CHAPTER 4

MOVEMENT FOR AUTONOMY: THE EARLY PHASE
(1947-1970)

Emergence of intelligentsia was an important aspect of colonial period. The colonial administration, western education, market economy, railway and tea had contributed toward the formation of Dimasa intelligentsia. The emerging intelligentsia became conscious about their position in the constitutional framework of Indian Constitution. The issue of protecting identity, the share in the democratic institution etc led them to form an organisation of political character. This orientation became the guiding force, through which, the intelligentsia advocated their case of the autonomy for the Dimasa people.

After 1947 political power was transferred to the Indian National Congress and with it the framing of a constitution for newly independent India began. The Indian Middle Class became engrossed in seeking power and other tools for socio-political uplift. The newly emerging intelligentsia of the hill areas of Assam also had started political mobilization for a share of the power cake. This marked the growth of autonomy movements among the Dimasa.

For the purpose of this study, the Dimasa movement for autonomy has been divided into three phases: The Early Phase (1947-1970), The Intermediate Phase (1973-1995) and the Final Phase (1986 till date). There is a reason for demarcating the three phases. The year 1947 is important for the independence of India and 1970 is important for declaration of separate district i.e. North Cachar Hills. During the period of 1970-1973 the Dimasa intelligentsia could not pay due attention to the autonomy issues, as they were
waiting for the fulfilment of the assurances of the Assam Government. However the demand to declare Assamese as the medium of instruction by the Assamese middle class in 1972 had ignited the Dimasa intelligentsia and they engaged them in the language issue. This exercises led to the formation of autonomous state demand. The movement for autonomous state end with the signing of Memorandum of Understanding in 1995. It is interesting to note that, during this movement a section of Dimasa intelligentsia differentiated them from the autonomous state demand which had result the Dimaraji movement in later period.

The Early Phase of the Dimasa movement for autonomy started with the submission of memoranda by the Tribal Council before the Gopinath Bordoloi Committee and ended with the acquiring of separate administrative district in 1970. During this period, the Dimasa had participated in the separate Hill State Movement along with the Karbi, Khasi and Garo people.

This phase was started by the Nagas when T. Aliba Imti Ao, the leader of the Naga National Council, demanded autonomy within the State of Assam. The Naga National Council also rejected the proposal of Crown Colony and the Cabinet Mission plan. However, in February 1947, it demanded Interim government for the Nagas, initially for a period of ten years after which, the Nagas would decide their own political status.¹

The Mizos also followed the path of the Naga. They demanded autonomy but opinion was divided between the Mizo Union of 1946 and United Mizo Freedom Organisation of 1947. The Mizo Union demanded full local autonomy within the Indian Constitution, while the later demanded their

merger with Burma on the ground of racial affinity. The Mizo Union in a memorandum to President, Constituent Assembly in April 1947, urged for the amalgamation of all Mizo areas into a single administrative unit and its right to self-determination within Assam. However in 1949, it demanded the integration of the contiguous Mizo areas of Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Cachar to form an autonomous greater Mizoram.  

The Khasi-Jayantia Political Association of 1946, an umbrella organization of Khasi and Jayantia traditional chiefs i.e. Syiems, demanded a federation of the Khasi areas with adequate ‘cultural and political autonomy’ within a ‘Sovereign Assam’.  

There was also a simultaneous demand for an autonomous Garo region by the Garo National Council in March 1946. During this period a Convention of All Assam Tribes and Races Federation was held in Durbar Hall, Shillong on 21 March 1945. Here a resolution was adopted unanimously not only for the autonomy of the tribes but also for the ‘Sovereignty of Assam’. It was resolved that:

In view of the fact that historically, Assam proper, with its hills, was never a part or province of India, and that its people, particularly the Tribes and the Races inhabiting it are ethnically and culturally different from the people of the rest of India. This Convention is emphatically opposed to Assam proper with its hills being included into any proposed division of India, Pakistan or Hindustan and demands that it should be constituted in to

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2 Ibid, p.2.
3 Ibid, p. 3.
Such was the political scenario in Assam at the very dawn of Indian independence in 1947. These issues and sentiments of the people had created an atmosphere in which the Constituent Assembly had to face a very complex situation. Moreover, paragraph 20 of the Cabinet Mission statement of May 16, 1946 stated that the Constituent Assembly of India was to form an Advisory Committee to prepare a scheme for the administration of the Tribal and Excluded Areas. Accordingly, under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallavbhai Patel, an Advisory Committee was constituted with two sub-committees, headed by A.V Thakkar for the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, (other than Assam) and the other under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the first Premier of Assam. The latter was also known as Bordoloi Committee for the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas. Nichols Roy, Rupnath Brahma and B.N Rao, a constitutional expert and a civilian were the members of the Bordoloi Committee.

Gopinath Bordoloi understood the tribal situation of Assam. He advocated for the cause of the tribal people. His attitude towards the tribals was reflected in his discussions with the fellow colleagues in Jorhat Jail. In 1940-41 he advocated the urgency of installing a representative system as well as providing autonomy, in these areas. He had also emphasized the necessity of these areas to be permanently attached to the state of Assam.5

Gopinath Bordoloi made an attempt to satisfy the aspirations of the tribal people. Therefore, he made an extensive survey of the hill areas and met the public leaders and representatives of several groups.

Thus like the others, the Dimasa intelligentsia too organised the people and formed a **Tribal Council** under the leadership of Hamdhanmohan Haflongbar as President and Desondao Hojai as Secretary. This Tribal Council submitted a memorandum before the Bordoloi Committee. In their memorandum:

> The Tribal Council demanded that forced labour and beggary[sic] should be abolished and the right to follow one’s own customs and usages should be guaranteed, the cultural life of the tribes should not be interfered with; that outsiders should not be permitted to acquire landed property or any other kind of vested interest in the area; only the bona-fide inhabitants of the area should be permitted to participate in the political life of the subdivision; The village administration should be carried on as at present, by the village authorities and social institutions with social customs and usages should be respected; and law or regulation passed by the Central or Provincial Legislature should not be applied to the hill area without the consent of the M. L As from the area concerned. The day-to-day administration of the area should be in the hands of the people themselves. The local officers must be appointed from among the local people. There should be a separate portfolio in the Provincial Cabinet for the administration of Tribal affairs and it should be in charge of a tribal. He should hold office so long he commands the confidence of the tribal
members of the legislature. There should be a separate secretariat for the management of tribal affairs.  

