Chapter 4

Growth and Development of the Karbi Ethnic Movement

The demand for formation of Mikir Hills district in the mid-decade of the last millennium paved the road for initiation of Karbi ethnic consciousness. The Karbi youths, who were educated through the newly institutionalized education systems of that time, could see the backwardness of their community in terms of education, health and development. They also became conscious of the marginalization and hegemonic subordinations that their community had been subjected to, from the so-called mainstream society. Such awakening led them to the seeding of the idea of self-rule of themselves. Moreover, the official policy of the newly independent Indian state at that was confronting between two polarized views, which was reflected in the Elwin-Ghurye debate. G. S. Ghurye, the founder of anthropology in India, was of the view that the tribal communities could be regarded as backward Hindus, which endorses the idea of integrating them with the mainstream Hindu society. In contrast, noted ethnographer and tribal activist Verrier Elwin held a more protectionist view towards maintaining the distinction of the tribal communities (Guha 1996). Elwin’s perspective seemed to be more influential in the governmental policies and activities, especially towards the tribal people of Assam and the North-East India, in the post-independence times. This led to a preservationist policy towards the tribal culture and heritage, which, in turn, facilitated the emergence of the ethnic politics legitimated by the state itself.

In the context of the then undivided Assam (now the North-East India), it started with the Naga insurgency which erupted in the wake of Indian independence. In the coming years, voices from other communities were also raised in the similar tone. The beginning of the Karbi ethnic consciousness can also be traced back to this time of the Indian independence. In this
chapter, a detailed trajectory of the growth and development of Karbi ethnonational politics will be attempted.

4.1 The Karbi People:

The Karbis are a Tibeto-Burman group and speakers of a language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan language family, who are now registered as one of the Scheduled Tribes as per the enumeration of the Government of India. Believed to be one of the earliest migrants to the region, their traditional settlement area is found in the Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (erstwhile North Cachar) districts in the state of Assam. As per the census of 2001, the total population of Karbis in Assam is 3,53,513 which constitute 10.7% of the total ST population of the State. Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao have the highest concentration of Karbi population, though considerable numbers are also residing in the plains of Marigaon and Kamrup, who are known as amri Karbi (plain dwellers) or dumarali in colloquial references. Besides these locations, small pockets of Karbi settlements are available in several other districts of Assam (Marigaon, Kamrup, Nagaon, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Karimganj) and in certain areas within the states of Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Anthropological writings on the Karbis report that there are four subgroup of the Karbis, namely; Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumrali on the basis of their geographical areas. These subgroups are again divided into clans and sub-clans (Sengupta 2003, 374).

The Karbis were popularly and frequently referred as Mikir, in the official colonial documents of the British as well as in the pre-colonial Ahom Chronicles. But they like to call themselves as Karbi or Ar leng. In the first Assamese dictionary Hemkosh published in the year 1900, their entry was given not as Karbi but as the Mikir where they were described as "an aboriginal tribe of Assam". Gunabhiram Barua a 19th century social reformer

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of Assam, in mentioned in his *Asom Buranji* that the Assamese called them as *Mikir*, whereas they call themselves as *Karbe* (Barua 2006, 14-15).

As per the available oral accounts, during the Burmese invasion in the early decades of the 19th century, the Karbis entered into the deep jungles to save themselves from the brutality of Burmese soldiers. The Karbi girls tattooed a black line (in Karbi it is called *duk*) starting from the forehead to the chin to show themselves ugly. It later became a tradition among the Karbi girls to draw the line. The tradition is still prevalent among many elderly women. In many folk performances, nowadays, the girls along with the traditional costumes also make this artificial line.

Another narrative related to a harvesting festival, called *Hachakekan*, it is recounted that a Karbi youth had learned the wet rice cultivation during his stay in plains, and he carried this new knowledge of cultivation to the hills which provided more productivity in comparison to traditional dry rice cultivation. Such narratives provide may hint about the existence of spontaneous relationship between the plains and the hills among the Karbis in the pre-colonial times. However, under the colonial scheme of classifying peoples and geographies, the Karbi settlements were subjected under the policy of *Inner Line Permit* in 1873 and finally segregated as *Partially Excluded Areas* in 1935.

4.2 Social Structure

As mentioned above, the Karbis have five exogamous clans (*nok:hum*) namely Terang, Teron, Enghi, Ingti and Timung. Each of these clans has several sub-clans as mentioned belows:

1. Terang (15 sub clans): Terang, Terang Ingnar, Terang Ingjai, Terang Dilli, Terang Rongchecho, Be Ke-ik, Be ke-et (Ronghang), Be Chingthog, Be Dum, Be Lindok, Be Miji, Kro, Kro nilip, Kro nihang, Kro Khamu
2. Teron: (9 sub clans): Milik, Kongkat, Langne, Sirang, Dengja, Ai, Torap, Sir:ik, Miji


4. Ingti (6 sub clans): Ingti Hensek, Ingti Kathar Bura, Kathar Riso, Ingleng, Taro, Ingti Killing


These clans are exogamous in nature. Marriage and sexual relationship between the same clan is strictly prohibited as children of same clan are considered as siblings. Violation of the same leads to punishment as per customary law. The society of the Karbis is a patriarchal one. Inheritance and descent passes through father’s line only. Children continue their father’s clan. A daughter, after her marriage, too continues her father’s title only. Cross-cousin marriage is a preferential form of marriage among the Karbis. Monogamy is widely prevalent practice and polygamy and divorce are rare.

