



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Karbis – the Unsung Tribe of Assam

¹Richa Gogoi, ²Jyoti Senapati

¹Research Scholar, ²Research Scholar

¹MIL & LS, ²MIL & LS

¹Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam, India

Abstract : Assam is a amalgamation of contrasting tribes. These tribes have a rich heritage associated with art, culture and tradition. One of the salient tribe found in Assam is “The Karbis”. Karbi Anglong is the home to this Karbi tribe. It is one of the major ethnic communities in the hills of Assam. Kabis have their own religion, culture which includes their beliefs, food habits, attire, dance , music and so on. They have their unique ways to run their social reforms. Their culture consists of many quirky traits. Even though Karbis resides in the hills of Assam they have found out their own ways to carry out farming in the hills. This paper endeavors the overview of the Karbi tribe of Assam.

Index Terms – Assam, Karbis, Culture, Ritual, Ethnic

1. INTRODUCTION :

The mark of the land Assam is carried forward by the tribes and groups of this land. And prominent amongst these tribes are the Karbis presently residing in *Karbi Anglong district*. In terms of ethnicity, Karbis are Mongolian and in reference to linguistic group, they belong to the Tibeto- burman category. Dwelling on the valley of Assam for several years, the Karbis have blended into the demography and tradition of Assam. Nevertheless their physical features and cultural contexts still possess traces of Mongolian origin.

They are referred to as the *Mikirs* in Assam History. The origin of this term is not defined. Presently near Dimapur(Nagaland) there was a place called *Hayong Dimura* where once upon a time a ruler named Thireng- Wangreng established a kingdom. The princess of that Kingdom named *Mekri* married a Naga Prince. The Nagas being unable to pronounce her name referred her as Mikir and that is widely believed to be the origin of this term. According to them, this term is a contribution by the people of other tribes and there is no trace of usage of this term in their vocabulary. In this context, the statement of Lyall is worth mentioning—“The name Mikir is that given to the race by the Assamese: its origin is unknown. They call themselves Arleng, which means men in general.”(*The Mikirs, Page 4*). Despite being attributed with the term Mikir, the Karbis prefer to identify themselves as Arleng or Karbi. Arleng in Karbi means slanting and High area and since they dwell in those places, hence prefer to identify themselves like that.

Just like any other Tribe and Community in Assam, the Karbis also showcase vibrant folk culture. Social-lifestyle, Folk-belief, Folk dance,songs, instruments, Folk Culture, Folk Literature, attires, use of language, rituals and festivals and social customs constitute the Culture of the Karbis. The tribe primarily dependent on Jhum Cultivation like any other tribe of Assam has tradition of materialistic culture of using bamboo in making objects and building, religious and social custom of making liquor from rice, weaving garments in handloom, and other characterizing features as well as hold on to some particular features of their tribe.

Patriarchy is prevalent in the society of the Karbis. There is compulsion for a Karbi women to essentially take her husband’s last name after marriage however there is no restriction from keeping her father’s name. The daughters are not considered heir to property. The head of the society of the Karbis are referred to as the *Saarthey*. In some cases villages are named in reference to the Saarthey’s name. The Saarthey is bestowed with all kinds of responsibilities of the society/village. It is to be mentioned that other than the Saarthey, there are *Habai or Habe, Pinpo* who hold equal possession over the social issues as counsellors. The culture of this tribe has progressed through two storeyed *Chang ghars* that they build to reside in. Just like the Non-tribal society which has *Naamghar* as one of their institutions, the Karbis have *Jeerkedam* as a similar institution. In the early times, the youngsters of the Karbis learnt and trained in Farming, making objects out of bamboo, music and dances in *Jeerkedam*. To run the *Jeerkedam*, a committee is constituted. This committee is referred to as *Jeersong*.

1.1. RELIGION OF KARBIS :

The Karbis are religious and faith centred. They believe in rebirth. Keeping belief on the dead being born again, the new borns are named after those who had passed away. People following both Hinduism and Christianity are part of the Karbi culture. Out of which Hindus are in majority. The Karbis worship deities. They don't have temples, idols or places of worship in particular but have faith on several gods and goddesses. '*Te Ploinchi Murti Adon, thengpi Arong Aarnam Aenut.*' Which means there is god in every hill, spirit in every tree and the Karbis worship this deities and spirits since time immemorial in rituals and festivals. Brahma, Mahadaai(Mahadev), Mahamaai(Mahamaya), Ram, and names of other deities are also prevalent in the tradition of the Karbis. Amongst the deities, names like, *Aarnam, Hemphu, Hemari, Parigya, Chinmong Aarnam, Peng, Mukrang Haracchi Aakreng, changlang or Duikhrai, Dengjaduri* are primary. The reason to worship each of these deities are also particular.

