

Chapter II

The plain Karbis of Demmorria block

2.1 The Karbis at a glance:

The Karbis are basically a hill tribe concentrated mainly in the Karbi-Anglong hill district, “between the Brahmaputra on the north, the Dhansiri valley on the east and the Kopili and Jamuna valley on the west and the south” (Lyall c. , 1908). However, they are now distributed over a wider area covering both hills and plains from Sibsagar and Golaghat to Nagoan and Kamrup districts of Assam. They have settled in the plains and taken to plough cultivation in Nagoan and Kamrup (Lyall c. , 1908). The Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group (Bordoloi, Preface: 1982). They are divided into four regional divisions, Chinthong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumarli showing some linguistic and cultural modifications of the common Karbi ethos. P.C. Phangcho (1989) writes that the Karbis are divided into four spatial groups *Amris*, *Ronghang*, *Chin thong* and *Domralis*. The spatial distributions of the four groups according to him are as follows:

- i) *Amri*: Are the westernmost settlers who largely occupy the hills of Amri block - the westernmost part of Hamren sub-division, Ri-Bhoi area of East Khasi hills and the foothills of southern Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam.
- ii) *Ronghang*: Inhabit the areas covering the eastern half of Hamren sub-division particularly the Rongkhang plains and southern parts of Hojai sub-division of Nagaon district.
- iii) *Chingthong*: Inhabit the areas of Chingthong development block of Hamren and those of Diphu sub-division.

iv) *Dumralis* are the plain dwellers now inhabiting the southern parts of Nagaon districts covering mainly Jamunamukh on the east to Sonapur in southern Kamrup on the west. They are believed to have come down from the hills after having lived there for years.

It is interesting to note that the Karbis have their own stories regarding their origin of migration through various phases to Assam and even their sufferings in the hands of the Burmese and in the hands of the Kachari kings. Karbi is one of the important ethnic communities of Assam. The Karbis, along with others entered Assam from Central Asia which was the first waves of migration. From the pattern of distribution or habitation, the Karbi are divided into three groups, viz, Chinthong, Ranghang and Amri. They prefer to call themselves “Karbi” or “Arleng” meaning “men” in the Karbi language (Lyall, 1997)

2.2 The myth related to the term ‘*Mikir*’:

In earlier times, the Karbis were popularly known as *Mikirs*. However, different literature shows that the term *Mikir* given by the non-Karbhis, whereas the Karbis themselves liked to be called as the Karbis. There are different stories about the origin of the term *Mikir*. These stories were popularly accepted by the community and by others also. In the peak of Karbi nationalism, an alternative discourse was created by the Karbi elites regarding the origin of the term *Mikir*. There is a popular discourse circulated in the society is that when the Karbis entered Assam they had a domestic cat with them. Unfortunately the cat was lost. When they were searching for the cat they had to deal with another group who demanded their identity. The question was meaningless for the Karbis; and they misunderstood it as a question on what they were searching for. Therefore, they answered with the word *mengkiri* (cat). The other group thought *mengkiri* was the name of their group (i.e. the Karbis). This *mengkiri* later became *Mikir*. There is an another narrative, that a Karbi King named *Thireng Wareng* set up his capital at Dimapur who had a daughter named *Mekri*. She was married to a Naga

prince. The Nagas could not pronounce *Mekri* and pronounced as *Mikir*. Karbis are basically animist, but elements of Hinduism have occupied the religious lives of those living along the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. All the stuff of this common yet complex belief-system prepare a common platform where religion, culture, and philosophy combine together and therefore give birth to a typical worldview of the people covering every aspect of their community life. Their folklores show that long ago they had lived on the banks of the rivers Kalang and Kapili and they even inhabited in the famed Kaziranga National Park. During the rule of the Kachari kings they were driven to the hills. Sections of them entered the Jaintia hills and lived in the Jaintia kingdom. Some of them remained there while some others moved towards North-East. They have their own appealing art, literature and culture which has added to the rich mosaic and fabric of the merged Assamese culture of which every citizen can be proud. The depressing thing, however, is that the tribe has been living almost an blinkered life, more or less cut off from the mainland Assamese society and has suffered from a lack of academic and other interests of the scholars for a long time.

Now they are spread in whole of Assam and they are staying in some pockets of Kamrup district like Chandrapur and Dimoria block. According to the 2011 census, Kamrup district has a population of 1,517,202. Major language spoken natively is Kamrupi with pockets of *Amri*, a Tibeto-Burman language related with Karbi having 1,25,000 speakers (Paul, 2009).

