

**MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT
ON
WOMEN IN KARBI FOLK LITERATURE**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

**UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION
NORTH EASTERN REGION
GUWAHATI**

**INVESTIGATED BY
JATIN SHARMA
ASSITANT PROFESSOR
DR. BIRINCHI KUMAR BAROOAH COLLEGE
PURANIGUDAM, NAGAON, ASSAM.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my deep sense of gratitude to the University Grants Commission and Honourable Deputy Secretary, UGC, NERO for offering me financial assistance to carry out the Minor Research Project on “WOMEN IN KARBI FOLK LITERATURE”. I also express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Bhupen Saikia, Principal, Dr. B.K.B. College who helped me to avail this project.

I also offer my sincere thanks to Prof. Ramesh Pathak, Prof. Umesh Deka, Prof. Tareene Deka, Prof. Gayatri Gopem, Prof. K.C. Saikia, Prof. Akunthita Borthakur, Prof. Mallika Bora, Mr. Amar Kro, Prof. Elwin Kro and all my informants for providing me useful tips and necessary guidance.

I am also grateful to the respected librarians of Gauhati University, Cotton College, DHAS, Diphu College, Dr. B.K.B.College for their kind help and cooperation. I also thank all the members of Rangma Communication, Guwahati.

Last but not the least I am enormously grateful to my family members - Ma, Deuta, Papu, Poli and finally my son Timtim and also Dipa who constantly encouraged me to get the work finished.

(Jatin Sharma)
Assistant Professor
Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barooah College
Puranigudam, Nagaon, Assam.

CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Acknowledgement	ii
Chapter – I Introduction	1-6
Chapter - II Woman in Karbi Folk Life	7-18
Chapter - III Women in Karbi Folk Prose Narratives	19-45
Chapter - IV Women in Karbi Folk Songs	46-68
Chapter - V Conclusion	69-77
Bibliography	78-86
Photographs: Karbi Women performing various socio-cultural Roles	87

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a sociological science and studied in terms of folk literature, social folk custom, material culture and performing folk arts. Karbi folk literature like that of any tribe of North-Eastern India is very rich and varied. It can be broadly divided into five categories - a) folk tales b) folk songs c) riddles d) proverbs and sayings and finally e) charms. The folk tales of the Karbis cover their myths, legends, stories, jokes etc. Their folk songs include marriage songs, narrative ballads, spring festival songs, Chomankan songs, Hasa Kekan songs, love lyrics, children songs, play songs, work songs, religious songs, Ramayani songs etc. Karbi folk literature also abounds in riddles, proverbs, sayings, charms etc. Karbi folk literature reflects the life and thoughts of Karbi people, their folk mind, their interrelations, their socio-cultural ethos, their religious activities, their ideas, customs and beliefs, art and tradition etc. Karbi oral literature also tells us a lot about women, their nature and temperament, their likings and disliking, wishes and aspirations, duties and obligations, household businesses and agricultural works, social and religious activities, their conjugal life, their interpersonal relationships, their role as a daughter, member of Jirsang, as a wife, mother, an old women etc. It also talks about their place and status in their family and society as well. Yet it would not be easy to make generalised comment on nature and character of karbi womenfolk. The point is that Karbi folk literature which has survived time along with their social custom and material culture tell us a lot about Karbi women folk, their nature and character, their place and status in their folk society etc.

Statement of the Problem: Karbi folk literature can be read as an index to the place and status of a woman in the Karbi folk society. The Legend of Creation portrays Karbi woman as a source of creation and cause of continuation of their community, the story of “Rang Kesheng” reveals the Karbi woman as a social organisier and in ‘Adamasar Kangthur’ the Karbi woman stands for pacifism and enculturation of her community. If the story of Harata Konwar portrays kind-hearted, witty, affectionate, loving and caring Karbi women with values of life, the tale “Karham Jung Res” portrays a hard-hearted, cunning, villainous step mother. If the story of Arlengpii shows a Karbi woman’s devotion to her husband and family, the tale “Orphan and the king of Sin” projects her as a betrayer to her husband. The story of Rongferpi shows the bold and brave Karbi woman who raises voice against the

powerful and even dares to kill the soldiers of the king when self respect is in danger. The Karbi women understand and respect dignity of labour. How sincere and particular the womenfolk are in their household works is clearly seen in the story of Harata Konwar and their social commitment in the story of Kareng and Kading in “Thap Lapen Har Keman”.

The role played by Uchebi in Chomankan undoubtedly gives Karbi women a reasonably high status. The songs like ‘Jir-Pang Seng’ and ‘Bante Kepe’ reveal the involvement of karbi girls in social institution, decision making body, community cultivations, handy-crafts etc. The Karbi children songs (Oso Sepadak Alun) reflect depth of feelings and imagination, intensity of motherly love of an uneducated Karbi woman. In a love lyric the beloved is compared to the humming of bees and her existence is sought in the spirit of nature.

The character of widow in “Orphan and his Six Uncles” signifies the sufferings of womenfolk. The story of Rumeer also portrays the plight of a woman. Sufferings of women are often seen in Karbi ballads. The karbi women are not allowed to attend the village council (Me’) or they have to make separate sitting arrangement for the feast in the ‘Rongker’ festival. But Karbi woman’s unrestricted participation in ‘Hasa Kekan’ and Chomankan festival uplifts their position. Moreover in the song “Amoi Moi Kikan Alun” the karbi girls are compared to the goddess Lakhimi (Fortune) signifying their high and lofty position in their home. The cross cousin marriage system of the Karbis signifies the importance of the maternal uncle enhancing position and status of the mother. Thus the Karbi folk tales and songs, their social custom and material culture etc. show the involvement of Karbi women in socio- cultural, religious affairs, agricultural and domestic activities. These folklore materials also reveal their independency and their role in the economy of their family. Though Karbi society is basically a patriarchal one, in reality a Karbi family revolves round the mother. Active participation of women gives true colour, variety and spirit to their socio- cultural, religious, agricultural activities.

So the prime objectives of this attempt is to see, read and understand how Karbi women folk do appear especially in their folk tales and songs and play role in their field of custom and culture with a view to evaluating their place and status in their folk society.

Review of Literature: The proposed project on Karbi Folk Literature with a view to studying the place and status of Karbi Women in their folk society is a virgin soil in the field of research. However different critics have studied Karbi folk literature and extended their views on woman in karbi folk society.

Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barooah in his pioneering book on folklore *Asomar Loka Sanskriti* paves the door for the study of folklore as an academic discipline in North-East India while P.D.Goswami in his books *Ballads and Tales of Assam*, *Asomia Jana-sahitya* and *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India* etc. shows the way how to make a scientific investigation to and systematic study of folk literature with certain objectives. P.D. Goswami shows in his book *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India* how the songs and sayings, the tales and beliefs of a community tell us a good deal about the community's behavior. The book *The Karbis from the Papers of the late Edward Stack* edited by Sir Charles Lyall makes a comprehensive study of Karbi community, throws a considerable light on Karbi folklore and narrates a few Karbi folk tales. In *Parbatia Sadhukatha* and *Tribal Folk-Tales of Assam* compiled by Satyendra Nath Barkataki a few Karbi folk tales are narrated. Further folklorist like Birendra Nath Dutta, Dr. Lila Gogoi, Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, N.C. Sharma etc. make a critical study of Karbi folk literature. The books *Karbi Kristir Utshwa* edited and compiled by Longkam Teron and Karen Das, and *Karbi Kimbadanti* are of great help in understanding Karbi folk songs, tales, myths, legends, rituals, festivals etc and the place and position of women in their folk society and also the values associated with.

Rong Bong Teron in his article "Karbi Loka Sahityar Abhas" published in the book *Asamia Loka Sahitya* edited by Dr. Prahlad Kumar Baruah categorizes Karbi folk literature into groups and provides a glimpse of its lofty socio-ethical aesthetic values and shows how the Karbi children songs (Oso Sepadak Alun) reflect depth of feelings and imagination, intensity of motherly love of an uneducated Karbi woman. Jajnuram Gogoi in his article "Mikir" published in *Asamar Janajati* edited by Promud Chandra Bhattacharya talks about the Karbi, their origin and language, their folk literature, songs and dances, rituals and festivals, their social activities, role played by women in their socio-cultural affairs. Dr. G.C. Sarmah Thakur in his book *Selected Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam* discusses Karbi folk custom, beliefs, deities, tradition, institution and also the status of women in Karbi folk society and shows hoe the Karbi males and females are not status conscious and there is mutual co-operation between the sexes in each other's activities. Dr. Upen Rabha Hakacham in his book *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti* making a comparative and contrastive analysis of the songs and festivals of Karbi with that of other tribes of North East India critically looks at the roles played by women in Chomankan which signifies woman's high and respectful position in the society and also at the cross cousin marriage system of the Karbis in which impotence of maternal uncle enhances position and status of the mother. . Dhruva Kumar

Talukdar in his book *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti* also deals with Karbi folk songs and dances and highlights woman's unrestricted participation in 'Hasa Kekan'. N.K.Gogoi and Farhin Ara Begum in their article " Karbi Folk Narratives: A window to social reality " published in *Tribal Studies in North- East India* edited by Sarthak Sengupta studies Karbi folk narratives as an index to the evolution of their social life and critically looks at the role played by women in their social walks of life. Dipti Rani Changmai and Bani Phukan in their book *Bhaiyamar Karbi Loka-Sanskriti* deal with folklore of the Karbi of the plains where woman is regarded as the goddess of fortune.

