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Discerning The *Domahi Kikan* Of Dumrali Karbi Community Through The Lens Of Identity And Belonging

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Abstract: Festivals provide core activities that build on or are displayed in a frame of local culture and heritage. An identity is who or what a person or thing is. Our identity defines who we are. Culture is a set of norms and values that we may not even know we have because we learn them as part of growing up in a group that shares them. Identity includes culture and many other personal things about us. Festivals are a vibrant expression of a community's cultural heritage. Festivals foster a sense of unity and belonging among people. By celebrating unique cultural traditions, promoting unity, festivals contributes in the formation of a community's identity. Racially the Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. Those Karbis residing in the plains of Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam, and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya identify themselves as the Dumrali or plains Karbis. Domahi is not only a festival or just an event of the Karbi community but it is rather a sentiment and an emotion for the Karbi folks. Domahi is the most colourful festivals where the community enjoys to their heart's content.

Key Words: Festivals, Identity, Belonging, Karbi, Domahi, Orality, Cultural diversity, Heritage.

Introduction: What is Identity and Belonging? An identity is who or what a person or thing is. Our identity defines who we are. It is a self-representation of our interests, relationships, social activity and much more. Our sense of identity and belonging is impacted by various factors, including our experiences, relationships and our environment. The journey to find identity and belonging often arises questions such as Who am I? Who do others want me to be? Where do I belong? Where do I fit in? The issue of identity and belonging has encompassed humans for many generations and will remain a key turning point for many to come.

Identity is multi-facet; it is a combination of many traits which forms one identity. An identity can be defined as anything, depending on what we wish others to perceive and also how others wish to perceive us. Identity can be of different forms such as: career identity, family identity, skills identity, cultural identity, social identity. Belonging means to feel a sense of welcome and acceptance to someone or something (Mahroua 10). There are different forms of belonging such as: relationships, social, environment etc. everything and everyone can influence a person's identity and belonging. Although we all live in the same world where many things are similar and dissimilar at some point, the reason why we are all unique is because we ultimately choose what does or does not impact us in a crucial or unimportant way. It is through the addition of the myriad parts of our lives that come together to create our identity (Mahroua15).. There comes a time when our opinions and beliefs begin to differentiate from those around us. During this time, some people may discover where they belong, whereas many others do not. It is not solely one stage of our lives when we are confronted with an identity crisis, but a continuous challenge throughout our lives as we encounter new experience that alter our thoughts, emotions and perspectives. Culture is a set of norms and values that we may not even know we have because we learn them as part of growing up in a group that shares them. Identity includes culture and many other personal things about us such as gender identity, education, religion, background, roots etc.

Research has suggested that festivals may influence the identities of the people involved and the host community itself. This impact may be a result of the events functioning as occasions to express collective

belonging to a group or a place, and provide opportunities to create histories, cultural practices and ideals. Festivals provide core activities that build on or are displayed in a frame of local culture and heritage (Taylor and Bennett 20).

The Power of Festivals in building Identity: The places in which festivities and festivals are held have a symbolic meaning and act as points of reference for local identity. Identity gives festivals some meaning, and the latter feed off the former to catch the attention of the local community and outsiders alike. The more festivals and festivities have content based on their local identity, the more authentic, attractive and interesting they become. By celebrating unique cultural traditions, promoting unity, festivals contribute in the formation of a community's identity. Festivals are a vibrant expression of a community's cultural heritage. They often revolve around specific traditions, customs, or historical events that are unique to a particular area or country (Kari 213). Hence, this study is a humble attempt to shed light on: 1) how festivals introduce an individuals' or a community's identity, 2) how festivals reflect the consciousness of holding a self-image and belongingness of a community.

Process of Belonging through Traditional Festivals: Festivals facilitate the expression and demonstration of particular values, cultures and histories of communities. Festival activities lure us in and arouse emotions that have the potential to encourage us to be more adaptive with others. At times one might feel associated and also one might feel alienated while discerning one particular community's festival. Emotions are activated through festival activities that encourage crowd inter-mingling, such as listening to music performances, joining in dance performances, the aromas and tastes of food, the draping of one's traditional attire and other forms of shared experiences. Festivals help sustain narratives of belonging by bringing people together to share or participate in various activities, but also exercise in remembering the past (Duffy 44). Festivals foster a sense of unity and belonging among people. They bring together individuals from different or same backgrounds promoting social cohesion and mutual understanding. Hence this study is a humble attempt to shed light on: 1) how rural festivals are significant events for communities 2) how rural festivals serve as a means to enhance and foster feelings of belonging.