2.3 About Dimoria block of Kamrup district:

Karbi tribes are no more restricted to any particular area or the hilly regions but are scattered over the entire Kamrup district. But the tribe is more concentrated in Chandrapur and Dimoria block of Kamrup district. The demographic pattern of Demoria block is a heterogenous one with tribals and non-tribals. Bodo, Kachari, Khamti, Tiwa, Karbi etc. are living together for centuries and there exist a perceptible degree of mutual love, respect and

inter-religious tolerance amongst them. Along with tribals the non-tribals as Hindu, Islam, Christian and Buddhism are staying together for many years in harmony in the district. The geographical area of Demoria Development Block is 261. 64 sq. of which an area of 16.58 sq.km, is under permanent. The total population of Demoria Development Block is 1,24,043 of which 63,832 are male and 60,211 are female. The number of people under scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes are 17,101 and 15,775. The total number of literacy rate 69,322 of which 40,186 are male and 29,136 are female. The Block consists of 12 Gaon Panchayats with total number of 144 villages. The block lies partly in the northern margin of the Meghalaya plateau, bordered by the river Umpri along its southern boundary, and partly on the plains created by the rivers Digaru, Kalong and their tributaries. The place is also a place of tourist attraction (Goswami, 2016.)

2.4 History of Dimoria:

The historical name of today's Dimoria was Dimoruwa. There are few information and data available in Assam history about the dimoruwa king and the state from which the curious minds get some idea about this region. The Dimorua kingdom was situated south-eastern part of Kamrup District (in ancient Pragjyotishpur) located at the southern bank of river Brahmaputra. The King Arimatta in the 13th century was supposed to be first King of the Kingdom and Rani Ikon Kowari was the last Queen of the royal dynasty, who died on 17th December, 1986. After the death of Ikon Kowari Raja Halisingh Ronghang became the king of Dimoria. Although the Assam history is silent regarding to ancient Dimorua Kingdom, many monarchial garments, fighting weapons, religious and cultural things, some old 'Sanchiapatia Puthi' are still preserved in the royal mini museum in the house of Dimorua Raja indicate the existence of the Kingdom. According to 'Raj Bongswali', there were 19 kings who ruled the Dimorua. The names of the king were Arimatta, Mriganka, Diang, Dimorua, Sona, Rup Singh, Makardhaj, Bathu, Yang Panggeteswar, Prabhakar, Mangal Singh, Jagat Singh, Repong Raja, Bairagi, Dhume Khunda, Hari Singh, Man Singh, Ballabh Sing and Sher Singh (P.C.Choudhury, 1998 in *Dimoriya Rojar Gorima*.pp-23-27). The boundary of the kingdom was mentioned in the memorial stone of Rani Ikon Kowari. As mentioned in the memorial stone - the northern part was surrounded by the river Kalong, southern part by Khasi and Jayantia hills, eastern side bounded by Gobha kingdom of present Morigaon district and western side was bounded by the Rajakhat Tetelia

Sir Edward Gait in his History of Assam (1926) mentioned about Dimorua, Pantheswar, the Raja of Dimorua, was a victim of Naranarayana's invincible general, but others say that he was formerly a care taker of the Kacharis, who sought and obtained Naranarayana's protection from their oppression, and was established by him as warden of the marchers in

the direction of Jaintia. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Jaintia King Dhan Manik seized Prabhakar the chief of Dimorua, whose family owed allegiance to the Kacharis. Prabhakar appealed to the king, demanded his release.

Presently Dimorua is popularly known as Dimoria. The name Dimorua turn into Dimoria, but nobody knows how and when the name of the kingdom was changed. In regard to Dimorua, there was a legend, which has been accepted by the local people. In ancient time, at Thimfloo there were four brothers- Gobha, Dimorua, Khairam and Millim. Once, Dimorua and Gobha went abroad for searching new place for habitation one on an elephant and other on a horse. They have lost their ways in deep forests. Dimorua at last reached the Khasi kingdom and its capital Nongkre and subsequently he felt very tired and hungry. To get relief from the hunger, he took the fruits of tree called Dimoro. In next day he reached the Ghagra Dong at the Silsung. The inhabitants of nearby villages - Khomer, Talani (Talni) etc. introduced them with Dimorua and asked him to be the King of their territory. The name of Dimorua is supposed to be come from the tree Dimoro, because the king took its fruits in that critical night. So, there is possibility in respect of the term Dimoria which came from Dimoro. Though legend popular among the Karbis of Dimoria the name of Karbi Kingdom Dimorua have originated from the name of the Dimoro (fruits tree). On the other hand there is a possibility of acquiring the name of the Kingdom from the name of the first Karbi King Dimorua. In mediaval period, during the reign of the king Pantheswara, the kingdom of Dimorua was dominated by Koch (a populus caste of Assam) and the Kachari (a plain tribe of Assam) and subsequently by the Khasis and the Ahoms.