4.3 Land and Gender Relations:

Karbi society is a male dominated society which is evident in their property rights, participation of men in rituals and other affairs of their society. The
preferential and proscribed marriage restricts women’s mobility and thereby controls the sexuality. The traditional Karbi society runs through village council known as Me which is constituted by all males, headed by the village headman of the village. A village is named after the name of the village headman (Sarthe) where the post of the headman is hereditary. The other members of the council are priest, representative of youth and other two male members. The village council takes all kinds of decision in a village. Village council is responsible for solving all kinds of problems and issues including disputes, distribution of land, adultery and birth of child out of such relationship etc. As it is constituted of all males, women participation in decisions making is found absent. Nowadays the role of Me is decreasing (Bathari, 2009:142-159).

Jhum\(^2\) was the preferred mode of cultivation by the Karbis which is still prevalent in interior villages. In recent times, most of the Karbis have adopted settled and wet-cultivation in the foothills. As jhum was common mode of cultivation, the Karbis had to shift from one area to another in the bygone days. Land was considered as the common property and cultivable land was distributed to families as per the requirement of the family by the village council. Jhum cultivation is more a self-sufficient mode of agricultural pattern that does not produce surplus to be sold in the market. Both men and women worked in the jhum field but gender division of labour did exist. Apart from the division of labour in agriculture, the gendered demarcation and discrimination are also evident in the various prescribed domestics roles for men and women which are illustrated in certain oral narratives.

The decade of the 1980s saw the emergence of environmental concerns among the actors of development. The large-scale industrialization and deforestation processes began to be critically reviewed, with increasing emphases on the newer vocabularies of the development paradigm, like alternative

\(^2\) Jhum is the traditional slash-and-burn cultivation method of many of the hill-dwelling communities of the region.
development, sustainable development, etc. The Southeast Asian hub received
significant attention for its traditional agricultural practices like the jhum
(slash-and-burn) cultivation. A widely held belief was that such kind of
cultivation causes of massive deforestation and soil erosion, for which the
Government departments encouraged for settled cultivation through various
schemes. As such, some model villages were established in Karbi Anglong
and some amount of cultivable land was given to each families. Thus, the
community land owned by the state started to be distributed with the pattas\(^3\) to
the individuals. The Rubber Board and Coffee board started working in these
areas. Apart from the model villages, cash crop cultivations, especially rubber
plantation, also started in Karbi Anglong. Individuals started cultivating
rubber in the lands which were earlier community lands. Moreover, as rubber
cultivation requires some amount of capital in the initial years, hence banks
became the sources for getting loan. To get loan from bank, an individual
requires his own land with patta. As such, many people occupied the lands by
different means and started cultivating rubber.

The diminishing of communal land and thereby rise of private property
resulted affecting many spheres of the tribal society. As stated, the jhum had
been more a self-sufficient kind of cropping system which produced the crop
within a short span of time giving the food security to a family. Therefore,
such pattern had kept the people away from the market and market economy.
But the new pattern of cropping connected the populace to the markets and
market-centric ideas and practices. Through some middleman, different cash-
crops began to be sold; and the cash usually flow to the hands of the male
members of a family. Along with this, the rubber cultivation is also having
different implications. As it takes around eight years for a rubber tree to get
matured and produce the latex, questions have been raised regarding how a
poor family, who were traditionally accustomed to the self-sufficiency of the
jhum, can survive for such a long duration. To feed the family, many people
have become daily wage labour or adopted different livelihood means.

\(^3\) Pattas are the official land-owning documents.
As the hills are not good for rice cultivation, cash-crops became a preferred cropping pattern once jhum cultivation stops. This connects the individuals directly to the market. Many traders invested money (gives money to cultivate to local people) purchased the crops from them in low price. The market price is determined by the middlemen or if it is sold in the market directly also expected value is not received by the farmers. The dependency syndrome, cash transaction, flow of capital altered the gender relations and has created a new kind patriarchy within such developmental frame.

The flourishing market economy thus, affecting the remote corners of the tribal areas, is creating a new development regime. In one hand, it is propagating the cash crops cultivation, and in turn, traditional mode of agricultural pattern is withering away. People became dependent on the market and cultivate as per the need of the market. The serious gender implication here is that such kind of new developmental paradigm has created a new order of patriarchy. Dependency of women on men increases as cash economy is controlled by men. The emerging land laws also create a set of dependent elites who earn money from outsiders by leasing out their lands. The operations of capital in multiple levels, either through direct connections with the market or through the government sponsored schemes, led to the rise of the elite class.

