PART I

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER I

1.00 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Assam is considered as a miniature India for its composite nature of culture and peculiar population structure, which constitute the representatives of some major races like Aryans, Dravidians, Austric and Mongoloids etc. Moreover many of the tribes and sub-tribes of these races maintain their own customs, traditions and languages for which Assamese is now considered as a multilingual state. Thus Assamese culture appears to be a composite culture of various elements of all these tribes and sub-tribes. The Karbi community is one of such important tribes of Assam.

The Karbi language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of language under the Sino-Tibetan family of languages. The speakers of this language are living mainly in the Karbi Anglong district, which was formerly a part of one district known as 'Mikir Hills and North Cachar'.

Before a few years of independence this district was divided into two districts : (a) Mikir Hills District and (b) North Cachar District. The first one is considered as the home-land

of the Karbi language and this language has been referred by some linguists and other scholars as Mikir language. The name of the Mikir hills district was identified as Karbi Anglong district.

The district is further geographically divided into separate two civil sub-divisions: Diphu and Hamren. It is very interesting to note that this Karbi Anglong district is divided into two separate parts by a small territorial area of the Nagaon district.

1.2 Area and Population: The total geographical area of the present Karbi Anglong district is 10,322 sq. kilometre. The present Karbi Anglong district is divided into four developmental areas with Diphu (3049 sq.km), Baithalangso (3055 sq.km), Bokajan (2279 sq.km) and Howraghat (1985 sq.km) as headquarters of each area. The Karbi Anglong district is situated in the middle part of the southern Assam. The Nagaon district is on the north while the Golaghat district and Nagaland are on the east of

3 District Gazetteers: Notification of the Hill Area, Department of Govt. of Assam No.TAD/R/115/74/47 dated 14.10.76.
Karbi Anglong. On the other hand North Cachar is on the South while Meghalaya is on the west of the Karbi Anglong district. Thus, it appears that the district is surrounded by the different language speaking communities.

1.2.1 The record shows that the population in the Karbi Anglong district is 3,79,310 and the average of density of population is 37 per sq. km. The total Karbi speaking population in Assam is 1,68,523. But the Hill tribal population of the Hill Karbis in this district is about 2,10,039. Similarly the projected population of the entire Karbi Anglong district in 1981 is also 5,25,300.

1.2.2 The Karbis are living in different places of Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. The Karbi speaking areas of Assam at present spreads in this district and its adjoining border areas of the districts, Kamrup, Nagaon and Golaghat in Assam and Khasi Jayantia district in Meghalaya and Tuensang district in Nagaland. But it is considered that the Karbi standard colloquial is basically developed on the spoken Karbi language of the Diphu Sub-Division of Mikir Hills.

1.3 The Karbi people have developed a very good neighbourly relation with the people of the plains of Assam specially of the Brahmaputra valley since the pre-Ahom era i.e. during the rules of the Kacharis and the Jayantias. They have migrated up to Assam during the Ahom rule. During the reign of Jayadhvaj Singha (1648 - 1663) a few Ahom officers visited the Mikir Hill and gave settlement to some Karbi people in some villages. Subsequently when they came in contact with the Ahoms, they were allowed to settle permanently within the Ahom kingdom on condition that they should pay annual tax to the king. Later on, when the Britishers had established their administration in Assam and in the kingdoms of Jayantia and Kachari then the Mikirs had to obey the British rule. Thus the Karbis have established a good neighbourly relationship with the plains people of Assam particularly of the Assam valley since the 17th century. In course of time the Karbis had picked up the Assamese language for their necessity. They learn it at their own initiative.

1.3.1 This way Assamese and Karbis, the speakers of both these languages have mutually incorporated some elements mainly vocabulary. This was happened without much consciousness of the language speaking population of these

two languages in their socio-cultural life. It was the result of impact of these languages. Some examples are illustrated from the Assamese language which are originated from Karbi. These are mainly the river names and place names.  

