⁸ . Earlier, the age for registration of a voter was 21 years. Through the 61st Amendment Act, 1988 of the Constitution with Act 21 of 1989 amending the Representation of People's Act, 1950, the minimum age of registration of voter had been brought down to 18 years. This had been made effective from 28th March, 1989.

⁷⁹ . Quoted from 1940 memorandum to the British Governor Reid by Semsonsing Ingti and Khorsing Terang

⁸⁰ . *Ibid*

⁸¹ . Gained importance probably due to opium trade

⁸² . J.P. Mills first proposed this concept in 1942

⁸³ . Bhowmick Subir, *Ethnicity, ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India's Northeast*, P. 10

⁸⁴ . Coupland A., *The Constitutional Problems of India*, Part-3,

⁸⁵ . Served as member Legislative Council (MLC) in 1937-1946 and as Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in 1946-1952. <http://assamassembly.gov.in/mla-1937-46.html> &

<http://assamassembly.gov.in/mla-1946-52.html>. Election was postponed during 1941-42 due to WW-II

⁸⁶ . Dhoniram Terang- 'Moi Jidore Janu'; Silver Jubilee Souvenir of KADC (1977), pp.41-44

Semsonsing Ingti, the first Karbi graduate from Sylhet's Murarichand College⁸⁷ in 1937 and the most illustrious representative of the emerging but very limited middle class, was instrumental in giving shape to *Karbi Adorbar*, the first Karbi organization in 1946 and led the struggle for a separate Karbi homeland. Semson, then aged 34, and his colleagues drew up a plan in 1945 at Golaghat and accordingly approached the only Karbi legislator to attend the first *Karbi Adorbar* session at Dipur at Hawaipur. Khorsing was dismissive⁸⁸ and warned Semson not to repeat something like the 1942 *Quit India* and *Civil Disobedience* movements led by the Congress in Assam. Before the British rule was to 'terminate in May,'⁸⁹ Semson made another fervent appeal through the *Karbi Adorbar*⁹⁰ for 'safeguarding the interest and existence of illiterate and ignorant Mikir people'⁹¹ to the last colonial governor Sir Andrew Gauley Claw in March 1947. Semson demanded recognition to the Association in matter of framing the Constitution of the country.⁹² It was Semson's last appeal too, as he died prematurely on 28th February 1948 when he was barely 38 years.

Politics of Ethnic Movements :

The Karbi youths stepped into Parliamentary politics when the Hill State movement gradually dissipated and finally dissolved in 1970. The youth leaders formed 'Mikir Hills Progressive Party'- giving birth to a second regional party after the *Karbi Adorbar*, which contested the 4th MHADC election in 1971 putting up 19 candidates in 19 constituencies, but failed to impress the voters when two of its nominees (Davidson Hanse and Khudra Bora) managed to win. The new party however died soon after as the two joined *Karbi Adorbar* immediately. The experiment of district based regional party, short lived, had thus begun. Barelong Terang, the veteran of Semson era, guided the failed process but he himself never gave up continuing his solo efforts.

⁸⁷ A Tribute' By PS Ingti in 'Glimpses into the life and Times of Semsonsing Ingti'(2010) Published by Semsonsing Ingti Birth Centenary Celebration Committee, Diphu.

⁸⁸ 'Smriti Lekha of Song Bey in 'Vojaru Ahir', Souvenir of the 49th Session of Asom Sahitya Sabha held at Diphu in 1982, p.113

⁸⁹ Memorandum submitted to Sir AG Claw on 1st March 1947 at Lanka

⁹⁰ *Ibid*

⁹¹ *Ibid*

⁹² *Ibid*

Subsequently, in 1978, amidst the fall of the mighty Congress and the beginning of the end of a single party domination in national politics, youth leaders captured power in Karbi Anglong for the first time and displaced the ruling *Karbi Adorbar* in the 5th general election to the MHADC. Mangalsing Ingti and Vidyasing Engleng, who were among the prominent youth leaders of the first 'non-congress/non-Dorbar' experiment in the Council, however failed to hold on their own and were soon absorbed by the Congress within the next two years. These youths only rode the countrywide 'Janata Wave' in the post Emergency⁹³ period. During the same time, another regional party 'Karbi Anglong People's Conference (KAPC) under the leadership of Lunse Timung and Samsing Hanse was formed. However, it soon fizzled out.

A new phase of youth assertion was beginning amidst a series of ups and down from the early 80s. Educated youths, still very limited, took to the streets and confronted the police. Probably, the first major showdown took place in 1973, demanding the implementation of the Roman Scripts for writing Karbi and retaining English as medium of instruction in educational institutions in Karbi Anglong. Youth and student leaders, under the banner of KSA, braved arrests and detention. The demonstrations were thwarted with heavy police deployment under the instruction from two ministers, Chatrasing Teron and Dhiniram Rongpi. Some of the top youth/student leaders, Sarsing Terang and Roy Enghi among the prominent few, were sent to jail that came up with a resolution to mobilize youth while in custody.

The brutal suppression of 1973 student demonstration and the 'Jail Resolution' thereafter led to the first 'Karbi Youth Festival' in 1974 held in the small courtyard of Karbi club, Rongnihang. Restricted by financial and organizational resources, the rich and powerful of the town ridiculed it. But enthusiasm carried the event and gave birth to a tradition of youth mobilization. Karbi Youth Festival became an annual feature, drawing increasing youth involvement and popular appeal across the district and a politics of culture began to strike deeper roots. If 1951 created a district with just a political map, 1974 created the emotional glue with the emergence of Karbi Youth Festival. Meanwhile, events in Assam, particularly the

⁹³. Emergency Rule, 25th June 1975 – 21st March 1977

six-year long anti-foreigners' movement led by ASSU during 1978-1985 influenced youth activism furthermore in Karbi Anglong and ushered in an era of youth political intervention that was unprecedented, relentless and far reaching.

In the backdrop of this intense political drama, new youth awareness was beginning to crystallize in Karbi Anglong. The 1985 'Assam Accord' offered nothing to the tribal communities of Assam, in spite of their sacrifices and wholehearted support to the movement. This created a situation of virtual tribal revolt throughout the state when the ASSU inspired AGP, the new regional party with youths in lead, formed the government by defeating the ruling Congress in 1986. Karbi youths rose in revolt in Karbi Anglong as did Boros, Mishings, Tiwas, Dimasas, Rabhas etc calling for varying degrees of autonomy during the same period. Through the 60s and 70s youth assertion only met with betrayal and suppression. The cultural integration provided by the Karbi Youth Festival made all the difference as the youth began to discover a new sense of purpose and direction. Consequently, the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC)⁹⁴ came into being on 17 May 1986 in the KASA Indoor Stadium jointly sponsored by KSA, People's Democratic Forum (PDF),⁹⁵ Karbi Cultural Society(KCS), Karbi Anglong Dimasa Youth Association(KADYA), Karbi Riso-Nimso ASong (KRNA), Karbi Employees Association (KEA), Karbi Unemployed Youth Association (KUYA, Mon-Tai Youth Association & Karbi Angling Pabao-Pachao Association, Lalung Darbar, and Karbi Anglong Kharvang Community (KAKC). The ASDC, with a youthful leadership, unleashed the most powerful, articulate and popular movement that went on to capture KADC for two consecutive terms during 1989-1996, 1996-2001, winning Parliamentary and Assembly elections as well during the period, defeating the

⁹⁴ Dr. Jayanta Rongpi and Elwin Teron (People's Democratic Forum), Mr. Lawrence Teron and Chandrakanta Terang (Karbi Cultural Society), Mr. Rajen Phonglosa and MR. Makhon Haflongbar (Karbi Anglong Dimasa Youth Association), Mr. Keshap Terang and MR. Ramsing Ronghang (Karbi Riso Nimso Asong), Mr. Jadab Ch. Tisso and Mr. Dipen Rongpi (Karbi Employees' Association), Mr. Soysoy Ingti and Mr. Dorsing Terang (Karbi Unemployed Youth Association), Mr. Promod Shyam (Man-Tai Students' Association), Mr. Ganesh Shyam (Man-Tai Speaking Pabao-Pachao Assocation), and Mr. Karlin Muktich (Karbi Anglong Kharvang Community

⁹⁵ A local regional party was formed in November 1985, led by Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, Lawrence Teron, Elwin Teron, Dharamsing Teron, Mangalsing Rongpi, Rajen Rongpi, Punyaram Teron, Jotson Bey etc merged with ASDC

Congress candidates. The ASDC movement marked the first serious youth political intervention with a clearly defined ideology, goal and programme.