The point is that there is ample scope to make a critical study of Karbi folk narratives, folk songs and dances, proverbs and sayings, riddles and charms etc. with a view to estimating the place and status of women in Karbi folk society.

Objectives: The objectives of the proposed project are as follows:

- a. To make a study of Karbi folklore and Karbi folk literature.
- b. To collect Karbi folk tales, myths, legends, songs, poems, riddles, proverbs, sayings, charms etc. and to categorise those into groups.
- c. To make a critical analysis of the Karbi folklore materials collected with a view to projecting the Karbi folk society.
- d. To see how Karbi folk literature reflects their folk mind and their attitude towards women.
- e. To see the place of women in their folk art and tradition, custom and beliefs, rituals and festivals, magic and practices, their ideas and ideals, fears and superstitions etc.
- f. To make a critical study of the role played by women in their folk society, in their socio-cultural, agricultural activities and indigenous institutions.
- g. Code of conduct for women in Karbi folk society, social norms and restrictions and also the values associated with women in their society.
- h. To make a comparative study of women of Karbi folk society with that of Assamese or other neighbouring folk societies. The present Karbi society will also be highlighted along with the place of women in it.
- i. To understand and estimate the place and status of women in Karbi folk society.

Methodology:

- a. Primary and Secondary Sources will be collected and thoroughly studied.
- b. Karbi villages of the Plains and the Hills will be visited and their rituals, festivals, cultural programmes etc. will be attended and folklore materials will be searched.
- c. Field-trips, interviews etc. will be taken, tales and songs would be collected and compared with those of recorded earlier.
- d. Comparative and contrastive approaches will be adopted in understanding women in Karbi folk society along with women of Assamese and other neighbouring folk societies. The present Karbi society will also be highlighted along with the place of women in it.
- e. The materials of Karbi folk literature collected will be critically analysed, the Karbi folk society will be projected and the role played by women in their folk society will be depicted.
- f. Methods and approaches like questionnaire, analytical, sociological, socio-cultural etc. will be used and the place, position and status of women in Karbi folk society will be estimated.

Hypothesis:

- a. Karbi folk literature may reflect a coherent, balanced Karbi folk society.
- b. A Karbi folk family, though patriarchal, but revolves round the mother.
- c. Karbi folk society, a rich treasure house of lofty socio-ethical aesthetic values, provides due respectable place to women and almost equal status with the males.
- d. The Karbi folk society with its values and the lofty place of women in it may appear instrumental in reorienting their new generation exhausted with unrest, materialism, consumerism etc. towards their age long values of life, their identity with rich heritage and also to live for the community and humanity as well.

Significance of the Study: The folk literature of the Karbis is the mirror of their folk life and folk values, traditional society and institutions, culture and tradition, indigenous knowledge and wisdom, individual and social behavior and adopting variations in different space and time it deserves systematic and scientific study. In present age characterized with technology and moral depravity the folk literature of the Karbis and their folk values are in a state of danger owing to different causes like urbanization, modernization, aggression of English language, lack of the narrators and singers of their folktales and folksongs etc. No doubt a

few books and articles are coming to light, yet a comprehensive work making a scientific categorization of every components of Karbi folk literature and systematic recording of those in written form is far reaching. The present study aims at a systematic study of Karbi folk tales and songs accessible in primary and secondary sources with a view to understanding and evaluating position and status of Karbi women in their traditional society.

Contribution of Karbi women to various components of their folk life and folk culture is well acknowledged by their folk society. Their folk literature is reflective of their various social roles and household duties, their involvements in their socio-religious activities and formation of society, roles as tradition bearer and protector of family and society, as a voice fighting for respect and dignity of women and protest against exploitation and marginalization of women. For example if the tales of Hi-mu, Dengrali, Larta, Lirbon, Kave and Kadom, Marpi etc. are reflective of the unending tale of owes and sufferings of Karbi women, the tales of Basapi, Kareng, Kading, Marongpi Rongpherpi Rongbe, Kareng Teronpi, Larbin and Lirbon, Disumai Rongpi, Dimmir etc uplift Karbi women from their victim position to a state where they can assert their voice. A rereading of Karbi folk tales and songs from the perspective of women is surely to help the young girls of the community to understand construction of woman self in their patriarchal folk society and reconstruct the same of their own in changing scenario.

Chapter - II

Woman in Karbi Folklife

Introduction: The culture and history of Assam starts with that of the ethnic communities in the state. Assam, in its present reduced form, is still the home of more than 23 tribes such as Boro, Mising, Karbi, Rabha, Dimasa, Tiwa, Deori, Sonowal-Kachari, Garo, Chakma, Hajong, Hmar, Naga, Lusai, Pawi, Synteng, Barman, Kuki, Lakher, Man, Mech, Hojai, Khasi-Jaintia etc. The areas of concentration of these tribal groups in the state are Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Baksa for the Boros, Dhemaji for the Misings, N. C. Hills for Dimasas, Goalpara for the Rabhas, Morigaon for Tiwas, Lakhimpur for Deoris, Dibrugarh for the Sonowal-Kacharies and Karbi Anglong for the Karbis. Apart from Karbi Anglong district the other areas inhabited by the Karbis are Nagaon, Dima Hasao, Kamrup, Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam and Jayantia Hills, Ri Bhoi and East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya. The Karbis are racially Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman ¹ and entered into Assam from central Asia in one of the earliest waves of migration ². Bishnuprashad Rabha called the Karbis the ‘discoverer of Assam’ and conferred the Columbus title on them.³ Of course Dharamsingh Teron is not happy with the ‘Columbus title’ and says “Like Columbus, we Karbis did not ‘colonize’ but ... have been colonized, divided, dispossessed, and deprived.”⁴ However the title was not an imposition but recognition of a peripheral reality made with a hope to understanding the identity of the greater Assamese community and constructing the history of the state from the below.

Understanding the Karbi Woman through the Folklore of the Community:

The traditional or folk ways of living a life constitute the folklore of a community. According to Richard M. Dorson folklore and folklife may be placed under four large groupings, namely oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts which may not be all-inclusive or mutually exclusive but throw the general terrain of folklore and folklife studies.⁵ Here an attempt is made to understand the folklore or folklife of the Karbi community in terms of the four-fold dimensions of folklore as shown by Dorson, namely their folk literature, material culture, social folk custom and their performing folk arts with a view to understanding place and position of Karbi women in their folk society.

(i) **Karbi Folk Literature:** Karbi folk literature covers different types of myths, legends, tales, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, chants and charms transmitted orally from generation to generation. Karbi folk literature is totally local, deeply rooted in folklife and provides ample scope for understanding the woman folk within their periphery. It can be broadly divided into - folk prose narratives, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters and chants and charms.

Karbi folk prose narratives refer to their myths, legends and tales. Karbi myths generally refer to their tales of remote past related to creation, gods and ghosts, birth of objects, festivals etc. The legends of the Karbis refer to their tales of recent past signifying historical importance. The Karbis have a good treasure house of folktales which can be sub-divided into supernatural, romantic, animal, humorous, trickster, cumulative, etiological tales etc. The Karbis have **folksongs** for every occasion of their socio-cultural life such as birth, purification, death, marriage, work, play, old age, worship etc. The folksongs of the Karbis may be classified into the following sub-genres - songs of creation, songs of social formation and administration, songs of feasts and festivals, seasons and agriculture, songs of rites and rituals, songs associated with children, songs of love and nature, songs of the aged, work songs, epic and ballad. A substantial number of **Karbi proverbs** contain practical and worldly wisdom and are considered in their society workable solution to problems and fruitful guidelines for getting success in life while a few are the wise instructions prescribed by the Karbi folk society to lead its approved way of life. If some of the Karbi proverbs reflect the community's moral judgment and socio-religious dogma while some of the others represent human nature, women's character and their attitude towards marginalized sections of the society. Karbi **riddles and tongue-twisters** are invaluable properties of Karbi folk society. The Karbi riddles are short folk expression often framed in the structure of a question starting with same phrases and designed in a way ensuring confusion on the part of listeners. The Karbi tongue-twister is a phrase or combination of phrases which is hard to pronounce quickly and clearly and naturally wrong pronunciation of the phrase(s) of a tongue-twister leads to much fun and amusement. The Karbis have a good number of household deities, territorial deities and agriculture related deities and worship them with particular **chants** made for the deity and occasion concerned. The **charms** of the Karbis are incantations or spells with magical power used to please a deity to get relief from disease, protection from evils, sickness and danger and for well being of crops and members of their community.

Karbi folk literature, rich and varied like that of any tribe of North-Eastern India, is reflective of folk life of the Karbis and an index to the status and position of women

in Karbi folk society and the socio-ethical values associated with. It records their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, wishes and aspirations, dreams and reality, expectations and experiences, anger and anguish, customs and traditions, courage and leadership. The Karbi folk literature also reflects the attitude of Karbi folk society towards women.

(ii) Karbi Material Culture and Women: If folk literature of a community deals with the aural aspects of their folklife material culture refers to the visible part of folk life or physical folklife. Karbi material culture refers to the skills and techniques, methods and formulas, arts and crafts associated with the process of building of their traditional home or their bachelors' dormitory, weaving of their traditional cloths, preparation of their folk dishes, farming and fishing, health and hygiene etc. which have been acquired by and transmitted across the generations throughout the ages.

