

**Violence and Search for Peace  
in Karbi Anglong, Assam**

Tom Mangattuthazhe



North Eastern Social Research Centre

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**Tom Mangattuthazhe**

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## **Chapter 1: The Background of Karbi Anglong**

The Northeast of India is known as a region of conflicts. Also the Karbi Anglong district of Assam has been experiencing a large number of conflicts. This booklet is an effort to understand the reasons of this violence, ethnic conflicts in particular, and their impact on the life of the people. Some suggestions are made in the booklet for precautionary measures to be taken to prevent conflicts. It also presents a plan of action for bringing peace if conflicts occur. In particular it points out the adverse impacts of the 2005 Dimasa-Karbi conflict with special reference to its social, political, cultural and economic effects.

Conflict is defined as a situation of two or more persons, groups or countries reacting to serious disagreements. Violence that results from it is a global phenomenon. In some western countries children may manifest an attitude of violence in ways such as bullying and through physical assaults. Of late this pattern of violent behaviour is spreading in the Indian society too. A more serious form it takes in India is communal violence obviously because religion forms part and parcel of the Indian psyche. Fundamentalist elements can easily exploit this multi-religious context to incite the masses of one religion against the members of other religions and whip up their emotions for their political and economic goals. The persons inciting others to communal violence may themselves be non-practising members but they use or abuse the religious emotions of the masses in a calculated and rational manner for their own vested interests.

### **Communal Violence**

In the past communal violence was mostly between Hindus and Muslims. Today Christians are increasingly coming under attack from the Hindu fundamentalist forces who treat the minority religions as alien to India. So they systematically malign the cultures

of the minority communities and make false propaganda that they are de-nationalised, de-culturalised and even anti-national. Among others, incidents of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 and against Christians in Orissa in 2008 have shocked the conscience of peace loving people of all persuasions. These incidents show how people can be motivated to commit acts of violence in the name of religion by events such as the burning of the train at Godhra and killing of a Swami in Orissa. These incidents are condemnable but the violence that followed shows how cruelty and violence can be perpetrated in the name of religion. The facts and figures collected by the Citizens' Tribunal headed by Justice Shri V.R. Krishna Iyer are shocking. Justice Shri P. B. Savant, a former Judge of the Supreme Court who was a member of the team states that preparation for the Gujarat communal violence such as recruiting volunteers, training them in the use of arms, collection of information on the houses, shops and other establishments owned by Muslims, began at least six months before the Godhra train incident of February 27, 2002. The tribunal believed that at least 2,000 people were killed and 250 women were raped in the riots. The most disturbing aspect is that the police who were duty bound to maintain law and order and act as protectors of the victims either remained mute witnesses or participated in the crime. That can be called a sabotage of the due process of law.

The most fascinating feature of India's cultural heritage is unity in diversity. Through the ages intrinsic to the Indian cultural ethos has been utmost respect for and tolerance of all religions. That unity was the strength of India. The composite and synthetic culture emerged, developed and flourished out of this unity in diversity manifested itself in the art, architecture, paintings, music, languages and other forms. The Constitution mandated respect for this composite culture but the communal clashes are a big blow to this tradition. The greatest tragedy of institutionalised religion today is that some leaders hijack religion for their personal political and economic objectives by misguiding their adherents.

Religion advocates love and compassion, but in the hands of politicians, it has become a tool of hatred and division. In this context, it is imperative on the part of all the true religious people and pilgrims of dialogue to reach out to their own and other communities not only to give the message of love, tolerance and peace, but also to create in them an awareness of the dangers of these games.

### The North East

North Eastern India, located at the junction of the vast trans-Asian landmass, is the natural gateway to Southeast Asia which was, in the British age connected by road to Assam and Bengal through Myanmar. Ancient Assam and other parts of the region had a long association with the South East Asian countries, especially South China and Myanmar. Therefore the Northeast shares many ethnic and cultural traditions with its eastern neighbours. The historic silk route from China to Central Asia that passes through Assam is a sign of this historical link.

Unfortunately, this ancient route and other trading corridors have fallen into disuse due to historical and political reasons but these links as well as cultural and trade relations are being revived. In November 2005 Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh brought the Northeast to the centrestage by flagging off at Guwahati the Indo-Asian car rally that ended at Batam in Indonesia. This link of the Northeast also brought to the fore the diversity of India which is a challenge that the region has to grapple with while trying to solve the problems of its economic backwardness, growing unemployment, militancy, recurring floods and immigration.

Assam, the biggest State in the Northeast is an ancient land of a rich cultural heritage, rituals, traditions, customs, beliefs, languages and legends. The state has been a meeting ground for people of diverse races, different cultures and civilisations. The fertile land, rich natural and forest resources, flora and fauna of Assam encouraged the wandering tribes and communities of people

to settle down here. These communities with their diverse cultural and racial backgrounds have contributed to the fusion of a new community. This history also makes most tribals of Assam different from those of mainland India. They have their roots in their own culture and civilisation and their laws of inheritance and marriage and other customs are not the same as those in the rest of India.

#### Box 1: Karbi Anglong at a Glance

**Location:** 24°54' North and 26°41' North latitude; 92°8' East and 95°53' East Longitude.

**Area:** 10434 sq km

**Population:** 812,320 (2001 census)

**Civil sub-divisions:** 3

**Development blocks:** 11

**Revenue circles:** 4

**Rural areas:** 103,97.01 sq km

**Urban areas:** 36, 99 sq km

**Number of villages:**

Inhabited – 2520

Uninhabited – 43

Total villages - 2563

**Schedule cast population :** 4.22 %

**Schedule tribe population :** 51.56%

Area under reserved forests - 185454.00 ha

Total cropped area -175785.00 ha

Total area cultivated more than once -52346.00 ha

**Area under irrigation utilized:**

For kharif season (Monsoon) -118,85.00 ha

For Rabi season (winter) -1085.00 ha

**Ethnicity: Mongoloid:** (Karbi, Dimasa, Rengma Naga, Bodo, Garo etc)

**Topography:** Karbi Anglong (Hills) are located at an average altitude of 740 meters above mean Sea Level (MSL) and Kopili, Jamuna and Dhansiri Valley at an average altitude of 200 meters above MSL.

6. Natural/Economic Resource:- Forest, Limestone, Iron, coal, Tea Industry, Hydro Electric Generating Rivers, Wildlife, etc.

**Political Institution:** Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)

**Official language:** English

*(Source – Director of Economic and Statistics, Assam = 2002-2003)*

The two hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar (NC) Hills have worked in close cooperation for two decades. The Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong has lived in peace with the Dimasa tribe of NC Hills. In fact, these two were a single district till the 1950s. Even after their division into two districts, Karbi Anglong remains the largest district of Assam and shares the distinction of being a melting pot of different cultural, religious, ethnic and linguistic groups. It is bound by the Nagaon and Golaghat districts of Assam in the north and by the NC Hills district in the south. In the west, it is bound by the state of Meghalaya and in the east by the state of Nagaland.

The district is rich in natural and economic resources like forests, minerals such as limestone, coal, tea and wildlife which attract a number of tourists. The district headquarters is situated at Diphu which has a railway station, a good transport and communications network with the rest of the district, state and region. The district has three sub-divisions namely Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan. Its official language is English while Assamese, Karbi, Bengali and Hindi are some of the other languages commonly spoken here.

Most ethnic groups of Karbi Anglong belong to the Mongoloid stock. They include the Karbi, Dimasa, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Kuki and Rengma Naga tribes. Also people belonging to the Adivasi, Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Bihari and other communities inhabit this district. This diversity only increases the charm of Karbi Anglong particularly since such diverse peoples have been living peacefully since the formation of the district in 1951. Till recently ethnic unrest did not affect the people of Karbi Anglong.

The economy of the district depends mainly on subsistence agriculture but it has not achieved the desired result of improving the socio-economic condition of a majority of its people. They remain poor and a large number of young persons from poor families are unemployed. All that they can do is to roam around with no work

in this land which has a scope for raising innumerable crops.

### **A climate of Violence**

Historically, the indigenous people of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills have been subjugated. The exploitation and subjugation perpetrated upon them led the hill people to violence. In this context dead bodies are merely the ciphers to send the message of terror between the State and the armed groups or warring armed groups which are fighting for their 'own freedom'. So the cycle of encounter killings, custodial deaths and rebelinflicted bomb attacks in public places like crowded markets and railway stations take place in a spiral. The victims are mostly innocent civilians who have nothing to do with the conflict.

Apart from the army-rebel standoff, the factional fights and ethnic violence in many parts of the Northeast add to the deaths, destruction and displacement that begin with the so-called counter-insurgency operations. Various armed groups too are involved in an organised network of extortion or 'an indigenous tax collection system' that sustains the militant governments, maintains their staff, security infrastructure and allied activities. The tribal people are compelled to part with a part of their income for this purpose. The nexus between politicians and militant groups is an open secret and is used to win democratic elections, settle business deals and fight political rivals. This symbiotic relationship is the biggest stumbling block to law and order which is the responsibility of a democratically elected government.

This encourages corruption and undermines the moral authority of the state. The common people lose confidence in the state which is constitutionally committed to protect their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Since the state fails in this task, people hardly react when some militants punish corrupt government officials or politicians through their own courts. The common people may not approve of this method but they feel satisfied that someone is bringing some justice to them, whatever

its type.

The failure of the state also explains why a large number of people in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills believe that they can solve their problems if they have their own state. Since there has been no response from the Central or State Governments some groups have taken to armed struggle to achieve this goal. At such a critical juncture, many extremist groups representing different tribes have been formed.

**Box 2: Some Ethnic Armed groups found in Karbi Anglong**

United people’s Democratic Solidarity Group (UPDS) formed on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1999 by Karbi People’s Force (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)

Karbi Longri – NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF)

Dima Haram Daogah (DHD – J) which is still not amenable to peace talks & (DHD-D) which is having a ceasefire agreement with the Central government.

Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)

National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)

National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)

**The Karbi-Dimasa Conflict**

The Karbi-Dimasa conflict has to be situated in this context and of the tension that was built up during 2005. On many occasions during this year people resorted to violence imbued with the ideology of protecting their ethnic, religious and linguistic identities. However, many in Karbi Anglong believe that this violence resulted from a planned move to destabilise Karbi Anglong district through ethnic clashes. For example, in July 2005 there was violence between the Biharis and Adivasis who were living in the same village, doing the same type of cultivation and most of them had migrated to this area from the same place. In August 2005, the tension between the Karbis and Khasis over the border issue was blown out of proportion both in Assam and Meghalaya.

The media in both the places published inflammatory articles and controversial news reports in order to maintain an atmosphere of tension. In September 2005 a rumour was spread in the region that three persons belonging to the Kuki community were killed by suspected Karbi militants. This incident did not take place but the rumour rocked the district. (See the chronology of violence during the Karbi-Dimasa conflict in Appendix 1 and the number of victims in Appendix 2).

Because of this sudden spate of violence and other incidents many in Karbi Anglong believe that that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict was fabricated by the elements that wanted hatred between these two tribes. The plan was executed through the killing of three persons on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2005. Three auto drivers from Manja, belonging to the Dimasa tribe were taken to the nearby forest and were brutally killed with sharp weapons. That resulted in the Karbi Dimasa ethnic conflict which destroyed the old bond between these two tribes. Many suspect that the conflict was meant to subvert the joint demand for an autonomous State. This conflict was even given a communal turn when on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2005, a church was burnt and looted. Many suspect that it was the handiwork of a national level communal organisation.