1.3.1.1 Karbi originated river names in Assamese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kapili</td>
<td>kapili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalon</td>
<td>kalan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kekdon</td>
<td>kakadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>landin</td>
<td>landin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lanchnli</td>
<td>lanchnliate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lanphrer</td>
<td>lanphrer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lanlit</td>
<td>lanlit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laikri</td>
<td>laikri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lunchnun</td>
<td>lunchnun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3.2 Karbi originated place names in Assamese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi.</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>akkre</td>
<td>akkre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amchen</td>
<td>amsaan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imraci</td>
<td>imraci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umceru</td>
<td>umceru</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>karkāthi</td>
<td>karkānthi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenkerālānc</td>
<td>tenkerālānc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dāmkak</td>
<td>dākma (ghat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denārañ̄</td>
<td>dhentā (ghat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nilip</td>
<td>nilip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nailalañ̄</td>
<td>nailalañ̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phāncherep</td>
<td>phānchep̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lānphar</td>
<td>(bar)lānphar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bōthālāñc̄</td>
<td>bāithālāñchu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raṅkhāñ̄</td>
<td>raṅkhāñ̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lañlit</td>
<td>lañnit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lañri</td>
<td>lañri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lañchōliyet</td>
<td>lañchōliyet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lānñhin</td>
<td>lānñhin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lāñc̄meperi</td>
<td>lāñc̄meperi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lumbazāñ̄</td>
<td>lumbazāñ̄</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hāmren</td>
<td>hāmren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hāwārkāk</td>
<td>hāwrā (ghat)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4 The cultural life of the Karbis to-day appears as a result of assimilation, where various elements of the Assamese - both tribals and non-tribals, the Kukis, the Nagas and the Khasis are quite apparent.

1.4.1 The Karbi socio-cultural life is influenced by the Assamese Hindu society in their religion, festivals,
songs and many other ways of life. Like the non-Karbis i.e., Assamese Hindus the Karbis worship Brahma and Rama as Creator of the Universe. The Karbis worship 'Hamphu', 'Mukrang', 'Rangcingza', who are considered by the Karbis as equivalents of Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Lord Visnu, Siva and Mother Parvati respectively. The sacrifice of fowl, goat, cock, pig etc. are common in the Karbi society.

1.4.2 The 'Pi-Lakhirni' festival of the Karbis shows much resemblances with the 'Lakhirni Adara' festival of Assamese Hindu society. This festival is observed just to pray God for prosperity of their corn and Jhum cultivation. They also believe that 'Pi-Lakhirni' festival is solely responsible for the protection of their cultivated crops from any natural damage. Their 'Hacha Kekan' festival is also identical with the another Assamese Hindu festival 'Bhogali Bihu', the harvesting feast. In the customary methods of performance of the festival some influences of the Assamese Hindus are also seen. The Karbis have used various types of musical instruments such as 'dhol', 'pepa' and 'gagana' in their Chamangkan festival. The marriage festival of the Karbis is highly influenced by the Assamese Hindu society. It is interesting to note that the marriage system in plain-Karbi society is totally lost in their

Karbi colours and they have adopted the Assamese customs in this important festival.

1.4.3 The Khasi elements upon the Karbi society is another interesting influence. Especially the 'Chamangkan dance' shows a remarkable similarity with the Khasi dance, performed on the shraddha day of one's death. It is also observed by the Khasis with the same purpose of purifying the soul of the departed one. Moreover, offering various things to their Gods before a slab flat stone is also incorporated in Karbi society from the Khasi culture. Use of yellow and black robes prints of dresses of Karbi is also considered as Khasi influence. Khasi culture draws its resources from Naga, Kuki-Chin and original Austric people. The Karbi woman uses bamboo bracelets, which is an imitation of the Nagas. They have also adopted some religious customs and traditions after the various religious ideas from the Nagas including the funeral.

'Zir-kedam' i.e., bachelors' dormitory of the Karbis has also shown the influence of such dormitory of the Nagas. The Jhumling cultivation which serves as a powerful bond of social unity is an influence of the Austric origin Chinteng i.e., Jayantia people of Meghalaya.

