Chapter – 5

The Emergence of the Identity of the Karbis

Emergence of Identity : With the completion of the effort of modernization on the tribes of North-East India by the Christian missionaries, one has to see the aftermath of it and the response from the tribes to this abrupt change. From the middle of the 20th century, the hill people of North-East India started a series of political agitations on the ground of saving and protecting their identities. Like the yeast that leaves the dough and the seed that bursts into flowers, the message that is sown in the heart of North-East India by Christianity has begun to act like a catalyst bringing out the best from every tribe and tongue of this multi-coloured corner of India.[1] Christianity acted as a stimulus, an inner urge, providing a new dynamism from within, setting on a path to transformation and change. The first consequence of this inner stimulus was an awakening of each community to it self,which gave birth to a self awareness, consciousness of its own collective identity, its heritage stirring to life an alertness to its own destiny.

Padma S.S Shashi who edited 'Encyclopedia of Indian Tribes', writes, "The tribal situation seems to be vitiated by a factor of considerable significance that is Christianity. I have nothing against Christianity as such, though we have to recall that this religion has often been a handmaiden of colonialism. This religion creates certain problems so far as the well being of India is concerned. I donot deny the welfare activities that it carries on; but while it gives with one hand, it takes away with the other more than is due. Through service and material amenities that it has been able to offer, it has won over the tribals. It has however, sapped the tribal's traditional culture, thus loosening the convert's mental and social roots. The tribal convert has lost what he had and on the other hand is not mentally assured[2]

Missionaries, who are backed by a world organization, are not interested in local cultures, except sometimes as academic pursuits; they are hardly interested in the well-being of India, except as a field for the spread of the Gospel. Missionaries failed to get converts in the plains of India to any considerable extent, but when they found the local cultural pull weak, or when they found a vacuum created by the indifference of Indian religion, as in the

1. J. Puthenpurakal SDB*, Impact of Christianity on N.E India*, (Introduction) Vendrame Institute, Shillong, Year, 1996.
2. Padma Sri S.S Shashi (Edited), *Encyclopedia of Indian Tribes*, Manas Publication, Guwahati, PP 98-99, Year, 1994

hills, they stepped in, backed by a Christian Government and supported by the entire Christian organization."[3]

The writer is however quick to admit and wrote, "This religion (Christian) is however, not entirely responsible for the tribal problem. Our Government too is to be blamed. After we attained freedom the old policy of isolation continued. No attempt was made to bring the tribes into the pan Indian pattern. We lost valuable time."[4]

True, the Indians lost valuable time. They did nothing to convert the tribes and if they ever did so in the past, they are placed in the lowest rank of the Hindu Caste system. As the Centurian Chandra Timung of Tika remarks, "We live on this bank of Karbi Langpi and you on the other, for centuries we have been living together, but you never tell us of your religion.[5]

The effort of change was noticed in the Karbi hills when in the forties of the 20th Century, they demanded a homeland for themselves. The movement for safeguarding their identity was led by Semsonsing Ingti, Who happened to be the first Graduate from the Karbi tribe.

Semsonsing Ingti and Karbi Identity : Born in 1910, this great visionary leader of the Karbis saw a struggling Nation where the great practitioner of Ahimsa was leading to free the country from the yoke of a powerful nation whose leaders had claimed to have said that, "the Sun never set" within the extent of their empire. As a young lad, Semson saw the country's independent movement and every event stirred him so much that the little years he lived became years of struggle for the sake of then little known tribe in the national arena. Semson was born at a time when the long course of India's freedom movement had already begun. The year 1885 was the year when the Indian National Congress was born, 1905 was the year of Bengal's Partition and the years after were years where the anti-Partition and Swadeshi movements dominated the Indian politics. In the international sphere, it witnessed the outbreak of the 1st World War which led to the signing of treaties in the Paris Peace Conference. As a young man his mind was filled on one side with sorrow and pity for his backward ignorant tribe and on the other the path of struggle that he saw for solutions to such problems offered him a ray of hope. Then came the Non-Cooperation Movement followed by

3. Ibid P- 99.
4. Ibid P- 99.
5. Opcit, An interview with Chadra Timung.

the Civil Disobedience Movement and finally, the Quit India Movement. In all these developments, he cautiously watched the steps taken by Gandhi and he finally became a 'Gandhian' both in theory and practice. That Gandhi became his most admired leader can be understood from the fact that in the course of the Homeland demand, not a single instance of violence was seen. There was not even an appeal or encouragement by him to his people to take such a step. In dealing with social evils and taboos where every activity of the tribe both individual and general was dominated by superstitions, the same peaceful techinique was adopted .In facing the British administrators, the petition of high literary order given to his Excellencies Sir Robert Niel Ried and Sir Andrew Gaulay Claw were within the permitted and accepted norm. The verbal duel with the Viceroy was a matured democratic ideal of freedom of speech and expression. Again, the appeal he made to the youth to take part in the freedom movement led by Gandhi too was a peaceful appeal. Thus, he developed in himself the ideal of the early moderate Congress leaders and later drifted away to the more effective non-violence method of Gandhi.