**Conclusion**

The background of Karbi Anglong given in this introductory chapter shows the climate of violence that has grown in the district. That has resulted in many conflicts during the last one decade. The

## **Chater 2: The Background of the Conflicts**

It is clear from the background given in the last chapter that violence that one has witnessed in Kabi Anglong during the last one decade did not erupt all of a sudden. There was a build up to it. The effort in the present chapter is to understand the processes that led to this build up and the violence that followed.

### **A Review of the Past Events**

The United People's Democratic Solidarity Group (UPDS) was formed in 1999 through the merger of the erstwhile Karbi People's Front (KPF) and Karbi National Volunteers. It sought to realise the dream of a separate state of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills and also aimed at accelerating the socio-cultural and economic upliftment of the people of the two districts. However, the UPDS later split due to disagreement on whether to hold negotiations with the central government or not. One faction agreed to hold negotiations while the other led by Mr. H. E. Kathar decided to stay away. The Kathar faction renamed itself the Karbi Longri National Liberation Front (KLNLF). Its demands include the creation of a political institution for self-determination for the Karbi people of Karbi Anglong and contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Assam and Meghalaya. They demanded this state under Article 3 of the constitution with additional powers under Article 371. KLNLF also demands the eviction of all non-indigenous people who have settled in the area after 1951. 'Self-determination here means self-rule within the framework of the constitution. The institution for self-rule demanded here is the creation of a full-fledged state. The new state shall be created by carving out the areas of present Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, contiguous Karbi dominated areas of Nagaon, Morigaon and Kamrup districts and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya' explains UPDS Joint Secretary Wajaru Mukhrang.

A parallel militant group of the Dimasa tribe, Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) was formed in 1995. That too split into Dima Halam Daogah, Jewel (DHD – J) and Dima Halam Daogah, Dilip (DHD – D). The DHD-D demands the creation of a separate Dimaraji (Dimasa kingdom) comprising the Dimasa-inhabited areas of North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, parts of Nagaon district and of the Dimapur district of Nagaland. Also its rival faction DHD-J, known as the Black Widow, formed by the ousted chairman Jewel Garlossa, is active in the twin districts. Another militant group is the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) (Karbi Anglong unit) formed in 2001 as an adjunct to the KRA formed in Manipur with the objective of using armed struggle as a means of achieving a separate homeland for the Kukis and work for their socio-cultural, political and economic upliftment. Also the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is active in the district.

Some of these groups have signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre and have been assigned specific camps in the district. NDFB has been trying to get a designated camp in Karbi Anglong but this has not materialised. The Assam State Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader Hemen Das says that this scheme of designated camps is dangerous because in the name of dialogue with the militants the armed groups are allowed to roam free and indulge in all types of anti-social activities. He adds that the bizarre practice of the militants belonging to both the UPDS and the DHD killing innocent villagers before the very eyes of the law-enforcement agencies, rings alarm bells about this practice of the government. The clashes between these factionl are different from ethnic riots. Their perpetrators are not unarmed civilians but cadres of militant outfits that have entered into a ceasefire agreement with the state.

### **Renewed Demand for an Autonomous State**

These incidents cannot be seen in isolation. They are integral to the larger issue of revival of the statehood movement in the two

hill districts. In 1970, when the then Prime Minister Smt. Indira Gandhi contemplated granting full statehood to Meghalaya, a similar case for an independent state of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills was given in a memorandum signed by the cabinet member from Mikir Hills (renamed Karbi Anglong) and 11 others. Almost 16 years later on May 17, 1986 that demand for statehood led to the formation of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC). The ASDC spearheaded a strong mass movement demanding an autonomous state under Article 244 (A) of the Constitution. That culminated in the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on April 1, 1995 between the Assam Government and the leaders of the ASDC.

The signing of the MoU led to an upgradation of the councils of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills with enhanced powers under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. But that has not stopped the demand for an autonomous state. The leaders who signed the MoU ten years ago are disillusioned with the councils that are in place in the hill districts. So they demand the creation of an autonomous state comprising the geographical areas of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The ASDC demand was unanimously passed in both the tribal councils. Subsequently the ruling Congress party tabled a resolution in the District Autonomous Councils demanding the creation of an Autonomous State comprising the hill districts.

The Karbi leaders have continued to make this demand also in the Union Parliament. In the course of a debate in the Lok Sabha, Veteran Karbi politician and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) leader Dr. Jayanta Rongpi said “the Sixth Schedule has been in practice since 1952. I have the experience of heading such an Autonomous Hill Council for seven long years. I was 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.” The former MP from the Diphu constituency made a case for a separate state for the two hill districts of Assam by insisting that the Centre had upgraded all Sixth Schedule areas into

states. He pointed out that the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills were in the Sixth Schedule; that Mizoram was in the Sixth Schedule; and that the Centre had upgraded all these Sixth Schedule areas to states ‘because there are inherent weaknesses in this Sixth Schedule’ (Sushanta Talukdar. “Violence in the Hills,” *Frontline*, November 18, 2005).

Leaders of the statehood movement argue that though 33 development departments were transferred to the tribal councils, the council authorities were not delegated adequate financial and legislative powers. As a result the council’s dependence on Dispur (the State capital) continued and the very purpose of the Sixth Schedule was negated. For example, Holiram Terang, President of the ASDC and a signatory to the 1995 MoU, justifying the revival of the demand for statehood stated that the present situation could have been avoided ‘had the Centre not ignored the warning that Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills have become a fertile ground for insurgency due to a combination of neglect and apathy of the rulers of Assam and the failure of the Sixth Schedule to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people’ (Inil. “United We Survive Divided we Perish,” *Frontline*, November 18, 2005).

### **Failure to Adhere to MOU**

This demand is only one of the problems. Other problems are caused by the fact that the militant groups do not adhere to the ceasefire rules that bar their armed movement outside the designated camps. The militant outfits as well as the security forces continue to terrorise the twin hill districts of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The militants violate the ceasefire agreement signed as the first step for negotiations on their demand for statehood. A series of gruesome killings of innocent villagers and arson are the manifestation of an internecine war that has been going on between the militant outfits. This violence has claimed hundreds of innocent lives and has rendered nearly 200,000 persons homeless between 2001 and 2006. Most of those killed or who lose their homes and

belongings are unarmed civilians, especially women who have nothing to do with this rivalry.

There is no instance of the law enforcement agencies enforcing this clause. Mr Rajiv Agarwal, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, who accompanied Mr Sriprakash Jaiswal, Union Minister of State for Home affairs to Karbi Anglong accused both the outfits of violating the ceasefire agreement and even hinted at disarming them. However, the security forces make no effort to rein in the militants. As a result, in the post-agreement period, there was competition between the militant factions and the democratic movement. But most people who had once rallied behind the democratic organisations remained aloof because they were afraid of retaliation from the militants.

Political parties like ASDC and the Congress (I) which are clamoring for an autonomous state and claim to have the support of the Karbi and Dimasa people and of other communities living in the two hill districts have failed to exercise any influence over the UPDS or the DHD-D and convince them to refrain from using arms against the villagers or against each other. This is most likely to weaken the democratic voice and encourage armed groups to dictate the terms of peace. For the Centre, it will again be easier to convince militant groups to accept a package in lieu of the statehood demand than to negotiate with leaders of the democratic movement on the same demand.

### **Moving Towards a Conflict**

At the moment, the Karbi and Dimasa insurgency problem seems far away but there are many areas of tension between them. The first is confusion over the territories which they will occupy if an autonomous state is granted. The territories that the UPDS and DHD demand overlap with each other. The persistent demand of the UPDS that the DHD should shift to its designated camp away from the Dhansiri area of Karbi Anglong is perceived by the DHD as an attempt to stake a claim over the territory demanded by the

Dimasa militant outfit. With these perceptions, the two militant groups are most likely to intensify their battle for supremacy. The two hill states may have to witness more bloodshed if a solution continues to elude the twin districts and the political dialogue is prolonged further. There are also signs of eruption of communal violence between the two tribes. This assumption implies that even in a situation of ethnic conflict one has to focus on promoting communal harmony between these two communities.

The second problem is “taxation”. That was the background of the 2003 Karbi-Kuki conflict. The tension between their militant groups resulted from their policy of “tax collection” which from time to time was not confined to their own communities though it was done in the name of safeguarding the interests of their community. Many minor skirmishes took place between these groups. Their victims were innocent villagers. Another reason for this tension was the UPDS ban on *jhum* cultivation in Singhason Khonbamon Hills on the ground that it led to ecological damage and soil erosion. Both the Karbis and Kukis followed this method of cultivation for a long time, but the conflict started when the Kuki farmers began to raise ginger crop on a very large scale and prospered. The Karbi farmers interpreted the ban on *jhum* as a strategy to free land for ginger cultivation.

A new situation arose when the hill leaders spoke of what they perceived as repression and exploitation at the hands of the Assam ruling clique. The dialogue of the UPDS and DHD with the Government of India was moved ahead and there was a new interest shown by the national media and political leaders in the affairs of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The 2001 intensive tour of Karbi Anglong by the NDA convenor Mr George Fernandes was part of that positive effort.

### **The Sequence of Events**

Despite these moves, many in Karbi Anglong think that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 was engineered by a third party and that it was the response of the decision-makers of Assam to these initiatives. Since 2001, the hill people of this tract have experienced conflicts that they find mysterious. After the Karbi-Kuki conflagration of 2003 the tribals were amazed at its brutality and at the manner in which they could kill each. Before 2005 there was no history of the tribals of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills killing or attacking each other. After 2005 they feel that the origin of the conflict remains a mystery. Also the 2003 Dimasa-Hmar clash has remained a mystery, so has the Karbi-Kuki and the Karbi-Khasi clashes in the same year. The Karbi- Dimasa clash of 2005 adds to the mystery.

Many who have studied the conflicts feel that those who engineered them have cleverly played the contradictions between the militant groups to ignite violence. The civil society members are never involved but sadly they become mere victims or spectators. In such a situation, the clashes cannot be categorised merely as ethnic violence. One has to expose the mysterious elements and the motive behind their actions. The political elements have created conflict situations between communities taking advantage of strong sentiments that go against their political aspirations. Analysts believe that the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 was an attempt to divide these two tribes and to portray them as mean and intolerant aggressors. The objective seems to divide these two tribes that are involved in a political struggle for a joint state. Simmering tension was built up between these tribes over the years. A small spark was needed to ignite a full scale conflagration and that was provided by the killing of three autorickshaw drivers on 26<sup>th</sup> Sept 2005. By accusing the UPDS of committing the crime the district police invited retaliation from the Dimasa tribe.

The possible objectives of the onslaught of violence in Karbi Anglong appear to be the following:

1. To divide the people of Karbi Anglong and their brethren in NC Hills.
2. To ensure that tribal aspirations are curbed by keeping them engaged in ethnic clashes. Inculcating the spirit of unhealthy competition among the people and forcing them to excel others thereby pushing them to be aggressive rather than assertive.
3. To ignite distrust and hatred among the tribes on the basis of aggressive chauvinism so that each tribe thinks of its own borders and territory and is engaged in violence and hatred and would not have time to join the others in any common demand.
4. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of this tract and all the conflicts have been in the agricultural season in May when agricultural operations begin or in October the harvesting season. That seems to be aimed at disrupting the economy.
5. To disturb the educational aspirations of the people in the area especially for the school and college going students whose examinations are held in October and November. Most conflicts have been during these months.
6. These conflicts also seem to be aimed at capturing the fertile and oil rich land in the Dhansiri area.
7. To encourage antagonism based on religion through false accusations such as forcible conversion, insults, arson, looting, raping and assaults on women.

