

## National Commission for Scheduled Tribes

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File No. Policy – 4/2013/Inclusion/RU-II

### Visit Report of Commission to Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam from 4.2.2015 to 6.2.2015 for examination of the proposal of the State Govt. for inclusion of KARBI (MIKIR) community in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam State.

A team of the Commission led by Dr. Rameshwar Oraon, Hon'ble Chairperson, NCST, New Delhi and accompanied by Shri Santosh Kumar, Joint Secretary, Shri Pramod Chand, Deputy Secretary, Shri T.D. Kukreja, P.S. to Hon'ble Chairperson, NCST, New Delhi, Ms. P. Symlich, Assistant Director, NCST, Regional office, Shillong and Shri R.K. Dubey, Assistant Director, NCST, Regional office, Bhopal visited Assam State from 04-02-2015 to 06-02-2015 to ascertain the ground position in the process of examination of the proposal of the State Government to include the KARBI (MIKIR) community at Sl. No. 11 in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of the State which was resubmitted by the Govt. of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs to the Commission along with the comments of the office of the Registrar General of India vide No. 12016/3/2000-TA(RL)-C&LM(pt1) Dated 28-02-2013 for comments of the Commission.

As per the approved modalities, wide publicity was given to the public through print and electronic media about the visit of the team of the Commission. The team met several delegations of various communities claiming scheduled tribe status and visited many villages / habitations of the Karbi (Mikir) community residing in Kamrup and Morigaon districts and gathered information related to the cultural aspects, rituals, traits, method of worship, marriages, language, occupation, social structure, totem, clans and sub-clans, methods of agriculture, agricultural equipments, utensils, present status of socio-economic development, representation in Government services, elected bodies etc. The team held detailed discussion through public hearings with the social leaders of the Karbi (Mikir) community, other tribal groups and other interested persons. As per para (c) of the modalities for deciding claims for inclusion in, exclusion from and other modifications in the orders specifying Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list approved by The Cabinet Committee on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities in its meeting held on 15-06-1999 and 25-06-2002, experts in the field of anthropology were also associated. Director, Joint Director and Research Officers of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Retired Director of the Institute, Superintending Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata and other eminent Scholars and experts were also consulted

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by the Commission on the subject. Copies of published articles on anthropological and ethnological studies related to these communities were also collected. The details of meetings, discussions, observations and findings of the Commission's team on the subject are, as under:

**Meeting with representatives of various Social organisations and Communities:**

On 04-02-2015, the Commission's team held two meetings with office bearers and representatives of following social organizations and communities:

1. **Meeting with office bearers and representatives of Assam Plains Karbi Adarbar, Karbi Arloso Ashem, Karbi Student's Union, Karbi Lammet Amei and Karbi National Convention.**

In the meeting, Shri Ajit Kathar, General Secretary, Assam Plains Karbi Adarbar welcomed the Commission on behalf of the above organisations and informed that Karbi (Mikir) are the aboriginal tribe of Assam and have been living in both hills and plain areas of Assam since time immemorial. In the year 1951, the United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills (presently Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao) had been declared as a District and on 23-06-1952, both districts got Autonomous District Councils. Since then, the Karbi's living outside the two Autonomous hills Districts are not recognized as scheduled tribe in the plain areas of Assam which was injustice to them. It was also informed that this Community has repeatedly demanded for scheduled tribe status in the plain districts of Assam and Govt. of Assam, WPT & BC department had sent proposal to the Govt. of India many times since 1998 but so far they have not been provided ST status in the plain districts of Assam State.

2. **Meeting with office bearers and representatives of Amri Karbi National Council and Amri Karbi Students Union.**

In the meeting, Mr. Kumud Ronghang, General Secretary, Amri Karbi National Council informed that they are Son of the soil and the land and the King belong to their Community. There is no tribe called Plain Karbi in the state and any Karbi person must either be Amri Karbi or Chinthong Karbi or Ronghang Karbi. He submitted that the proposal for inclusion of Amri Karbi as Scheduled Tribe (Hills) is pending in Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India which should be expedited at an early date.

