

# THE ETHNIC IDENTITY OF KARBI: CHALLENGE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

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## **Abstract**

North-East India is home to many ethnic communities and tribes, they speak different languages, each having their culture, folklore and traditions and proud of their traditional practice. Among them, there is conflict between each other which brings a big challenge for their ethnic identity. Ethnic violence in Assam took place in a very serious problem for the development and also affect the ethnic identity. The Karbi ethnic group is fighting against the government for protecting their land and ethnic identity. The Karbi ethnic group is different from many other tribes in Assam. The Karbi belief system, custom, tradition, religion differs from other ethnic groups. The conflicts often occur in their region due to the feeling of minorities in their land, feeling insecurity, culture, and ethnic identity.

**Keywords:** Karbi Anglong, Ethnic Violence, Karbi, Ethnic identity.

## **I. Introduction**

The present paper is to study the reason for the ethnic conflict. This paper presents the major ethnic group of Assam the tribe. The Karbis are the oldest ethnic group of Assam but it becomes a big challenge of their identity among them are the acceptance of other languages, due to the process of modernity, Political reason, a border dispute with neighbour State or district, and exploitation are the main reason for the challenges of ethnic identity. There are many research scholars and thinkers written about the Karbi ethnic group and this paper will discuss the conflict between tribal and non-tribal, inter-ethnic conflict of the present.

## **II. The objective of the Study**

The objective of the present study is to discuss the problem behind the conflicts between ethnic groups and what deals with the tribal people by Nontribal. This study is to try to bring out the major area of conflict between Inter-tribe and the influence of tribal identity.

## **III. Methods of Study**

Information was collected following both unstructured and structured interview methods, and personal observation. Ethnic conflicts of Karbi Anglong District the information were collected from various articles, available source of literature, and the help of internet.

## **IV. Conclusion**

Study on the reason behind ethnic conflicts in Assam. The conflicts between tribal and nontribal, Inter-tribal conflicts become a big challenge for the government. It is also the challenge of promoting and protecting ethnic identity.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framework

Assam is the homeland set up with various ethnic cultures. Assam is located geographically in the middle of Northeast India. The people of Assam inhabited multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-culture, and multi-religious societies. The major language to Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, and Tai Kadai. Each ethnic group is rich in culture and its languages, customs, religion, and traditions. The major ethnic groups of Assam are Karbi, Dimasa, Chutia, Sonowal, Tiva, Garo, Hajong, Kachari, Deori, Thengal Kachari, and Koch, in history ironically they are the dominant group of Assam. Later in 1228 AD, Tai Ahom came to Assam the Ahom famous king Sukapha started to establish a relationship with other tribes of Assam. Successfully Tai Ahom rises as dominant of Assam the ethnic group along with Bodo Kachari, Chutias, Borahis, Morans, and Motoks, associated with the terms of the Assamese. All indigenous or ethnics were to accept as the Assamese so now evolve the great Assamese ethnic of Northeast India.

Karbi Anglong is one district of thirty-three districts of Assam. The karbis mentioned as in the constitutional order of the government of India, are one of the major ethnic groups of northeast India especially in the hill area of Assam. They constitute the third largest ethnic community in Assam after Bodos and Mishing (Table No.01). The karbis are unique cultures from the other ethnic group of the region. The karbis are peace-loving tribes they don't want any conflict that means they don't want to create any enemies. Still, there are no infrastructure and transport systems in the remote area of the villages. They are far from the government's privileges due to corrupted political leaders. The Karbi people by nature simple living they are based on cultivation which is known as 'Jhum Kheti' everything is dependent upon nature. The new generation of karbis people is aggressive due to economic exploitation and natural resources by Political leaders involving with the Non-tribal. The karbis always wanted to protect their homeland and ethnic identity.