The ASDC movement led by Bharat Kumar Timung and Babu Rongpi as joint conveners, provided the youth a perfect platform to project social, political and economic problems on the widest scale so far and marked the departure from the old style verbal demands. A huge majority of youth was experimenting with the left wing and nationalist ideologies and reposed its faith on an autonomous state. Young women, who were independently taking up women issues at the local level, also joined the movement in the first ever organized mobilization when the Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong (Karbi Progressive Women Organization) was formed in 1986 at Donkamukam. Interestingly the bulk of youth came from the vast rural areas exposed to increased scope of education. Not surprisingly, the first guerillas of KPF/KNV also emerged from this section, dreaming of a *hemprek* that still eludes them like the proverbial *Rongbin*.⁹⁶ Angry and frustrated with the extreme repression let loose on the democratic and peaceful movement, this section of youth took up arms and turned the 'island of peace' into a land of endless bloodbath. ASDC fired up the entire generation, either in support or opposition, and made it sure that politics in the hills was not going to be the same again. Although the MoU has not been totally successful, yet the ASDC must be given the credit for bargaining the highest level of autonomy and for its legacy of a new language of organized political protest. In spite of a few excesses of the 'boycott' policy, the ASDC movement became a trend and model of popular mobilization. 1951 created the map, 1974 promoted the cultural vision while 1986 provided the strong political base that youths needed to assert their identities.

There have been debilitating splits in the ASDC movement after two consecutive terms of power partly due to inexperience and partly due to failure to handle power itself. Factionalism continues to haunt the oldest Karbi student's organization that was the springboard of youth activism. But the ASDC experiment had demonstrated that the youths as a political class have arrived and are now prepared to take on the pro-establishment forces whatever it might take.

⁹⁶ Literally, a hidden village, a popular Karbi myth of a parallel world

The same leaders who struck the deal with the Assamese leaders at Halflong to remain in Assam soon got disillusioned because they felt 'let down' and 'deceived' and to make matters worse the Assamese language was imposed in all the schools up to the Higher Secondary level.⁹⁷ Moreover the provision of the Mehta Committee recommendations were not implemented in letter and spirit and the disparity in the per capita Government funding of the area as compared to other hill tribal areas of Meghalaya and Mizoram had already started showing in violation of the promise of parity already made.

The only option that remained was to seek complete separation from Assam. So the elected leaders of the two hills submitted a detailed memorandum to the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1973. If the elected Congress leaders were brought on as part of the defence of the Assamese leadership, the Karbi civil society represented by the Mikir Hills Nationalist Organization who were a part of All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, had continued their representation to the Union Government on 21.11.1971 and to Sri B. K. Nehru, Governor of Assam, on 12 April 1972.⁹⁸ In fact their main complaint was that the Members of the District Council (MDC) whose term in office had already expired by then were undemocratically allowed to exercise on the lines dictated by the Assamese leadership by prolonging the life of the District Council without holding elections.⁹⁹ That way the Assamese leadership was able to silence the democratic voice of the people of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills.

The response of the Government since then has been to placate the hill tribal leadership through a series of Government Office Memoranda entrusting executive functions of the state to the District Councils and later onto the Autonomous Councils under the provision of Para 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the first of which was issued on 30th May, 1970¹⁰⁰ and was repeated every time the demand for separation from Assam was pursued by the hill people- the second on the 3rd February, 1976,^{101, 102} the third on 25th August, 1976.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Dutta P.S., *Autonomy Movements in Assam*, pp. 27 - 30
⁹⁸ Rongphar Borsing, *Karbi Anglongor Rajnoitic Itihas*, pp. 334-336
⁹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 338
¹⁰⁰ vide order no. TAD/R/153/70
¹⁰¹ vide order no. TAD/R/65/75/110,

Cleverly drafted, these Memoranda retain basic authority for the Government while seeming to devolve executive power to the authority of the Councils. It is obvious that the Council authority cannot hope to fulfil the aspiration of the hill people under constant prompting from Dispur. Thus a situation has developed where the Council authority has to take the blame for all the failure and every success is dependent on the goodwill of the Government of the day or the personal integrity of the executive officer concerned.

Right from the formation of the schemes to the release of the funds, the State Government has continued to exercise hegemonic control and the Council Authority is forced to resort to sycophantic approaches in order to function smoothly. Political differences with the state could result in taking over of the Council which jeopardizes development process in the hill areas.

The peculiar relationship weakened the tribal traditional institutions, encouraging unbridled immigration that reduced tribal population ratio from over 74% in 1951 when the District Council were instituted, to alarming proportions in the subsequent years. The government schedule tribe quota had been usurped by the ruling section of the state leaving the local tribal youths unemployed and angry; and large scale corruptions indulged by the executive officers whose service, discipline and control were ill defined by the office memoranda, have left the departmental resources unaccountable and paralyzed. The government officers, particularly the drawing and disbursing Officers who were predominantly from non-tribal communities, became super rich amassing wealth and assets beyond their known source of income.

In that hopeless and subjugated situation there could be only anger and resentment among different sections of the hill people and there was immense pressure on the elected leaders to respond to the situation. So the Action Committee of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills Separate State Demand Committee was constituted under the leadership of the chief executive Members of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous District

¹⁰². vide order no. TAD/R/ 65/75/153 and the forth on 14th November, 1979, vide No. HAD/ 218/77/153

¹⁰³. Rongphar Borsing, *Karbi Anglongor Rajnoitic Itihas*, pp. 348-375

Council who submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on the 24 November, 1980 complaining of the step-motherly treatment of the government of Assam and expressing their dissatisfaction at the growing disparity level of development between the two district and neighboring hill district of Meghalaya. The Memorandum had pointed out that the Prime Minister had in 1973 advised the two hill people to adjust themselves in Assam with enhanced financial allocation from the Planning Commission. The allocation was subsequently enhanced and Karbi-Dimasa leadership, though not satisfied agreed to accept the offer "for a fair trial." They now rued in memorandum to the PM Indira Gandhi that 'being advised by your good self we have tried our level best to adjust for years (from the last memorandum submitted to the PM in June 1973) but regret to say that we simply failed in our endeavor because of unsympathetic attitude of the Assam Administration towards minority communities in the state.'¹⁰⁴ The Memorandum then demanded creation of Autonomous State comprising Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills under the provision of article 244(A) of the Constitution of India for the first time

As the government had consistently ignored the democratic and peaceful partitioning of the people of the two hills through their elected representatives, and as the mounting economic and social pressure in the area was already creating social tension, there was no other option but to launch a peaceful mass movement involving the grassroots people. So on the 17th May 1986, a meeting of all political parties with the participation of social, cultural and students' organizations was convened at Diphu, Karbi Anglong, where the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) was constituted to lead a democratic mass movement demanding the creation of Autonomous State comprising the two hills under the provision of Article 244(A) of the Constitution. One year later on 18th May 1987, the ASDC along with the representative of the Karbi Students' Association (KSA) submitted a formal memorandum to the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.¹⁰⁵ The ASDC subsequently justified their representative status by winning all the District Council, State

¹⁰⁴ Dutta P.S., *Autonomy movements in Assam*, P. 52.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, P. 63

Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary elections in the area by thumping majority of votes.