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**Field visits and observations:**

In the process of examination of the proposal of the State Government to include the KARBI (MIKIR) community at Sl. No. 11 in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam State, the team visited **Hatimura** and **Bamgphor** villages of **Kamrup** district and **Kuthori No. 2** village of **Morigaon** district on 05-02-2015 predominantly inhabited by the Karbi (Mikir) Community to have a firsthand information about the way of living, rituals, customs, houses, social structure, economic activities, political organization, religious life and folk arts of the community and to observe their standing for qualification for Scheduled Tribe status in terms of criteria for specification of community as ST viz. indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness. The team visited the houses of the plain Karbis and interacted with the leaders and individuals of the community on the above aspects. The observations during the field visit of the team and the information provided by the leaders of the community and individuals are as under:

- I. **Habitats and status of Karbi (Mikir) Community-** The list of Scheduled Tribes for the State of Assam notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India has two parts viz. 1) for the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (Presently Dima Hasao District) and 2) for the State of Assam excluding the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (Presently Dima Hasao District). In the first part of the list (which is for Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao) Karbi's have been provided ST status. However, in the second list which is for rest of the State including plains, they have not been conferred ST Status. Though, the main concentration of Karbi population resides in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao autonomous Districts, a sizeable population of the community resides in the plains districts of the State viz. Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon, Sonitpur, Golaghat, Lakhimpur (N) and Cachar Districts where they have not been conferred ST status. On the basis of pattern of distribution or habitat, the Karbi's are divided into four groups viz. (i) Chinthong (ii) Ranghang (iii) Amri and (iv) Dumrali. The first three groups of Karbi's live in the hills and only the Dumrali's live in the valleys and have adopted plough cultivation. Thus, the Dumrali's are Karbi's living in the plains districts of Assam who are demanding ST


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status in the instant case.

- II. **Population-** Census figures of Karbi's living in the plains districts of Assam are not available as they were not separately enumerated as ST. However, as per the survey conducted by Bhoiyam Karbi Adorbar, the estimated population of the Karbi's residing in plains districts is 2,46,938 scattered in 452 villages of above mentioned 7 plain districts of the State. The highest concentration is shown in Kamrup (96,261) followed by Nagaon (61,530), Morigaon (41,449) and Sonitpur (35,700). AIRTSC, Govt. of Assam has supported the above population estimates to be more or less correct.
- III. **Physical features-** The Karbi's living in the plains belong to the Indo-Mongoloid stock of population and their physical features are like that of other plains tribes of the region. No significant variation is seen in the somatometric measurements between Karbi's of Hills and Karbi's of the plains.
- IV. **Language-** The Karbi's including the plain Karbi's speak a language akin to Kuki- Chin group belonging to the great Tebeto- Burman Linguistic family. They speak their own dialect but while communicating to other people, they speak Assamese.
- V. **Religion-** The Karbi's residing in plain protects and preserve *Nungpe-armu (Mudha Khuta)* as the sacred post. *Nungpe-armu* occupies the same status as the *Jambil Aathon* of the Hill Karbis. Most of their family rituals are held at the main or original post of the house known as *Nungpe-armu (Mudha Khuta)*. It is a megalithic pole which is worshipped usually in the month of February and on other special occasions. Village deities of Karbis are named as Hempu, Tamlang Mahadu and Nubat in different plains districts of the State. A heap of soil worshiped by the community is called *Dobang*. Their religious philosophy is animistic based which is similar to other tribal societies. They believe in benevolent and malevolent deities and their appeasement by sacrificing boar, goat or fowl. They resort to divination to ascertain the will of gods or the winds of fate. Male priests called Kurusar conducts worship and divination by breaking eggs, observing of liver of sacrificed pigs, hens etc.