The Dumrali Karbi Community: Racially the Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. The Karbis along with others entered Assam from Central Asia in one of the waves of migration. Those Karbis residing in the plains of Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam, and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya identify themselves as the Dumrali or plains Karbis. With their social head at Dimoria, culturally and customarily they have different sets of social behaviour and functions to their counterpart at Karbi Anglong. Linguistically they are as sub-group of Mikir groups of the greater Tibeto-Burman family and class as Amri (the other being Karbi). Amongst the plains Karbis or Dumrali Karbis there are three main social festivals: Domahi, *Mono ke-enⁱ* and *Rong ke humⁱⁱ*.

The Domahi of the Dumrali Karbis; an Introduction: The meaning of the word Domahi is derived from the word Domohi of the Karbis. 'Dom' means twist and turns and 'hi' means here and there. So the etymological meaning of the term Domahi means twists and turns of the body, basically the steps or bodily expressions made while performing dance here and there and there with joy. Thus, from the word 'Domhi' the word Domahi is derived. It is celebrated in the months of March-April. It is a festival of thanks giving to the Almighty *Hemphuⁱⁱⁱ*. Each member of the social setup of the village is known as Mekar, which might be the origin of the word Mikir as the tribes were known till very recently and in fact still do in some of the official documents. During the festival all the ancestors of the village are remembered and worshipped, this practice is known as *Sar-Kacherdung^{iv}* (Tumung 15).

Orality related to Domahi: Domahi is not only a festival or just an event of the Karbi community but it is rather a sentiment and an emotion for the Karbi folks. In the ancient days around 1440 AD, the Domahi was celebrated in the Dimoria region after the king Mriganka took his last breathe who was the last heir of king Arimatta, Karbi folk have chosen their reso a person named Dumura Rahang. It was the month of Jangmi (April) and folks greeted their newly elected king by playing folk musical instruments like seng-muri and performed dances gracefully and with immense joy by using shield and sword here and there. Since, then Domahi became a sentiment for the Karbi folks. There are three Domahi festivals of the Karbi community. They are as: Jangmi Domahipe, Fre Domahiso and Arkoi Domahiso.

Jangmi Domahipe: It is celebrated in the month April and is celebrated for seven consecutive days. It starts with gorubihu where the cow is given bath by the folks in the riverside or ponds; they are smeared with turmeric before giving bath. A new rope is given to the head-shepherd as a token of respect to tie on the neck of the cow. On that day itself deer hunting is a mandatory task to be performed by the village folk. If deer is hunted then it's meat is distributed in a systematic manner maintaining a hierarchy, the best portion of the meat is given to *bangthe*^v, other members of the village council is given the backpart of the hind legs, the folks prepare *okomi*^{vi} of the deer meat and distributes it to the village council. The villagers arranges for Domahi kikan in the starting of the Domahi. The charge of organizing the festival is given to the *khokrekhopo*^{vii} of the village, the merrymaking during this event is known as *nengrong*. In the closing ceremony of Domahi kikan the village folks are given blessings by the khokrekhopo and the village folk consider themselves to be very fortunate to receive these blessings as for them to be very something very sacred and valuable. Likewise for seven consecutive days Domahi kikan is celebrated and on the last day in the household premises of bangthe the youths specially the performers surrenders their folk musical instruments commonly known as seng-muri by paying reverences to their deity and seniors and thus bid farewell to the festival.

Fre Domahiso: It is also known as small bihu celebration or kati bihu. This bihu is celebrated marking the sowing season of crops in the paddy fields. As soon as there is sunset and dark fall the village folks light up *melur*^{viii} in the paddy fields. A yellow bird is sacrificed and offered to the *kothi*^{ix}. There is a local belief that once the sacrifice is done on this occasion, the insects in the paddy fields dies and do not eat or ruin the harvest/crops. In this bihu there is no such arrangements of local brew or feasts, thus, it is known as *Domahi Nengkrenso*^x. This event is celebrated in the month of late October.