**Table 01**

<b>Scheduled Tribes Population of Assam (Census, 2011)</b>	
<b>Name of the Scheduled Tribe</b>	<b>Total Population</b>
Bodo	13,61,735
Miri	6,80,424
Karbi	4,30,452
Rabha	2,96,189
Kachari Sonowal	2,53,344
Lalung	1,82,663
Dimasa	19,702
Deori	43,750
Others	6,16,112
All Scheduled Tribes	38,84,371
Population of Assam	31,20,55,76

Source: Statistics Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India (2013) Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Statistics Division, Government of India

### 1.1.1 Unique Identity of Karbi ethnic Group

The Karbi tribes are the one oldest tribe in Assam. The great artist-Scholar Bishnu Prasad Rabha refers to them as the Columbus of Assam. The Karbi tradition is unique from the other cultures in Assam. The Karbis belief system is formulated dignified honoring of the 'Kurusar', worship of household deities, territorial deities, and rituals for the death. Karbi's belief system of religion still practices Animism with their culture and traditional influences practitioners of traditional Animism believe in reincarnation and honor their

ancestors. Animism is not Hinduism nowadays many people follow Hinduism and confusion about their religion there are also Karbi Christians.

The karbis mainly speak their native language, some other plain Karbi use Assamese as mother tongue. There are also minute variations in the native Karbi language that can be observed in different geographical regions inhabited by the karbis.

The Karbi tribes are rich in cultural heritage, folklore, and traditions. The clan's system is a very important role in Karbi society. Everyone has to follow the rules of clans who break the rules he/she should be punished and boycott from society. The major clans of Karbi are Lijang, Hanjang, Ejang, Kronjang, and Tungjang. The same clan's marriage is restricted in Karbi society. Now become the ethnic crises among the Karbi ethnic group due to some political issues, the role of the leaders, ethnic conflicts.

### 1.1.2 Area of Conflicts

Assam is a land of lots of cultures of ethnic groups. Every culture has its unique identity. The notable conflicts between Assamese and Bengali speaking, tribal and nontribal although the ethnic conflicts in Assam are associated with an inter phenomenon for the main reasons for conflicts such as sub-nationalistic and the-nationalistic. Such concept the tribal people are inspired by autonomous state even separate states within Assam territory. Sometimes in news the Karbis, the Bodos movement become a big challenge for the government of Assam.

### 1.1.3 Non-tribal Attitude towards Tribal

Sometimes Non-tribal attitude towards tribal which leads to the feeling of aggressiveness toward Nontribal by tribal people. Misbehaved towards each other is still prevalent in societies in terms of tribal and nontribal. The background behind Non-tribal and tribal conflicts is some kind of economic exploitation, natural resources by non-tribal. Sometimes non-tribal People treat tribal people as uncivilized, poor, illiterate, and so on. Misused of the word 'Mikir' to the Karbi people by nontribal. The meaning of the 'Mikir' is closely related to the 'Amekar' of Karbi language (Ahmekar means a definite population of territories) from the other side Karbi tribes also mention non-tribal as 'cache as' that means a place which is full of dirty, undisciplined. Such kinds of thought are still prevalent in rural remote areas of the villages. Sometimes they forget to forget about involving the large Assamese ethnic groups they think Assam is separated from the hill area and they feel hesitant to accept the Assamese language. Due to fear about losses about their languages and ethnic identity by tribal. For example, even an accident took place in front of the tribal people in rural areas they ask first about tribal or Nontribal. This kind of humanity human impacts as a human being and also challenges the nation-building process. Such kind of incidents took place in the Karbi Anglong District of Assam.

2018 Karbi Anglong Lynching was a violet incident of mob lynching that took place in 'kangthilangso' Karbi Anglong Assam which is a remote area of Karbi Anglong. A mob of about 270 people attacked two innocents' men Abhi & Nil, under suspicion of child trafficking and beat the two men and incidentally, they died before the people even they introduce himself as Assamese but nobody listens to the sorrowful voice. These incidents took place due to some illiterate among the people and negligence thoughts towards the nontribal by the tribal.

This incident was leading to the big controversialist of ethnic identity. Some of the people mention the Karbi tribe is uncivilized, illiterate, poor, so on the even, they don't want to include with large Assamese ethnic groups in Assam. Such kinds of thoughts Karbi people insecure about the future.

