

A Brief History Of Karbi Community Living In Assam.

By Pranab Kumar Baruah(HOD , Department of Linguistics) Dimoria College Khetri , 2017

Linguistically Karbi is a Tibeto-Burman language. The original home of various people speaking Tibeto-Burman language was in western China, near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and Hwang-ho rivers. And from this place they went down to the course of the Brahmaputra and entered India. (Indranoshee Das, 2005). According to the anthropologist, Karbi belongs to the Mongoloid group. The old name of Karbi is Mikir. Presently, the Karbi community is mainly found in Karbi Anglong and other parts of Assam. The Karbi inhabited areas of Assam are Dimahaso , Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Lakhimpur , Sonitpur and Biswanath.

The Karbi Autonomous district was established on 17th November 1951.

Their total population is 8,13,311 according to the 2011 census. Only 11.30% population live in urban area, while the rest live in 2563 villages in rural area. The medium of education in Hills and Plains are Assamese and English . In Hills, few Christian schools teach Karbi language. Most of the students go to the Assamese or English Medium in the Hills area. The Karbi people of Assam use their Karbi language for communication in their society. As we know, Karbi speech community is a bilingual speech community. They have wide spread bilingualism among them. They use Assamese language as their common medium of conversation in all purposes. As Assamese language is State language of Assam, hence it is the dominant language of entire State.

As Karbi is a minority language, they use Assamese language very frequently in their society. Assamese language enjoys a higher status than Karbi language in their society. Karbi people treat Assamese language as a high(h) language and Karbi as a low(l) language. As wide spread bilingualism is seen among the Karbi speech community, so we can see Fishman's concept of Bilingualism with Diglossia prevailed here.

This is a purely sociolinguistics study of Karbi Speech community of Assam. The main aim of this study is to find out the linguistic phenomenon of Bilingualism and Diglossic situation among the Karbi Speech community. This is a purely virgin area as far as Karbi speech community is concerned.

Origin of Karbi people and Geographical spread of Karbi and their Religion.

Linguistically Karbi is a Tibeto-Burman language. The original home of various people speaking Tibeto-Burman Languages was in western China, Near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and Hwang-ho rivers. And from this place, they went down to the course of the Brahmaputra and entered India (Indranoshee Das, 2005).

Bishnu Prashad Rabha called Karbi the "Columbus of Assam", they are one of the earliest groups of people who settled on the bank of the river Brahmaputra.

Karbi did not have a script and no written History about their origin, spread and settlement is found. After 1228 A.D. in some Ahom Burangi, we can see some information about the Karbi community but Karbi community has a very rich folk literature. According to the Folk literature of Karbi People, they were living in the bank of the River Kolong and the Kapili, some areas of Kaziranga. There, they had a conflict with Dimasas Kachari, and King chased them out from that place. Then they moved towards the hill and Jaintia Kingdom.

After some time, some of them remained in the Jaintia Hills and few of them moved towards the North-East, Ahom Kingdom and Few of them moved towards lower Assam. Some of them crossed the Brahmaputra and settled in the North Bank.

Presently, the Karbi community is mainly found in Karbi Anglong and other parts of Assam. The Karbi inhabited areas of Assam are Dimahaso , Kamrup, Morigaon ,Nagaon,Golaghat, Lakhimpur , Sonitpur and Biswanath.

The Karbi Autonomous district was established on 17th November 1951.

Their total population is 8,13,311 according to the 2011 census. Only 11.30% population live in urban area, while the rest live in 2563 villages in rural area.

Karbi people basically believed in their indigenous religion. Anthropologists believed that they are animist. Among them 70% of Karbi people believed in their indigenous religion, 14.64% believed in Hinduism. 15% believed in Christianity and 0.36 believed in other religion.

Racial and Linguistic Classification of Karbi

According to the anthropologist, Karbi belongs to the Mongoloid group. The old name of Karbi is Mikir and it is a Tibeto-Burman language. Karbi was included in the Linguistic Survey of India (LSI) by Grierson and Konow in the early 20th century (Grierson,1993). Before Grierson, few works of the Karbi language has been documented by Sir Charls Lyallin1908.

Griersonsaid that the Karbi Language has affinity with Bodo, but if we look into deep, it appears that it is having a very close relation with kuki, so he put Karbi Language into Naga Kuki group.

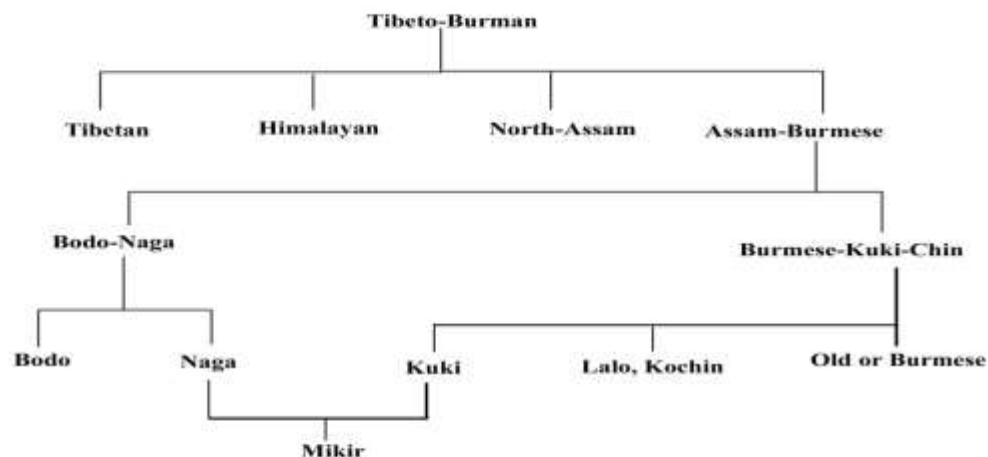


Fig:- 1. Language Family Prepared by George A. Grierson.

