CHAPTER 2

GEO-ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING AND
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

2.1 Geo-Environmental Setting:

2.1.1 Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills:

Location:

Being located relatively in the central part of Assam the district of Karbi Anglong, in global context, extends from 25°31'45" North to 26°36'40" North latitude and from 92°08'47" East to 93°53'50" East longitude. Comprised of two detached physical units of land, the district covers an area of 10,347 square kilometers on the south of the Brahmaputra Valley. The state of Meghalaya makes the boundary on the west and south of the western part of the district. To the north, north-east and south-east of this physical unit there lie the districts of Morigaon, Nagaon and North Cachar Hills respectively. On the other hand, the eastern part of the district is bounded by the districts of Nagaon on the west, Golaghat on the north and east, North Cachar Hills on the south-west and the state of Nagaland on the south.
The district of North Cachar Hills (N.C. Hills) stretches between the latitudes of 24°58'15" North and 25°49'33" North, and the longitudes of 92°31'28" East and 93°28'33" East. It covers an area of 4890 square kilometers to the north of Barak Plain of Southern Assam. The district makes the northern boundary with the districts...
of Karbi Anglong and Nagaon, and the southern boundary with Cachar district. To the east, there lie the states of Nagaland and Manipur while there is Meghalaya on the west.

**Geology:**

The geological setting of the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills is a complex one. Though both the districts are interlinked, yet the structural geology significantly differs from one another in many respects.

The lithological structure of Karbi Anglong area relates to the neighbouring Shillong (Meghalaya) Plateau located on the west. It is an extended part of Deccan Plateau of Archaean origin and believed to be parts of the hypothetical 'Gondwanaland'. On the other hand, the high elevated region of N.C. Hills comprised of the Barail range is closely related with the Purbanchal hills, i.e. the southern part of the Eastern Himalayas of Tertiary origin. Almost the entire region, in the past had undergone tremendous Tertiary disturbances causing superimposition of Tertiary rocks over the Precambrian basement, and lot of metamorphism, folding and faulting had taken place.

Broadly speaking, the region can be divided into three distinct geological units:

I. The western part of Karbi Anglong physically attached with Meghalaya lying mainly north of the Mynriang and Amring rivers. Granite, gneiss and the Shillong group of rocks are predominant.

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1 Dr. Phukan Ch. Phangcho (2001), Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills- A Study on Geography and Culture, p. 7.
II. The eastern part of Karbi Anglong lying mainly north of the Jamuna river is separated from the previous one by the Nagaon plain. Granite and gneiss of Archaean origin predominate the area.

III. The entire N.C.Hills, parts of bordering western Karbi Anglong and the southern parts of eastern Karbi Anglong physically attach together to form a separate unit with Upper Tertiary rocks comprising Barail, Surma and Tipam series, etc. having number of folds, faults, thrusts and unconformities.

**Physiography:**

The region of both the districts consists of hard rocks of Precambrian period and comparatively less resistant rocks of Tertiary origin. The areas predominated by hard rocks have been standing as plateaus, and on the other hand, the areas formed of Tertiary rocks have been posing as high hilly ranges. In certain areas streams have cut the Tertiary rocks forming them into plateaus. Some of the areas are covered with thin layers of alluvial deposits over the Surma series of Tertiary base, particularly in Diphu–Lumding area.

The entire region as a whole has a general slope towards north and northeast. But the central portion of the eastern part of Karbi Anglong has its gradient towards south-west, i.e. towards the Nagaon plain. This plateau region of Karbi Anglong attains the height of more than 1,100 metres above the mean sea-level (msl.). The Barail range of N.C.Hills, on the other hand, is standing in the southern margin like a wall overlooking the Cachar plain on the south rises more than 1,220 metres above msl. The northern part of N.C. Hills not exceeding the altitude of 460 metres is the lowest plateau in the region. The northern borders merge into the plains of alluvial deposits of the rivers of Kopili, Jamuna, Dhansiri and their tributaries. All
the marginal plains remain below the 150 metres contour. 'Eastern Karbi Anglong slopes down in all directions with somewhat higher degree towards south. Towards north it forms several extensive ridges with flattish surfaces generally separated by river valleys. The western Karbi Anglong areas more or less uniformly run down towards north-east maintaining a moderate slope. The flattish surface undoubtedly exhibits the characteristics of plateau. At many places rivers have cut it into narrow and steep sided valleys. The entire N.C. Hills area on the other hand, excepting the Barail range, is a bowl-shaped plateau with openings towards Lumding and Dimapur. It is low and extremely flat. The Barail range gradually rises from north but abruptly from south. It has been at several places cut by the southward-flowing rivers into deep V-shaped valleys and gorges. The southern flank is highly dissected. The bordering plains of Karbi Anglong, at many places, are merely marshy lands usually inundated by monsoon floods. The plains eventually merge with that of the Brahmaputra.'