### 1.1.4 Inter-tribes Conflicts

Karbi Anglong is one of the largest districts of Assam. Karbis are the major ethnic group of the territory along with the Karbi Dimasas, Khasi, Nepalis, Garo, Kukis, and Nagas, which are also other ethnic groups present in Karbi Anlong. The constitution of India provides the sixth scheduled administrative system of the hills area. The district executive by Autonomous Council according to the sixth schedule of the constitution of India. The Karbis are rich in culture, and unique identity from other tribes was always protecting their land and ethnic identity. A major reason for conflicts is the insurgency problem between the tribes. There are various insurgents conflicts took place in Karbi Anglong

In 2003 the clashes between militants of Karbi and Kuki tribal groups in Karbi Anglong district including the 'Singhason' hill areas. It is estimated that militants of the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) and anti-talks faction of United People of Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) together killed 85 persons, mostly men, in this period.

### 1.1.5 Dimasa and Karbi Conflicts

Karbi and Dimasa conflicts main reason is the political issues and failure of the government of Assam. In 2005 Karbi and Dimasa conflicts took place in the Dhansiri area of Karbi Anglong due to political purposes. The Karbis and Dimasas as mean and intolerance contentious to isolate the Karbi and Dimasas destroy the ongoing political struggle against oppression and exploitation. Some of the political leaders for their political purpose bring divide and rule policy among the Karbi and Dimasa tribes which the insurgency groups started the inter-ethnic conflicts. The horrible incidents took place in 'Charchim' which is the west of Karbi Anglong district in 2005. On October 17 near Charchim village in southern Assam of Karbi Anglong district, 22 passengers, all are Karbis, were killed by the Dimasas rebels. They then walked away to raid Charchim and started burning the Karbi villages, burning homes and killing 15 more. Alongside a sprinkling of other ethnic groups like Kukis, Garo, and Bodos.

### 1.1.6 Karbis and Bodos conflicts

In 2020, the Karbis Bodos conflict is more delightful in the present phenomenon. The constitution, under the sixth schedule, contains a special provision for the hills area as mentioned in article 244 of the constitution of India. The Bodos, an ethnic group of Assam, and had been demanding a separate state since 1972 and are now recognized as scheduled tribes, Plain. The Karbi Anglong district has been in existence since 1951 by the sixth schedule under article 244 of the constitution they have the right to protect their culture, language, custom, and tradition. The home ministry, The Assam Government, and Bodos in the hills will be given the scheduled Hill tribe status, and villages dominated by the Bodos outside the BTAD will be included and those with non-Bodos excluded. This agreement was opposed by the Karbi insurgents groups according to their, the Bodos are no right to in the hill areas not be the scheduled tribe status as it will affect the identity of the Karbis. Thus the government of Assam has looked over the situation and has been challenging for the Autonomous Council of Karbi Anglong.

### 1.2.1 Area of Development

Given the history, the tribal is harmony among themselves due to facing the same problems such as economic exploitation, Natural Resources by the Nontribal, and the political leaders. The economic backwardness and improving the living conditions of the population of the hill area are immediate needs to take action by the government. In the development paradigm, many schemes have been passed by the central government. Education is the way to educate people therefore the state government has to improve the infrastructure of schools in rural areas. The social evils can be removed through education. Respect with each other tribe and thoughts of brotherhood among the neighbourhood.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it's come to know that the area of conflicts between tribal and nontribal, inter-tribal conflicts due to some insurgency problems, the role of political leaders, and economic exploitation. The contradiction of political autonomy, the rise of ethnic and religious tensions in response to intensifying competition for economic and political opportunities, control over land, the establishment of the ethnic homeland, insurgents groups or extremist groups fighting on behalf of their community, preservation of one's identity custom and tradition, government policies, protection of territorial boundaries, the feeling of becoming minorities and so on are the causes of ethnic conflicts that have taken place in Assam.

There prevail a sense of fear and insecurity among the Karbis ethnic group regarding their position and also about their future in the political set of Karbi Anglong. Ethnic conflicts rise because these are grits to the political mill of electoral campaigns. Political leaders appeal to pride, historic achievements, and current injustices real and imagined to win elections, to deny the same to opponents, and gain office. Therefore the identity crisis is increase day by day.

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