1.2. KARBI SOCIETY AND ITS FEATURES :

A society can't function smoothly without customs, traditions and rituals. The social reforms which helps a society to gain social validation in turn helps to uplift the values of the society. Even the Karbis have certain customs, tradition and rituals.

At the time of pregnancy, the pregnant woman is showered with auspicious spell in order to wish her best—"*Karbi aso' Karbak aso, hu aso, Kali-'wang aso' kali. Wang ong kehang Jeesi-ni kehang jeesee, May Kehang jeesee-lok kehang, jee see peerthey kaahase- mindar kahache.....*" (O lord, the one about to take birth is not an offspring of an animal but a human of the Karbis and is taking birth to form relation with human beings). The baby once is five to six months old, a ritual is organised, namely folongsor aahi- e and aahop aafi in order to safeguard the child from the negative energy of any spirit.

Marriage is one of the most important social institution of mankind. This important social institution of mankind is embodied with several hopes, desires, rituals, traditional folk belief and songs and dances. The Karbis also have different customs and traditions in context of marriage. According to folk-belief, the very first wedding knot of this tribe was tied between heavenly muse of *Rasinja* and *Muring Rongsongpi*. The marriage was witnessed by two Karbi men namely *Wailongbi* and *Harlongbi*. Throughout the years their successors have institutionalized marriage and marriages are apparently performed in the same tradition. The Karbis consider marriage between blood related cousins, the bride being the daughter of the maternal uncle of the groom. However there is no such compulsion prevalent in the present times.

There are five categories amongst the Karbis-*Ingti, Teron, Tengmu, Inghi and Terang*. Marriages between these categories are prevalent. However, marriage within a particular category is restricted. In any case, if marriages are performed within the same category, the marriage is declared illegitimate and is considered under punishable offence even extended to sentenced to death. Like many other tribes, the Karbis also held tradition of sacrificing human beings, animals, etc. Realising the blunder of sacrificing human beings, during the reign of a generous king named *Rengbonghom*, goats, birds and pigs were chosen as alternatives to sacrifice for the deities. It is worthy to be mentioned that during the reign of the same ruler, the law of *Laaisenem* according to which two young lovers were found and separated was demolished. *Remgbonghom* had only one son and when he was accused under *Laisenem*, it was then rubbed off by the ruler.

There are four stages to a Karbi Marriage:

- *Nengpi-Nengchokasingki*(Primary Conversation): in this stage, the head of both the families are in talks. Basically the stage of asking for the bride's hand.
- *Piso- Kehang*(establishing relation): in this stage the family of the groom take auspicious parcel including beetel nut and leaf to the bride's house and confirms if they have any refrain from the upcoming conjunction. If not then the bride accepts the auspicious parcel.
- *Laam- Kepathit*(final organization): there was since ancient times a tradition among the Karbis to have the groom reside at the brides paternal home for around two to three years. This ritual is also known as '*pis'kemen*' or *gaa khatoni*. However in the present times under the influence of modernization this ritual is done away with within two to three days or around a week.
- *Aajo'-Aaroni Kefa* : in this stage the family of the groom once again brings ritualistic token and decide upon the day and date of the marriage. There is no particular Almanac through which the date or day is decided. Once decided, they celebrate the upcoming event with *horlang* or liquor.

After completion of these four stages the main wedding function is referred to as "*Aadam Aachar*" or "*Piso'-pangri*". The bride and groom on that day are required to wear the traditional attire. The groom wears floral scarf, a long shirt, named '*choi-eek-choi-aang*' with a turban called *poho*, and has a bag or *jambili* on his shoulder. The bride on the other hand, wears a *wamkok* which is a floral border with a black *pini* or *mekhela*. The Karbi bride do not wear the Vermilion and there is a tradition for the bride to return the wedding attire to her paternal home once the wedding ritual are over and only after that does the marriage rituals end.