On the basis of landforms, this physical unit of both the districts can be divided into the following physiographic divisions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physiographic Division</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. The Chenghe-Amam Plateau</td>
<td>(3884 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The Hamren Plateau</td>
<td>(2395 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The Dimasa Plateau</td>
<td>(4600 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The Barail Range</td>
<td>(1208 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The Bokajan Plain</td>
<td>(1040 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. The Howraghat Plain</td>
<td>(1100 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. The Rongkhang Plain</td>
<td>(1010 sq km.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 15237 sq km.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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i. The Chenghe-Arnam Palteau: The Higher elevated part of Karbi Anglong, traditionally known as 'Mikir Hills' is the Chenghe-Arnam Plateau with an area of 3,884 sq km. The name is derived from the two peaks of the terrain- the Chenghehishon (Singhashon) and Arnam Rongman. This second largest
A physiographic division covering about 25% of the total area of the region is higher on the central and northern sides rising above 1,200 metres from msl. The plateau consists of ranges of hills and has been subjected to high weathering and denudation resulting rugged topography of moderate slope. The ranges like Lokaparbat and Konkochan in the north-east, Hatikhuli and Ramoti Hill in the north, Burapahar and Lankhangram Hill, etc. are located in the north-west; while the Rengma Hills is on the south of the Kaliani river. The outer ranges of the region have an average elevation of about 450 metres, whereas in the central portion the average altitude of the ranges is around 1,000 metres above mean sea-level. The peak Singhashon (Chenghehishon) is the highest with 1,357 metres altitude above msl. (26°15'29" N. latitude and 93°22'24" E. longitude) which is followed by Khonbamon of 1,305 metres and Dambukso of 1,173 metres. The north-western areas have the predominance of extensive ridge-like features forming sharp spurs separated by wide stream-valleys along the margin. Northern margin is somewhat steep but edges have been cut by streams resulting in penetration of narrow plains. Most of the streams originate from the two higher areas around the peaks of Singhashon and Arnam Rongman.

**ii. The Hamren Plateau:** This highland, essentially the easternmost projection of the Shillong Plateau belongs to the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya state. The plateau covering about 16% of the total area exhibits a rugged topography as it is criss-crossed by numerous streams and rivers. The general gradient of the slope is from south-west to north-east i.e., towards the Rongkhang Plain and Nagaon Plain. Streams with a number of small falls and rapids run through deep valleys to meet the rivers in the plains. Lâru peak with an altitude of 1,209 metres is the highest peak of

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the plateau located to the west of Umlaper village (25°48'09" N. latitude and 92°13'19" E. longitude). The average elevations of the region vary from 600 to 900 metres. Kalimukh, Thangnanship Tila, Merpung, Khorungina, Konglong, Sunngut, Rongkhong and Tirkim are the other peaks of the region.4

iii. The Dimasa Plateau: Extending right from the northern flank of the Barail Range of N.C. Hills district up to the Jamuna river of the eastern part of Karbi Anglong district, this plateau region covers about 30% of the districts’ total area. This contiguous region having comparatively lower elevation spreads over about 4,600 sq km. and is characterized mostly by flat topped hills and hillocks denuded by streams and rivers. Rock exposure is rare with alluvium deposits over the stratified sedimentary as well as igneous rocks. The plateau slopes down towards north and merges into the alluvial plains of the Kopili, Jamuna and Dhansiri rivers. The average elevation of the plateau area is about 350 metres above msl.

iv. The Barail Range: Barail Range, the only Tertiary mountain range of the region extends from Meghalaya border to Nagaland-Manipur border. “From the Jaintia Hills to a point a little to the west of Asalu, the Barail or ‘great dyke’, runs almost due east and west across the district, and forms a continuous wall of mountains, gradually increasing in height towards the east.”5 It constitutes about 8% (1208 sq km.) of the total area of both the districts along the southern border acting as a water-divide. The north-flowing streams and rivers form a part of the Kopili drainage basin whereas, the Barak river on the south receives the tributaries from the southern slope of the range. Lithologically, the range is connected with Naga Hills and the hills of Manipur on the east. Being the highest physiographic division of the

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entire hilly region of Assam, it attains a height of more than 1,820 metres above msl. on the east from 1,220 metres on the west.\textsuperscript{6} Hampeopet, one of the highest peaks with the elevation of 1875 metres above msl., is located in the north-eastern part of the range.\textsuperscript{7} But the highest point having an altitude of 1957 metres is found to occur on the border line with Nagaland (at 25°19'18" N. latitude, and 93°27'22" E. longitude). The mountain pass through which the age-old Lumding-Badarpur metre guage railway line is passing, is the result of the down cutting of the Jatinga river.

\textbf{v. The Bokajan Plain:} Covering an area of 1,040 sq km. this marginal plain is located to the east of the Chenghe-Amam Plateau in a north-south direction. This narrow and elongated alluvial plain of the Dhansiri river, in broad sense, is a part of Golaghat Plain. This gently-sloped plain towards north is the product of the erosional and depositional activities of the main stream of river Dhansiri and her tributaries coming out of southern and western highlands. The length of the plain is about 72 kilometres while width varies from 8 to 12 kilometres. \textit{Bil}, marsh and other types of wetlands are not uncommon throughout the area. Comparatively more fertile land and plane surface support high population concentration than that of high altitude areas of the districts.

\textbf{vi. The Howraghat Plain:} The valley of Jamuna which covers an area of 1,100 sq km. is by far the largest amongst the three plains of the districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills. The river Jamuna and her tributaries coming out mainly from the eastern highland of Chenghe-Amam Plateau create this low depositional plain. The plain is more than thirty kilometers in width towards the northern part.