The Government then invited the ASDC for talks and the Government of Assam also came up with a proposal to resolve the issues demanded by ASDC and KSA. After several rounds of protracted tripartite talks involving the ASDC, the Government of Assam and the Union Government and recognizing the urgent need for the early return of the peace in the area, the ASDC along with its allied organizations, the KSA, the Dimasa Students' Union (DSU), and the North Cachar Hills Students' Federation (NCHSF) decided to accept the government offer, again 'for a fair trial' and the movement organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Assam in the presence of S.B. Chavan, the Union Home Minister on 1st April 1995.¹⁰⁶

The consequential amendment of the Sixth Schedule and the Office Memorandum (OM)¹⁰⁷ were far short of the spirit of the MoU and they were simply inadequate to cope with the massive social and economic problems that had accumulated over the years since the two hills were segregated from the rest of the hill areas of erstwhile Excluded and partially Excluded Areas during the Assam reorganization of 1971. It could not provide answers to basic issues like infiltration, unemployment, police tyranny, lack of educational facility due to meaningless imposition of Assamese medium in government schools, building of health care facilities including appointment of doctors, lack of economic opportunity, continued exploitation of mineral and water resources without local benefit, continued disparity in government funding as compared to Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram. In fact, there were no visible changes after the MoU regime was introduced and a feeling of subjugated existence under the plain people's hegemony continued to hold the determining authority. The most recent instance is the NC Hills Autonomous Council election held in November last when the undersigned party in alliance with the BJP returned with over two third majority but found it most cumbersome to form the

¹⁰⁶ Rongphar Borsing, *Karbi Anglongar Rajnoitik Itihas*, pp. 376-379

¹⁰⁷ Vide No HAD. 57/95/63-64, dated 29th June 1995, HAD.57/95/pt/162, dated 19th October 1995 and HAD.57/95/309 dated 31st December 1996

the latter half of 1990s. There was a spurt of armed militancy confirming earlier fear that the situation might go out of hand if the Government concede enough. The graph of violent incident rose rapidly from 1998 onwards and the millennium saw Karbi Anglong transforming into a full blown violence hit area.¹¹¹ But in 2002, the main armed group, United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) decided to come and join the peace process, and the NDA Government immediately grabbed the opportunity to suspend operation against them (Agreed Ground Rules) which succeeded in containing violence in the two hills districts. But the slackness in the government's initiative in the subsequent years saw the return of violence with a new vigour. Till July 2006, six rounds of official level talks were held involving the representative of UPDS, the Union Government and Assam Government. Unfortunately the talks have not yielded any substantive progress and the peace process is precariously under threat of breakdown. The lack of progress in the talk process obviously did not inspire the KLNLF to enter into peace agreement with the Government and that is why they continued with the armed movement. The same is the case with North-Cachar Hill-based Dima Halam Daoga which had taken up arms around the same period to push for political cause of the Dimasa tribe. They too had entered into a 'suspension operation' with the same result. The disillusioned section of them led by Jewel Garlosa, to broke away from the peace process, relying more on the merits of continuing with the movement process.

The presence of the local armed groups together with several militant outfits from neighboring districts and states, have given rise to apprehension among the peace loving people. Reports that the militant organization of the tea tribes. The All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA) based in Karbi Anglong, is already in touch with the Maoists of Jharkhand for training and cooperation has created a great tension for this can give the Maoists direct access to the international market of illegal arms in South Asian and South- East Asian countries, because of the strategic location of the hills. The Karbi-Dimasa are basically peace-loving people as respective histories testify. A section of the youth has been forced by jinx of modern history to take up arms against their will after twenty four years of partitioning has failed to bring justice for the hill people. It is a matter of time before the two hills are

¹¹¹. Written submission of ASDC/KSA/KNCA/NCHSF/DSU 31 May, 2002, pp. 2

transmuted into hub of militancy in the North-East to make it a permanent war theatre and only the sympathy and resolve of the Union Government can save the people of the two hills from the imminent catastrophe. The obvious solution is a dialogue between the armed organizations the local tribal people and the Government.

The creation of autonomous state under the provision Article 244(A) of the Constitution of India is the unfinished agenda of the political rehabilitation of the tribal people of erstwhile Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. The very existence of the said constitutional provision testifies to the incompleteness of the process that had begun immediately after the commencement of the Constitution. It is beyond the conviction of the Karbi-Dimasa to accept coexistence with the Assamese people in the present state of dependency and only to preserve the territorial integrity of the present Assam state to raise the political status of the hill people to a federal entity within Assam as envisaged by Article 244(A) of the Constitution.



CHAPTER – III

ISSUES OF CONFLICT IN KARBI ANGLONG AND N.C. HILLS DISTRICT

The two hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong in recent years have witnessed a series of ethnic conflicts in the last decade of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty first century. A cursory scrutiny of the conflicts illustrates the need for quick interventions and early warning system by the State Government.

Political background :

The signing of the MoU led to upgradation of both Councils of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills with enhanced powers under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, the District Councils have failed to fulfill the aspirations of the people because its results remained limited to district level only never reached to the grassroot level. Limited administrative and legislative powers also acted as a constrained the functioning of the council. The State Government continues to pull all the strings. The funds allocated for the District Councils by the Central Government are often allegedly diverted elsewhere or not released in time. Dissatisfactions of the people manifested in different movements in ethnic line. However, with the emergence of the armed opposition groups in 1990s, the influences of democratic forces have been reduced. The Central Government of India and the State Government of Assam, in order to legitimize their acceptance for gaining political mileage started giving more importance to the armed groups, as they were able to articulate peoples' opinion in the region...

The demands of the various tribal groups illustrate the nature of the conflict over land and resources. These demands center around creation of an autonomous state. The demands of the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) formed in 1999 in a merger of the erstwhile Karbi People's Front (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers, include creation of a separate state for the Karbi Anglong and contiguous Karbi-dominated areas of Assam and Meghalaya under Article 3 of the Constitution

with additional powers under Article 371, expulsion of those who came to Karbi Anglong after 1951, issuance of domicile certificates to non-Karbhis who have arrived before 1951, introduction of Inner Line Permit and an economic package for the region. After the UDPS signed a ceasefire agreement with government of India and the State government of Assam, the anti-talk faction of the UPDS re-christened itself as the Karbi Longri National Liberation Front (KLNLF).

The Dima Haram Daoga formed in 1995 after almost all the leaders and cadre of the erstwhile Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) surrendered *en masse*, demands Dimarji Kingdom comprising the Dimasa-inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nagaon district and parts of Dimapur district of Nagaland. Its rival faction, the Black Widow, formed by the ousted Chairman Jewel Garlossa, is also active in the twin hill districts. The Bodos demand implementation of Clause 8 of the Bodoland Accord of 1993 to provide Scheduled Tribes (hills) status to the Bodos living in Karbi Anglong. The Kukis demand creation of an Autonomous Regional Council within Autonomous District Council Area of Karbi Anglong. The Khasi-Pnars of the Block I and II areas in Karbi Anglong have been demanding to be a part of Meghalaya. These areas have remained a disputed area between Assam and Meghalaya for a long time. In 1951, these areas had been transferred to Karbi Anglong (then called United Mikir and North Kachar Hills) after slicing them from the erstwhile Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and remained with Assam even after the birth of Meghalaya in 1972. The Biharis and Advasis too have been having conflicts over land and resources under the Howraghat police station area.

Kuki-Karbi conflict :

The ethnic conflict between the Kukis and Karbis that started in 2003 continued till mid 2004. Both the United People's Democratic Solidarity (anti-talk faction) and Kuki Revolutionary Army were involved in the killings of people from both the communities.¹¹² The Karbi and Kuki civil society groups and community organisations questioned each other's role but reiterated the refrain about the State

¹¹². NSCN extracts Kuki promise – The Telegraph, 31st March 2005

government's apathy to the conflict. The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah) reportedly mediated to bring peace between the warring KRA and the anti-talk faction of the UPDS.¹¹³ On 18th January 2004, members of a Karbi armed opposition group swooped on the Basamili village in the Singhasan Hill area under Karbi Anglong district at around 9 a.m. and started firing indiscriminately killing Kimnoy Singson, Ngahneichisong Langthin and Konnen Singson on the spot and injuring K Singson, P Langthin and T Singson belonging to the Kuki community. They also set ablaze around 14 houses.¹¹⁴ On 19 March 2004, 4 Kuki villagers including a woman were gunned down and 10 houses were torched at Hong Bong village in Karbi Anglong district.¹¹⁵

On 24 March 2004, suspected members of the Kuki armed opposition groups in Karbi Anglong district allegedly massacred twenty-eight Karbi villagers. The rebels raided the Woden Tisso village, dragged villagers out of their houses, lined them up and fired indiscriminately. Two other villages of Sarpo Terang and Sarke Engleng were attacked and 22 Karbis were mowed down in these three villages. The rebels then attacked Jarigaon Terang village under Manja police outpost at around 12 noon killing six Karbis.¹¹⁶ More than 50 houses were burnt down.¹¹⁷ On 27 March 2004, Kuki armed groups attacked the three Karbi villages of Arleng Fara, Bohakandoi and Ranghanlam in Deopani area under Bokajan police station and burnt down about 50 houses. Patar Kachari, Chandra Bahadur, Raju William and Joyram Kathar were killed in the attacks. Three other persons- Lindok Ingty, Kem Lekthe and Manik Lekthe, were seriously injured.¹¹⁸ The conflict between the Kukis and Karbis erupts on and off. In the early morning of 4 July 2004, armed groups opened fire at the Kuki village Deigrun Teron in upper Deopani area under Bokajan police station in Karbi Anglong district killing Jiten Teron and injuring his father Borsing Teron, brother Rocky Teron and a neighbour Ranjit Ingtik.¹¹⁹ On the night of 13th