Arkoi Domahiso: In the month of January or Magh, it is seen that the paddy fields are golden with crops, it is the season of harvesting. During this event there is usually many eateries prepared in the households, as every houses are packed and stuffed with crops thus many delicious items are prepared during this event such as: rice cakes made of rice powder, jaggery and sugar filled with desiccated coconut and sugar also with jaggery and black sesame seeds. Along with rice cakes many other items such as flatten rice, broken rice, puffed rice, rice flutes, ladoos made of coconut and sugar also of sesame seeds and jaggery, curd etc., are prepared. As there is availability or preparation of many edible items in every household during this event, thus, it is also known as Domahi sothapo. There are some major rituals to be performed during this event such as; a house of hay and straw is built in the corner of the village commonly known as *bhelahem*. In this bhelahem the village folks have grand feast together just the night prior to arkoi domahiso and on the day of this event in early morning the village folks lit fire to the bhelahem. This is also known as domahi honjengso or xutameruwa bihu. A thread is taken and tied in the four corners of the house, so that the family or that respective home stays out of the reach of any evil eyes or negative spirits for the whole year; it's a folk belief. After the thread is tied, then a half burnt bamboo slice along with a hay is tied on all the fruit bearing trees of the household premises. As it is not possible to tie bamboo slices/ threads in all the trees thus, only a hay/straw is tied. In this bihu the ancestors are paid homage by offering local brew in newly made bamboo mugs, freshly plucked betel nuts and leaves alongwith freshly made rice cakes. This paying of homage to the ancestors on this event is known as sarkidung in their local dialect.

The evolution of Domahi festival: First Domahi was celebrated in the kingdom of Dumura Reso gradually the *asono sirkep* or the ministers of the kingdom started celebrating in their respective regions like: Kiling, Kolongpar, Khamar, Sanimur, Tegheria, Tetelia, Barokasorong, Burosi, Marmeto etc. After this starting of Domahi celebration amidst other thirty ministers of the kingdom in their regions, the Domahi is declared by the King to be celebrated collectively in all the Karbi regions. Even if sometimes the Karbi folks of Karbi Anglong does not celebrate this Domahi event due to unavoidable circumstances but they embraces it as a part and parcel of their cultural identity. This domahi is seen celebrated in other important events such as *khari-khador*^{xi} where Barbangthai of the Senimur region of the Karbis is chosen as the chief of all the village heads (Tumung 20-25).

Domahi Alun and it's classifications: The songs which are sung during the Domahi is known as Domahi alun, alun means song. These alun are basically seasonal songs which are emotions of Karbi folks. There are seven major types of Karbi alun, they are as: a) Songs of Tribute b) Ballad c) Historical songs d) Songs related to animals and birds e) Work songs f) War songs g) Descriptive songs (Terong 25-30).

The Significance of Domahi Alun: One major instrument which is to be played while singing or performing Domahi songs is cymbals or locally known as Kali (muri). One or two stanzas of the songs are sung along with the rhythm of Kali-muri whose sounds are ear pleasing, these songs are performed from soft melodious range to high range. The performers or dancers while performing to the Domahi alun they have to mandatorily make a constant peculiar sound with their feet which sounds like girip girip; a particular step made by thudding the foot against the ground with immense pressure, this particular step of feet is commonly known as *sap bai sap bai kui*; which means stepping and killing all the negative energies, bad vibes, evil eyes, sad thoughts from their festival ground they step it hard on the ground and this indicates that no negative energy should pop up from the ground beneath all must stay underneath the ground. The spectator/audience gets an eye feasting performances of Domahi alun (Tumung 30). The songs are much of ditty and age old ballads which are of great importance and holds historical significance of the community's identity. Some important alun are as:

- 1) Songs of Tribute (Somon kiyan Alun): This type of song is sung by khokrekopo of the village addressing or paying reverences to the family in whose household premises the domahi performances is going on. The family of the house where the domahi performances happens is considered as the backbone or a support system of the domahi husori or commonly known as *ahoriya*^{xii}. One such important song is:

*Oo hembung oo hembung/
Hali pasi tha//
Doni donthom sokaobang/
Hali hudi tha//*

(Translation and meaning): Oh family come and greet us, we have to perform again in other two three family households. Please come and offer us platter of treats, here treats means the troop of husori is requesting for local brew and further sings by saying that only if the family provides them brew they shall get the energy to perform in the premise of other families houses. In this song one thing is found that local brew is a mandatory thing for the Karbi folk in the celebration of Domahi festival.

- 2) Ballads (Kitoko Alun): These type of song is sung in a rapid rhythmic order. The pace of performance on these types of songs is very fast. And this fast pace dance/performance is commonly known as dangduruk kikan. One such song is:

*Bang salbuk salbukpe/
Bang salbukpe//
Alang alang horo peene/
Riso kabhulepe//
Nango tape tape/
Nangmen thakiriko//
Riso riso alerengyako/
Meko kapabiriko//*

(Translation and meaning): the one who shakes the brew jar, one who serves/pour brew to the boys/man, you are that sweet sister in law whose name is *Thakiriko*^{xiii} (jujube), the one who passes winks at the young boys. Here the brother in law is teasing the lady who is serving brew in a very playful yet flirtatious manner saying that you are not an ordinary woman dear sweet sister in law, you can seduce the young boys of our village just by pouring brew to their mugs, even if your heart is like the jujube that is found in amidst thorns yet with your pretty eyes if you wink that skips the heart beats of our young village boys.