These objectives have to be situated in the context of the inability of the Government to take any responsible and legal action to settle the land disputes between the Dimasas and Karbis. They have been pending for a very long time. Dhansiri which comes under Karbi Anglong is claimed by the DHD as part of Dimaraji (kingdom of Dimasa) and by the adjacent Nagaland as

part of Greater Nagaland. Dhansiri is rich in oil and that explains the interest of all the parties in this area. The 2003 conflict began in this area. The 2005 conflict was its continuation. During all the conflicts, the media played a dangerous role of misinterpreting the facts and figures and that led to further conflicts.

### **Social and Psychological Impacts**

Whether the above were conscious objectives or not, these have been the consequences of the conflicts. These acts of violence have been sustained through a hate campaign especially through the media. During the conflict, external forces, for example the fundamentalist groups manipulate the minority communities and mislead them to achieve their political interest of suppressing their rights. The total disregard for non-violence is visible in the conflicts. In fact, the 2003 Karbi-Kuki conflict began on 2nd October, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of non-violence.

An impact analysis was done of the conflict according to the socio-economic, educational, health and sanitation criteria. The evaluation was based on village or household surveys, observation, discussion and information obtained through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). It was also an attempt to throw some light on the socio-economic, political, educational and cultural feature of the area (see chapter 4). The clashes were enormous and their psycho-social impact could not be quantified easily. Most victims of the clashes were left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead or abused. Among the immediate consequences was loss of security in the clash prone areas as civilians took the law into their own hands and targeted their perceived enemies. As a result of insecurity, there was indiscriminate loss of human lives. Many others sustained physical injuries and most were traumatised.

The first impact of these conflicts is displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons but not all of them can be counted. A standard and perhaps convenient practice has been to adopt a head counting of the people who ultimately find their way to the

relief camps and close their eyes to the population who choose to migrate to the urban centres or mingle with the general populace. For example, as per the data available the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005 caused around 75,000 refugees in Karbi Anglong. But many others live with relatives or in makeshift shelters far from the zone of conflict. Most of them received first aid and medical care but have no access to proper food, sanitation and clothing. Though it is presumed that refugees and internally displaced persons are one and the same and the only distinction between them is bureaucratic and legal attitude in reality the only commonality between them is that both are displaced from their traditional homes due to similar reasons. But there is a clear distinction between them.

The inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities coupled with overcrowding made the relief camps ideal places for outbreaks of jaundice, typhoid, diarrhea, chicken pox, measles, respiratory tract infections and other communicable diseases. The cultural heritage too was disrupted. The tribals were unable to go to their place of worship such as churches and temples as some of these holy places were destroyed. They abstained from wearing their traditional dresses for fear of being identified and attacked. The beauty of their culture and traditions was checked by this conflict. (See Appendix 2)

### **Economic Consequences**

Whether they lived with their relatives or in the relief camps, in public buildings, makeshift shelters, schools or colleges the displaced persons faced acute poverty as their sustenance was destroyed during the conflict. They lived with little health care. The self-help groups (SHG) in the affected villages were showing remarkable progress by way of rural upliftment. Their activities were hampered. For example under Jirsong Asong (An NGO) 58 SHGs located in and around Diphu, Dhansiri, Rongkangthir, Kheroni and Manja were having regular savings, monthly meetings and income generation schemes. All the activities were disrupted since the members fled their homes.

However, the economic impact of the clashes has not been quantified since it is not easy to assess it. One can only say that the conflicts have resulted in a gigantic waste of human and economic resources. Agricultural activities were disrupted; important crops like sesamum, ginger, rice, chilly, brinjal, yam, ladies finger, cabbage, radish, peas and mustard were either destroyed or abandoned because of the widespread violence. Work on agricultural land stopped for a long time as farm workers stayed away due to fear of being attacked by the groups in conflict.

Other economic problems related to the clashes followed such as food insecurity, destruction of property, loss of livestock etc. Thousands of families lost their personal and household possessions as their houses, granaries, farms, shops and other premises went up in flames. The household possessions that were lost included furniture, utensils, ornaments, clothes, handloom sets, rice mills, vehicles, TV, VCD, radio sets, solar lights, shops and cash. Many lost cows, buffaloes, oxen, pigs, goats, sheep, pigeons, rabbits, ducks, dogs and other domestic animals and birds.

### **Impact on Education**

A major consequence of the clashes is that the educational ambitions of the youth of the tribes of this tract are curbed by keeping them engaged in ethnic clashes. The school and college examinations are held during October and November and most clashes have been during these months. Thousands of school and college going children were unable to attend school or appear for the exams. Some children dropped out of school or college due to the financial and socio-economic constraints resulting from the conflict. Both the students and teachers belonging to the 'enemy' ethnic groups were forced to leave the district and go to other schools while some others abandoned their teaching careers. The students and teachers of the two ethnic groups treated each other as enemies and experienced feelings of fear, anxiety and distrust.

Tragically many children have suffered also emotional and mental damage and psychological trauma as a result of the horrifying experience. Even those who did not witness violence or lose family members suffered the disruption of their normal lives as schools closed, friends dispersed and their homes were turned into ashes. Because of the trauma some children even lost their faculty of speech or became emotionally withdrawn. One fears that some of them may permanently change over to an aggressive behaviour or to revenge. That may manifest itself in another cycle of violence. Apart from losing their books, bags and uniforms, many children went hungry and fell sick because of inadequate food and poor living conditions. Schools were turned into relief camps. All of it added to the disruption of their studies.

### **Conclusion**

Long standing political insecurity is the root cause of ethnic conflicts. The Indian heritage of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) preached by Mahatma Gandhi and the spirit of a life of simplicity or 'living lightly on earth' has been forgotten by the present day leaders. Instead of people's welfare, most leaders think only of their own good. In the process peace and harmony between communities are destroyed. Crores of rupees sanctioned for various schemes are not spent or are misused. That causes discontent among the people but the leaders exploit these grievances by building up animosity against other communities instead of dealing with the discontent. What is the way out of it? The next chapter will take a look at this question.

### **Chapter 3: A Way out of the Conflict**

Some of the causes of the conflicts have been studied till now and the process that leads to them has been documented. The purpose of this exercise was to find a way out of the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. The only way of getting out of this vicious circle is to activate peace processes whose first step is to bring relief to the victims. Simultaneously efforts have to be made to initiate a dialogue between the leaders of the groups in conflict. Slow but definite steps have to be taken to recreate an atmosphere of trust between the communities. This chapter will look at some of the steps required.

#### **Some Steps Towards Peace**

The objective of the peace process is to promote a movement from the culture of violence which has dominated the district to a culture of peace and non-violence characterised by human values, an attitude of reconciliation and mutual understanding. These steps are required for a non-violent solution of conflicts through respect for human rights and different cultures, democracy, tolerance and solidarity. The objectives of this process are:

1. To spread among the people the message of love, by creating an awareness in the community of the danger of the ideologies that perpetuate hatred and division among them.
2. To work for a culture of peace based on non-violent relations not only between communities, but also between individuals, social groups and all the citizens.
3. To make people aware of the culture of peace that can grow out of their own beliefs and traditions.
4. Non-violent solutions by promoting the transformation of violent competition into cooperation for shared goals through a process of healing and reconciliation.

5. To promote networking and honest dialogue among persons committed to peace building.
6. To build communion and relationship by reaching out to others.
7. Networking with others in society based on the human qualities of compassion, sacrifice, selfless service and listening to each other.
8. To nurture the art of caring on the basis of aspirations for peace.

#### **Possibilities in Schools and Colleges**

While every section of society needs such awareness of peace, schools and colleges can be a good starting point of the process. That is the age at which children need to see some hope in their future. Besides, schools and colleges are also the main recruitment ground of the militant outfits. So at this level alternatives have to be provided in the form of non-violent options of social transformation and of development whose benefits reach every citizen.

This approach also has its hazards. Given the formal set up of the Government sponsored curricula and the heavy load of the syllabus that is already prescribed by the Board of Education, it may be too much to expect the educational institutions to remodel their objectives to the demands of peace building. However, an attempt can be made to introduce the kind of human value formation in an informal way through non-formal techniques of education. One can give the following as possible steps in this direction:

1. Inter-religious prayer during the daily school assembly at which the culture of different tribes is used and introduced to the students.
2. Dialogue meeting every month on different religions and tribes.
3. Organising inter-religious and inter-tribal live-in during the

- summer camps;
4. Joint celebration of major religious and national festivals and feasts of importance to each tribe.
  5. Providing the children with a prayer room or a meditation hall so that at any moment, they can go there and seek solace. Its decoration can show religious and ethnic diversity.
  6. Peace clubs in schools, other educational institutions and villages.
  7. Use of Parent-Teacher Associations to help parents to handle the ideology of violence which their children imbibe and to inculcate in them a spiritual attitude of mutual appreciation.

### **Cultivating Values**

It is important to cultivate in the children already from the school level the type of values that develop in them spiritual and moral attitudes of service, cooperation and unity as against the material, consumerist and competitive model that makes them selfish. In a multi-religious multi-ethnic society, cultivation of human values can be done by building on each one's social sensitivity and appreciation for one's own religion and culture together with respect for the religion and ethnic identity of others. The following steps are possible to help the students move towards this objective.

1. Specific education for peace whose awareness among the affected groups can be imparted in formal and informal ways.
2. Giving moral, political, monetary, social and educational support to vulnerable sections when possible.
3. Tackling the exploiters however great they may be, by helping them to correct themselves when possible or by ostracising them if such a possibility exists.
4. Re-orienting the mandate of education to form the children to face today's context of violence.

The educators can also go beyond standard education to

give the children information outside the official syllabus and by recreating in the children, motivation for peace in the following manner:

1. Enabling the students to gain a spiritual worldview of peace, justice and service as against the purely materialistic one.
2. Cultivating altruistic values in the students as against the selfish and egoistic ones that are propagated by the media.
3. Training children in a voluntary simple lifestyle and reduction of needs as against the modern consumerist and competitive lifestyle.
4. Developing in the student insights that promote a commitment to integral human liberation.
5. Encouraging in the students greater sensitivity to human suffering and a spirit of collaboration by encouraging them to get involved in the promotion of justice, peace and harmony.
6. Developing in the students the tribal ethos of rootedness in Mother Earth that resists actions that exploit the earth unduly or destroy the environment; involving them in action to bring about ecological wholeness.
7. Forming communities of faith in which all students are rooted in their own native tradition but respect other traditions; promote relationships among the differences and celebrate diversity.

### **Peace Education**

Peace education is a means to help a community to move from a culture of violence to one of non-violence. One way to ensure it is to include peace education in formal and non-formal education in the form of human rights, democracy, non-violence, conflict resolution and justice. If that is not possible one may have to opt for informal means. In either case it begins with the definition of peace which should **include cooperation, justice and reconcili-**

**ation.** It should deal with peace between individuals and groups that is to be achieved through non-violent means. Emphasis should be laid on the importance of peace with all peoples irrespective of caste, creed, colour and sex. The definition should show the close link between peace and development.

The definition is only a step in helping the learners to become conscious of their role in contributing to peace and harmony and in promoting peace around them beginning with their villages. The very definition of peace can itself encourage people to respect the rights of others amid the diversity of tribes, communities and language groups. The definition can be arrived at through a common reflection that leads the learners to the need to understand and respect the identity, culture and traditions of the ethnic groups they come in contact with and to treat them as precious. The participants will also reflect on the implications of imposing the dominant traditions on the social, ethnic and religious minorities. Such a reflection can become an opportunity to learn about the cultures and traditions of others and develop cordial relations with communities that are different from their own.