The Karbi women are closely associated with their traditional **crafts** like the vessels made from dried gourd such as 'Bongchin', 'Bongkrok', 'Damdam', 'Bongkari', 'Bongkor', 'Bong-e', 'Langjok' etc.; bamboo made baskets such as 'Hak', 'Hoton', 'Hakmarjong', 'Khailun', 'Khangra', 'Woum', 'Phakum' etc.; bamboo made household items like 'Noksek', 'Lang-bong', 'Inghoi', 'Hingru', 'Hor-Ahi', 'Tar', 'Ingkrong', 'Hijap', 'Sampai', 'Dur', 'Phangcho', 'Chenam', 'Beleng', 'Chi' etc.; indigenous weaving instruments such as 'Ingthi', 'Harpi', 'Honthari Langpong', 'Thining', 'Thehu' etc.; fishing crafts such as 'Ru', 'Rukrak', 'Ruperlip', 'Rubongkang', 'Choklet', 'Burup' etc.; farming instruments like 'Ku', 'Nopak', 'Nokek Bengcho', 'Long Pum', 'Long', 'Kucho' etc.; ritual related crafts like 'Jambili Athon', 'Banjar', 'Mekik-Mekang', 'Tarso Ahi', 'Nok Kangthi', 'Horhak', 'Akrap', 'Lorap', 'Batang', banana leaf made filtration instrument etc. ⁶ The subsistence crafts of the Karbi farmer and the household crafts of the Karbi woman need separate treatment. The opinion of W.E. Roberts remains relevant – 'The farmer and his wife must have gained considerable personal satisfaction from supplying the needs of their families by their own hands, guided by their inherited knowledge of necessary techniques and patterns'. ⁷ The fact is that in a Karbi traditional society the Karbi women, acquiring of and capitalizing on their indigenous skills and techniques, formulas and patterns remain busy in addressing the needs of their family members, their social and cultural responsibilities, religious and environmental ethos.

The Karbis applied their aesthetic sense or their sense of taking or giving pleasure even in the objects made for practical purpose. The images or design of thorn, eyes of silk worm etc. used in their folk ornaments like 'Roy Pengkhara' are also examples of their **folk art**. The 'Nokek', a small knife used by Karbi women, with ivory handle also reveals their

aesthetic sense. In a traditional Karbi society pipe image and floral design are often used in their household tools. The Karbi women draw images from nature and their folk life and use as design in weaving their traditional garments. The turban worn by males on head called 'Poho' with the images of different objects of nature like birds, animals, butter-fly, trees, flowers etc is the expression of the inner beauty and aesthetic sense of the Karbi women. They also imprint the images of their traditional flowers in 'wamkok', the colourful belt used to tighten their 'Pini' the petticoat to their waist. Flower images are also used in their other folk garments such as 'Choi' the sleeveless striped jacket used by males. Further geometrical designs such as straight parallel lines are used in 'Choi' and 'Pini' the long skirt or petticoat worn by Karbi ladies. ⁸

Folk architecture of a community is concerned with the indigenous ways of building a house, a traditional sheltering place but meant to serve their folk ways of life. In a Karbi folk society their traditional house 'Chang-ghar' is a multi-functional unit meant to serve their socio-cultural, economic, religious aspects of their folk life and inculcate in the younger generation the values associated with. It gives exposure to their traditional kitchen, folk cookery, folk art and craft, household deity, rituals like purification of a new born baby, rituals for welfare of family members and property, traditional household items, fireplace, furniture, the sacred religious items, domestic animals, loom etc. It is the place where the woman self is constructed and made to learn how to receive a guest, worship a deity, cook a folk dish, how to sit, eat and sleep, how to take care of domestic fowls and animals, how to weave their traditional cloths etc. It is reflective of their male dominated folk society. As far as sleeping is concerned the household head, who is always a male, sleeps in the 'Kut' being close to 'Marjong' the symbolic centre of the house while the unmarried girls are provided peripheral area like 'Tibung' to sleep. It is also a rule that the household head is the first to be served and hence the first to eat food prepared for the family. The 'Household head' title passes from father to the eldest son or to the next in a compelling situation. If there is no male heir in the family a daughter can become a household female and inherit land and property, but cannot become a household head of the family and cannot inherit the religious artifacts constituting 'Marjong'. In such a case it is handed over to a close paternal male relative.

Folk costume is not mere an outward badge but reveals the inner self of the wearer, weaver and the community as a whole. The importance of Karbi folk costume lies to a great extent in its socio-ritualistic meaning, its role in their folk environment and the message carried to the outside and also the wearer's reaction to and belongingness with the costume and its manifold associations. Dharamsing Teron says that the Karbi loom is not just a piece

of cultural symbol but provides the Karbi women subsistence, self respect and pride and helps them to keep their homes and heritage alive.⁹ The Karbi women are the expert weavers. The traditional dress for the Karbi males are 'Choi', 'Poho' and 'Rikong' while for women are 'Pini', 'Vamkok', 'Pekok' etc. Stack and Lyall observed –'The women wear a petticoat (pini), secured round the waist by an ornamental girdle (vamkok). The petticoat is of white and red striped 'eri' cloth. The upper part of the body is covered with the 'ji-so', a wrapper passing under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts, the head is uncovered, and the hair is drawn back and tied in a knot behind. In the funeral dances, however, the head is covered with a black scarf called 'ji-soke-ik'.¹⁰ The 'Pini' generally is of black colour with white simple lines. According to the designs used the 'Pini' may be different types, such as 'Pini Pajangre', 'Pini Asanduk', 'Pini Aphidop', 'Pini Holki Raltom', 'Pini Ali' and 'Marbong Homkri Apini'.¹¹ 'Vamkok' is a colourful waistbelt full of floral designs exclusively used by women to tighten the 'Pini' to their waist. 'Pekok' is a long piece of cloth worn by women fixing it on their right shoulder and keeping it around their body over their blouse and 'Pini'. 'Piba' is another long piece of cloth used by women to tighten a child over their back and also in their ritual. 'Pelu', the white bed cloth with black border on both sides and 'Pelu-ku', the bed cloth with the design of 'merbong-kekang' or 'Marbong-bitu' are exclusively used by males and females respectively. And 'Jarong' is the traditional bag of the Karbis with various designs taken from nature is used by the both.¹² The Karbi women knew the art of making natural dyes out of various species of shrubs, herbs, barks, roots, flowers, plants etc. Besides the basic three white, black and red, the Karbi weavers could produce yellow and blue. White colour naturally came from cotton. Black and blue colours were produced from the leaves of a plant called 'Sibu' while red colour was produced from the resinous secretions of the 'lac' insects retrieved from plants such as 'thekok', 'chiri jangphong' and 'inghok'. The insects were collected and boiled in a container and the yarn is soaked in the water to produce the red dye. The yellow colour was produced from turmeric and the roots of 'jangtarlong'.¹³

The Karbi women are fond of **folk ornaments** and since the ancient days they have been using natural objects as ornaments or silver and golden ornament with designs taken from nature with a view to beautifying themselves and looking attractive. They wear various types of necklace such as 'Lekdhon', 'Lek Pongting', 'Lek Sabai', 'Ser Alek Punjang', 'Lek Pengkhara', 'Lek Ruve', 'Lek Bonghan', 'Lek Pila', 'Lek Paikam', 'Lek Bongnai', 'Lek Changti', 'Lek Thanpet', 'Lek Siki', 'Lek Jengjiri' etc. They wear three types of wrist band – 'Roi Pengkhara', 'Roi Tahu' and 'Roi Setung'. The Karbi women used to wear bamboo ear rings. The common Karbi traditional ear rings are 'Nathengpi', 'Nalangpong', 'Nathengpi

Plirplar’, ‘Nathengpi Akoron’, ‘Nathengpi Chawah’ etc. The traditional rings worn by Karbi women are ‘Arnan ke et’, ‘Arnan kelok’, ‘Rup Banda’, ‘Ser Banda’ etc.¹⁴ A small knife with a beautiful handle generally of ivory one has been an accessory of the Karbi women in their folk society, an ornament strengthening their personality and the value of self-defense associated with them. In a Karbi folk society till the days of recent past blackening of teeth with the ashes of the young branches of a tree called ‘Choik’ was a convention among the Karbi women. Another traditional ornament popular among the Karbi women in a folk society is the convention of taking ‘Duk’, a straight line of black colour from forehead to chin. Such natural ornaments like blackening of teeth and taking a black line on face metaphorically reflect the wrongs done to Karbi women in a patriarchal Karbi folk society. In present days of women empowerment such ornaments are read by the young generation of the Karbi women as means of suppression and consequently rejected by them.

Folk Cookery is a work of folk art reflective of or associated with different aspects of folklore and folklife. The Karbi women are in charge of their traditional kitchen placed in their ‘Kut’, the most innermost and sacred space of a traditional Karbi house. Traditionally they are fond of three basic preparations – ‘Kang-moi’ the alkaline, ‘Kalang-dang’ the boiled and ‘Hon-thor’ the sour dish. In ‘Kang-moi’ alkali is the prime ingredient which is gleaned from various natural sources like dried and burnt ashes of immature bamboo, mustard plant, corncobs, barks of a local variety of banana etc. Generally smoked meat and dried fish are cooked in alkaline preparation. But in ritual raw fish and meat are cooked in ‘Kong-moi’. ‘Kalang-dang’ is a process of preparation in which meat or fish or the item to be cooked is boiled in water with salt and raw turmeric. Rice is the prime dish of the Karbis. ‘Horlang’ is their traditional rice-beer without which hardly a Karbi ritual is performed. They are also fond of wild potatoes like sweet-potato etc. They traditionally avoid use of mustard oil and spice and use only a few locally available spices. In an alkaline preparation they never use turmeric. The Karbi women, the tradition bearer of their male-centric society, always serve the first spoon of rice to the head of the household at home and to the eldest male or the male of the highest socio-cultural status in a ritual.

