CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Dimasa Nationality Question requires a discussion on the definition of the terms, *ethnic, tribe* and *nationality* so as to point out clearly as to why the Dimasa identity issue is regarded as a *nationality question* and not an *ethnic* one. The term *ethnic* is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* meaning *people, nation, foreign people*. In general terms an *ethnic group* is a group of people whose members identify with each other, through a common *heritage* that is real or assumed. This shared heritage may be based upon putative common ancestry, *history, culture traditions, kingship, religion, language* shared territory, *nationality* or *physical appearance*. Members of an *ethnic group* are conscious of belonging to an *ethnic group*; moreover *ethnic identity* is further marked by the recognition from others of a group's distinctiveness. ¹

For the purpose of the present study, Rajan Ganguli’s definition of an ethnic group is appropriate. According to him an ethnic group is,

either a large or small group of people, in either backward or advanced societies who are united by a common inherited culture (including language music, food dress and customs and practices), racial similarity common religion and belief in common history and ancestry and who exhibit a strong psychological sentiment of belonging to the group.²

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¹ Encyclopaedia of Social Science, Wikipedia.
An ethnic group mobilizes itself for its own common interest and creates an atmosphere to distinguish itself from other groups. It uses particular cultural marker, symbols etc. To quote Paul Brass:

Any group of people dissimilar from other peoples in terms of objective culture criteria and containing within its membership, either in principle or in practices, the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction forms an ethnic category. The objective cultural markers may be a language or dialect, distinctive dress or diet or customs, religion or race.  

The use of cultural markers distinguish the ethnic group from other social groups, which is based on gender, class or age grades. Moreover, such type of self consciousness led to the ethnic group to claim certain recognition from the other groups either as superior or as equal in status. Thus starts the process of ethnic formation.

The process of ethnic formation occurs in three stages. They are Dormant, Calmed and the Active ethnicity. The social behaviour of a particular group can be effected by factors like urbanization, geographical mobility etc. These factors strengthen the ‘We’ and ‘They’ attitude among the members of particular groups. This leads to the development of a consciousness among them which may be termed as ethnic consciousness. This stage is known as Dormant ethnicity, a consciousness that is always present.

The ethnic consciousness of a particular group often receives a challenge from the dominant group or from other social, economic or political forces. These

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forces call upon the particular group to follow its given dictate or formula. The socio-economic and political supremacy of the dominant group, thus suppresses the process of ethnic consciousness of a particular group. This stage is termed as *Calmed ethnicity*. As stated by B. Pakem this stage is generally marked with ethnic resentment. It is at this stage that the government and the politicians suppress or calmed down the process of such ethnic formation.  

The process of ethnic formation reaches its peak, when it raises its voice for political participation through the formation of regional political parties.  

This stage is known as *Active ethnicity*. However, mere formation of regional political parties is not the only criteria of *Active ethnicity*. The consciousness of a particular ethnic group in the socio-political arena also reflects the characteristic of *Active ethnicity*.

The term *Tribe* is often used to refer to an ethnic group. This term was used by British colonialists to refer to the group of people who live in either hill or backward areas. However, the term *Tribe* itself is not sufficient to refer to the activities or the consciousness of a particular group of people. To quote B. K. Roy Burman:

> Any hereditary group with shared values, style of life, and exclusive symbol of identity and consciousness of kind can be considered as an ethnic group. Obviously an ethnic group shares many features with tribal social organisation; but all ethnic groups are not tribes. Generally a tribal community has historical association or prerogative in respect of some

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5  loc. cit.
6  Ibid, p. 117.
productive resources; an ethnic group may not have such prerogative.

Besides tribal societies are relatively closed societies; all ethnic groups may not be closed societies to the same extent.\(^7\)

Despite sharing some common characteristics, there is a difference between the term *tribe* and *ethnic group* in its existence and manifestation. As for example most of the diaspora community may not be regarded as a *tribe* due to their disconnection with a particular territory; but they may be regarded as an *ethnic group*.