1.5 Borrowed elements of the Karbi language -

The Karbi language as a spoken tongue in Karbi
Anglong district and other places stated above has developed in its own course. Although the main Karbi speaking area forms an island within Assam, it maintains its linguistic specialities besides a close relation with a few other Tibeto-Burman spoken tongues of its adjoining areas.

The Karbi speakers have incorporated in their tongue some elements from the other spoken languages of the neighbouring other tribes such as Jayantia on the west, Boro-Kacharis on the south, Kuki-Chin and Naga on the east besides the Assamese language. Such borrowed elements are illustrated below in brief:

1.5.1 Borrowed elements from Assamese -

The Karbi language has taken quite a good number of vocables from the Assamese language. These words have undergone some phonetic changes in the mouth of the Karbis as noted below -

1.5.1.1 Phonology -

(i) As. \(a > \ddot{a}, \ e. \ o\) in Karbi initially. e.g.

As. \(\ddot{a}nkur\) > Karbi. \(\ddot{a}nkur\) 'root'

\(bat\ddot{a}\) > \(b\ddot{a}t\ddot{a}\) 'a small box for keeping betel-nut'

\(dala\ddot{n}\) > \(dela\ddot{n}\) 'bridge'

\(dak\ddot{ai}\text{it}\) > \(dak\ddot{ai}\) 'dacoit'
(ii) As. a > ai in Karbi medially. e.g.
    As. dōrī kanā > K. darikainā 'a small fish'

(iii) As. ā > i, a, āi in Karbi initially. e.g.
    As. bāri > Karbi biri 'garden'
    tākon/tānon > takin 'stick'
    kāni > kāini 'opium'

(iv) As. u > e in Karbi medially. e.g.
    As. tākuri > K. tākeri 'a whirl round'

(v) As. u > a, e in Karbi in initial syllable. e.g.
    As. buddhi > Karbi. bidi 'intelligence'

(vi) As. u > i in Karbi medially. e.g.
    As. buddhi > K. bidi 'intelligence'

(vii) As. ai > ui in Karbi initially. e.g.
    As. mai > K. mui 'harrow'

(viii) As. i > i in Karbi finally. e.g.
    As. phāndi > K. phandi 'elephant catcher'

(ix) As. i > e in Karbi finally. e.g.
    As. muthi > K. muthe 'a bundle of cut paddy'

(x) As. o > a, o, u in Karbi initial syllable. e.g.
    As. dokān > Karbi. dukān 'shop'
    mon > man 'mound'
    monā > munā 'bag'
Vowels prothesis in Karbi borrowed words from Assamese. e.g.

\[ \text{As. thag} \rightarrow \text{Karbi ṛāthak} \quad \text{'appearance'} \]
\[ \text{dān} \rightarrow \text{ādān} \quad \text{'gift'} \]
\[ \text{dar} \rightarrow \text{ādar} \quad \text{'price'} \]

Vowel anaptyxis is another notable feature in Karbi borrowed words from Assamese. e.g.

\[ \text{As. nakṣā} \rightarrow \text{Karbi nakachā} \quad \text{'picture'} \]
\[ \text{rākhyas} \rightarrow \text{raik} \quad \text{'demon'} \]

Devoicing of consonants in Karbi loan words from Assamese. e.g.

\[ g \rightarrow k : \text{As. garā} \rightarrow \text{Karbi karā} \quad \text{'the stiff bank of a river'} \]
\[ d \rightarrow t : \text{As. racad} \rightarrow \text{K. rachat} \quad \text{'ration'} \]
\[ gh \rightarrow kh : \text{As. ghantā} \rightarrow \text{K. khantā} \quad \text{'bell'} \]

Voicing of consonants in the Karbi borrowed words from Assamese. e.g.

\[ t \rightarrow d : \text{As. āṭar} \rightarrow \text{K. ādar} \quad \text{'distance'} \]

De aspiration is also a notable feature in Karbi borrowed words from Assamese. e.g. kh \( \rightarrow \) k,

\[ \text{bh} \rightarrow \text{p/b, dh} \rightarrow \text{d} \quad \text{etc.} \]
\[ \text{kh} \rightarrow \text{k : As. tārikh} \rightarrow \text{Karbi tārik} \quad \text{'date'} \]
\[ \text{dukh} \rightarrow \text{duk} \quad \text{mentally aggrieved'} \]
bh → p.b : As. bhal → K. bāl 'good/well'
labh → lap 'profit'
dh → d : As. dhan → K. dahan 'money'
bandha → banda 'close'