The other issues of the memorandum were about the representation in Legislative Assembly, Franchise, Financial Administration and the appointment in the Public Offices:

As regards representation of the North Cachar Hills in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Tribal Council demanded that two seats should be allotted to the sub-division because it contained many tribes. As regards franchise, it need not be adult franchise. The basis of franchise should be taxing capacity or literary qualification. While all the Hill areas demanded adult franchise the North Cachar Hills alone demanded restricted franchise. Each tribe should have a council of its own and it should have the same status as that of a local board. Dealing with the finance of administration, the tribal council also said that the system of common holding should be continued.

Regarding the appointment issue, the memorandum argued for the relaxation of qualification to tribal candidates. The most important issue of the memorandum was the demand for inclusion of Dimasa inhabited areas into a single unit. It demanded to the Provincial Government for appointing a boundary commission to fix the boundaries of the North Cachar Hills subdivision, with an aim to bring all the Dimasa inhabited adjoining areas.

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7 Ibid, p. 172.
8 Ibid, p. 171.
9 loc. cit.
The Bordoloi Committee after a series of discussion with the leadership of hill areas had submitted their draft proposal before the Advisory Committee. The extensive proposal had discussed several issues. The subcommittee divided the entire tribal territory of Assam into two parts. In the first part, it included the backward tribal areas which largely formed parts of Assam. On the second part, it included the tribal areas, which were administered by the Central Government on behalf of Assam. The sub-committee further recommended for the continuation of frontier areas with the central government, i.e. in the Sadiya and Balipara frontier Tracts, the Tirap frontier Tract (excluding the Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts) and the Naga Tribal Area, where the Governor of Assam would act as its agent. The sub-committee however, recommended the transfer of the region to provincial responsibility as soon as possible.\(^{10}\)

The committee proposed for six autonomous districts namely Khasi and Jayantia Hills District, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, the North Cachar sub-division of Cachar district and the Mikir (Karbi) Hills District. The Governor was to set up a District Council for each of these tribal districts and if there were different tribes inhabiting certain areas within a district, each area or group of areas could be divided into autonomous tribal regions with Regional Councils. A District Council was to consist of not more than twenty-four members, out of whom not more than three-fourth was to be elected from the territorial constituencies on the basis of adult suffrage.\(^{11}\)

The committee also recommended the power and function of the district and regional councils. The councils were empowered to make laws on subject like the allotment, occupation or use of lands, the managements of forests other

\(^{10}\) N.K Barooah, *op. cit.* p. 55.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, p. 56.
than reserved forests, the use of canal and water courses of agriculture, regulation of the practice of Jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation, the establishment of village or town committees or councils, the appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen, the inheritance of property, marriage and social customs etc. The scheme of the sub-committee also gave the district councils the power to run primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle-ponds, ferries, fisheries, roads and waterways.¹²

On the question of the administration of justice the committee stated that, the District and the regional councils were empowered to constitute village councils or courts for the trial of offences. But the offences related to punishable with death, transformation for life or imprisonments for over five years were beyond the jurisdiction of the councils.¹³

Moreover the committee empowered the councils to review the provincial laws of the concerned areas:

The idea was that, the provincial legislation in respect of subjects entrusted to the councils should not apply to an autonomous district or region except through an order of council itself. In particular, the sub-committee included a clause concerning the drinking of rice-beer which was a part of the hill people's life. It recommended that the councils should have liberty to permit or prohibit this, [sic] according to the wishes of the people and that the prohibition policy of the state government should not apply automatically.¹⁴

¹² loc. cit.
¹³ loc. cit.
¹⁴ loc. cit.
Regarding the taxation and financial aspects, the Councils were empowered to impose tax on, house, poll, land revenue, village forest; the council would be financially assisted by the State and Central Government. Apart from these, financial, administrative, legislative powers, the committee imposed some restrictions. The restrictions were of two kinds: First, any decision of a council that was considered by the Governor as likely to endanger the safety of India could be overruled at his discretion. Second, the Governor was also empowered to order dissolution of a district or regional council, or with the approval of state legislature, place the administration of the area either directly under him or under a commission. 15

The Bordoloi Committee report was placed before the Constituent Assembly for further discussion. Meanwhile Bordoloi had rejected the demand of Tribal Council for inclusion for all Dimasa inhabited areas, which led to a series of problems in later times. Even in the debates to the Bordoloi Committee Report, at Constituent Assembly; Kuladhar Chaliha, the founder President of Assam Provincial Congress Committee and a member of Constituent Assembly from Assam raised the point of inclusion the Dimapur Mouza, the one-time capital city of Dimasa Kings. However that point was rejected as the Dimapur Mouza was included in the Naga Hills District for administrative convenience. Under the Presidentship of Rajendra Prasad, the Constituent Assembly, assembled on 5-7 September 1949 at Constitution Hall. Issues were opened for the discussion. Like Kuladhar Chaliha, another member of Assam, Rohini Kumar Choudhary raised objection to paragraph 10 of the

15 Ibid, p.57.
Schedule which empowered the District Councils to control any person other than Scheduled Tribes residing in the district as money lenders and traders in the districts. 16

The background of the Sixth Schedule was also discussed thoroughly. Bordoloi pointed out that the foreign rulers in these areas continued to have the power of evicting anyone from any place within 24 hours. Moreover, during the World War II, the British officers developed a sense of separation and isolation in the minds of tribal people. They were also assured of an independent state at the end of the war. A plan of creating a separate state in Assam, called Crown colony comprising the entire hill areas into a single province, under a Governor, was also hatched in England. 17

Moreover, Bordoloi tried to justify the claims of the tribal people for the self-rule institution on the very basis of the democratic set-up of the tribal societies. To quote:

