CHAPTER – IV

STUDY AREA PROFILE
The state of Assam endowed with fertile river valleys and green mountains has been the abode of various tribes with rich cultural heritage since remote past. Assam has always been known for her forest wealth. The tribal communities have entered into the Assam state from their original habitats through different routes at different intervals of time and have permanently settled here. The tribes of Assam may conveniently be classified into two main categories - the plains tribes and the hill tribes. The plains tribes are exclusively found in the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys of the state. On the other hand, the hill tribes are mainly concentrated in the two autonomous hill districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, which are commonly referred to as the Hill areas of Assam.

The Karbi Anglong district located between latitudes 25°30' and 26°41' N and longitudes 92°7' and 93°52'E. It is bounded on the north by Nagaon and Golaghat districts, on the south by the North Cachar Hills district, on the east by Golaghat district and Nagaland and on the west by Meghalaya.

The district happens to be the largest district in the state of Assam, covering a total geographical area of 10,434 Sq. Km. As per 1991 census the total population of the district is 6,62,723. On the whole the district covers 13.3% and 2.95% of the state's total area and total population respectively. The important rivers of the district are Kopili and Dhansiri. The tributaries of Kopili are Barapani, Umium, Amreng, Kolonga and Jamuna etc. while those of Dhonsiri are Kaliani, Nambar, Deopani and Doigrung etc. The highest peak in the district is the Singhason (1357 meters) located at East Karbi Anglong. Physio-graphically, the district consists of two hilly lobes which genetically belong to the Shillong plateau. The two lobes are separated by the Kopili Valley. The eastern lobe is dome shaped and approximately doubles the size of the western lobe.

The district of North Cachar Hills lies between latitudes 25° and 25°45'N and longitudes 92°30' and 93°30' E. It is bounded by Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts on the north, Cachar district on the south, Nagaland and Manipur on the east and Meghalaya on the west. The district with a total geographical area of 4,888 Sq. Km. Covers a total population of 1,50,801 thus having 6.2% and 0.67% of the states total
area and total population respectively. The northern flanks of the Barail range and the eastern flanks of the Jayantia hills constitute the North Cachar Hills. The highest peak Hempeupet (1571 meters) is located at the Barali range. Diyung is the longest river (170km) of the district. Originating from the Barail range it flows to join Kopili at Diyungmukh. The tributaries of this river are Langting, Lumding and Mohur etc. Again, Jatinga, Jiri and Chiri rising from the North Cachar Hills become the tributaries of Barak, the principal river of the Cachar district of Assam.

The two hill districts were, in fact, two subdivisions of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district which was inaugurated on November 17, 1951 and created by carving out certain portions of Nagaon, erstwhile Sibsagar and United Khasi and Jayantia Hills districts and the whole of the North Cachar subdivision of Cachar district. On February 2, 1970 North Cachar was declared as a September civil district while the remaining portion, i.e. Mikir Hills subdivision was constituted into Mikir Hills district which was again rechristened as Karbi Anglong in 1976.

In accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India, the North Cachar Hills district Council and the Karbi Anglong (Mikir Hills) district council came into existence. On April 20 and June 23, 1952 respectively. The powers and functions of the District Councils may be broadly divided into four heads- Legislative, Executive, Financial and Judicial. Each council has tenure of five years. The District Council budget consists of two sections-Council Sector and State Sector. The Council Sector budget is entirely dependent upon the revenue collected through the Taxation Department of the Council while the State Sector is financed jointly by the Centre and the Government of Assam.

The Karbi Anglong district has three civil subdivisions viz., Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan while the North Cachar Hills district has two civil subdivisions viz, Haflong and Maibang. It may be noted here that Bokajan and Maibong subdivisions have came into existence on August 15, 1989 and November 17, 1987 respectively. Again, there are 4 Revenue Circles, namely, Phulani, Diphu, Silanjian and Donka in Karbi Anglong and 3 Revenue Circles, Namely, Haflong, Maibang and Harangajao in North Cachar.
Hills. Moreover, the number of Development Block is 10 and 4 in Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills respectively.\(^{10}\)

According to 1991 census the autonomous hill districts of Assam i.e. Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills together cover a total geographical area of 15,322 Sq. Km. Out of the State's total area of 78,438 Sq. Km. The total population of the two districts is found to be 8,13,524 against the State's total population of 2,24,14,322. In other words, the two hill districts cover 19.5% of the total geographical area and 3.6% of the total population of the state.\(^{11}\)