The history of the other part incorporated in the study area is different, which falls in present Morigaon district. This region also has its own historical background. In 16th century there were some small kingdoms in present Morigaon district, at least five kingdoms name can be mentioned. Name of the Kingdoms were Gobha, Neli, Khola, Uttar khola and chahari. Earlier

these small kingdoms were popularly known as Tiwa kingdoms. Gobha kingdom is very adjacent to Dimoria kingdom. It was biggest than the other Tiwa kingdom. In 1564 Gobha king Pantheswar was successfully stand against the Bir Chilarai. Earlier, Gobha was dominated by Jayantia kings. In 1656 the Gobha kingdom was administered by Ahom king Jaydhaj Singha till the end of the Ahom rule. Still Gobha king is there and Gobha king and his ministers organized a fair every year during the Magh Bihu time and traditional barter system is still prevailed in the fair among the plain people and hills people. From historical point of view both these two old kingdoms are more significant (Bargohain, 1994) in Assam history as well as Dimoria region. (Patar, 2014-15)

2.5 The plain Karbis: a profile of the community

As it is mentioned that Karbis entered into Assam from central asia in an wave of migration therefore they are racially indo mongoloid and linguistically tibeto- burman. According to G. C Medhi, the early habitat of the Karbi was in the hilly region between the *Nagaon* and *Sibsagor* presently in jorhat district in and around the forest of *Kazironga* it was named after a Karbi lady *Kajir*. Phangchoo also states that relying on Karbi folktales the Karbi were the earliest settler of areas around the rivers *Kalang* and *Kapili* and entire *Kazironga* region. It is found that the tradition of the race point to the eastern portion of the khasi and jayantia hills, bordering on the kopili (or kupli) river (where many still remain) as their original abode (Lyall & Stack, 1908). During the reigns of kachari kings Karbis went to the hills and some section entered to the jayantia hills and remained there. After that a section of Karbis moved towards north east by crossing river borapani, a tributary of kopili river. There they established their capital called socheng. from the field study what are the information collected and the available data pertaining to the hill Karbis, leads to believe that both the

tribe at some point of time lived together as one tribe and in course of time a section of them had to move down to the plains for some reasons and started their settled life in plains.

There is another noticeable factor that as those living in plains still cultivate crops or vegetables in the nearby hills by slash and burn method (*jhum*), which perhaps they learnt while living in hills. There is consequently scope to believe that the tribe under study is of the same stock although with the course of time large scale changes have taken place in their social, political and economic organisation and this study is made to assess these changes.

2.5.1 Physical features: The physical features of the Karbi resemble any other mongoloid population of Assam. The skin texture of the Karbi is light yellowish brown and the females tend to be relatively fair. The average height of Karbi to be 5.35 m. The nose is broad at the base, and often flat. The front of the head is sometimes, but not generally shorn. A man has practically no beard and the moustache is thin. A Karbi men have muscular body is capable of long-standing physical exertion. Both Karbi man and woman are capable of carrying heavy loads and endowed with significant stamina. In frontier expedition in Assam they have frequently served (like the khasis) as porters, and carry heavy loads, the burden being borne upon back and secured by plaited bamboo or cane strap passing round the forehead (*Mikir, sinam*) (Lyall & Stack, 1908)

2.5.2 Social life of the Karbis: the cultural life of the Karbis today come into view from the influence of the assimilation, where various elements of the Assamese culture both tribal and non tribals, the Nagas and the Khasis are quite noticeable. The plain Karbis socio cultural life is influenced by the Assamese Hindu society in their religion, festivals, songs and the ways of life. Like the non Karbis as equivalents of Hindu Assamese plain Karbis worship *Shiva* as *Deo Hal* puja. They also worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses like *Vishnu, Lakshmi and Parvati*.

The 'pi lakhimi' puja of Karbi shows much resemblance with the festival '*lakhimi adora*' of Assamese hindu society. This festival is observed for the prosperity of their agriculture and *Jhum* cultivation. They also believed the festival is solely responsible for the protection of their crops from the damage of natural calamities. It's also interesting to note that the marriage system of plains Karbis nowadays highly influenced the Assamese hindu society. They have adopted some of Assamese rituals in their marriage system. It is noticeable that the influences of the khasi elements are also seen in the Karbi community. Mainly the death rituals performed by the Karbi society. Offerings of various things to their Gods, erection of a stone in the name of deceased soul, a megalithic practice which are performed in their death rituals are also included in Karbi society as the khasi culture. Again if we see linguistic pattern the Karbis of hills maintains its linguistic specialities besides the close relation with the few neighbouring tibbeto burman spoken tribes of its adjoining areas.

The social life of the Karbis living in plains is simple and based on honesty and devotion to social norms. Like the Karbis of the hills, Karbis of the plains also follow the patriarchal norms in their society. Marriage within the clan is prohibited and property is transmitted through the father's line. Mothers' movable items are shared between the daughters.

The Karbis are divided into five major clans called 'Kur', namely Terang, Timung, Enghee, Ingti and Teron. Each of these clans is divided into a number of sub-clans (Bordoloi, Thakur, & Saikia, 1987). These clans are exogamous and marriage within the clan is prohibited. Monogamy is the general rule and widow remarriage though rare is permissible. Cross-cousin marriage is the preferred type of marriage (Bordoloi, Thakur, & Saikia, 1987). After marriage the wife continues to use the surname of her father while her children take the surname of the father.