113. "Peace Maker" NSCN-IM in blame game over killing – The Telegraph, 5th April 2004
 114. Three more killed in Diphu – The Sentinal, 21st January 2004
 115. Millitants blow up pipeline, go on killing spree – The Telegraph, 21st March 2004
 116. 28 Massacred in Karbi Anglong – The Sentinal, 25th March 2004
 117. Karbi Militants back out of surrender – The Telegraph, 2nd April 2004
 118. Kuki ultras gundown 4 in Karbi Anglong – The Assam Tribune, 28th March 2004
 119. Karbi Anglong tension refuses to die down – The Sentinal, 5th July 2004

September 2005, eight Karbis were shot dead by suspected Kuki armed opposition groups at Kangburatisso village in the Thekerajan area under Diphu police station. The dead were four men, three women and a one-month-old baby.¹²⁰

Dimasa-Khasi conflict :

In March 2004, about 70 Khasi families living in the border areas of Cachar district were displaced following the murder of Thomas Tariang, headman of Khasi-dominated Boro Damcherra village near the Cachar-North Cachar border area on 11 March 2004. Tariang was also Secretary of the Village Defence Party.¹²¹ In August 2004, Assam State Human Rights Commission (ASHRC) intervened into the alleged "systematic rape of tribal women and assault on tribal village chiefs, particularly of the Khasi-Jaintia tribe of Maniknagar Tea Estate, and the inaction of the district administration over the matter in spite of repeated complaints by the victims".¹²² The Barak Valley Khasi-Jaintia Welfare Association, in a petition to the ASHRC, alleged that miscreants belonging to a particular community, had been "systematically" perpetrating rape on tribal women with a view to create panic among the Khasi-Jaintia populace at Maniknagar Tea Estate. The association also furnished a list of six victims. In the last week of November 2004, about 200 Khasi families fled Cachar Hills in Assam to escape atrocities by armed groups.¹²³ Over 4,000 Khasi-Pnar people who were displaced from Block I and II areas in Karbi Anglong district of Assam due to alleged threats and harassment from the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) returned in late 2003 only to come back to Meghalaya in 2004.¹²⁴

Bihari-Adivasi conflict :

On 18 July 2005, Adivasis and Hindi-speaking people at Ganapathar village under Bokulia outpost clashed in which five of the latter, including two women, were killed and 10 others seriously injured. Those who were killed were identified as

120. 8 Kukis shot dead – The Sentinal, 15th September 2005
 121. Khasi exodus from Cachar after murder – The Telegraph, 23rd March 2004
 122. The Assam Tribune, 18th August 2004
 123. 200 Khasi families flee Cacher hills – The Shilong Times, 2nd December 2004
 124. 400 flee to Meghalaya – The Central Cronicle, 19th November 2003

Sudama Chauhan (60), Lalmoti Devi (45), Ratan Chauhan (35), Ramavati Devi (55) and Nandlal Chauhan (60). The injured had been admitted to Bakuliaghat Hospital and the condition of one of them –Pritam Kurmi -is reported to be critical. The Adivasis went on a rampage torching about 40 houses, most of them thatched, belonging to 13 Bihari families. Tension had been simmering between the two communities since 15 February 2005 over a land dispute in which about four Adivashis had been allegedly beaten up by some Hindi-speaking people. One Adivasi namely Dinesh Gaur (30) died in the incident. The police, however, failed to confirm the death.¹²⁵ Thousands of Biharis torched as many as 25 houses of Adivasis in Sampathar area of Bakulia under Howraghat police station in Karbi Anglong district on 13 August 2005.¹²⁶

In such conflicting demands of different groups of people, the situation has become more sensitive and vulnerable. A little incident or rumour is enough to spark off violence. For example, the spark which lit the ethnic violence was the suspected killing of three DHD cadres by unidentified militants at the Hmar dominated Zoar village, near Dittokchara in the NC Hills in February 2003. The DHD immediately roughed up Hmar villagers in the area and caused further violence, causing the Hmars to flee in large numbers to Cachar and Mizoram. Violence against Dimasas in the Hmar dominated areas of Cachar followed, leading to Hmars getting targeted all over NC Hills. Three Hmars and a Kuki were lynched in a train by a Dimasa mob. The Hmar People's Convention (Democratic) (HPC (D)) the militant group of the Hmars, led a massive attack on Lodhi Cachari, a site of historical importance to the Dimasa. Thereafter both tribes set about attacking and burning each other's villages in earnest. The HPC (D) and the DHD coordinated the planning and provided the armed cadre for attacks on the rival tribe.

On 26th September 2005, in a Karbi village, violence was apparently sparked off by the abduction and murder of three Dimasa autorikshaw and drivers. When the culprits could not be apprehended by the authority, the rumor spread that the district police authority took little action to apprehend the culprits, the Dimasa sentiments

^{125.} Howrahghat tense under control – The Sentinal, 20th July 2005

^{126.} Twenty houses torched in Karbi hill – The Sentinal, 15th August 2005

rose to its heights and armed groups soon took law into their hands by slaughtering the innocent civilians with *Daos*, machetes. The victims were often mutilated and killed in most despicable way. Even children were not spared.

By November 2005, the total casualty was 90. The victims included 76 Karbis, 11 Dimasas, 1Bodo, 1Bengali, and 1Nepali. An estimated 1,014 houses- 534 of Karbis, 469 of Dimasas and one of Nepali were burnt down.¹²⁷

Different communities have been engaged in conflict in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills in the last decade. Between 2003-2007, conflicts between Hmar and Dimasa, Karbis and Kukis, Karbis and Khasis, Karbis and Dimasas and the growing tension between other communities in Karbi Anglong led to a volatile situation.¹²⁸

A cursory look at the following table showing extremist related violence in Karbi Anglong will reveal that as the MoU fails to achieve any substantive changes in the society, extremist violence becomes more rampant and more desperate.

The simmering conflict generally worsened. In 2005 there were 136 deaths, as many as 1, 83,000 persons taking shelter in the camp and 2,22,000 persons being internally displaced. Since then although the number of persons killed seem to have reduced, the number of violent incidents have increased.¹²⁹

Apparently the issues of the conflict seem to be very trivial, but their roots lie in longstanding grievances among the people of different communities. Many a time the immediate causes are used as a pretext to manifest their grievances. A comparative study of the development in other districts will show that political isolation, economic deprivation and social exclusion have been very important in creating out conflicting situation in the region.

127. '72 lives lost, 1,014 houses burnt:' Govt., The Sentinal, 20 October, 2005
 128. Mangattu Thazhe Tom "Voices Waiting to be Heard from Karbi Anglong, The Internally Displaced People of Karbi Anglong, Forgotten Group of People?" - A paper presented at IIT Guwahati on 14th Nov. 2007
 129. Memorandum submitted to L.K. Advani by ASDC/KSA/DSU/KNCA and DWS on 8th Feb, 2008

Grievances of the people :

Organizations representing a particular community or even the district often complain that the Assam government has neither the political will nor the capability to protect tribal society and tribal land from the onslaught of influx. The excessive rate of decadal growth of population, the highest in the country and among the highest in Assam, and the corresponding sharp fall in the percentage of tribal population is, to say the least, scary. They recollect from history that during the time of state reorganization of 1970 the Assamese mainstream leaders "successfully played the role of a villain"¹³⁰ and that even during the time of the Assam Movement, despite the participation of the people of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills, AASU leaders did not pay attention to the problems of the hills people.¹³¹ Though Monsing Rongpi participated in the first round of talks at Delhi, no Karbi student leader participated in the subsequent talks.²⁰

It is seen that State the Government is not able to contain the influx of the outsiders to the area, It led to an alarming and abnormal growth of population in the hill areas resulting to an abnormal fall of the percentage of tribal population. Contrary to this, neighbouring states like Meghalaya and Mizoram have been able to contain influx. The reason is that the tribes of these states have been given the right to look after themselves. Consequently they have been able to contain influx and stabilize the preponderance of indigenous tribal population in their respective states.