It is necessary to mention here that there are certain institutions among these hills Tribal which, in my opinion, are so good that if we wanted to destroy them, I considered it to be very wrong. One of the things which I felt was very creditable to these Tribal was the manner in which they settle their disputes. Cases which would go in the name of murder according to our Penal code were settled by these people by the barest method of panchayats decision and by payment only of compensation. Then the democracy which prevails there though limited in the sense it is confined only to the Tribal of a clan or region will rouse the admiration of any disinterested student. And again take the instance of their village

16 Ibid, p.123.
17 loc. cit.
administration. The district authorities have indeed very little to concern themselves with the way things go on there. Take again the case of Ao Nagas who distributed the entire functions of the society though certain age groups of people in their society. The boys would perform certain simple functions, leaving the sturdier function of the state to the adults, while the elders would give their judgments in cases of disputes and order, distribution of land for Jhuming and things of that kind. In other words, they are exercising a certain amount of autonomy which, I thought and the members of the Tribal sub-committee thought should be preserved rather than destroyed. What is necessary for good government is already there. After a series of discussion the Constituent Assembly adopted the provision of Sixth Schedule with some amendment. The unique socio-economic situation of the tribal areas of erstwhile Assam was recognized. The Constitution of India provided the administrative set-up, which would safeguard the customs, way of life and political autonomy to some extent. It also provided for local self-government and economic infrastructural development. The newly emerging intelligentsia was quick to take active participation in the activities of the Sixth Scheduled areas.

The Dimasa dominated North Cachar Hills sub-division was separated from the Cachar district. The sub-division was amalgamated with the erstwhile Mikir Hills. A new administrative district was constituted as United Mikir and North-Cachar Hills district. The new district was formally created on 17 November 1951 by the Government Notification T.A.D / R 31/50/204,

18 Ibid, pp. 126-127.
dated 3 November 1951 including some parts of Nagaon, Sibsagar, Cachar and United Khasi and Jayantia Hills districts.\textsuperscript{19}

As per the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the North Cachar Hills District Council was created along with the Mikir Hills District Council. On 29 April 1952, the Chief Minister of Assam, Bishnuram Medhi inaugurated the District Council. The Council consisted of 16 members. 12 members were elected and 4 new members were nominated by the Governor. Twelve constituencies were demarcated to elect its representatives to the Council. These constituencies were Haflong, Kalachand, Mahur, Khunglulg, Laisong, Maibang, Hajadisa, Langting, Lobong, Gunjunj, Garampani Christian villages and Harangajow. Meanwhile, the other Dimasa inhabited areas of Cachar, Nagaon, Mikir Hills and Dimapur were adjusted in the same districts. The people were recognized in the several scheduled lists. Accordingly the Barman of Cachar and Hojai Kachari of Nagaon districts were recognised as Scheduled Plains Tribes, The Dimasa of Mikir Hills as Schedule Hills Tribe and Kachari of Dimapur as the Scheduled Tribes category.

As per the provisions of Sixth Schedule, the Deputy Commissioner would be the Chairman of the District Councils. However, in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district, the Deputy Commissioner had to look after the general administration only. The Sub-Divisional Officer became the Chairman of the North Cachar Hills District Council, who was assisted by an Extra-Assistant Commissioner and one Sub-deputy Collector. The Chairman

was to serve for a period of six years. Within this period, he had to guide the Council. This special provision was made with the intention of providing the District Council with the advice and guidance of experienced officers for the smooth running of the District Council in its initial stage. The Sub-divisional officer of the North Cachar Hills Sub-Division acted as the Returning officer during District Council elections.  

According to the provisions of The Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution) Rules 1951; the duration of District Council, unless sooner dissolved, shall continue for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman would be elected by the members of the Council. The Executive Committee was to be formed with the Chief Executive Member and two other Executive Members. The members of the District Council elect the Chief Executive Member. The Governor has the power to appoint the two members, amongst the members as Executive Member, in consultation with the Chief Executive Member. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman are not eligible to hold office of either the Chief Executive Member or the Executive Members. Whenever, the day to day administration of the Council gets paralysed, the Governor appoints an administrator to run the administration.

In Jun 1952, the North Cachar Hills District Council elected C.H Khothlang as the Chief Executive Member. He selected Sonaram Thaosen and J.B. Hagjer as the Executive Members. The Council office was started at the private house of Nityananda Daulagapu. Hagjer was later appointed as the Parliamentary Secretary of the Government of Assam and so he resigned from

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the office of Executive Member. D. B. Thaosen was elected as the new Executive Member. In the next election of 1957 People Union Party, a political organisation came to power. The newly formed District Council elected P.C Langthasa as the Chief Executive Member. He selected Haulung Hmar and Hori Mohan Das Barman as Executive Members. During this tenure P. C Langthasa had to face a no-confidence motion, which was moved by Sonaram Thaosen. Langthasa resigned from the Chair without facing the motion. This situation created a constitutional crisis. Therefore, Governor of Assam, appointed Inggimba Jame as Chairman to run the administration.

The next election of District Council was held in 1962. Sonaram Thaosen was elected as the Chief Executive Member. Here a coalition was formed between People Union Party and the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress). G.C Langthasa of Congress and Lalvouma of People Union Party were selected as Executive Members. But this political courtship did not go smoothly. Sonaram Thaosen had to face a no-confidence motion. But as the mover refused to move the resolution, Thaosen could get rid of the crisis. He reconstituted his executive by appointing K.N Thaosen, P.K Garlosa and Thogen Thado, as his colleagues instead of G.C Langthasa and Lalvouma.

The general election to the District Council was held in 1968. But this time, Sonaram Thaosen had to face a challenge from R.C Langthasa for the office of Chief Executive Member. Election was held to elect the Chief Executive Member. Sonaram Thaosen was defeated in the hands of R.C Langthasa. He became the new Chief Executive Member. He appointed N.K Bathari, Semian Jeme and G.C Langthasa as the colleagues.