**People:**
The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Act, 1976 specifies the following fourteen tribes in the two hill districts of Assam (1) Chakma, (2) Dimasa Kachari, (3) Garo, (4) Hajong, (5) Hmar, (6) Khasi, Jayantiya, Synteng, Pnar, War Bhoi, Lyngnam (7) any Kuki tribe (8) Lakher (9) Man (Tai speaking) (10)Any Mizo (Lushai) tribe (11) Mikir (Karbi) (12) Any Naga tribe (13) Pawi and (14) Syntheng. Again, according to the same Act, the following nine tribes have been scheduled in the state of Assam, excluding the autonomous district (1) Barmans in Cachar (2) Boró, Boro-Kachari (3) Deori (4) Hojai (5) Kachari, Sonowal (6) Lalong (Tiwa) (7) Mech (8) Miri (Mishing) and (9) Rabha.

The Karbi Anglong district is inhabited by the Karbis, Bodos, Tiwas, Dimasa Kacharis, Rengma, Nagas, Garos, Kukis and Shyams etc. while the North Cachar Hills district is inhabited by the Dimasa Kacharis, Jeme nagas, Hmar, Kukis, Mizos, Karbis and Khasis etc. As a matter of fact, the major concentration of the Karbis is found in the Karbi Anglong district. On the other hand, the North Cachar Hills district is predominantly inhabited by the Dimasa Kacharis.\(^{12}\)

**The Karbis:**
The Karbis, mentioned as the Mikirs in the constitution order, Govt. of India, constitute an important ethnic group in the hill areas of present Assam. However, they never call themselves Mikir but call themselves Karbi and sometimes Arleng, which literally means a man. The name Mikir is that given to the race by the Assamese; its origin is
unknown. Although at present they are found to inhabit the Karbi Anglong District, nevertheless, some Karbi inhabited pockets are found in the North Cachar Hills, Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon, Golaghat, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur districts also. Moreover, their settlements are known in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. It is often heard that the Karbis are living in Sylhet of Bangladesh and Myanmar also. Racially the Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. The Karbis, along with others entered Assam from Central Asia in one of the waves of migration. It is very difficult to trace the history of the early settlement of the Karbis bereft of any written documents and other evidence like archaeological remains, etc. According the Stock and Lyall the original abode of the Karbis was the eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering on the Kopili River. The folklores of the Karbi, however, indicate that during the long past once they used to live on the banks of the rivers the Kalang and the Kopili and the entire Kaziranga area, the famous National Game Sanctuary of Assam, was within their habitation. During the reigns of the Kachari Kings they were driven to the hills and some of them entered into Jaintiapur, the erstwhile Jaintia Kingdom and lived under the Jaintia Sovereignty. Those who continued to live under the sovereignty of the Jaintia King had to face constant harassment at the hands of the Jaintias and this had compelled them to migrate new world. A good number of them had entered into the Ahom territory and prayed for protection from the Barphukan at Raha. Thus migration took place at the beginning of the 17th Century. The Karbis who migrated to the Ahom Kingdom had to face the Burmese invasion. The Burmese who invaded Assam perpetrated inhumane oppression on the people. The Karbis took refuge in the deep jungles and high hills leaving their hearth and home in the sub mountainous regions. The British found them to be quite a peaceful people and there had not been any hostility between the British and the Karbis.

Clans.

The Karbis have five clans called "Kur". These are Terang, Teron, Ingti and Timung. Each of the five clans has a number of sub-clans. While Ingti and Timung have 30 (thirty) sub clans each, Terong and Teron have 6(six) sub clans each and the remaining
clan Ingti has only 4 (four) sub-clans. These clans are completely exogamous and marriage between a boy and a girls belonging to the same clan can never take place since the children of the same clan are considered as brothers and sisters. Cremation found called Tipit or Thiri, area is kept demarcated for each clan. Although all the five clans are socially on an equality. Ingti, being a priestly clan was supposed to have a higher status in former times.