4.4 Formation of Mikir Hills District (Karbi Anglong)

The coming of the Christian Missionaries in the hills of Karbi Anglong during later decades of the 19th century brought the illiterate and tribal people of the hills under the purview of colonial modernity. The white men's burden of civilizing the savage led to the twin processes — religious conversion to Christianity and spread of western education. Within a short span of time, a considerable section of the Karbis adopted Christianity in the early 20th century. Some of these neophyte Christians also passed out of the Missionary
educated who could feel the relative *backwardness* of their own community. However, unlike the state of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya of North-East India, where majority or sometimes the entire population was converted to Christianity, the absolute religious cleansing did not take place among the Karbis or among other tribal communities of the present-day Assam. As such, diverse religious affiliations worked crucially at certain levels in furthering the political discourse of the people.

Semson Singh Ingti (1910 – 1948), the father and architect of Karbi nation and nationalism was a Christian Mission-educated gentleman who first raised the issue of a separate district for the Karbis. As a part of Christian Mission, Semson's father shifted from Tika hills of present day west Karbi Anglong to Golaghat where Semson got his early education in Golaghat Mission School, and did his matriculation from Bezbaruah High School, Golaghat. Later he went to Cotton College and finally completed his Graduation from Murari Chand College of Sylhet in 1933. Once he came back after his higher education, Semson Sing Ingti was appointed as a School Sub-Inspector in Education Department. This service opportunity gave him the scope to know the illiterate, backward Karbi people living in villages and hills. Visiting different primary schools as a part of his Government duty, he could see the appalling conditions of primary education and economic backwardness of his community. He tried to bring all the Karbis scattered in different places to one geographical space and to form a single political administration so that necessary measures could be taken for the upliftment of the Karbis. Along with Semson Sing, a set of other educated elite came out from the community and a political consciousness of the Karbis developed. Some of such individuals of that time were namely Khorsing Terang, Nihang Rongpher, Song Be, etc. This attempt of bringing all the scattered Karbis under a singular political and geographical constellation was the manifestation of imagining themselves as an ethnic community. However a more immediate agenda was to function like a pressure group towards the desired course of development for the people and their places. The newly emerged political consciousness is
reflected in the memorandums submitted to the then Governors of Assam. Semson Sing and his colleagues welcomed Sir Robert Neir, the Governor of Assam, at Mohongdijua Camp, during his visit to upper Assam via Mikir hills in 1940. There, the delegates led by Semson submitted the first memorandum where it was informed that,

"Mikirs who have been kept in perpetual subordination by their progressive neighbours beg to express our deep gratitude to Your Excellency for taking in for the first time a Mikir Representative in Provincial Legislature, an act which has not only received appreciation from the Mikir people but has also worked as an initiative among the Mikir youths for improving the status of their tribe; and we sincerely hope that however busily engaged Your Excellency might be with multifarious activities. Your Excellency would be graciously pleased to bear in mind the deplorable condition of the Mikirs due to complete isolation in the jungle area of the hills and further to redress to their legitimate grievances as embodied in the memorial annexed herewith." (quoted in Rongpher 2006, 344-345)

Thus the political consciousness of the Karbis started and in the later periods the demands became more crystallized. With the formation of various political organizations, the mobilization process got momentum in later times.

One old Karbi Socio-Political organization namely Karbi A Dorbar was formed in the year 1946 at Hawaiipur of the then Nagaon district. Semson Sing Ingti was nominated as General Secretary and Sarsing Teorn Habe became the President of the organization. Right from its inception, the A dorbar was concerned about the problems of its community. On 1st March, 1947, it submitted a memorandum at Lanka to Sir Andrew Claw, the then Governor of Assam, in his visit to the tribal dominated areas along with his wife. Some of the important issues highlighted in the memorandum were necessity of educational, medical, and agricultural facilities and governmental recognition of the A Dorbar. The memorandum says,
"We, the Mikir people who are in every respect backward and neglected, feel most encouraged by Your Excellency and Lady Claw's presence in our midst today.

The country is passing through a most critical time in the political history of India. Every minority community is fully alert of the situation and asserting their best for their own political safeguards. The Mikirs, as well have strongly organized themselves to voice their feelings through their only All Assam association called 'Karbi A Dorbar'. We humbly pray to Your Excellency to give due recognition to the aforesaid Association, so that in the matter of framing the coming Constitution of the country, the Association is consulted.

Your Excellency is aware that the Mikir people are living in areas where there are scanty educational, medical, and agricultural facilities. Communication as compared to with rest of the province is nil. So we most humbly pray the immediate steps are taken to better the conditions prevailing in these areas. It is general opinion of the country that the backward tribes require protection and protective rules in the Hills. But we have come to know that there is a proposal for the abolition of Chin Hill Regulations. If that is done, we pray that some other rules or regulations should be substituted for safeguard the interest and existence of the illiterate and ignorant Mikir people." (ibid, 346-347)

An important issue reflected in the above memorandum is the vouch for a protective administration of the Karbi population that can safeguard their tradition and culture. There was colonial regulation, under the name of Chin Hill Regulation which was initially passed in 1896 for the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) which authorized the Superintendent or Deputy Commissioner to order an undesirable outsider to leave the area and to tax the residents, permanent or temporary, clans and villages. In 1911, this regulation was also extended to the Mikir Hills which protected the Karbi localities from outsiders. A concern for the removal of this regulation is revealed in the above memorandum.