Thengkur Sing Ingti the father of Semson was one of the early converts of the American Baptist Missionaries. The Ingti family by dint of their open and broadminded nature was close to the English and more particularly to the American Baptist Missionaries.

The children of Thengkursing Ingti namely, Jonaki, Semson, Lawrence, Roland, Pratap and Maya were brought up as per Christian precepts. A day was never spent without a family worship and a night rest was never taken without a prayer.The discipline that the children of Thengkursing had later moulded them to become great persons.

Thengkursing Ingti realised fully the value of education and he often used to tell his children that, if he gave them land, it will go away from them someday, if he give them money, it will be spent, but if they have education it will go with them till death. Thengkursing Ingti had his education upto class VII but he was well versed in English. This quality had made him an interpreter (Dubhasi) and his association with the missionaries especially the writing of a book 'Plipli Akitap' earned him the title 'Pandit'. The Ingti family was a happy family and Semson in his early days likes to play football.[6]

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6. An Interview with Maya Ingti (youngest sister of Semsonsing Ingti) Retired Lecturer, Union Christian College, Barapani, Shillong, Date of Interview- 21.01.2009, Place- Tika Hills, Karbi Anglong.

Semson had his early education at Golaghat Mission School and later passed his Matric Exam from Bezboruah, Government High School in 1928. He joined Cotton College but could not complete his Graduation. Semson left Cotton College and joined Morari Chand College in Sylhet. In 1933 he completed his Graduation and became the first Karbi Graduate.[7]

After completing his B.A degree Semson jointed Bezbaruah Government High School of Golaghat as a teacher. There after, he was appointed as a School Inspector and went to Nowgong which was the place of his posting. Even though the love for his people developed right from his student days, his inclination towards it developed in the later part of his life when he was the School Inspector. He had visited all the Karbi inhabited places. His visit to Sylhet and his enrolment at Morarichand College was due to his interest in interacting with the Karbis of that area. He also planned to go to Burma but he could not make it. In all these visits he found that the tribe is vast but scattered. The will to know his people closely led him undertook strenuous journeys mostly by his humble feet and sometimes on horse back and bullock cart. By now, the Government was watching his every step and found that his activities were against service rules. As such, he was in a dilemma and had to take a decision whether to leave his job or stop working for his people. His children were still young and to leave a job at this stage would really make him and his family economically insecure. The decision on his part to quit the job was the greatest sacrifice he made. This bold humble step of his made us think that he was not happy to lead a comfortable life with his family where others were suffering from hunger and diseases due to ignorance.

In the year 1948, Semson while rendering selfless service to the preparation of the Annual Session of the 'Karbi Adorbar' at Katumari, Duar Amla, he became very sick. His tireless efforts, selfless devotion and sincerity from 1934 to 1947 did not give him the opportunity to pay attention to his health. But before the Annual Session at Katumari, he received a message from Delhi inviting the members of the Boundary Determination Committee for a talk. Immediately after attending the talk, he went to his family at Nowgong and had to be bed ridden for his illness. Semson never uttered a word of his ailment to any of his colleagues while working for this mighty goal. So his state of coma was a 'bolt from the blue' to all his associaties. When only a few days were left for the Katumari Karbi Adorbar Annual Session, the great leader went to his eternal sleep. The day was 28th February of 1948.

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7. '*Monjir*' Karbi Newsmagazine, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, 2nd Edition, Year, 1980, Editor - Dhaneswara Ingti P-2

He could not see the blooming of his dream, a dream he worked for his whole life. His sudden death nearly orphaned the Karbis, for whom he was a father figure. His death was like a thunder strike to the infant Karbi renaissance.[8]

Because of Semson's untimely demise, the plan and programmes he had could not be accomplished. He could not see for himself the granting of the district which he so much worked for. The demand for a district was his idea. He was ahead of his time and others failed to understand him. He single handedly dealt with the district demand. It was when he realised that such a movement needed a group of followers that the Karbi Adorbar was formed in 1946.

Taking lessons from his father, Semson knew fully well that the backwardness of his people was due to illiteracy, Semson recommended the setting up of primary schools.

As langauge is the strongest element for preservation and protection of an identity, Semson favoured the teaching of Karbi language in schools. In this regard, he published books like, 'Kalakha Akitap' (Tables), Tomo Puru, Bituso etc in Karbi.

A scattered people cannot maintain their identity intact. Semson set up model villages. The district demand was made keeping in mind the necessity of staying together in a compact area.

Semson dealt with the social menace which affected his people. He appealed to the opium eaters as well as the dealers to refrain from their degrading and harmful activities. He also appealed to his people to restrict the use of wine. But he was not successful in this regard as drinking is an established practice of the Karbi's social and religious life.

Semson tried to improve the status of women. Women were not at par with men in socio-economic strata. Women's position was so bad that a woman can not walk parallel to a man. The women were even debarred from using the umbrella to protect themselves from rain or sunshine. In the economic field, there was no property right. Semson's initiative in this regard led the Lindokpo (Traditional King) pursue a liberal policy towards women.