The situation of North Cachar Hills District Council took a new turn in 1970. The United Mikir and North Cachar Hills was bifurcated into two Districts.
Accordingly, the North Cachar Hills sub-division was declared as the full fledged district. The Government Notification No APP/65/70/100 dated 10 September 1970 entrusted some powers related to Agriculture to all the district level officers as well as their subordinate officers and staff working in the newly formed District. The same notification entrusted to District Council the departments of Agriculture, Public Works Departments (flood control and Irrigation), T.A. &W.B.C Department (Soil Conservation) Animal Husbandry Veterinary and Fisheries, Forests, Developments, (Panchayat and Community Development), Industries (cottage), P. W. D. (Roads & Buildings), Education (General&P.T.M.), Health and Family Planning and Development (Social Welfare). 21

During the period of 1952-1970 the Dimasa intelligentsia played an important role. Politically they became very influential. J.B. Hagjer proved to be an important political personality in state politics. He held different portfolios in the Assam Cabinet. The dream of Hamdhanmohan Haflongbar was fulfilled, while the Dimasa people got the Sixth Scheduled status. Sonaram Thaosen, G.C Langthasa emerged as important political leaders due to their control in District Council’s activities. But despite their personal political career, their tenure was full of political conflicts. Such political conflicts emerged during the tenure of P.C Langthasa, the second Chief Executive Member. A few months before the general elections to the District Council Sonaram Thaosen moved a motion of no-confidence against the P.C Langthasa’s executive. He gave a number of reasons; such as, Langthasa’s failure to operate the loans taken from the Government for the construction of quarters for the Executive Members and the staff, to utilize the grants for rural

21 Ibid, p.135.
housing, rural communication and provision for drinking water for moving the motion. Moreover, it was accused that the executive had fixed a high rate of land tax, levied taxes on the entry of goods into the markets for sale without considering the financial condition of the people.  

P. C Langthasa resigned from the office, which had created a constitutional crisis. The struggle for power again started in 1967. Sonaram Thaosen had to face challenges from his colleagues, G.C Langthasa and Lalvouma. It was believed that the relation between the C.E.M. and the E.Ms were not cordial. The C.E.M. wanted to get rid of them. If he would suggest their removal from office, political complications might arise and should he take away their portfolios, it might not prove very effective. Therefore, he adopted an underhand method. It was alleged that he requested one of his confident Thogen Thado to move a motion of no-confidence against the Executive and remove the C.E.M. from office and then elect him again at a subsequent meeting. 

Removal of the C.E.M. meant the mischievousness dismissal of the Executive. The plan materialized accordingly and Thaosen government fell on 7 November, 1967. On 9 November, a meeting of the District Council was held. Thogen Thado who moved the no-confidence motion against Sonaram Thaosen and condemned him in unmistakable terms, supported Thaosen. Thogen Thado said that Sonaram Thaosen was the fittest person to be the C. E. M.  

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24 loc. cit.
The political conflict reached its peak, just after the general election to the District Council in 1968. It was said that some of the members of the People’s Democratic Party went to the meeting hall. They bolted the door from within. While the Congress, the key seat holder of the District Council came a little later. But they found the door was closed. The Secretary of the District Council summoned the police to open the door. The members of the People Democratic Party were requested to open the door of the meeting hall and were break. As police assistance was sought, the matter was placed to the Chairman for permission to impeach the members. Then the members sought an unconditional regret.  

The doors were opened and the meeting was held for the election of the C.E.M, R.C Langthasa and Sonaram Thaosen was the candidates. Sonaram Thaosen did not get a single vote. Even his proposer and seconder did not cast their votes in favour of Thaosen. R.C Langthasa was unanimously elected as C.E.M.  

The most vital issue before the North Cachar Hills District Council was the question of hereditary land. Therefore the Council adopted a land settlement policy resolution in 1954. According to this policy resolution, the first preference was given to the indigenous local tribal in settlement of government land. The second preference was given to the permanent non-tribal residents of the district, who were the electors to the District Council constituencies. A tribal belonging to the same community but coming from another village also got settlement of land in the village; on condition that

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co-villagers showed no objection. Moreover that person had to express his capability of cultivating land.\textsuperscript{27}

Regarding the transfer of tribal land to the non-tribal, the District Council issued some executive instructions. The instruction vide memo No GA/REV/5/14/62/21. Dated 6 July 1962 laid emphasis on this issue:

so for as land under periodic lease is concerned, the tribal settlement holder cannot transform his land to a non-tribal without prior permission of the District Council Authority. In according permission the District Council sees whether the person to whom the land is proposed to be transferred is a permanent resident in the district and secondly whether he has enough land in the possession already even if he is a permanent resident.\textsuperscript{28}

But despite this policy and instruction, the issue of protecting the hereditary land remain unsolved. Unlike as in the Karbi Anglong district, where there are suitable laws for prevention of transfer of land and a well-defined land settlement policy, in the North Cachar Hills there has been no law barring transfer of land from tribal to non-tribal. Therefore the whole question of land remained as it was on paper only viz. in the executive instructions and policy of resolutions in respect of land settlement.\textsuperscript{29}

In the field of judicial administration, the North Cachar Hills District Council founded a court at Haflong in 1956. The Council Court was headed by a judge, who was appointed by the Council. The Government of Assam deputed another Sub-judge as a subordinate at the Council Court. Moreover


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p.30.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p. 31.
the District Council had passed numerous rules and regulations during the period of 1951-1970. From the very beginning, the North Cachar Hills subdivision was a part of United Mikir and North Cachar hills district. Despite the attempts of District Councils, the district had to face a number of developmental bottlenecks. The financial condition of the people was far from pleasing. An assessment report on 18 tribal villages in 1967 exposed that:

82.87 percent of the surveyed families are found to have agriculture as the basis of occupation for means of sustenance. 16.57 percent of the families are found to be partly agricultural. Besides agriculture some members of these families have other occupations like teaching jobs in the elementary schools, service in the police organization and army, trade etc. Only 56 percent of the families are found to be non agricultural. Among the subsidiary occupation, mention may be made of spinning and weaving, rearing of Endi and Muga, black smithy, carpentry, manufacturing of bamboo and cane goods etc. the parentage of earning members is found to be 46.47, while the parentage of non-earning dependents found to be 46.13.7.40 percent are found to be earning dependent. The average land holding per family is 14.16 Bighas-the break-up being as follows - land under permanent cultivation 8.05 Bighas, land under cash crops 99 Bighas, land for homestead 1.17 Bighas, fallow land 59 Bighas and Jhum land 3.36 Bighas.  

