

Aspiration for an 'Ethnic' Identity: Assessing Autonomy Movement in Karbi Anglong District of Assam, India

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Abstract: Movements for autonomy have marked the political discourse in North East India for the last decades. While some have resolutely expressed the need for more autonomy within the present set-up, other movements have evolved more militant, secessionist idea of political and geographical demarcation of territory. The aim and purpose of this autonomy movement is not only to bring change in the existing system, but also to augment legitimate expressions of aspirations by the people having a distinct culture, tradition and common pattern of living. The autonomy movement by the tribals of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam state in India is a result of continuous resentment and frustration of the hill tribal people, due to discrimination and oppression by the government of Assam and the plain people of Assam. Although, Autonomous District Council (ADC) existed in Karbi Anglong district since 1952 to give some sort of autonomy to the tribal people to administer themselves and take some developmental steps, much improvement could not be achieved due to limited power of the ADC and the state government's apathy. This very question of identity crisis of the ethnic groups impels them to resort to various sorts of ethnic movements demanding either autonomy or separation from the larger groups. The state of Assam itself has undergone several splits in the post independence period only to satisfy the ethnic aspirations of the different ethnic groups of the region. As in the other parts of the region, among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district of Assam, the question of ethnic identity is responsible for the ethnic movements of the Karbis demanding autonomy or statehood at different periods of times in the post independence period of the country. This paper tries to focus on those aspects of politicization which is playing a pivotal role in making the identity question and also finding out the factors inherited with the autonomy movement among the Karbi community of Assam.

Keywords: Autonomy, ethnicity, Movement, Aspiration, Karbi Anglong, Tribal.

1. INTRODUCTION

North-East region of India is bounded by the political boundary of China in the North, Bhutan in the West, Bangladesh in the East and Burma (Myanmar) in the South. North-East India is comprised of eight states and they are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Of these, Assam is the biggest state (as per land area) of this region consisting of Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley, which shares international borders with China, Myanmar (Burma), Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The British annexation of Assam into Colonial India began in 1824 as a response to the Burmese invasion of Assam in 1822 and was complete by 1839. The Colonial province of Assam, by 1874, was a large administrative area with the annexation of Naga Hills in 1826, Jaintia, Garo and Khasi Hills by 1835 and the Lushai Hills in 1895 into British India. The North East, by the time of India's independence in 1947, comprised of the states of Assam, Manipur, Tripura and the predominantly Buddhist frontier province of North East Frontier Agency (NEFA), which became a full fledged state of the Indian Union in 1986, and was renamed as Arunachal Pradesh. In the aftermath of Indian independence, different ethnic groups within the administrative domain of Assam began voicing their aspirations for self-determination that ranged from demands of autonomy within the Indian union to