(iii) Karbi Folk Social Custom: Karbi social folk custom understood in terms of their traditional rites and rituals related to birth, marriage and death, their folk institutions and socio-political system, folk feasts and festivals, celebrations regarding seasons and agriculture, games and recreations, their folk religion and modes of worship and their indigenous healing system is reflective of women’s place in their folk society. In the ‘Mei’ the Village Council there is hardly any place for women while an unmarried girl can be the

member or leader of their bachelors' dormitory known as '**Jirkedam**' or '**Jirsong**'. The Karbis strictly follow clan exogamy and consider a marriage between a boy and girl of the same clan a sin. The children belong to the clan of their father and own his property. The important point is that the clans of the girls after marriage are not changed and so they do not take their husband's surname. **Karbi Customary Laws** are guardian of their patriarchal society. These are as follows –

- a. They follow the patrilineal system tracing their descent in the male line.
- b. After the death of the father the eldest son becomes the household, the owner of the father's all movable and immovable properties and owns the obligation to perform the rites. But, if he marries a girl from the same clan he loses all right and in such a situation the next son inherits the property and the household as well.
- c. If there is no son in the family, after the death of the father, a daughter can inherit the parental property, but cannot become a household. In such a situation the nearest male relative from father's side owns household and obligation to perform rites.
- d. Marriage is monogamy. Clan plays an important role in maintaining exogamy. 'Kursenem' the marriage between a boy and a girl of the same clan is a punishable crime. There is no bride price or dowry system.
- e. Divorce is permissible. After divorce, the husband and wife get the custody of grown up and minor children respectively. If she remarries, all her children are bound to go back to the father.
- f. Widow marriage is permissible. Junior levirate and junior surrogate are permitted. But at no circumstance the widow is allowed to marry the elder brother of her deceased husband. If a widow or a widower gets married violating the prescribed categories, they have to pay a fine fixed by the village head or council for acceptance.
- g. A widow is entitled to receive maintenance from the family of her deceased husband. If she remarries, she loses her right over her dead husband's property.

The **Codes of Conduct** traditionally followed by the Karbis reflect that their folk society is conscious of prestige and respect of women in their society. 'Nihu Sarkan' is one of such rule through which males are compelled to respect the ladies like the wife of maternal uncle. Further the society stresses on maintenance of a distance between a Karbi woman and her father-in-law or the elder brother of her husband.¹⁵ Further the **social ethics** traditionally followed as taught by Hemphu such as purification of body, mind and spirit, purity in whole life, nobility, humble and amiable nature, rejection of ill temper, self dependent, competitive spirit in mind and good sense, obedience, good dealing and self confident¹⁶ are instrumental

in making the woman self of the Karbis. Another important aspect prevailing in a Karbi folk society is the **tradition of fortune telling** by the diviner. There are two kinds of diviner- 'Lodepi' and 'Sang Kelang Abang'. 'Sang Kelang Abang' is the male diviner and 'Lodepi' is the female diviner who can talk with the ancestors and deities and predict the cause of a disease and distress of a family and the result of a ritual.

The salient features of **marriage** in a Karbi folk society are reflective of women's respectful place in their folk society.

- i. Marriage by negotiation known as 'Adam Achar' is the most common among the Karbis. The women always take the initiative.
- ii. A symmetrical cross cousin marriage system is the most preferred type of marriage in Karbi tradition. A boy in a Karbi society is always expected to marry the daughter his mother's brother.
- iii. The Karbis prefer tribal endogamy and strictly follow clan exogamy. Marriage between a boy and girl of the same clan is strictly prohibited.
- iv. The practice of polygamy is not favoured in Kabi society.
- v. Child marriage has never been a practice in Karbi society.
- vi. Widow marriage is preferred and she is expected to marry the younger brother, but at no circumstance the elder brother of her husband.
- vii. After marriage the girl does not change her surname though her children take her husband's surname.
- viii. Karbi marriage system is devoid of bride price.
- ix. The Karbis do not have dowry system.
- x. The ritual 'Pechoricho Kasethon' is observed by returning the bridal dress to the parents of the bride with honour in a traditional way.
- xi. Divorce is rare in Karbi society.
- xii. The maternal uncle and thus mother's place is highly esteemed in a Karbi marriage.
- xiii. A married woman in a Karbi tradition maintains the rule 'Kaservi', i. e. while walking she is always in front of her husband but remains at the back with a male other than her husband. The young generation hardly follows the rule.

'**Chumangkan**' or '**Karhi**' the funeral ceremony of the Karbis is reflective of women's important role in ensuring the dead their ancestors' land and the living to a state of social cohesion. If 'Obkopi' takes home the souls of the dead in the form of shells, 'O'chepi' inserts life to the dead and takes care of the dead providing them food and other

necessary stuff while ‘Charhepi’ continues her lamentation songs for three days preparing the ground for the final farewell of the dead. The ‘Nimcho-kerung’ dance, where unmarried boys and girls of different clan take part, signifies rebirth and regeneration while the ritual ‘Rong Kethon’ signifies the final farewell to the material life of the dead and their safe passage to ‘ancestors’ land’. In the ritual of the fourth day known as ‘Thkup-Karkok’ the relatives especially the sister-in-laws clean the environment and are honoured for their service. Further ‘Ochepi’, ‘Charhepi’, ‘Dihuidi’, ‘Obkopi’, ‘Nihu’ etc. are honoured in a traditional way and are thanked for their service in the whole ritual and formally given farewell. ‘O’chepi’ performs ‘Munchin’ tradition while receiving the honour. Its prime significance lies in the fact that it provides opportunity for the individuals to identify and associate themselves with their rites and rituals, folk belief and tradition, art and craft, songs and music etc. and helps them to develop oneness with the community and its culture. Thus ‘Chomangkan’, a celebration of death and rebirth, fertility and regeneration, is one of the prime means of social cohesion in a Karbi folk society. Women can take part freely in ‘**Chajun**’ festival while do not take part in the worship and sacrifices of ‘**Rongker**’. **Wolo Keter**’ is the worship of the rain deity ‘Ha-i-mu’ or worship of nature suggesting a celebration of love and fertility. The magico-religious ritual called ‘**Nihu Kasiri**’ gives lofty place to maternal uncle. Unmarried young boys and girls sing and dance together in the festivals like **Johang, Hacha Kekan, Domahi, Kurmi etc.** The Karbis of the plain perform a ritual called ‘**Monuki en**’, worship of goddess Lakshmi providing a respectable position to woman in Karbi society. Folk games and recreations are nothing but traditional forms of play practiced by a particular community with regional varieties. ‘**Chobai ke pathu**’ is a game generally played by the girls with mollusk shells and ‘**Jat jat kechan**’ are the means of recreations for the girls played with small bamboo sticks and in a palanquin respectively. ¹⁷

Karbi Religion is animistic in nature characterized with its own philosophy expressed in their rituals and purifications, worship of nature and its objects, ancestors’ worship, worship of household and territorial deities etc. The Karbis do not believe in the concept of heaven and hell but think that the final destination of the Karbis is their ancestors’ land. The narratives of the ‘Charhepi’ remain the same for all dead persons irrespective of their class or clan or nature. As far as the female Karbi folk deities are concerned **Rasinja, Kase** and **Kabe** are noteworthy. Rasinja is the deity of sunrays and rain, the deity of war and peace. Rasinja is worshipped on the first day of the year by offering red fowls, harlong and boiled rice in a bamboo pipe to her. Kase and Kabe are considered the presiding deities of crops grown in high land and low land respectively. The Karbi women folk are expert in using the plants for

curing different diseases, take initiative in magico-religious 'Vo kartap' ritual and even play the role of a diviner.

(iv) Karbi Performing Folk Arts: Performing Folk Arts cover folk drama, folk music, folk dance etc. The Karbis have a rich tradition in performing art especially in folk dance and music. The Karbis do not have folk drama proper but have certain performance-types or folk drama like performances integrated to their rituals such as 'Vo Kartap', 'Adam Achar' etc. where women are not detached from. The funeral ritual of the Karbis 'Chomangkan' is characterized with a variety of dances like 'Songchingnang', 'Chong Kedam', 'Rong-Ketong', 'Ingat-Seron', 'Kengtir-Kekan', 'Kengtir Kebane', 'Nimcho-Kerung', 'Banjar Kekan' of which 'Kengtir-Kekan' and 'Kengtir Kebane' are associated with 'O'chepi' and unmarried girls dance 'Nimcho-Kerung' with unmarried boys of different clan. The Karbis also have dance forms associated with agriculture and season. For example, the dance form performed in the harvest festival by the Karbis of the hills is known as 'Hacha Kekan'. If 'Hacha kekan' is a dance form segregated by sex 'Nimcho Kerun' dance is performed by partners of opposite sex of different clan.

Another dance form is 'Lengpum-Sokchon' in which a group Karbi women dance on bamboos signifying production of rice from paddy in a folk way of their life. The dance form associated with 'Kurmi' worship is known as 'Akkaral Kekan' and the unmarried young boys and girls in the ritual sing 'Kurmi Alun' and dance the same on bamboos for the whole night. Participation in a folk dance by a Karbi girl is a two-fold journey for the individual – an outward one wearing a folk costume following the motor movements to identify themselves with others of their community and inwardly a search for the self with a view to understanding the self in terms of their culture and patriarchal setup.