The civil and police administration in the hill areas are run by the plains people to suppress the hill people. Apathy of the officials is frequently manifested in the discharge of their functions. At the slightest pretext, the police harass the tribal people by imposing various punitive sections of the Cr PC, IPC and put them through a lengthy process of legal hassles. Mass punitive arrests are not uncommon in the name of maintaining public order. Most arrests are not recorded in the crime register

130. Memorandum submitted to L.K. Advani by ASDC/KSA/DSU/KNCA and DWS on 8th Feb, 2008.

131. Interview with Monsing Rongpi, ex-MLA, ASDC and lone Karbi student to be in the first round of talk with the representatives of AASU in the movement of National Aliens' Issue.

and the detenues are let off after extracting monetary benefits or after giving them a taste of police brutality. The fact is that even after 50 years of Independence, the judicial and executive magistracy continues to be discharged by a single authority, facilitates to the sadistic pursuits of the law and order officials destroy the age-old tribal judicial and customary systems. It is no wonder that section 144 of the Cr PC is constantly in operation in the hill areas in spite of the fact that the hill areas record among the lowest crime rate and among the lowest conviction rate in the state. Note the following table:

The Autonomous Council authorities are forced to remain mute bystanders to the criminal outrage of basic human rights and natural justice being regularly committed by the police, army and civil administration against the indigenous hill people. Instead of protecting the lives and properties of the hill people, they are always put at the receiving end and the police force seems to be stationed in the hill areas only to protect the interests of the infiltrators, traders and corrupt government officials. The age-old tribal judicial and customary system and authority is systematically undermined and the sight of a uniformed policeman is therefore repugnant to the common tribal psyche.

The Karbis and Dimasas feel that they have always been treated contemptuously, not as fellow Assamese but as "Kha" (slave) or 'culturally inferior foreigners'¹³² The British noted that "The Assamese had always looked upon the Mikirs with "Contempt and dislike" and had always been treated them as bondsmen. It was therefore the British who tried to raise the status of the Karbis by putting them on the same fiscal platform as Assamese of the plains in 1838.¹³³

In the past also they were subjected to similar treatment. Military expeditions were sent several times against the Dimasas never allowing them peaceful existence till 15th April, 1708, after having secured the surrender of TamraddhvajB by sheer superior force the Dimasa king in the Shom's Durbar at Agrhgaon, punished them

132. Guha Amalendu, *The Ahom Political System, an inquiry into the state formation process in Medieval Assam (1228-1714)* Social Scientist. Vol. II, No. 12, December 1983, P. 12.

133. Mackenzie Alexander, *The North East Frontier of India*, pp. 213-214

and secured from him the promise of tributes consisting of two elephants, two horses, and forty survivors per year, and allowed him to return honourably to his kingdom.¹³⁴

The Karbis were also subjected to similar treatment- they were coerced into submission only after the Karbis accepted the Ahom king as their sovereign and promised to pay annual tribute, to King Jayadhwaja Singha. The Ahom king then recognized the Mikir king and presented him with a sedan, a girl, a drum, one clarion, a *Dao* and a dish. But in July of 1765 when the Karbi king stopped to paying the tributes, two forces were sent to punish the Karbis- one under Nyaisodha Phukan of Jalambala family by the Chapanala side and the other under Dayangia Rajkhowa of Sandikoi family from the Kopili side setting Karbi houses and granaries on fire and capturing a number of items in the raid.¹³⁵

At present also the Karbis and Dimasas suffer from indignity at the hands of the plain Assamese people and subjugation under hegemonic overlordship of the state government. They are allowed to to be represented by only 5 out of 126 MLAs in Legislative Assembly.

The Govt. of Assam continues to maintain the age-old attitude of neglect towards the people of the hill areas even after signing of the MoU. The following tables show that infrastructure development and employment opportunities for the hill tribes have remained as dismal as ever –

The districts, which have the lowest road length per 100 sq. km. of geographical area in Assam, are:

- N.C. Hills (28.6 km)
- Kokrajhar (32.9 km)
- Hailakandi (33 km) and
- Karbi Anglong (33.4 km)

¹³⁴. Barpujari H.K., *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. II, Guwahati, p. 268

¹³⁵. Devi Lakshmi, *Ahom Tribal Relations- A Political Study*, p. 188

The neglect in infrastructure development in the tribal dominated areas and non-Assamese areas is obvious.

District-Wise Development Rank:

Based on combined indices of development sectors like agriculture, industry, infrastructure and social & demographic levels of each district, the districts in Assam have been categorized into four categories of development rank¹³⁶

Developed category

Moderately Developed category

Under Developed category

Backward category

North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and Kokrajhar districts have been categorized as backward districts.

Throughout course of history, the hill people living in Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills have together with the tribes of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland suffered neglect and suppression. But just because these two hill areas are being tagged with Assam, the people of the said areas are deprived of the huge per capita government investments enjoyed by the fellow tribes of Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

The reservation share of the ST (Hills) is 5%, ST (Plains) – 7.5%, SC-12.5%, but instead of rectifying the glaring violation of the norm, the Govt. of Assam remains unconcerned. In Meghalaya 90% of the jobs are reserved for ST (Hills).

By holding over 80% of the Government posts and capturing the lion's share of overnment contracts in the hill areas, the plain people are siphoning off most of the non-plan and plan fund meant for the hill people in the form of salary and contract bills.

¹³⁶ . Gopalkrishnan R. : Assam-Land and People

Due to acute industrial backwardness and utter exploitation and under-development of agriculture, mineral and forest resources, job opportunity in the hill areas has remained stagnant causing high rate of unemployment and poverty.

The banking institutions in Karbi Anglong district continue to shy away from investing in the area as the above table shows. The Swarojgar Gramim Sarak Yojna failed to take off due to gross negligence of the officials and field staff of the District Rural Development Agency. The district has remained industrially backward and the apex banking body has attributed the following reasons for the area's backwardness to - a) Infrastructural deficiencies b) Lack of entrepreneurship c) Transport communication bottle neck d) lack of marketing facilities and e) Unstable law and order situation.

From the above discussion it is seen that the conflict in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills districts is a result of complex combination of social, economic and political problems. Democracy has made no difference in the economic condition of people nor has it brought about any real transformation in the political culture. Poverty along with a weak Government and absence of effort to address developmental issues and ethnic problems has resulted in a period of instability which has led to the rise of the ethnic conflict. The conflict has become more complex as the different organizations representing different indigeneous communities have not only launched 'war against state' but have also become hostile to other communities of their own land.

This has got a serious bearing upon the civil administration, law and order situation, administration and developmental process. Above all the humanitarian condition has been worst not only for the victims during the time of direct conflict but also to the lakhs of internally displaced people who live in the camps in deplorable condition.

Director of Asian Centre for Human Rights, Mr. Suhas Chakma undertook an on the spot field visit to Karbi Anglong district on 3-4 November 2005. ACHR, the only Human Rights Organisation to visit the spot has put forward some

observations to reflect the real picture and to resolve the conflict between different communities in the two districts. These observations and recommendations are given below because they are important to understand the magnitude of the problem as well as the way to resolve the problem.

Observations :

Failure of the State

The failure of the Assam Government to learn from previous ethnic conflicts, which have been raging in the State since 1993, requires little introduction. Until the present ethnic clashes, the Karbis and the Dimasas despite being two largest ethnic groups did not have any ethnic conflict. While the present killings have increased distrust and suspicion, the intensity of the conflict has baffled both the communities. That the killings were not ethnic conflicts but handiwork of the armed opposition groups - DHD and UPDS- has been a common refrain of both the Dimasas and the Karbis met by ACHR delegation.

That the State has failed to fulfil its responsibility to protect the lives and properties of the citizens is all-pervasive.

In the 1990s, Karbi Anglong witnessed the formation of the armed opposition groups, mainly UPDS claiming to represent the Karbis and DHD claiming to represent the Dimasas. The formation of these armed opposition groups could be attributed to measures taken by armed opposition groups from neighbouring areas as a response to the counter-insurgency measures of the Government of India.

On 23 May 2002, the UPDS entered into a ceasefire agreement with the State Government of Assam and the Government of India. The UPDS designated its camps at Diphu and Hamren.

On 23 December 2003, the DHD entered into a similar cease-fire agreement with the State Government of Assam. The designated camps of the DHD are at

Dhansiri, Haflong and Doyangmuck. Under the cease-fire agreements, the members of the UPDS and DHD are supposed to remain in designated camps.

The DHD designated camp in Dhansiri Reserve Forest area under Karbi Anglong district has been a bone of contention between the DHD and UPDS.

The UPDS has been demanding its removal. It has been highlighted as an ostensible trigger for the ethnic cleansing. While the DHD designated camp at Dhansiri certainly remains a contentious issue, the DHD had entered into cease-fire more than one and half years ago on 23rd December 2003. The Central Government and the State Government of Assam are yet to start any substantive talks with the DHD or UPDS to address their demands. Why would the Dhansiri designated camp spark off the killings now?