complete secession. The Naga Hills district of Assam was separated from Assam and became a full-fledged state within the Indian union in 1963; however, attempts at secession from India continue and the Government of India is in negotiation with some of the secessionist groups, and a partial cease fire is in place. There are occasional bloody upsurges of interethnic clashes between the different ethnic groups fighting for secession and a negotiated settlement still looks remote. The Lushai Hill district, after a bloody and protracted struggle for secession, was separated from Assam as a centrally administered territory² in 1972, and a full-fledged state named Mizoram within the Indian union in 1987. Unlike Nagaland, statehood ushered in peace and stability, and Mizoram is held up as a success story of the Indian Government's policy of negotiated settlement. The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and Garo Hills district of Assam, in response to growing demand for autonomy by the 'tribal' areas of the state, was cohered into a semiautonomous region of Meghalaya within the state of Assam in 1970 before becoming a full-fledged state within the Indian union in 1972. Thus, by 1972 Assam was divided into four states: the Hindu majority Assam with a sizeable Muslim population, and the Christian hill states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. However, in the 1960's, there was a movement in the predominantly Bengali speaking Southern Assam, popularly known as Barak Valley, after the river Barak which flows through the region, against the Government of Assam's notification declaring Assamese as the official state language. On the 19th of May, 1961, 11 people lost their lives in a police shooting in Silchar, the headquarters of the southern Assam district of the then undivided Cachar, while agitating for the recognition of Bengali as an official language. The government of Assam subsequently gave the status of official language to Bengali in Southern Assam that now comprises of the three district of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. However, the language issue keeps cropping up sporadically, the latest being in 1980 when Assamese was made a compulsory subject in the secondary school of Assam, only to be subsequently rescinded. However, the creation of Meghalaya can be said to mark the first phase of the complete fracturing of Colonial Assam, and a relative lull was observed in territorial demands based on tribal/ ethnic/ linguistic identity till the 1980's. In 1979, the influential All Assam Students Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad³ (AAGSP) launched the anti-foreigners agitation against Bangladeshi immigrants, and it enjoyed unprecedented mass support in the hill districts and Brahmaputra valley, as all the constituent ethnic groups that went into the evolution and consolidation of the Assamese nation lent its might to the movement, popularly known as the Assam Agitation or Assam Movement that had as its agenda the identification and deportation of Bangladeshi nationals and the prevention of fresh infiltration. It was during the movement that the secessionist United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)⁴ was formed and a violent insurrection for an independent Assam was launched. The Assam accord was signed in 1985 with the Government of India, and the AASU and AAGSP agreed to end the movement. The political party Asom Gana Parishad⁵ came into being and it rode to power in 1985, steered by the leaders of the Assam Movement. Meanwhile, the ULFA gradually strengthened, and the armed and violent battle of attrition continues. Not all the contributing constituents of the Assam movement were happy with the aftermath of the Assam accord, and many found themselves out of the corridors of power. Upendranath Brahma, who was a close collaborator of AASU, launched the All Bodo Students Union's (ABSU) movement for the self-determination of the Bodos, the largest ethnic group in Assam, with the collaboration of Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC), formed on the lines of AAGSP in 1987. The principal demand was for a separate Bodoland state. Parallel to the ABSU's movement, groups like Bodoland Liberation Tigers (BLT) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) were formed; whose agenda was a violent and armed rebellion for the self-determination and freedom of the Bodo people. In 1995, the Indian Government conceded the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council to the Bodo people, but the movement for statehood still continues, in the trajectories of the up gradation of Meghalaya from an autonomous region to statehood, with one faction of the NDFB in a truce and the other in rebellion. Similar statehood demands dot Assam, with the hill districts of Karbi Anglong demanding a Karbi State for the Karbi ethnic group and the hill district of North Cachar Hills demanding a Dimas state for the Dimasa ethnic group by integrating all Dimasa speaking regions of the North East that includes tracts in Nagaland and Southern Assam. Both demands are backed by armed rebel groups, factions of which are now in negotiations, while others carry on with their insurrection. The recent renaming of the district of North Cachar Hills to Dima Hasao (land of the Dimasas) invited strong protests from other ethnic groups like the Hmars and Jeme Nagas, as they contend the assertion that North Cachar Hills is a Dimasa homeland.

Objectives of the study: The main objectives of this study are:

- (1) To study the historical background of the Karbi Ethnic Movement from the angle of ethnic identity question.
- (2) To find out the factors responsible for inculcating the ethnic aspiration of Karbis.

(3) To study the role of some ethnic based political parties of the district in leading the autonomy movement in Karbi Anglong.

(4) To highlight the different actions taken by the ethnic based civil-society groups of Karbi Anglong.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on descriptive method with the help of both primary and secondary data. The primary sources of data included the official records and data collected from the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), through personal interviews with some of the leading pro-autonomy/separation leaders and ethnic based civil-society groups of the district. Apart from this, the chronicles, research books, research papers, periodical articles, magazines, encyclopedias and journals are the secondary sources also incorporated to the study in order to bring out the main aspects of the research paper. The methodology for this study is also analytical, evaluative, interpretative and comparative as well.

Ethnicity and aspiration for identity: Ethnicity stands for a group's way of conceptualizing and relating to society. It welds together individuals who share a history, culture and community, who have an amalgam of language, religion and regional belonging in common and perhaps most critical of all, they feel that they come from the same stock. Though the term ethnicity is of recent origin, its idea has been present since long. Its probable first use by David Riesman in 1953 only renamed an already existing and recognized phenomenon. People have identified themselves with particular cultures through processes like acculturation, integration and assimilation. Ethnic identity on the other hand is an affiliative construct, where individuals view themselves and others view them as belonging to a particular cultural group (Trimble and Dickson: in press). The growth of the spirit of ethnicity or ethnic self-assertion among various groups leads to the aspiration for a distinct identity for themselves. The ethnic groups with a small population and low exposure to development tend to suffer from an identity crisis. The aspirations for an independent ethnic identity lead to the formation of a nation within a nation through various ways including ethnic struggles and violence.