**Demographic characteristics:**

As per 1961 census the total population of the Karbis was 1,16,887 and this had gone up to 8,12,320 (52% males and 48% females) in 2001 census. The Karbis constituted 3.05 percent of the total population in the state of Assam in 2001 and 11.89% of the total tribal population of the state. Their percentage of literacy as per 2001 census was 48.33 and level of literacy between the males and the females was 60.56 percent and 39.44 percent respectively against the state percentage of 53.79 % (58.10% males and 41.29% females) As per 2001 census 88.58 percent people living in rural areas and 11.42 percent people living in urban areas, 1000 males there were 992 females (sex ratio). Population density (per Sq. Km) was 78 against 340 of state as per 2001 census.

**Religion:**

From the point of view of religion the Karbis can be regarded as animists Hinduism in its crude form finds manifestation in their worships of Gods, Goddesses and deities. They believe in the immortality of the soul, life here after and reincarnation. "Arnam Sansar Recho" or God Almighty is considered to be the creator of this universe. Among the innumerable deities, Some are considered to be benevolent and some malevolent. Each disease is associated with as presiding deity. Hemphu and Mukrang are two benevolent household gods. For the appeasement of the deities the Karbis observe many religious rituals throughout the year where the sacrifice of pigs and birds and use of rice beer are indispensable. They also believe in witchcraft and black magic. Karbis do not have any idol, temple or shrine. They do not worship trees and animals. A smaller section of the Karbis has embraced Christianity.
Family Structure, Birth, Death and Marriage:
The Karbi follow the patriarchal system of family structure and as such the father is the head of the family and his authority, as such, is undisputed. The line of descent is traced through the male members only. The head of the family, his wife, their children, the unmarried brothers and sisters constitute the family. The brothers start living separately as soon as they get married. A Karbi family, therefore, is a unitary one. Joint family system is also still prevalent to a very limited extent.

The birth of a child whether male or female is an occasion for joy in the family in the sense that a person died earlier in the family is supposed to be reborn in the same family. Death in the family, on the other hand, is considered to be the most tragic incident in the family. For the cremation of the deceased the Karbis observe some specific rules and regulations and they believe that non-observance of them might lead the family to great troubles in near future. They perform the death ceremony called chomongkan at a later date for the eternal peace of the deceased, it is the most elaborate and expensive socio religious ceremony of the Karbis which continuous for four days and four nights non-stop. In respect of marriage clan exogamy is strictly followed. Since the violation of this customary law leads to ex-communication, which is rather a severe punishment, this marriage taboo is rarely violated. Although monogamy is the prevailing practice, there is no bar to polygamy and the cases of polygamy are very rare. Marriage by negotiation and marriage by selection of life partners are prevalent among the Karbis.

Houses:
A typical Karbi hut is neither too small nor too big. It is built on a bamboo platform using timber posts for super structure. The platform is several feet high above the ground. For roofing purpose, thatch is used. The walls made of split bamboos are mud-plastered. The house is divided into two parts lengthwise. The front part or room with a hearth at the center is called Kam or guestroom while the inner chamber called Kut is
used as the living room for the family members. A wooden or bamboo ladder is used as an approach to the front varanda. Cattle are generally kept under the bamboo platform.

**Socio-culture:**
Shifting Cultivation being a part and parcel of Socio-cultural life of the Karbi people of North-East India, all its operations are inseparably linked with their religious rites and festivals, viz, Agalmaka, Miamua, Rongchugala and Ahia om Mikir Hills. In spite of its adverse effects on the eco-system and low productivity, it still continues with them as a necessary evil for the following inherent characteristics –

(a) Bulk of the labour force management and capital comes from the households;
(b) Production is either consumed on the farm or traded in local markets;
(c) The decision making process is hampered by limited access to marketing and political institutions; and
(d) Most of the farmers do not live much above the culturally determined subsistence level.

The rationale behind the persistency of this system lies in its compatibility with the physico-social environment of sparse population, community land tenure system, undulating and steep topography, short crop cycle, rainy season and thereafter, acute moisture stress during post-monsoon period, as well as, meager resources with the farmers and also the only available means of providing moderate calories and protein for the sustenance of families with minimum risk and the least income variability. This sort of socio-cultural equilibrium environment centering round Shifting Cultivation is, of course, gradually getting slackened under the impact of higher population, low yield, shortening of Jhum cycles, new economic and social goals, as well as, incursion of modern science and technology with the dying out of tribal isolation from the main stream.