3) Historical songs (Arodipohu Alun): These songs are generally sung by the elder section of the community by conveying a message to the younger generations that everything in this world or life is transitory and fragile. One such song is:

*Angnim nemoprujino/
Kiye afuwok oi//
Barik lutsi lango/
Akuwel loi loi//
Tanga poisa pangrume/
Bithi jor jorosi//
Akhap kido dondon pen/
Alu alu si//
Dondon ingjong tangata ingjong/
Sirono sirono si dolo//
Ne jiropi ne duko theko si/
Suru suru si katdung//*

(Translation and meaning): What is this smell? This smell is of the bananas that is coming from the backyard orchard, but going to the orchard got to see that those are raw bananas which are not even ripe. I will earn and save money by selling betel nut and leaves, and I shall pluck them by climbing on a ladder, but there is no ladder, there is no money. I stood in utter disappointment thinking that there are dozens of problem. Getting to see me in disappointment my younger sister fled with someone crying her heart out.

Folk Musical Instruments used in the Domahi Kikan: Folk musical instruments are those equipments which accompany a song or any performance with rhythms and beats etc., these instruments are not mere instruments but carriers of cultural identity and holds communities emotions and sentiments. Musical instruments play a crucial role in any performance or a song when sung, it helps in placing the rhythms and beats which makes the song more melodious and pleases our ears.

Classifications of musical instruments: instruments can be classified into three major kinds, they are: folk musical instruments, classical musical instruments and western musical instruments. Amidst these classifications of musical instruments most widely accepted musical instruments are those introduced by Bharata Muni in his magnum opus Natyashashtra, it has its worldwide acceptance even in the contemporary era. Classifications of musical instruments as per the school of Natyashashtra are as: Tata Vadya, Avadana Vadya, Ghana Vadya, Sushir Vadya.

- a) Tata Vadya: This is basically string instruments. For example Dotara. Karbi folk musical instruments are: bin, seronda, tokari, senkumobang.
- b) Avadana Vadya: This is basically percussion instruments. For example Dholak. Karbi folk musical instrument is the seng.
- c) Ghana Vadya: This is basically solid instruments. For example Bells. Karbi Folk musical instrument is the taal.
- d) Sushir Vadya: This is basically wind instruments. For example Flute. Karbi folk musical instruments are: xinga, muri, pepa.

Introduction and crafting process of the folk musical instruments used in the Domahi Kikan: Karbi community has got only few folk musical instruments and there are four types respectively. They are: seng, muri, sonng and nok.

- a) Seng: This is a Avadana vadya or percussion instrument. Seng is one of the most important folk musical instruments of the Karbi folks. This instrument was first founded or introduced in the Karbi society by Bijangre Tumunge a renowned performer of the community. This instrument called seng can be classified into: sengpi, sengburup, sengkumeng, sengkhailot and seng lang pang.

The sengpi is performed in thi karohi event and also in Domahi kikan, *Dehal kasidorm*^{xiv} and *Retkinong*^{xv} too. The sengburup is a percussion instrument which is played only from one side, it is played in every occasion, if this particular instrument has to be played in the *thi karohi*^{xvi} event then it is a mandatory task to craft this instrument with the barks of a particular tree called *mas-petuka tree*^{xvii}. The sengkumbang is crafted of bamboo trees cut into smooth fine slices. Sengkhailot or also commonly known as tarsing is made from *ikora tree*^{xviii} or freshly growing soft bamboo sliced into 7

pieces and crafted. The sengpalang instrument is one of an ancient instrument of the Karbi folks. This particular instrument made from the bamboo where the hollowed portion is filled with dry twigs and thatches/grasses, it is not made out of animal skin or any other strings. This particular instrument is played by colliding the edges to the ground, the heavy side gives loud sound and soft side gives light sound.