\textsuperscript{6} Dr. Phukan Ch. Phangcho (2001), Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills- A Study on Geography and Culture, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{7} B.C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Volume-I, Cachar, Shillong, 1905, p. 2.
whereas it is just about ten kilometres in the middle. Sloping gently towards west the
plain merges with the Nagaon Plain in turn.

vii. The Rongkhang Plain: Being located to the east of Hamren Plateau and
to the north-west of Dimasa Plateau the Rongkhang Plain covers an area of 1,010 sq
km. accounting for about 7% to the districts’ total. It stretches from Baithalagso to
Diyungmukh with a length of more than 55 km. in northwest-southeast direction.
Width varies from 12 to 15 kilometres. It is also an erosion-cum-depositional plain
of the river Kopili and her tributaries, which tends to merge with the plain of
Nagaon located to the north-east.

Drainage:

The hills of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills are the sources of
innumerable streams and rivers. The Dhansiri river in the east and north-east on one
hand, the Kopili, Diyung and Jamuna in the north and west together on the other
constitute the two main drainage basins in these hill districts. The eastern part of
Karbi Anglong shows a radial drainage pattern with the streams and rivers flowing
south and west into the Jamuna; east and north-east into the Dhansiri. The drainage
network in the western part of Karbi Anglong appears to be dendritic pattern.
Likewise, the district of N.C. Hills also exhibits a beautiful dendritic drainage
pattern formed by the river Diyung together with her tributaries. Originating on the
southern slope of the lofty Barial Mountain, the rivers like Jatinga, Jirigang, Jenam,
Jiri, etc. run to meet the Barak river in the Cachar Plain towards south.

The river Dhansiri, originating in the south-west corner of the Naga Hills
below the Laishiang peak enters the Karbi Anglong at the confluence of the
Watidisa river near the trijunction of Karbi Anglong, N.C.Hills and Nagaland state.
Except for a little portion nearby Dimapur, it forms the entire eastern boundary of Karbi Anglong district. The river, though receives Doyang as the principal, the other tributaries from the hills of Karbi Anglong are the Lahorijan, the Harihajan, the Laijan, the Deopani, the Nambor, the Doigrung and the Kaliani.

The Jamuna of Karbi Anglong district and the Diyung of N.C.Hills district in fact are the two important tributaries of the Kopili river. The river Jamuna which runs about 120 kilometres from its source to the confluence with the Kopili receives its tributaries like the Dikharu, the Dikak, the Patradisa, the Disobai, the Longhit, the Meyongdisa, the Disama, the Diphu, the Dillai and so on.

The Diyung is the principal drainage channel of N.C.Hills district originating near Mahur on the northern slope of the Barail Range. It drains about more than 75% of land of the district following a tortuous course for about 192 kilometres upto the Kopili river. The important tributaries of the Diyung on the left bank are the Dalaima, the Longloi and the Langeon. The Mahur, the Mupa, the Langting and the Langpher are the tributaries on the right bank of worth mentioning.

The Kopili, acting as the chief channel to drain the waters through its tributaries from the western part of Karbi Anglong as well as the north-western margin of N.C. Hills receives the Diyung at Diyungmukh. Coming out of the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya it flows in the north and north-east directions being the borders between N.C. Hills and Meghalaya state, and between N.C.Hills and Karbi Anglong-West. Its main tributaries in N.C. Hills district are the Dikisim, the Wokhynriam, the Umphung, the Kharkor and the Umsong. The Jamuna river flowing from the eastern side meets the Kopili at Jamunamukh in Nagaon district. The Kopili receives the Derajuri, the Kolonga, the Barapani (Umkhen), the Umiam
(Killing), etc. as its tributaries along with the Myntang and the Amring from the western part of Karbi Anglong district.

**Climate:**

Like other parts of north-eastern states in general, these two hill districts of Assam also enjoy tropical monsoon climate. The effect of both the south-west and north-east monsoon winds is well observed throughout the year. However, three important physical factors affect/control the local climate of this region to a large extent. They are-

a. Location of the region,

b. Variable altitude and

c. Vegetation cover.

The Cherra-Dawki Escarpment of Meghalaya to the west, the Barail Range and the western border hills of Manipur on the south obstruct easy access of the south-west monsoon wind into the region. This situation gives a rain-shadow effect to the eastern part of the Rongkhang plain of West Karbi Anglong around Lanka and Lumding as well as the central portion of the Dimasa Plateau of N.C. Hills. These areas lie on the leeward side of the Shillong Plateau.

The common weather and climatic phenomena occurring generally in the Brahmaputra Valley are rarely experienced except for the bordering areas which come under direct influence, only because of orography of the region.

The dense vegetation cover over the undulating topography of the region too has its impact on the climate maintaining the humidity at local and regional levels.
The average annual rainfall gradually decreases from the west and south with 1300 mm towards the central portion with 1100 mm. High amount of rainfall occurs in the southern part of N.C. Hills lying south of the Barail Range being located on the windward slope, and also in the western part of Karbi Anglong adjoining to Meghalaya state due to south-west monsoon. Again, towards the Dhansiri valley of the eastern margin, gradual increase in rainfall amount is observed. On the other hand, Mailoo, Hawaipur, Doyangmukh (Diyungmukh) and the entire Howraghat plain experience semi-dry condition during April and May, and continues even upto June in some years. Generally winter is dry and comfortable. However, occasional rainfall during this period rarely exceeds 350 mm. Light rainfalls sometimes in the months of December and January continuing for 4/5 days drop the temperature below 8° Celsius. Gradual increase in temperature from the south towards the north is a normal phenomenon. The average annual isotherm of 20° Celsius could be drawn along the Barail Range while it is about 25° Celsius in the Dhansiri Valley to the north-east. However, during summer, some peripheral places having low altitude sometimes record maximum of 37° Celsius temperature. High altitude places like Haflong, Hamren and Singhashon areas, etc. enjoy mild climate even during high summer. Among them, Haflong, located on the Barail Range said to be the only health resort of Assam is really a abode of cloud with unique picturesque surroundings.