(xvi) Nasalisation in Karbi borrowed words from Assamese. e.g.
As. kakila → K. kankila 'a kind of fish'
cor → cunhu 'thief'
takā → tankā 'money'

(xvii) As. l > i,y in Karbi finally. e.g.
As. kapāl → K. kapāi 'forehead/luck'
nāngal → nānai 'plough'
nārikal → nārikai 'coconut'
pital → pitai 'brass'

(xviii) Loss of initial consonants of the Assamese loan words in Karbi. e.g.
As. katari → K. tari 'knife'
sthir → thir 'firm'

(xix) Sometimes final consonant of Assamese loan words in Karbi is lost. e.g.
As. kalah → K. kala 'earthen pot to carry water etc.'
kor → ku 'spade'
bih → bi 'poison'
(xx) Aspiration of consonants in Karbi loan words from Assamese. e.g.
    As. ki tap > K. kitāb 'book'

(xxi) c > ch initially in Assamese loan words. e.g.
    As. cābi > K. chābi 'key'
    cikār > chikā 'hunting'

(xxii) As. j > c in Karbi loan words from Assamese. e.g.
    As. jān > K. cān 'ditch'
    jām > cam 'the God of death'

(xxiii) s, ś, ś > h in Karbi loan words from Assamese.
    e.g.
    As. samān > K. hamān 'equal'
    satra > hatur 'enemy'
    sumathia > hamchirā 'orange'

(xxiv) As. rh > r in Karbi loan words. e.g.
    As. bārhai > K. barā 'skill-man'

(xxv) As. m > n in Karbi initially. e.g.
    As. māgur > K. mākur 'a kind of mud fish'

(xxvi) Sometimes the semi-vowel 'y' becomes 'z' in Karbi. e.g.
    As. māyā > K. māzā 'illusion'
1.5.1.2 Morphology -

(i) -e is prefixed to the generic determinative: it is a loan from Assamese e eka. e.g.
- K. kowe e-pum 'nut one pun (= eighty numbers) i.e. one pun nut'
- K. cek e-phlāk 'bamboo one piece i.e. one piece of bamboo'
- K. monit e-zan 'man one i.e. one man'

(ii)
- (a) Use of definitive - zon in Karbi loan words from Assamese. e.g.
  - K. innār zon phli 'elephant the four i.e. four elephants'
  - K. phāk zon thrakchi 'pig the seven i.e. seven pigs'
- (b) The Karbi plural suffix -hor/āhor is originated from Assamese -bor and dialectal -bhor, -bhorak etc. e.g.
  - cainan āhor 'a board of cows'
- (c) Karbi plural suffixes -mokhā is an Assamese loan. e.g.
  - K. monit amokhā 'one group of man/people'

(iii) The verbal post-position -dei in Karbi is an Assamese loan element. e.g.
  - K. derchi wānthā dei 'you will come lately'
(iv) The indeclinable words ba 'or', bah 'brabho', 'oh' in Karbi are clear loan from Assamese. e.g.

K. bā pilo tāke! 'brabho! what is this?'
ō nāñli lādāk wāntha 'hallow! come here'
Jadu bā ne hādāk dāmzi 'Jadu or I will go there'

(v) The adverbial words are zene 'as' ākau 'again', derchi 'lately' (As. derikoi) in Karbi are also direct loan from Assamese. e.g.

K. ālāñli derichi wānzi 'he will come lately'
nāñli ākau wānzi 'you will come again'

(vi) It is interesting to note that there are quite a good number of words in Karbi originated from Hindi, English, Perso-Arabic sources and many other sources. But all these words incorporated into Karbi through Assamese.

(a) Perso-Arabic originated Karbi words in Karbi come through Assamese.