Growth and Development of the Karbi Ethnic Movement: The demand for formation of Mikir Hills district in the mid-decade of the last millennium paved the road for initiation of Karbi ethnic consciousness. The Karbi youths, who were educated through the newly institutionalized education systems of that time, could see the backwardness of their community in terms of education, health and development. They also became conscious of the marginalization and hegemonic subordinations that their community had been subjected to, from the so-called mainstream society. Such awakening led them to the seeding of the idea of self-rule of themselves. Moreover, the official policy of the newly independent Indian state at that time was confronting between two polarized views, which was reflected in the Elwin– Ghurye debate. G. S. Ghurye, the founder of anthropology in India, was of the view that the tribal communities could be regarded as backward Hindus, which endorses the idea of integrating them with the mainstream Hindu society. In contrast, noted ethnographer and tribal activist Verrier Elwin held a more protectionist view towards maintaining the distinction of the tribal communities. Elwin's perspective seemed to be more influential in the governmental policies and activities, especially towards the tribal people of Assam and the North-East India, in the post-independence times. This led to a preservationist policy towards the tribal culture and heritage, which, in turn, facilitated the emergence of the ethnic politics legitimated by the state itself. In the context of the then undivided Assam (now the North-East India), it started with the Naga insurgency which erupted in the wake of Indian independence. In the coming years, voices from other communities were also raised in the similar tone. The beginning of the Karbi ethnic consciousness can also be traced back to this time of the Indian independence. In this chapter, a detailed trajectory of the growth and development of Karbi ethnic national politics will be attempted.

Autonomy Demands of the Karbis: The Karbi Hills, politically known as Karbi Anglong is one of the two hill districts of present Assam, the other being the NC Hills (Presently known as Dima Hasao). At the beginning, i.e. in 1951, when the districts were carved out was known as the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. In the year 1952, both the Karbis and Dimasas were granted autonomy in the form of separate District Councils under the 6th Schedule of the Indian constitution. The present Karbi Anglong by then was a sub division, namely, the Mikir Hills and this was further renamed as Mikir Hills district in the year 1971 by separating North Cachar district from it. Since 1976, the name of the district was changed to Karbi Anglong. Again, in the year 1995, the Union government by granting more powers to the Autonomous District Council upgraded it to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

The Karbis, formerly known as the Mikirs are the major community of the districts of Karbi Anglong and the district is named after them. It is worth mentioning that the Karbis, who have been classed as „Scheduled Tribe Hills“ by the census of India, occupy an important position among the tribal communities of Assam in particular and the North East India in general. They constitute the third largest tribal community in Assam after the Bodos and the Mishings and are the principal tribal community in the Karbi Anglong district, the largest district of Assam having an autonomous administrative system vested by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Ethnically, they belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages.

Formation of Mikir Hills District (Karbi Anglong): The coming of the Christian Missionaries in the hills of Karbi Anglong during later decades of the 19th century brought the illiterate and tribal people of the hills under the purview of colonial modernity. The white men’s burden of civilizing the savage led to the twin processes – religious conversion to Christianity and spread of western education. Within a short span of time, a considerable section of the Karbis adopted Christianity in the early 20th century. Some of these neophyte Christians also passed out of the Missionary educated who could feel the relative backwardness of their own community.

However, unlike the state of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya of North- East India, where majority or sometimes the entire population was converted to Christianity, the absolute religious cleansing did not take place among the Karbis or among other tribal communities of the present-day Assam. As such, diverse religious affiliations worked crucially at certain levels in furthering the political discourse of the people. Semson Singh Ingti, the father and architect of Karbi nation and nationalism was a Christian Mission-educated gentleman who first raised the issue of a separate district for the Karbis. As a part of Christian Mission, Semson’s father shifted from Tika hills of present day west Karbi Anglong to Golaghat where Semson got his early education in Golaghat Mission School, and did his matriculation from Bezbaruah High School, Golaghat. Later he went to Cotton College and finally completed his Graduation from Murari Chand College of Sylhet in 1933. Once he came back after his higher education, Semson Sing Ingti was appointed as a School Sub-Inspector in Education Department. This service opportunity gave him the scope to know the illiterate, backward Karbi people living in villages and hills. Visiting different primary schools as a part of his Government duty, he could see the appalling conditions of primary education and economic backwardness of his community. He tried to bring all the Karbis scattered in different places to one geographical space and to form a single political administration so that necessary measures could be taken for the upliftment of the Karbis. Along with Samson Sing, a set of other educated elite came out from the community and a political consciousness of the Karbis developed. Some of such individuals of that time were namely Khorsing Terang, Nihang Rongpher, Song Be, etc.