In outlook and intellect, Semson was a modern man. He tried to discard the medieval

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8. Nazmin Anam, *The Enchanting Karbi Hills*, Angik Publications, Guwahati, PP-105-106, Year, 2000.

orthodoxy inherent among his people. He was against the abusive powers of the village headmen, who at times evict their villagers for petty reasons.[9]

The District Demand movement: The British in course of their expansion of their rule in different parts of India came directly into contact with the tribal communities. While the peace-loving, meek and mild natured communities became loyal subjects of the British rulers, the ferocious and brave communities offered resistance to the British expansionists even when the areas inhabited by them were fully brought under the British administration. Revolts and rebellion rather became a regular feature.[10] This has led to the British Government to make some special administrative arrangements specially for those areas where there were tribal preponderance.[11]

The Scheduled District Act of 1874 of the old Madras Presidency laid down simple and elastic procedure for civil and judicial administration in the areas inhabited predominantly by tribals called 'Scheduled District'. The Act also empowered the Government to extend its application to any parts of the British India simply by an executive order. Thus, wide powers were vested with the Executive. The Government of India Act 1919 empowered the Governor General with more powers. This Act empowered the Governor General of India to modify the acts applicable to the backward tracts meaning the tribalinhabited areas (Scheduled district) according to his discretion. Similarly, he was also authorised to issue similar directions so far as the acts of the provincial legislatures were concerned.[12]

In 1933, the 'White Paper' on the Indian Constitutional Reforms accepted the proposal of the Simon Commission. It also accepted the classification of tribal areas into Excluded and Partially Excluded areas. It also said that the expenditure on the Excluded areas should be non-votable.[13]

The Sixth Schedule of the Government of India Act., 1935 contained the recommendation of the 'White Paper' on tribal areas of 1933. Part-I of the Bill is mentioned

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9. A Seminar paper by Donald Teron, Title - *The vision of Semsonsing Ingti*, Organised by Semsonsing Ingti, Centenary Birth Anniversary Celebration Committee, Place-Diphu Club, Date, 26/02/2009.
10. Opcit, B.N Bordoloi, *Karbis- Their Origin and Migration*, P-17.
11. Ibid. P-17.
12. Ibid. P-18.
13. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, '*A glimpse of the socio-political evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*. P-57

the Excluded Areas. They are North East Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A now Arunachal Pradesh) Sadiya, Balipara, North Lakhimpur, Naga Hills district and Lushai hill district.

Part-II of the Bill is the Partially Excluded areas. They are the North Cachar hills in the Cachar district, the Garo hills district, the Mikir hills tract in the Nowgong and Sibsagar districts, the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia hills other than Shillong municipality and cantonment.[14]

The formation of Karbi Adorbar: The Karbis are numerous but scattered. They settle in different districts of Assam. They also settle in Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. At one time they also settled in Nagaland, Manipur and Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Reports of their presence have come from Myanmar and China. The Karbis wherever they are, think that they are the only one because the means and the platform to meet and interact with their own people from other places were absent.

Inorder to find ways and means to unite the scattered Karbis, an informal discussion was held at the residence of Thengkursing Ingti attended by the host himself, Semsonsing Ingti, his son and Song Bey. The three persons discussed the matter all throughout the night. Semsonsing Ingti said that he had visited almost all the Karbi inhabited places and found that they all speak the same dialect. If the Karbis continue to stay in different areas the Government too will not be able to do much for them. For example, if they are to contest elections in the Local Board, or M.L.A they will be denied the Reserved Sit and should contest elections from the General Sit. Likewise, in education too, the Government will be rather handicapped to lend any support or help. As we have seen that India's independence was possible only through a party known as the Indian National Congress, likewise, the Karbis too should have a platform inorder to demand concessions from the Government. In course of the discussion, Thengkursing Ingti gave his opinion and said that since time immemorial, the Karbi King, 'Sot Recho' (The Truthful King) used to have a Durbar inorder to reign justly over his subjects. The Karbis irrespective of their ranks whole heartedly obeyed their King. We should therefore, revive the Durbar for the sake of unity of the Karbis. Semson Sing Ingti immediately agreed to his father's proposal.

In 1945, Semson Sing Ingti convened a meeting at Kothalguri near Nowgong and the next year he convened a much bigger one at Hawaipur near Lanka. The meeting at Hawaipur

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14. Ibid. P-57

in 1946 was attended by Khorsing Terang, M.L.A, Karbi Traditional Chief and judges, R.R Khaund, the D.C. of Nowgong district, Professor Mohesh Goswami and Bondhuram Kosari, the Assistant Inspector of Schools. Besides, a host of general public, representing the Karbis from North Lakhimpur, Darrang, Eastern and western part of present Karbi Anglong attended the meet.