The process of ethnic formation reaches its final stage when that particular group raises a demand for secession and this marks the beginning of the process of nationality formation.\(^8\)

In this regard, Lenin's standpoint on the nationality question is mention worthy. He maintained that there are two tendencies in the nationality question. The *awakening of national life, national movements and the struggle against all national oppression*, aspire to *create national states* is the first tendency; while the *development and growing frequency of international intercourse, the breakdown of national barriers, the creation of the international unity of capital of economic life in general, of politics, science, etc* is the second tendency.\(^9\)

Moreover, Lenin advocated for the right to self-determination and secession for addressing the nationality question. As he defined:

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\(^7\) B. Choudhary, (ed), *Ethno Politics and Identity Crisis*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 32.  
\(^8\) B. Pakem (ed), *op. cit.* p. 117.  
By self-determination is meant political and not merely cultural self-determination; nation does not only have the right to self-determination but can go as far as secession and the formation of independent states.\textsuperscript{10} However, it will be simplistic to argue that the demand of secession of a particular group is the starting point of nationality formation. The process of nationality formation may be started without the demand of secession or complete independence from its core area. The demand of a particular group for a major share of power in the existing political system may also be the starting point of nationality formation. Moreover, there is an objective difference between the \textit{ethnic group} and the \textit{nationality}. As Brass maintains:

> The process of nationality formation is one in which objective difference between ethnic groups acquire increasingly subjective and symbolic significance, are translated into a consciousness of and a desire for group solidarity and become the basis for successful political demands.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Brass identifies three stages of nationality formation.} The first stage is related to ethnicity with an \textbf{emphasis on cultural markers} only. Culture becomes the symbol of group activity. The political demands remain insignificant. The second stage begins when \textit{language, clan, and even religion becomes the central point of attention}. The process of political consciousness of cultural identity begins with a community interest. The growing political consciousness translates into community interest with the demands of social recognition, economic benefits and even constitutional rights such as voting and reservation for the particular community. This is followed by the third stage when the \textbf{process of nationality formation starts}

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\item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p.12.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Paul R. Brass, \textit{op. cit.} p. 22.
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with concrete political demands. The ethnic groups work towards the articulation and acquisition of social, economic and political rights for the members of the group or for the group as a whole.

Brass observes that the perceived needs and demands of the group determine its size and distribution, its relation with other groups and the political demands may aim at relatively modest civil, educational and political rights and opportunities for the individual members of the group or for recognition of the group’s corporate existence as a political body or nationality.\(^\text{12}\) He categorically pointed out that in so far as an ethnic group succeeds by its own efforts in achieving and maintaining group rights though political action and political mobilization; it has gone beyond ethnicity to establish itself as nationality.\(^\text{13}\) The present research work, the Dimasa Nationality Question, is based on this argument put forth by Paul Brass.

Nationality is itself a social category. David Miller identifies several features which contribute towards the formation of nationality. First of all, national communities are constituted by belief; Nation exists when their members recognize one another as compatriots and believe that they share characteristics of the relevant kind.\(^\text{14}\) The historical continuity is the second feature of a nationality. He states:

Nations stretch backwards into the past and indeed in most cases their origins are conveniently lost in the mists of time. In the course of this history, various significant events have occurred, and we can identify with

\(^{12}\) Ibid, p.23.

\(^{13}\) loc. cit.

the actual people who acted at those moments, reappropriating their deeds as our own. Often these events involve military victories and defeats.  

An **active identity** of a particular group is the third important feature of the nationality.

Nations are communities that do things together, take decisions, achieve results, and so forth. Of course, this cannot be literary so: we rely on proxies who are seen as embodying the national will- statesman, soldiers, sportsman etc.  

Another characteristic of a nationality is that it connects a group of people to a **particular geographical place** and here again there is a clear contrast with most other group identities that people affirm.  

A **common public culture** as Miller puts it is the basic characteristic of a nationality. He explains:

> a national identity requires that the people who should have something in common, a set of characteristic that in the past was often referred to as a 'national character' but which I prefer to describe as a common public culture. It is incompatible with nationality to think of the members of the nation as people who merely happen to have been thrown together in one place and forced to share a common fate.  

Thus, factors like shared belief and mutual commitment, historical continuity, active identity, connection with particular territory and the distinguished public culture have contributed to the process of nationality formation. This work will show how all these factors are found in the history of the Dimasa

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15 Ibid, p. 23.  
17 loc. cit.  
18 Ibid, p. 25.
and it explains why their identity issue has been described as a ‘nationality question.’

Here, again the question of nation and nationality emerges as a focal point of discussion. A nation is a concrete manifestation of several ethnic groups, communities with a common territory, language, economic life and a psychological make-up, as stated by the Soviet statesmen ideologue, Joseph Stalin. The nation is being formed to organize and run the independent sovereign authority. That sovereign authority is also accepted by the people of diverse ethnic groups, communities who share a common territory. The sovereign authority is also recognized by the other sovereign authorities from outside the particular territory. The willingness to continue the sovereign status is the primary responsibility of that institution. However, a nationality may exist without such sovereign authority or the desire for one. To quote B. K. Roy Burman:

In case of Nationality the lack of “will” to organize independent state power may not be because of incapacity, but because of qualitative difference with nation about the meaning of power. In case of the nation, it is the coercive power of the state which is the primary source of its continuation as a distinct entity. In case of nationality it is the historical moral binding which has more or less equal claim with the coercive dimension of the source of power of the state.19