The Inner Line Permit was introduced in the year 1873 to certain areas of North-East, especially to the hills of the region. The then Mikir hills were part of the two districts of Assam viz. Nowgong and Sibsagar; hence it suffered
most as it was nobody's child (Chaube 1999, 47). The Mikir Hills tract in
the colonial period was constituted with the administrative boundary of Nowgong
district from the year 1884. There was no administrative boundary of Mikir
Hills until 1884. Through the Frontier Regulation Act 1884, it came under
Nowgong district. A part of the tract was transferred to Sivasagar district in
1893. In 1928, the Simon Commission came; and under its advice, the
categories of excluded areas and partially excluded areas were created.
Creating and separating some areas from the mainland by this process, the
colonial Government began treating such areas with different administrative
measures. The Mikir Hills fell under the partially excluded areas in 1935.

During the time of Indian independence, with the recommendation of Cabinet
Mission, the constituent Assembly hurriedly formed a committee named as
Fundamental Rights of the Minority and Tribals and Excluded Area. Ballav
Bhai Patel was the chairman of this committee. It set the sub-committee for
NORTH-EAST Frontier (Assam) Tribal’s and Excluded Area, taking
Gopinath Bordoloi as the chairman of the sub-committee. This sub-committee
is popularly known as Bordoloi Committee. Rev. JJ Nichols Roy, Rupnath
Brahma and A. V. Thakkar were the members of the committee. Semson Sing
Ingti, and Khorsing Terang were the co-opted members of Bordoloi
Committee. The Bordoloi sub-committee found ‘considerable’ but unequal
progress in the hill areas. The Mikir Hills and the Garo Hills – both the
partially excluded areas were found to be the most backward areas of the
region.

Thus, creation of a separate district including the partially excluded areas of
Nowgong and Sibsagar district was the need of the hour for the newly
independent state for a fast development of the backward people. The rising
elites of the community also found an immediate solution for the development
of the community through the creation of a separate hill district for the Karbis.
Karbi A Dorbar, as it claimed the first socio-political organization became the mouthpiece of the community. On 18th May of 1947, the Dorbar submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee where it demanded a separate district for the Karbis. They desired consolidation of the Mikir areas, protection of customs and extension of franchise (Chaube 1999, 47). On the recommendation of the Bordoloi Committee and further modifications, the Constitution of India adopted the Provision of Sixth Schedule for the hill population of North-East India. After India got independence the United Mikir and North Cacher Hills district also came into existence vide Government notification dated 17.11.1951 no. TAD/R/31/50 as the largest district of Assam curving an area of 4421.12 square kilometres from then Nagaon district, 4382.28 square kilometres from Sivsagar district, and 1540 square kilometre from Khasi and Jaintia Hills district the United Mikir and North Cachar District was created. The Autonomous District Council formed under the provision of Sixth Schedule on 23rd June 1952. In the year 1970, bifurcating United Mikir Hills District, Mikir Hills and North Cachar district was created. Following this on 14th October in 1976, vide Government notification TAD/R/115/74/47 Dtd. 14.10.1976 Mikir Hills District was renamed as Karbi Anglong. Karbi Anglong is now the largest district of Assam comprising 10434 square kilometres of area. Diphu is the Headquarters of the district; and two other sub-divisions are Bokajan and Hamren.

4.5 Consolidation and Institutionalization of Karbi Identity

The formation of Autonomous District Council under the Provision of Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution brought the ‘anarchist population’ to the modern set up of the new state. The process had already been started during the colonial rule. In addition to the Karbi A Dorbar, formation of other bodies in subsequent times under the names and styles of KSA (Karbi Students Association), Karbi Lamet Amei (Karbi Literary Society), Karbi Cultural

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4 James Scott in his *The Art of not Being Governed* (2006) regarded the hilly population as anarchist people
Society, Kabi Riso Adabar, etc. gave momentum to the ethnic mobilization among the Karbis. In Assam, the students’ organizations and literary bodies of different communities always play vital role in articulating identity. In Assamese nationalist discourse, Bodo nationalist discourse the literary bodies (Asom Shitya Sabha, Bodo Thunlai Afad) and Students Union (All Assam Students Union, All Bodo Students Union) have been seen as the prime movers of nationalist ideology.

4.5.1 Karbi A-Dorbar:

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

4.5.2 Karbi Riso Adorbar

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

The Karbi Cultural Society was formed in 1977 on 30th January in Diphu. Since its inception KCS has been trying to preserve and promote Karbi culture and heritage. It is responsible for organizing the Karbi Youth Festival. It claims Karbi Youth Festival as the biggest ethnic festival. It is celebrated every year during February 15-19th which is one of the prominent initiatives to preserve and propagate Karbi oral and material culture. Initially it was celebrated in small scale, but nowadays it is celebrated in a grand way where food festival, exhibition, musical entertainment and other material and non-material cultural forms are celebrated. A permanent site for the festival was developed near Diphu.