In this society, the married women, are not allows to dance or sing or to wear flowers in their bun. They are not supposed to walk ahead of any man other than their husband. There is scope for widow remarriage in the Karbi culture. However the remarriage has to take place within the same family. The wife of the elder brother upon being widowed due to the death of her husband can be married off to the younger brother.

One of the attractive event is *Chamangkan*. The spirits of the ancestors and forefathers are given respect and in a way worshipped through *Chamangkan* and this event is organised for three to four days. Upon death of any person, the body is cremated according to the directed instructions. Three days after the death a ritual is performed putting and end to the rituals for the dead. Upon the death of several members of the family, after few years have passed, *Chamangkan* is organised. This ritual can be performed for several members at once. The

materials required to perform this ritual are *songnok*(sword and shield), *seng*(drum), *sengblum*(small drum),*taar*(mat), *hijab*(fan), *kusatap*(bamboo hat), *thaireng cup*(bow and arrows),*khalun*(bamboo basket),*satar*(scarf) *pouhou*(turban), *Choi*(shirt), etc.

In accordance to social customs, the Chamangkan is organised in three levels:

- a) *Harne Chamangkan* (Higher strata),
- b) *Langtuk Chamangkan* (Middle strata),
- c) *Kanflafla Chamangkan* (Common strata).

Since the first two stratas demand huge expenses, therefore families with abundant wealth only opt for *Harne or Langtuk Chamangkan*. On the other hand *Kanflafla Chamangkan* is organised by people of the lower strata as it doesn't require heavy expense.

For the running of this ritual, the *Saarthey* is invited with a token of respect. The proceedings are then made according to the instructions of the *Saarthey*. The main roles played in the *Chamangkan* are by the *Usepi* and *Dohuedi*. An elderly lady from the *usepi* village is invited as she prepares '*Aanjam*' for the dead and the family, she sings songs of sorrow for the family in a mourning tone. On the other hand, the *Dohuedi* are the two drummers of the *Chamangkan*. This role is often played by members of the maternal family who are experienced in every ritual that needs to be performed in the *Chamangkan*. They play the *Sengpi*(drum) to the beats of which young boys and girls dance to perform and celebrate the event:

On the first day of the *Chamangkan*, the corpse is brought from the cremation ground to the courtyard of the house where along with the *usepi*, the family members start a procession to carry the corpse to the cremation ground after performing certain rituals. The *usepi* prepared rice and curries that she carries for the one passed away with the *Dohuedis* leading the march as they play the drums. The *usepi* recites hymns asking for the spirit to come back to life and a log of wood is kept at the centre of the place where the corpse is to be cremated believed to be a leading tool to guide the spirit in direction of heaven. Further, the head of the family cuts an egg into three pieces and throws it in three directions and sacrifices a seven days old chicken. The head of the family then dances to the beats of the *dohuedi* and takes the sword in his hand up high and lowers it down to move the log of wood. The one performing this rituals is referred to as the *Tirkaam*. He then places a black cloth on the surface and presents the *anjam* prepared by the *usepi* which mainly consists of rice, liquor(*horlang*), some kind of curry with beetel nut and leaf. The *usepi* then picks up the served essentials in a banana leaf and offers prayers on behalf of all of those who are present there. This ritual is sometimes called *banta*. Sometimes money is offered in the *banta*. At the time of offering the *anjam*, young boys dance with sword and shield to the beats of the *sengpi*. The *usepi* then cries and summons the spirit, " o holy bodiless spirit, we have prepared *anjam* for you, we have prepared a dance for you too... we hope you are at peace, please come down to the land and accept our offering."

After the rituals of the cremation land is over, the women of the maternal family bring the parcel consisting of the log of wood to the house and then take the log of wood to the end road of the village and place it there. The place where the log is kept is regarded to be the resting place for the departed soul also known as *Hungthur*. The *Hungthur* is the place where the people those who have accompanied the procession are served flattened rice. The young boys again perform the sword and shield dance in the *Hungthur*. After this ritual, the log is brought back home and a structure imitating the one passed away is created and kept in the courtyard. The spirit is said to have existence in this structure. However after sometime, the spirit is believed to fall sick and during *Chamangkan* a discussion meeting is held in order to think of possibilities to heal the dying spirit. After being unable to find any way of saving the spirit, the person is declared dead and the rituals just like before when the last rites were performed are again organised to bid goodbye to the departed soul for the second time.