As. Kārbār > K. kārbār 'business'
kalam > kalam 'pen'
khājanā > khāzānā 'revenue'
hukum > hukum 'order'
(b) Chinese originated Karbi words in Karbi come through Assamese. e.g.

As. cāh > K. cā 'tea'
badam > badam 'almond'

(c) Meleyu (language of Malay) originated words in Karbi come through Assamese. e.g.

As. gudām > K. kudām 'godown/store'

(d) Karbi words from Dravidian sources come through Assamese. e.g.

As. kor > K. ku 'spade'
kuli > kuli 'labourer'
par > par 'time' (1/6th time i.e. six hours of a day)

(e) English originated Karbi words in Karbi come through Assamese. e.g.

As. gilās > K. kilāt 'glass'
zebrā > zibrā 'zebra'

(f) Assamese loan words in Karbi with some phonetic changes. e.g.

As. ojā > K. ocā 'a priest who can drive away the evil spirit'
dān > ādān 'gift'
jāti > zāti 'nation'
As. kapāl > K. kapāl 'forehead, luck'
nāpit > nāpit 'barber'
pāp > pāb 'sin'
lābh > lāb 'profit'
samān > hamān 'equal'

1.5.2 Khasi elements -

The Khasi language, an offshoot of the Mon-Khmer branch of Austro-Afroasiatic, has not any link with the Karbi language from linguistic points of view, but there are a good deal of interchanges of vocabularies between them for the neighbourly relation of these languages. The influence of the Khasi language on the Karbi language is quite apparent. These Khasi words while incorporated into the Karbi language show some phonetic changes as illustrated below -

(i) Khasi a > i in Karbi initially. e.g.
Kh. zahur > K. zihur 'vegetables'

(ii) Khasi u > āi in Karbi initially. e.g.
Kh. rukum > K. rāikam 'oath taking ceremony'

(iii) Khasi originated Karbi words with vowels anaptyxis. e.g.
Kh. klet > K. kelet 'forgetfulness'
mrād > mārat 'animal'
(iv) Khasi originated Karbi words with vowels prosthesis. 
e.g.
Kh. lum > K. ālum 'the top of a hill'

(v) Khasi originated Karbi words with vowel apocope.
e.g.
Kh. pirthei > K. pirthe 'earth'

(vi) Khasi tripthongs become simple vowel in Karbi: ieu > u.
e.g.
Kh. chintien > K. chintu 'flower'

(vii) Khasi b > m in Karbi. e.g.
Kh. banai > K. mānai 'the moon'

(viii) Khasi final dipthong ai > we in Karbi. e.g.
Kh. kai > K. kowe '(betel) nut'

(ix) Khasi consonant cluster nt > t in Karbi. e.g.
Kh. linti > K. loti 'road/path'

(x) Certain other phonetic peculiarities in Khasi originated Karbi words. e.g.

Inserting - k-: K. kăktun < Kh. kātun 'dried fish'
Initial chā-: K. chālazan < Kh. lāzan 'own'
Loss of - h-: K. dōkhā < Kh. dōkā 'fish'
Loss of - r-: K. bantā < Kh. brantā 'a bundle of betel-nut'
(xi) Metathesis in Khasi originated Karbi words. e.g.

Kh. killā > K. kirlā 'to change'

(xii) Khasi ch > c in Karbi. e.g.

Kh. chiteŋ > K. ceteŋ 'half a bottle'

(xiii) The feminine marker 'kā' in Karbi is a direct loan from Khasi. This 'kā' is always used as prefix in the names of women in Karbi. e.g.

Karen 'Miss/Mrs. Reng'
Kabaŋ 'Miss/Mrs. Bang'
Kāche 'Miss/Mrs. Che'
Kāzir 'Miss/Mrs. Zir'

(xiv) Khasi words in Karbi without any phonetic change.

e.g.