2.5.3 Village Structure:

The Karbis live in villages, which are generally situated either on foothills or on hilltops. However, now days the Karbis living in the plain regions have settled in villages alike the surrounding Assamese population. The Mikir house, as noted by Lyall & Stack (1908), is built on posts, and the floor is raised several feet above the ground. The material of the construction is bamboo, silt and latched out, and the entire roof is thatched with san-grass. A moderate height, with a flat top, is preferred for building; if no better site can be found a slope will be taken. Each revenue village has a headman who is called *Gaonburah* who is appointed by the District Council authority and each revenue village has a number of rural communities situated kilometres apart and these are also headed by *Gaonhurahs*. Moreover, the aspiration to become village headman which is a most prestigious post when there is a number of aspirants lead to shifting of villages and the fulfilling the despite of becoming *Gaonburah* on the part of the competitors. The villages are not only smaller in size but also scattered and people do not generally live in compacted areas. In the plain areas which the Karbis practice wet cultivation and where the village headman is quite strong. The villages are found to be stationary. However, in interior areas where shifting cultivation is practiced, shifting of village sites are still in the practice. The Karbis have the belief that if diseases and epidemic haunt the villagers then they shift their village to a new site to get rid of the ghost or the evil spirit causing the disease, Such a practice are still in practice.

Generally four other sites are common to all the villages used as traditional public places:

- i) *Than*, - a sacred area where the village gods are believed to reside,
- ii) *Khel* – the open space around the *Than* which is usually chosen as the centre of the village. In this open space, the “*Khel*” meet and other important events take place.

iii) *Silputa*- the third important area is the *Sil Puta* area where the memorial stone monuments are erected and slabs are setup to remember the dead. In this place it is believed that the souls of the dead persons take rest.

iv) The residence of the *Burha Bangthai*- the head of the traditional village council.

Burha Bangthai, is the head of the traditional village council. His resident, the courtyard and the drawing room (*Borghor*) which is the sacred room used for rituals and religious purposes, form spaces for community gathering, performance of community rituals and festivals and a place for the keeping of community's sacred objects.

One of the important room that is attached with the kitchen called the *Borghor* (or the big house to mean that significant importance is attached to it although the room may not be a big one). Karbis of plains put up a post made of *Xunaru* tree (*Cassia fistula*), in this room they performs some specified ritual on a specified day. It is called the *Nungpe-aarhi* (*Mudha Khuta*). This has become a sacred symbol the Karbis of Plains like the *Jambili Aathon* of the hill Karbis. Each and every Karbi family must have *Borghor* and should put up a *Nungpe-aarhi*. If any sons of a family set-up new separate house and willing to set up a *Borghor*, the matter is to be put up in the village *Mel* for approval. If the request is accepted by the *Mel*, only then the *Mudha Khuta* and *Borghar* are built, otherwise they are to use their parental *Borghor*

2.5.4 Language:

The language spoken by the Karbis belongs to the great family of Indo- Chinese speech called tibeto Burman. The Karbi language is a member of the Naga-Bodo sub-group, in which it is classed together with Empeo or Kachcha Naga, Kabui, and Khoirao, also specified that it is an intermediate stage between the Naga languages and the various dialects belonging to Bodo group (Grierson, 1903). Affinities of the Karbi language to the major Tibeto-Burman

languages as the Bodo (or Bodo including Dimasa and Garo), Kuki-chin (including Meitei, Thadou, Lushai) Naga (including Tangkul, Angami, Rengma, Lotha etc (Lyall & Stack, 1908). They believe that there are greater linguistic affinities between the Karbis and the Kuki-chin than between the Karbi and Bodo. The Karbis language between the Naga and the Kuki-Chin sub groups. Some affinities of the Karbi have also been observed with the Mon-Khmer family (Austrie) in respect of language. Khasi and Jaintias are the present Mon-Khmer speakers, and there lie correspondence between the Khasi and Jaintias. But there is somewhat difference between the language of both the hills and plains Karbi. During the field study it is found that the accent of the Karbi language of plains is a bit discourteous then the karbis resides in the hill specifically Karbianglong.