This attempt of bringing all the scattered Karbis under a singular political and geographical constellation was the manifestation of imagining themselves as an ethnic community. However a more immediate agenda was to function like a pressure group towards the desired course of development for the people and their places. The newly emerged political consciousness is reflected in the memorandums submitted to the then Governors of Assam. Samson Sing and his colleagues welcomed Sir Robert Neir, the Governor of Assam, at Mohongdijua Camp, during his visit to upper Assam via Mikir hills in 1940. There, the delegates led by Samson submitted the first memorandum where it was informed that, “Mikirs who have been kept in perpetual subordination by their progressive neighbours beg to express our deep gratitude to Your Excellency for taking in for the first time a Mikir Representative in Provincial Legislature, an act which has not only received appreciation from the Mikir people but has also worked as an initiative among the Mikir youths for improving the status of their tribe; and we sincerely hope that however busily engaged Your Excellency might be with multifarious activities. Your Excellency would be graciously pleased to bear in mind the deplorable condition of the Mikirs due to complete isolation in the jungle area of the hills and further to redress to their legitimate grievances as embodied in the memorial annexed herewith.” Thus the political consciousness of the Karbis started and in the later periods the demands became more crystallized. With the formation of various political organizations, the mobilization process got momentum in later times. One old Karbi Socio-Political organization namely Karbi A Dorbar was formed in the year 1946 at Hawaipur of the then Nogaon district. Samson Sing Ingti was nominated as General Secretary and Sarsing Teron Haber became the President of the organization. Right from its inception, the A dorbar was concerned about the problems of its community. On 1st March, 1947, it submitted a memorandum at Lanka to Sir Andrew Claw, the then Governor of Assam, in his visit to the tribal dominated areas along with his wife. Some of the important issues highlighted in the memorandum were necessity of educational, medical, and agricultural facilities and governmental recognition of the A Dorbar.

The memorandum says, “We, the Mikir people who are in every respect backward and neglected, feel most encouraged by Your Excellency and Lady Claw’s presence in our midst today.The country is passing through a most critical time in the political history of India. Every minority community is fully alert of the situation and asserting their best for their own political safeguards. The Mikirs, as well have strongly organized themselves to voice their feelings through their only All Assam association called ‘Karbi A Dorbar’. We humbly pray to Your Excellency to give due recognition to the aforesaid Association, so that in the matter of framing the coming Constitution of the country, the Association is consulted. Your Excellency is aware that the Mikir people are living in areas where there are scanty educational, medical, and agricultural facilities. Communication as compared to with rest of the province is nil. So we most humbly pray the immediate steps are taken to better the conditions prevailing in these areas. It is general opinion of the country that the backward tribes require protection and protective rules in the Hills. But we have come to know that there is a proposal for the abolition of Chin Hill Regulations. If that is done, we pray that some other rules or regulations should be substituted for safeguard the interest and existence of the illiterate and ignorant Mikir people.” An important issue reflected in the above memorandum is the vouch for a protective administration of the Karbi population that can safeguard their tradition and culture.