In delivering the objective of the meeting, Semson Sing Ingti explained that inorder to maintain a strong bond of unity among the scattered Karbis, an organisation should be formed and invited the members present to propose a name for the newly formed organisation. Some of the members present gave the name, Mikir Jatiya Mahasabha, somebody said 'Mikir National Council' still another member said, 'Karbi Kachingrumpet Amei' (United Forum of the Karbis). In the midst of such different proposals, Song Bey as per their preliminary discussions held in the residence of Thengkursing Ingti, proposed the name of Karbi Adorbar after Sot Recho, the Truthful King's Durbar. The M.L.A Khorsing Terang also favoured the name and the members present unanimously agreed to it by clapping their hands three times. In this way the Karbi Adorbar was born.

In the afternoon session, Mahesh Goswami chaired the meeting. Many from the members present thanked and praised the organisers of the meeting. Khorsing Terang the M.L.A said, "Now that we have formed the Karbi Adorbar, it may bring both positive and negative results to us because we shall be demanding several concessions from the Government. Till now, we have only two L.P Schools, and three M.E schools, one at Merok, the other at Mohendijua and the third at Deithor which was run privately. There is only one dispensary at Mohendijua. We still have to demand so many things. Let this Dorbar be our guide, let this Dorbar be our voice".

Semsonsing Ingti also stood up and said that all the hill tribes have their own districts but we the Karbis donot have a district of our own, we don't even have a Police Station. In the past one or two persons worked in this regard by sending petitions to the Government. Therefore, inorder to achieve our aims at the earliest the Karbi Adorbar should take a resolution and procceed to Shillong and to Delhi if the need arises. There was total silence among the audience as they were still afraid to take such a step against the Government. Song Bey stood up and told the audience not to be afraid and he supported the resolution. Sarsing Teron Habai also supported it and said that we should be ready to face any consequences for the sake of getting a district. Song Bey moved some more resolutions. They were:

1) Abolition of the opium traffic from Karbi area. 2) Separation of Assam and Sylhet and 3) Cancellation of Bengal-Assam grouping Order. These three resolutions were supported by the M.L.A and Harsing Ingti. Finally, the Chairman of the meeting stood up and said that let the Karbi Adorbar be a guiding factor for the progress of the Karbis and let the One from above guide the Karbis and showers his blessing.[15]

The Karbi Adorbar was a political organisation in the beginning, but after the creation of the Autonomous district, it had converted into a social organization. As a social organization the Karbi Adorbar had taken up various social welfare works like reorganization of villages, bringing down people from the hills to the plains, distribution of land for cultivation, introduction of the method of wetland cultivation and establishment of model villages. During the tenure of Chatrasing Teron the Karbi Adorbar was utilised as a political organization.[16]

In the year 1940 Sir Robert Neil Reid, K.C.S.I, K.C.I.E, I.C.S, the Governor of Assam visited the Mikir Hills tract and camped at Mohendijua near Diphu. A public meeting was convened at Mohendijua on 28th October, 1940 in his honour. On the auspicious occasion, Khorsing Terang M.L.A Semsonsing Ingti and Song Bey submitted a memorandom to him demanding a political identity for the Mikirs. Sir Robert Neil Reid was the first Governor of Assam to visit the Mikir Hills.[17]

Sir Robert Neil Reid was succeded by Sir Andrew Gaulay Claw as Governor of Assam in 1942. As Governor of Assam he wanted to gather the first hand knowledge about the political, social and economic condition of the Mikir people as his predeessor Sir Robert Neil Reid did. In April, 1942, the Governor visited Dengaon near Dabaka along with Lady Claw. On this auspicious occassion a public meeting was convened at Dengaon in his honour. The meeting was attended by public leaders, the M.L.C Khorsing, Terang and members of the Karbi Adorbar, Semsonsing Ingti and Song Bey. Semsonsing Ingti submitted a memorandum on behalf of the Mikir people demanding a separate hill district comprising the Mikir portion

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15. An article by Song Bey, Founding Father of Karbi Adorbar, Title, *'The Karbis 1946-1964'*, Published in the Karbi Newsmagazine, *'Monjir'* Editor - Dhaneswar Ingti. Monjir Publication, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, 2nd Edition Year-1980.

16. Opcit, Barelong Terang, *History of the Karbis*, PP-81-82.

17. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio-political evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*, P-59.

of Sibsagar and Nowgong districts.[18]

On 1st March 1947, Sir Andrew Gaulay Claw and Lady Claw visited Lanka in Nowgong district. On this occassion the leaders of the Karbi Adorbar, Semsonsing Ingti and Song Bey accompanied by the M.L.C Khorsing Terang submitted a memorandum demanding a separate hill district for the Mikir people.[19]

In 1945 the British Government contemplated the introductioon of Local Government Institution in the hill areas. Therefore, it directed one of its officers, P.F Adams, to consider the means for establishing and developing local self Government among the hill people in such manner to secure advancement by peaceful and progressive administration, the growth of democratic spirit among them, and the equipment of the hill people to play their part in any larger unities of which they would form a part.[20]

Adams in consultation with the local officers made a number of recommendations. He suggested for the establishment of village council and sub- tribal councils consisting of Chief or chiefs with elders elected by the respective class. Thus, the village councils would differ from tribe to tribe of North East India.[21]

As regards the powers and functions of the village council, it shall concern itself with the customary internal administration. It shall also settle all disputes of minor nature. The tribal council shall be responsible for the administration of all local affairs.[22]

The Constituent Assembly was set up in July 1946 on the eve of Independence and it had completed the task assigned to it by November, 1949. For the preparation of the comprehensive Constitution for Independent India, it was in fact, the Government of India Act 1935 which had acted as the stepping stone.[23] Under the provision of the Government of India

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18. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio-Political Evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*- P-67
19. Ibid. P-67
20. Ibid. P-6
21. Ibid, P-6
22. Ibid, P-6
23. H.S Saksena, *Safeguards for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes- Founding Fathers' View (Introduction),* Uppal Publising House, New Delhi, P-XIV, Year, 1981.