Moreover, while nation is created in a common territory, a nationality may not be a part of that common territory. Rather a nationality may exist in two different nations. The Germans of erstwhile East and West Germany, Koreans of North and South Korea and even the Bengalis of India and Bangladesh are

19 B. Choudhary, op. cit. p.423.
the classic examples of nationality existing in different nations. Likewise a *nationality* is a mono-language or dialect entity with cultural markers. Despite the spread, development and recognition of the language or dialect, a *nationality* can express itself through that language or dialect which is also a part of the public culture. However, a *nation* may not be regarded as a mono-language entity. Despite its patronage to a particular language of a dominant group, it has to recognize the multilingual status of the other components. The state of India is a classic example in this regard. Several nationalities living in India exhibit their own languages, despite the state declared national language. The state of India also recognizes the languages of nationalities in its constitutional frame.

To conclude it can be argued that the term *ethnic, ethnic group, nationality* and *nation* are interconnected to some extent. The socio-political mobility and nature of struggle for existence and assertion opens new stages of development gradually. Thus ethnicity is the initial stage of a particular group of people, related with the existence of cultural markers only. Then the process of the evolution of political consciousness of cultural identity begins. The third stage of nationality formation begins with the development of the concept of right to self-determination. The concept of nationality does not always involve with the aspiration for complete Independence, even, when the pragmatic consideration may involve a utopian plan or in a form of an ideology. A nationality is a social category with public culture, historical association of a particular territory which aspires to preserve its identity and protect its entity through the socio-economic development process. It is within this conceptual framework that the Dimasa nationality question will have to be understood.
An understanding of the different terms, *ethnic, ethnic group, nationality* etc will help us to understand the situation of Northeastern part of India. What is today known as Northeast India comprises of the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura. Mainly three major linguistic groups, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Chinese and Indo-Aryan are found in this part of the Indian state. Several branches of these major linguistic groups grew in the North East. On the basis of these linguistic families, one can categorize the ethnic and nationality pattern of the North East. The process of development and even quasi-development of these languages contributed a lot towards the formation of ethnic and nationality identity. Like language, the historical tradition of sharing the territory in the course of history also contributed in this process.

In the perspective of the North East, the indigenous people have regarded their geographical possession of hills and valleys as their historical land, where rivers and small streams are recognised as natural boundaries. The Ahom, Koch, Dimasa, Jayantia, Tripuri, and Manipuri have developed their feudal state structures in these geographical areas in pre-colonial era. While the Khasis developed a federal structure under the Syiems in that period, the Mizos, Adis, etc also developed such type of chieftainship in their respective geographical areas.

However the British colonial power introduced a new set of rules and regulations to control the historical land of these nationalities. The old feudal state structures disappeared and except in Manipur, Tripura and Koch-Bihar: the traditional chiefs were regulated. The colonial power established the Chief
Commissionership and later Provincial Governance in a single umbrella of Assam Government. Obviously the colonial power tried to divide the entire people of the region through the provision for Excluded Area, Partially Excluded Area and Inner-line Regulations.

After independence of India in 1947, two Constitutional provisions were introduced for these nationalities. The provision of Sixth Schedule was incorporated for providing the self-rule institution in the Partially Excluded and Excluded Areas. The Instrument of Accession was signed with the Princely State of Tripura, Manipur and Koch Bihar. Accordingly the Khasi, Jayantia Garo, Karbi, Dimasa, Naga and Mizo were included in the Sixth Schedule provision. The Princely State of Manipur was included as a Union Territory. Tripura was provided the status of State, while Koch Bihar was divided into two parts. One part was included in West Bengal and the other part was included in Assam. The erstwhile North East Frontier Agency remained as a separate entity which later upgraded to the Union Territory and consequently as the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

However, these provisions could not satisfy the aspirations of the nationalities of the North East. Soon after the Independence of India, the Naga nationality raised its voice for Independence under the leadership of Naga National Council. The Naga were followed by the Mizo, Manipuri, Assamese, Tripuri and Bodo subsequently. These nationalities aspired for *independence* to protect its distinguished identity.

The Government of India adopted several initiatives to satisfy the aspirations within the orbit of Indian Constitution. The Sixteen Point Agreement between Naga Peoples’ Convention and Government of India in 1960 resulted in the
formation of Nagaland State and the Shillong Accord of 1975 was such an attempt to meet the Naga aspirations. However, these attempts failed and Naga nationality question remained unsettled till today, despite the signing of the cease-fire agreement between Government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1997. The Mizo nationality question raised by the Mizo National Front was settled by the Memorandum of Settlement 1986, which resulted in the birth of Mizoram State. However, in the case of Assam, the Assam Accord of 1985 was an attempt to satisfy the aspiration of Assamese nationality but the Accord failed and it resulted in militant insurrection in Assam. The case of Manipur is almost the same as that of Assam.