The relative humidity even in winter falls rarely below 50 percent. As the monsoon begins heavy precipitation enhance the percentage of humidity in the atmosphere. Muggy weather with overcast sky is a common phenomenon during summer season i.e., from June to August.

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8 Dr. Phukan Ch. Phangcho (2001), Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills- A Study on Geography and Culture, p. 19.
Soil:

Since the region is formed of plains, plateaus and hills of different geological ages, therefore, soil types and their composition also differ from area to area. Five types of soil of broad categories can be observed.

The old alluvial or older alluvium soils are mostly found in the zone above the annual flood level. These are found along the northern portion of Hamren Plateau and the eastern portion of Chenghe-Arnam Plateau, i.e. to the west of Dhansiri Valley. It is also available in the same parts adjoining to Nagaon district.

The plains, on the other hand are composed of younger alluviums or new alluvial soils. These are deposited mainly by flood-waters of the rivers carrying silt. These are mostly available in the Rongkhang Plain of Kopili Valley, the Howraghat Plain of Jamuna Valley and the Bokajan Plain of Dhansiri Valley.

The red sandy soils are formed from sediments derived from crystalline metamorphic rocks which consist largely of granites and gneisses. These occupy the areas covering the proper Precambrian plateau tracts in the district of Karbi Anglong. Similar soil materials are also seen on the southern part of the Barail Range in N.C. Hills district.

The red loamy soils comprising sand, silt and clay mixed with pebbles are generally brought down by the rain-water from higher slopes. In the districts of N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong, this type of soil is found to occur along the Assam-Meghalaya border. It is observed also in the southern part of N.C. Hills.

The lateritic soils or laterites are highly leached soils developed under the conditions of high rainfall with alternating dry and wet period. This soil type occupies almost whole of the northern part of N.C. Hills district. It spreads over also
Vegetation:

Both the hill districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills have their large areas under vegetation cover. According to the report of Forest Survey of India, 2001, the vegetation cover in the district of Karbi Anglong accounts for 4935 sq km. which is about 47.70% to the total geographical area of the district. While on the other hand, N.C. Hills has its 78.81% vegetation cover accounting for 3854 sq km. in 2001. All these include (a) State Reserved Forests, (b) District Council Reserved Forests, (c) District Council Proposed Reserved Forests and (d) Un-classed Forests.

The vegetations found in these areas are of two kinds- natural and planted. The natural vegetation is comprised of naturally grown indigenous plant species; while the planted vegetation is created by man planting some valuable timber-bearing trees of indigenous species (Sal, Gomari, Titasopa, Koroi, Bansom, Ajar, Pine, etc.) as well as some exotic species like teak (*Tectona grandis*). Agricultural plantation (e.g. rubber, etc.) also constitutes a part of planted vegetation cover.

The predominant types of natural vegetation found in these hill districts are:

(i) Tropical Evergreen/Semi-evergreen Forest,
(ii) Deciduous Forest,
(iii) Mixed-Deciduous Forest,
(iv) Pure Bamboo Forest,
(v) Grasslands and
(vi) Sub-Tropical Pine Forest.

(i) **Tropical Evergreen/Semi-evergreen Forest**: This kind of vegetation of luxuriant growth is found in the areas of higher rainfall.
The northern part of hilly Karbi Anglong and the southern part of N.C. Hills districts are predominantly covered with this vegetation type. Sometimes the pure evergreen trees are associated with semi-evergreen trees of evergreen character depending upon the ecological factors. The southern part of eastern Karbi Anglong bordering Nagaland is covered with semi-evergreen type of forest.

(ii) **Deciduous Forest**: Comparatively low-rainfall areas of both the districts are having this type of vegetation in wide extent. It is predominantly found in the western part of Karbi Anglong and in the plateau areas having low relief especially the northernmost portion of Dimasa plateau i.e., the northern and eastern part of Diphu Plateau.

(iii) **Mixed-Deciduous Forest**: Deciduous trees associated with grasses and bamboos formed this kind of vegetation. It is mostly found in the areas of low rainfall. The northern part of Dimasa Plateau especially in N.C. Hills possesses mixed-deciduous forest.

(iv) **Pure Bamboo Forest**: Bamboos, the *pseudo-trees* of different species constitute forest covers having no other trees-species along with. These pure bamboo forests occupy hill slopes in large patches particularly in the district of N.C. Hills where the amount of rainfall is moderate. Small patches are also found to occur in western part of Karbi Anglong district under Hamren Forest Division, and in the eastern part of East Forest Division of the district.

(v) **Grasslands**: Grasses of short and medium height mixed with scattered low-growth vegetation are found in fragmented small
patches on the flat-topped undulating surfaces where precipitation is moderately low. Such views are common in the river valleys of western Karbi Anglong i.e., in the Hamren division. On the other hand, the central part of the Dimasa Plateau also exhibits similar type of grassland covers where there is absence of pure bamboo or dense tree-forest.

(vi) Sub-Tropical Pine Forest: In the high altitudes of western Karbi Anglong, western part of N.C. Hills bordering Meghalaya and the eastern part of the Barail Range natural pine (*Pinus kesiya*) trees occupy large areas. Although these constitute evergreen/semi-evergreen vegetation cover, the sub-tropical pine trees bear a special significance from ecological point of view in these areas.