Act 1935 although the British Government declared that it was their sacred duty to protect the minorities which included Muslims, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians, Indian christians backward classes and hill tribes from the oppression and exploitation at the hands of the majority, meaning the Caste Hindus. Nevertheless, the declaration did not at all specify any measures for their integration into the main stream of national life and removal of their special problems.[24]So far as the tribals were concerned their efforts were, infact, to keep the tribal areas and the tribal people under the direct rule leading to isolation. The areas inhabited by the tribals were directly administered by the Governor General of India through the Governors of the provinces encouraging rather a feeling of separatism and also injecting the seeds of mistrust and insecurity.[25]

The Cabibet Mission suggested that there should be an Advisory on the rights of citizens, minorities and Tribal Excluded areas. Sir Stafford Cripps said that an influential commitee should be set up to make proposals for the administration of the tribal areas. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly set up an Advisory Committee in terms of the Cabinet Mission statement of 24th January, 1947.[26] The Advisory Committe on Fundamental Rights, Minorities, Tribal and Excluded Areas constituted by the Constituent Assembly was the main Committee concerned with the Scheduled Tribes as well as the Scheduled Castes. This Committee was constituted with 50 members elected by the Constituent Assembly and out of 50 members, four were from Assam(undivided).Out of these four members, two were from the Tribals.These members were Gopinath Bordoloi, Muhammad Saadula, Rup Nath Brahma (representing plain tribes) and J.J.M. Nichols Roy (representing hill tribes) [27]

This Advisory Committee had constituted several sub-committees. The North-East Frontier Tribal Areas and Assam Excluded and Partially Excluded areas sub-committee was one of them. Besides, the Chairman Gopinath Bordoloi the Sub-Committee had other four members, namely, J.J.M Nichols Roy, Rup Nath Brahma, Iliba Imti and A.V Thakkar. The incorporation of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India was the direct outcome of the recommendations of the Sub-Committee. The Report of the Sub-Committee was submitted on 28th July, 1947 when the drafting of the Constitution had already begun by this time. The

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24. Opcit, B.N Bordoloi, *Karbis*, *Their Origin and Migration*, P-19
25. Ibid, P-19
26. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio-Political Evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*. P-69
27. Opcit, B.N Bordoloi, *Karbis, Their Origin and Migration*, P-19

recommendations of the Sub-Committee were therefore, incorporated in the Draft Constitution directly.[28] The Sub-Committee was popularly known as Bordoloi Sub-Committee.[29]

In the Government Communique clear instructions were given to the members of the Sub-Committees for discharge of their duty. The task before them are -

(1) The members of the Committee will visit the areas for which they have been appointed so as to meet the people, to see the conditions there for themselves and to afford the representatives of the area the opportunity, not only placing before the Sub-Committee the relevant facts and circumstances and their own wishes, but also of associating themselves with the Sub-Committee in its task. The Constituent Assembly will thus be able to take into consideration the freely expressed desire and wishes of the people and to shape the Constitution so as to meet them to the fullest extent that is possible.

(2) The policy of the Assembly in framing the future Constitution is contained in the resolution moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and unanimously adopted by the Assembly on the 22nd January, 1947. This resolution guarantees to all people justice, equality of status, of opportunity, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, subject to law and public morality and in particular, adequate safeguards for backward and tribal areas. This means that it will be the responsibility of the future Government to look after the well being of the hill people, and to assist them to the full extent of its resources to attain a portion equal to that of the rest of the country in the field of education and economic development.

(3) The committee will be visiting the areas on dated which will be announced separately. As the British Government is to transfer the administration to the future Government of India before 1948, it is necessary for the Sub-committees and the Constituent Assembly to do their work as speedily as possible. It is important, therefore, for representatives and suggestions of the people to meet the Sub-Committees during its tour and submit their representation in writing or to give oral evidence.

On 3rd March, 1947 the SDO(C) of North Cachar hills sent a copy of the Constituent

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28. Opcit, H.S Saksena, *Safeguards for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste – Founding Fathers' View*, P-XXVI.

29. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio-Political evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*.P-70.