Sengpi is one of the major instruments that is played in the Domahi kikan. The crafting process of this instrument is different from the other folk musical instruments of the Karbis. The hollowed portion of the sengpi is upto 15-20inch length; the breadth is 10-20 inch. If this particular instrument is played in the thi karohi festival then it is to be prepared with the barks of arhi arong or mas-petuka tree. In other festivals like Dehal Kasidorm and Retkinong the sengpi is prepared with the barks of *fang tree* or *jangfang tree*^{xix}. The portion of sengpi where hands are used for playing is called rithap and the other side played by using a stick simultaneously is called bethap. The rithap portion is crafted with goat skin and the bethap portion is crafted with cow skin, the rithap is to the left and bethap is to the right side of the instrument. The performer of this particular instrument is known as senkithep abang. The beating stick of this instrument is called sebeng and the pieces of the bark of the tree which is used to give the loud sound of the instrument is known as sengbaik. The stick which is used to sharpen the sound of the instrument is known as senkindar.

b) Muri (Kaali): This is a sushir vadya or wind instrument. This instrument is played by blowing air through mouth. This made with soft bamboo shaped and sliced finely to be played in a melodious way. There are three sections in a muri: muripe, muri jankek and muri tongpo. On the cone of muripe a bronze cap is fixed. Just to blow air smoothly powder of bird's feather is put in the cone. This instrument is played and performed in Muripe domahi, dehal kasidorm etc. In the very entrance of the instrument which is muri jangkek, pieces of bittergourd or pieces of the curved end of a buffalo horn is used a cork in the entrance of the instrument. In the event called thi karohi, basically muri tangpo is played.

c) Sonng (Shield): Sonng is basically used as props while doing performances. It is prepared out of animal skin. It is crafted like a round sifter. There are four holes and threads are tied to the holes to hold it properly. In the old days this very instrument was made out of Rhino skin, but now it is crafted or made out of cow or buffalo skin instead of Rhino skin.

d) Nok (Sword): Nok is also used as props while performing. It is made of iron; it is long and with sharp edges on both the sides. The edge towards the hand has a holder and a place to rest the fingers and hold it with a firm grip. The one who knows or have a mastery of performing sword dance is known as *Nokobe* or also *Harling* commonly. Nokobe means courageous people according to the Karbi folks. The dance performance which is performed with a sword in the Domahi kikan is known as *nakojir kikan* or *harling kikan*.

Knowing the significance of Domahi kikan from a close proximity: This particular dance is loved by the Karbi folks. The female folk of the community has to take care of catering and supplying local brew to the male folk of the community while they enjoy Domahi performances. It is the duty of the host family to take care of the ahoriya or husori troop so that the team does not faces any disturbances or trouble during the performances. The host family needs to keep an eye on the arrangements for the troop including their treat and greet. It is considered to be a duty of the hosts of the events. This kikan is celebrated in the month of April. This kikan is led by the khokrekopo. This kikan is not celebrated in the months of January and October. Domahi kikan can be divided into few groups. They are: loti kikan, ahoriya kikan, farbo kikan, dangduruk kikan and hai ki hang. Along with these kikan or dance forms different steps or postures are included which explains different steps/ postures of the kikan.

Postures and steps of Domahi kikan:

a) Loti kikan asel (road dance steps): the performers while finishing their dance in one house moves to the next house to dance again, they performs a peculiar dance step only on that very road/path leading to the next house this is loti kikan *asel^{xx}*. They perform on medium rhythmic beats only two medium beats is given to this performance. The performers here dances holding their sword and keeps their pace alongwith the rhythms by giving a step of cleaning the road and while reaching the gateway of the other house stops this dance step as this step is meant to be performed only on the road.

b) Ahoriya kikan asel (addressing or husori dance steps): this step is started by the performers as soon as they step inside the gateway of the house where they are going to perform. During the husori performance the performers requests the host family to treat them with homemade brew and sings of the benefits of devouring on homemade brew. To this song the performers forms a circle and in a circular manner sings and dances aswell. They sing:

*Horo soro wangole wangole ajohelo/
Kido ma kangwe ma oi ajohelo//
Apo ke junoje oi junoje ajohelo/
Alangsi june oi june ajohelo//*

(Translation and meaning): Is there fresh homemade brew in the mugs for us that is to be offered to the performers? Please bring the brew to us oh owners, dear sister, dear mothers, dear sister in law, but make sure we won't accept bitter brew but shall happy to devour on freshly made brew.

c) Farbo kikan asel (folk dance step): after ahoriya comes farbo kikan. This particular step is known as the keepsake or controller of the Karbi Domahi (it is also known as arosen rekha or bhangima rakhyak) within this there are many folk dance steps which are performed in the Domahi kikan they are as:

1) Sang nok-kasing deng (shield and sword play): during this dance performance the dancers split into two groups and dances like engaging in a war, this is basically war dance steps. Both the group performs as if they are engaging in a fight with steps like how to fight with a sword and protect with the shield simultaneously.