### **The Role of Different Groups**

Though the discussion above is on peace education in schools and colleges, one has also to find ways of reaching the message to the youth who are drawn towards violence because of the uncertain future they face. One has to find ways of instilling in them the hope of a better future and of motivating them to work for a new and more just society. Such a discernment on their future can lead them to an understanding of the value of the democratic set up and motivate them to use the existing structures and the constitutional framework for solving the differences peacefully by electing the right persons as their representatives to govern them.

This message of peace has to reach also the village headmen and other influential people of the villages. Genuine commitment to this message can motivate them to utilise their wisdom, intel-

ligence and authority to find peaceful and democratic solutions to problems. They can thus ensure that simple problems do not get out of hand because of their failure to solve them through discussion and negotiations. An essential component of such an approach to peace is justice and equal treatment for everyone regardless of their tribe or community.

To come back to children and teachers in schools, peace and conflict resolution are essential if they are to accept their responsibility for taking their society towards a new future. Children reflect what they read in school books and mirror their teachers by observing their behaviour especially their method of dealing with conflicts. If teachers use corporal punishment or prevent students from expressing themselves or giving their views, children will do the same with their friends and younger siblings. So before formulating the classroom curriculum and teaching children teachers should educate themselves both on ways of dealing with conflicts when they happen and of avoiding or preventing them. Most conflicts contain personal and cultural aspects. So they can be avoided if the system of education instils in the students a sense of ethical values, communication skills and respect for other communities.

Both the teachers and students need this approach because they are constantly living with interpersonal conflicts but find it difficult to talk about them. Because of it teachers need to develop the art of listening to the students and understanding their concerns. This can be done through informal meetings between teachers, students and parents, in organised workshops and in social activities. This combination of meetings and activities can be effective in changing the relations between students and teachers and improving children's positive behaviour. The meetings in an atmosphere of mutual respect can create in the students a culture of peace within their own community and with other groups.

### **Tips for Teachers**

**1. Models of tolerance and compassion:** Children take their

emotional cue from significant adults. An area that creates tension between communities is negative statements about racial, ethnic, or religious groups. The teacher should avoid all such remarks and find ways of reaching out to his/her neighbours and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their ethnicity.

2. **Provide useful information:** Instead of negative remarks the teacher should give accurate information about the people, events, reactions, and feelings of the other communities. Even factually correct information has to be given in a language that helps children's development. In other words, one has to avoid stereotyping peoples or communities.
3. **Emphasise positive images of ethnic groups.** Identify people of different communities who have a positive place in the children's mind. They may be neighbours, friends, school staff, health care professionals, members of their faith community or local merchants. Discuss the many characteristics, values and experiences the children have in common with these people.
4. **Avoid all blame game:** A good way of doing it is to use non-speculative terms. The teacher may discuss with the children how they would feel if they were blamed unfairly by association, for example if they got into trouble for some wrong that a friend or a sibling had done or if their whole class was punished for what one student did.
5. **Explore children's fears:** Many children who can describe what happened during a conflict or at a moment of tension may not be able to express their fears, questions, assumptions or conclusions. Using activities, role-plays, games and discussion sessions it is possible to explore their fears about events and their feelings about various ethnic groups.
6. **Undertake projects to help those in need with people from diverse backgrounds:** Helping others is part of the healing process. Working with classmates or members of

the community who come from different backgrounds not only enables children to feel that they are making a positive contribution. It also reinforces their sense of commonalities with diverse people.

7. **Learn about different communities and faiths represented in your area.**

Knowledge debunks myths about other people and can humanise other cultures. One possible way is to get school children to share information about their family or cultural customs to reinforce the notion that all people have special beliefs and rituals all of which are respectable.

8. **Read to the students books that address prejudice, tolerance and hatred:** There are many stories appropriate for varying age groups that can help children to think about and define their feelings regarding these issues. The school or local librarian can make recommendations.

#### Action at the Political Level

By political associations one does not mean parties but bodies like the Village Development Associations (VDA) that can play an active role in moulding the children's attitudes. The work of the VDA and similar bodies will include:

1. Maintenance of common property resources;
2. Finding a solution to the long standing safe drinking water problem;
3. Supply of books, notebooks and uniforms free of cost to poor school going children;
4. Settlement of conflicts and disputes on many occasions;
5. Maintenance of village sanitation;
6. Serving as agent for the village to canvass, negotiate, access and implement government welfare schemes.
7. Multi-purpose disaster shelter to the victims in the relief camps

may be considered.

In the present political scenario, the members of the Parliament from the Northeast do not constitute a strong voice of the region and do not articulate its aspirations as MPs from many other regions do. Because of their small number they do not get much importance at the national level. The whole of the Northeast has only 22 members in a total of 540. If they were to work together the MPs of the region can still make their voice heard because the Indian State cannot do without the Northeast as an integral organ as in a biological construct. Its political image in the present international scenario demands that the Centre pay special attention to the Northeast. But the representatives of the region do not form a collectivity and use this political leverage to negotiate with the Centre. In that sense one can say that they fail to uphold the equality of all states and peoples in the Indian union that the Constitution has conferred on them.

In such negotiations it can do the Northeast no harm to admit that the region depends on the economic resources and production of larger India. They should also assert that the people of the region need to move away from it to greater economic autonomy and a more productive economy. Building such an economy can also be an expression of the commitment of the people of the region to build the Indian collectivity. The economic programmes can thus become an alternative to the violence that many young persons of the region are forced into. That requires constant negotiations by all the representatives of the region. The village leaders have to become advocates of the people in putting pressure on the elected representatives to make the voice of the region heard at the Centre. They can thus make a contribution to development which is another word for peace.

### **Conclusion:**

#### **Key Messages on the Importance of Peace**

This chapter has discussed some possible steps for peace

that can be taken at the school and village levels. One can end this chapter by identifying some messages that the teachers can popularise in order to make the voice of peace heard. The following are some possible messages that can be disseminated to the public in the form of slogans:

1. Peace comes from the ability to cope with differences and conflicts.
2. Violence and hatred are never solutions to a problem.
3. The whole group should not be judged by the actions of a few.
4. Unity in diversity is our strength.
5. All people deserve to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity.
6. Vengeance and justice are not the same.
7. Intolerance leads to more conflicts and violence.

The main thought discussed in this chapter is that peace-building is a multi-faceted process but it has to begin at the grassroots level. This chapter has given some indications of the contribution that the educational and village political system can

## Chapter 4: Participatory Rural Appraisal of Manja

The last chapter has discussed the action that can be taken at the school and village level. Also civil society initiatives can make a contribution to peace. This chapter will describe the action of one of them viz. the Peace Team that conducted a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) that gave the team much knowledge about the people. However, it was meant to be primarily a process of awareness building about the potential for peace in the Manja area in the Lumbajong block of Karbi Anglong District which was the centre of the Karbi-Dimasa conflict. The Peace Team, a group of young persons trained in conflict resolution skills and peace building programmes met all the families of the area, collected data with the help of a printed questionnaire and tried to turn it into a tool of facilitating a peace process. The overall goal of the programme was capacity building in communities and strengthening the local people in terms of human resource development and conflict resolution skills. In that sense one can say that the team tried to promote the organisational capabilities of local institutions by providing consultancy and advisory services.

### Background of PRA at Manja

The Peace Team has gone through several stages of development from 2000 to 2008. During and after the violence in Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills it has undertaken several relief, rehabilitation and peace building activities in the region. During the 2007 evaluation exercise of their programme, the evaluation team observed that the team should strengthen the grassroots communities with skills in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, to augment development initiatives with a clear focus on peace. It is against this background that the PRA was done in the Manja area where most conflicts started.

The term PRA is used in relation to development programmes aimed at strengthening local institutions in terms of human resource development and organisational skills. During data collection at the grassroots level the peace team organised training and demonstration sessions for farmers, youth leaders, the local community and artisans to acquire skills that would enable them to provide goods and services to the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries were to be empowered to take control of their own development by involving them in the entire process in order to ensure good performance and sustainability. This was to be done using the findings, tools and methodologies of PRA.

To ensure adequate transfer of skills to people at the grassroots level, the Peace Team will continue to organise short courses and workshops for various sections of people within and outside the villages studied. This training will be in specific skills and will enable the participants to initiate grassroots level projects such as skills for agricultural extension, livestock management, land use planning and natural resource management. Emphasis will be on development of skills using participatory approaches in the assessment and appraisal of adult education and community mobilisation (see the schedule in Appendix 3).

**As a step to this approach the first question the team asked was “Why does conflict occur over the use of the natural resources? How are external factors built into local conflicts?” They then went on to ask: “What governing mechanisms are conducive to equitable and sustainable natural resource management by communities? How can research help identify opportunities for turning conflict into collaboration?”**

PRA at Manja grapples with some of these questions. This experience and conceptual insights in the area where conflicts began will hopefully create a climate of dialogue based on the lessons learned. To arrive at this step one also needs to fill the gaps in the understanding of the conditions that need to be met to move from

conflict to collaboration. It is because conflict management is a critical but constructive way of looking at problems, involving two basic steps of conflict analysis and planned multiparty intervention. Conflict analysis involves the study, conducted by those directly involved and those seeking to assist in this endeavour, of the various dimensions and consequences of the conflict, with a view to understanding its causes. Multi-track interventions, when based on a study of the conflict, involve the use of a variety of techniques, such as mediation and negotiations, leading to changes in resource management. PRA was undertaken in Manja with the hope that the critical assessment of conflicts would inform the practice of all the persons concerned with the equitable and sustainable development and peace of the communities involved in the conflicts. It was also hoped that they would then be able to take some steps towards peace.

Conflicts are resolved fully only when the underlying sources of tension are removed. PRA and communication of its results can help establish a link between the communities and become a step in dealing with the proximate causes of the conflict. It can also be a catalyst for social learning about how to manage the resources. Specific conflicts usually have multiple causes, some proximate, others underlying or contributing over a long period. A pluralistic approach that recognises the multiple perspectives of the stakeholders and its diverse effects is needed to understand the situation and identify strategies for promoting change.

Peace is a factor in development. In other words, only peace and harmony can take a community towards development. Without peace and harmony there will not only be no development but the little that has been done will be destroyed. Conflicts lead to negative development. On the other side there can be no peace without justice and equitable development. PRA is conducted in the hope of covering many development miles and of seeing the ripple effect of the effort realised through some visible developmental ventures (see the background data in Appendix 4).

**The people are united by the ability to communicate with one another, to share experiences, develop strategies and create sustainable processes for their common good and development. Agents of development need to borrow a leaf from the strategies applied in these case studies in order to dialogue with the beneficiaries, policy makers and implementers if sustainable development is to be achieved.**

### **Expected Outcome of PRA**

Pursuit of peace through PRA can come in different ways. Creating awareness through seminars in order to equip the people with means and strategies for development and a peace process is one possible step. One can also help the communities to discover their spiritual, social, economic and environmental shortcomings and their potential to alleviate the same, thus improving and sustaining their standard of living.

Through PRA and through the participatory impact of the monitoring approaches, individuals and groups learn to identify and voice their own problems, plan, design, monitor and evaluate projects while making their own decisions about project implementation. That can be a step towards self-sufficiency and better schemes of clean and safe drinking water, health care and development of the natural resources. It can also promote shared responsibilities between men and women and communities because outcomes of the dialogue include communal labour on farms, construction of houses, for social functions such as funerals and weddings and when a woman gives birth to a child.

PRA also targets households through women's societies with the hope of creating awareness in them of the need to promote equity and share responsibilities. This step is based on the hypothesis that approaches that target only women while isolating men create imbalances through which they ultimately transfer their responsibilities to women without sharing power with them. Through PRA group members are helped to analyse the goals, create awareness

and promote the machinery through which they can appreciate the need to change and to be more productive.