Assembly report to David Long Inghee inorder to study the contents of the report and translate the same into Karbi language and explain the same to the public.[30]

The demands of the Karbi Adorbar: On 18th May, 1947 the Karbi Adorbar submitted a memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee. Besides the members of the Karbi Adorbar like Sarsing Teron, Moniram Langneh, Chingkang Terang, Harsing Ingti, John Kathar, Song Bey, Chandrasing Teron, David Long Inghee, Barelong Terang, several others gave evidence before the Committee at Dimapur and Lumding. In their memorandum they demanded for the creation of a seperate hill district so that all the Mikirs could be placed under one single administration. They suggested that the Mikir area of 4,174 square miles of Partially Excluded area, the Mikir portion of Nowgong district, Sibsagar plains, North Cachar hills and Khasi and Jaintia hills should form the new district. A Boundary Commission should be set up immediately by the Assam Government to report on the areas which could conveniently be added to the existing Mikir hills particularly the Excluded Area. In other words, all the hill areas inhabited by the Mikirs and which are contiguous to the present Mikir hills particularly the Excluded area and which could conveniently be added to this area should be included in the proposed Mikir Hills district. But even if it is not geographically covenient said Semson Sing Ingti, if it is administratively convenient, these areas should be brought together. But if any Mikir village was surrounded by the Khasi villages it should not be included. But the Mikir villages in the Khasi hills contiguous to the Mikir hills should not be compelled to join.

The memorandum also demanded that the Mikir hills of the other areas which could not conveniently be added to the new district should be protected so far as their land problem, educational and social customs were concerned.

The Karbi Adorbar also demanded that the new district should be a part of Assam with Autonomy so far as local matters were concerned. The Chin Hill Regulation Act should be enforced to protect the people from foreign exploitation. The Mikir language should be the language of the district. The qualified young Mikirs should be recruited for Government service, if they were not available others might be recruited for a temporary period but they should know the Mikir language.

There should be a local council consisting of elected members at the rate of one for

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30. Opcit, Roy Inghee, *The life story of David Long Inghee*, P-25.

every five thousand persons. All the tribes inhabiting the district should be alloted seats in the local council in proportion to their population strength in the district. The members of the local council shall be elected on the basis of the Adult Franchise and on separate electorate system. The local council should have a Chairman and a Vice-Chairman. It should have Legislative, Executive and Judiciary functions. It should decide all disputes relating to land and local customs. The Central Provincial legislation should be introduced in the district only with the consent of the local council. The local council alone shall have the power to permit outsiders to reside in the district. The powers of the local council might be increased or decreased by the provincial legislature.

The Mikir hills district should be represented in the Assam Legislative at the rate of one member for five thousand populations. The candidates must belong to the Mikir tribe or the tribes living within the district. If the provincial Legislature is bicameral, the district should be represented by at least one member in it.

Regarding the representation of the Mikirs in the Central Legislature, they should be represented by rotation. Some seats should be reserved for the tribals in the Provincial Cabinet in Proportion to their strength. But the tribal members in the Provincial Cabinet must be selected by the tribal members of the legislature. The tribal welfare Department in the Secretariat should be entrusted to the tribal member of the cabinet.

As regards franchise, Mauzadars, village headmen, traditional Mikir judges the Pinpos and Habes and those that had passed the Lower Primary Examination, the Head of the family paying a house tax or land revenue, male or female provided they had attained the age of 18 must be entitled the right to vote to the Provincial Legislative Assembly. For the Central Assembly, however the voting qualification would be different. Members of the Provincial Legislature and of the Local Council, Mauzadars and those that passed the Middle school examination should have the right to vote. Thus the memorandum did not prescribe adult franchise. But in the evidence before the Tribal Sub-Committee Semsonsing Ingti advocated adult franchise.

As regards the administration of justice, the memorandum suggested that petty cases such as thefts, land disputes involving social customs should be decided by the Village Panchayats. Appeal against the decisions of the village Panchayat might be taken in the Mauza Panchayat, and from there to the local Council. Cases involving serious crimes should

be taken to the ordinary criminal courts. The memorandom also recommended that education should be free and compulsory. Further, Mikir students should be admitted to the professional college.They should be given certain number of foreign scholarship. The medium of instruction should be given in Mikir in the Primary stage.

Dealing with social customs, the memorandum suggested that they be preserved at all cost but they might be modified by the local council. The memorandum suggested that all posts within the Mikir hills district should be reserved for the Mikirs and a proportion of the provincial services also should be reserved for the Mikirs. Dealing with the development of agriculture, the memorandum suggested the introduction of co-operative farming.

As regards financing of the administration, the memorandom suggests that all revenues derived from Mikir hills district shoulld be reserved for the expenditure in the district. This demand was made because the total income of the district was Rs.2.81lakhs but the amount spent in the area was only Rs.57,000. Finally, the memorandum said that there should be compulsory military training for the Mikirs.