After the second death of the spirit the structure that was made with straw is washed in water and then wrapped with a white cloth from head to toe. The structure is then taken to the room inside and laid on a bamboo mat. Two *mithongrang* are placed near the head and two near the feet of this structure. The *mithongrang* are bamboo structure made by attaching two sticks with threads of white black and red colour. These are essentially doors. The ones near the head are doors to the heaven and two near the feet are doors to earth. The *usepi* again offers *anjam* to this structure and prays and cries out the good qualities of the dead while the youngsters sing songs called *Kopayer* that are composed in terms of carnal context.

The second of *Chamangkan* has nothing special. On this day preparations are made for the fourth day. The entrance of the cremation ground that has the '*Mehar hem kim*' is cleared and cleaned. The *Mandusa* is also prepared. The *mithongrangs* are placed on the two doors. The door on the forefront has a flat stone. The *Mandusa* is believed to be the home that the dead carries to their afterlife. The tools for farming(*farlung*) are kept at the back door. The *usepi* keeps crying at regular intervals. On this day young boys and girls perform some dances in regards to the *Chamangkan*. In the evening on the occasion of a ritual called *Riso'mar*, (the social service ritual of the youngsters) a chicken is also sacrificed.

The third day is of utmost importance in the *Chamangkan*. On this day, early in the morning the members of the family accompanied by the *dohuedis* march towards the field to cut five pieces of bamboo for the *langtuk*(well). The ritual of cutting the bamboo is generally performed by the in-laws of the dead and the cuts are made to the beats of the drum and after cutting are taken to the cremation ground. Before cutting the bamboo in order of *riso'mar* a chicken is sacrificed. In the afternoon, a march is held from the home of the dead to the place in the cremation ground where the *langtuk* is formed consisting of the relatives and family members. The youngsters start the *Jambeli Jatra*.

Jambeli Aakhon is an inevitable part of the *Chamangkan* festival. Around seven feet in length a wood log along with silver plank and straw is made and used as a symbolic component of the Karbis. The colour, art and craftsmanship on this component is worthy to be noticed. The main log of wood has 4 straws in four directions. The main log is called *aakhon* and the four straws are referred to as *jambili*. The is a bird structure mounted on top of the *aakhon*. On the other four straws small birds like sparrows and owls are drawn in a illusion of a climbing creeper on which birds are seated. The five sticks resemble the five categories into which the Karbis are divided-*Ingti, Teron, Tingmu, Inghi, and Terang* and the unity that they have amongst themselves. The black cloth that is used in this component is also symbolic. According to folk tradition, the *yampuri* or the world of dead is a gray and dark place. Hence, the black cloth signifies the darkened that the soul has departed to. It is to be noticed that not every village has their own *jambeli aakhon*, after the completion of the ritual, the tribal treasure us kept aside with proper maintenance for future use.

On the third day the straw structure is prepared and clothed with new garments. All the tools and knick-knacks used by the one who has passed away are kept near the straw body. With it are kept a wheel made of sticks tied together by white red and black thread and a pot(*langdung*). On reaching the cremation ground the women offer beetel nut and leaf along with liquor(*horlang*) to the spirit. The men on the other hand reach out to the *langtuk* and start fixing the bamboo to the ground. The tallest among all the pieces is called the *pirsikpi* and it is fixed in the middle of the well. The other four are placed and fixed in four other directions. On the middle a white cloth with a large whole in the middle is fixated on which the sacrificed animals like chicken, pigs are facilitated to be thrown down the *langtuk*.

On the third day of the *Chamangkan*, the invited group of the Karbis perform a dance with the musical instrument called *chumphang*. First the *Chamchinang* dance is performed. It has two variations: *Chamso'kedam* and *Chumpikedam*. The first variation requires at least two drums. It is to be noted that the village that organises *Chamangkan* gets the chance to perform this dance. It can be performed with wooden sword and shield. The only reason to perform this dance is to divert the evil spirits. After the main village has performed the dance every group from all other villages invited perform the dance. After the groups that have brought drums, the ones that did not bring drums get a chance to perform.