2) Nokojir kikan asel (sword dance steps): how to play a sword in a fight/war is shown through this step. The performers show stunts amidst performances by holding two swords at the same time by their teeth. Through this dance step it is power of the performer's physique is specifically shown or focused upon.

3) Fuk kiyo asel (step that shows how to plant a banana tree): the banana tree is planted in a straight direction. How the banana leaves sway to breeze and wind just like the banana leave swaying the dancers turns upside down with the help of hands where the head is placed on the ground feet is lifted on the air and swayed like the banana leaves, here the head and the hands placed on the ground is considered as the root of the banana tree the feet are considered as the leaves.

4) Sang kisang dang asel (shield play step): this dance step basically showcases how a shield is hold by a soldier or warrior in a fight/war for protecting themselves from the attacks of their enemies at the same time how it is used to fight back. Sang or the shield is hold in the front by the performers, how they hold and jumps towards front and to the back is showcased.

5) Boput kaklong asel (a step that shows how a bird turns and twirls): Boput is a bird which is found in the hills, it is basically red in colour. It is seen that sometimes the bird turns and twirls here and there with joy while it sings likewise the performers by resting their chest on the ground and holds their feet with hands dances by turning and twirling on the ground.

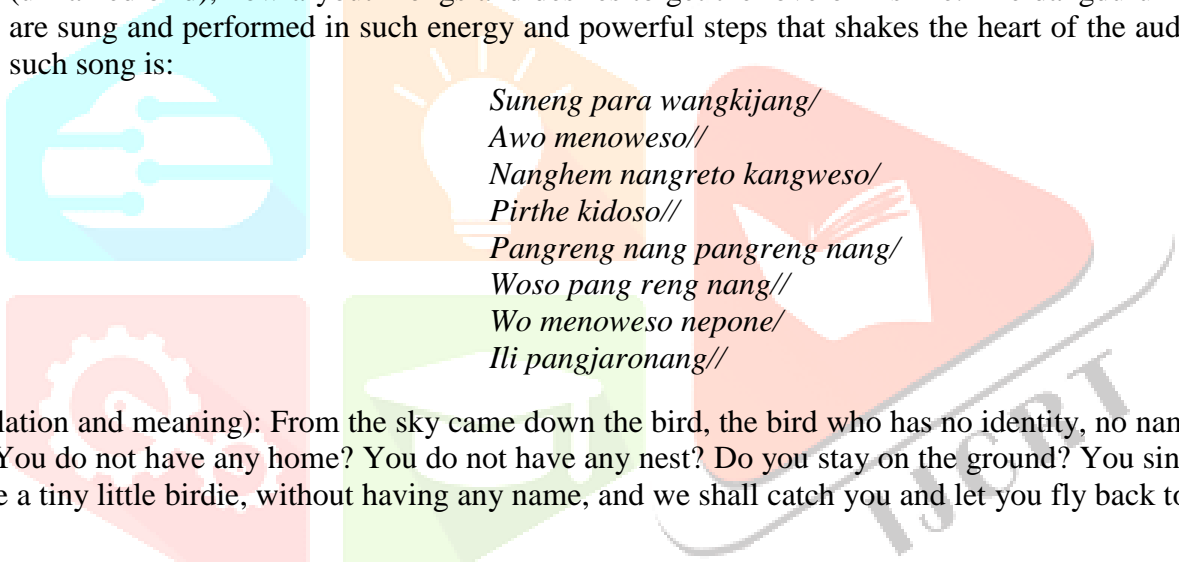
6) Waako atar kihoom asel (a step that shows how a crow picks up twigs from the ground): the performers while dancing showcases a step that is like how a crow picks up twigs from the ground. In the very onset of performing this dance step small twigs or hay/straw is spread or distributed on the ground. The performers then sits on the ground holds their feet with hands passing through their calves makes a posture like the crow wings and grabs the twigs laid on the ground with their mouth. The twigs collected are piled one side of the ground just how the crow does while gathering twigs.

7) *Seheng kikan asel* (a step that shows how a snake moves): this step showcases how a snake slithers or crawls on the ground and while slithering how it throws glances here and there, the performers too do the same movements. They also performs steps like that of a gecko lizard, the performers here put their hands on the ground and look up, they do not let their chest touch the ground they form the shape of a gecko lizard leaps up by looking here and there and shows these amazing steps by forming the shapes of a snake and a gecko lizard too.