The Peace Team collaborates with other civil society groups, governmental agencies and networks in soliciting and facilitating fund flow to the ethnic communities involved in this process. They assist people, through SHGs to mobilise their own resources by sensitising them to the potential of these resources to deal with and alleviate their problems and meet their basic needs. This step includes training for self-reliance in improved agriculture, better health care and provision of drinking water. PRA thus leads to an action plan following the identification of problems, the way forward and the resources required for it. Training needs are identified and planned for individuals and groups and common denominators are fixed for their implementation.

### Aims and Objectives

**In this participatory appraisal exercise, carried out between February and May, 2008 in the Manja area of the Lumbajong development block of Karbi Anglong four volunteers conducted a survey of the residents of the Manja area to find out how they perceived their community as a place to live in. The aim of the team was to meet at least 200 persons representing a cross-section of residents and provide them with the opportunity to say what they liked or disliked about living in their area, and what they felt would improve it. The researchers were to remain neutral throughout the process. That was meant to be the first step leading to the discussion on the conflicts and possible peace processes.**

In preparation for the PRA the peace Team had two workshops for various sections in the village, aimed at introducing to the people the need and scope of the survey. The team introduced PRA to the people and gave them the general principles, practices and typical issues involved in a public consultation of this type. They presented the main PRA tools, such as participatory mapping.

The fieldwork continued for four months during which the residents were interviewed as individuals and groups, door-to-door surveys were conducted, the respondents' comments were shared with the community and all were provided an opportunity to respond to their own situation. Through this step many issues and concerns were identified. A cross-section of people were then provided an opportunity to submit their views and to get involved in the search for alternatives to conflicts through relationships to support the community renewal process. Above all this step provided a valuable training opportunity and learning experience for the team. Some of the key lessons they learnt from the field were:

1. The violence that has entered the psyche of the local populace is so deep-rooted and so widespread that they find it difficult to distinguish between friends and foes.

2. Once they succeeded in getting the villagers to talk to them, they understood the extent of extortion, the misery it caused and the manner in which the people were trying to meet their primary needs.

3. The people who were affected by the conflicts were so poor that they more or less became economic outcasts. They were living a hand to mouth existence at the outer edge of society. For them, food was whatever they could gather from others. So theirs was a day-to-day or moment-to-moment existence. Since most of them could not afford to send their children to school, the next generation too was condemned to a bleak future.

4. The people began to feel that militancy is not necessarily an ideological struggle. Poverty and neglect are the fertile soil on which seeds of discontent are sown.

5. The villagers were caught in a vicious spiral of distrust. Distrust begot distrust, violence begot violence. The magnitude of the problem was such that one cannot hope to solve it all at once. But a beginning has to be made somewhere. PRA was an effort

towards that goal.

(A summary of the questions asked to facilitate discussion is found in Appendix 3).

**Literates and Earning Members**

Studies as well as experience show that unemployment is a major cause of the youth joining the militants. That is not the only cause but is a major motivating factor. So it was important to find out the number of literates and illiterates in the community and of persons earning an income. The PRA showed that the total population of the village is 5,538 of whom 835 are farmers, 603 daily wage unskilled labourers, 81 service job holders, 2 are teachers and 3 are doing small jobs which earn them Rs 1,000 to 2,000 per month. The remaining 3,340 (60.31%) do not earn any income. About 20 percent of them are not economically active but nearly 40 percent of the 5,538 persons earn no income. This situation can be expected to deteriorate with the intervention of the militants and the security forces. Natural calamities add to people’s discomfiture and poverty.

This situation shows the potential for conflicts in the village. Besides, most persons affected by the conflicts are not in relief camps though they have been displaced several times. Only a few of them have received compensation from the state. The fact that in this situation the youth do not see a future for themselves can easily push them towards the militant outfits. Low literacy adds to the problem since the illiterates can hope to get only unskilled jobs and they are scarce. Because of land alienation to the immigrants and other tribal and non-tribal encroachers, work on land is limited and enough jobs are not created outside agriculture (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1: Family Size, Educational Level and Occupation**

Sl. No.	Total number of Family members in the villages	Educational level in the villages		Occupation
1	Male – 2934	Nursery – 37	Class 9 – 246	Farmers – 835
2	Female – 2604	KG – 59	Class 10 – 291	House wives – 616
3	Dimasa – 1372	Class 1 – 237	Class 11 – 96	Labors – 603
4	Karbi – 3561	Class 2 – 209	Class 12 – 27	Service – 81
5	Nepali – 136	Class 3 – 208	BA – 29	Business – 58
6	Adivasi – 256	Class 4 – 229	PG – 1	Teacher – 2
7	Garos – 213	Class 5 – 299		Driver – 1
8		Class 6 – 201		Handyman – 1
9		Class 7 – 267		Carpenter – 1
10		Class 8 - 252		
11	Number literates in the area	2688	Number of earners in the area	2198
<b>The Economic Situation</b>		2850	Number Not earning	3340

Thus, Table 4.1 shows high unemployment and low land ownership but other sources of income are limited. Studies and experience show that apart from unemployment, poverty and a feeling of neglect are among other major factors motivating the youth to join the militants. One sees signs of poverty in their low income (Table 4.2). It becomes crucial when one compares their income with the expenses. The major expenses of the family are on food and medicine. Expenses on medicines are high because of the prevalence of tuberculosis, malaria and other communicable diseases. Because of the need to spend much on medical care, education and other needs take a back seat. However, the amount spent on charity shows that community feeling continues to be strong. That can be a starting point for peace building (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.2: Sources of Income of the Families**

Total number of male and female in the villages	Occupation	
	Male – 2934	Farmers – 835
Female – 2604	House wives – 616	Driver – 1
	Labour – 603	Handyman – 1
	Service – 81	Carpenter – 1
	Business – 58	
	Total No. people earning in the area	2198
	Total No. of unemployed	3340
	People in the area	5538

**Table 4.3: Expenses of the family**

Sl. No.	Items	Total Amount spent in the villages per year (in Rs.)
1	Food	6,826,150.00
2	Medicine	4,131,911.00
3	Education	699,500.00
4	Clothes	593,550.00
5	Entertainments	472,310.00
6	High indebtedness	468,965.00
7	Festival	44,710.00
8	Charity	212,916.00

High indebtedness shows that the modern financial services have not reached the people of the area. Only 12 families avail of loans from the banks, all of them holding salaried jobs. The vast majority of them do not have access to the official sources and have to depend on the moneylenders at a high interest. That begins the debt trap. Most loans are taken during the monsoons i.e. the lean season when they cultivate their land but do not have enough food to eat. They borrow money also for contingencies like sickness and social needs. The more the people borrow the higher the amount that they have to repay. Since they are

often unable to repay the loans, they lose their land and other belongings to the moneylenders. The moneylenders collect a minimum of 50 percent interest but it may go up to 10 percent per month or 120 percent per year. In case crop of failure the borrowers both lose their land and starve and may end up as bonded labourers (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4: Loans Taken by the People**

Sl. No.	Source of loan	Rate of interest	Purpose of loan
1	State Bank, Manja (5)	15 %	Cultivation, personal, business
2	However, people do not speak readily about the extent of their indebtedness to the moneylenders. Only a very small number of them are moneylenders (26) who know 50% that they are indebted.	10%	Agriculture
3	Moneylenders (26)	50%	Personal, Business

area only 26 were ready to acknowledge it but their number is much higher. Little wonder then that only about 10 percent of the respondent families have some savings. That shows the subsistence nature of their existence. They spend all their earnings on basic needs and medicines so they have no savings for an emergency. Only six families have been able to join an insurance scheme, all of them holding salaried jobs. Also those who have savings in banks as short-term deposits for emergencies are persons with salaried jobs (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5: Savings by the Families**

Sl. No.	Where you save	Total Amount of savings (in Rs.)	Purpose of saving
1	Rural Bank (44)	29,400.00	Education & future
2	State Bank (46)	32,000.00	“
3	Insurance (6)	48,00.00	“

**The type of house shows the level of poverty. That is the reason for the next question. A majority of the people live in kacha houses with a mud floor, a thatched roof and use firewood as the main fuel. Fewer than a quarter of the houses have electricity. No family has a public water supply tap (Table 4.6).**

**Table 4.6: Type of Houses in the Village**

Walls	Floor	Roof	No. of rooms	Assistance from	Fuel	Facilities
Mat -291 Mud Plaster -579 Other -27	Mud -855 Cement -75 Other -27	Thatch - 441 Tin -303 Tin & Thatch	1 - 77 2 - 390 3- 4 4- 453 5- 37	Own (797) Govt (160) Bank NGO Other	Wood (830) Smoke-less Chula Bio-gas LPG (127) Other	Electricity (205) Water supply Tables (569) Chairs (513) Newspapers Radio TV (337+228)

**Options in Agriculture**

Since land is the major source of sustenance, the crops that the people grow were identified in order to see whether they could meet their needs. Paddy and mustard are their main crops. Very few grow commercial crops and most of those growing them are non-tribal cultivators. The tribes sustain themselves on a single crop based subsistence agriculture. That can become a source of conflict because the tribals who lose their land to the non-tribals see the latter prospering by growing commercial crops on the land alienated from them. That is the background of many killings and conflicts with the Bihari, Kuki and others.

**Table 4.7: Crops Cultivated in the Villages and the Season of Cultivation**

Sl.No	Name of Crops/ Number Cultivating	Season of cultivation
1	Paddy – 343	Summer
2	Mustard – 108	Autumn
3	Maize – 69	Autumn
4	Vegetables – 63	All seasons
5	Livestock can supplement the income of the villagers who sustain themselves on subsistence agriculture and those who do not have much land. Table 4.8 shows a deficit also in this source of additional income and of employment. Most respondents own one cow each and some poultry birds but their number is nowhere near what is required to replace the jobs that they do not get or the land that they have lost. In other words, the livestock owned by them cannot function as a source of conflict prevention.	Winter

**Table 4.8: Livestock Owned by the Respondents**

Sl. No.	Type of animals in the villages (e.g. Cows, goats, pigs etc)	Total Number
1	Cow	902
2	Hens	2320
3	Goats	986
4	Pig	346
5	Duck	227

The people may be able to earn some income if they find a market and a fair price in the neighbourhood for their agricultural produce or handicrafts. Today their choice is to sell their goods locally at a low price to the merchants coming from outside or travel to the market 10 to 15 kilometres away. That is difficult because of very poor transport facilities. That explains why most of them sell their goods at Manja itself. Only a few take them

to Diphu or Dimapur. The former is 20 kilometres and the latter is 40 kilometres from Manja. So most of them are forced into a subsistence existence.

### **Conclusion**

The data given in this chapter show low income, poor living conditions and high indebtedness. All of them are signs of poverty or neglect and that is an important motivation for the youth to join the militant outfits. That also becomes a source of competition between the ethnic communities. When there are shortages, every community tries to get for itself as much as possible of the small cake. That is a major cause of conflicts. To begin the march towards peace, alternatives have to be found to the land lost and to other scarce resources. Jobs have to be created and the health status has to be improved.

Such alternatives can only be got by optimising the use of existing resources. Expelling the immigrants and getting the alienated land back are often mentioned as possible alternatives to their poverty. But experience shows that it cannot be done without massive bloodshed and that is unacceptable. While efforts have to be made in the direction of restoring alienated land, immediate alternatives can be found only through new crops and other income generation schemes undertaken as a community. The next chapter will give data on the type of efforts the people make to get out of this vicious circle.

