CHAPTER - I

A PROFILE OF THE DISTRICT
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The Kerbi Anglong district with an area of 10,332 sq. Kilometres lies between latitudes 25°30' N to 26°41' N and longitudes 92°7' E to 93°53' E approximately bounded on the north by the district of Nowgong and Jorhat; on the east by Jorhat and Nagaland; on the south by North Cachar and Meghalaya and on the west by Meghalaya and a part of Nowgong.

According to the Census of 1971 the district of Kerbi Anglong had a population of 3,79,310 of whom 2,02,347 were males and 1,76,963 were females. The decennial growth rate during 1961-71 was 68.28 which is fantastic compared to the State growth rate of 34.71 per cent. The density of population per sq. kilometre was 37 compared to the state figure of 150 per sq. kilometre. There were 875 females per 1000 males, which was slightly less than the state figure of 897. Thus there was the shortage of females. The percentage of literacy was less i.e. 19.17 compared to the state figure of 28.72. The percentage of literacy among the males was 26.93 while amongst the females was 10.29 only.

The bulk of the total population of Kerbi Anglong live on agriculture. The percentage of Scheduled Caste population to total population was 2.59 only while the Scheduled Tribe was 55.37 only.

1. The Census of 1981 was not held in Assam and hence all figures relate to 1971 Census only.
The district of Karbi Anglong is divided into two detached parts by a portion of district of Nowgong jutting into it and the continuity of it as a whole had been maintained till recently by North Cachar Hills sub division linking up the gap between the eastern and western parts of Karbi Anglong. The creation of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong into separate districts has completely detached the eastern part from the western part of the district. On 1st January, 1972 a new sub-division comprising the western part of the district has been created. The eastern part of the district has been named as Diphu while the western part has been named as Hamren.

The entire district of Karbi Anglong is covered by hills excepting the narrow strips of flat lands on the border along the banks of the Kapili, the Jamuna, the Dhansiri and the Barapani rivers. Except the portion connecting the North Cachar Hills district in the south, the Diphu subdivision of Karbi Anglong is covered with hills which end on the north at the plains of the Brahmaputra and on the east and west at the plains of the Dhansiri and the Jamuna valleys respectively. These hills support a small population who grow dry rice, vegetables, cotton mustard, sesame on the slopes and are seldom visited by the natives of the plains. The upper reaches

2. AAP 134/68/14 dated 22.1.70.
of the Dhansiri and the Kaliani are covered with dense tree forest which is entirely destitute of population.4

The Hamren Subdivision, except the narrow strips of flat lands along the Kapili and Barapani rivers is also covered by hills belonging to the Khasi and Jaintia group of hills whose elevation varies from 500 feet (152.40 meters) to near about 4000 feet (1219.20 meters) above the sea level. These hills have less forest than those of Diphu subdivision. The density of population of these hills being more than that of the hills of the Diphu subdivision, most of them have already been heavily jummed out, followed by intensive grazing by the cattle of the Nepali Khutis have been rendered nothing but green pastures. The land in between the slopes of grass covered hills, have in most places been turned into narrow patches of paddy fields by the Karbis and other tribal people of the area.5

Of the plains portion of the eastern part of the district i.e. of the Diphu subdivision the Jamuna valley is by far the largest and themost thickly populated area in the whole district. The portion was previously covered by dense forest and thick jungle, but during the last two decades specially after independence there is a heavy rush of immigrants specially from the erstwhile East Pakistan as a result the entire valley had been covered by them. The Kapili valley

4. Gazetter of India, Assam State, 1979 (United Mikir and North Cachar Hills) P.6

5. Ibid.
is not free from occupation. The Dhansiri valley, however, is
narrower than the other two valleys. But the area from Dhansiri
to Borpathar had been a subject of occupation since a long
time.  

The climate of the district is most unhealthy.

It is a malarious region. It has a moist climate devoid of
the amenities of a breezy atmosphere as are available in the
higher plateau of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The high hills
of the Hamren subdivision will, however, be exempted from
this description as the area itself is a part of Khasi and
Jaintia group of hills. The average temperature of the
district rises to 30° centigrade and the lowest comes down
not below to 18° centigrade. The rainfall is scanty and the
average rainfall annually comes to 1200 millimetres.