It is a humble attempt made with the objective of understanding the Karbi women in terms of their folklore or folklife read from the perspectives of folk literature, material culture, social folk custom and their performing folk arts. The varied ways of the folk life of the Karbis, the racially Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman community, with their distinct geographical concentrations, indigenous socio-political institutions and customary laws, with their own culture and language, deities and religion, festivals and celebrations, customs and rituals, folk dance forms and music, diviner and healing system etc. form the Karbi folk society with its indigenous environment, where a Karbi woman-self is constructed in tune with their folk way of life and as designed by their male dominated folk society. Still they enjoy certain liberty in comparison to their non-tribal counterpart of this region and live a free, self dependent, courageous life. They hardly suffer from inferior

superior complexity in their social life but prefer to be busy in their household duties, cooking food or weaving garments for their family members, taking care of their children and their animals and fowls. The Karbi woman may experience certain restrictions in their folk way of life, but not a suppressed self, rather lives a respectable life enjoying their right on property and surname, access to widow marriage, ban on dowry etc. They are not merely tradition bearer and care taker of the values of life fostered by the community, but lead their families from the front and remain life force in their familial, socio-religious, ritualistic life.

Notes and References:

1. Dipankar Moral, *Languages of North East India*, B.G. Basumatary Memorial Lecture, Bijni College Cultural Society, Bijni, Bongaigaon, 2003, pp.1-10.
2. B. K. Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 1951, 4th edition 2003, p.6.
3. Bishnuprasad Rabha, "Asamia Kristi", in *Bishnuprasad Rabha Rachana Sambhar*, Part-II, ed. Dr. Sarbeshwar Bora, Rabha Rachanawali Prakashan Sangha, Tezpur, 1997, p.1092.
4. Dharamsing Teron, *Karbi Studies*, Vol.2, Assam Book Hive, Guwahati, 2011, p.3.
5. Richard M Dorson, ed. 'Introduction', in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972, p.2.
6. Informant: Amar Kro (55), Chapanalla.
7. Warren E. Roberts, 'Folk Crafts', in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, ed. Richard M Dorson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972, p.250.
8. Basanta Das, *Karbi Sanskritir Etihash*, ed. Ajit Singnar, Aank-Baak, Guwahati, 2010, pp.50-51.
9. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit. 102-106.
10. Charles Lyall (ed), *The Karbis from the Papers of the Late Edward Stack*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati:Delhi, 1997,, op.cit. p.6.
11. Basanta Das, op.cit. pp. 50-51.
12. Informant: Bina Tokbipi (45), Parkup Pahar
13. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit. 118.
14. Basanta Das, op.cit. pp. 53-54.
15. Basanta Das, op.cit. pp. 75-80.
16. Mondal Sing Bey, *The Karbi Belief*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2009. p.11.
17. Informant: Amar Kro (55), Chapanall

Women in Karbi Folk Prose Narratives

Folk Prose Narrative is one of the prime genres of folk literature of a community. The impulse to tell a story and the need to listen to it, according to Linda Degh, have made narrative the natural companion of man throughout the history of civilization.¹ The Karbi folk prose narratives comprise of myths, legends and folktales told in prose. Myth generally refers to those tales related to religion, creation of earth, man, ghost, gods, origin of different objects and birth of festivals. A legend is generally the story of a legendary figure or episode or a place of historical importance. The folktale, the highly polished and artistic story genre having a relatively consistent and finished form, may be sub-divided into Marchen or Magic or Supernatural tale, Religious tale, Animal tale, Etiological tale, Humorous tale, Trickster tale, Realistic tale, Cumulative tale, Historical tale etc.² However, it is not an easy task to differentiate the genres or the sub-genres each from the other for the intra and inter variations. A tale for one culture may be a legend for the other or a myth for one culture may be a tale for another. According to Linda Degh the greater their popularity, the greater is their inconsistency. They have no “final” form. As long as they are told, they vary, merge, and blend.³ The prime objective of this chapter is to go through Karbi myths, legends and tales with a view to understanding of the place and status of women in a Karbi folk society from different perspective.

Women in Karbi Myths: A Karbi myth deals with the story about the creation of Karbis and their land, different objects of nature, birth of rituals, story about gods and goddesses, beliefs and religion etc. The Karbi myths constitute the realm of their earliest worldview, folk belief and reflect their folk society. The Karbis have a good number of **creation and origin myths** constituting their worldview. A few of their creation myths are legend of creation, creation of Karbis, origin of objects like rice, cotton, fish, salt, rice beer, chilly, pig, fowl, ginger, bottle gourd, tobacco, sward etc. Of course most of the Karbi myths have its origin in folksongs. The myth ‘**The Legend of Creation**’⁷ narrates the myth of creation of the Karbis and their land. It is said in the myth that Hemphu and Mukrang with the help of the deities like Bamon’s wife, Hajong, Helong Recho and Kaprong created the land for the Karbis, planted various seeds of trees and plants and non-human beings with the help of Rekbepi and Rek Kropi, Pithe and Pothe. Then Hemphu and Mukrang created

‘arlung’ Bamonpo, who was instrumental in giving birth to the Karbi community. According to **another version of the creation myth**⁸ the gods of the Karbis after plantation and animal established a forge and created ‘arlung’ the Karbi. According to another version of the **myth of creation**⁹ the first Karbi was born from the biggest egg laid by the bird ‘Plakwuk’ who came out of the egg slowly with much hesitation, fear and anxiety caused by presence of inhuman and cruel people all around. These variants of creation myth show how ethnocentrism and sense of hesitation have been with the national character of Karbi community since creation, and so with Karbi women. Here acknowledge of the role of women in their earliest policy making body or in creation of the community is reflective of a balanced folk society where a healthy man-woman relationship and inter-dependence is projected as the cause of creation. The Karbi **origin myths**, basically found in their songs of creation, are related to the origin of bottle gourd, rice beer, rice, cotton, plantain leaf, chilly, tobacco, fowl, sword etc. reflect the community’s original perception of their world, the way of their folk life and healthy human-nature relationship.

The tales of Hemphu, Rukasen, Teron RongSopo, Rangchina Sarpo, Rangmukrang, We Longri and Har Longri, Borli e, Klongklo’ Athekar, Harbamon, Binongpo, Sat Recho etc. can be considered myth in Karbi oral literature. A study of these myths shows various contributions of women deities and women to their folk life and their position in their folk society. As it is found in the myth of Rukasen,¹³ the divinely bestowed social organizer Kasen Be or Rukasen, listening to the advice of his wife established the first Karbi village Miring Rongchopi at Nongkula on the bank of the river Kopili. The tale portrays **grandmother Basapi** in the process of village formation and reflects woman’s participation in policy making affairs in a Karbi society. The myth with Rang Mukrang¹⁴ narrates how **Kareng** and **Kading** getting fascinated with the smell of the droppings of ‘kongching’ devised the fermentation and prepared the magical brew and gave birth to their traditional rice-beer ‘hor’ without which hardly any ritual can be performed in a Karbi society. The myth of Hemphu¹⁵ narrates how the deity in human shape with his sister **Rasinja** came to the village Miring Rongsopi and introduced social rituals and customs especially marriage system and social ethics to the Karbis. The myth of Hemphu is integrated with values like purification of body, mind and soul, keeping purity in whole life, nobility, humble and amiable nature, giving up of ill temper, self-dependence, unity, obedience, good dealing and self-confidence etc which have been the prime **values structuring the woman self** in a Karbi folk society. However in present day context the values associated with purification and purity can hardly attract the younger generation of the community and remain relevant

basically in ritual and religious activities. The tale of Teron Rongsopo¹⁶ takes into account the contribution of Teron Rongsopo to the origin of rice in Karbi world and narrates how **Rice the woman deity**, daughter of Barithe, came to village Teron Rongsopo with a view to addressing the hunger of the Karbi people. The tale of Harbamon¹⁷ makes the young Karbis learn their culture and tradition, the myth of Borli e¹⁸ projects their philanthropic deities and the myth of Rangsina Sarpo¹⁹ introduces song and music to Karbi society. The tale of We Longbi and Har Longbi²⁰ portrays the wise old woman **Marongpi** who makes the two friends learn ills of war and the values of discussion, cultural assimilation and healthy environment. The myth of Thireng-Wareng²¹ introduces ‘Chomangkan’ and shows how love for an individual gets transformed into love and concern for the community. The myth of Binongpo²² portrays **cruel sisters**, inculcates a sense of love and respect for maternal uncle, and importance of non-human environment in sustainability of human life on earth. The myth of the great Karbi ruler Sat Recho,²³ condemn while the myth associated with Richo Arnam Karkli²⁴ is a tale of sorrows and sufferings, reflecting the atrocities on the weaker sections of the society.

These Karbi myths give the new generation of the community exposure to their ancestors and their contribution to the earliest processes of formation and organization of Karbi village, construction of ‘Changghar’, formulation of rules and regulations, appointment of village chief and establishment on the bank of river, bachelors’ dormitory and training to the youths, rites and rituals, folk dress and cookery, purification and sacrifice, clan system, songs and dance, creation of rice, cotton, ‘Bong’, ‘Hor’ etc and above all folk values of life providing backbone to their folk society. These tales take the names of the mythical-historical figures like Rukasen, Rang Mukrang, Long Mukrang, Hemphu, Harbamon, Teron Rong Sopo, We Longbi and Har Longbi, Borli e, Rangsina Sarpo, Thireng-Wareng, Binongpo etc. and women characters like Rasinja, Basopi, Velibon, Kareng, Kading, Kase, Marongpi, Kasang Ingtipi, Kawe Timungpi, Kase Ingtipi, Kanong etc. Representation of women character as bold and courageous, taking part in policy making, contributing to culture and tradition is one of the striking features of the Karbi myths. These women characters, if read with feminine sensibility, may help the young girls of the community not only to socialize and assimilate themselves with their culture, but to compare and contrast role and position of women in their mythical social structure with that of their own in their present social milieu and thus to reconstruct their selves for their own sake.