It is clear that non-enforcement of the cease-fire agreement was responsible for the conflict. As over 450-odd armed cadres of the DHD and the UPDS roamed about freely, the situation immediately went out of control. When the Governor of Assam, Lt General (Retd) Ajay Singh visited the UPDS designated camp in Diphu, he reportedly found only two members of the UPDS in the militant outfit's designated camp in Diphu in place of the dozens that were supposed to be there. The non-enforcement of cease-fire ground rules also makes it difficult to distinguish between those which are in cease-fire and those which are not such as the Black Widow and the Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front.

Non-enforcement of cease-fire agreements can lead to more conflicts among the armed opposition groups over collection of resources. These groups can openly carry out activities which are hitherto banned by the government. As one Karbi official on condition of anonymity stated, "earlier the notice for taxes used to come secretly, now they deliver it in bikes".

There has been no attempt to find out the reason behind the murder. This inaction on the part of the administration flared up the killings.

Failure to deploy adequate Security Forces :

The failure of the state government despite repeated ethnic cleansing has been all pervasive. There was credence to the joint demonstration of Karbi Student Union (KSU) and All Dimasa Students Union (ADSU) in Guwahati on 19 October 2005 which held the State Government and the district administration responsible for allowing the situation to go out of hand. It is clear that the State Government did not use the security options available at its disposal. Only after the death toll reached to 70 that the State Government decided to call the army to aid the civil authorities. Senior political leaders irrespective of their political colors or ideologies resorted to political skullduggery and blame game. What remains disconcerting is that no statement had emanated from the political figures of the Karbi Anglong and NC Hills outrightly condemning the violence, mobilising people to take visible peace initiatives and condemning stray incidents of burning down the deserted houses which could easily turn into ethnic conflict. It is easy for the opposition to blame the Government and for the Government to conjure up conspiracy theories about the opposition.

While the Government has the primary responsibility, ethnic conflict requires the leaders to rise above party politics. However, stray incidents of burning down of the abandoned houses as witnessed during the visit of the ACHR delegation to Karbi Anglong have the potential to spread to NC Hills. This will further intensify the conflict but the State administration until today appears to be complacent about these stray incidents.

Failure to Fix the Accountability:

The failure to fix the accountability is one of the reasons for recurrence of ethnic cleansings in the North East. Experiences from Rwanda to Darfur in Sudan show that accountability is crucial to stop recurrence of such incidents. Asian Centre for Human Rights does not suggest the need for international war crimes tribunal. But the need to establish accountability is fundamental to stop such gruesome killings. While most perpetrators of communal riots in other parts of India continue

to roam freely, there have been at least few inquiry commissions and prosecutions. In the North East, inquiry commissions have seldom been ordered. When the inquiries are ordered, the reports are never made public. The question of prosecution never arises.

On 10th October 2005, Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi instituted a one-man inquiry committee headed by the retired judge, Justice PC Phukan to inquire into the killings in Karbi Anglong. The inquiry report was supposed to be submitted to the State Government within three months but till date the terms of reference of Justice Phukan's Commission have not been made public. No staff or resource had been provided to Justice Phukan Commission. Worst, Justice Phukan did not visit Karbi Anglong immediately after the incident.

Meanwhile, the Assam Government in a press release of 27 October 2005 reportedly decided to request the Central Government to institute a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Truth once again appeared to have become the victim. The Chief Minister announced an ex-gratia of Rs 3 lakhs to the kin of each of the victims who died. Until today, not a single relative of the victim has received any compensation. The district administration officials when asked by ACHR have informed that they are taking up the matter with the State Government

Deplorable conditions of the IDPs in Karbi Anglong, NC Hills and Nagaon :

"Such a carnage is bound to happen in a jungle"- stated Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi while justifying failure of the State to prevent further loss of lives. The statement of the Chief Minister explains the apathy of the State Government towards the displaced persons in Karbi Anglong, NC Hills and Hajoi of Nagaon.

It will not be an understatement to state that the provisions provided to the IDPs in Karbi Anglong, NC Hills and Hajoi are worse than what is being provided to the convicted criminals under different jail manuals of India.

Lack of Proper Accommodation :

Representatives of Asian Centre for Human Rights visited the camps of the IDPs in Dhipu and Dhansiri on 3 and 4 November 2005 including the Oxford English School which house about 2000 people. They found displaced Karbis and Dimasas were housed in most unhygienic conditions like chickens in a coop. The camps are extremely overcrowded, and most inmates had to sleep in the open. When it rained, there was no adequate space even for standing.

Lack of adequate Food and Utensils :

Apart from rice, *Dal* and *Chirra*, the Government had also not provided adequate clothes or cash to buy vegetables or firewood. In Karbi Anglong district, there were 32,871 inmates and the State Government as of 30 October 2005 had only provided only 8,504 plates. It implies that four persons had to share a plate. This was highly inadequate. Even a convicted prisoner is given a plate and glass. But the victims of gross human rights violations were not provided any such assistance.

Inadequate Medical Facilities :

The Government failed to take preventive measures against the spread of malaria. An estimated 1,170 families had not been provided mosquito nets as on 3rd November 2005. There were 6,349 families but the government has provided mosquito nets to only 5,179 families. Many families had more than five members. The lack of adequate mosquito nets is a problem in all the camps. There were about 200 women in the relief camps in their early stages of pregnancy. But there are no special medical facilities for these women. Due to the lack of facilities and transport, babies were delivered inside the camps and not at the hospital. There had been nine deaths in the relief camps.

Recommendations :

1. Enforce respect for cease-fire agreement with DHD and UPDS. The Central Government and the State government of Assam must immediately take measures to enforce cease-fire ground rules especially keeping members of the UPDS and DHD in the designated camps as agreed under the cease-fire agreements. Head count of the members in the designated camps is indispensable for establishing peace.
2. Form Assam State Commission on Internally Displaced Persons and Community Recovery given the frequent internal displacement because of the ethnic conflicts and the lack of early warning mechanism. The State government of Assam should consider forming "Assam State Commission on Internally Displaced Persons and Community Recovery" for a trial period of at least five years. The Commission should compose of Government officials working in close collaboration with the authorities directly responsible for internally displaced persons including those responsible for security matters, Assam State Human Rights Commission, prominent social workers, non-governmental groups and displaced communities. Such a commission could be mandated to monitor developments in conflict areas for early warning, address security concerns and facilitate the granting of safe access to internally displaced persons by humanitarian workers, monitor measures taken to ensure recovery of the community and take community confidence- building measures.
3. The State government must not force those living in the camps to leave the camps for their villages without ensuring their safety, security and dignity. In this respect, the State Government must take measures immediately to stop burning of the houses and uphold the rule of law.'
4. The Central government should declare a package to rehabilitate the displaced Karbis and Dimasas to enable them to stand on their own feet, in other words, to be self-reliant. The package should, among others, provide for construction of houses, compensation for properties lost/damaged and at least six months free rations to enable them to start cultivation. These initiatives would go a long way for

conflict resolution and peace building. All citizens of India who are displaced whether by natural calamities such as Tsunami and earthquake or ethnic cleansing, must have equal access to relief and rehabilitation. The Government of India must develop standards for providing humanitarian assistance based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. The level of assistance to the Karbi and the Dimasa IDPs must be at par with what is being provided to the Kashmiri pandits who have also been displaced from Jammu and Kashmir because of armed conflicts.

5. Improvement of the camp conditions. The government must take immediate measures to reduce overcrowding and provide proper accommodation, adequate provisions for fooding especially firewoods and cash doles for vegetables, adequate utensils, medical facilities especially for pregnant women, baby food, adequate and appropriate clothing and educational facilities for children.
6. Special Focus on Women and Children. The provisions for humanitarian assistance for the IDPs must contain special assistance for baby food, special care and protection for the pregnant women.
7. Vacate the schools and provide proper accommodation. The State Government of Assam and the Government of India must immediately build temporary camps to provide proper accommodation and vacate 32 schools in Karbi Anglong alone presently being used to house the internally displaced Karbis and Dimasas. The government must immediately provide free textbooks to the children of the displaced persons. Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi must implement his declaration on the issue.
8. Compensation for the dead and injured. The State government must take immediate steps to provide the compensation of Rs 3,00,000 announced for the relatives of those who have been killed. Compensation must also be paid to those who have been injured.
9. Justice P K Phukan Commission of Inquiry or CBI Inquiry. Accountability is crucial to stop recurrence of such killings. The Assam Government must take all measures necessary to start immediate functioning of the Justice P K Phukan

Commission of Inquiry, which was supposed to complete its inquiry within 90 days, irrespective of an inquiry by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

10. Disseminate Geneva Conventions. The State government of Assam and the Central government of India should distribute International Humanitarian Law Standards in Assam and the North East India.