The district of Karbi Anglong is a mineralised
area with deposits of coal, limestone, lithomargio, clay,
beryl, building stone, mica etc. The most important areas
from which coal has been located and investigated are at
Koilajan, Longlai, Kheroni, Silvetta, Disobai Kallah and
Khonbamon range and other places along the Jamuna valley of
the Diphu subdivision. Some coal is known to have occured
in the upper reaches of the Kaliani and Daigrung rivers of

6. Gazetteer of India, Assam State, 1979 (United Mikir and
North Cachar Hills) P.6
7. 'Karbi Anglong' - Published by the Department of Infor-
mation and Public Relations, Assam.
the same subdivision. Limestone of good quality are known to have located at Koilajan, Manjali, Silvatta, Mayong Dima, Longlai and adjacent areas along the Jamuna valley on the southern side of Karbi Anglong. Mica has also been reported to occur in some of the places, such as, north of Mahendijua in Diphu subdivision but they have not yet been explored for economic purposes.8

The Karbi Anglong district is very rich in forest resources. Species like Koroi, Jhamuk, Ajhar, Sam occupy the moist localities while Gomari, Sapa, Poma, Bhelu, Simul etc. occupy the typical sal areas. In addition to the types mentioned above there are innumerable varieties grown in different parts of the district. About three fourth of the district is covered by Reserved and Unclassed State Forest. The State Reserved Forest covers an area of 1951.452 sq. kilometres, District Reserved Forest 811.905 and the Unclassed State Forest covers an area of 5648.23 sq. kilometres.9

The district of Karbi Anglong is one of the most industrially backward districts of Assam. There is a public sector cement factory at Bokajan in the north east portion

8. The Gazetteer of India, Assam State, 1979 (United Mikir and North Cachar Hills) P.27.
of the Diphu subdivision and two cooperative khandsari sugar mills, one at Manja and the other at Howaipur both within the Diphu subdivision. There is one weaving training centre at Diphu to impart training in improved and up to date method of training to the tribal girls of the autonomous district. In view of the educational backwardness of the district the government have established a college to provide educational facilities to the pupils of the district.

The people - The Karbis are the most predominant tribe of all the tribes of the autonomous district of Karbi Anglong. Although they are concentrated within the present district of Karbi Anglong they are spread over into adjoining areas of Jorhat, Sibsagar, Nowgong, and North Cachar Hills district of Assam, the Jaintia district of Meghalaya and some areas in the State of Nagaland. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock which had been identified by Geirson long ago. The Karbis are divided into twelve clans. These twelve clans form the four tribes of Chintong, Ronghang, Amri and Dummali. Among these four tribes, Chintong and Ronghang rank higher than the Amri because the Amri expatriated itself from sending a man on the dangerous mission to the Ahom King at Sibsagar, when a representative was required from each tribe. Hence Amri is excluded from sharing the liquor at a sacrifice and they are looked down upon by the Karbis of the present
Havnen subdivision. The Damrali acted as interpreters to the embassy at the Ahom Kings. 10

The story of the migration of the Karbis is very long. There is no historical record to testify to their route of migration. But it can be presumed that the Karbis had entered Assam through the north east along with other Tibeto-Burman groups such as, Aka, Mishmi, Garo, Kachari and settled in different parts of Kamrupa. There is, however, no known evidence regarding the early settlement of the Karbis in the north east. But that they inhabited the present North Cachar Hills area for a considerable period is evidenced by the writings of some of the early investigators of the subject. 11

Being oppressed by the Kacharis, the Angamis, the Kacha Nagas from the east and the Kukis from the south they migrated to Jaintia Kingdom for permanent settlement. But in the Jaintia kingdom also they did not get good reception and therefore they sent an emissary to the Ahom Governor at Raha.

   (c) William Robinson, "Descriptive Accounts of Assam", Published in 1841 - reprinted 1975, Samakaran Prakasan, Delhi-110035. P.308.
and offered to place themselves under the protection of his master for a happy and peaceful life. But as the ill luck would have it, the emisaries were unable to express themselves and they were buried alive in the tank which the Governor was excavating at that time. Hostilities began and they were soon subjugated by the Ahoms. The incident seemed to have occurred during the reign of the Ahom King Rajeswar Singha.

In July 1765 King Rajeswar Singha undertook an operation against the hostile Karbis by despatching two forces one entering Chapanala and another through the Kapili and Jamuna rivers. The two forces defeated the Karbis and burnt their houses and granaries. The Ahom king appointed a principal chief over the whole clan and collected tribute from them. The Karbis agreed to pay tributes and begged forgiveness.  