There was colonial regulation, under the name of Chin Hill Regulation which was initially passed in 1896 for the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) which authorized the Superintendent or Deputy Commissioner to order an undesirable outsider to leave the area and to tax the residents, permanent or temporary, clans and villages. In 1911, this regulation was also extended to the Mikir Hills which protected the Karbi localities from outsiders. A concern for the removal of this regulation is revealed in the above memorandum. The Inner Line Permit was introduced in the year 1873 to certain areas of North-East, especially to the hills of the region. The then Mikir hills were part of the two districts of Assam viz. Nowgong and Sivsagar; hence it suffered most as it was nobody’s child. The Mikir Hills tract in the colonial period was constituted with the administrative boundary of Nowgong district from the year 1884. There was no administrative boundary of Mikir Hills until 1884. Through the Frontier Regulation Act 1884, it came under Nowgong district. A part of the tract was transferred to Sivsagar district in 1893. In 1928, the Simon Commission came; and under its advice, the categories of excluded areas and partially excluded areas were created. Creating and separating some areas from the mainland by this process, the colonial Government began treating such areas with different administrative measures. The Mikir Hills fell under the partially excluded areas in 1935. During the time of Indian independence, with the recommendation of Cabinet Mission, the constituent Assembly hurriedly formed a committee named as Fundamental Rights of the Minority and Tribals and Excluded Area. Ballav Bhai Patel was the chairman of this committee. It set the sub-committee for NORTH-EAST Frontier (Assam) Tribal’s and Excluded Area, taking Gopinath Bordoloi as the chairman of the sub-committee. This sub-committee is popularly known as Bordoloi Committee. Rev. JJ Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma and A. V. Thakkar were the members of the committee. Semson Sing Ingti, and Khorsing Terang were the co-opted members of Bordoloi Committee.

The Bordoloi sub-committee found ‘considerable’ but unequal progress in the hill areas. The Mikir Hills and the Garo Hills –both the partially excluded areas were found to be the most backward areas of the region. Thus, creation of a separate district including the partially excluded areas of Nowgong and Sivsagar district was the need of the hour for the newly independent state for a fast development of the backward people. The rising elites of the community also found an immediate solution for the development of the community through the creation of a separate hill district for the Karbis. Karbi A Dorbar, as it claimed the first socio-political organization became the mouthpiece of the community. On 18th May of 1947, the Dorbar submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee where it demanded a separate district for the Karbis. They desired consolidation of the Mikir areas, protection of customs and extension of franchise. On the recommendation of the Bordoloi Committee and further modifications, the Constitution of India adopted the Provision of Sixth Schedule for the hill population of North-East India. After India got independence the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district also came into existence vide Government notification dated 17.11.1951 no. TAD/R/31/50/ as the largest district of Assam curving an area of 4421.12 square kilometres from then Nagaon district, 4382.28 square kilometres from Sivsagar district, and 1540 square kilometre from Khasi and Jaintia Hills district the United Mikir and North Cachar District was created. The Autonomous District Council formed under the provision of Sixth Schedule on 23rd June 1952. In the year 1970, bifurcating United Mikir Hills District, Mikir Hills and North Cachar district was created. Following this on 14th October in 1976, vide Government notification TAD/R/115/74/47 Dtd. 14.10.1976 Mikir

Hills District was renamed as Karbi Anglong. Karbi Anglong is now the largest district of Assam comprising 10434 square kilometres of area. Diphu is the Headquarter of the district; and two other sub-divisions are Bokajan and Hamren.

Consolidation and Institutionalization of Karbi Identity: The formation of Autonomous District Council under the Provision of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution brought the ‘anarchist population’ to the modern set up of the new state. The process had already been started during the colonial rule. In addition to the Karbi A Dorbar, formation of other bodies in subsequent times under the names and styles of KSA (Karbi Students Association), Karbi Lamet Amei (Karbi Literary Society), Karbi Cultural Society, Kabi Riso Adabar, etc. gave momentum to the ethnic mobilization among the Karbis. In Assam, the students’ organizations and literary bodies of different communities always play vital role in articulating identity. In Assamese nationalist discourse, Bodo nationalist discourse the literary bodies (Asom Shitya Sabha, Bodo Thunlai Afad) and Students Union (All Assam Students Union, All Bodo Students Union) have been seen as the prime movers of nationalist ideology.

Karbi A-Dorbar: The first socio-political organization of the Karbis was Karbi-A Dorbar was formed in 1946 at Hawaipur, near Lanka. Sarsing Teron Habe and SS Ingti was the founder President and Secretary of the Adorbar. Right from its inception political consciousness is seen of the organization as it took active part in demanding, submitting memorandum for the formation of a separate district for the Karbis.