Kh. um > K. um 'water'
kinto > K. kinto 'to speak'
comān > K. comān 'a Khasi tribe'
zari > K. zāri 'friend'
tirwā > K. tirwā 'to offer for sale'
duwān > K. duwān 'alter'
pirthe > K. pirthei 'the earth'
bilɔr > K. bilɔr 'bottle'

1.5.3 There are some other Karbi words, which are commonly used in Boro, Dimasa and Garo with some
phonetic changes as illustrated below -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Dimasa</th>
<th>Boro</th>
<th>Garo</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ści</td>
<td>shi</td>
<td>se, sui</td>
<td>sa</td>
<td>'one'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hini</td>
<td>gini</td>
<td>ni, nui</td>
<td>gni</td>
<td>'two'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kethom</td>
<td>kāthām</td>
<td>thām</td>
<td>gitam</td>
<td>'three'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phli</td>
<td>bri</td>
<td>bri, brui</td>
<td>bri</td>
<td>'four'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pho</td>
<td>bōnā</td>
<td>bā</td>
<td>bōnā</td>
<td>'five'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thrak</td>
<td>dō</td>
<td>rō, dō</td>
<td>dōk</td>
<td>'six'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thrakchi</td>
<td>sini</td>
<td>sni, sini</td>
<td>sni</td>
<td>'seven'</td>
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<tr>
<td>nerkep</td>
<td>jai</td>
<td>zāt</td>
<td>chot</td>
<td>'eight'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chirkep</td>
<td>sikau</td>
<td>skho</td>
<td>sku</td>
<td>'nine'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kep</td>
<td>ji</td>
<td>zi, zu</td>
<td>chikun</td>
<td>'ten'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.5.3.1 There are some common words used in both the languages, Karbi and Boro with some phonetic changes. These are appeared to be developed from some common sources. e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Boro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inhu</td>
<td>khnā</td>
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<tr>
<td>kethom</td>
<td>tham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nōkān</td>
<td>nukan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>po</td>
<td>pā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hini</td>
<td>ni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5.3.2 Common pronominal form in Karbi and Boro: e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Boro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nān</td>
<td>nān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nānlī</td>
<td>nānsur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mā</td>
<td>mā</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.5.3.3 Common words in Karbi and Kuki-Chin: e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Karbi</th>
<th>Kuki-Chın</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ni</td>
<td>ni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nān</td>
<td>nān</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pɔ</td>
<td>pā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phi</td>
<td>pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phu</td>
<td>pu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.5.4 The plain Karbi people have incorporated various linguistic elements from the Assamese language. They have adopted Assamese as their first language not only for education purpose, but in all other spheres of life. Even they speak in Assamese to the Assamese people as well as to their own community people. The inter-caste marriages have also played a great role in the growth of such close relationship with the Assamese people. This way Assamese vocabularies has been getting places in the Karbi language. Of course such words have gone through certain phonetic changes. The general features of the Assamese language used
by the Karbis are as below -

(1) Some Assamese phonemes i.e. kh, g, gh, dh, bh, s are not retained in tact in Assamese loan words in Karbi.

**Examples:**

- kh > k: As. khari > K. kari 'fire wood'
  - khristant > kictan 'Christian people'
  - nukhuliba > nukulibo 'do not open'

- g > k: bagari > bukuri 'plum'
  - gaonbura > kanbura 'a village headman'
  - gadha > kada 'ass'

- gh > k, kh: ghar > kahar 'house'
  - ghantaa > khantaa 'bell'
  - ghiu > khi 'ghee'
  - ghori > kori 'clock'

- dh > d: bandha > banda 'closed'
  - dhan > dahan 'money'
  - dhani > duni 'rich man'

- bh > b: bhāl bāl > bāl bāl 'selected good'
  - rabhā > rabā 'pandal'
  - bheleki > beliki 'witch-craft'

- s, ś, ṧ > h: śāri > hari 'line'
  - scāi > hacāi 'truth'
  - seibābe > heibābe 'therefore'
(ii) The definite affix 'to' of Assamese is used in plain Karbi after the noun words. e.g.

K. deutā to 'father'
K. māiki to 'woman'
K. kheti to 'cultivation'

(iii) The Assamese dative case-suffix 'lai' is not used in Karbi while they speak Assamese. e.g.