Population:

Human population and its compositions provide an effective ground for the study of social patterns in a particular area or region. The process of urbanization is therefore closely and strongly associated with population and their characteristics.

Since the districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills came into being as a single political unit only in 1951, population records for both the sub-divisions or the hilly area as a whole hence, are not equally available prior to this period. Furthermore, owing to a number of political disturbances, changes in administrative boundaries, frequent changes of places of inhabitance of the rural tribal due to their migratory nature; it was rather difficult to maintain proper census or demographic records prior to independence of the country. It can however be mentioned that the ethnic eagerness or racial tendency to live together in the same place especially
amongst the Karbis and the Dimasas compelled them to settle here coming even from outside the country’s boundary.

The first regular population census in Assam was exercised in 1872. During that period, the Cachar Hills (North Cachar sub-division) had a population of about 30,000 (estimated); but the succeeding two decades (1881 and 1891) showed the negative growth.\(^9\) Out of 40,812 persons in 1901, 20,324 were temporary visitors engaged on the construction of the Assam-Bengal Railway connecting Lumding with Badarpur. Again, the N.C. Hills sub-division experienced negative population growth in the census year of 1911 (Table-2.1). This is due to the fact that the workers left the region after completion of the railway line in 1903. The census records of 1951 showed low decadal population growth in the sub-division (6.16%). But, by 1971 it became 40%. Influx of non-tribal population from outside the region overcame the rate of natural growth. During the period of 20 years (1971-1991) the growth rate became 98.30%. It is still 12,000 more to be two lakhs for the entire district in the last 2001 census.

On the other hand, population records for the present Karbi Anglong were not available upto 1931 census year. The growth was however much higher after the creation of the new sub-division of Mikir Hills under the district of United Mikir and North Cachar Hills in 1951. Nearly one lakh persons were added within one decade from 1951 to 1961 in the sub-division. Greater part of this population was the migrants coming from the neighbouring districts for joining in the jobs. A considerable section of the Karbi community came to settle in this newly created sub-division from other parts of the north-eastern region of India and even from the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) leaving their original places of habitation. By

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\(^9\) B.C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers Vol-I, Cachar, Shillong, 1905, p. 43.
1971, though the percentage of decadal variation became 11% lesser than that of the preceding decade, the addition of 1.54 lakh new heads raised the total number of population to 379,310. The 1991 census shows the growth rate of 74.72% during the two decadal periods (Table-2.1). The last census of 2001 reveals the total population of 813,311 in the district of Karbi Anglong with 22.72% decadal growth rate.
These are the districts having lowest population densities in the state of Assam (Table-2.2). The chief factor for this low density among the others is physiography. The government’s rules and regulations regarding the Land and Revenue Acts in these Sixth Schedule Areas have also certain impact on this aspect.

Table – 2.2


(Persons per sq km.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Karbi Anglong</th>
<th>N.C. Hills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.1

Growth of Population in the Hill Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (1901-2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Division/District</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Decadal Growth</th>
<th>Percentage of Decadal Variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mikir Hills / Karbi Anglong</strong></td>
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<td>Not Available</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>96,041</td>
<td>49,666</td>
<td>46,375</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>125,777</td>
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<td>1961</td>
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<td>+99,630</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>379,310</td>
<td>202,347</td>
<td>176,963</td>
<td>+153,903</td>
<td>+68.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>662,723</td>
<td>347,607</td>
<td>315,116</td>
<td>+283,413</td>
<td>+74.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>813,311</td>
<td>422,250</td>
<td>391,061</td>
<td>+150,588</td>
<td>+22.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cachar Hills / North Cachar Hills</strong></td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>40,812</td>
<td>27,355</td>
<td>13,457</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>27,296</td>
<td>14,239</td>
<td>13,057</td>
<td>-13,516</td>
<td>-33.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>28,913</td>
<td>15,365</td>
<td>13,548</td>
<td>+1,617</td>
<td>+5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>32,844</td>
<td>17,302</td>
<td>15,542</td>
<td>+3,931</td>
<td>+13.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>37,361</td>
<td>19,299</td>
<td>18,062</td>
<td>+4,517</td>
<td>+13.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>39,663</td>
<td>20,618</td>
<td>19,045</td>
<td>+2,302</td>
<td>+6.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>54,319</td>
<td>29,087</td>
<td>25,232</td>
<td>+14,656</td>
<td>+36.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>76,047</td>
<td>41,314</td>
<td>34,733</td>
<td>+21,728</td>
<td>+40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1981*</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>150,801</td>
<td>81,196</td>
<td>69,605</td>
<td>+74,754</td>
<td>+49.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>188,079</td>
<td>99,822</td>
<td>88,257</td>
<td>+37,278</td>
<td>+24.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Population Census could not be done in 1981 owing to the prevalence of the Students’ Movement in Assam

Source:  
(ii) Statistical Hand Book, Assam, 1994, Govt. of Assam.  
(iii) Primary Census Abstract, Assam, Series 19, Census of India, 2001
The sex-ratio, being one of the main components of population composition as recorded in Table-2.3 shows year-wise slight variations in the districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills during 1951 and 2001 census years.

Table – 2.3

Sex-Ratio in the Hill Districts of Assam, 1951 – 2001
(Females per 1,000 Males)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Karbi Anglong</th>
<th>N.C. Hills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>911</td>
<td>924</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>867</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>857</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>884</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Majority of the population in these hill districts belong to tribal communities. The Karbis form the major section in Karbi Anglong while the Dimasas in the district of N.C. Hills constitute the predominant ethnic group.