## **Chapter 5: Search for Peace with Justice**

The purpose of PRA is not merely to know the situation of the people but also to launch a common search for solutions. The Peace Team, therefore, did not stop at looking at the present situation. The Team members asked the people what alternatives they would like to attempt in the form of new crops in order to optimise the use of the land left to them, the type of associations to strengthen their communities and the process of reconciliation that they would like to go through. These processes are important because the Manja area is inhabited by tribal as well as non-tribal groups. The tribal groups themselves are not homogeneous. The Karbi, Kuki, Dimasa, Boro and other tribes have their own community based organisations such as Students' Associations and women's groups. But they do not have an association that can bring all of them together.

This alternative is important because as many as 957 families that were involved in the PRA exercise had lost their property and house in the 2005 conflict and many more in those that occurred before it. The conflict forced 688 children to drop out of school. Some families were sent to relief camps but a much bigger number of families found shelter in the houses of their relatives and were not counted among the displaced and were not compensated. Their lives had to be rebuilt.

### **Natural Resources to Rebuild the Village**

Natural resources play an important role in supporting the livelihoods of the villagers. The natural resources existing in the area, such as the agricultural lands and the rich fertile soil of the highlands can be used to grow ginger, rubber, mangoes, lemon and other crops. But because of low land ownership, poor marketing facilities, indebtedness and ignorance the villagers are not able to make use of these facilities. However, their responses showed that they are aware of their potential and of the need to search for alternatives. Proper community structures, financial and natural

resources have to be identified for this search. The following schemes emerged out of the PRA exercise as a way out of the conflicts.

1. Rubber plantation, watershed management, fishponds, cattle and goat rearing; and training programmes for this purpose in the neighbouring schools.
2. Workshops on community development and on peace building skills.
3. All sections of people will participate in these training and development programmes.
4. Organisations meant to implement these schemes have to be rebuilt.
5. Improving the physical infrastructure because the villagers have to earn the income required for this investment by selling their labour and agricultural produce that are perishable. Improvement of the transport infrastructure is essential for this.

### **Social Resources for Rebuilding the Village**

These schemes cannot be implemented by individuals. They require a community. That is why the team questioned the people about their community structures. Before the violent conflicts the people in the Manja area used to maintain good relations among themselves and help each other on occasions like funerals, weddings, sicknesses, child birth, repairing of roofs and construction of new houses. This situation changed suddenly and the traditional organisations got weak because of the conflicts. The people continued to have a sense of charity and of mutual support as one can see from the amount of money spent on charity (Table 4.3). However, the conflicts had impoverished the communities. So most individuals are unable to come to the aid of members of their own community leave alone assist other ethnic groups who are in need.

For peace to be real the traditional social structures have to be revived or new ones built on their foundation. The community structure that has been attempted in this area is the SHGs. So the team asked those who had lost their property whether they had joined community organisations such as SHGs. The people acknowledged that these groups were being encouraged in the whole area before the 2005 conflict but that the conflict had disrupted their working. So one was not surprised to hear that only 43 out of 957 persons questioned on this point continued to be members of the SHGs.

### **Physical Resources to Rebuild the Village**

That showed the need to rebuild these and other community organisations. As help to the task of rebuilding these organisations, the Peace Team tried to get the villagers to identify the physical and natural resources available to them. When they began this exercise the team had begun with the assumption that the people would speak of land and money as the main resource required. To their surprise the villagers considered the Manja-Hidim-Teron village bridge the most important resource. This bridge has been under construction for 16 years. If not completed quickly, the villagers will continue to face problems of transport in the rainy season because it is meant to connect 34 villages. Its completion can assist these villages in their commercial activities. Children will be able to go to school and patients can be taken to the health centre. As a result, the people perceive the long time taken to build the bridge as a sign of neglect by the administration. Dealing with such grievances can create the atmosphere required for peace since a resource of this type can change their lifestyle.

The community water supply scheme and the electric transmission system are the other physical resources of the village which are not functioning properly. Some soil types in this village are suitable for brick making, which is a valuable resource to make livelihoods for the villagers. That requires water and power and the administration has not made them available. This neglect is a major grievance of the people.

### **Vulnerability**

While attempting to optimise the use of these resources, one has also to be aware of the limitations and vulnerabilities. Vulnerability can be defined as the extent to which a household may be adversely affected by the events of the recent past or by its own traditions. According to the problem tree, the villagers have faced several problems around their livelihood but the following are the main among them.

1. Lack of knowledge
2. Low production in the agricultural sector
3. Anti-social activities and lack of marketing facilities.
4. Addiction to alcohol

According to information collected, all the families are economically vulnerable. Some of them are beneficiaries of job cards which come from a Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme of the Government of India which ensures 100 days of work for one unemployed person in a rural family. The study found that a majority of the villages have not got the benefits of this programme though they are holders of job cards. The middlemen seem to have got much of the money in their name. Political considerations coupled with bureaucratic red tape hindered many from getting even registered in the scheme.

That brings one to the major vulnerability of governance. The cycle of conflicts in the region has created a history of impunity that is characterised by militarisation that gives birth to violent politics and bad governance. One of its offshoots is lack of respect for constitutional means and importance given to superficial divisions that cause tensions among ethnic groups and struggles for the identity of the marginalised. The issue of good governance is no longer an academic exercise. On it hangs the fabric of growth. There is a virtual collapse of the state, making it possible for a small number of anti-social elements both organised and unorganised,

to hold people and communities to ransom. Criminalisation, communalisation and corruption have been blended into this vicious circle. The state has made itself powerless and is unable to arrest the contagion.

As a result, the people have lost faith in peaceful and constitutional means of organisation and resistance. For example, hundreds of people were brutally murdered but one does not know whether any arrests have been made and the progress of the legal proceedings. Private capital is shying away from the region; the villages of the area are virtually out of bounds for the state machinery, let alone private investors. Another example is the Manja-hidim-Teron bridge that is under construction for 16 years. Instead of improving communications between 34 villages this bridge has become a mode of extracting money.

The insurgency has aggravated the problem to such an extent that development workers of both the Government and civil society groups are discouraged from going to the hill and rural areas as they face constant threats of extortion and abduction. Thus the combination of an incompetent state and insurgency is pushing the backward areas of the region into greater darkness and further underdevelopment and is retarding the movement of the people towards progress.

Education is the backbone of development and is the foundation on which the child grows. Only an educated child can claim its rights in its society. After the conflict a large number of students had to drop out of school. Most educational institutions turned into relief camps. The students were unable to resume their studies after a long interval. A large number of them have thus become vulnerable and can be recruited either by the criminal gangs or by the militant groups. They have become an easy prey to groups that can lead them astray through false promises. That puts an obstacle on the path of peace.

Loss of land documents is another serious concern. People

do not know the commercial value of land and do not keep proper documents for it. Some of those who had documents have lost them during the conflicts. This prevents them even from getting a bail in the court. They are unable to avail of loans from the financial institutions. That adds to their impoverishment. Absence of irrigation adds to the constraints. The villagers have to depend on the rains to cultivate their land. As it is often insufficient because of drought, their crops fail every now and then. It happened in 2007.

Health is another major concern of the villagers. Because of lack of transport and absence of health centres in the neighbourhood and the failure to build the bridge, the people are unable to go to the hospitals in the town though they have become more vulnerable than in the past to diseases and the health care system has deteriorated. The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) which is said to have spread to all the villages does not exist in these areas. As a result many die every year due to malaria, cholera, typhoid and various other diseases. Those who are cured are often too weak to do any productive work.

Amid these constraints the economy and the absence of income generation schemes have become extremely vulnerable areas. Corruption and militarisation have combined to destroy the rural employment and infrastructure building schemes. As a result, the villagers are facing problems such as lack of food, lack of personal security even within their homes, continued tension and an uncertain future.

### **Livelihood Strategies**

Amid these and other constraints, the livelihood strategies of a village have to be decided according to the resources available to it and the abilities and the skills of the population. The people of Manja are aware of their constraints. They also feel that their main resource is land and that they should find a way out of the vicious circle of conflict, poverty, violence and unemployment by optimising its use. Since agriculture is their main sustenance, they

felt that they should deal with poor irrigation. Since the State has not done enough to activate the irrigation schemes, the people decided to put pressure on the state to activate them. This approach can become an alternative to the violence that a section of the population uses to make demands on the state and society.

The people felt that they should follow the same approach of non-violent protests to demand the completion of the bridge without further delay since transport is another possible alternative in favour of peace. They think of health as another major area of concern but they give priority to transport since it is of greater importance for the future. The bridge will help them to take their goods to the market and send their children to school. Till they are in a position to demand health centres in their own villages they will be able to use the bridge to take patients to the urban areas once the bridge is built.

When they heard these statements the Peace Team was able to understand why they gave such importance to the bridge. The villagers are aware that they cannot implement the schemes individually but only as communities. The method they want to opt for is the SHGs which are not merely for an economic objective but are primarily for rebuilding their communities that have been destroyed by the conflict. They are also meant to be steps towards an equitable society because peace has to be built on justice. Based on an understanding of the constraints and their potential, the villager drew up the scheme given in Table 5.1.

The people also discussed the role of women. When they were in the relief camps, many women faced problems such as drugs, unwed mothers, malnutrition, dirty water and diseases. They became aware of the extent and seriousness of unemployment and of the dropouts. They also felt that girl children and women were the worst sufferers of these events. So they concluded that there cannot be a just society if the problems facing girls and children are ignored.

Many villagers felt that in its effort to re-establish unity, Manja which is the abode of several communities should rely mainly

**Table 5.1: Problems and Possible Solutions Identified by the People**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Poor health facilities	Raising funds to buy drugs; clean water; sanitation, electricity in the health centres
Unemployment (School drop outs)	Develop farming, improved livestock and business. Introduction of projects in the community by use of available resources.
Poor means of transport	Raising funds to buy implements for road maintenance; hire labour for it.
Shortage of food & poor farming methods	Develop technical advisory centres through agricultural tours, demand irrigation by installing storage tanks.
Lack of working capital	Need of loans in form of cash and facilities
Lack of water	Demand pipe water and a tank to store it.
Alcoholism	Get people involved in development activities: through group work and provide social amenities
Drought	Environment conservation, reforestation; tree nurseries, water storage tanks
Lack of management skills	Training and groupings

on women without ignoring men. That too led them to the SHGs and other community organisations as the main tool. The families live in clusters and they meet only in the market place where they do not have much interaction. Men predominate that area so they cannot be ignored. But women are in a better position to deal with the issues at the family level. In the past there were many cultural activities and mechanisms to bring the communities together but they have got weak after the conflict. The Manja Citizens' Peace Forum, Manja Churches' Forum, Manja Welfare Society

and Manja Students' Forum have come together to revive some of these organisations. Many felt that women can be effective in continuing this commendable work and bringing the communities together once again (see appendix 5).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the above understanding, the villagers made the following statement as a sign of their hope in a society based on peace and justice

**We believe that a peace-building process can identify and support structures meant to strengthen peace and prevent a relapse into conflict. We decide to :**

#### **Box 1: Infrastructure development**

*To complete the Manja-Hidim-Teron bridge construction at the earliest.*

*A community hall that can be used as a centre for social activities.*

*To rehabilitate the village irrigation system.*

*To construct common wells in all the villages.*

*To build a marketing information centre, a meeting centre and a rest house.*

*To encourage and introduce villagers to rainwater harvesting.*

*To establish a Higher Secondary school and college in the area.*

*To install internet linkages and telephones in the area.*

*Set up recreational facilities and community centres like library and peace clubs in the villages and Manja.*

**Box 2: Income generation activities**

*To initiate a good programme of growing kitchen gardens, providing free seeds, plants and equipment for at least five years. This is an urgent need since drought and conflicts have displaced the entire area.*