As. tāk dekhīb lāi jām K. tākei dekhāb o zam 'go to see him only'

(iv) A prefix ā is used in many Assamese words while the Karbi people speak Assamese. e.g.

K. āketi 'cultivation'
K. ā kām 'work'
K. ā baran 'colour'
K. ā zāt 'caste'
K. ā zug 'age'

(v) There are some Assamese words which are used by the Karbi people without any phonetic changes. Such words are very limited. e.g.

K. bāzār 'market'
K. cini 'sugar'
K. rakam 'variety'
K. kām 'work'
1.6 Script and Literature -

The Karbis are considered as very backward community. They are not advanced educationally or otherwise like the Mizo or the Khasis etc. The literacy in the Karbi Anglong district is only 19.2% (male 26.9% and female 10.3%).

The Karbi is a spoken language and it has no script of its own. The Karbis are bilingual, they have adopted Assamese as their first language for education purpose. They speak in Karbi to their own people in their domestic and village life, while they converse in Assamese i.e., Karbi-mixed Assamese in their social life. At present they have accepted the modified Karbi script for printing their text book in primary school. So the Assamese script or the Purbilipi i.e. the easternmost variety of the Modern Indian script is now an accepted script of the Karbi language. They are learning their language through this script. The literacy of Karbi is slowly and gradually increasing as the children come forward to get education as introduced by the state government. There are a few Karbi people, both male and female who are highly qualified having university degrees in Arts, Science and technical subjects like Medicine and Engineering etc.

The Karbi language has been actually flourishing as a spoken tongue among the Karbi people. But after independence of India, the tribe has drawn much attention of the popular government of Assam and the language has also got some importance. As a result, the language was introduced in the school as a medium of instruction in the primary level. Thus text books were also prepared in the language using the regional script i.e. Purbilipi. Of course, a few books on the language and the tribe had been prepared in English by some British administrators and Missionaries long back. These books are mostly on their culture, tradition, religion etc. All these books are published using Assamese and English script. Such books prepared in Assamese are 'Karbi Janagosthy', 'Karbi Prasanga', 'Karbi Sahitya Sanskritit Ebhumuki', 'Karbi Samaj aru Sanskritit Eserenga' and 'The Mikir' and 'Sociology in Karbi' in English. There are three important dictionaries, such as 'Karbi Lamtacham' (1974), 'Karbi Assamese', 'Mikir English Dictionary' (1978) Karbi-English, and 'English Karbi dictionary' (1978) English-Karbi.

At present the oral literature i.e. the various oral compositions like songs, tales, etc. are also compiled and published in the Assamese script i.e. Purbilipi. The Karbis are very rich in their such traditional literature which include folk-tales, ballads idioms, proverbs and folk-songs relating to the Karbi life and society. Through these
literature we get various pictures and information on agriculture, different household activities, wedding and other festivals, death etc. of the Karbi society. These are grouped as love-songs, natural songs, marriage songs, children songs i.e. cradle songs, Ramayana songs which they call 'cabin alun' etc. A few of them are compiled and published in book form in the Karbi language. All these have been published in Assamese script i.e. Purbilipi. The published literature comprises mainly relating to poems, stories, prayers and songs on the one hand, and journals and magazines with different types of compositions on the other hand. There is a few number of published novels named 'Rangchapi', 'Mekri', 'Puwate Ejak Dhanesh Pakhi', 'Hamchera' etc. in Assamese script. They have also some poetry books, such as, 'Thai awo mangwee', 'Kumalin', 'Lammet' etc. in Karbi language. It is just a beginning and all are published within a period of last twenty years. It is hoped that in course of time the Karbi literature will be flourished in the hands of the young and progressive Karbi writers.

A few selected specimens of the Karbi folk-songs, folk-tales, short stories, poems etc. are given at the end of this study under Appendix.

1.7 Aim and Objective -

In this study an attempt has been made to give a critical analysis of the Karbi people and their language i.e.
Karbi as spoken by the Karbi population of Assam specially the Karbi Anglong district. The Karbi spoken in the Diphu Civil Sub-Division is considered as a Karbi language, which has been taken as the basis of this linguistic analysis of Karbi. Thus the Karbi people maintains their own spoken tongue, but they have adopted Assamese as their first language for all purposes. Besides that they are getting education in various institutions through Assamese medium.