After *Chomchingnam*, *Nimaso'kirung* is the dance that is performed. In this dance, equal number of boys and girls perform together. *Kopayer* songs are the melodies of this dance and because of being carnal and sexual in context, boys and girls belonging to the same village do not dance together to it. The young girls cover their mouth while dancing in order to cover or avoid any use of derogatory or carnal words or if used they can hide their identity.

Rengkethon is the fourth and final day of *Chamangkan*. *Rengkethon* means to take the straw structure of the dead to the *Tipit* with respect. On the other hand the *Chumphangs* who have danced all night gather in the courtyard of the family. The elderly people sit and recite the *Mochirakahi* spells. These spells consists of the emergence, social customs, traditions, which are written in a manner of descriptive recital. These spells can only be recited in funerals.

On the same day another religious festival is organised. The head of the village takes responsibility in organising the '*Fak aangtuve so'lang*'. The youngsters of the *Rismaar* organise another ritual called the *rongsam kedam* and through this they acquire the right to bring yhe bamboos of the *bonjar* to the family's courtyard. The straw structure of the dead prepared in the family home and the mat on which it is laid is carried on shoulder by the four young boys and they go round about the house. Each of them carry a chicken, a chick and an egg which they take to the *bonjar* to sacrifice. They sacrifice the chicken and chick and spread the blood in all directions and cut the egg in two keeping on on a banana leaf and the other on a basket. The meat from the chicken is then roasted and devoured by them.

After this, they bring the mat back home. The bamboo(*pirsik*) that is fixed on the courtyard is kept and beside that the bamboos from the *bonjar* are also kept. The *jambili aathun* is also kept in the same place. After all these are done, the ritual of the *Rongsam kedam* is put to an end.

Soon after this, the *bonjar kekan* dance starts. This dance from village to village has several variations. The youngsters participate in this dance. After this dance the *chumphangs* bring the *jambili aakhon* from the *pirsik* and keep it with themselves.

The last ritual of feeding the dead is called the *Kachole* ritual. This meal is served with rice, greens and liquor(*horlang*) in fifteen banana leaves and fifteen bamboo jars. The family members and the *chumphangs* bring the commodities from the straw structure and make it into a big parcel. The youngsters carry the structure on their shoulder. Animals like duck, pigeon, female goat are carried along the march to the cremation ground in order to sacrifice it to the dead. They also carry the *bonjar* bamboo, white cloth and red cloth. The animals once sacrificed are determined of the way of death whether auspicious or inauspicious. The straw structure is taken out of the mat and placed on the pyre. In a corner of the cremation ground, chicken and rice are cooked to offer to the dead. Once offered the structure is set on fire after which everyone goes home.

It is to be mentioned that the *usepi* throws some bamboo pipes towards the burning pyre. After the pyre has burned out, the bamboo pipes if found are considered auspicious and if not, then inauspicious.

The socio-economical base of the Karbis is jhum cultivation. For this, the Karbis select a place in the slanting valley which is helped by the head of the village to open up for farming. For this, they perform a ritual of *Reet Aarnam* which then they believe open up the land for them. The lands lose fertility after two to three years because of which the Karbis need to search for new patches of land. *Hemptap* is made in the fields that are cultivated by the karbis to free their farms from birds, animals, insects and evil spirits which have potential to harm the crop. The beginning to the end of the jhum cultivation has several steps. These are:

- *Ritkesam* : 'Rit' means the land for farming in the Karbi language. Ritkesam is the name given to the step that involves the selection process for the land worthy of farming.
- *Ritkepon* : Ritkesam is followed by Ritkepin. In this step, small trees and bushes are cut down and cleared to make it ready for farming.
- *Rit May-kekai* : This is the step where bushes and weeds on the ground are burned down in order to clear the land for farming. This is generally done in the month of March and April just before monsoon arrives.
- *Aarhek- Kaarhi* : In this level if in case trees and bushes have remained half burnt, they are burned again to clear the land.
- *Rit kenong* : In this step members of family or society take turns to plant seeds.
- *Jhap Karlu or Jhap keku* : In this step the weeds that grow besides the crop are deplanted and cleaned.
- *Chokokerot*: This is the step of cutting crops.
- *Chokokeroi* : In this step paddy is taken to home. In accordance to the time table of farming, the karbis also organize and celebrate some festivals. *Hachakekan* is one of the primary agricultural festival of the hilly Karbis. It is a festival of harvest. The jhum field of the hills are accumulated with crops. On a particular day they go to fetch the crops which they load on their shoulders and bring to courtyard. Since they go in group to fetch the crop, this process is hence referred to as the *chokokeroi*. After completion of this task the people rejoice having meal of rice and dance and sing to celebrate the harvest.