4.6 APHLC Movement & Karbi Anglong:

The formation of State Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1954 received mixed reactions in the hills of Assam. W.A. Sangma, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Garo Hills District Council convened a meeting of all the CEMs to discuss some of their mutual interests at Shillong. Except the CEM of Mikir Hills District Council, all the other CEMs were present. The meeting resolved that a separate hills state should be formed and Sixth Schedule needs amendment. The Assam Hills Tribal Leaders' Conference held at Tura in the same year on October adopted the similar resolution comprising all the Autonomous districts, and decided to submit a memorandum to State Reorganization Commission. The SRC rejecting the demand said,

"Generally speaking, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Lushai Hills are not in favour of a separate hill state and the District Council in the Lushai Hills and the Karbi a dorbar (Mikir National Council) are in favour of the status quo. The agitation in favour of hill state is, therefore confined virtually to the Garo and Khasi and Jaintia Hills." (ibid, 123)
In 1955, in a conference of the tribal leaders held at Aizawl, it formed a political party, called Eastern India Tribal Union, with similar demands. In the general election in 1957 it won couple of seats in different constituencies of the hills.

Meanwhile, the Assam Assembly in 1960 approved the Language Bill by which Assamese language was adopted as the State language. It received negative reactions especially in the hills areas of then Assam as well as among the other tribals of plains and also in Bengali dominated Barak valley. As a part of the reaction, in 1960, W.A. Sangma called a conference of all the Hills tribal leaders at Tura on July 20. In the meeting, the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed. The meeting opposed the language bill that Assam Government brought to Legislative Assembly. The APHLC raised serious concerns against the Language Bill, as it felt that tribals are unsecured under this Government and considered the move as the cultural aggression of Assamese nationalism over the minorities. As such, the APHLC started raising demand for a separate state comprising the hills areas of the then Assam. The formation of APHLC (All Party Hills Leaders Conference) in 1960 had a mixed reaction in Karbi Anglong and among the Karbis.

Concerned with the language policy of the Assam Government, demand for a separate hills state was stronger. To neutralize the Naga aspirations, in 1963, the state of Nagaland was created. After series of demands and movement, by the 22nd Amendment of Indian Construction, on 25th December, 1969, passing the Assam reorganization bill, Meghalaya was created as a state within the state comprising Garo, Khasi and Jayantia hills. The article is named as Article 244 A.

After formation of United Mikir Hills and north Cachar District, the political consciousness came into existence with the idea of reformation of the state. The formation of Meghalaya and Nagaland was one of the catalytic factors. The APHLC however, demanded for a separate state including all the hill
areas of Assam, excluding Nagaland. A branch was established in Karbi Anglong also under the leadership of Raidang Ingti, John Kathar, Devidalang Enghi, Maniram Langne and so forth. In between 1961-62 a meeting was held at Deothor, where DD Lyngdoh, Darwin Piu, Nichols Roy etc. were present (Rongpher 2006, 67) where a consensus could not be achieved among the Karbis in this issue. Contrary to the support of APHLC, a section of Karbi leadership had opposed the movement by voicing against the inclusion of Karbi Anglong in proposed hill state. This difference of opinion is believed to be due to the religious difference between the Christianized and the other Karbi leaders. Chatrasing Teron, Choi Choi Teron, Dhaniram Ronpi, Joysing Doloi were some of the leaders who opposed the move of the APHLC at Karbi Anglong. The religious affiliation always played a significant role in Karbi politics since its inception. The architect of modern Karbi Anglong Semson Sing Ingti lost the election with Khorsing Terang in the lone assembly seat from Mikir Hills as because of his religious affiliation i.e. Semoson was a Christian (Teron, 2013). The APHLC movement was also nullified in Karbi Anglong as almost all the leaders of the organization were Christian. So there was a counter campaign that the movement for a separate hills state was a movement of the Christian leaders. According to many leaders, Karbi Riso Adarbar was established to check the Christian aggression in Karbi Anglong.

In 1968, the Assam Government announced the formation of autonomous state of Meghalaya out of the Khasi-Jayantia Hills and Garo hills. The APHLC appealed the leaders of Karbi Anglong to take a resolution in Autonomous District Council (ADC) for inclusion of Mikir hills in the new state. But the leaders of Karbi Anglong who were engaged to APHLC movement were not the members of ADC. There was only one member namely Raidang Ingti in the ADC who supported the APHLC movement. Hence the resolution of inclusion of Mikir Hills could not be taken in ADC and Karbi Anglong did not become a part of the separate state of Meghalaya. Even during the times of creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963, a considerable amount of land of Karbi Anglong was occupied by the Nagas, for which political tension in the
border erupted (the border dispute is still going on). To solve the land dispute, a one-man commission was formed with K.V.K. Sundaram, the then Advisor of Home Affairs, Government of India. When Sundaram made his visit to Karbi Anglong in 1971, a section of Karbi leaders submitted a memorandum where they demanded full inclusion of Karbi Anglong in the newly formed state of Nagaland. The signatories were Bapuram Singnar, Sarsing Teron, Alex D. Sangma, Resulo Hinbe Rengma, Chondrasing Tokbi, Monsing Rongpher, and Thousal D. Sangma. In the memorandum it said,