This economic condition led to raise lots of inconvenience. Among the problems, the rural indebtedness was one of the primary causes of economic backwardness of the tribal people of the district. When a family entered that nexus they had entrapped in the debt net. The moneylenders or mahajans

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took advantage of the poverty and ignorance of the people. They exploited the villagers, which had worsened the financial condition of the people further:

Out of the total loan of Rs. 41,927.00, Government sources supply only 5.40 percent while the non-tribal Mahajans supply 31.10 percent and tribal Mahajans supply 63.50 percent. The last includes the value of loan in kind also. The rate of interest in the case of Government loan varies from 6¼ % to 8 %. The rate of interest in the case of cash loans given by the village Mahajans varies from the minimum of 50 % to the maximum of 100 % when the loans are given against the security of standing crops, the rate of interest cannot be determined accurately. It may vary from the minimum of 100 % to the maximum of 200 %. In the case of loan in kind (paddy) the usual rate of interest is 50 % to be paid in kind at the time of harvest along with the Principal. 31

This new economic arrangement did not benefit the common people. In fact it made their condition worse. Therefore it can be argued that, the activities of Council did not reach the grassroots of Dimasa society. The whole system was channelized for the benefit of the upper structure of the Dimasa society, i.e. the Dimasa intelligentsia, during the period of 1951-1970.

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The demand for autonomy in the form of separate state, which was raised in the dawn of Indian independence, by the emerging intelligentsia of hill areas in Assam, remained dormant. The constitutional provision of Sixth Schedule could not satisfy the need of either the masses or the intelligentsia. Though they took active participation in the affairs of District Councils, they tried to raise their voice for a separate state comprising of the hill areas of Assam.

31 Ibid, p. 106.
Therefore, in June 16, 1954, the Executive Members of Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, Khasi and Jayantia Hills and North Cachar Hills assembled in Shillong, to discuss the demand for a separate hill state and amendment of the Sixth Schedule. Captain Williamson Sangma, the Chief Executive Member of Garo Hills District Council, strongly advocated for the separate state demand. On the other hand, C.H. Khothlang of North Cachar Hills and Lalsawa of Lushai Hills put forward their views on the amendment of Sixth Schedule. The meeting decided to raise the demand for creation of a separate Hill State. Captain Sangma further convened a conference at June on 6 October 1954. The conference resolved to submit memorandum to the State Reorganization Commission, demanding a Hill State.

Here it is necessary to consider the different views of the leaders of North Cachar Hills. C.H. Khothlang, the Chief Executive Member of North Cachar Hills District Council gave importance to the amendment of Sixth Schedule. J.B. Hagjer, an emerging Dimasa leader, strongly supported the views of the Separate Hill State Demand. Anyway, the memorandum was placed before the Commission. But the Commission rejected the demand for creating a separate Hill State. The Commission observed that the demand for a Hill State was confined to the Garo and Khasi & Jayantia Hills only since the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Lushai Hills were not in favour of a separate Hill State. 32

After the tour of the State Re-organisation Commission, the hill tribal leaders convened a Conference at Aijal from 26-28 October 1955. Members of the North Cachar Hills District Council were present at the Conference. The

Conference showed the dissatisfaction regarding the report of State Reorganisation Commission. A new organisation, **Eastern India Tribal Union** was formed to carry out the Hill State demand. Accordingly, the organisation had submitted a memorandum before G. B. Pant, the then Home Minister of Government of India, on 1 November 1955, who was visiting Shillong. The organisation however could not take a bold step due to internal conflicting factors. The cohesion among the groups was very scrawny. Moreover the General Election of 1957 had twisted decisive fractions among the leaders.

At this juncture, the mounting public opinion in favour the pronouncement of Assamese language as the state language in the plain areas of Assam had opened a new episode in hill politics. The **Asom Sahitya Sabha** (Assam Literary Assembly) and the Assamese Press had preferred the demand. The tribal intelligentsia of hill areas in Assam regarded it as a threat to their distinct identity. Therefore, Captain Williamson Sangma called for a Conference of all leaders of political parties in June 1960. The Conference resolved to form the **All Party Hill Leaders Conference** (here after APHLC). Dimasa leaders like P.C. Langthasa, the Chief Executive Member of North Cachar Hills District Council, Sonaram Thaosen, Hamdhanmohan Haflongbar, the member of Legislative Assembly to Assam and J.B. Hagjer were present at that Conference. Since the Conference had measured the move to assert Assamese as a language for all or any of the official purposes in the state of Assam, and had well-versed that a Bill to that effect will be introduced in the ensuing session of Assam Legislative Assembly, it unanimously articulated its strong disagreement to such a move and gave the subsequent reasons: -
(a) The position and the conditions of the Hills people in Assam are such that the acceptance of the Assamese language, now or at any time, which would place the Assamese in a more dominant position will lead the assimilation of all the Hills people into the Assamese Community, thereby gradually leading to the disintegration of their identity as distinct communities of India, which identity has been given recognition and projection under the Constitution. Such assimilation and disintegration are against the deepest sentiments of the Hills people and detrimental to the composite culture of India, which is born of unity in diversity. [sic]

(b) The imposition of the Assamese languages will even burden the Hills people with too many languages (Hindi, the vernacular, English and Assamese) in different scripts.

(c) The adoption Assamese as the official language of the State will adversely affect the opportunity and prospects of the Hills people in the Government services and other avocations not withstanding any amount of safeguards, which can always be circumvented.

d) There is no justification for the declaration of Assamese as the official language even from the population point of view, as less than fifty percent of the populations has Assamese as their mother tongue.

(e) The move has already created discord, disruption and violence among the different language groups of the state, thereby defeating the very purpose, which an official language is intended to serve.