The Karbi language is highly influenced by the neighbouring different languages developed from Indo-Aryan, other Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic groups of languages. Nobody can ignore the linguistic and cultural importance of the Karbis for which this humble scheme has been made on the Karbi population to prepare a dissertation in two major parts: (1) Society and (11) Language. The work has been done following the principles of the methods of modern historical traditions and descriptive linguistic, but due to various limitations it was not possible to use the modern equipments for phonemic analysis of the Karbi language. Much emphasis has been given on the analysis of the cultural aspect and the Karbi language of the tribe to give a complete idea of the entire Karbi people, who linguistically develops a bilingual behaviour but culturally still retain their original tribal characteristics to a great extent.

1.8 Methodology -

The present study is based on the field works done
in some selected places of two different sub-divisions of the Karbi Anglong district and a few villages of the plains of Assam. In Diphu Sub-Division such selected places are Manja, Bordambuk, Langcoliet and Langnit. Rangkather village of Manja area is situated at a close distance of Diphu town. The entire population of the village are Karbis who are bilingual. They converse in Karbi within their community in the village and talk in Assamese to non-Karbis in Assamese. But most of the women folk are not bilingual, they converse only in Karbi. Of course many of them understand Assamese, but cannot speak. Shri Chaching Terang a young teacher of Primary school of Rangkather has extended his co-operation as Informant in collecting dates during my field works. Moreover, a few other young Karbi boys and girls along with the village headmen, namely Shri Moncing Teron of Hiding Teran Bastee, Shri Charthe Inghi of Charthe Inghi Bastee, Shri Ching Ticu of Chingticu Bastee have also helped me a lot in my field works programmes in the Karbi villages like Informants.

The other Karbi villages Ranghang, Terang, Hempiticu, Teran, Jilangcu and Kannep of Langnit area are situated at a long distance, about thirty kilometres away from Diphu town. These villages are thickly populated, excepting a few Assamese speaking families the entire population of these villages are Karbis. Shri Lunche Ranghang, a village-headman and his wife and two other young village boys and
girls have helped me in data collection, like informants. The main informants in this area are Shri Ram Teran and Shri Mohanching Teran.

Shri Rangbang Terang, a Lecturer of Diphu Govt. College has been associated with me in various data collection from different places of my field work. Moreover, he has helped me in various ways from collection and verifying my datas from the very beginning of my research work.

In Hamren Civil Sub-Division the villages, viz. Omrenti Bastee, Ambinang Bastee, Tirkim Bastee and Umphanci Bastee are have been selected for field study. All these villages are situated in different sides of Hamren approximately at a difference of 15 km. Accordingly datas were collected from these villages, where the entire villagers are Karbis but the most of the menfolk are bilingual while the majority of the womenfolk are monolingual. They speak only the Karbi language and many of them understand Assamese.

Besides that some other selected Karbi youths and young girls such as students, local social workers, service holders, house wives, school teachers etc. have also helped me in data collection during field work in the district. Without their personal interests and helps it would not have been possible for me to collect data on the Karbi language. The data collection and its analysis have been done on the principles of descriptive analysis of linguistics.
1.9 Method of my Study -

The data collected for this study are very carefully divided into primary and secondary two groups.

1.9.1 Primary data: The primary data are collected personally from different persons of the selected villages stated above with the help of the informants. While collecting the materials many persons like village headmen, school teachers, students, social workers, housewives, labourers, young boys and girls etc. have been approached and dictations have also been taken from many of these villagers. The folksongs and such other oral compositions have also been collected from the field.

1.9.2 Secondary data: The secondary data are collected through the interview guide. To know about the size, location, population, communication, tribe and their society, language etc. different journals, books, magazines, government reports, census reports and other documents have been consulted in library and other such collections. Moreover, the supervisor himself has also given me instructions and guidance regarding the methods of collecting data through dictation and questions in the field. The interview methods have been followed very carefully in collecting and verifying the secondary data of this study.