*To distribute motorbikes and bicycles to the villagers who have lost their means of transport in order to promote a local market.*

*To control middlemen in the market chain.*

*To conduct vocational training and to create linkages with appropriate government organisations, NGOs and private entrepreneurs in order to create job opportunities for the youth.*

*To develop traditional and new income generation activities such as fish breeding.*

*Most families are unaware of technical and entrepreneurial education.*

*Effective use of the Information Technology (IT) can empower the people and help them to link the villages with the towns. An appropriately designed model of technical entrepreneurship can generate self-employment to the trained youth and change their lives.*

*Provide educational grants to the youth to continue college studies.*

*Provide non-formal educational assistance to boys and girls and other school-children who discontinued their studies, especially to the children of widows.*

*Monetary support for running educational institutions, free instruction to orphans, youth and women*

*Ensure nutritional supplements to women and children and medical aid to the victims of endemic diseases like Malaria and T.B. Concentrate on their prevention...*

*Livelihood restoration of the families through:*

*Formation of Self Help Groups.*

*Financial assistance to the affected people through food for work programmes.*

*Sustain the process of empowerment and selfdependence through training programmes, for example on sustainable agriculture and animal husbandry.*

*Skill development training complemented by specific inputs of seeds and implements, for example through grihini training to girls and giving them a loom at the end of the programme*

**Box 3: Institutional development**

*Providing a platform for different communities of diverse political, religious and social affiliations and ethnic groups to meet at regular intervals to deliberate on their concerns. This enables people to isolate politics and concentrate on their concerns and will also open channels of communication to concentrate more on issues that unite them than on those that divide them. The following are some possible steps:*

*Initiate institutional and leadership development programmes to enhance the capacity of the village leaders.*

*Undertake confidence-building measures in the community.*

*Awareness building, capacity building training programmes leading to the empowerment of villagers.*

*Strengthen the existing civil society groups in the area like Manja Citizens' Peace Forum, Manja Churches' Forum, Manja Welfare Society and Manja Students' Forum.*

*Support and organise People's organisation through SHGs and Peace Clubs in the villages and educational institutions of the area.*

**A Way Forward**

Women play a crucial role in attitudinal changes since they are mothers, sisters and wives of those involved in conflicts. It is therefore important to build their skills in early warning, disaster preparedness, peace building and reconciliation, negotiations, rehabilitation and reintegration. For sustainable peace to be achieved, there is an urgent need for governments to invest in changing the perceptions of communities. Since policies and laws alone cannot build sustainable peace, it is important for governments to invest in civic peace education that can address the root causes and not symptoms of conflicts.

That demands that the state as well as civil society organisations listen to the perceptions of communities. Civic peace education is intrinsic to this effort. Coalition building is key to effective advocacy to redress the grievances of the survivors of human rights abuses. That demands that civil society organisations build

strategic alliances that will influence technocrats to get involved in the redressal process. The civil society should be engaged in a broad range of strategies as long-term measures to address the root causes and consequences of conflicts, and to promote a culture of peace among the population.

That can be done through training and providing skills to use international and regional human rights instruments in their advocacy work; analysing conflicts, managing trauma, initiating peace processes as ways of creating a critical mass of women advocates for peace-building, and preparing women for formal peace negotiations. Mobilising and organising people to solidarity and exchange visits as a strategy to help people share, learn, help in healing and promoting solidarity among survivors of different ethnic groups. The exchange visits facilitate the breaking of isolation that survivors often suffer from and helps them to realise that others too have suffered equally. That provides them the inspiration required to find new coping mechanisms.

Civil society groups should mobilise communities to rally behind issues that affect their livelihood. This will help communities particularly women to build self-confidence and demand their rights. The critical mass is vital in forcing policy-makers to address the plight of the people and also ensure justice with accountability. This approach can take the people towards a new just society on which peace has to be based (see some of the results in Appendix 4).

### **Conclusion**

The participatory rural Appraisal was difficult because of the extremely sensitive nature of the issues involved but it was required in order to draw attention to the plight of the people in such a situation and to mobilise opinion in favour of change. The PRA helped to bring to the surface some problems that the people faced. The interactive field survey and the report show that the rights of the community have been violated both by the state and

non-state actors. The PRA thus became a mode of creating among the people awareness about their situation and their potential for change. It also showed the people the possibilities of self-reliance through SHGs and by mobilising their own resources. PRA was a mode of sensitising them to these resources and to the possibility of using them according to the immediate, medium and long-term needs of the area identified during this process.

Various skills too were acquired through the PRA-based training programmes. They included social skills of dialogue coping with the unrest as well as technical skills of parenting, methods of dealing with children, hygiene, health, new crops for food sufficiency, safe and clean drinking water and equity in sharing responsibilities and solving problems. As a result at the social level there is more harmony between communities and collaboration in problem solving. Capacity building for these objectives is facilitated at various levels. Local marketing agencies are being set up in order to minimise exploitation by middlemen.

Through these agencies the people will hopefully learn to initiate their own structures and institutions for addressing the issues that result in conflicts. At this stage efforts are being made to send all children to school. One can see its result in the Little Flower school at Hidim Teron village that had only 205 children when the PRA effort began. In 2008, since the start of the PRA scheme, their number has risen to 307. That is a sign of a change in attitudes. People are trying to be resourceful and establish better relations among themselves. These new attitudes and steps towards a more inclusive society are essential for genuine peace based on justice.

### Appendix 1: Chronology of Events after the Karbi-Dimasa Conflict Began

26<sup>th</sup> September: Three Dimasa auto drivers aged 22, 23 and 35 belonging to Mohendijua Dimasa village near Manja (16 km from Diphu) are abducted and murdered. Their bodies are found at the Karbi majority Ramsapathar village. Two autos recovered and third is reportedly burnt. Motives or identity of killers not known.

1st October: Dimasa Organisations (*Jadikhe Naisho Hoshom*), Dimasa Sahitya Sabha called 10 hours bandh in protest against the killings. The bandh was supported by the Karbi Organisations.

2<sup>nd</sup> October: In retaliation for the killings, 5 Karbi males are hacked to death at Phonlangso. They are from another village but 15 masked gunmen forcibly take them to Phonglangso village, 8 km from Diphu and kill them there. The Peace Team and Diphu Citizens' Peace Forum convene a Peace Fellowship to celebrate Gandhi Jayanti by involving all the religious and political leaders in and around Diphu. The inter-faith meeting of more than 1,000 persons is followed by an inter-tribal cultural programme.

3rd October: A 34 hour general strike begins in Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills in protest against the attacks on the Karbis. Emergency meeting of UCF decides to talk to influential people of both communities to urge them to restrain from violence.

4<sup>th</sup> October: According to police information, four assailants dressed in black went to Mauja Fanchu village, 40 km from Diphu town around 8.30 pm and entered the houses of three villagers aged 20, 30, 40 and forcibly took them to a nearby jungle and hacked them to death. A 24-hour bandh is called but ends in 10 hours. Rockybul Hussain, State Home Minister visits Karbi Anglong. UCF delegation met and submitted a Memorandum to the Home Minister urging him to restore normalcy.

5<sup>th</sup> October: 10 hour bandh called off. The *Jathike Naisho Hasom*, which is the apex organisation of the Dimasa tribe and the DHD

blame the UPDS for the killings. The UPDS which has a ceasefire agreement with Delhi and Dispur refutes the allegation and accuses the DHD of trying to sabotage the ongoing peace process by killing innocent people and blaming others. The common factor in all three incidents is that firearms were not used.

6<sup>th</sup> October: United Christian Forum (UCF) meets with North East Joint Peace Team.

7<sup>th</sup> October: Peace rally organised by UCF and Somindar Karby Amei (SKA, Apex body of the Karbi); Memorandum submitted to the Deputy Commissioner by the SKA. *Jatikhe Naisho Hasom* (JNH), apex body of the Dimasas and Karbis decide to find a solution to the problem through peace talks. SKA spokesman, Upen Ingty states that a preliminary investigation into the killings has proved that neither the UPDS nor the DHD was involved in them. "This is the work of a third party" Ingty said. Without giving any clues to its identity he says that a third force was trying to create hurdles in the peace talks of the two communities with the Centre. He also added that a special peace drive would be carried out in cooperation with all the leading political and non-political organisations. The JNH spokesman, Debajit Thausen promises full cooperation and says that the killings are the handiwork of an external force.

8<sup>th</sup> October: More than 500 persons participate in a silent procession of ASDC/KSA/KNCA to the office of the Deputy Commissioner, Diphu and submit a memorandum to the Governor of Assam. Jirsong Asong, other like-minded NGOs, religious and social organisations and schools participated in it. More than 50 houses in 5 Karbi villages are burnt down at 12:30 am; six persons are hacked to death and a 2-year-old child is burnt to death. At 5.00 pm, 19 houses in Bura Terang and Engti villages are burnt down and 50 houses in Walingdisa and Kothalbari Dimasa villages at 8.00 a.m. Five villagers missing. UCF begins daily review meetings to keep track of incidents and discuss means of reducing them.

ASDC, KSA, KNCA and KCA take out a Peace Rally in Diphu.

9<sup>th</sup> October: Five Karbi villagers, including the village chief and his two sons are killed at Singh Terang Karbi village, 8 km from Diphu. Their bodies are recovered from Langsoliet. Relief camps set up in KASA stadium and several schools in Diphu since 3,000 Karbi and an equal number of Dimasas flee their villages. Peace meeting held at Tumpreng at the initiative of Shri Bajong Tisso, Joyram Engleng and Sing Teron, members of the Autonomous Council. Participants include both Karbi and Dimasa. They form a peace committee. UCF and United Christiand Youth Forum (UCYF) appeal for peace and request organisations to desist from calling bandhs. Discussion is also on mobilising relief materials for the relief camps. Different churches agree to donate food, clothing and money and send their youth as volunteers for relief. Though anger mounts many from both sides ask for an amicable solution.

10<sup>th</sup> October: 336 houses burnt down in 8 Karbi villages and 67 in a Dimasa village. Five Dimasas killed. Also Garos from Basbari Garo village in Daldali take shelter in the Rengma community Hall in Diphu. DHD leaders hold talks with senior police and intelligence officials about the ongoing situation in Karbi Anglong. Shri Tarun Gogoi Chief Minister of Assam and Shri P. K. Mahanta, Former Chief Minister visit some affected areas and relief camps. The chief Minister holds an all party meeting and another meeting of the district admistration; announces an enquiry headed by retired Justice Shri P. C. Phukan and an ex-gratia of Rs 3 lakhs to next of kin of the dead and rehabilitation of those whose houses have been gutted. Peace rally organised by CPI (ML), KSA, KNCA and KCS. The Jirsong Asong team and UCF visit relief camps to find out about the immediate requirements of the people.

11<sup>th</sup> October: 16,299 people are taking shelter in 31 Relief Camps. Trains are stopped at Daldali. The district administration starts distributing essential commodities like food and clothes in the relief camps. A team of health workers visits relief camps and provides

treatment to patients.

12<sup>th</sup> October: 51 Dimasa houses burnt down and one woman killed. The district administration forms a Peace Mission with representatives from student, women's and political organisations. The *Assam Sahitya Sabha* condemns the violent incidents. Peace rally held at Tumpreng by the Peace Committee. The number of relief camps goes up to 34 with 21,375 persons.

13<sup>th</sup> October: The Peace Mission Team visits many affected areas and relief camps. A team from Jirsong Asong and UCF meets the DC and reports about the relief works undertaken by them and requests him to improve the situation in the camps. The number of relief camps grows to 35 with 20,238 persons.

14<sup>th</sup> October: Peace Mission under the Commissioner, Hills and Barak Valley visits the affected areas. The number of relief camps increases to 37 with 20,280 people.