With the downfall of their masters, the Ahoms, the Karbis automatically came under the British. In the year 1837-38 the system of taking tribute in kind was abolished and the first revenue settlement was affected with them by levying tax at a certain rate.  

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separate system of administration and it was notified as the Mikir Hills Tract under the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 in the year 1884. In 1896 a part of this tract was transferred partly to Nowgong and partly to Sibesar district of Assam. The amended boundaries of the Nowgong and Sibesar Mikir Hills Tract were notified in 1907. A slight modification was made in 1913-14 when the area around Dimapur was transferred to Naga Hills. In 1921, the Mikir Hills Tract was declared as a "Backward tract" by the Governor General-in-Council under the Government of India Act 1919. Under the provisions of the Act the Governor General could direct that any act of the Indian legislature should not apply or only apply with modifications and he could empower the provincial governors to give similar directions in respect of Acts passed by the local legislatures. Proposals for expenditure on these tracts need not be submitted to the vote and no question about them could be asked without the Governor's sanction.

Then came the Simon Commission and finally the Government of India Act, 1935. The commission took exception to the word 'backward' and proposed the division of these areas into two - 'excluded' and 'partially excluded'. An excluded area was one into which reforms could not be introduced. A partially excluded area was one into which
reforms could be introduced. Again the administration of the Excluded Area was vested in the Governor acting in his discretion and that of Partially Excluded Areas in the Council of Ministers subject, however, to the Governor exercising his individual judgement. The Mikir Hill Tract was classified as a Partially Excluded Area under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935.

The Cabinet Mission suggested the appointment of an influential advisory committee to enquire into the future political and administrative arrangements for the Tribal and Excluded Areas. Accordingly the Constituent Assembly set up an Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal Areas etc. The Advisory Committee, in turn, set up a sub committee known as the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee with Gopi Nath Bordoloi as its Chairman, J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Rup Nath Brahma, and A.V. Thakkar as members. Khor Sing Terang and Samson Sing Engti were coopted as members of the Bordoloi Sub-committee from the Mikir Hills.

The Bordoloi Committee did not visit the Mikir Hills to take evidence. The Karbi-A-Durbar, the only socio-political organisation of the Karbis gave evidence at Lumding. The Durbar submitted a memorandum. Sar Sing
Terang, Chatra Sing Teron, Sai Sai Terang, Barelong Terang, Bonglong Terang and Song Bey were amongst those who gave oral evidence before the sub committee.\textsuperscript{14}

The memorandum together with the oral evidence demanded a separate district for the Mikir People, appointment of a boundary commission to demarcate the boundary of the proposed district, protection of those Mikirs who could not be brought under the proposed district, application of the Chin Hills Regulation to protect the interests of the Mikirs, constitution of local council to conduct the administration of the district, representation in the State Cabinet in proportion to the strength of the tribal members of the Assembly, constitution of a three tier judicial system, protection of tribal customs, free and compulsory education, introduction of Mikir language as the medium of instructions at the primary level, appointment of young qualified Mikir in Government service etc. etc. The sub-committee finally submitted its report for acceptance by the constituent Assembly of India.

\textsuperscript{14} Song Bey interviewed on 28.11.82.
Recommendations of the Bordoloi Sub-Committee and the Sixth Schedule -

The Bordoloi Committee among other things made the following recommendations.

(1) District Councils having a maximum strength of forty and minimum twenty should be set up in the hill areas with powers of legislation over occupation or use of land other than land comprising reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891.

(2) Reserved Forest should be managed by the Provincial Government but regarding the appointment of forest staff, granting of contracts the legitimate desires of the hill people should be taken into account.

(3) Jhuming should be discouraged and stopped if possible but the control of Jhuming should be left to the local councils.

(4) Social laws and customs should be controlled or regulated by the tribes themselves. All criminal offences excepting those punishable with death, imprisonment for five years and upwards should be left to be dealt with by local councils. All ordinary civil suits should be disposed of by local tribal courts. The civil and criminal cases where non tribals are involved should be expeditiously dealt with by the provincial government.
(5) The District councils should have powers to manage primary schools, dispensaries and other institutions which normally come under the scope of local self-governing institutions of the plains.

The District or the Sub-Divisional Officer, as the case may be, should be ex-officio President of the local council for a period of six years since its inception.

(6) Certain taxes and financial powers should be allocated to the councils and the federal government should render financial assistance.