Karbi Riso Adorbar: Asom Karbi Riso Adarbar was established in the year 1964 on 25th January taking Bronson Ingti as President and Birensing Ingti as the Secretary. Later, the prefix Asom was removed and it was renamed as Karbi Riso Adarbar. The APHLC movement tried to include Mikir hills in the proposed hill state, but it was subsequently opposed in Karbi Anglong by Karbi Riso Adarbar. They submitted a memorandum to the then Home Minister Y. B. Chawan opposing the federal plan of the Government for re-organizing the state in his visit to Assam. It also took a resolution in the Annual session of the Association held at Parkhuwa which considered that the proposed separate hill state issue vis-à-vis, so call federal plan is a vague idea. A section of leaders of the Karbi A Dorbar supported the hills state movement and Riso-Adarbar opposed such moves

Karbi Cultural Society: The Karbi Cultural Society was formed in 1977 on 30th January in Diphu. Since its inception KCS has been trying to preserve and promote Karbi culture and heritage. It is responsible for organizing the Karbi Youth Festival. It claims Karbi Youth Festival as the biggest ethnic festival. It is celebrated every year during February 15-19th which is one of the prominent initiatives to preserve and propagate Karbi oral and material culture. Initially it was celebrated in small scale, but nowadays it is celebrated in a grand way where food festival, exhibition, musical entertainment and other material and nonmaterial cultural forms are celebrated. A permanent site for the festival was developed near Diphu. APHLC Movement & Karbi Anglong: The formation of State Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1954 received mixed reactions in the hills of Assam. W.A. Sangma, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Garo Hills District Council convened a meeting of all the CEMs to discuss some of their mutual interests at Shillong. Except the CEM of Mikir Hills District Council, all the other CEMs were present. The meeting resolved that a separate hills state should be formed and Sixth Schedule needs amendment. The Assam Hills Tribal Leaders’ Conference held at Tura in the same year on October adopted the similar resolution comprising all the Autonomous districts, and decided to submit a memorandum to State Reorganization Commission. The SRC rejecting the demand said, “Generally speaking, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Lushai Hills are not in favour of a separate hill state and the District Council in the Lushai Hills and the Karbi a dorbar (Mikir National Council) are in favour of the status quo. The agitation in favour of hill state is, therefore confined virtually to the Garo and Khasi and Jaintia Hills. “In 1955, in a conference of the tribal leaders held at Aizawl, it formed a political party, called Eastern India Tribal Union, with similar demands. In the general election in 1957 it won couple of seats in different constituencies of the hills. Meanwhile, the Assam Assembly in 1960 approved the Language Bill by which Assamese language was adopted as the State language. It received negative reactions especially in the hills areas of then Assam as well as among the other tribals of plains and also in Bengali dominated Barak valley. As a part of the reaction, in 1960, W.A. Sangma called a conference of all the Hills tribal leaders at Tura on July 20. In the meeting, the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed. The meeting opposed the language bill that Assam Government brought to Legislative Assembly.

The APHLC raised serious concerns against the Language Bill, as it felt that tribals are unsecured under this Government and considered the move as the cultural aggression of Assamese nationalism over the minorities. As such, the APHLC started raising demand for a separate state comprising the hills areas of the then Assam. The formation of APHLC (All

Party Hills Leaders Conference) in 1960 had a mixed reaction in Karbi Anglong and among the Karbis. Concerned with the language policy of the Assam Government, demand for a separate hills state was stronger. To neutralize the Naga aspirations, in 1963, the state of Nagaland was created. After series of demands and movement, by the 22nd Amendment of Indian Constitution, on 25th December, 1969, passing the Assam reorganization bill, Meghalaya was created as a state within the state comprising Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills. The article is named as Article 244 A. After formation of United Mikir Hills and north Cachar District, the political consciousness came into existence with the idea of reformation of the state. The formation of Meghalaya and Nagaland was one of the catalytic factors. The APHLC however, demanded for a separate state including all the hill areas of Assam, excluding Nagaland. A branch was established in Karbi Anglong also under the leadership of Raidang Ingti, John Kathar, Devidalang Enghi, Maniram Langne and so forth. In between 1961-62 a meeting was held at Deothor, where DD Lyngdoh, Darwin Piu, Nichols Roy etc. were present where a consensus could not be achieved among the Karbis in this issue. Contrary to the support of APHLC, a section of Karbi leadership had opposed the movement by voicing against the inclusion of Karbi Anglong in proposed hill state. This difference of opinion is believed to be due to the religious difference between the Christianized and the other Karbi leaders. Chatrasing Teron, Choi Choi Teron, Dhaniram Rongpi, Joysing Doloi were some of the leaders who opposed the move of the APHLC at Karbi Anglong. The religious affiliation always played a significant role in Karbi politics since its inception.