15<sup>th</sup> October: 16 houses burnt down. 3 men are feared killed in the attack, 2 women and 2 men injured and 8 persons including 5 women are reported missing. The number of camps grows to 42 with 22,111 persons.

16<sup>th</sup> October: 69 houses in 3 Karbi villages and 54 houses in 3 Dimasa villages are burnt down. The ethnic strife takes a turn for the worse with the Bodo community being sucked into it after a Bodo young person dies. Various Bodo organisations react angrily to it and blame the government's lackadaisical attitude to the strife. Karbi Anglong DC complains of a shortage of security personnel. The Assam Home Minister takes stock of the situation. Shri Rockybul Hussain visits Karbi Anglong for the second time and meets various officials to take stock of the situation. Manja police pick up 38 persons for interrogation. The Karbi apex body, SKA appeals to all organisations in the state to come forward to find a solution to the ongoing violence and promises them full cooperation. SKA also appeals to the state to shift the militant DHD designated camp from Dhansiri. The UPDS publicity secretary Tong

Eh Nongloda makes a similar demand. The Government decides to deploy two additional companies of the Central Reserve Police Force.

17<sup>th</sup> October: Two district Council buses are stopped along the Diphu Jirikyndeng road at Charchim at 6.30 a.m. and 70 Karbi passengers are hacked to death and the buses are burnt. A total of 189 Karbi and Dimasa houses burnt down and 12 persons killed. JNH asks the two parties to remember the age old brotherhood and friendship between the two communities and asks for a halt to violence. The Christian Forum of Dimapur requests all churches to observe 23<sup>rd</sup> October as a 'day of prayer'. The relief camps increase to 45 with 26,429 persons.

18<sup>th</sup> October: 71 Dimasa houses burnt down. CPI (ML) representatives submit a Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India. The number of relief camps reaches 46 with 26,842 persons.

19<sup>th</sup> October: Villagers from 14 Karbi villages in NC Hill district take shelter in relief camps at Kheroni. 7 Karbis are feared killed in NC Hills district and several Dimasa houses in Karbi Anglong are burnt down. The Assam Governor visits the affected areas and some relief camps. The number of relief camps grows to 47 with 26,870 persons.

20<sup>th</sup> October: About 50 Dimasa houses and 19 Karbi houses burnt down. The number of relief camps increases to 49 with 42,627 persons.

21<sup>st</sup> October: Bodies of 9 unidentified persons are recovered in the Hojaiipur area. An all Party delegation visits the district and meets representatives of both the communities. Curfew relaxed for 12 hours. The representatives from ASDC meet the President of India.

22<sup>nd</sup> October: Five dead bodies are recovered, four of them in army fatigues of UPDS. UPDS claims that 6 DHD militants were killed in an encounter in the Hojaiipur area. An All Party peace team visits Karbi Anglong.

23<sup>rd</sup> October: UPDS clarifies that it has not declared war on the

DHD. Five DHD cadres arrested near the relief camp at Umrangso in NC Hills. Delegations of various student organisations visit the affected areas.

24<sup>th</sup> October: A four member team representing various NGOs visits Karbi Anglong.

25<sup>th</sup> October: More than 400 Karbi houses burnt down near Diyungbra in NC Hills. The NC Hills Autonomous Council condemns the killings and violence in Karbi Anglong. The DC of NC Hills has been providing food, shelter and healthcare to about 3,215 inmates, both Karbi and Dimasa at relief camps in the district.

**Appendix 2: Statistics on Deaths and Relief Camps October 9 to November 8, 2005**

Total No. of relief camps: **53**

Total No. of families who took shelter in relief camps: **5,291**

Total No. of people who took shelter in relief camps: **45,361**

No. of Refugees: **75,000 approximately**

Total No. of patients treated at Catholic Hospital Diphu: **185**

Total No. of Patients treated in the relief camps: **around 2,000(mostly children).**

Delivery cases attended: **20**

Total No. of people killed: **97**

Total No. of people missing: **115**

Total No. of deaths in the camps: **14**

Communities that took shelter in relief camps: **Karbis, Dimasas, Nepalis, Bodos, Garos, Bengalis, Biharis and Muslims.**

Total No. of volunteers involved in relief work: **340**

Total No Christian religious leaders involved in relief and peace building efforts. **35**

No. of relief teams: **20**

Categories of personnel involved in relief works: **social, religious, political and educational leaders, medical doctors and nurses, teachers, social workers, students, drivers, youth volunteers etc.**

*Note: West Karbi Anglong is excluded in these statistics*

**Appendix 3: Some Leading Questions Used for PRA.**

1. Name of the Village; 2. Family constellation:

3. Has anyone discontinued studies? Yes (688). No (4850)

4. If yes, why?

i. Non availability of school/College (42)

ii. Poor economic condition of family (186)

iii. Poor in studies (17)

iv. Ignorance of parents (48)

v. Poor school atmosphere (36)

vi. Lack of interest (43) vii. Other (7)

5. What is the monthly family income (in Rs.)?

i. Below 500 (291) ii. 501-1000 (368) iii. 1001-3000 (190); iv.

3001-5000 (80) v. Above 5000 (28)

6. What type of land do you have?

i. Patta land (419)

ii. Non Patta land (538)

7. How much cultivable land do you have?

i. No land (298) ii. Below 1 Bigha (121) iii. 1-3 Bigha (190)

iv. 3-5 Bigha (185) v. 5-7 Bigha (60) vi. 7-9 Bigha (49)

vii. Above 9 Bigha (54)

8. How much non-cultivable land do you have?

i. No land (496) ii. Below 1 Bigha (65) iii. 1-3 Bigha (142) iv. 3-5 Bigha

(98) v. 5-7 Bigha (59) vi. 7-9 Bigha (47) vii. Above 9 Bigha (50)

9. How much land do you cultivate for Jhum ?

i. None (223) ii. Below 1 Bigha (148) iii. 1-3 Bigha (256)

iv. 3-5 Bigha (129) v. 5-7 Bigha (54) vi. 7-9 Bigha (52)

vii. Above 9 Bigha (95)

10. How much land have you given for sharecropping?

i. Not given (750) ; ii. Below 1 Bigha (40); iii. 1-3 Bigha (51); iv. 3-5

Bigha (36); v. 5-7 Bigha (30); vi. 7-9 Bigha (30); vii. Above; 9 Bigha (20)

11. How much land have you taken for sharecropping?

i. Not taken (833); ii. Below 1 Bigha (32); iii. 1-3 Bigha (37); iv. 3-5 Bigha

(21); v. 5-7 Bigha (18); vi. 7-9 Bigha (9); vii. Above 9 Bigha (7)

12. Does your village have irrigation facilities? i. No (957) ii. Yes (0)

If yes then mention the source:

13. What type of training do you require? Where can it be held and for how long?

**Appendix 4: Data of Manja Area Lumbajong Block**

Data of P R A of Manja Area

Surveyed by – John Phangcho, Anil Ekka and Borsali Teron

Compiled by – Sarah Phangchopi

District: Karbi Anglong; Block: Lumbajong

Number of villages: 49; Number of houses: 957;

Total Population – 5,538

Tribe/Community: Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki, Nepali, Garo Etc.

**Names of the Villages**

1. Hidim Teron. 2. Sarmen Hanse. 3. Dikoi Terang. 4. Garo Bosti

5. Sarthe Inghi. 6. Lower Ekorani. 7 Rong Ali Village (Disama – 2)

8. Jonasing Rongbong Pothar. 9. Lonbi Tisso. 10. Baliram Tisso Arong.

11. Jari Teron. 12. Jericho Village. 13. Nepali Bosti. 14. Donthe Nala

Nepali Bosti

15. Paklangso Village. 16. Longkoi Bey. 17. Adivasi Gaon. 18. Longki

Bey

19. Sonali Gaon. 20. Sonaru Gaon. 21. Mas Gaon. 22. Langtuk Rongpi

Village.

23. Kanthalal Village. 24. Upper Ekorani. 25. Lower Ekorani.

26. Upper Mohundijua Village 27. Lower Mohundijua Village. 28.

Althuram Village.

29. Enghee Arong. 30. Timung Arong. 31. Birik Timung. 32. Kehai

Bey Village

33. Sing Terang Village. 34. Dengso Teron Village. 35. Kehai Ronghang

Village.

36. Sikaris Hanse Village. 37. Hidim Timung Village. 38. Kemai

Timung Village.

39. Kangram Arong. 40. Chetat Bey Village. 41. Manai Terang Village.

42. Sondorsing Tisso Village. 43. Rakchom Terang Village. 44. Hemai

Timung Village.

45. Khoya Terang Village. 46. Jor Timung Village. 47. Model Village.

48. Men Rongphar Village. 49. Garo Bosti - 5

### **Appendix 5: Rural Development through Reconciliation: Two case studies from Manja**

Here below are case studies of initiatives for peace and reconciliation with a long-term goal for rural development. The people want to communicate with one another, share experiences and develop strategies for sustainable development. Those interested in development can learn from them.

#### **1. A report of a reconciliation meeting by Manja Welfare Society, February, 15, 2008.**

The public meeting organised by the Manja Welfare Society was meant to find ways of bringing about peace and reconciliation between different communities living in this area. By using their traditional words and gestures the people greeted one another with smiles and cheers. The gathering of nearly 250 persons included community leaders and village headmen and women drawn from communities that have been in conflict for a long time. Among the areas they listed as destructive of peace are drought, poverty and illiteracy. They blamed the state and non-state armed groups as contributing causes. Other problems include political antagonism, rumours of conflicts, clashes around grazing and agricultural land, alcoholism and jealousy. They concluded that peace can be promoted through various organisations such as SHGs and people's cooperative movements.

*One of the participants said that it was the first time that women were invited for such a meeting. That showed the importance of women in the peace-building process. She expressed her desire to meet members of other communities. Another participant said that she was happy with the fact that mothers are going to be involved in peace as peace initiators. She stated that mostly women are the ones most affected. Others agreed that women are the most affected; they have to carry their children up and down hill and find ways of providing food to their families while living in the displaced place, far away from the fields. Participants said that it is good that men, women, youth and children are going to be involved in peace issues. So far only district leaders were involved and their voices were never heard in such meetings.*

#### **2. Manja Churches Forum**

The group was initiated in 2007 with the objective of gathering

the Christian Churches of the area for peace building. The membership is open to all the Churches. At present 18 Churches are members of the forum. The main objective of MCF is *to enable the communities discover their spiritual, social, economic and environmental shortcomings and their potential to alleviate the same, thus improving and sustaining their standards of living.* Their mobilisation is through PRA or participatory impact monitoring systems. Individuals, through their groups are empowered to identify and voice their own problems, plan, design, monitor and evaluate projects while taking their own decisions in order to improve self-sufficiency.

# Violence and Search for Peace in Karbi Anglong, Assam

Tom Mangattuthazhe

The Karbi and Dimasas tribes of Assam have lived in peace for decades. But suddenly during the last decade one notices a spate of incidents of ethnic violence in the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills that are the habitat of these tribes. The incidents culminated with the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of September-October 2005. The author of this book tries to find out whether it is a coincidence or whether there is some vested interest in this continued violence. These two tribes have been demanding a common state for themselves. That hope seemed to have been dashed with the Karbi-Dimasa conflict of 2005. That was preceded by conflicts with the Kuki, Pnar, Hmar and other tribes. There was also bloodshed between the Bihari and the Adivasi both of whom came from the same area and had similar interests. The author tries to understand the role of the media, the political forces and other factors in exploiting tension caused by minor events and asks whether there was a plan behind these conflicts.

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