  
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- VI. **Festivals-** Festivals and rituals are the markers of ethnic identity of any community. *Dehal Kachirdom* or *Rongker* is one of the important festivals of the community in which deities *Longri arenam*, *Nubot*, *Longle Ahi'i* are worshiped for the welfare of village as well as villagers. This festival falls during the month of February. *Chojun* and *Hacha* are the other festivals of the Karbis residing in the plain districts of Assam state. *Hacha* is the harvesting festival celebrated in the month of January. Song and dance is indispensable part of this festival. Only the young boys as well as men participate in the dance. *Chojun* is worship of the god "Barithe"- The god of thunder. This worship is aimed for welfare of the family. Community feast gets major importance. *Botor Kekur* (worship of god of cloud praying for timely monsoon, Ritnong Chingdi or Arunong Chingdi) and *Chomangkan* (praying for ancestors soul to reach *ethak* or heaven) are other important festivals of the community.
- VII. **Cultural heritage-** The Karbis residing in the plain districts have their own folk songs and dances for different social and cultural occasions. *Tomahi dance* is very popular in the community and outside. Some musical instruments are also used by the community during songs and dances. The men and women wear colourful dresses during the festivals and on other social events. After the birth of a child, the *Kathar* or priest leads the function by sacrificing 12-13 hens and names the child. This function is called *Osoamin kipu*. After the death of a person of the community, the dead body is buried in Kamrup district but in Nagaon district, cremation is done. Megaliths (long-ae) are erected in the memory of the deceased. The community believes in re-birth and whole community is invited in *Chomankan* (gathering after death). They also believe in ancestor worship (*Sil puta*). They offer Rice beer and Chicken to the soul of the deceased occasionally.
- VIII. **Social organization-** The social organization of the plain Karbis is Patrilineal and Patrilocal. Major groups of exogamous clans include *Ingti*, *Terang*, *Tumung*, *Teron* and *Rohang* related to various groups of hill Karbi. The village organization of the plain Karbis shows distinctive links with the past traditions. *Bangthai* is the traditional head of a village who always belong to Rohang clan. He is overall in charge of social,

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political and administrative matter pertaining to the community. He works in close collaboration with the *Gaon Bura*. *Deka Bangthai* looks after the affairs of the youths of the village during festivals and community occasions. *Kathar* acts as the priests in all life cycle rituals like birth, marriage, deaths and ceremonial funeral involving erection of monoliths. *Bisar* initiates all legal matters, *Dhan Bharali* works as a treasurers and *Barwa or Huria* communicates the messages.

IX. **Marriages-** The Karbis residing in plains have two types of marriages viz. 1) Arranged marriage/marriage by negotiation and 2) marriage by kidnapping or marriage by elopement. The later types of marriages can also be converted to arranged marriage if the *Mel* so orders. Arranged marriages are of three types- (a) Dangor or Bor-biya, (b) sewa choron biya or siyachoron biya and (c) secret or confidential marriage performed in the presence of close relatives but remains secret for the other villagers, which is termed as “Bapek make dekha rajje nedekha biya”.

X. **Custom of Inheritance-** In the Karbi Community residing in plain districts, property is inherited from father to son. Daughters are not given any share in the property including land property.

XI. **Houses and Villages-** The villages of plain Karbis are found usually down the hills. However, the population has later spread to the districts and places away from the hills. They prefer to lead community life. Their houses are made of bamboo, wood and other locally available material and may not be distinguishable from houses of any other neighboring communities. Most of their family rituals are held at the main or original post of the house known as *Mudha Khuta (Nungpe Armu)*. They try to place their kitchen in the easternmost corner of the house. They use utensils and equipments made of bamboo, wood, earthen pots and iron. Banana leaves are used for serving the food.