While these nationalities are engaged in the movement for Independence, other nationalities like the Garo, Karbi and Dimasa are still aspiring to protect their interest within the constitutional orbit of the Indian State. Their movement was started in the 1960, demanding a separate Hill State under the leadership of All Party Hill Leaders Conference. The movement resulted in the formation of the Meghalaya State in 1972. While the Garo, Khasi and Jayantia accepted the Meghalaya state, the Dimasa and Karbi dissociated themselves from the new state.

Later the Dimasa and Karbi jointly demanded for a separate State under article 224 (A) of the Indian Constitution which ended with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 1995. Recently both Karbi and Dimasa nationalities demanded separate homeland in the name of Hemprek Kangthim for Karbi and Dimaraji for the Dimasa. Their movement for separate homeland is still continuing, despite the cease-fire agreement and arms surrender before the Government of India. Meanwhile the Garo also are
demanding a separate homeland an issue which is yet to be settled. The Koch also started its movement for revival of Kamtapur comprising the Koch Rajbanshi in their habitat areas of Assam and West Bengal.

Apart from these statehood and independent aspiration of nationalities, several ethnic groups like Rabha, Mishing, Tiwa in Assam, Kukis in Manipur and Reangs in Mizoram are aspiring for constitutional guarantee of the Sixth Schedule to protect their identity. The Khamti, Tai-Phake of Arunachal Pradesh are also demanding territorial council in Tirap district. Of course the aspirations of the ethnic groups of Arunachal Pradesh are not boldly manifested till today. However the diaspora ethnic group of the Chakmas of Arunachal Pradesh has aspired to protect its cultural and human rights. Likewise other diaspora groups like Bengali Hindu and Muslims of Assam also manifested their agony to protect constitutional rights like citizenship, voting, etc.

Thus the aspiration of several nationalities and ethnic groups in North eastern part of India becomes a vital issue for discussion. Through the extra-constitutional and constitutional policies, these nationalities, ethnic groups have started their movements. These movements also posed a security challenge, toward the Indian State, due to its geo-political position. The general law and order situation has also turned vulnerable. Several conflicts such as ethnic, communal etc also turned the North East into a conflict zone. Therefore none can avoid this ground situation to protect human values, human rights and other constitutional rights.

However, this situation was not created in a single year or a decade. So a peep into the socio-economic structure is required to understand the ground reality.
During the pre-British period, the economy of the nationalities solely depended on land. The local rulers and the chiefs were the sole owners of the land. They distributed land among the peasants and collected levy in the form of human labour and crops. The *Paike* system of the Ahom in Assam was one of such example. The traditional chiefs were also owners of the common land and distributed the crops among the clan members. These structures led to the foundation of semi-feudal land structures. When the colonial forces entered the territory of the nationalities, they tried to change the land pattern in favour of colonial interest.

The Assam Land Revenue Regulation 1886 is a classic example of colonial land policy. The peasants were provided individual ownership of land for which the peasant had to pay direct tax in the form of currency. However, in some cases, the peasant could acquire the landownership, but it had no right to its resources. Even the traditional chief's ownership was curtailed and they too had to pay direct tax. Moreover discovery of natural resources like coal, oil and growing importance of timber and tea created attractive prospects for the colonial rulers. They set several policies on lease of land, reservation of forest area, which led to the total deprivation of rights on natural resources for the nationalities. The colonial forces also chanalised the process of urbanization, trade, commerce, and widespread money economy in the territories of these nationalities which resulted in a semi-colonial economic structure. This semi-feudal, semi-colonial economic structure has deprived the nationalities of their rights on land and natural resources.

With the independence of India in 1947 the nationalities of the North East were liberated from the clutch of direct colonial forces. But the new regime also continued the upkeep of the semi-feudal, semi-colonial structure. Even in
some sectors like tea, the colonial capital remained almost intact. Moreover, the ruling class of India left no stone unturned for the outflow of the resources from the region. The exploitation of natural resources by the ruling class has created a sense of deprivation among the nationalities of the North East.