2.5.5 Environment:

The Karbi houses are located in plain and semi hilly land in both the blocks i.e. Dimoria and Chandrapur of Kamrup district. While going to the villages from the highway, paddy fields were seen on both sides of the roads which make the villages appear green and beautiful. Different trees like jackfruit, drumstick, elephant apple, berries, etc. were seen in the roadside connected to the Karbi villages. In some villages, stream or small rivers are present. The people resides there mentioned that during rainy season, they fetch small and big fishes from the over flooded ponds and rivers. The fishes if collected in plenty are dried to be used in different folk dishes when it is limited in number. The Karbi houses were built having a plinth of about one foot from the ground with bamboo wall plastered with mud and thatch roof. The floor is plastered with mud. All the Karbi houses looked very neat and clean due to mud plastering. *Pucca* houses were also seen. In some houses instead of thatch roof, tin roofing was used. All households had bamboo fencing and a gate. The gate was wide with bamboo posts inserted (*nongola*). In some households depending on the size of land holding,

the kitchen was separate from the main house. A kitchen garden is seen in every household where indigenous crops were planted. In the backside of the house, washing area is present where banana plant, lemon, areca nut and betel leaves are planted to give privacy to the back of the houses.

2.5.6 Family structure:

Plains Karbi clans, as discussed above are although kinship categories, they do not form any compact residential units. The household units, among the plain Karbis, are the families and they are also the smallest residential units in their social system. Patriarchal social system is dominant among the plains Karbis. Male member is the head of the family and he gives the final decision on every matter. The common family norm for them is a nuclear family consisting of father, mother and unmarried children, having a common hearth. In the study area however, various types of joint family system is observed, though few and such families remained more or less stable till they were pursuing agriculture as their main occupation. Shortage of agricultural labour and homestead land happen to be the main reason for raising separate residential units and thus for this deviation.

The father is considered the head of the unit like in any other patriarchal society. Traditionally, the females take charge of the domestic chores and are entrusted with the family treasure. Males leave home and take part in different external activities whereas females are confined within the walls of home.

Like that of the hill Karbis, the plain Karbis also have a number of groups, which they call *Ghar* or *Gharia* or sometimes *Kuras* used by hill Karbis. They have classified themselves largely into five groups - these are *Terang* (or *Terang gharia* or *Terang faid*) *Teron* (or *Teron Gharia*), *Ingti*, *Inghi*, and *Timung*. Each of these five clans has many sub-clans. While *Inghi* and *Timung* have 30 subclans each, *Terang* and *Teron* have 6 sub-clans each and the

remaining clan *Ingti* has only 4 sub-clans. As they follow the patriarchal system of family structure and the line of descent is marked through the male members only. Thus, every Karbi must belong to the clan of his or her father. The clan members are believed to have descended from their ancestor.

2.5.7 Food habits:

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Karbis. They practice both shifting and settled cultivation. Settled cultivation is generally practiced in the plain areas and shifting cultivation in the hilly areas (Das, 2003). Weaving, basketry, rearing of livestock and fishing are common amongst them. Craft work is exclusively done by Karbi men. Like the other tribes of Assam, the staple food of the Karbis is rice. They also take vegetables grown in their *Jhum* fields, wild roots and tubers and edible leaves collected from the nearby forests along with rice. Rice is taken twice daily in the morning and in the evening. The food of the Karbis, which depends on the available plants, animals and crops of the region, does not differ much from that of the other tribes of northeast India. Fowls, goats, and pig are kept for food, but taken chiefly at sacrifice. The roasted curry made of Eri-silkworm is cherished by the Karbis. Dry fish, pork, chicken etc. are also very much liked by them. Wheat products like- ata, maida, suzi etc. are still not that familiar among the Karbis living in remote areas.

The most favourite drink of the Karbis is rice-beer (*horlang*), which is brewed by every family at home. It is a pre-requisite for the celebration of every festival whether social, or religious. Guests are also entertained with rice-beer. Black tea without sugar and milk is also occasionally liked by the Karbis. Tobacco is smoked and also chewed with betel. Betel nut is largely consumed with lime and betel leaf. However, because of the long association with the Assamese Hindu society certain taboos have crept into their culinary practices and culture. (Phangcho, 2003)

2.5.8 Dress and Ornaments: The Karbi women and girls generally use *Pini-pekok* or a piece of cloth tied around the waist like a *Mckhela* (A piece of cloth worn under the waist by Assamese ladies/ they cover the upper part of their body by a piece of artistic cloth and it is called Jar-ek. This cloth is tied over the right arm to cover the breast part. Every women and girl also use a very highly artistic waistband called Wankok during religious events; young girls use a special Endi scarf called *Dokherso*. In earlier years, Karbi male used to put on a brass made earring Narik, silver bracelet called *Prinsoroi* and heavy silver necklaces called / *ckrooa* and *ek-Ijiji*. But now days no male person of this community is found to have used them. The most beautiful ornaments put on by aged Karbi woman are *Nolhenpi*, a pair of very big earring made of silver The Women and girls use silver bracelets called *Roi* .