XII. **Level of Development-** The community is socially, economically, and educationally backward. Agriculture is the main occupation of the community and like all farmers; their economic status is also poor. More than 85% land holdings are small and size of average holding is slightly above 1 hectare. Thus, the farmers are left with only meager amount of produce as surplus which gives them an earning not more than Rs-

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2000/- per month. Almost all villagers are poverty ridden and many of them borrow money and fail to repay in time. Piled up interest push them to further poverty. The community is also backward educationally. Children of the households are engaged in paddy fields. Girls are given the task of baby sitter. Those who go to school rarely continue after attainment of puberty. Thus, the dropout from school at this age is very high. Level of literacy among the community is lower than other communities. Female literacy is also quite lower than male literacy. Very few of the plain Karbis are engaged in Govt. Jobs. Those who have secured Jobs in Govt. are grade IV or at the most Grade III employees. Very few of them have come out as successful businessmen. The community rarely has any potable water source. Those who live in interior areas, use natural streams for water requirement. At other places they dig wells for obtaining water. Most of the villages do not have pucca roads and access to the villages is difficult especially during rainy season. Wooden and bamboo bridges are common on the streams and the transportation facility is poor.

**Meeting with the officers of the State Govt., Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Anthropologists, Sociologists and Research Scholars**

The Commission held a meeting with the officers of the State Govt., Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Anthropologists, Sociologists and Research Scholars at the conference hall of AIRT and SC, Guwahati on 06-02-2015 to have discussion on the proposal to include the KARBI (MIKIR) community at Sl. No. 11 in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of the State which was resubmitted by the Govt. of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs to the Commission along with the comments of the Registrar General of India vide No. 12016/3/2000-TA(RL)-C&LM(pt1) Dated 28-02-2013 for comments. The list of participants is enclosed as **Annexure-A**. Following discussion was held in the meeting:

1. Principal Secretary, WPT & BC Department, Govt. of Assam informed that the list of Scheduled Tribes for the State of Assam notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India has two parts viz. 1) for the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills (Presently Dima Hasao District) and 2) for the State of Assam excluding the Autonomous Districts of Karbi Anglong



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and North Cachar Hills (Presently Dima Hasao District). In the first part of the list (which is for Hill districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao) Karbi's have been provided ST status. However, in the second list which is for rest of the State including plains, they have not been conferred ST Status. As per the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes order (Amendment) Act, 1976, "Mikir" was notified as a Scheduled Tribe in the Autonomous Districts of Assam. The name "Mikir" was replaced by "Karbi" vide the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes orders (Amendment) Act, 2002. At present "Karbi" is a notified ST in the Autonomous Districts of the State comprising of hilly areas. However, a sizeable population of the community also resides in the plain districts of the State. The demand of Social Groups and Organizations of Karbi community for inclusion of Karbi (Mikir) community in the list of Scheduled Tribe (Plains) of the State is very old and the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes had conducted field studies in some pockets of the plain districts and supported the inclusion of this community in the Scheduled tribe list (Plains) of the State in the year 1992. In the study, the Institute had applied five criteria laid down by the Govt. of India to determine whether a community could be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes or not and it had recommended for inclusion of the Karbis inhabiting plains districts of the State in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam State. The State Govt. had sent a proposal to the Govt. of India recommending inclusion of the Karbis inhabiting plains districts of the State in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam State.

2. The Director, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes also informed that in the study conducted by the Institute, the criteria laid down by the Govt. of India to determine whether a community could be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes or not viz. indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, Geographical isolation, Shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness were tested and it was revealed that the Karbi (Mikir) community residing in plains districts of the State broadly qualifies for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of the State.
3. The Superintending Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata also participated in the discussions and pointed that the Lokur Committee had stated that "The Scheduled Tribe can also be generally ascertained by the fact that they live apart in hills, and even where they live on the plains, they lead a