(7) The council by a majority of three fourth of their members may levy a license fee on the money lenders and traders coming from outside the district.

(8) The District Council should be entitled to a share of the revenues from the mineral resources.

(9) Provincial legislature should not make laws pertaining to the subjects dealt with by the council.

(10) Regional councils for different tribes inhabiting an autonomous district may be provided.

(11) The Governor should be empowered to set aside any Act or resolution of the council if the safety of the country is prejudiced or he may take such action including dissolution of the council subject to the approval of the legislature.
(12) There should be a District Fund for each autonomous district and the rules for the management of the Fund shall be framed by the council with the prior approval of the Governor.

(13) Representation for the hill in the Ministry should be guaranteed by statutory provisions or by a suitable provision in the instrument of instructions or corresponding provisions.

(14) The non tribals should not be barred from serving in the hills but they should be selected with care if posted to the hills. The appointment of a due proportion of the hill people in the services should be particularly kept in mind and provided for in rules or executive instructions of the provincial government.

(15) A commission may be appointed at any time or permanently to enable the Government to watch the progress of development plan or to examine any particular aspect of the administration.

(16) The question of altering boundaries so as to bring the people of the same tribe under a common administration should be considered by the Provincial Government. The Borpathar and Sarupathar mouzas included in the Mikir Hills, should be included in the regularly administered areas henceforth.
(17) Non tribal residents may be provided with representation in the local councils if they are sufficiently numerous. For this purpose non tribal constituencies may be formed if justified and if population is not below 500.

(18) Provincial councils should be set up by the Governor of Assam after consulting such local organisations as exist. The provisional councils which will be for one year will have power to frame their constitution and rules for the future.

(19) The Governor of Assam will act as the functionary who will carry on the administration till the new constitution comes into force.

The recommendations of the Bordoloi sub committee were carefully processed by the Drafting committee with certain modifications and alterations which were finally incorporated in the draft Sixth Schedule and placed before the constituent Assembly for discussion and approval.

Now let us see to what extent the recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were accepted by the constituent Assembly. Let us first take up the delimitation of the administrative areas of the District Council. The sub committee, in fact, did not go into the details of the administrative areas to be determined by the Governor.
The Sixth Schedule, however, empowered the Governor to exercise certain discretionary powers in respect of the delimitations of the administrative areas.

Second, the maximum strength of the council recommended by the sub committee was not endorsed by the constituent Assembly. The Assembly considered twenty four the maximum of whom not less than three fourth shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage. The provision, however, had been subject to further amendment and the maximum had been fixed at thirty now. 15

Third, the sub committee recommended that while the District Councils in general shall elect their own Chairman the council of Mikir Hills may be presided over by the Deputy Commissioner or the Sub-Divisional Officer, as the case may be, for a period of six years with effect from the date of its formation. This recommendation was included in the Sixth Schedule without any amendment.

Fourth, regarding the powers and functions of the councils the recommendations of the sub committee were accepted with certain additions. The Sixth Schedule envisaged that the councils shall have the powers to

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collect taxes on buildings, tolls on persons residing within their jurisdiction, a tax on entry of goods into the market for sale, toll on passengers and goods carried by ferries etc. The Act of 1969 has endowed the council with more functions to which the executive power of the State extends.

Fifth, regarding the management of the District Fund the sub committee's recommendations were incorporated although it was again subject to amendment according to which the governor shall make rules for the management of District Fund. 16

Sixth, on the sharing of royalty on minerals the recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were accepted in toto without any additions or alterations.

Seventh, in respect of the application of the state law in an autonomous district the recommendations of the committee were accepted with some additions which had given more powers to the State Government.

Eighth, the sub committee's recommendations for the appointment of a commission to enquire and report on the administration of a tribal area was accepted with some additions. While the committee recommended to enquire and

report on the administration of a tribal area the Sixth Schedule empowered the same commission to recommend delimitation of the administrative areas of the District Council.

Thus it is observed that although certain additions and alterations were made by the Constituent Assembly the Sixth Schedule, basically speaking, is the product of the report of the Bordoloi sub-committee constituted by the Advisory Committee of the constituent Assembly.

Along with other District Councils of the hill areas of Assam the District Council of Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) was formally inaugurated in a colourful ceremony by Bishnu Ram Medhi the Chief Minister of Assam on 23rd June, 1952. Thus for the first time the Karbis came to have a political institution of their own under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.