8) *Tike sorong kinap asel* (step that shows how a tiger pounds on a cow): this step showcases how a tiger pounds on a cow and sucks its blood out. While performing the performers segregate into two teams where one team performs as cows grazing on the meadows and the other team acts as tigers pounding and attacking their prey the cows.

9) *Karole kisan asel* (step that shows how a squirrel jumps): this step showcases how a squirrel jumps or leaps playfully from one branch to the other or also on the trees on the grasses while searching for fruits. While performing the dancers segregates into two teams where one team acts as twigs, grasses or tree branches and the other team acts as squirrels hopping, leaping and jumping on top of the branches for fruits.

d) *Dangduruk kikan asel* (Tandaav steps): this step is performed with steady and fast pace, the performers hold shield and sword as well and performs the steps. The songs of this dance form are more descriptive; themes that revolve within the songs are those of: a village splitting into two (fights, war), lamentation, repartee etc., also sometimes it includes themes such as: life of Anamika bird (unnamed bird), how a youth longs and desires to get the love of his life. The *dangduruk kikan* songs are sung and performed in such energy and powerful steps that shakes the heart of the audiences. One such song is:



*Suneng para wangkijang/
Awo menoweso//
Nanghem nangreto kangweso/
Pirthe kidoso//
Pangreng nang pangreng nang/
Woso pang reng nang//
Wo menoweso nepone/
Ili pangjaronang//*

(Translation and meaning): From the sky came down the bird, the bird who has no identity, no name (mystical bird). You do not have any home? You do not have any nest? Do you stay on the ground? You sing and chirp, you are a tiny little birdie, without having any name, and we shall catch you and let you fly back to the sky far away.

e) *Hai ki hang asel* (steps of giving blessings): when *dangduruk kikan* comes to a closure the next comes the *hai ki hang*. There is no singing and dancing to this particular form. Only an instrumental music is played. Folk musical instrument that is *seng-kali* is played in an instrumental rhythmic way. During this form, the host family, audiences seeks for blessings from the *khokrekhopo* and in return the family offers a barrel of local homemade brew, rice, betel nuts and leaves and also an amount of money to the *husori* team performing. *Khokrekopo* blesses the whole family, audiences/spectators by saying that may the family have longevity like uncountable hair on the head, may almighty give them strength like those strong pillars of the temples, may they be righteous in their life chooses correct path, may they be healthy and wealthy, may goddess *Laxmi* bless them with harvest and wealth for the life time.

The Domahi attire: In the Domahi festival, the Karbi folk wear their attire but does not adorn any ornaments or accessories alongwith the attire. This festival is gender specific the females are seen not participating in the performances; since there are no female folk so there is no case of putting ornaments as accessories and ornaments are generally seen putting by the female group of a community. The male folk put on a blue coloured *solsang*^{xxi}, they tie a waist belt commonly known as *wamkok* or *tongali* which is of red colour. They also tie a turban on their head which is commonly known as *pongshore phudum* which too is red in colour. The gamosa which is hung around the neck should be either blue or white in colour and it should be long enough to wrap around the neck above the shoulder. And a white dhoti is worn on the lower part of the body where on top of it is tied the waist belt or *tongali*.

Conclusion: Identity is an outcome, a condition created largely through heritage which may or may not be conveyed through rituals as the vehicle of transmission. Like, heritage it is a product of imagination. Identity is that which makes something or somebody uniquely different, or makes something or somebody the same as identical with something or somebody else, both these two contradictory meanings are often used interchangeably (Christine and Karin 23). Identity is that we know exactly who we are, belonging means it is to know exactly where we fit, and identity allows us to know boundaries. Our social and cultural identity allows us to be a part of a group and to discover a sense of belonging-something that we all as humans innately crave. Traditional festivals hold significant importance for various reasons, including:

- 1) Cultural preservation: they help preserve and promote cultural heritage, traditions, and customs, ensuring that they are passed down through generations. The domahi kikan of the Dumrali Karbi community needs a cultural preservation for the generations to know and keep their roots intact.
- 2) Community bonding: festivals often bring people together, fostering a sense of community and belonging. They provide opportunities for social interaction and strengthen relationships among community members. Domahi kikan of the Dumrali Karbi community helps in bringing the community together and bring forward their cultural identity through the various forms of events, performances, gastronomy, ethnomusicology etc.
- 3) Identity and belonging: celebrating traditional festivals helps individuals and groups express their cultural identity and pride, reinforcing a sense of belonging to a particular community or heritage. Domahi kikan of the Dumrali Karbi community stands as a pride factor gives a sense of belonging to the folks.
- 4) Spiritual significance: many traditional festivals have religious or spiritual dimensions, providing a time for reflection, prayer or connection with the divine or nature. The Dumrali Karbi folk are found to keep deep spiritual connection with the nature and divine aswell, the dance steps farbo kikan asel (folk dance steps) and celebration of jangmi domahipe, fre domahiso and arkoi domahiso etc., shows their deep connection with nature and spiritualistic belief system.
- 5) Artistic expression: festivals often showcase traditional music, dance, art, and cuisine, allowing for artistic expression and the continuation of these art forms. Types of Karbi alun, usage of folk musical instruments like seng, muri, sonng and nok, also the graceful steps and expressions such as: loti kikan, ahoriya kikan, farbo kikan, dangduruk kikan and hai ki hang explains different steps/postures of the Domahi kikan which showcases various artistic expressions.
- 6) Rituals and traditions: they often involve rituals that mark important life events, seasonal changes, or historical events, helping individuals and communities navigate the passage of time. The Dumrali Karbi community holds firm belief on maintaining rituals and traditions like offering prayers to ancestors in the onset of every events and lighting of melur on the event of fre domahiso, maintaining a deep connection with the nature by following the traditional dance steps that emulates those of animals, birds, trees etc., can be seen reflecting through their Domahi kikan.

Dumrali Karbi folks celebrate the Domahi kikan festival with an intention keep the traditional games, art, culture, cuisine etc., alive for the future generations and after. The Dumrali Karbi folk perform Domahi kikan during Spring. Domahi is one of the most prominent community thanksgiving occasions of the Dumrali Karbi folk, when people comes together, feast together, dance to the beats of seng and to the melodious tune of muri and swing to the traditional melodious alun to heighten the celebration. Undoubtedly, Domahi is the most colourful festivals where the community enjoys to their heart's content (Bhattacharjee 10). Cultural diversity is considered as a source of wealth, and as a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, people and nations as a traditional knowledge system. The diverse forms of cultural practice across space and time embody the uniqueness and plurality of the identities and cultural expressions of peoples and societies. It can be summarized that, traditional festivals play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity, fostering community spirit, and contributing to the social and spiritual fabric of society. Individuals change their own behaviour to conform to the norms of a group; feel accepted and find a sense of belonging. Role of environment too plays a crucial role in building identity and fostering the spirit of belongingness. In the conclusion it can be put forward that festivals do influence the identities of people and place and that all processes related to festivals influences the need to belong too.

Notes:

- ⁱ Mono means paddy or rice and ke-en means to take. It is an occasion celebrated for two days, once in five years. All unmarried males and females of the village are to take part in the occasions. An event celebrated by the Karbi folks.
- ⁱⁱ It means village curfew. It is generally a three days affair once in five years. Just like the name suggested a kind of curfew is imposed in the village with all the roads leading to the village being blocked with thorn and bushes. No outsider is welcome to the village during these three days affair. The festival is generally celebrated in the winter. No female is allowed during the rituals of this festival.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Traditional God Head of the Karbi household. A local deity of the karbi folks.
- ^{iv} Ancestor remembrance occasion of the Karbis.
- ^v Village headman of the Karbis.
- ^{vi} chutney/ pickle
- ^{vii} Head shepherd of the village.
- ^{viii} Earthen lamp is known as melur.
- ^{ix} Local deity of harvest and wealth.
- ^x Dry bihu, a celebration without feasts or local brew.
- ^{xi} Greet and treat ceremony of the Karbis.
- ^{xii} The performers or husori troop that performs in the events.
- ^{xiii} Jujube fruit, a fictitious name given to the ladies who serves brew to the youths of the village.
- ^{xiv} It is an event which is performed with all ritualistic flavour and joy amongst the Karbis of Kamrup and some parts of Meghalaya. It is performed for the well being of the wealth, health and also for the better return for the agricultural activities to be undertaken by the people. Dehal means place of Gods and Kasirdom means Propitiation of the Gods where they stays.
- ^{xv} An event of the Karbis.
- ^{xvi} Ancestral homage offerings, commonly known as thi karohi by the Karbis.
- ^{xvii} A type of local tree.
- ^{xviii} A type of local tree.
- ^{xix} Jackfruit tree.
- ^{xx} Steps are commonly known as Asel in Karbi dialect.
- ^{xxi} A sleeveless hand woven shirt specially worn by the men of the community.

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