The land issue also became sensitive after Independence due to large-scale human migration from the neighbouring countries, which created increasing pressure on land. Even the provision for Tribal Block and Tribal Belt could not prevent the pressure on land alienation due to migration. The urbanization and semi-industrialization also accelerated the process of land alienation. Likewise though the provision of Sixth Schedule was created to protect this region, it could not protect the land interest of the nationalities. Absentee landlordism developed in these areas. The newly emerging intelligentsia of the nationalities favoured absentee landlordism to consolidate its position in the areas under their control. This has totally ignored the interests of the common people. These serious land questions have created a sense of losing one’s identity in one’s homeland.

Meanwhile the ruling class of Indian State adopted a policy of assimilation or integration with the so-called national mainstream. These forces have totally ignored the nationality aspiration of the indigenous people by introducing hegemonic policies such as introduction of a national language, national culture etc. In the name of Indianization, the ruling class has tried to impose Hindi and the Hindu faith upon the nationalities of the North East, which effected a serious dissatisfaction among the nationalities.

During the colonial period, the spread of western education contributed to the emergence of the intelligentsia among the nationalities of the Northeast. The
political atmosphere of the Indian freedom movement and the Second World War played a catalytic role in the formation of the intelligentsia. After independence the intelligentsia could strengthen its position in new political arrangement. It also consolidated its position in the press and among pressure groups. Absentee landlordism also strengthened its socio-economic position. The Sixth Schedule gave them constitutional authority to raise its voice in favour of its concerned nationality. Therefore the intelligentsia grasped the vital economic, cultural issues and played an important role in developing political consciousness. This political consciousness turned into movements for autonomy, separate state and even secession from Indian State.

It is usually seen that during and after the course of these movements the nationality of a particular territory often exercise its domination upon other nationalities or ethnic groups. The dominant nationality tries to suppress the aspiration and fundamental rights of the sub-nationalities. In most cases, the historical process of co-existence in a particular territory has been ignored, causing a fear of losing one’s own hereditary land. Obviously this has led to the development of a conflict situation within the concerned area. The policy of ethnic cleansing is often used. This is a serious limitation of the nationality struggle in the North East.

Moreover it is seen that the intelligentsia which raises the issues, leads the movement, and formulates the policies often uses the aspiration of the nationalities for its own interest. The power-capturing game compelled them to follow a policy of compromise with the Indian State. The state apparatus takes full advantage of this limitation of the intelligentsia and therefore very often would dictate ‘agreements’. Examples are available where a onetime mass movement led by the intelligentsia has end with a dictated peace with
the Indian State. Therefore due to the bargaining character of the intelligentsia, it has failed to address the basic issues of the concerned nationality. Which later open another chapter of movement. Therefore it can be concluded that most of the nationality struggles of the Northeast are guided by the political opportunism of the intelligentsia rather than by a genuine desire of improving the socio-economic condition of the people. This is apparent in the Dimasa nationality issue.

(III)

With this conceptual framework, the present study attempts to look at the nationality question among the Dimasa of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Cachar district of Assam in a historical perspective.

The Dimasa is a *Bodo* group along with the Garo, Chutiya, Rabha, Koch, Tiwa, Mech of Assam. They are one of the earliest settlers of Assam. Like many other nationalities of this region, the Dimasa migrated from Tibet earlier known as ‘Bod’ country, comprising of North Himalayas and North China. They began to live and control the foothill areas. Once they established their chieftainship from the South Sadiya up to Nagaon along the eastern belt, a bulk of them pushed towards the slopes of Mikir Hills and the foot of Naga Hills. They established their kingdom with Dimapur as their capital. The seat of their capital was shifted from Dimapur to Maibang in North Cachar Hills and then at a later phase, to Khaspur in the plains of Cachar.

At present, the Dimasa is dominant in the North Cachar Hills district. They also live in Karbi Anglong, Nagaon and Cachar districts. Some Dimasas are
found in Dimapur of Nagaland and Karimganj district of Assam. According to Dimasa tradition, these people are divided into four divisions viz. Dijuwasa (People of Dimapur) Demrasa (People of plains Nagaon), Harawasa (People of Cachar) and Hasawsa (People of North Cachar Hills district). The Dimasa have a population of 91,232 as per 2001 census in North Cachar Hills district, comprising 4881 sq km.

Linguistically, the Dimasa along with the Bodo of the plains belong to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Tibeto-Chinese speech family of the Indo-Mongoloid. It is spoken by the Dimasa of both hill and plains. It is a rich dialect with numerous folk-tales, folk-lore, ballads, idioms and idiomatic phrases etc.

The Dimasa has outstanding characteristics of both male and female clans. There are forty male clans known as Sengphong and forty-two female clans known as Julus or Jaddi. They have their own system of marriage, divorce, birth and death, laws of inheritance, adoption etc. The traditional village system is called Noblai-Raji. This Noblai-Raji is managed by a village council, known as Sali under the leadership of Khunang. They profess some sort of Hinduism along with traditional beliefs in the day to day life.