2.5.9 Festivals of the Karbi tribe:

Those Karbi people residing in the plains area of Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam and Ri-bhoi districts of Meghalaya identifies themselves as the *Dumrali* or Plains Karbi. Culturally and customarily they have different sets of social behaviour and functions with the social head at Dimoria to their counterpart at Karbi-anlong. *Dumrali* Karbi tribe celebrate festivals namely *Dehal rongker*, *baah puja*, *gorokhiya puja*, *gokhain puja*, *maal gohain puja* etc. These are the festivals with ancestor worship which is followed till today among Karbis of Kamrup district very religiously. *Dehal rongkher puja* is performed once in a year during *Phagun* month i.e. between February and March. The puja is dedicated to god Shiva. This puja is performed by every family among the Karbi people. In this puja, all Karbi people remember their ancestors and make an offering with a bunch of grains, homemade rice beer which is given in a tumbler (bamboo *chunga*) with *tamul paan*.

Karbis of plains also celebrate various festivals some of which are traditional and some are celebrated due to close contact with their neighbouring Assamese communities. All three

Bihus are celebrated by them with their own way. They also celebrate *Na khuwa* with great enthusiasm and various pujas like, *Durga puja*, *Lakshmi*, *Ganesh puja* etc. all in their own way. The plain Karbis celebrated mainly three social festivals (Phangcho M. , 2007)

- 1) Domahi: is celebrated in the months of march-april. This festival is a kind of thanks giving to the traditional God head of Karbi household almighty Hemphu, each member of the village social set-up known as *Mekar*. It might be the origin of the word *Mikir*. During the festival all the ancestor of the village are remembered and worshiped, this practice is known as *Sar-Kacherdung* that means ancestor remember.
- 2) *Mono ke-en* : literaryit means paddy or rice and ke-en means to take. It is generally an event of 2 days, once in five years. All unmarried males and females of the village are to take part in the occasions. In the house of *Riso Bangthe* (an authority concern with the affairs of the youth of the village) their traditional folklore about the origin of rice and route of folklore migration taken by the Karbis from the place of their origin are retold, it is known as *Karbi Kebang* which literary means ‘Karbi coming’. They believed that their ancestor starts moving from the place called *Inglong kelok* . which is unmistakably the Himalayan mountain range. The reason for the Karbi s to move out from ancestral village in very interesting. It is said that they tried to touch the moon and play with it. But when they climbed up to the top of the mountain then they realized their mistake that moon is still afar and unreachable. Since the felt ashamed to return to their ancestral village they decided to move forward towards the east and settled somewhere else near *Kopili River*. (Phangcho M. , 2007)
- 3) *Rong kehum* : it means village curfew. It is generally three days event in five years. Just like name suggested a kind of curfew is imposed in village with roads leading to the village being blocked with thorn and bushes. No outsider is welcome to the village during these three days affair. However they can come and witness the rituals by

taking non traditional route. This festival is celebrated in during the winter season. It is very similar to the hill Karbi's *Ronker* festival. Only male members participated in this festival no women are allowed during the rituals. The fences are broken and lots of hue and cry is created during the rituals as a symbol to chase away evils from the village during the night using long stick. If any person comes out of the house during the rituals then he might be killed assuming to be an evil spirits and no blame is to be confer upon the evil spirit chaser (Phangcho M. , 2007)

2.5.10 Material Culture:

The reflection of creativity is distinctively visible in the various aspects of folk material culture of a community. The objects one makes and uses for these purposes are termed material culture. In short, the term material culture means all objects used for ones survival or for supporting and improving his life. The detailed study of all the aspects of material side of an individual life seems to be of great interest and importance not only from the intrinsic interest for the artefacts themselves, but for the source of new invention and techniques of manipulate the object. It has a close resemblance with the entire social organization and other religious and ceremonial practices. Anthropologists on many occasions have warned that many items of material culture are fast disappearing without leaving a draw behind. More and more traditional artefacts and techniques are outmoded by speeding up technological changes. To study material culture, the study of ecology is very much important as an interrelation between ecology and material culture. Material culture is a product of technology, which comprises of tools and implements, weapons, cookery, drum and ornaments, houses, etc.

The Karbi houses are consist of four rooms one bedroom called *Ingkam* or “*Keahem*”, one guest room that is “*Aatsali*”, a kitchen or *Ingkut* or *Pakahem* and a granary or *Raak* or *Maal*

hem. And also there are cowshed or *Charangathali* and poultry house or *Waaral* or *Phakahem* is also seen at the back of the house. The main house where the head of the family resides is constructed on the east-west side of the courtyard maintaining its length in the eastern direction. This is traditional pattern of a Karbi house.

The plain Karbis use several forms and types of material culture items, like any other community. These material cultural items are also decorated with various designs. Such as:

Polo, which is a kind of Bamboo basket trap, used for fishing purpose. In shallow water this is used. *Jakhoi* is also a Bamboo Fishing implement; this is narrowed down at both ends having its entrance at the middle.

Duli, it is made of bamboo used as a big squared basket to keep grains of rice. *Harbong* is used for storing rice beer which is dried skin of guard. *Horpong* is a bamboo glass used to serve rice beer to the guest. *Janga* is a bamboo vassel where rice beer is filtered. There are some of the examples of items. There are many scope for researcher to work on the material culture. for an aged karbi person making of these items are the favourite pass time. These items are not make for the commercial use. These are only for household purpose. If there is a demand then they make it in large number.