Thus, the memorandom submitted by the Mikirs was 'bread and butter' business. They did not, like the Nagas and the Lushais now Mizos demand interim Goverment or the right of secession. They simply wanted that they should be protected against external exploitation. Later, the President and the Secretary of the Karbi Adorbar were co-opted by the Bordoloi Committee to represent the Mikir hills.[31]

The Khatomari Annual Conference of Karbi Adorbar: The Karbi Adorbar used to hold its Annual Session either inside or outside of the district. The President of the Dorbar was elected for a term of one year only and its Secretary was selected by the President and the Working Committee. The Action Committee's meeting use to be held once in two months.[32]

By the intiative of Biren Teron, the Treasurer of the Karbi Adorbar, its Annual Conference was held at Khatomari, Duar Amla Mauza on 1st March, 1948. The meeting was held after the demise of Semsonsing Ingti and thus, the Assistant Secretary of the Dorbar was entrusted the responsibility of the Secretary. During the Annual Session held at Khatomari, it

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31. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio- Poltical Evolution of the Karbis of Anglong of Assam*, PP. 77-75

32. Opcit, Barelong Terang, *History of the Karbis*, P-82.

was confirmed that the memorandum for seperate hills district submitted earlier by the Karbi Adorbar was accepted by the Goverment of Assam for considerations. The meeting at Khatomari was held amidst sorrow and weeping due to the untimely demise of Semsonsing Ingti. The meeting ended without taking any concrete steps.[33]

In April 1947 the Constiuent Assembly of India sent a letter to the hill people of Naga Hills, Mikir Hills, Cachar Hills, Khasi and Jainlia Hills and Garo Hills asking the following questions.

Now, India is to be governed after that date is to be settled by the Indian themselves. For this purpose a Constituent Assembly has been set up in New Delhi and the Assembly has set up an Advisory Committee. We, the Sub-Commitee of this Advisory Committee are coming to your area shortly to find out from you how the Administration of your area is to be carried on in future. We are not coming with any settled plan of our own. We want your views because you know best what your needs are. We would like in particular your views on the following questions.

i. What are the matters in which you are especially interested and for the effective maintenance of which in your opinion special provisions in the Constitution are needed? Eg. for your guidance maybe mentioned land tenure, Agriculture, social customs and education.

ii. How should the representatives of your area be –

(a) For the Provisional Legislative

(b) For local self Governing bodies like district councils.

iii. Have you any special considerations to urge regarding the number of your representatives in the Provisional Legislature.

iv. Have you any suggestions to make regarding the manner in which the Provisional Ministry should be constituted is satisfactory.

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33. Bidorsing Kro, *'Semsonsing Ingti and Karbi Anglong', 'Monjir'* Newsmagazine. Editor Dhaneswar Ingti. 3rd Edition, 1980.

i. Have you any suggestions regarding the recruitment of hill people to the services (Government) in general and in relation to the administration of your area.

ii. Are there any other matters which you would like in particulars to bring to you would like in particular to bring to your notice.

Debate in the Constituent Assembly regarding the creation of Sixth Schedule : When the Sixth Schedule was taken up for discussion by the Constituent Assembly some of its members were opposed to the creation of the District and Regional councils because they might ultimately lead to establishment of another Pakistan in this country. "The responsibility of Parliament life can be shouldered by those who are competent, wise, just and literate. To vest political power in the hands of the tribals is the surest method of inviting chaos, anarchy and disorder through out the length and breath of this country. I am not in favour of self determination. The principle of Self Determination has worked havoc in Europe. It has been responsible for the two world wars in my life time. It led vivisection of India, arson, loot, murder and worst crime upon women" said a member.

Another member said that while he had no objection for establishment of District Council and Regional Councils provision should be made for the absorption of the areas.

Rohini Kumar Chondhury was totally opposed to the formation of the District Council. He said," we want to assimilate the tribal people in the art of self Government, why not introduce the Municipal Act? If you want to keep them seperate they will combine with Tibet, they will combine with Burma, they will never combine with the rest of India."

Lakhsmi Narayan Sahu thought that the District Council and the Regional Council would not benefit anyone because they would develop a spirit of aloofness and there would be no opportunity for assimilation. Above all, they would fight among themselves. Therefore, he suggested a cautious apporach to the problem.

But Jaipal Singh a tribal himself cautioned the matters of the Constituent Assembly to be some what charitable in their approach to the tribal problems in North- East India.

Rev. J.J.M Nichols Roy contended that the hill tribes had a better culture than many in the plain areas.

But Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar defended the creation of the district councils. He said that there is a difference between the tribals in Assam and the tribals of other places. The tribals in places other than Assam were more or less Hinduised and assimilated with the culture and civilization of the people among whom they lived. This was not the case with regard to the tribals of Assam. They had their roots in their own culture and civilization. They didnot adopt the mode of life and manners of their neighbours. Their laws of inheritance and marriage and their customs were different from those of others. In other words, the position of the Red Indians in the U.S.A as against the white immigrants there. What did the U.S.A do for the Red Indians ? They created reservation within which the Red Indians lived. They are a Republic themselves. They are no doubt citizens of the United States. But actually they are a separate independent people. The United States Government felt that their laws and mode of life, their habits, manners of life were so distinct that it would be dangerous to bring them immediately and at one time within the range of laws made by the white people for the whites and white civilization. This was the main reason why we have created District Councils and Regional Councils on the line adopted by U.S.A for the Red Indians.[34]