(f) The imposition of the language by law will create more chaos and insecurity in this Frontier State; will be catastrophic especially in view of the Chinese aggression.
Assam being India in miniature, inhabited by people of diverse races, cultures and languages, the proper official language should be Hindi. Meanwhile, English should continue as the official language until such time as the people of the State are ready to adopt Hindi as the official language.\(^{33}\)

Subsequently, the Conference demanded the rejection of the anticipated Bill for the interest of the linguistic minorities of Assam, in particular and the people of the Hills Districts in general. On the basis of this resolution, the A.P.H.L.C. had submitted its memorandum before the President of India. But, despite the sturdy disagreement of A.P.H.L.C, the Assam Assembly passed the Assam Official Language Bill on 18th October 1960, which had totally displeased the leaders of A.P.H.L.C. It convened a Conference at Haflong on 16 November 1960. Under the Chairmanship of J.B. Hagjer, the Conference resolved to elevate the demand for separation from Assam:

The conference adopted the constitutional setup for the North-Eastern Frontier State. The state would be known as Eastern Frontier State. It would have territorial jurisdiction over all the tribal areas of Assam and NEFA, the Cantonment and the Shillong Municipality. It might include any other area geographically contiguous inhabited by the hill tribes and tribal areas of Manipur and Tripura. The North-Eastern Frontier State would have a unicameral legislature, consisting of 60 members, elected directly on the basis of adult franchise from single member constituencies. Each autonomous district would be represented by at last one member and by two members from all the autonomous districts and NEFA in the Rajya Sabha. The Constitution provided for the retention of the District Councils

\(^{33}\) V. R. Trivedi (ed), *Documents on Assam*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 119-120.
and the regional councils. The power of the District Councils would be increased by an amendment to the Sixth Schedule. The Eastern Frontier State would have a Governor and a Council of Ministers, a High Court, a University with English as the official language and a Public Service Commission. The Constitution promised the protection of the legitimate interests of the minorities.34

The delegation of A.P.H.L.C met Prime Minister of India on 24 November 1960. However, the Prime Minister discarded their demand for separate State on financial ground. On 25 November the delegation met the Home Minister of India concerning the subject but failed to achieve result. Therefore on 26 November, they again met the Prime Minister. In this discussion, the Prime Minister proposed a scheme, which was known as the Scottish Plan. The Scottish Plan proposed that there should be a regional committee consisting of all the elected members of the assembly from the autonomous districts. The Regional committee would exercise similar powers as entrusted to the Regional Committees of Punjab and Andhra Pradesh.35

The plan further stated that at the state level all special development affairs of the hill areas would be under the control of a high-powered Statutory State Council. This Council would have all the functions including planning and execution. The Chief Minister or any other non Hill Minister of the Government of Assam would not be interfered the functions of the Council. The Council would be constituted with the representatives from the hill areas. Moreover the Council would have power to allocate funds for the

development of all hill areas financed by the Government of India under Article 275.  

Regarding the matters of legislation, a committee for the autonomous district affairs would be formed comprising the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly of the hill districts. That committee would be presided over by a Hill Minister. He was entrusted to look into all legislation affecting the welfare of the people of the hills. Apart from that, a Minister of the Cabinet rank would be appointed for the whole hill areas. In order to represent the entire hill districts, there would be an appointment of one or more Deputy Ministers. The Hill Minister would exercises the power of executive authority in concerned hill areas. The Governor had to act his discretion, in case of any divergence between the Regional Committee and the Legislative Assembly. His discretionary power was to be the final in this regard.  

A separately shown and administered fund was to be required for the execution of plans and development schemes in the autonomous districts. To assign more powers to the autonomous District Councils and Regional Committees, the provisions of Sixth Schedule would be amended. Such liberalize attempts were required to confer the greatest practicable measure of autonomy to the District Councils.  

Nevertheless the proposals of the Scottish Plan were rejected by the A.P.H.L.C on the ground that:

It was almost a state within a state providing for partial administrative separation without actual political separation. Since the tribal areas would

36 loc. cit.
37 Ibid. p. 375.
38 loc. cit.
be a part of Assam politically, there would be many occasions for friction and discord would continue to exist. It would bring about greater strife. Therefore, the Scottish Plan was not of politics.  

However the Assam Provincial Congress Committee accepted the Scottish Plan. Its constituent district committees in Garo Hills, Khasi & Jayantia Hills and North Cachar Hills extended their support towards its state committee. J. B. Hagjer who was the one of the architect of A.P.H.L.C also put forwarded similar viewpoints and in this he was supported by his colleagues like Mohan Sing and Eamonsing Sangma. Afterwards they left A.P.H.L.C.  

On the other hand, the A.P.H.L.C determined to initiate a non-violent program of movement. But due to the aggression of the Chinese into Indian Territory, it had to postpone the programme in 1962. After the war the A.P.H.L.C delegates met Prime Minister of India on 10 June 1963. As a result of the discussion, a scheme of administrative set-up was anticipated; this came to be known as Nehru Plan. Nehru framed a broad outline providing them the largest autonomy within the framework of Assam. The appointment of the Commission depended upon their recognition of the broad principles. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference finally accepted the Prime Minister's offer on 17 April 1964 and requested him to proceed with appointment of the Commission.  

In this regard, the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India took a resolution on 16 March 1965. The Resolution endorsed that a certain measure of autonomy on these areas be conferred on the hill areas of Assam.

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40 Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's Views on Hill Areas, Shillong, January1, 1962, in V. R. Trivedi, op. cit. p.150.
comprising the Garo Hills, The United Khasi & Jayantia Hills, the Mizo Hills, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts, subject to the special provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. It had been represented to the government of India time and again that for accelerating the pace of and ensuring fuller participation of the people in the development of these areas, and for upholding the interests of the tribal people effectively, it was obligatory to increase the autonomy subsequently.\textsuperscript{41}

The Government of India after a careful examination of the needs and interests of the people of the hill areas concluded that it would be desirable for the hill areas to have a full measure of autonomy subject to;

- the preservation of the unity of Assam, the continuance of a common legislature for the whole State of Assam and the maintenance of the Cabinet government of the accepted form functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility of the State Assembly.\textsuperscript{42}

In consultation with the Government of Assam and on the basis of the acceptance on principles by the A.P.H.L.C.; the Government of India appointed H.V. Pataskar as Chairman and Sankar Prasad, G.S. Rao as members of the Commission. This Commission was known as the \textbf{Pataskar Commission}. The Commission was to recommend a detailed scheme for reorganising the administrative set-up of the hill areas. The Commission would also recommend the administrative, financial, and legal measures necessary for giving effect to the Scheme. The Commission was to consider whether in the light of the Scheme which they may suggest for the

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\textsuperscript{41} Resolution NO 4/2/64-SR(R)-A, Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, in V. R. Trivedi, \textit{op. cit.} p. 209. \\
\textsuperscript{42} loc. cit.
\end{flushleft}
administration of the hill areas, it is necessary to make changes in the powers and functions of the District and Regional Councils constituted under the Sixth-Schedule and recommend after examining the working of the District and Regional councils, what changes, if any, should be made in that Schedule.