2.5.11 Religious beliefs: From the religious point of view the plain Karbis considered as animists. Raw form of Hinduism can be found in their Karbis worshipping of various Gods, Goddesses and deities. They believe in the reincarnation of soul life hereafter as the soul is immortal. To satisfy the deities, the plains Karbis observe many religious rituals throughout the year when the sacrifice of pigs and fowls and use of rice bear are essential. A major part of the plains Karbis already assimilated with the Assamese hindu culture neighbouring Hindu culture and have begun to take part in all religious festivals like *Durga Puja*, *Lakhi Puja*, etc. but one can denied the fact that the basis of their religious philosophy based on the

animism. They believed in witchcraft and magic also. Now many of the tribes of Assam are the followers of saivism and shaktism. The spirituality of life spread through every aspect of daily living. Rituals are very often performed for even the most ordinary tasks like cleaning the filthy surroundings. The signals of good or evil are constantly watched for, especially before a good event or the start of important enterprises. They also practice blood sacrifices - usually of hen, or pig, but more common are bloodless offerings like the betel quid, or common gourd with prayers, entreaty, praises, etc. The plains Karbis have "temples" known as the *than*. The structure of the temple in most cases, are found to be small and temporary, but with enough open spaces for great feasts concerning the whole village. The megalithic tradition is still in practice among the plains Karbis. In their festivals, festivity rites included the offerings to the almighty God and dance performance in the fields; the rituals are for good health, in which the community go for a sacred bath in the river where they would often sprinkle themselves with bundles of sacred herbs dipped in the river this is how they performed *Porachit* or in Karbi language it is called *birkilut*. This feature of Karbi society has been carried on since long past from generation to generation and the possibilities for such festivals are endless.

The practice of seeking knowledge of the future by supernatural means is still very common in the Karbi society. By breaking eggs, observing liver of sacrificed pigs, hens etc. the male priests conduct divination process.

2.5.12 Marriage:

Monogamy is the rule among the Karbis and polygamy is permissible but rare. Marriage within one's clan is not permissible and they strictly follow the rules arranged by their traditional customs, cross cousin marriage is generally preferred Marriage by negotiation and marriage by selection of life partners are prevalent among the Karbis. Arranged marriage are

of two types that is *bor biya* or *dangor biya*, *siyachoron biya* and *maak bapeke nedekha biya* (secret confidential marriage in the presence of parents and close relative). In case of marriage by negotiation the consent of the girl is a must since a Karbi girl cannot be forcibly married to a boy of her disliking. Marriage by elopement is also present among the Karbis. If a boy elopes a girl it is the boy and their parents who commit *dukh*. It is not negotiated by the parents of both families of boy and the girl. It is actually initiated by the boy, their parents with the cooperation of the some of kins or the relatives of the girl. After the negotiation in Karbi practice, the boy's *khel* elders send messengers to the girl's *khel* and on a scheduled date invite them to the boy's house. The girl's side then arrives to the boy's place and immediately do not disclose the reason of their arrival formally. At first they would find out whether some cows or birds from their village have strayed into theirs (boy's village). After such discussion, the matter comes up and then they seek the opinion of the girl that what she wants. If she expresses her wish to stay back the deal is accepted and *dondo* for having taken their girl is negotiated; a list of items prepared for the boy's side to give to girl's side and then invites the boy's side on a date fix by them. Both boy and girl take blessings (*sewa*) from the elders gathered there, *puja* is offered at *bor ghor* and sometimes the boy puts Vermillion on the girl and may exchange garlands. *Tamul pan* is offered by the bride to the guests. Again in case of elopement of a non-karbi girl and the girl's side do not come even after getting the message, the boy's side does the ritual on their own including only their guests which may take the form of *bor* or *sewa choron biya*. On all occasions, whether arranged or eloped, Karbi or non- Karbi, the marriage should be preceded by *Birkilut* or *Parachilt* (purification) in order to make possible her living as a new member in the boy's house and family.

In case of the age of marriage is from fourteen to twenty-five for the man and ten to fifteen for the girl. Eighteen or nineteen for man and fifteen for woman are the most usual ages.

2.6 Socio economic profile of the Karbi population:

Socioeconomic profile of the population in any study describing the age, the economical background, occupation and income status of the family of the respondents and household characteristics are some of the influential and important variables.