Karbi Legend: If the myths of a community belong to a world preceding the present order the legends date to the early stages of the present order of the community. In comparison to the myths and tales the legends are more human and give exposure to real life of their recent past.²⁵ The Karbi folktales built on historical events and legendary figures are called the legends of the community. These are considered true by the community and transmitted orally from one generation to another with a view to making the new generations of the community aware and be proud of their glorious and eventful, happy and painful past and to live with their rich tradition and folk values. A few women centered Karbi legends are as follows -

1. **The legend of Rongpherpi Rongbe**³²: The legend of Rongpherpi narrates how the Kachari king tortured and humiliated the Karbi people and especially the Karbi women. Rongpherpi, a bold Karbi woman, violently protested and killed the soldiers of the Kachari king when they demanded milk from her breast to feed the tiger of the king. After the incident naturally the Karbi people suffered and searched for new destination.
2. **The legend of Larbin-Lirbon**³³: The legend belongs to the time when there was a cold war going on between the Karbis and the strong Khasias. Larbin and Lirbon, the Karbi girls, while playing on the bank of a stream in a hilly area and making a garland of 'Tamhidi' they noticed the Khasi soldiers and informed villagers of the possible attack. While guarding the villagers that night Lirbon got asleep and Larbin through her song tried to awake her and let the villagers know the presence of enemy soldiers. Larbin went on singing, kept the enemy waiting and saved the lives of their villagers. When her song came to an end after a prolonged time the Khasis entered and killed both of them.
3. **The legend of Disumai Rongpi**³⁴: The legend narrates how for the first time in a Karbi tradition 'Jirsong' the bachelors' dormitory was established at the village Teron Rongsopo with nineteen office bearers for six years. Disumai Rongpi was made the Klengsarpo, a Naga was posted as messenger and a few girls led by Didimur were made members of Jirsong. Disumai and Didi fell in love and decided to get married at the end of six years. But Disumai Rongpi wanted to go to his maternal uncle at the village Tanti Rongsopi to bring costume for him and promised to come back to marry her. Didi waiting in vain became depressed and committed suicide learning that Disumai's marriage was fixed with his maternal uncle's daughter. While returning Disumai only found the dead body of Didi near Amseng hill.
4. **The legend of Dimmir**³⁵: Dimmir, the beautiful daughter of Mai Longbi grew playing with Long the son of Mai Longbi's sister. The ritual 'Honjeng Kekok' of binding white

thread on the hand of Dimmir as a wife of Long was socially performed. The youthful beauty of Dimmir attracted the village head Sar Mangbi who with the help of Long Teroi, a magico-religious man, could hypnotize Dimmir through chants and charms and eloped with her. The villagers searched for Dimmir and finally recovered her from the hands of Sar Mangbi. Dimmir, the symbol of physical beauty of Karbi women, victim of the strong male's conspiracy, shows her courage and mental strength and spits in the mouth of the loud village head.

5. **The legend of Larta**³⁶: During the festival of 'Rongker', the village head receiving the honour called 'Banta' allowed the youths of the village to constitute the bachelors' dormitory 'Jirsong' and ordered that at least one from every family should join the Jirsong. No way was left for Larta the expert weaver, since she had no brother, but to join the Jirsong. The girl had to stay and work with the boys and to perform all the duties assigned to the members of the Jirsong. For six years she could not think of her personal life and sometimes people laughed at her for staying with the boys. She had to live a life of suffering and humiliation for the male friendly rules of their society and humiliation of women.
6. **The legend of Serdihun**³⁷: If 'Chintu' made the cotton grow on Karbi land, Chelangdi discovered the way how to make thread from cotton, Rimsipi introduced the art of weaving, according to the legend of 'Serdihun' Dihun introduced to the Karbis the art of their indigenous dying system and for the first time floral design in their costumes. Once Dihun danced 'Nimcho-Kerung' with Bangphu, a member of Jirsong of a distant village and fell in love with him. Bangphu gave her a pair of 'Nalangpong' made by himself. Dihun wanted to give him a 'Poho' a turban in return. She went to forest and collected a few shrubs, herbs, barks, roots, flowers, plants etc. from nature and produced natural dyes out of those. She made the black colour from the tender leaves of 'myrobalam' tree and the blue colour from leaves of a plant called 'Sibu'. The red colour was produced from the resinous secretions of the 'lac' insects retrieved from plants and produced the yellow colour from the roots of 'jangsailong'. With four coloured threads she began to weave the 'Poho' and could make floral design such as hand-fan, deer, creeper etc. in the 'Poho'. She went to meet Bangphu and Bangphu got the turban but Dihun was lost forever. With such invaluable contribution Dihun came to be known in Karbi folk society as 'Serdihun'. There is a folk belief that her blessings can give relief to pain of the weavers caused by constant weaving for long time.

7. **The legend of Dengrali** ³⁸: ‘Deng’ means tree while ‘Rali’ refers to the daughter of sister. Soineri loved Dengrali the daughter of his sister and made her pregnant. But a marital relation with the daughter of sister is considered a sin in a Karbi society and the marriage could not take place. The girl out of shame went to the forest and got herself transformed into a tree. Since then on the final day of a Jirsong the youths observe a ritual of worshiping a tree and offer pork to the tree.

The Karbi legendary world is obsessed with a sense of tragedy and sadness, especially of women being marginalized by internal and external negative forces, male friendly patriarchal rules of their society and oppressive neighbours. The women are projected as tradition bearer, keeper of household duties, care taker of children and other family members, savior of community members. The Karbi legends are reflective women’s contribution to and sacrifices for the community and their sufferings in a patriarchal social structure. If the legends of Dimmir, Didimur, Larta and Dengrali record the tales of owe and suffering, anger and anguish, exploitation and humiliation of the Karbi women the tale of Serdihun is reflective of the contribution of Karbi women to culture and economy of the community. If the tale of Larbin and Lirbon shows how to sacrifice life for the community the legend of Rongpherpi projects Karbi woman fighting for the dignity of women and freedom of the community. The legend of Dengrali shows that the Karbi folk society never tolerates violation of codes of conduct and compels Dengrali to commit suicide. Of course the Karbi folk society is also seen being sensitive to women’s respect and punishes the village head Sar Mangbi for not respecting ‘Honjengkekok’. Thus the Karbi legendary figures through their contribution to and sacrifice in crucial juncture of their past inspire the young girls of the community to live, work and die for the community. These Karbi legends, if narrated from the perspective of feminine sensibility, may lead the young girls of the community to probe deeper into the pains and sufferings of women, and understand the causes of marginalization of women self and lead themselves to reconstruct their women self from their own perspective.

Karbi Tales and Women: A folktale, according to Linda Degh, is highly polished and artistic having a relatively consistent and finished form, fictitious and the creation of human fantasy and always a well-proportioned whole whether composed of one or many episodes.⁴⁴ Actors and actions are represented symbolically rather than as flesh and blood characters.⁴⁵ The Karbi tales are all about some imaginary episodes, fairy events, magical spells told basically to amuse and as a by-product to inculcate certain values in the

target groups of the community. Lyall is of the view that these Karbi folktales undoubtedly correspond in every respect to the general characteristics of folk literature and contain the same incidents or the same sequences of events or have the same forms what is peculiar to the folktale of all over the world; what is distinctive and characteristic is not the progress of incidents, but the local dressing, the narrator's point of view, the colour of his daily life which he lends to the details of the story.⁴⁶ Rongbong Terang is of the view that Karbi folktales, one of the varieties of flowers of Karbi folk literature blossoming in different colour and in different forms, are reflective of their folk beliefs, ideals and their folk society. The Karbi grandmother tells children the folktales sitting at 'hongfarlat' of their 'changghar'. Presence of 'Jangrecho' the orphan and supernatural elements, projection of King's environment as village or rural one etc. are the other features of Karbi folk tales.⁴⁷ The Karbi folktales are also reflective of their folk society's attitude towards women. A few Karbi folktales reflecting women's place and position in their folk society are as follows –

a. Sita Kamar⁵⁰ : Sita Kamar, a man of great physical strength, went in search of wisdom and knowledge, wife and fortune. On his way he found a few super humans and took them with him. He performed a few supernatural activities and magical spells and got rid of dangers. Finally listening to the advice of a wise old woman he reached the King's village, married his daughter and became the king himself and returned home with his wife and children.

b. The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri⁵²: It is the tale of adventure of posthumous, pious orphan Jangreso who took away Dalimet Kungri, the daughter of his maternal uncle king Nihang Recho, but lost her to a nymph. At last the orphan got rid of the nymph, married Dalimet Kungri and became the king.

c. Kongso Recho and Bongso Recho⁵³: Kongso and Bongso were alike in appearance and fond of playing with wheels. Bongso entered into a competition with the demons and lost his life. Kongso defeated the demons and brought his brother back to life. But Bongso killed Kongso out of doubting adultery with his wife. However with magical power the elder is brought to life again. The two brothers destroyed the demon village and became the king and minister and lived happily with their people. The tale reflects commitment to tradition and customary laws, avoidance of relationship with the wife of younger brother, rejection of adultery and doubt and above all triumph of goodness over evil forces.