In the absence of written records it is very difficult to trace their past history. They were one of the ruling powers in Northeast, for about three hundred years. During this period, their Kingdom was large and prosperous, with a significant system of administration. Buranjis written in Tai-Ahom and Assamese languages make certain reference to the Dimasa as Kachari in regard to their relation with the Ahom. They came into formal contact with

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20 The term Indo-Mongoloid was used by S K Chatterjee, Kirata Jana Kriti, Calcutta, 1964, p. 13.
the Ahom during the reign of Suhungmung alias Dihingia Raja (1497-1539). The Ahom had maintained a relation of *friend and foe* with the Dimasa until they shifted their capital from Maibang to Khaspur.

After the annexation of Assam in 1826, the British paid due attention towards the Dimasa Kingdom. After the death of last Kachari/Dimasa King Govindrachandra in 1832, the British had annexed his territory in 14 August 1832, comprising the Cachar plains. The other portion of Kachari/Dimasa kingdom was ruled by Tularam Senapati comprising the plains of Kopili-Jamuna valley, Mikir-Naga Hills and Dhansiri valley. As a result of the agreement concluded between the Tularam Senapati and the British on 16 October 1834, the former’s territory was annexed in 20 July, 1854. Thus, the last vestige of the Dimasa Kingdom came to an end.

After the annexation the British had divided the entire Dimasa Kingdom into several parts. Cachar was divided into two sub-divisions, Cachar and North Cachar. The other portions were divided among the newly formed districts of Nagaon, Naga Hills and Sibsagar.

The British had introduced a Railway tract through the Dimasa-dominated areas. As a result, townships grew in Haflong and Maibang areas. Haflong became the centre of all-round development of the Dimasa people. The education system introduced by the British in Haflong played a major role in the formation of the Dimasa intelligentsia. In 1935 the British Government declared Dimasa-inhabited North Cachar sub-division area as a partially excluded area.

The emerging Dimasa intelligentsia was largely instrumental in moulding Dimasa nationality consciousness. Just after independence of India in 1947,
the Dimasa intelligentsia had raised its demand for creation of a Tribal Council, under the leadership of Hamdhammohan Haflongbar, before the **Gopinath Bordoloi Committee**, which was constituted to suggest the issues of hill tribes of Assam. As per the recommendation of Bordoloi Committee, the provision of Sixth Schedule was incorporated in the Indian Constitution. The Dimasa of North Cachar Hills was included in the List of Scheduled Tribe (Hills). The Dimasa people living in Nagaon district, Cachar district and Nagaland state were recognized in the Scheduled lists of Indian Constitution in different names, such as Barman, Hojai Kachari, Thangmi or Rukmini Barman and Kachari. The North Cachar Hills was separated from Cachar and amalgamated with the erstwhile Mikir Hills. The new district of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills was declared under Sixth Schedule. United Mikir & North Cachar Hills came into existence in 1951 with its District Councils.

In the initial stage, the Dimasa intelligentsia took active part in District Council and state politics. They also participated in the Hill State Movement of All Party Hills Leaders Conference. As a result of their effort, in 1970, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district was bifurcated and the North Cachar Hills sub-division became a full-fledged district with its own District Council. A section of Dimasa intelligentsia jointly launched the movement for an autonomous state with the Karbi since 1973. This movement has resulted in the signing the Memorandum of Understanding with Government of Assam and Government of India in 1995.

Another section, mainly the students and the youth have raised the demand for creation of a separate state comprising the all Dimasa-inhabited areas of Assam and Nagaland since 1991 under the banner of All Dimasa Students Union. While this organisation has followed the constitutional path of
agitation, a section of Dimasa youth has formed a militant organisation, adopting extra-constitutional means to acquire a separate homeland. Recently these militant organisations have engaged themselves in dialogue process by signing the cease-fire agreement with Government and placing their demand charters.

The historical and cultural affinity of all the Dimasa scattered in various parts of the region, is the main source of inspiration to the growth of the Dimasa nationality question. The Dimasa nationality question came into prominence following the success of other nationality movements in the region in particular and the world in general. The present study will also look into what extent their backward socio-economic conditions have played a catalytic role in the growth of the nationality question.

As regards the area of study the present study is geographically confined to the hill districts of Assam i.e. North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong. Few plain districts like. Cachar and Nagaon come as a reference, within the parameter of study. The reference of Dimapur of Nagaland state is made in some relevant areas. The focus of the study is on the Dimasa; a nationality group of Assam, inhabiting the aforesaid geographical area, covering all political, economic and social and cultural aspects of the Dimasa people. Periodically the study covers the post-independence era, although the pre-colonial and colonial periods are highlighted by way of providing a historical background.