Table – 2.4

Scheduled Tribe Population in the Hill Districts of Assam
(1991-2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe Population</th>
<th>Percentage of S.T. Population to Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karbi Anglong</td>
<td>662,723</td>
<td>813,311</td>
<td>341,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C. Hills</td>
<td>150,801</td>
<td>188,079</td>
<td>98,834</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other important Scheduled Tribes apart from Karbi and Dimasa residing in these districts are Bodo, Garo, Kuki tribes, Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Hmar, Chakma, Rengma, Zemi, Hajong and so on.
2.1.2 Diphu Urban Area:

Location:

Being positioned at the coordination of 25°50'20" N. latitude and 93°26'30" E. longitude Diphu, the principal centre of administration, politics, socio-culture, education and trade & commerce of present Karbi Anglong is located towards southern side of the eastern part of the district. Like many other towns and cities, Diphu also grows up on the bank of a river named Diphu.

Geology:

Although the overall geological setting of the district of Karbi Anglong relates to that of Shillong Plateau, the litho-stratigraphy of the area in and around Diphu reveals some geo-environmental incidences took place in the remote past. Quaternary deposits comprising alluvium and laterites are found overlying earlier sedimentary rocks. Presence of petrified woods (fossilized trees) in the soils of Diphu is a common feature. These evidences reflect submergence and emergence of the area during various geological epochs in the long past.

Physiography:

Diphu has been grown up over a low-relief undulating topography. The flat-topped hillock-like features associated with narrow valleys and levelled plains give a landscape of semi-hilly characteristics. The average altitude of the town is 174.53 metres above mean sea-level, and the general slope is towards north.
DIPHU URBAN AREA

IMAGE CAPTURED FROM GOOGLE EARTH

Source: Google Earth
Source: Town and Country Planning Department, and Diphu Town Committee, Diphu
southern hills, local waterbodies, and the gradual expansion of concrete landscape affect the local climate of the area to some extent, which is characterized by higher temperature (up to 39°C) during day time in summer and also higher average annual rainfall compared to many other places of the district.

Soil:

In general, the soils in and around Diphu are red-loamy and red-sandy. The top soils deserve the characteristics of cohesiveness. The valleys and low-lying areas have diluvial fertile soils rich in humus.

Vegetation:

Like many other towns of Assam, the core market-area of Diphu is also devoid of plants and trees. But the surrounding areas are more or less covered with green carpets. Most of these plants and trees, belonging to households and road side plantations are deciduous in character. Plantation forests consist mainly of teak are common on the surrounding hill-slopes. Crop plantations especially rubber and coffee are also found in the outskirts of the town. Natural vegetations either in the form of high or low growth are rarely seen in patch within the town boundary.
The heart of the town is surrounded by the 180 metres contour passing through Diphu Govt. College area, Diphu Police Station, Council Colony, etc. The 200 metres contour encompasses the Rongkimi area along Diphu-Lumding road. At few places the hillocks in this area attain a height of more than 220 metres. Rongkhelan area is in between 160 and 180 metres. Again towards east of the Diphu river the altitude gradually increases. Just after the confluence of the Diphu river and Dharam Nalla (a tributary of Diphu river) at the heart of the town the landscape follows 160 metres of elevation and less than that along the river valley. The railway tract passes through a narrow valley. Immediately south of the tract the hills attain a height of more than 220 metres above mean sea-level.

**Drainage and Water bodies:**

The Diphu is a small river flowing through the heart of the town, after which name this urban centre is known. It comes out from the southern hills and moves northward to meet the Jamuna river in the north. Dharama Nalla, an important tributary of the Diphu also originates in the southern hilly terrain and meets the same in the core area of the town. Lorulangso (Lunrong Disa) is another streamlet drains from the west to join the Diphu river at the heart of the town. There is another natural drainage channel known as Sadhu Nalla in the northern part of the town core.

Apart from running waters, the urban area of Diphu is spotted with small numerous waterlogged areas. Most of these natural ponds/waterbodies are perennial by nature.

**Climate:**

Similar type of climatic condition prevailing in the entire part of eastern Karbi Anglong is felt in and around Diphu urban area. However, the existence of
2.2 Historical Background:

2.2.1 Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills:

Because of the absence of written historical accounts either in the form of stone-carvings or metallic plates or in the form of manuscripts, very little is known about the past historical evolution of this hilly tract of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills. The discovery of various shorts of used stone-things and items believed to be of Megalithic and Neolithic ages, and the archaeological ruins found in various parts of the region reveal the evidences of human settlement in earliest times. Opinions are in favour of the fact that this hilly terrain was ruled by the 'Varman' and 'Pala' dynasties before the Kacharis (Dimasas). The Hill Kacharis (popularly known as Dimasa Kacharis) was the powerful and dominant tribe who ruled over at least for four and a half centuries having their capital at Dimapur (now in Nagaland).

Towards the latter part of the first-half of sixteenth century A.D., the mighty Ahoms eventually captured the northern foothill and plain areas of the Kachari Kingdom for which the Kacharis had to shift their capital from Dimapur to Maibang on the northern slope of the Barail Range (now in N. C. Hills district) and finally to Khaspur on the south (now in Cachar district). It should however be mentioned that the Karbis and the Jaintias, though not dominant tribes, also ruled some isolated parts of the region during these historical periods.