The architect of modern Karbi Anglong Samson Sing Ingti lost the election with Khorsing Terang in the lone assembly seat from Mikir Hills as because of his religious affiliation i.e. Samson was a Christian. The APHLC movement was also nullified in Karbi Anglong as almost all the leaders of the organization were Christian. So there was a counter campaign that the movement for a separate hills state was a movement of the Christian leaders. According to many leaders, Karbi Riso Adarbar was established to check the Christian aggression in Karbi Anglong. In 1968, the Assam Government announced the formation of autonomous state of Meghalaya out of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Garo hills. The APHLC appealed the leaders of Karbi Anglong to take a resolution in Autonomous District Council (ADC) for inclusion of Mikir hills in the new state. But the leaders of Karbi Anglong who were engaged to APHLC movement were not the members of ADC. There was only one member namely Raidang Ingti in the ADC who supported the APHLC movement. Hence the resolution of inclusion of Mikir Hills could not be taken in ADC and Karbi Anglong did not become a part of the separate state of Meghalaya. Even during the times of creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963, a considerable amount of land of Karbi Anglong was occupied by the Nagas, for which political tension in the border erupted (the border dispute is still going on). To solve the land dispute, a one-man commission was formed with K.V.K. Sundaram, the then Advisor of Home Affairs, and Government of India. When Sundaram made his visit to Karbi Anglong in 1971, a section of Karbi leaders submitted a memorandum where they demanded full inclusion of Karbi Anglong in the newly formed state of Nagaland. The signatories were Bapuram Singnar, Sarsing Teron, Alex D. Sangma, Resulo Hinbe Rengma, Chondrasing Tokbi, Monsing Rongpher, and Thousal D. Sangma. In the memorandum it said,

1. The original area of Naga Hills district where it was initially formed included the whole area of the Mikir Hills, North of Barapani, river and East of Kapili river the then Naga Hills District.
2. Whereby the subsequent modification of the Naga Hills boundary, as modified by the Govt. of India in 1875 some portion of the present Mikir inhabited areas were out of the then Naga Hills
3. The Mikir people as a whole, have been as a whole have been struggling heart and soul to be out of Assam and have worked together with the APHLC to achieve this end.
4. Under the circumstances mentioned above, and to fulfill the wishes of the people, we wish to affirm our desire that the whole of the present Mikir Hills district with its contiguous areas, without disintegrating, be merged with Nagaland without delay. In another memorandum submitted to the Governor of Assam, on 12th April, 1972 by Mikir Hills Nationalist Organization also raised the similar demand. It also said that it had actively participated in the APHLC movement. During the creation of Meghalaya, though option was given but many people demanded that the decision should be taken after the election of ADC, but election was not held despite the term of the ADC was over by that time. The same organization again submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi raising the similar demand. But the demand was rejected by both states viz. Assam and Nagaland. Hence the demand of incorporating Mikir Hills in Nagaland was not fulfilled.

Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC): The Assam Movement (1979-1985), which has been discussed in the previous chapter, was a movement primarily for the deportation of the illegal Bangladeshi migrants from Assam. Though the various ethnic community leaders of Assam participated in, and sacrificed their lives, for the common cause of the elimination of foreigners, the movement is now remembered by many as a site of the chauvinistic nationalism of the Assamese-speaking caste Hindu and non-tribal segments of the Brahmaputra valley. Several participating ethnic communities felt betrayed afterwards; and reacted politically against the hegemonic attitude of the Assamese nationalists towards the so-called tribal leaders and the people behind them. Most of the leaders of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC, a political party of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar district formed in 1986, after the Assam movement) of the Karbis were initially a part of the student leadership of the Assam movement.

In an interview, Haliram Terang, one of the founders of the ASDC, narrated the cause of forming a different political party in Karbi Anglong district after Assam movement. According to Terang, in the 1985 Assembly Elections, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came to an alliance with the newly formed Peoples Democratic Forum (PDF) headed by Dr. Jayanta Rongpi. Among the four Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Karbi Anglong, namely Diphu, Howraghat, Bokajan and Baithalangso, it was only the Baithalangso constituency where the candidate from the AGP-PDF alliance won in that Election.