d. Vokronso⁵⁴: The orphan Jangreso being advised by a vokronso bird went on a journey for a fortune and on the way he got married to the daughters of the kings of bird,

goat, pig, pangolin, pigeon, tortoise, snake and finally the daughter of the king of vokronso. He returned home with the new wives and wealth and came into conflict with the king. Jangreso defeated the king with the help of his wives and became the king and lived with his subjects happily. The tale is an eco text signifying sustainability of human life on existence of non-human beings and coordination between the human and non-human environments.

e. The Orphan and the Earth Priences⁵⁵: The orphan Jangreso with the help of heavenly forces sang and danced with the princess of Earth Purthimi Kungripi, got married and came back home with her, defeated the king the oppressor and became the king himself and ruled his subjects wisely with his wife and grandmother. The tale shows that their folk society rejects treachery, envy, jealousy, social status but rewards the values like goodness, honesty, valour, will power, simplicity, kindness, work culture.

f. Ingru Tulapi⁵⁶: As advised by a parrot the king rejects his ugly wife and proceeds towards the east in search of beautiful Ingru Tulapi. The king and the parrot befool the guards and elope with Ingru Tulapi. On their way they make fire and cook on the back of a big fish in the middle of a river. The big fish goes deeper into the river and leaves the king and Ingru Tulapi drifting away in the water. Fortunately both of them are finally rescued by the people living around the area. The tale reflects a patriarchal folk society where woman is a commodity to be rejected or owned for its physical appearance. At the same time it is also shown that in a Karbi folk society every wrong doer whether he is king or a poor has to endure suffering for the wrong committed.

g. The Hingchong Twins⁵⁷: It is tale of twin brothers, the sons of a village head, who were left at forest after their birth by their step mother, a demoness, and recovered and looked after by a couple of tigers. In their youths the twin brothers as advised by the tiger parents came to the village chief as guests and informed them everything. The village head named his sons Hinchong brothers, punished his demoness wife and lived happily with his Karbi wife and two sons. The tale shows the demon or animal force within human, the Karbi society with village head and Jirkedam the youth cooperative, the tiger as savior and the harmony in human and non-human environments. The tale rejects envy, treachery, jealousy, greed, conspiracy etc. and inculcates the value that the wrong doer is always punished and the good may suffer initially but finally rewarded. The male centric society leaves the causes of familial problem to the credit of women and gets purified with her punishment.

h. An Orphan and a Vulture⁵⁹: A poor orphan helps a couple of old vulture, in return gets two feathers through which the orphan understands the language of trees, grasses, animal, birds etc. and raises his fortune. Finally the orphan makes his wife calm learning the

trick from a goat. Here the Karbi folk society gives stress to 'give and take' way of life between human and non-human environments and leaves the causes of familial disturbances to the credit of women.

i. Story Of Harata Kunwar⁶¹: Harata Kunwar, rejected by elders for his idleness and inactivity, finally left his land for a fortune. Listening to the advice of a wise old woman Harata Kunwar trapped the youngest daughter of Sun-god, visited the kingdom of Sun-god and won his favour, married her. Returning with wife and children he became the king of his own land and lived happily with all. The tale gives exposure to a Karbi folk society with its headmanship, different profession, jhum cultivation, 'Hem-thap', maize cultivation on the bank of river, folk deities, and deep forest with its local animals. The society believes that everyone should have a nest or a house at least, a place of their own like that of a sparrow or a dove. The society through the tale rejects laziness, conspiracy, treachery, greed and inculcates work culture, emotional bond in relation, love and affection, will power, boldness, courage etc. The women either princess or housewives of common folk are seen in their household works and weaving. The old wise woman who knows the way to success lives alone in the forest.

j. The Orphan and The King Of Vices⁶²: The orphan, who grew up without love, became rich getting married to the daughter of a heavenly deity. The king of vices seduced her, made her pregnant and then dejected her. The depressed orphan went to forest again to live on wild roots and fruits and his wife was compelled to be wandering in the clouds. The tale rejects timidity and fear, sense of hesitation, unfaithfulness to husband, illicit love affair and inculcates sympathy towards and protection of the needy and the poor, faithfulness and encourages success at one's own strength rather than relying on others.

k. Tale of Womu Langlupi⁶³: It is similar to Assamese tale 'Daughter of a Kite's Daughter'. In the Karbi tale, the eagle found a new born girl child in a jhum field, looked after her and once brought the king's attention to the girl and ensured her well being with the king. The bird of prey the eagle is projected with motherly love and in present day context metaphorical of the loss of human values in human and importance of other beings in sustenance of human life on earth.

l. Tale of a She-Demon⁶⁴: A she-demon took Arlengpi to the deep forest for fishing and killed her through poisonous spider, centipede and snake, and returned in disguise of Arlengpi. However Arlengpi transformed herself into a kite and took care of her children. Finally Arlengpo killed the she-demon, could recover his wife and lived with her happily.

The good coordination between human and non-human beings and triumph of goodness over the evil are the values inculcated through the tale.

m. Tale of a Dog⁶⁶ : The younger prince of a kingdom who was a victim of a political crisis and transformed into a dog by his sister-in-law inserting a magical throne at his head. A family looked after 'Methan Songbir' the dog without an owner and got their own daughter married to the dog to keep their promise. One day the wife got the throne out of his head and the dog got itself transformed into the prince, became the king and lived happily. Here the women are projected as the negative and positive forces through which treachery, cheating and greed are rejected while human qualities, filial gratitude and a sense of love for non-human beings are inculcated.

n. The Sleeping Cat⁶⁹: It is the tale of friendship and hatred of Birikman and Sedeng, two kings of neighbouring Karbi states, their loss of kingdom and others to each other going on a bet on a sleeping cat and their subsequent restoration to their throne by their respective wives through their wit and intelligence, love and affection for their husband and cementing of their relationship by getting their children married. Here the males are characterised with cheating and greediness, foolishness and ruthlessness while the females are endowed with love and affection, friendliness and human kindness, wit and intelligence. If the males are revengeful and exploiter the females are the saviour to their husbands and their kingdoms. The tale is reflective of how a woman is highly esteemed in a Karbi folk society who can even transform a wrong-doer and establish peace in family and society.

o. A Hen and her Lazy Friends⁷¹: A hen makes other animal members living together learn the lesson that those who do not work have no right to eat the food produced and prepared by the hen. The fable mocks at laziness and dependence nature of the males and tries to inculcate the values like work culture and right of workers on production.

p. The Sunbird and His Wife⁷³: Two female drongo birds lived in a raised house and spent their time weaving cloths. One day Voso Lindok (Sunbird), the husband of the elder sister went to the deep forest to collect materials for making loom leaving the sisters alone. A bear befooled them and spent the night with the sisters. The sisters could get rid of him but out of shame, anger and anguish left the place forever. The husband tried to win their favour but in vain. The elder sister made the divination that they would be united in their next birth when the two sisters would take birth as flowers namely 'Pharche-Pharkong' and the husband Voso Lindok will be the first to suck their nectars. Since then, it is a taboo for a husband to go for thening-therang and it is believed that Voso Lindok is the first to suck the nectars of 'Pharche-Pharkong' and reflects patriarchal ego . The fable is reflective of self

respect and dignity of female selves and shows that Karbi women are not born to be humiliated by others and can make sure of their security and livelihood by themselves.

q. The Tale of a Dove⁷⁴: A couple of dove with their kids lived happily in a forest. A wild cat stealthily ate the offspring of the couple and each time the couple suffered to see the tragic end of their children. One day the wild cat ate the male dove leaving the female in distress. But she decided to fight with the wild cat and one day she shifted her children to a safer place and kept only thrones in her nest. The wild cat jumped at the nest to catch the offspring and got himself hurt by the thrones and died. The tale reflects their folk belief that greed is a sin and sin results in death. More importantly the tale raises a voice against any sort of colonization and exploitation and to fight for own land and right. The male succumbs to the strong intruder but the female appears the successful avenger, reflective of a Karbi woman's spirit and courage. The tale is metaphorical or allusive of their sorrowful political past and willingness to assert their voice.

c. Origin of Toe-Sore⁸⁰: Two sisters Kave and Kadom living without a brother had to join the Jirsong owing to the customary law that every household is to depute one. Though Klengsar and Klengdun the chief and deputy ensured security but seduced the girls. As a result a time came when the two could no longer appear in public. No one listened to the girls and at last they approached the river spirit to take their lives away and let them appear as sores on human toes. Since then during rainy season human toes gets infection and sores and if Kave and Kadom are remembered with dignity through chants and charms, the cure is assured. The tale is meant to inculcate a voice against marginalization of women, exploitation of the weaker in the name of tradition.

d. Origin of 'Winter-Summer Way' in the manners of Karbi People⁸¹: As advised by father Songsar Recho, to know who is the sharpest, strongest, fittest, perfect and knowledgeable, the two brothers as human visited different places on earth and transformed the wise old lady full of human kindness into a young beauty while punished the old lady of filthy tongue and evil heart totally blind and deaf. The tale reflects that the Karbi folk society rests on winter-summer way sort of mannerism and believes that women represent both destructive and creative forces.