The karbis during the *Hachakekan* festival rejoice in harmony to bring the wealth of harvest home. There is no ritual of sacrifice in this festival. Only tradition is of Feasting and rejoicing with hearty and and comfort meals consisting of rice, liquor and dry fish. On being instructed by the head of the village the young boys dance to the rhythm of *Ay-ha-cha-ha*. The festival starting before noon has to be put and end to by dusk. Otherwise fine needs to be paid. The festival is supposed to be celebrated without any female participation and there is no use of musical instruments.

One of the primary rituals of the Karbis is the *Rongker*. Generally, different flu and diseases, any fatal attack and the smooth running of the farming without any loss is ensured through this ritual. This ritual also prohibits the participation of women. The *Rongker* Ritual is performed by forming altar in names of deities like Hemphu, Mukrang, Rasinaja, Sonpi who are worshipped and offered with prayers.

The English word Ballad is translated into the Assamese lexicon as story songs. The Epic Ramayan by the Karbis called the '*sabin aalun*' the *lokhi keplang* of *Mosira kohi*, *Karbi Keplang*, *Thap Keplang*, *Wong Keplang* etc. Can be categorised under story songs or ballads. Other than that the *Haai and Romirok* songs are the ballads of the Karbi Tribe.

The love story of *Haaimu* is a widely propagated and accepted story that resides in the heart of the Karbis. Once upon a time in a auspicious hour of dawn in the house of Sai ronghang, *Haai* was born and soon after sometime in another household of On teron a son, Longteron was born. The karbi culture believes that the wife takes birth right before the husband does. Since Haai took birth before Long, they believe because of that *Kasorbi*(a ritual) came down to earth. This belief of the wife being born before the husband is referred to as *kasorbi*. And that is why Haai and Long came down to earth to be wife and husband. This belief prevails among the Karbis.

Haai and Long grow up under similar environment. Just like other children they played in the *Umrasi* river, swim and form sand castles. After been grown up they build their own household as husband and wife. Haai cooks rice in bamboo pipes on a earth flame while Long goes out for jhum farming. While coming back long brings home wild greens which they cook and eat together. Time flies like these and Haai and Long keep coming closer to each other. Being grown up their families marry them to each other and out of their love, a son is takes birth between the two.

However, love seems incomplete without hurdles and challenges. Obstacles are inevitable from love. Haai's pure love story also seems to be no exception from this. Haai's mesmerizing beauty with no mark of imperfection stood out to be a hurdle for her. The smoothly running life of Haai Long and their Child was disturbed by the dark storm brought by Ronsantang Cho'Mang(Khasi Trader). Mesmerized by the beauty of Haai, Ronsantang lived in their home as a guest for several days which made Haai restless. Bound by her insecurities Haai reauested him to leave their place. This seemed to be an insult to Ronsantang and he therefore pledged to kidnap Haai's son. On account of his plan, Ronsantang went to Chucheng and told the Royal counsellor about the beauty of Haai and misinformed him of Haai being single and unmarried. The Royal Counsellor Longdili then sent a messenger to ask for Haai's hand to marry her. The Messenger brought the news of Haai being married however Longdili by then was drunk in the beauty of Haai and believed that the kind of beautiful that she is, only he can be her husband and married her forcefully through power. Long Teran protests but with no results. At the end Haai doesn't give up in front of Longdili and commits suicide. While doing this she asks her husband to come along and summons the gods before dying that she never would be reborn, because of which, no Karbi New born girl is named Haai on the other hand Long did not make any such pledge because of which there can be boys seen with the name of long.

The Indian Mythological Epic: The Ramayana has its excerpts running forward in the terms of songs. These songs among the Karbis are called *sabin aalun*. The *sabin aalun* written and composed on the basis of the story of the ramayana is a treasure to the Karbi Folk Culture. These songs are propagated among the Karbis since ancient times. These songs rolling right from the ancient Karbi Poets can be traced back to around the 14th or 15th century. The *Sabin Aalun* has traces of influence from *Borahi King Mohamanikya and Madhab Kandali*.