The basic objectives of the study are:

- To provide the historical background of the Dimasa nationality question.
• To highlight the formation and the important role of the emerging Dimasa intelligentsia.

• To trace the various stages of political developments and consciousness among the Dimasa.

• To analyze the political, economic and social factors contributing to the nationality question.

• Also to examine the extent to which the movement addresses itself to the basic issues of the Dimasa society or offers a direction for changing the socio-economic condition of the people.

A survey of literature has shown that an in depth study on the Dimasa Nationality Question has not been undertaken as yet. A few historical and anthropological studies on the Dimasa have been carried out till date. C.A Soppit’s work Historical and Descriptive Accounts of the Kachari Tribes on North Cachar Hills etc Shillong 1886 was a pioneering work in this area. Sidney Endle’s, The Kachari (Delhi, 1975) is another work where one finds references to the Dimasa. In his work, Endle includes the Dimasa along with other tribes such as the Boro, Deori, Rabha etc, and briefly touched upon the socio-cultural aspects of the Kachari with some historical background. This approach to socio-cultural studies was also followed by B.N Bordoloi in Dimasa Kachari of Assam, in which he focused on the cultural aspect. Dimasa (Jorhat, 1974) by Nirupama Hagjer written in Assamese language deals with the socio-cultural aspects of Dimasa people. The use of the Dimasa nomenclature is an important aspect of this book. The research work of Dipali Danda Among the Dimasa of Assam (Delhi, 1977) is an anthropological study, which also deals with the socio-cultural aspects only. Regarding this
category. *The Dimasa* (Guwahati, 2003) edited by P.C Sarma and *Dimasa Anewasa* (Haflong, 1996) by J.A Tapaddar in Bengali are mention worthy. The *Dimasa of Assam -a Study in literature culture and society* (Gauhati University 1997) is an unpublished PhD thesis of Sunil Kumar Majumdar, which also deals with the linguistic aspects of Dimasa. Studies have also been conducted in the field of language and literature. *Anglo- Dimasa Grammar and Dictionary* (Silchar, 2006) edited by R.R Barman; Triangular Dimasa-English-Assamese dictionary *Grou-Dima Pandar* (Dimasa Bhasarar Bharal) (Guwahati, 1992) by N.N Baruah are some of the works on Dimasa language. So far as the history of Dimasa is concerned, S.K Bhuyan’s *Kachari Buranji* (Gauhati, 1936) is a pioneering work. S.K. Bhuyan paid attention to Ahom relations with the Kachari. U.C Guha’s *Kacharer Itibrita* (Guwahati, 2004) written in Bengali, deals with the history of the Kachari. J.B Bhattacharjee’s work *Kachari Rajya: Uthan Aru Patan* (Jorhat, 1993) in Assamese and *Social and Polity Formation in Pre-colonial North East India* (New Delhi, 1991) has discussed the history of the Dimasa people. S.K Barpujari (ed) the *History of the Dimasas (From the earliest times to 1896A.D.)*, (Haflong 1997), where a brief outline is drawn regarding the history of Dimasa people.

Thus the aspects like history, culture, language and literature and society are discussed in the aforementioned works. However, the nationality question of the Dimasa people or their movements for autonomy has been largely ignored. Although social scientists have dwelt upon the ethnic, nationality of the north east, they have not paid due attention on the nationality question of Dimasa whether in *Political Dynamics of North East India* (New Delhi, 2000) edited by Girin Phukon, *Dynamics of Identity and Inter group Relation in*
North East India (Shimla, 1999) edited by K.S Aggarwal or Ethnicity Culture and Nationalities in North East India (New Delhi, 1996) edited by M.M Agrawal etc. P S Dutta’s article on Karbi-Dimasa Autonomy Movement is incorporated in Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam (New Delhi, 1990) edited by himself, where emphasis is laid on the political roots only of the Karbi-Dimasa’s autonomy movement. A paper on Dimasa Identity Consciousness is incorporated in B. Pakem’s (ed) Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in North East India (Guwahati, 1990). No serious research till date has been undertaken on the Dimasa Nationality question. Hence it is an unexplored field of study.

The rationale for this study lies in the fact that the nationality question has become a pertinent point of discussion for India in general and northeast in particular. Socio-political incidents like democratic movements, armed struggles, ethnic clashes and conflicts have opened the discourse in the public domain. The Dimasa case is one of such domain, reflected in the various stages of the movement for autonomy. Under the leadership of the intelligentsia, the masses have participated in such movements. The character of these movements and its consequences has drawn the attention of social scientists, but no serious study has been undertaken till date.