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separate, excluded existence and are not fully assimilated in the main body of the people. Scheduled Tribes may belong to any religion. They are listed as Scheduled Tribes because of the kind of life led by them". He opined that the above parameters of identification of Communities viz. indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, Geographical isolation, Shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness were introduced in 1950's and 1960's and is very old. Like other Communities, the tribals are also transforming and the changes in their way of living are easily identifiable. Adoption of some of the socio- cultural practices of other communities, growing contact with other communities due to improved transport and communication facilities and extension of education has affected the general shyness of the tribal groups which are significant changes in tribal characteristics. Presently, the Govt. of India is reviewing the parameters by constituting a task force for the purpose. He submitted that only socially and culturally distinct communities should be considered for inclusion in the ST list of any State or UT.

4. The issue of requirement of consultation with the Governor of the State and various Autonomous Districts Councils on the matter of inclusion was also discussed in the meeting. As the proposal of the State Govt. for inclusion was for the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of Assam State outside the Tribal dominated Autonomous Districts, the same was not considered necessary.
5. The Anthropologists, Sociologists and other Scholars presents in the meeting supported the claim of inclusion of KARBI (MIKIR) community at Sl. No. 11 in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of the State and justified the same.

**Conclusion and recommendation:**

On the basis of discussions held with various tribal groups, Officers of the State Govt., Officers of the Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Anthropologists, Sociologists and other Scholars and observations of the team of the Commission during field visits, it has been found that the KARBI (MIKIR) community residing in the plain districts of State possess tribal characteristics and qualify for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes (Plains) of the State. In view of the above, it shall be appropriate to agree with the proposal of the State Government to include the 'KARBI (MIKIR)' community residing in the plain districts of Assam in the ST (Plains) list of the State, which is also supported by the ORGI.

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ANNEXURE 'A'

PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING HELD BY NATIONAL COMMISSION OF SCHEDULED TRIBES WITH THE WPT & BC DEPARTMENT AND AIRTSC ON 6<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 2015 AT THE CONFERENCE HALL OF THE AIRT & SC, GUWAHATI-22

Sl.	Name & Designation	Signature
1	Dr. Rameshwar Oraon, Chairperson, NCST, New Delhi	<i>Rameshwar Oraon</i>
2	Shri Santosh Kumar, Joint Secretary, NCST, New Delhi	<i>Santosh Kumar</i>
3	Shri Pramod Chand, Deputy Secretary, NCST, New Delhi	<i>Pramod Chand</i>
4	Shri R. K. Dubey, Assistant Director, NCST Regional Office, Bhopal	<i>R. K. Dubey</i>
5	Ms. P. Syiemlieh, NCST Regional Office, Shillong	<i>P. Syiemlieh</i>
6	Shri T. D. Kikreja, Private Secretary to the Chairperson, NCST, New Delhi	<i>T. D. Kikreja</i> 991111573
7	Dr. A. K. Singh, IAS, Principal Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, WPT & BC Department	<i>A. K. Singh</i> 06/02/15
8	Smti Binita Pegu, Deputy Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, WPT & BC Department	<i>Binita Pegu</i> 06/02/15
9	Dr. G. C. Sarma Thakur, Former Director, AIRT & SC (Expert - Tribal Affairs)	<i>G. C. Sarma Thakur</i> 06/02/15
10	Dr. Kanchan Mukhopadhyay, SuperIntending Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India	<i>Kanchan Mukhopadhyay</i> 6.2.15
11	Shri Udayan Hazarika, Director, AIRT & SC	<i>Udayan Hazarika</i> 6/2/15
12	Shri G. C. Kakati, Joint Director, AIRT & SC 97435303551	<i>G. C. Kakati</i> 6/2/2015
13	Smti Mitra Das, RO, AIRT & SC	<i>Mitra Das</i> 6/2
14	Dr. Farzana Begum, RO, AIRT & SC	<i>Farzana Begum</i> 6/2/2015
15	Shri Ashim Borah, ARO, AIRT & SC	<i>Ashim Borah</i> 6/2/15