CHAPTER - IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The situation today is such that each community of the region, or at least important sections of these, is involved in violent conflicts with one or more of the other communities. This violence is affecting the everyday life of the ordinary citizens in a manner that threatens their right as members of a democratic society. The civil administration, system of justice and the law and order machinery are seriously affected by it. Some organizations of indigenous communities often claim that only their members have civil and political rights. Such outrageous demands not only reduce the non-indigenous persons to the status of *persona- non-grata* legitimizing the denial of their democratic rights but also inflict violent atrocities on them.

The last three decades have witnessed a kind of tribal revivalism. This is marked by an awakening or re-awakening based on the loyalties to their own community. The leaders of such movement have been successful in mobilizing the masses by exploiting not only the socio-political, historiographic or demographic marginality but also economic deprivation. Government policy of granting autonomy or any other political space has not been able to reduce the conflict. Rather, it has balkanized the entire region.

The Indian Government after Independence has failed to achieve the desired goal in its nation building project. Though the central and urban areas have been developed in many respects the peripheral regions have remained backward and underdeveloped. The accumulated grievances of the people have manifested in ethnic movements resulting in various conflicts. North East India, with its population consisting of large number of tribes or several ethnic groups, speaking different languages and dialects, following different religion, is more vulnerable than any other parts of India. The centre's apathy and overbearing dose of military nationalism have played a major role in the emergence of conflict in the region.

Ethnic conflicts and hate campaigns are brutalizing the most visible sections of society, particularly the educated youth. The gory details of the ethnic violence published in the print and electronic media reveal not only the extent of violence but also its nature. Burning people alive on the streets in broad daylight, killing of unfamiliar persons merely on suspicion, murders of small children are no longer rare. These are the situations that cannot be ignored

The districts of Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills, which have enjoyed autonomy under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution since 1951, have witnessed inhuman brutal killing of innocent people. Thousands of people have lost their lives in ethnic conflicts- between Karbis Dimasas, and Biharis, Khasis Mhars and Zeme Nagas. The brutality of these conflicts is such that even new born babies, pregnant women and age-old people have not been spared and have been burnt alive with their families in the darkness of night. Innocent people have been brought down from the buses and have been brutally assaulted by mutilating their body using sharp weapons instead of using bullets. This is a clear case of ethnic cleansing, violating ethical cannons of humanity. The conflict is not merely between tribal and non-tribal but also intra-tribal.

A deeper look into the problem shows that infrastructural development for modern lives in these areas have remained very poor. Beyond this there are other reasons which have contributed to the conflicting situation particularly in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. These are as follows:

Lack of Space for Youth :

Throughout the contemporary history the young people have become a force for social and political change. In Karbi Anglong also youth has played a major role in social and political change. From the time of Semson Sing Engti to Jayanta Rongpi, the young section of the society has played a crucial role in conditioning the social and cultural development. When ASDC stated their movement in 1986, the youth played an the important role because they considered the ASDC movement primary their identity struggle.

But the present scenario is frustrating for the youth. Educational unemployment in Assam across all categories is significantly higher than national

average. According to 2001 Census, there has been considerable increase of young people under 18 in the population among the Karbis. In absence of political mentors, unable to get in to salaried jobs or devoid of any other option. A section of youth has made its way to the insurgent groups out of frustration. This can be inferred from a survey conducted by 'Integrated Counseling and Testing Centre (ICTC) in Diphu and Bokajan. 74 (out of 13,700 tested) and 32 (out of 3453 tested) persons respectively have been found HIV positive till December 2010.

Nexus between Politicians and Militants:

The genesis of the conflict can be traced back to the nexus between political aspirants and the armed groups. For example, the conflict in the N. C. Hills was sparked off in 2009 by a resolution passed by the Executive Committee of North-Cachar Hills Autonomous District Council in February, 2009 without the consent of other indigenous communities also present in the small hill district. The content of the resolution was mainly dominated by a nomenclature issue concerning changing the name of the district from North Cachar Hills to 'Dima Hasau Raji' meaning 'Hill Kingdom of the Dimasas'. This resolution of the Council was vehemently opposed by other indigenous communities like the Hmars, Kukis and the Zeme Nagas under the banner of the Indigenous Peoples' Forum (IPF) that spearheaded the opposition. For reasons unknown, the Zeme Nagas were targeted by armed cadres of the Dima Haram Daoga (DHD). The most plausible explanation for this could lie in the political situation where the Zeme Nagas, a part of the larger Naga group were considered a more dangerous threat by the Dimasas to their political aspirations. Furthermore, it is alleged by some people that the Dimasa insurgents were funded clandestinely by powerful people in the Council where the former used the money to buy sophisticated weapons and ammunition. This gradually led to the insurgents becoming bolder and more aggressive to an extent that they now believe themselves to be strong enough to challenge even the NSCN, one of the most feared insurgent groups in North-East India. The National Investigating Agency (NIA), a post-Mumbai terrorist attack security agency formed by the Indian Government is also investigating this alleged nexus between the Council and the DHD.

Though the Constitution has empowered the Autonomous Council in Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills for self-rule there is no provision for yearly auditing of the accounts of the Council. It has led to the misuse of funds allocated for the welfare of the people. Money has been siphoned off to the militants for buying arms. So, there should be an amendment of the provision of the Sixth Schedule in the constitution to prevent the hobnobbing of the politicians and the militants and there should be provision for devolution of powers to the grass root level. For example, there has been large scale irregularity in the N. C. Hills Autonomous Council which came to light following investigation of a case relating to the politician-militant nexus by National Investigation Agency (NIA). After NIA investigation the office of the Accountant General was entrusted with the responsibility of auditing the accounts and the AG special audit also pointed out glaring irregularities and siphoning off of government funds. The accounts of the N. C. Hills Council as well as other Councils were not audited regularly because of lack of statutory provisions and till the NIA investigation, no one knew what was going on in the Council.

Geographical Location :

The geographical location of Karbi Anglong is of crucial significance for understanding the genesis of this recent increase in violence. Karbi Anglong is one of the largest districts in India in terms of territory and shares its district borders with the states of Nagaland and Meghalaya. Its extended neighborhood includes Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The Kaziranga National Park cuts through this district and most of the area has dense forest cover. This district, therefore, provides the most suitable area for militant organizations to operate in and from. The supply of arms and ammunition is also facilitated by the porous borders of nearby states and countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Policing in areas like Karbi Anglong has been largely ineffective due to its large tracts of dense forests and riverine nature. Also, there are very few police outposts in the district; in some places, the nearest police station is about 50kms away. The district headquarters in Diphu is also cut off from most of its remote areas. The Hindi-speaking people living in Karbi Anglong are scattered in as many as 80

clusters, which makes it virtually impossible for the paramilitary forces and police to provide them effective security at all times.

The vast and well-consolidated terrorist networks of the ULFA, KLNLF, NSCN (IM), and other militant outfits have been operating out of Karbi Anglong at will. The Karbi and Dimasa tribes in this district have been fighting for a long time for control over this territory, with the major bout of violence occurring in between 2004-2005. This ethnic conflict has been fuelled by the Naga militant outfits to gain control over more land for their proposed Greater Nagalim state. They have been providing support to the Dimasa tribe against the Karbi tribe, which has resulted in a vicious cycle of violence in Karbi Anglong.

Fear of Minoritization :

The Karbi and Dimasa people fear that the continuous influx of the outsiders will lead to serious consequent demographic change and that they will lose their grip on the society. The tribal population ratio in Karbi Anglong alarmingly fell to 55.70% in the 2001 census from a healthy 75% in 1951 while Meghalaya and Mizoram maintained healthy 85.9% and 94.5% respectively in the same year, in fact registering a slight growth compared to earlier decades. The per capita GDP was a mere Rs.9638 in 2000-2001 in Karbi Anglong while Meghalaya and Mizoram had registered Rs.14, 632 and Rs.18, 491 respectively in the same year which rapidly rose to Rs.21, 500 and Rs.30, 667 in 2004-2005. Only 19.3% of the household of Karbi Anglong and 43.80% in NC Hills have electricity in spite of making major contribution of hydro power to the state while it is 53.28% in Meghalaya and 81.84% in Mizoram. The annual employment growth rate in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills are 1.54% and 1.02% respectively while in Meghalaya and Mizoram they are 5.05% and 4.96% respectively.