Although studies on history, society and culture of Dimasa people have been conducted, these studies have not touched the political behaviour or the aspirations of the Dimasa people. As none can ignore the political situation of any nationality, so the situation itself demands the review of the aspirations and consequences of the nationality struggle of the Dimasa people. Therefore, an attempt is made to review the nationality question of the Dimasas.
The sources for the study have been classified into **Primary and Secondary sources**. **The Primary sources** include the official records of the Assam State Archives, Dispur, Autonomous Council, North Cachar Hill and Karbi Anglong and of the various socio-political organisations of Dimasa people. It also includes memoranda and other political pamphlets. Moreover an extensive field work has been done in the Dimasa-inhabited areas of Assam and Nagaland. **The secondary sources** include secondary works, English Assamese and Bengali, available in the Indian Council for Historical Research Regional Centre, Guwahati, the K. K. Handique Library, Gauhati University, and State Library of Assam, a detailed list of which is given in the Bibliography.

This work is **based on the following hypotheses**:

- The rising aspiration of the Dimasa *nationality* is a product of their historical background and the development of political consciousness.

- The hegemony of the ruling class, uneven development, and deprivation of economic rights, political injustice, and exploitation of natural resources are largely responsible for creating a sense of dissatisfaction among the masses.

- The emerging intelligentsia has conceptualized the issues in the form of autonomy and were instrumental in translating this concept into movements for autonomy.

- The growing nationality aspiration of the Dimasa and government apathy led to a movement for autonomy.
As far as methodology is concerned, the present work has been aimed at acquiring historical objectivity through the critical use of sources, both primary and secondary. It analyzes how economic changes have led to socio-economic and political change by creating a conflict situation, thereby leading to higher levels of political consciousness. A comparative approach with other nationality movements of the Naga, Meitei, Mizo, Garo, has been resorted to whenever the study demanded.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters for the sake of convenience. **Chapter I: Introduction,** attempts to conceptualise the several terms like *ethnic, ethnicity, tribes and nationality* etc in the context of the Dimasa nationality question. The analysis shows that the Dimasa may be regarded as a nationality due to their long-standing struggle for existence.

**Chapter II: Historical Background** of the Dimasa outlines the history of the people and state. It deals with the Sadiyal, Herembial, Dembra branches of the early period to the Dimapur, Maibang, and Khaspur periods of Dimasa history thereby showing the strong historical roots. This historical background of Dimasa is discussed to understand the root of the nationality question.

**Chapter III: Emergence of the Intelligentsia** shows the important role played by the intelligentsia in the nationality struggle. Therefore the genesis of its formation is an important aspect of the thesis. Several forces and factors like colonial administration with the introduction of railways and the subsequent growth of townships, western education, money economy, the market system etc, played a catalytic role in forming the intelligentsia. The intelligentsia has formulated socio-political issues and translated them into
movements. However its own limitation and bargaining character itself becomes a barrier to the attainment of the goals of the movement.

**Chapter IV: Movement for Autonomy: The Early phase** discusses the various stages of autonomy movements. Since the Independence of India, the Dimasa people have been struggling for their existence. Their representation in Bordoloi Committee, their participation in separate Hill State movement shows their aspiration, and developing nationality consciousness.

**Chapter V: Movement for Autonomy: The Intermediate Phase** deal with the struggle for an autonomous state along with the Karbi’s of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The movement for an autonomous state under Article 244(A) of Indian Constitution was the central demand of this phase. However this phase ended with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between Autonomous State Demand Committee, Karbi Students’ Association, Dimasa Student’s Union and Government of Assam in presence of S B Chaban, Union Home Minister of Government of India on 1995.

**Chapter VI: Movement for Autonomy: The Final Phase** is significant in that the political demands strongly urged for an entirely separate state of Dimaraji. The demand for Dimaraji state raised by the Dimasa intelligentsia has come under the purview of the study. The participation of student body, rise of militant armed activities etc also a part of the study. The demand for self rule, Hemprek Kangthim of Karbi armed group is also outlined. The Hmar-Dimasa conflict (2003) and Karbi-Dimasa clashes (2005) are discussed in this chapter.

**Chapter VII: The Epilogue** discusses the outcome of the autonomy movement. The Dimasa Nationality Question is one of the many nationality
struggles of the Northeast. The question of territory often poses as the major obstacle in addressing these questions, due to its multi ethnic-multi nationality character. The Dimasa case is not different from this obstacle. Moreover the half-hearted approaches of the State machinery to address the nationality question have been transforming the ground realities into complex one. Therefore a comprehensive approach is earnestly required to strengthen the democratic values and promote human rights.