'Some scholars are of the opinion that the Karbis, at least their first batch-the Amri section who migrated through the southern part of Nagaland, were the preceding tribes to inhabit around Maibang and the Kopili Valley on the west before
the Kacharis came to establish their capital at Maibang'. The later Karbi migrants from southern Nagaland who came under the Kachari administration in the valley of Kopili as well as other parts of N.C. Hills could not retain cordial relationships with the Dimasas, and eventually they had to vacate the inhabited lands and took shelter in the areas of lower slope of Jaintia Hills, to the west of the Kopili river. 'In a vast area of the north-eastern Jaintia Hills, the Karbis largely concentrated and established their Kingdom called 'Rongkhang'. But the Karbis could not maintain healthy relation with the Jaintia for long, and thence batches of them migrated to Nagaon plain during the Ahoms and further east towards Golaghat/Dhansiri Valley during the British period.'

It is to be mentioned here that the Dimasa (Kachari) and the Jaintia Kingdoms were never entirely occupied by the Ahom emperors, and therefore, the present geographical area of the districts of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills were not included in the Ahom Kingdom or the then Asom or Assam. But occasional invasions by the Ahoms in the peripheral hilly areas to make the inhabitants tributaries were not uncommon.

The brutal and hostile invasion of the Burmese (Mān), over the Ahom Kingdom during the third decade of the 19th century compelled the local tribal people including the Karbis to abandon their earlier settlements. A good number of Assamese speaking people living in the plains of Assam migrated to the interiors of the present eastern Karbi Anglong to get rid of the horrible atrocities of the Burmese soldiers. On the other hand, the western part of present Karbi Anglong as well as N.C. Hills was not directly affected by this panic situation.

10 Dr. Phukan Ch. Phangcho (2001), 'Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills- A Study on Geography and Culture' p. 3.
The Mikir Hill Tract in the district of Nowgong (Nagaon) was originally constituted by a notification under the 'Assam Frontier Tract Regulation' (II of 1880) in the year 1884. In 1898 a part of this was transferred to Sibsagar while part of Naga Hills district was transferred partly to Nowgong and partly to Sibsagar.

Although a separate sub-division of North Cachar Hills was formed for the first time in 1853, but later was abolished in 1867 placing the area under the Deputy Commissioner of the then Cachar district. By 1880, the sub-division was again formed with a different administrative set-up from the rest of the district. This hilly area then was termed as 'Excluded Area' under the direct control of the Governor.

The geographical areas of the present North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong districts were, originally therefore parts of erstwhile Cachar, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Sibsagar, Nowgong and Naga Hills districts as constituted in 1874 under a Chief Commissioner.

Until the independence of India in 1947 this hilly region was remained so with the then districts of Cachar, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Nowgong and Sibsagar.

After the independence of India, the hill people of the then 'Mikir Hills Tract' of Nowgong, Sibsagar and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills districts and the North Cachar sub-division of Cachar district especially the Karbis and the Dimasa Kacharis made a demand to the Government of India through the State Government asking for a separate district for the tribal people. Finally, after four years of

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Following the Treaty of Yandaboo with the Burmese on 24th of February, 1826, the East India Company (British) took over the charge with a view to controlling the Ahom territory. 'The territory covering the present Cachar-Hailakandi districts and N.C. Hills, was under the Kachari King, Govind Chandra. He died heirless and the British annexed his territory on August 14, 1832. The territory in the Barak Valley thus annexed, was first made a district in the name of Cachar District under the Commissioner of the Brahmaputra Valley ('Assam'), but later on it was transferred to the Dhaka Division of Bengal. The hilly part of the Kachari Kingdom, i.e. the present N.C. Hills District and a large part of the present Diphu Sub-division, was then under Tularam Senapati, a rebel Kachari leader, again as a Company's protectorate. This portion (surrounded by the Jamuna river in the north, the Dhansiri in the east, Barial Range in the south and the Diyung and Kopili rivers in the west) was annexed by the British in 1834 on the plea of Tularam's depredation on the former's territory. Tularam was, however, allowed to remain as its feudal lord. After his death in 1844 and the land was divided between his two sons. They could not properly administer their respective parts. The East India Company finally took over the region. The northern part inhabited mainly by the Karbi people was joined to Nowgong district, while the present N.C. Hills was constituted an administrative sub-division and attached to Cachar District.' 12

The Jaintia territory which was a separate kingdom under Ram Sing - III, alias Rajendra Sing eventually came under the Company on 15 March, 1835 and was merged with the Khasi Hills to form a single administrative unit 'United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District' of Assam administrative Division.

independence under the provisions of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India a separate district was formed with Diphu as the district's temporary headquarters.

It was on 17th of November, 1951. Vide Govt. Notification TAD/R/31/50/190 dated 27th of August 1951, under the Assam Regulation X of 1951, a single administrative unit named as 'United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District' was carved out from the then districts of Cachar, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Nowgong and Sibsagar. The entire hilly sub-division of North Cachar became one of the two sub-divisions of the newly formed district as 'North Cachar Hills'. On the other hand, the Mikir Hills sub-division was constituted with the areas of 4421.12 sq km. (1707 sq miles) from Nowgong (Nagaon) district, 4382.28 sq km. (1692 sq miles) from erstwhile undivided Sibsagar district and 1543.64 sq km. (596 sq miles) from the then United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district.