The *Sabin Aalun* since is set in the Karbi Hills has description of the Karbi Lifestyle and culture. The influence of the Karbi Culture, Art, philosophy and mindset is prominent in it. The widely known text of *Sabin Aalun* meaning the Karbi Ramayana is a canonic text to know about the Karbi Tribe. The first part of the *Sabin Aalun* is a description of *Sinta Kungri*(princess *Sita*) who is portrayed as being the ideal daughter of a Karbi household who completes every chore, cleans and cooks, takes care of the garden, goes to the field with food for her father, weaves clothes in the loom and wears clothes traditional and simple like a Karbi Girl.

On the other hand the house of *Janak* is also a house of a common peasant. Works in field like other farmers, rests in the *Mandu* or the resting stall on the field, consumes rice and liquor and has egg with pickle. There are no fundamental differences in the *Valmiki Ramayana* and the *Sabin Aalun*. The presentation showcases some influenced changes. The *Valmiki Ramayan* describes the birth of *Sita* to be from the plough of *Janak*, in *Sabin Aalun*, *Sita* is born from a bird egg. In *Ramayana* *Ravan* has ten heads and ten hands, in *Sabin Aalun* it increases to twelve. And the naming of Characters are different in *Valmiki Ramayana* and *Sabin Aalun*.

The Karbis refer to their musical scholar as *Lunche*. The song of the *Sabin Aalun* is presented before everyone but the *lunche* incorporated with melody. According to instructions, it takes two to three days for *Lunche* to present the song. The *Sabin Aalun* can be performed by a person only thrice in his lifetime is widely believed.

The Karbis do not lack behind in Folk culture. Among their folk culture, one of the prominent is the weaving craft through which the craftsmanship and value of beauty for the Karbi women is displayed. The loom that they use to weave their own garments is a simple structure made of wood and bamboo. To colour their skirt(*mekhela*) black, they use excerpt from a tree called *sibu*. The borders are made using white thread in contrast in patterns of stripes. Karbi *pini* is of seven types. Among which '*Morebong homokri aapini*' is valued the most. This level of *pini* is halved in between and has teeth like designs. For the *pini* to be stiff a rope is tied to the waist which is around one to one and a half finger wide. Which is called the *wamkok*. The *wamkok* has floral patterns called *bernum*, *ponglang*, *fongrong aangsu amek* etc. The *wamkok* weaved with white thread had small floral stripes made out of black thread. The ends of the *wamkok* is tied together with black red and white thread. Other than this, some other garments worn by the Karbi women are— *Pe -sarpi*, *Khon-jari*, *pe-seleng*, *dukfirso* etc.

It is not that the Karbi women only weave garments for themselves. They prepare clothes for the old-young, men-women, essentially for all. The *Rikong* (dhoti) worn by the Karbi Men, the *Choi*(shirt), *po'ho*(turban) have patterns of flying butterflies, flowers, birds, trees and elephants as if the clothes are nothing but canvas. Even the symbol of fauna the deer and others help in brightening up the attraction of the garments even more. Other than loving garments of vibrant colors, the Karbi Women love to wear jewellery namely: *Lek*(beads), *No'thengpi*(earrings), *Roi*(bangles) and *Aarnan*(ring). There is no such speciality in the beads for neck however, the *lek-paikom*, is a special bead that has special craftsmanship. Three threads of red white and black colors are taken together with beads of red, black, white and yellow colour. *Lek paikom* has significant value in the Karbi society. The Karbi women wear bangles out of which a silver bangle called *roi penkhra* has special designs made in it. The designs alongside *inki aamek* has a worm like pattern that increases its beauty. Just like making beads and pendant out of old silver coins, they also form rings out of silver. Out of all the craftsmanship of the *No'thengpi* earrings worn by the Karbi Women are research worthy jewellery with their vision, design and fashionable approach.

The Karbis are rich in terms of Folk Musical Instruments. The drum used in *Chamangkan*: *Sengpi*(Big drum), the drum of the youngsters: *Sengklop*(one sided drum), *Bongoi Aalun*(wild music) instrument: *pongchi*, the Karbi pipe *Muri*, Karbi *Gagana Krungsui*, Instruments used during *Sabin Aalun* and *Hachakekan* called *kumleng*, *dotara*, *prakoch*, small bells, funeral used small drum *sengso* etc are widely used Karbi Instruments.