Conflicts have mostly been explained using the grievance narrative. But such explanations fail to account for the large variance in violence levels within the region. A rather more fruitful line of inquiry is provided by a state-society reading of the political history of the districts that highlights the fact that conflicts there are accompanied by a contested and weak authority of governmental agencies and the fragmentation of society. It is important to delve into the region's history to

study the process of integration—how state leaders in colonial and post-colonial times established bureaucratic apparatuses, and constructed and mobilized collective identities in an effort at legitimizing them. In the case of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills, it can be said that the conflicting groups consolidated and legitimized their position by emphasizing on their politically, socially, culturally and economically marginalized status. The concerned groups do not feel a dignified position in the process of greater dynamic society and are aggrieved not only of socio-economic marginality but also feels marginality in the North East historiography.

In case of BTC, for the plain tribes of Assam two accords signed in 1993 and 2003 have failed to fulfil its objective of gearing up of development and establishment of peace. There is a need to analyze them and make an attempt to evolve appropriate politico-administrative structures which, while satisfying the rising aspirations of different ethnic groups, promote traditional harmony and integrity.

In modern complex age, different yearnings of different strata of society can be sensed. While the elite sections look forward to techno-economic achievements, the oppressed sections dream of an era of fulfilment of minimum needs, basic rights, human dignity etc. There can be found among them a cognitive streak off historical prerogatives of earlier settlers over common property resources.

In the matter of responsibility of physical safety and socio-economic security of minorities. It should be considered whether it should not rest with the federating units, the centre's role being reinforced to that of a watchful and overseeing referee and a zealous guardian.

The idea of "India" can be concretized only by institutionalization of the rule of law and creation of a just and equitable social order. A rule of law which does not discriminate between disparate segment and whose uniform extension in the social, political and economic fields to the majority and minority communities alike will inspire confidence among all and sundry.

Some of the ethnic Bodo organizations and advocates of a separate state of Bodoland within the Union of India have been stirred by the goal. On the other hand, some of the Assamese-speaking organizations have been totally opposed to the idea of further division of Assam. So far as the creation of BTC the Government of India has not made any pronouncement on it. Government task has been strictly limited to two aspects. First, to determine the area of the Bodo and other plains tribes to the north of the river Brahmaputra in Assam and second, to make recommendations as to the legislative, administrative and financial powers that may be given to autonomous structures conceived of for these areas. Thus, the Government of India has not been obligated to go into the question of creation of a separate state.

It is to be mentioned here that no Census was held in Assam in 1981 and the Government of India used the 1991 census figures and furnished provisional 1991 Census figures relating to the north plain of Assam.

To determine the area of the Bodo and to the north of the Brahmaputra in Assam the broad pattern of settlements was made yardstick in the plain north of the river Brahmaputra. The pattern of settlement shows that the Bodo group is concentrated on its west-central side with a total population 11.07 lakhs and the Mishings with a population of 3.15 lakhs live mostly in the eastern sector. There is a big area in between eastern sector in which none of the groups has any notable presence. The tribe-wise and district-wise distribution is roughly as follows:

	Bodo	Mishing	General	Rabha
	11.07 lakhs	3.15 lakhs	1.02 lakhs	0.80 lakhs
Kokrajhar	28.5%	-	-	13.1%
Darrang	16.8%	-	-	37.8%
Nalbari	12.4%	-	24.3%	19.5%

Bongaigaon	12%	-	-	7.3%
Sonitpur	9.4%	11.1%	-	4.9%
Barpeta	9.3%	-	-	3.5%
Kamrup North	5.1%	-	15.2%	2.8%
Dhemaji	-	45%	20.6%	-
Lakhimpur	-	43.3%	17.7%	-
Dhubri	-	-	-	10.8%

Certain other scheduled tribes like the Lalung are present in smaller numbers in north bank areas but have larger presence in the south of the river Brahmaputra.

It has been seen that BTAD was created in a demographic situation where Bodos constitute not more than 28 percent.

For dealing with the legislative, administrative and financial autonomy that could be developed to the different tribes in the north plain, a large number of social, political, cultural and other organizations and individuals who are opponent of a separate state of Bodoland support the idea of autonomy. There is a good number of reasons to believe that there could be large measure of agreement among the parties concerned over autonomy. But when it comes to a question of territorial autonomy problem has arisen.

There has been a break-down of communication, for varying lengths of time at different periods among the diverse ethnic groups that constitute the plural Assam polity. The resulting estrangement has created a socio-psychological-gulf which has not been easily bridgeable. Among the factors which contributed to the break-down

have been dispossession of land, disappearance of forests, a slow pace of socio-economic development, low spread of education, persistent back-logs in reservation quotas in public services and posts. Hegemonic attitudes in culture and language, intangible and tangible sources of discrimination and psychological alienation etc. are the factors for which the possibilities of communities coming together, interacting with each other and sorting out problems has been shrinking. No other community was taken into confidence in the table of discussion in the creation of BTAD. Before the attitudes harden further, healthy intervention and promotion of interaction is necessary.

In resolving the crisis, two approaches are very important- firstly, better utilization of existing socio-political-administrative institutions and creation of new ones as are felt necessary and, secondly, devolution of maximum autonomy to such traditional and modern institutions.

It is said that democracy is in essence, majority rule and minority rights. The Legislative Assembly of the State does serve the purpose of enabling different socio-political entities to interact with each other, hammer out solutions to the public problems of the day and undertake legislation required for the entire state. But the complaint of ethnic minorities has been that they have been neglected and discriminated against. An important intellectual section of the society in Assam feels that, for the purpose, a second chamber should be created in the state with the stipulation of equal representation to all ethnic groups. At the time of presenting the 99th Amendment Bill 2003 relating to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, in its 102nd report, the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee for Home Affairs recommended for establishment of a Second Chamber. 'We recommend creation of a second chamber in Assam i.e. a Legislative Council. In accordance with the Article 171 (3) of the Constitution and the present membership of 126 in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the strength of MLCs would be around 42. But we have recommended that it should be more to enable adequate representation of scheduled tribes in the House.' The Committee also says 'The ST population (1991) of 30.33 lakhs in the state bears a percentage of 14 of the total population of the state.

We propose this part of the additive to be 14% of 126 seats of the Legislative Assembly i.e. 17.6 rounded off to 18.'

In the North plain Brahmaputra Valley, there are major tribes i.e. the Bodos with a population of about 11.07 lakhs and the Mishings with a population of about 3.15 lakhs. The Bodo are mostly concentrated in areas west of the Sonipur district, though some pockets are found towards the east of that district. The Mishings are concentrated in the three districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur. There are other similar scheduled tribe communities also which make up the balance of 2.09 lakhs of a total ST population of about 16.31 lakhs in the north plain like Sonowal (1.02 lakh), Rabha (0.8 lakh), Deori (0.2 lakh), Lalung (0.05 lakh) and Mech (0.014 lakh). In such a demographic pattern the Committee suggested establishment of a three-tier socio-political structure.

Apart from the Bodo and the Mishing in the North Plain there are other scheduled tribe communities like Kachari-Sonwal (1,02,476), Rabha (80,097), Deori (20,128), Lalung (5,133), Mech (1,351), Hojai (29). So for an extremely small population, there should be a way to find representation at the village level in the Gami Jothums and Dolung Kebangs as well as at the regional level in Gudi Jothums and Bane Kebangs. If, for any reason, they are missed out, special provision should be made. Similarly, at the apex tier also, representation to the small tribes has to be ensured.

The earlier distinction between 'Same and 'Other' has now changed into 'We' and 'They' in modern political context. The British policy of Divide and Rule resulted not only in the rise of communalism but also in the institutionalization of tribal exclusiveness in North East India region. Ethnic movements which have been manifested in tribal revivalism based on the idea of this exclusiveness. In course of time, the ethnic movements have transformed from ethnicity to ethnocentricity.

There is no escape from building in India a pluralistic society composed already as it is of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual constituents. Any approach in the reverse direction will not only be unnatural and unrealistic, but also fraught with grave risks of internecine conflicts, collisions and

conflagrations. As against the parochial and fundamentalist forces in the country, the liberal and secular forces should strengthen themselves to counteract and contain them. Indeed, the challenges posed by narrow sectarian forces can be met only by liberal, tolerant thought and action. In the ample, over-flowing spaces of the Constitution, there is room to accommodate the legitimate needs and aspirations of all groups for fulfilling the vision of a bright future.



16625