**The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam:**
The Dimasa Kacharis are a Scheduled tribe in the autonomous Hill Districts of Assam. Their present abode is confined mainly into the North Cachar Hills District. They are, however, found in small-scattered groups in Dhansiri, Mahangdihua (Manga), Hawaipur and some interior areas of the Karbi Anglong district also. The Dimasa
Kacharis belong to the Bodo group of people. Linguistically the Dimasas belong to the Tibeto-Burman family. The origin home of Tibeto-Burman family was in Western China near the Yong-te-Kiang and the Howangho rivers from where they went down the courses of the Chindwin and the Irawadi and then the Brahmaputra and started settling down in the valleys of these rivers and also remote hills adjacent to the valleys.

The term “Dimasa” literally means the children or descendants of a big river, meaning children of Brahmaputra “di” means water, “Ma” means big and “Sa” means Children.

**Clan:** The Dimasa Kacharis have 40 (fourty) male clans called SENGPHANG and 42 (fourty two) female clans called JULU or JADDI. The existence of female clans along with the male clans is the most outstanding feature of the social life of the Dimasas and such a division of clans on the basis of sex is very rare among the tribal societies. Moreover the female clans are numerically more than those of the males.

A list of SENGPHANGS and JULUS or JADDIS is given below:

**SENGPHANGS (male clans)**

1. Adaosa
2. Dader Bhagia
3. Bodosa/Batarisa
4. Daudungangthasa
5. Daulagupusa
6. Daolagajaosa
7. Diphusa
8. Dibragadesa
9. Disausa
10. Gorlosa
11. Girisa (Lonf Mailai)
12. Haflongparsa
13. Hagjersa
14. Hakmaosa
15. Haphilasa
16. Hasnusa
17. hohaisa
18. Jongthongsa
19. Jongthongsa
20. jareambusa
21. Kersa
22. Kampraisa
23. Kharigabsa
24. laftaisa
25. Langthasa
26. Laobangdisa
27. Maibangsa
31. baidingsa/Gainisa 32. Nunisa/Londisa 33. Perbarsa
34. Phonglosa 35. Rajyongsa 36. Riaosa
37. Singyungsas 38. Gurungfangsa/Phurusa Warisa 39. Thaosensa
40. Zigdungsas

JULU/JADDU(female clans)

34. Sasdima Daoga 35. Saidima Gedeba 36. Saidma Khaseba
37. Sagaodima 38. Sagaoson Parain 39. Saikhudima
40. Sander Sagaedi 41. Tharnjikma 42. Ymathondiraoma
Demographic characteristics:
As per 2001 census the total population of the Dimasa was 1,86,189 (53.12% male and 46.88% female). The district has 0.70 percent of total state population. As per 2001 census 68.81 percent people live in rural areas and 31.19 percent people living in urban areas which are higher than state rural urban ratio. The sex ratio was 883, density of population only 38 against 340 of state population density. Regarding literacy percent, the district 57.56 percent literate peoples in which 59.71% male and 40.29% female. The district occupies 6.23 percent of state total area 99,000, scheduled tribe population which 3.45 percent of state scheduled tribe population.

Religious life:
The Dimasa consider themselves to be Hindus although they have their traditional gods and goddesses. Among the six ancestral gods, Sibrai/Shivraj being the eldest is the most important and in every worship his name is to be uttered first. Sibrai or Shivaraj is equated with Hindu Siva, and Ranchandi with Parbati or Kali. The Hindu goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati have already made a place for them in the Dimasa religion. But the most noteworthy feature of Dimasa religion is the abode of gods and goddesses. They believe that gods and goddesses residing in a particular Daikho protect the people and control their destiny.

Family:
A Dimasa family generally consists of the head of the family, his wife their unmarried sons and daughters and the unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family. Marriageable daughters and sisters when given in marriage have to live in the houses of their husbands after spending one year in their own houses along with their husbands.

Marriage:
The Dimasa society has also its own system of marriage. The male clans and the female clans are exogamous and no marriage can take place between the boys and the girls of the same clan whether be it patrician or matricial, and however distantly related they might be. Many Dimasa families do not like to send their daughters to the bridegrooms' houses and the boys are required to stay in their father-in-laws' houses for a period of one year. This custom is called minihawaba. This custom, however, is losing its ground.
as many of the boys do not like to follow it when the period of *minihawaba* is over, the couple lives in a newly constructed house erected either near the bride's house or the bridegroom's own house in the village. Monogamy is the prevailing practice among the Dimasa although there is no bar to polygamy. Divorce is allowed in the Dimasa society but the incidence is not of greater significance\(^\text{15}\).