1. Sir, the original area of Naga Hills district where it was initially formed included the whole area of the Mikir Hills, North of Barapani, river and East of Kapili river the then Naga Hills District.
2. Whereby the subsequent modification of the Naga Hills boundary, as modified by the Govt. of India in 1875 some portion of the present Mikir inhabited areas were out of the then Naga Hills.
3. The Mikir people as a whole, have been as a whole have been struggling heart and soul to be out of Assam and have worked together with the APHLC to achieve this end.
4. Under the circumstances mentioned above, and to fulfil the wishes of the people, we wish to affirm our desire that the whole of the present Mikir Hills district with its contiguous areas, without disintegrating, be merged with Nagaland without delay. (Rongpher 2006, 334)

In another memorandum submitted to the Governor of Assam, on 12th April, 1972 by Mikir Hills Nationalist Organization also raised the similar demand. It also said that it had actively participated in the APHLC movement. During the creation of Meghalaya, though option was given but many people demanded that the decision should be taken after the election of ADC, but election was not held despite the term of the ADC was over by that time. The same organization again submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi raising the similar demand. But the demand was rejected by both states viz. Assam and Nagaland. Hence the demand of incorporating Mikir Hills in Nagaland was not fulfilled.
4.7 Script Movement:

After the APHLC movement, in Karbi Anglong, another significant movement was the script movement. The Karbi language did not have any script and it adopted Assamese script to write the language. The Script movement demanded Roman Script for Karbi language. On 31\textsuperscript{st} May, 1973 a meeting was convened in Diphu Club, under the chairmanship of the then CEM of the ADC where the meeting anonymously resolved that the Roman Script should be used for writing of Karbi literature as well all the Karbi text books used in schools. In the same meeting it also formed a Script Implementation Committee where Bronson Ingti was made the President and Indrasing Ingti, Roy Inghi, Longki Phangso and Jiwan Bey were the Secretaries. After the first sitting of the Script Implementation Committee the members decided to approach the Autonomous District Council to raise the issue on the next session of the Council. It also resolved to request Karbi Lamet Amei (Karbi Literary Society) to use Roman Script.

To popularize the demand of Roman Script and to mobilize the people the Script Implementation Committee conveyed public meetings, rallies in different parts of the district. On 29\textsuperscript{th} December 1973, in such a rally, the state police force treated the protesters in brutal manner, injuring several students (\textit{ibid}).

There were contradictions among the Karbis regarding the use of Roman Script for the language. A section of the Karbis opposed the Roman Script movement; and leaflets were circulated by both the pro- and anti-Roman script sections. On 26\textsuperscript{th} March, 1974 in the Council Session, the proposal of implementing Roman Script was raised. Finally in 1978, the ADC adopted the resolution of using Roman Script for Karbi language and literature. As the Script movement was to some extent opposed by some leaders of the All India Congress party, the Congress lost the Election of the Council to the Janata Dal in 1978. However, with the official adoption of Roman Script by the
Autonomous District Council, the Script Movement came to an end successfully.

4.8 Idea of Autonomous State: Article 244 A

As mentioned earlier, the history of the demand for a separate state goes back to the APHLC movement. The Provision of Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution offered to the hill areas of North-East India limited autonomy within the state. The rising demand for a separate state including all the hill areas of Assam started with the APHLC movement during 1970’s decade. As a result of such popular demands, different states were created. Meghalaya was created under Article 244 A without making necessary corrections in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Article 244 A was added here to mitigate such demands. As per the Article 244 A, it says,

(1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, Parliament may, by law, form within the State of Assam an autonomous State comprising (whether wholly or in part) all or any of the tribal areas specified in 218[Part I] of the table appended to paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule and create therefore-

(a) a body, whether elected or partly nominated and partly elected, to function as a Legislature for the autonomous State, or

(b) a Council of Ministers, or both with such constitution, powers and functions, in each case, as may be specified in the law.

(2) Any such law as is referred to in clause (1) may, in particular,-

(a) specify the matters enumerated in the State List or the Concurrent List with respect to which the Legislature of the autonomous State shall have power to make laws for the whole or any part thereof, whether to the exclusion of the Legislature of the State of Assam or otherwise;
(b) define the matters with respect to which the executive power of the autonomous State shall extend;

(c) provide that any tax levied by the State of Assam shall be assigned to the autonomous State in so far as the proceeds thereof are attributable to the autonomous State;

(d) provide that any reference to a State in any article of this Constitution shall be construed as including a reference to the autonomous State; and

(e) make such supplemental, incidental and consequential provisions as may be deemed necessary.

(3) An amendment of any such law as aforesaid in so far as such amendment relates to any of the matters specified in sub-clause (a) or sub-clause (b) of clause (2) shall have no effect unless the amendment is passed in each House of Parliament by not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting.