This winning candidate was Haliram Terang himself. However, in the general context of Assam, the AGP won that election with unprecedented majority and its leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta formed his ministry in 1985. But Mahanta did not include Terang in his ministry despite the fact that Terang was the sole winning candidate of the AGP-PDF alliance. Instead, Samsing Hanse, the winner from Diphu constituency under the banner of the Karbi Anglong Peoples Conference (KAPC) was given a ministerial berth in the AGP ministry. According to Terang, Samsing Hanse was offered ministry because of the pressure of Asom Sahitya Sabha, as Hanse was an active member of the Sabha. Now it is widely held in the political circles that if Haliram Terang were included in the cabinet, there would have been no scope for forming a different political party named as ASDC. After formation of the ASDC, the Karbi politics got a boost and the demand for an autonomous state came to be more concretized and strengthened. To carry on the demand for the implementation of Article 244 A in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, the Karbi political elites finally formed an organization called Autonomous State Demand Committee on 17th May of 1986. Most of the leaders of ASDC were the students who took part in the Assam Movement. The ASDC brought together peoples from different political and non-political organizations of the Karbis and Dimasas community to make the movement stronger. In the same year of formation of the ASDC, another organization called Karbi Anglong North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHASDCOM) was also formed. However, the ASDC could not form its branches in the entire district of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The Karbi Students Association (KSA) joined hand in hand with ASDC in the movement right from the inception of ASDC. The political activism of ASDC was included mobilizing of people through meetings, strikes, protest-rallies and so on.

The movement, which was led separately by ASDC-KSA and KANCHASDCOM, got its peak during the years 1986-1989. Strikes, protests, processions became frequent events in Karbi Anglong during this period. In 1989, the ASDC participated in the state electoral politics; won 22 out of 26 seats in the Council. In the Election Manifesto, ASDC leader Dr. Jayanta Rongpi stated the objective of the party and the movement: "objective of the party and the movement for autonomy was to achieve more decentralization of the political, economic, socio-cultural and parliamentary power and restore them to the people of the region by the formation of an Autonomous State." It also assured the other non-Karbis of the region that it would remain non-hostile to the non-Karbis. Dr. Jayanta Rongpi was selected as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Council. However, even after the coming of the ASDC to electoral politics, the intensity of the movement continued remain high in different forms of resistance and protest. The Karbi youths became cynical towards the amount of power offered to them in the name of self-rule via Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, who later got elected as member to the Indian parliament in New Delhi, described the inefficiency of the Sixth Schedule provision in one of his parliamentary debate. The Sixth Schedule has been in practice since 1952. I have the experience of heading such Autonomous Hill Council for seven long years. I was the Chief of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for seven years. With that experience I can say that the Sixth Schedule has failed in India since 1952 there was considerable amount of leftist influence in the ASDC right from its inception.

Dr. Jayanta Rongpi and Holiram Terang were the primary members of Communist Party of India's Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML) fraction. Initially it was not disclosed, but with the passing of time the fact came to be known as many leaders and cadres could not accept that political ideology. ASDC kept on enjoying absolute majority in all the elections of the Council till 2002 and showed good results Assembly elections and Parliamentary elections as well. The growing influence of ASDC and rising demand for implementation of Article 244 A became stronger with the increasing intensity of the movement. Finally, the ASDC came to discussion with Assam State Government and Central Government of India. As a part of the discussion, the State Government agreed to hand over 30 administrative departments to the Autonomous District Council in 1995. In the periodic elections of ADC, State Assembly and Parliament, the issue of autonomous state remained as a major issue; where different political parties tried to exploit the sentiment of the common Karbis

3. CONCLUSION

Thus, the assertion of Karbi identity and autonomy movement led to a unique and complicated situation. It created a rift not only between the different ethnic groups but also between Karbis themselves causing uncertainty and tension in the two autonomous district councils Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous District Council of Assam. It is important to mention that a proper assessment and occasional review of the whole system is required so that aims, purpose and objectives of the Autonomous District Council can be meaningful and serve the interests and aspirations of the people for whom it is meant. It will further require political maturity and astute political maneuvers of the Karbi leadership who will have to take all sections of the society along with them in their voyage towards the separate state movement.

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