This attitude of Government of India had satisfied a section of intelligentsia in particular, as it attempted to meet the demand for amendment of Sixth Schedule, which was raised by C.H. Khothlang in the Shillong Conference in the initial stage of the movement.

Meanwhile, the Pataskar Commission started its programmes. It made an extensive survey of hill areas. Several organisations had submitted their memoranda before the Commission. Person like H.D. Barman, ex-Executive Member of North Cachar Hills District Council, North Cachar Hills People Union, and District Congress Committee expressed the viewpoints of the Dimasa. The North Cachar Hills District Council also presented their viewpoint. Along with the Mikir Hills, District Council, they supported the stand of the Assam Government. The District Congress Committee also followed the same path. The State Government of Assam had approached the question of autonomy to the hill districts on the grounds that, any examination of political administrative or other reforms should be based on the security of the country and the balanced accelerated economic development.

In view of the strategic location and need for economic development of Assam and the entire region, which depended on the hills and the plains, the Government considered for a compact and unified administrative structure of

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the State. The State Government also realised that the largest measure of autonomy to the hill district was essential to enable the hill people to progress. However they did not favour any scheme of administrative reorganisation that may encourage the disruptive tendencies. It also emphasized for the preservation of the unity of the state, government and legislature might be an essential requirement of any scheme to be formulated. According to the Government of Assam, the hill people had been asking for a Constitutional arrangement and autonomy in the matter of development rather than any special authority outside the state legislature for the protection of their welfare.44

On the basis of different viewpoints, memoranda and evidences, the Commission categorised two sets of arguments. One was the need for economic development of the hill areas and the other was the widespread dissatisfaction regarding the District and Regional Councils. So far the economic development was concerned; the Commission argued that the political parties and local organisations considered that economic backwardness was the main problem of the hill areas. It was emphasized that the separatist tendencies which grew in the hill areas during the British rule had been aggravated by persistent economic backwardness of the areas.45

The working of the District Council and Regional Councils were under the scanner of the Commission. The evidence before the Commission revealed widespread discontent with the working of these Councils. The dissatisfaction was reflected as a result of the failure of the Councils in development activities. It was told before the Commission that as the Councils did not

44 Ibid, p. 228.
possess sufficient powers, authority and resources. They had not been effective in guiding the affairs of the people of their area in right direction. In certain quarters there was the feeling that, the limited power and authority of the Councils were also utilised for political ends as a result of which the Councils had failed to defend the socio-economic interests of the hill people.\textsuperscript{46}

After the investigation the Commission revealed certain findings. The most important findings were that, Assam has an indissoluble geographical, administrative and economic link between the hills and the plains. The hills districts were a series of economic islands joined only by the plains. As the two regions were interdependent, the prosperity of both would depend largely on interchange between the hills and plains. In proportion to the population, the relative contribution of the hill districts to the States revenues was much less and it had gone down further in the period of 1951-52. Moreover the per capita contribution of the hill districts to the State revenues was much less than that of the plains while the per capita contribution of the plains had more than doubled. The share of the hill areas in revenue expenditure had also more than their share of population. The per capita expenditure of the hill districts had increased 5 to 6 times from 1951-52 and it was much more than in the plains. The allocations of the Plan outlay for the hill districts had not been unfair vis-à-vis their population. It was also opined that, in respect of the total and per capita income the hill districts had recorded higher rate of increase than the plains.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{46} loc. cit.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p.151.
On the basis of these findings, the Commission had recommended a set of provisions, comprising the economic and financial aspects, autonomy etc. The recommendation regarding the autonomy of the Hill Areas was very important:

The Scheme of Autonomy that emerged from the discussion between the Prime Minister and the hill leaders did not envisage a completely separate administration for the hill areas with only a notional superstructure remaining common with the rest of Assam. The scheme assured the hill people that the State Assembly would pass laws applying to them with the approval of their representatives and that they would have full opportunity to control their social, cultural and personal matters and their areas within the framework of the larger political and economic life of Assam.48

The recommendations of Pataskar Commission, however, could not satisfy the leaders of A.P.H.L.C. Therefore they convened a meeting at Tura on 19 May 1966. The Conference had put the view that the Commission adopted a partisan attitude in favour of the State Government. Therefore the Conference had redundant the recommendations. It also stated that some of its recommendations fell short of the plan for full autonomy as outlined by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Moreover the Conference had to rely on the State Government for information relating to development plans. Then the A.P.H.L.C was endorsing its resolution of 16 November 1960 at Haflong, for the creation of the North-Eastern Frontier State for the hill people of Assam. It further opined that, the Nehru Plan was inadequate to meet the situation in the hill areas. The A.P.H.L.C directed its Council of Action to formulate

adequate policies for launching a non-violent Satyagraha movement before the last part of June 1966.\(^9\)

Meanwhile the national political scenario was changing. The new Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi took the issue of separate state seriously. She visited Shillong on 27 December 1966 and discussed the matter with the Chief Minister of Assam. The A.P.H.L.C had submitted a memorandum. She too invited the A.P.H.L.C leadership for discussion at Delhi on 17 January 1967.

The A.P.H.L.C accepted the invitation. The Chief Minister of Assam was also present. As a result of the discussion, the Government of India proposed to reorganise the Assam on the basis of the federal structure. The hill areas would be given equal status with the rest of the Assam. This plan was known as the **Federal Plan**. This plan was accepted by the A.P.H.L.C. But the Assam Provincial Congress Committee strongly opposed the plan. The Assam Provincial Congress Committee regarded the plan as a threat to the unity, security and integrity of Assam. The Assamese press also strongly opposed the plan. As a result of the opposition, the Government of India postponed the process of constituting the committee.