(4) Any such law as is referred to in this article shall not be deemed to be an amendment of this Constitution for the purposes of article 368 notwithstanding that it contains any provision which amends or has the effect of amending this Constitution.5

As per the provisions of 244 A Meghalaya was created on 1970 as a state within state. But on January 21, 1971 Meghalaya was declared as a full-fledged separate state after rising demands for several months. After formation of Megahlaya, Article 244 A was not removed from the Constitution. Thus, Karbi Anglong and NC Hills became the left-out areas under the constitutional provisions to implement the Article 244 A.

The demand for a full-fledged separate state and the same for an autonomous state were carried on from time to time during the last couple of years of 1980s. The demand for a separate Karbi-Dimasa state (combining Karbi Anglong and NC Hills) was raised in the meeting of All Party Peoples Conference (APPC) held on 20th August, 1978 under the Presidentship of

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5 http://www.constitution.org/cons/india/p10244a.html
Joysing Dolui. In that meeting, the executive members of both the ADC’s of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills were present. It took a resolution that

“now, therefore, it is strongly felt that nothing short of separation from Assam would solve the political aspirations of the two districts of Karbi Anglong and north Cachar Hills and the meeting resolved to launch a movement in legal and constitutional methods with the demand for creation of a separate full-fledged state comprising the two districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills” (Rongpher 2006, 103).

It also formed a central action committee for the same. In 1979 Separate state Demand Committee was formed. In the same year, the Karbi Anglong Peoples Conference (KAPC) also declared the need of a separate state for the hilly population of Assam. The President of KAPC also proposed that the new name of the proposed state should be Ratnagiri. In the same year it submitted a memorandum to the then Governor of Assam demanding a separate state. But KAPC sometimes supported the issue of separate state and sometimes opposed it and finally reduced the demand to implementation of Article 244 A. Thus the demand for a separate state became diluted; and towards the 1990s and onwards, a political consensus began to prevail among most of the Karbis in favour of an Autonomous State.

4.9 Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC):

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

In an interview, Haliram Terang, one of the founders of the ASDC, narrated the cause of forming a different political party in Karbi Anglong district after Assam movement. According to Terang, in the 1985 Assembly Elections, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) came to an alliance with the newly formed Peoples Democratic Forum (PDF) headed by Dr. Jayanta Rongpi. Among the four Legislative Assembly Constituencies of Karbi Anglong, namely Diphu, Howraghat, Bokajan and Baithalangso, it was only the Baithalangso constituency where the candidate from the AGP-PDF alliance won in that Election. This winning candidate was Haliram Terang himself. However, in the general context of Assam, the AGP won that election with unprecedented majority and its leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta formed his ministry in 1985. But Mahanta did not include Terang in his ministry despite the fact that Terang was the sole winning candidate of the AGP-PDF alliance. Instead, Samsing Hanse, the winner from Diphu constituency under the banner of the Karbi Anglong Peoples Conference (KAPC) was given a ministerial berth in the AGP ministry. According to Terang, Samsing Hanse was offered ministry because of the pressure of Asom Sahitya Sabha, as Hanse was an active member of the Sabha. Now it is widely held in the political circles that if Haliram Terang were included in the cabinet, there would have been no scope for forming a different political party named as ASDC. After formation of the ASDC, the Karbi politics got a boost and the demand for an autonomous state came to be more concretized and strengthened.

To carry on the demand for the implementation of Article 244 A in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, the Karbi political elites finally formed an
organization called Autonomous State Demand Committee on 17th May of 1986. Most of the leaders of ASDC were the students who took part in the Assam Movement. The ASDC brought together peoples from different political and non-political organisations of the Karbis and Dimasa community to make the movement stronger. In the same year of formation of the ASDC, another organization called Karbi Anglong North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHASDCOM) was also formed. However, the ASDC could form its branches in the entire district of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The Karbi Students Association (KSA) joined hand in hand with ASDC in the movement right from the inception of ASDC. The political activism of ASDC was included mobilizing of people through meetings, strikes, protest-rallies and so on. The movement, which was led separately by ASDC-KSA, and KANCHASDCOM got its peak during the years 1986-1989. Strikes, protests, processions became frequent events in Karbi Anglong during this period. In 1989, the ASDC participated in the state electoral politics; won 22 out of 26 seats in the Council. In the Election Manifesto, ASDC leader Dr. Jayanta Rongpi stated the objective of the party and the movement: “objective of the party and the movement for autonomy was to achieve more decentralization of the political, economic, socio-cultural and parliamentary power and restore them to the people of the region by the formation of an Autonomous State.” (Barbora 2008, 313-334) It also assured the other non-Karbis of the region that it would remain non-hostile to the non-Karbis. Dr. Jayanta Rongpi was selected as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Council. However, even after the coming of the ASDC to electoral politics, the intensity of the movement continued remain high in different forms of resistance and protest. The Karbi youths became cynical towards the amount of power offered to them in the name of self-rule via Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, who later got elected as member to the Indian parliament in New Delhi, described the inefficiency of the Sixth Schedule provision in one of his parliamentary debate
The Sixth Schedule has been in practice since 1952. I have the experience of heading such Autonomous Hill Council for seven long years. I was the Chief of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council for seven years. With that experience I can say that the Sixth Schedule has failed in India since 1952 (Rongpi 2003).