In Endangerment list published by UNESCO, Karbi is one of the Endangered languages and its ISO code is 639-3code 'mjw' for Hills karbi and 'ajz' for Plains karbi.

The Karbi Dialects

The Karbi language has two dialects, one is Plains Karbi and the other is Hills Karbi.

Plains Karbis are found in the plains districts of Assam, mainly in Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon and Biswanath. The dialect they use is known as Amri or Dumrali. The Plains Karbi believed that the language they are using (Amri or Dumrali) is very different from the other one. The Plains Karbi is highly influenced by the Assamese language. There are lots of loan words from Assamese as well as from the other Indo-Aryan languages.

Karbi Language is used in Karbi Autonomous district referred as Hills Karbi. Hills Karbi Language is treated as the Standard One. These Plains and Hills Karbi terminology is used by M.Teron and Tumung (2007).

There is very little dialectical variation found among these two dialects. This is a remark by Lind Konnarth (2014) in her PhD thesis.

There is a strong political movement among the Plains Karbi of Assam. The Plains Karbis want to say that they have different language and it is not a Dialect of the Hills Karbi. The Plains Karbi speaking people are found in many places of Assam. According to some researchers, there are around 125000 people who use Plains Karbi language (Lewis, Simons and Fenning 2013).

It is very difficult to say on what basis these researchers put this figure. According to 2011 census data, there are 813311 people are using Karbi language. There was no specific distinction between Plain and Hills Karbi in the 2011 census.

Karbi Festivals

As we know that Karbi language doesn't have script and written literature but Karbi people are very rich in their oral literature. They orally transmitted traditional literature to their next generation. It is a unique feature of Karbi Community. I have come across a number of Folk stories, songs (Ballads that tells some stories about their origin, enemy, love story etc.) and Chants (religious). In some story, Karbi People try to say that they had a written system or script but it was eaten by a deer. Therefore, they lost the script. Now a day, they are using Roman and Assamese scripts for writing.

Karbi celebrates lots of festivals such as Hacha-Kekan, Chojun, Rongker, Dumahi, Peng, Karkli, Thoiasor, Ritaasor, Botor, Kekur. These festivals are held around the year and some of them at a specific time of the year.

Karbi Speech Community

According to Leonard Bloomfield, 'A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech' (Language P.42). According to Hudson, Speech community: where all the people use a given language or dialect. (Sociolinguistic, P.24).

From the statements above, we can draw a definition about speech community, a speech community is where a group of people use a language for the purpose of communication in their society. The Karbi people of Assam use their language for communication in their society. As we know, Karbi speech community is a bilingual community. They have wide spread bilingualism among them. They use Assamese language as their common medium of conversation in all purposes.

Bibliography

- Abbi, Anvita. 2001. "A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Indian Language Structures" (LINCOP Handbooks in Linguistics 17). Munich: LINCOP EUROPA.
- Austin, Peter K. 2006. "Data and Language Documentation." In *Essentials of Language Documentation*, edited by Jost Gippert, Nikolaus P. Himmelmann, and Ulrike Mosel, 87–112. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Balawan, Fr. Michael. 1978. *A Mikir-English Dictionary with Some Tit-Bits of Mikir Grammar*. Shillong: Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Press.
- Bauman, James. 1976. "An Issue in the Subgrouping of the Tibeto-Burman Languages: Lepcha and Mikir". Paper presented at the 9th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, October 22-24, Copenhagen.
- Benedict, Paul K. 1972. *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloomfield, L. 1933. "Language", Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Burling, Robbins. 1983. "The Sal Languages." *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 7 (2): 1–32.
 ———. 2003. "The Tibeto-Burman Languages of Northeastern India." In *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*, edited by Graham Thurgood and Randy J. LaPolla, 169–91. London: Routledge.
- Census of India. 2001. "Census of India - Statement 1." http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001/Census_Data_Online/Language/Statement1.htm
- Das, Indranoshee. 2005. *Ethnomedicine among the Karbis of Assam with particular reference to Disease and Treatment of Women*. Gauhati University.
- Dutta Baruah, P.N. (ed.). 1998, "Languages of the North East", Guwahati.
- Ferguson, C.A. 1959. "Diglossia" in *Word*, vol. 15
- Fishman, Joshua A. 1967. "Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism" in *Journal of Social Issues*.
- Grierson, George Abraham. 1903. *Linguistic Survey of India*. Vol. 3, parts 1–3, Tibeto-Burman family. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, India. <http://www.joao-roiz.jp/LSI/search>.

- Grüßner, Karl-Heinz. 1978. *Arleng Alam, Die Sprache Der Mikir: Grammatik Und Texte*. Beiträge Zur Südasienforschung 39. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag.
- . “Karbi Dictionary”. Tübingen.
- Goswami, U.N. 2000. “Asamiya Bhasar UdbhabS amriddhi Aru Bikash”, Guwahati
- Goswami, S.N. 1998. “Studies in Sino-Tibetan Languages”, Guwahati .
- Hakachan, U.R. 2000. Asamiya Aru Asamar Tibbat Barmiya Bhasa, Guwahati.
- Konnerth, Linda Anna. 2014 “A Grammar of Karbi”, University of Oregon.
- Maral, Dipankar. 1991 Upabhasa Bijnan Guwahati
- Padun, N(ed.) 1993 Bhasar Tatva-Katha Sibsagar
- Walker, George David. 1925. *A Dictionary of the Mikir Language*. Shillong: Assam Government Press.