Meantime, in July 1967, a committee was constituted with the representatives of various political parties of plains and A. P. H. L. C. The committee was known as **Mehta Committee**. The Mehta Committee had to make an effort to reach an agreed solution for the reorganisation of Assam. The Mehta Committee did not favour the federal structure of Assam and it considered the unity and integrity of Assam as an essential one. There was a mixed reaction

on the Mehta scheme. A. P. H. L. C. rejected the scheme on the ground that it aimed at breaking the unity established among the hill tribes. The Assam Provincial Congress Committee welcomed the scheme. The North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills District Councils also welcomed the proposal. All of these reactions led to a dead lock to the whole issue.

Meanwhile the A.P. H. L.C threatened to launch Satyagraha unless their demand was fulfilled. Then the Government of India announced its plan for reorganisation of the Assam on 11 September 1968. As per the plan, an autonomous state would be constituted, in the name and style of the State of Meghalaya. The jurisdiction of the autonomous state would be over two districts, the Garo Hills district and the Khasi & Jayantia Hills District. With a view to encourage an integrated approach to the security and development of the region, the provision of an Advisory Council for the North Eastern region as a whole was also forwarded. Moreover the autonomous districts of Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills were given the option to join the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. However the District Councils had to adopt a resolution for option which would be passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the District Councils before the prescribed date. 50

On 19 September 1968, the A.P.H.L.C suspended their Satyagraha programme and constituted a committee to evaluate the plan. The A.P.H.L.C considered the report of the committee on the 15 October and decided to give a fair trial to the plan of the Government of India and at the same time understanding the A.P.H.L.C would continue all efforts to achieve a full and a

50 Ibid, p. 433.
separate state comprising all the hill areas as discussed in its Haflong session in 1960. The Conference appointed a committee to point out all the shortcomings of the plan and improvement.\textsuperscript{51}

At last, the A.P.H.L.C accepted the plan of Government of India on 28 January 1969. They appealed to the two District Councils, the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills, to join the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. The A. P. H. L. C also assured to each and every autonomous district for providing equal representation in the Cabinet and equal opportunities for participation in the various fields of administration and development. The necessary opportunity for preserving the distinct identity and culture was also assured.\textsuperscript{52}

Acceptance of the Autonomous plans by the A.P.H.L.C led to the 22nd amendment of the Constitution of India, in the Parliament. The Parliament passed the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Bill, to create an Autonomous state within the State of Assam, comprising the Garo Hills District and United Khasi & Jayantia Hills District.

At this juncture, the decision of the leaders of North Cachar Hills District and the Mikir Hills District became very important. Already J.B. Hagjer disassociated himself from A.P.H.L.C. The leaders of both Councils had put similar viewpoints with the Government of Assam before the Pataskar Commission. There were several reasons for this standpoint.

The Mikir and the Dimasa unlike other hill tribes are pro-Hindus being very much influenced by Hindu religion and culture. Moreover, they are nationalistic in outlook and Congress minded. The district has been

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid}, p. 436.  
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid}, p. 437.
returning Congress M.LAs and voting congress to power in the District Councils. They have been all along against joining the hill state or the hill unit on grounds of religion, culture, custom and language. The Garos and the Khasis are matriarchal whereas the Mikir and Dimasas are patriarchal. Quite a large number of them are Christians and are very much influenced by culture that Christians has brought with it. The Mikirs and the Dimasas who having nothing in common with either the Khasi or the Garos are heavily outweighed in number: Garo Hills: 3,07228; Khasi and Jaintia Hills: 4,62,152; Mikir and North Cachar Hills: 2,79,726. Besides, the Mikirs and Dimasas are the most backward both economically and educationally. The percentage of literacy in Mikir and North Cachar Hill is 12% whereas in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills it is 27%. Therefore for the Mikirs and the Dimasas to join the proposed autonomous district is like the making friendship with faints. 53 (sic)

Moreover, the leaders of both District Councils were provided strong assurance by the Assam Government and the Assam Provincial Congress Committee. In a combined meeting at Congress Bhavan Haflong the then Acting Chief Minister of Assam M.M. Choudhary, B. Bhagavati, President, Assam Provincial Congress Committee, Tribal Areas Development Minister, C.S. Terrong, Education Minister J.B. Hagjer, Deputy Minister of Tribal Areas Development S.S. Terrong extended their hands towards the leaders of North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills District Council.

The re-organisation of Assam was thoroughly discussed in the meeting and the acting Chief Minister and the President A.P.C.C clarified all the points.

and implications involving the re-organisation. On the basis of the recommendations of Mehta Committee they were also assured that both legislative and executive powers would be given to the District Council and special financial provision also would be made for development plans of the District Council within Assam so that rapid development of hills area would be possible. The members thus unanimously decided to exercise their option to remain within Assam in the District Council session scheduled to be held on 20.2.70.\(^{54}\)

Accordingly the both District Councils had rejected the appeal of A.P.H.L.C to join in the Meghalaya and remained in the State of Assam. The A.P.H.L.C had to confine their satisfaction with the two District Councils of Garo and Khasi & Jayantia Hills only. Thus the movement for a separate Hill State comprising the hill areas of Assam reached a conclusion with these two District Councils. The new Autonomous state Meghalaya ended the decade long movement for the separate Hill State.


\(^{54}\) N. Rongpi, *Rajjya Dabi Samatir Samu Itihakh*, Diphu, p.36.
including Panchayat on the basis of the power conferred by paragraph 6(2) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.55

The Early Phase of autonomy movement of Dimasa intelligentsia has some characteristics. Initially they put forwarded their case before the Gopinath Bordoloi Committee. They acquired the Sixth Schedule. They had participated in election and other activities of District Council. However the activities of Council did not reach the grassroots of Dimasa society. The whole system was channelized for the benefit of the upper strata of the Dimasa society, i.e. the Dimasa intelligentsia. Meanwhile, the aspirations of Dimasa leaders grew. Their participation in the organisational process of A.P.H.L.C. helped them to acquire the skill of power politics. Though they did not join in the new state Meghalaya in fear of losing identity, they were able to acquire some benefits from the Government of Assam. But they were still dissatisfied. A new chapter of movement for autonomy was started in North Cachar Hills in the subsequent period, which will be discussed in the Intermediate Phase.