In the mean time, by 29th of April, 1952, the District Council for North Cachar Hills sub-division was constituted. About two months later, on 23rd of June, 1952, the Mikir Hills District Council was also formally inaugurated by the then Chief Minister Bishnu Ram Medhi of Assam at the temporary district headquarters-Diphu. These District Councils were formed in each of the two sub-divisions of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District based on the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India by giving the status of 'Autonomous District'. For the ease of administration the entire district was controlled by one Deputy Commissioner.

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It was on February 2 of 1970. The North Cachar sub-division was separated from the erstwhile United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district; and since then these N.C. Hills and Mikir Hills have emerged as two individual districts vide Govt. Notifications AAP.134/68/19 dated 30th January, 1970 and AAP.134/68/22 dated 11th February, 1970 respectively. Haflong became the district headquarters for N.C. Hills whereas Diphu remained with Mikir Hills as the district headquarters. The name of the district 'Mikir Hills' was not in favour of the willingness to the Karbi people. Therefore, the Government of Assam altered the name of 'Mikir Hills District' to 'Karbi Anglong District' with effect from 14th October, 1976 vide Govt. Notification No. TAD/R/115/74/47 dated the 14th October, 1976.

2.2.2 Diphu Urban Area:

History becomes silent while sought after the past records of the place of Diphu belonging either to ancient or medieval or to early-modern period. But it can however be presumed following the name of the place that once upon a time, this area was reigned by the Dimasa Kacharis. The stream which is coming out from the southern hills and flowing through the place is known as 'Diphu river'. The word 'Diphu' belongs to Dimasa language, which implies: 'Di' for water and 'Phu' for white that denotes turbid. Therefore, it is a river of turbid or muddy or unclear water. The place has been named as 'Diphu' after the name of the stream.

Until the establishment of the railway station between Lumding and Manipur Road (Dimapur) at Diphu in 1904, it was an unknown place covered with dense jungle. Some Karbi people lived in isolated small villages in and around present

Diphu. Those temporary Jeng Tisso gaon, Habe Tisso gaon, Dak gaon, Het gaon, Pong gaon, etc. had been, during later periods, replaced by some other semi-permanent Karbi villages like Kangkher basti (extending from the present Town Committee Office to Rangsina Bhawan at Lorulangso), Tisso basti (from Amolapatty to Mentila) and Keshab Timung basti (area around Ginning Mill).

Most of the people who had come to this place as labourers for the construction works of the new railway line left Diphu, and some remained engaging themselves either in small businesses or in daily wage earnings or in small farmings centering the railway station.

In course of time, a weekly market was developed on the bank of the Diphu river where Karbi villagers from distant places like Longnit came to sell their agricultural products of cotton, maize, ginger, turmeric, etc.

It was during the latter part of first half of the Twentieth Century. Some Marwary and Bengali people from Dimapur arrived Diphu to escape the bombing terror of the 2nd World War.

After the World War-II, the treasury of the British Government became empty. New economic policies had to be adopted by the Government for strengthening the week economy. Since the surrounding area of Diphu was very rich in forest resources, therefore, the 'Mahal' system was introduced centering the Diphu Railway Station. Cane Mahal, Thatch Mahal, Medicinal plant-products-Sotkora, (Citrus macrophthora var assamica) Salmugura (Taraktegenos kurzii) and Bangshalochan (bamboo manna) Mahals, and the coop of forest having valuable trees like Gomari (Gmelina arborea, Eng: Assam Hill Teak), Teak (Tectona

19 'Mahal' is a system of private agencies permitted by Government associated with collection and distribution of raw materials and commodities in wholesale forms.
and Sal (*Shorea robusta*) had been given on lease. On the other hand, Opium Mahal and Wine Mahal had also been introduced to collect extra revenue. Thus, Diphu became a trading centre of collection and distribution of forest based commodities through the railways. Gradually number of population increased day by day, mainly because of in-migration to this place. In the mean time the semi-permanent Karbi villages of this locality had been shifted to other places of interior location.

After the formation of the district and the demarcation of the boundary, there occurred a long discussion for selection of the location to set-up district’s permanent headquarters. Opinion came from various sections of people indicating the places like Tarabasa, Hawaipur, Langlokso, Dengaon, Singhashon, Siloni, Haflong and Diphu. But eventually, owing mainly to the existence of the railway communication and for some other favourable factors the Government of Assam took decision to establish the permanent District Headquarters at Diphu in the month of January, 1954.

Just after the formal inauguration, sub-divisional as well as district offices of various governmental departments had been set up at Diphu. Influx of people, to run the departmental office to this place started from different places of the state as well as other parts of the country. When the Mikir Hills sub-division got the status of separate individual district in 1970, the importance of Diphu Township increased. Since then growth and development of the town has been taking place at faster rates.
Summary Statement:

The study area being located on a hilly terrain, comprised of plateaus and hills bears a closed relationship between physiography and the process of urbanization. Compared with other plain regions of the state, the process started much later in this undulating remote area. On the other hand, the impact of geo-environmental settings on the origin and growth of Diphu town cannot be discarded. Relatively low-relief topography, availability of fresh stream-water and the abundance of various forest resources provided the ground for the growth of human habitation in this locality.

The history of these hill districts which influenced the human habitation is also equally important. The early migration of the tribal people, especially the Karbis and the Dimasa Kacharis to this land, their settlement in due course has an influential impact over the urbanization processes in this region. During the later periods of the British reign, the developmental activities particularly the establishment of railway line played a very important role in this regard.