A) Economy

The Karbis have a very simple economic life and they mainly depend on agriculture for livelihood. Paddy is the most important crop and the villagers attach more importance to growing paddy than other crops in the hilly region, they practice shifting cultivation i.e. *Jhum* cultivation where besides paddy other crops and vegetables are also cultivated. In the plains, the Karbis have chosen the alternative way of cultivation like the other neighbouring non-tribal. Most of the Karbi families rear cows, goats and hen specially fowls, which are important for both ritual and religious reasons apart from their economic value. Some families are found to have reared buffaloes also but use of either cow-milk or buffalo milk is not a common practice among the Karbis in the commercial aspect of milking. In every households Handloom is very common among the Karbis. Every woman has a fine knowledge of weaving. The cloths of domestic use are produced in the home itself. In the *Jhums* they cultivate cotton and Spinning of yarn from home grown cotton is a common prospect in the interior areas. Rearing of *Endi* -- a kind of silk worms is also an important small house industry of the Karbis. They produce Endi-scarf also in their family loom. They themselves produce bamboo and cane goods required for the day-to-day use. The Karbis have not been commercially utilised Fishing and hunting as major economic activities for the means of livelihood. From the above points it can be said that the Karbis continuing their economic system with little surplus and the concept of savings is almost nil and majority of

the people are poor without modern facilities of life. So many numbers of social festivals and religious rites and expenses is also one of the major causes of poverty of the Karbis. However, the fast emergence of a middle class among the Karbis is taking up modern means of livelihood including white coloured jobs, petty business and other commercial activities.

b) Occupation

The traditional occupation of the Karbis was jhuming, weaving, livestock but from tradition, some Karbis have shifted to salaried jobs and business. Because of the decreasing of agricultural land people are going out of their native places in search of jobs. In the present study, the respondents' family whose sole source of income from agriculture is very few followed by 42.75 per cent doing either government or private service. More than one-fourth of the family were working as daily wage earner and 13.75 per cent were doing business like grocery shops, tea shops, vegetable sellers, etc. There are also examples of plains Karbi boys and girls having successfully completed their higher and professional education and engaged in various professions although their numbers are very few.

Domestication of animals is their traditional habit. Animal products provide additional incomes to their family. Most of the plain Karbi families rear cow, goats, pigs, dogs, fowls, etc, which are the major domestic animals. Another source of additional income is making rice beer which brings a good income in the town market although till now remained a secret trade mostly ran by women.

c) Political scenario: The political structure of the Karbi society of plains shares the both traditional and modern elements. They are today at least part of three administrative agencies in addition to their traditional administrative set up. These agencies are the local police, local

revenue authority and urban local body. In rural areas, a Government appointed *Gaon burha* is made responsible for coverage of all-important happenings in the village.

Khel is the important part of the Karbi society. The *Khel* organisation plays an important part of day to day social life of plains Karbi. In case of death of a person, person from deceased must arrive and then only the proceedings of death rituals begin. Thus the *khel* system is very strong organisation among the plain karbis, it's like a clan.

2.7 Women status in Karbi community of Demoria block: Karbi community is a patriarchal society, therefore it is obvious that the male members of the family have the right to their paternal property. According to tradition and social custom females don't have right to their paternal property. But there are also many examples of giving land property to their beloved married daughter by their parents. Depriving the female members of their paternal property rights automatically placed women to the lower strata of society in comparison with the men.

From the religious point of view it can be seen that in every religious occasion public or personal the rites and rituals are performed by men. Often it can be seen that there is no major role of female in religious festivals. She can't act as '*Kathar*' (Priest). Only a man can be performed as *kathar*. But there some religious festivals where men don't participate such as *aai puja* or *aai naam gua* there women have to performed all the rituals and plays the major role. Because of the high position of her husband the woman can have the same position in the community. On the other hand, if a high educated woman participates in any holly festival, she may don't get such respect as compared to the wife of the high ranked person of the society. However, Karbi women are much more independent and free as compared to other mainstream Assamese or Indian women. They are not neglected but deprived of some

rights. In daily life and agricultural activities their independence and activities their independence and or role can be considered higher than the men of the community.

Karbis of plain s are mainly based on agriculture. The community mostly give importance to growing paddy. Besides paddy other crops and vegetables are also cultivated in their shifting cultivation (*jhum*). In the times of *jhum* cultivation for cleaning the forest and sowing of crops both men and women take part equally. Besides that they are the good weavers. They weave cloths by their own in home and also sell them to earn money. Besides that the women collected green leaves and vegetables from the forest and to sell them a Karbi woman have to walk at least 6 or 7 kilometre.

So its noticeable that Karbi women earns money by selling things, as a result of which they gains some economic independence.

In the traditional customary law of Karbi society there is no evident of woman taking part in political activities. It is mentionable that generally no woman can be a member of village council. Moreover women are not allowed in any judgmental activities taking place in the village court. From these examples it can be noted that the Karbi women are not treated equally as men in traditional political system and customary law (Bhuyan, 2009).

2.8 Means of communication: Dimoria block and the villages under the block are situated in the sides of National Highway. The communication to the main block is by private car, city bus, mini bus and trekker. The condition of the roads in the highway is good but to reach the interior villages it is very poor. The main means of transportation in the interior villages is walking or by hiring auto.