There was considerable amount of leftist influence in the ASDC right from its inception. Dr. Jayanta Rongpi and Holiram Terang were the primary members of Communist Party of India’s Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML) fraction. Initially it was not disclosed, but with the passing of time the fact came to be known as many leaders and cadres could not accept that political ideology. ASDC kept on enjoying absolute majority in all the elections of the Council till 2002 and showed good results Assembly elections and Parliamentary elections as well.

The growing influence of ASDC and rising demand for implementation of Article 244 A became stronger with the increasing intensity of the movement. Finally, the ASDC came to discussion with Assam State Government and Central Government of India. As a part of the discussion, the State Government agreed to hand over 30 administrative departments to the Autonomous District Council in 1995. In the periodic elections of ADC, State Assembly and Parliament, the issue of autonomous state remained as a major issue; where different political parties tried to exploit the sentiment of the common Karbis.

4.10 Split in ASDC:

The split of the ASDC into two fractions in 2000 was a major setback in the Karbi ethnic movement. Despite the emergence of Dr. Rongpi as a powerful leader in ASDC, his leftist inclination was not liked by many of his colleagues. Moreover, allegations of corruption and mishandling of state funds began to be raised against Dr. Rongpi by members of his own party.
Consequently, on 21 August of 2000, twenty one CPI(ML) members, including Dr. Rongpi, were expelled from the ASDC. After this split, Holiram Terang and Babu Rongpi were given the charge of Secretary and President of the ASDC respectively. Interestingly, on 22 August, the next day after the expulsion, Jayanta Rongpi’s fraction convened a meeting of the Standing Committee where Holiram Terang was expelled from the ASDC. Thus, both the sections claim themselves to be original beholder of the ASDC. This split resulted fratricidal conflicts and killings in Karbi Anglong.

After the split, none of the fractions could win in the succeeding elections of the Council, the Legislative Assembly as well as of the Indian Parliament. The failure of the movement for autonomous state led to the emergence violent groups advocating armed struggle, which is described later in this chapter. The Congress Party, often referred as the Congress-I, came back to power in the Council of Karbi Anglong in 2002.

4.11 Insurgency and Ethnic Conflicts

Along with democratic movements, groups subscribing the ideals of armed struggle also developed in Karbi Anglong. With the demand of a separate homeland outside Assam, insurgent activities were started with the formation of Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) and Karbi People’s Force in 1994. In 1999, both the organization came under one banner and named itself as the United Peoples’ Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). The UPDS blamed the ASDC for its failure to achieve Autonomous State through constitutional democratic means and started armed struggle for the creation of a separate state. In this armed struggle of the UPDS, a reign of violence, terror and extortion erupted in the region. In 2002 it came to a ceasefire agreement with Indian Government. However, in 2004 the anti-talk fraction of the UPDS formed Karbi Longri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF). During the period 2000-2005 several ethnic clashes took place between the Karbi and Kuki groups, between the Karbi and the Dimasa groups in Karbi Anglong.
Interestingly, the other ethnic groups living in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills districts formed its own insurgent groups. As such, violent activities began to be multiplied in number in the region. The KLNLF came to an agreement for peace-talk with the Indian Government in 2008 which is still on. However, a number of other extremist groups are still active in the region in present times.

After the coming of the UPDS into peace-talk with Indian state in 2004, a series of discussions was carried out and a peace-accord was signed in 2011. As per the peace-accord, Karbi Autonomous District Council will be reorganized through proposed creation of four new districts. The Council will be renamed as Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council. From 2016/17, the strength of the new territorial Council will be increased to 50 seats from the existing 30. A special economic package of Rs 350 crore (Rs 70 crore per annum) has also been promised by the Central Government as a part of the peace-accord. With this negotiation with the government, the UPDS declared to abandon its armed struggle for the autonomous state and promoted a new platform called People’s Alliance for Peace Agreement (PAPA). However, in the election of the Council in 2011, PAPA could manage to win only 8 seats out of 26; and the Congress continued to remain in power.

Thus, the failure of the ASDC and its movement for an autonomous state, which received massive support of the Karbis, fractionalized and defocussed the Karbi ethnic movement. During its good old days, the ASDC could earn the confidence of the various non-Karbi communities, including the Dimasas. But after the failure of the ASDC leadership in fulfilling the hopes of the common masses for a betterment of life in their territory, several fractional groups emerged. The present political scenario in this hills district of Assam is marked by fragmented activities, both violent and non-violent, by various groups of this kind which are multiplying in number.
It is to be noted that the institutionalized activities and the party-based politics do not always stand for the entire political consciousness of an ethnic group, though such elite institutionalizations do play crucial parts in mobilizing the very ethnic consciousness itself. Therefore, though the above story of the movement for an autonomous Karbi state came to an abrupt halt, the entire Karbi ethnic consciousness cannot be reduced to it. An important development that took place along with these organized movements has been the creation of a very distinct cultural consciousness among the Karbis, which can be read both as a by-product of, as well as an ally to, these organized political activities. This cultural activism, which seeks to locate and narrate the Karbis themselves through various aesthetics of textual, visual and material modes, is discussed in the next chapter.