The formation of the Boundary Committee: The Boundary Settlement Committee was constituted in January, 1945 under the Chairmanship of Motiram Borah, the Revenue Minister of the Assam Government. The Committee had to discuss many times as they had to make several trips to Golaghat, Nowgong, Shillong, Halflong and Dimapur for consultations between 1945-1948.[35] The first meeting of the Comittee was held at Nowgong in the office of the Local Board. From the Karbi Adorbar Semsonsong Ingti, Khorsing Terang M.L.A, Song Bey besides others attended the meeting. From Halflong, David Long Inghee and C.S. Booth the S.D.O (C) of the N.C. hills also attended the meeting.[36]

The second meeting of the Boundary Committee was held at the residence of S.D.O (C) at Golaghat. In the meeting the Chairman, Motiram Borah vehemently opposed to the creation of the district. He said that since the present populations of the Karbis are rather thin, a Sub-Division instead of district can be created. The remarks of the Chairman made the representatives of the Karbi Adorbar utterly dissapointed. During this moment of utter frustration, Song Bey got angry and said that why should we be frustrated when someone had

34. Opcit, Mondalsing Bey, *Socio Political Evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong of Assam*, PP-78-80

35. Opcit, Barelong Terang, *History of the Karbis,* P-80

36. Opcit, Song Bey, '*The Karbis'*, Founding Father of Karbi Adorbar, P-11

said against our behalf? Song Bey requested all the Dorbar members to go to the Mission Compound and a meeting of the Karbi Adorbar Working Committee was held. The meeting passed strong uncompromised resolutions for the creation of the district and deputed Semsongsing Ingti the Secretary of the Dorbar to proceed to Shillong for a meeting with the Governor.[37] Some of the members present in the meeting were Semsonsing Ingti, Song Bey, Rev, Hondroval Millik, Robi Rongpi, Bogaram Terang and Khorsing Terang, M.L.A After the meeting at the Mission Compound, the members had lunch at the residence of Song Bey and they decided to meet again at Nowgong where the next Boundary Committee meeting will be held.[38] After making the trip to Shillong Semsongsing Ingti became seriously ill. But inspite of his illness he took a rickshaw and proceeded to the venue of the 3rd Boundary Committee meeting. Unfortunately, on the night of 28th February, 1948 he died.[39]

The Boundary Dispute: On the eve of the creation of the Mikir Hills district, there arose the boundary problem. The dispute was in the area of Dolamara and Malasi Pathar bordering Golaghat District and Punja Borpathar of Duar Amla, Mauza bordering Nowgong district. It was the demand of the Karbi Adorbar to include the cultivable land of those areas to Mikir Hill district in the time of its creation. The area of dispute was surveyed and made cadestal by the Authority of Revenue Department of Assam. In the meantime the Boundary Committee meeting was held at Golaghat and a final one was to be held at Shillong. But the members of the Karbi Adorbar were not in a position to attend the meeting due to the sudden demise of Semsonsing Ingti. However, a Telegram message was sent to the Chairman, Golaghat Boundary Commmission by the Dorbar requesting him to include Dolamar-Malasi pathar of Duar Bagori Mauza and Punja Borpathar of Duar Amla Mauza to Mikir hills District. But it is unfortunate that even though these areas were included in the newly created district, it became just in theory because the land records have not been transferred from Nowgong District till date. Worst still, people of the area have their names both in the electoral rolls of Karbi Anglong district and Nowgong District as well. The Nowgong District Authority had also established a Police Outpost in the area.[40]

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37. Ibid. P-12

38. Ibid. P-12

39. Ibid. P-12

40. An Interview with J.I Kathar, I.A.S (Retd.), Place of Interview, Tika, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Date -20/12/2010.

The demand for the inclusion of Dimapur and Lumding to the Mikir hills district: In this critical juncture arising out of the boundary dispute, another problem appeared before the Karbi Adorbar. The Business Community of Dimapur and Lumding demanded the inclusion of these two towns to Mikir hills district. But the leaders of the Karbi Adorbar were not in favour of inclusion. They were of the opinion that the Nagas will not sit silently to this development and there may be border clash between the two sides on the question of Dimapur. The Lumding town was also not included in the Mikir Hill District on the ground of saving the future generations of the Karbis from outsiders' influence.

The creation of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District: After a long struggle by the people of Mikir hills and North Cachar hills spearheaded by the likes of Semsonsing Ingti, Khorsing Terang, Song Bey, Sarsing Teron Habe, Thengklong Rongpi and others of the Karbi Adorbar, the Government of India conceded to the demand and passed in the Lok Sabha of the Indian Parliament. The President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad gave his assent to this regulation on 21st August, 1951.[41] Subsequently, the Government of Assam finally created the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district Vide Government Notification number TAD/R/31/50/15 dated the 17th of November, 1951.[42] The newly created district was inserted in the map of Assam and the struggle for Homeland by the Karbi Adorbar came to an end.

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41. Opcit, Mondolsing Bey, *Socio-Political Evolution of the Karbis of Karbi Anglong, District of Assam.*

42. Ibid, P-83.

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