The staple diet of the Karbis consist of rice. They incorporate *hansau*(ginger), *hanserang*(sour berries), *hipi*(brinjal), *thengthe*(barley) etc are consumed in their meals. Their favourite meals consist of *dungkek*(greens), *Uup*(bamboo stem), *longkhong*(banana flower) are mention worthy. Like other tribes, Karbis also devour on dry fish, *Okreng*(small fish) cleaned and sundried, *Toman menthu*(large fish) cleaned and sundried, *tibuk* (small fish cleaned and marinated in salt, sundried and preserver in bamboo pipes) are the three ways in which the Karbis prepare dry fish.

Other than these, *Inki Ok*(silkworm) and different kinds of meat, curries with hems, beetel nut and leaf , tea with salt, *Muri*(the tobacco pipes smoked by the elderly), homemade liquor are some prime food items of the Karbi cuisine. The three main kinds of liquor in Karbi Culture are— *Horlang*(special liquor), *hor aarak*(watery liquor), and *Horpotok*(rice liquor).

When looked into the Karbi Language system, it is known that due to the absence of a definite script particular to them, they use the letters from the Assamese script. The *Pirthe Kimi*, which is a Karbi newspaper, or *New Earth*(*Notun Prithibi*) uses Assamese letters. However some texts were written and composed using the English language and letters as well. The Karbi language has use of Bodo, Kukichin and Assamese words extensively. Some Assamese words can be seen to be used under some influence in the Karbi Language. Some of them are

- Karbi: Haar bail Assamese: Haal bua (Plough)
 - Karbi: Bura Assamese: Burha (Oldman)
 - Karbi: Mahadeo Assamese: Mahadev (Shiv)
 - Karbi: O' Assamese: Aakou. (Again)
- Etc.

1.3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT : We have to thank all the authors who previously researched and studied about the tribe Karbi. Without them it would not have been possible to carry forward this study. This study has no financial implication or assistants and it is only done to know about the Karbi tribe.

2. CONCLUSION : This paper walks through the Karbi society and their life-style. And we know that society and culture is interlinked. The Karbis of Assam have many striking features. The society they have is a patriarchal one. The headman(*saarthey*) is the superior person of a Karbi community. Headman is the prime person who takes care of each and every member of the Karbi village. Also he looks into the social justice system of the village. There is a social preaching for the youth of Karbis where they learn about the different spheres of life which is termed as *Jeerkedam*.

Religion of Karbis also carries important trait of its kind. In the recent times Christianity has thrown its effect upon the Karbis but their own religion is still intact. Their marriage system, food habits, dance, music, attire, instruments are different from the other tribes found in Assam. The Karbi peoples are basically dependent on agriculture and farming. This paper has tried to touch the Karbis from a bird view. Karbis migrated to Assam in time unknown to history. Karbis don't have any documented history however through folktale and folksong traces of their history can be established. Which will if studied in future new information will come to light.

REFERENCES :

- [1] Bora, Debojit. 2018. Uttor-purbansolor janagusthiya luko-samskriti. M.R. publication.
- [2] Das, Angshuman. 2013. Asomor utsav parbon butoli. Aank baank.
- [3] Das, Basanta. 2010. Karbi samskritir itihis. Aank baank prakashan.
- [4] Gogoi, Lila. 1994. Asomor samskriti. Banalata prakashan.
- [5] Kramsa, Suren. 2004. Karbi kristit abhumuki. Publisher: Bikramsing Kramsa.
- [6] Kro, Bidarsing. 2008. Karbi samskritir akhila. Karbi lamet aamei.
- [7] Saikia, Pallabi. 2012. Karbi bhasa- samskritir rengoni. Jagaran sahitya prakashan.
- [8] Sharma, Mrigen. 2014. Uttor purbansolor janajati. Chandra prakash.
- [9] Patar, Padma(editor). 2013. Janajati samaj and samskriti. Bhabani offset private limited.
- [10] Rabha Hakacham, Upen. 2010. Asomor janajatiya samskriti. Bani mandir prakashan.
- [11] Sharma, Nabin Chandra. 2013. Bharatar uttor purbansolor paribeshya kola. Banalata Prakashan.
- [12] Terang, Rangbang(Editor). 2010. Karbi samskritir ruprekha. Assam sahitya sabha.