**Dimasa concept of life and death:**

The Dimasa concept of life and death does not fundamentally differ from the Hindu concept of life and death. They believe that while the body is subject to death and decay its soul or spirit never dies. They also believe life hereafter and in the rebirth. The deceased is supposed to be reborn sooner or later either in the same family or in the family of a relative. If the death ceremony is not properly performed and ceremonial offering of food and drink does not take place during the celebration of annual harvesting festival of Bishu, the spirit of the deceased will not find a place in the other world and it will roam with great misery in the vicinity of the village\(^\text{16}\).

In Dimasa society all operations of shifting cultivation were performed with religious awe and the series of annual rites and festivals were linked with different stages of shifting cultivation. After allocation of plots each household performed a religious rite in the plot. The *agalmaka* rites make burning and planting. The *miamua* rites are performed by the *nokma* (representative of the land owning clan) at the time of fruiting of the rice plants. The rongchugala and ahia rites mark the lifting of taboo on certain plants and vegetables of the shifting cultivation. The agricultural activities of the year culminated in the grand wangala rites and festivities to mark the end of harvest and also to mark the close of the agricultural season. Wangala rites are performed in honors of *Saljong*, the Sun-god, who is the ultimate bestowed of crops. All these rites involve festivities, in which rich man can demonstrate their wealth which adds to their prestige. The traditional rites and festivals importance is decreasing along with the decline of shifting cultivation.
### TABLE 4.1: General Profile of the two hill districts of Assam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Particulars</th>
<th>K. A</th>
<th>N.C.</th>
<th>Assam</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Population (As per 2001 census)</td>
<td>8,12,320</td>
<td>1,86,189</td>
<td>2,66,38,407</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Percent of population to state population</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Percent of male population</td>
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<td>53.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Percent of female population</td>
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<td>46.88</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Percent of rural population</td>
<td>88.58</td>
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<td>Percent of urban population</td>
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<td>Sex- ratio (female per 1000 male)</td>
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<td>883</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Density (per sq. km)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Percent of literate population</td>
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<td>Male literacy percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Female literacy percent</td>
<td>39.44</td>
<td>40.29</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Area (in sq. km)</td>
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<td>Percent of Area to state area</td>
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<td>Scheduled Tribe Population (&quot;000)</td>
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<td>Scheduled Caste Population (&quot;000)</td>
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<td>Sub-division</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>Gaon Panchayat</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Number of Villages</td>
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<td>Number of towns</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Gross District Domestic Product (1997-98)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Primary Sector (Agril, Forestry, Fishery)</td>
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<td>Secondary Sector(Manufacturing, Gas, Electricity, Water supply, Construction)</td>
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<td>4807</td>
<td>378459</td>
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<td>c)</td>
<td>Tertiary Sector (Transport, Storage &amp; Communication, Trade, Hotel &amp; Restaurant banking)</td>
<td>20019</td>
<td>7425</td>
<td>864392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59333</td>
<td>24371</td>
<td>2280602</td>
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<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>Per capita Gross District Domestic product</td>
<td>7911</td>
<td>14169</td>
<td>8989</td>
</tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Percent of Population by Religion</td>
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<td>a)</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
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<td>c)</td>
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<td>e)</td>
<td>Sikhs, Buddhists &amp; Jains</td>
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<td>f)</td>
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<td>Tribal Languages</td>
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Source: Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2000
Table 4.1 presents General profile of the two hill districts of Assam. The table shows data on demography, administrative and economy of two hill districts of Assam. From the table it is clear that Karbi Anglong and N. C. Hills district plays an important role in state economy.

This chapter presents profile of two hill districts of Assam. It includes natural resources, ethnic group composition, culture, food habits, and demography of the two hill districts. The information on profile of two hill districts is necessary for proper planning and sustainable management of resources.
References


3. Ibid


7. Ibid


15. Das, G. N (1990): Statistical Profile of the Hill Areas of Assam, Guwahati, Tribal Research Institute