e. A Dog, a Hyena and a She-Eliphant⁸²: Once on being scolded harshly by Jangreso's wife Ingnarpi for being idle his two younger brothers Sibong and Mahar ran away from home. Jangreso ill-treated his wife and she too ran away from home. At last Jangreso got Sibong, Mahar and Ingnarpi in the forest transformed into a dog, hyena and she-elephant respectively. He brought home the dog, but the hyena refused to come to his brother and the

she-elephant promised to come back if he could be a rich and a great man. Since then the dog stays with and remains like a shadow of man, dog and hyena never bite each other, the hyena if noticed leaves its prey for man and the she-elephant is tamed in the Karbi world. The tale is reflective of their folk beliefs, rejects laziness, humiliation of woman and inculcates values like patience and tolerance, work culture and self respect of woman.

j. Mangbon the Brute⁸⁷: A strong brute terrorized the villagers, even disturbed the propitiation of ancestors' spirits in 'Chojun', killed and devoured the animals kept for deities. Finally the duty to finish the brute was entrusted to the tigers by the hundred gods. A few of the tigers sacrificed their lives and finally an old tigress killed the brute and restored peace and order in Karbi society. But the atrocities of the brute continued in the world after death and forced their ancestors to flee from Malong Soling to the mountain ranges of Mukindon and since then it has been the ancestors' land of the Karbis. The tale is reflective of Karbi folk society's projection of female force as the means of establishing and sustenance of peace and order in their society.

c. The Orphan and the Vulture's Feather⁹⁵: As the tale narrates, a poor orphan lived with his mother and wife and the quarrel that took place between the two even at the slightest pretext made his life gradually unbearable. The King vulture became sorry to see the plight of the orphan caused by continuous quarrel between his mother and wife and gave him a feather from his wings and asked him to look through it for remedies. The orphan looked through the feather and saw that his mother was actually a pig and his wife a deer and consequently discarded them. Once he saw a real woman through the feather, got married and restored peace and order. The tale is reflective of a patriarchal society considering woman the cause of all trouble, puts stress on importance of vulture in human society and inculcates the folk value that a man becomes a human not by appearance but by nature.

d. Cher Aplipli⁹⁶: Once the son of a king wished to wear an ear ring of gold with butterfly design. The queen asked him to go for jhum cultivation. The prince cultivated and through hard labour earned a lot, bought the gold ear ring and wore it with satisfaction. The Karbi woman, though a queen, rejects easy money and luxury and inculcates work culture and the folk value that one should live at one's own earnings.

d. The Orphan girl and the Witch¹⁰⁶: An orphan girl got herself caught by a witch while having ripe fruits climbing up a tree, befooled the witch saying that she had to attend to nature's call urgently and got released. After a few days the angry witch again caught hold of her and took her to her home. The witch was pleased to see the blackened teeth of the girl. The girl befooled the witch saying she would blacken her teeth. So the girl made the witch a

captive, poured on her boiled water, killed her and came out being victorious. The tale projects a Karbi girl as a trickster with rare wit and intelligence, woman in an empowering state and teaches the lesson that the right word or right work at the right moment leads to escape from danger and get success.

g. The Orphan Brothers ¹⁰⁹: Once the elder orphan divided the cow in the middle, gave the front to his younger brother and kept the rear part for himself and similarly assigned the endi shawl to the younger brother for the day while kept it for himself during the night. As a result the younger brother suffered from cold and kept on feeding the cow. As advised by the wise old woman the younger brother watered the shawl while using it during the day and started to beat the front side of the cow. The trickster got himself befooled and agreed to enjoy the benefit of the cow and the endi shawl equally. The tale projects woman and a wise and witty force meant to save the innocent and ensure well being and equal growth of all.

m. Tale of Sarpipen Sarbura ¹¹⁶: An old woman in her plan to kill her idle, inactive, drunker, oppressor husband, got a mad elephant killed and then exploiting the situation used her husband to kill a man eater tiger, a giant snake, a foreign warrior and won king's favour and lived happily thereafter. The tale projects the Karbi woman with boldness, cleverness, intelligence and inculcates a voice against idleness and any sort of domestic oppression.

a. The Legend of All Women Village ¹²³: During the time of Thong Nokbe the two neighbouring villages Miring-Murong and Arkli-Arklo had a long-running dispute over the sharing of the water of Marle river. The father of Thong Nokbe led Miring-Murong and defeated Arkli-Arklo. The living menfolk of Arkli-Arklo took shelter in caves and left the protection of the village to women folk. Lirbon a renowned weaver of Arkli-Arklo village made cloths in the likeness of dog-skin and the female fighters in disguise of dog attacked the intruders and guarded the village. She developed a soft corner for Long Timung of Miring-Murong village and disclosed the secret of 'dog soldiers'. Long's men killed those 'dog soldiers' and established their control over the river. After the battle, the village Arkli-Arklo vanished, but the legend of All Women Village remained. The tale projects Karbi women as expert weaver, protector of village and community who had to pay the price for their simplicity and believing in others easily. The tale leaves scope for historians to reread the Karbi women village in relation to the 'Women Kingdom' leaving its trace in 'Baduli-Khurung' at Kondoli, Nagaon found in a historical myth popular in the region. The tale also deals with environmental issue of sharing of river water.

b. The Legend of Baby Hill ¹²⁴: A secret affair developed between Klengsarpo and his marpi the female companion. Poor Marpi, though was raising a baby, had to follow the strict rules and custom of the dormitory and complete the tasks assigned to her. She left the baby in a hammock and remained busy in the given work. One day she failed to listen to the cry of her baby and at day break found the hammock empty. The sound of the hiccups made by the child was heard and was coming from below the ground. So, the members of the dormitory started digging and finally the entire hillock was dug but the child was not found. Since then the 'Putsari' range of hills in Western Karbi Anglong has been identified as the 'Baby Hill' and it is said that the locals still hear a faint sound of the crying baby and its hiccups. The tale apart from its historicity associated with the 'Baby Hill' reveals another historical truth of humiliation and exploitation of women members by male leaders of Jirsong and the patriarchal Karbi society is seen indifferent towards the rights of women.

c. How the name of Kaziranga Came into force: It is believed that the entire region of Kaziranga was inhabited by the Karbis. The name 'Kazir' is a popular female name among the Karbis. An informant is of the view that once a Karbi woman named 'Kazir' lived there who was popular among the non-Karbis and later on the region was named after her. To refer the region the non-Karbis used to call it 'Village of Kazir' or in Assamese 'Kaziror gaon' which in due course of time got itself turned into Kaziranga.¹²⁵

One of the objectives of telling a Karbi folktale is to socialize their young boys and girls and assimilate them with their culture and tradition, to make them aware of and understand their folk religion, folk belief, folk mind, various folk systems and institutions, folk society, traditional knowledge and wisdom, glorious and painful days of their past, inculcate in them their folk values and more importantly to structure their selves as designed or approved by their folk society. The Karbi tales reflect their patriarchal society with its agencies and codes of conduct. Here women play the role of tradition bearer and transmits the male friendly rules and regulation from generation to generation. A sense of hesitation, anger and anguish, fear and timidity characterizes the behavior of the beautiful damsels. The Karbi folktales do not always have happy ending, rather a tone of melancholy often strikes in the undertone of especially the women-centered tales. The Karbi folk society is seen indifferent towards the plight of women who are made marginalized by the internal and external negative forces, male friend socio-cultural norms and strong neighbours. Some of the women centered Karbi folk tales can be read as criticism of caste and class hierarchies. The tales like 'Origin of Toe-Sore', 'The Legend of Baby-Hill' etc. project women as a voice against the

powerful, the male leaders of 'Jirsong' and village head. Change in their attitude towards the values may affect the narration of a women-centered tale.

It is not an easy task to make generalized comment on nature and character of Karbi womenfolk based on their folktale materials. P. Goswami says - "The songs and sayings, the tales and beliefs of a community, however, tell us a good deal about the community's behaviour. The information cannot be said to be the result of any complicated and scientific process of testing, but the songs and sayings and tales have survived time and are in use, directly and indirectly, to describe what persons of a certain community are like or how they react to circumstances".¹³¹ S. K. Nath also says that many tales employing exaggeration, farcical element are hardly meant to reflect social reality. Yet folktales, serve as windows to look into the earliest stage of the society concerned and the issue of representation of women is reflective of the manner in which the society perceives or treats a woman, the mechanics of man-woman relationship in the society, traditionally sanctioned behavior towards women and the society's attitude to the issue of gender.¹³²

The women gallery seen in the Karbi myths is constituted of Karbi women deities, divinely bestowed and mythical-historical women characters like Rasinja, Panjok, daughter of Barithe, goddess of rice, Basapi, Velibon, Kareng, Kading, Kase, Marongpi, Kasang Ingtipi, Kawe Timungpi, Kase Ingtipi, Kanong etc. These female figures contributed to creation and organization, constitution and composition of the Karbi world. For example, '**Legend of Creation**' portrays Karbi women the mother, Bamonpi, Rekbepi, Rek-kropi, wives of Bamonpo, Rama's wife etc. contributing to the creation of the Karbi earth and the Karbis. **The myth of Rukasen** portrays far sighted Basapi as the organizer of village, instrumental in establishing the first Karbi village Miring Rongchopi at Nongkula on the bank of the river Kopili and reflects woman's participation in policy making in the earliest process of their village formation. **The myth with Rang Mukrang** narrates the contribution of Kareng and Kading with their traditional rice-beer 'hor' without which hardly any ritual can be performed in a Karbi society. **The myth of Hemphu** introduces traditional wedding system through Rasinja. **The tale of Teron Rongsopo** portrays another woman deity, the deity of rice who came down to earth to address the hunger of the poor Karbi people. **The myth of Borrli e** projects women deities like Rasinja, Panjok etc. who appear in human shape and help in performing Hemphu worship for the first time in a Karbi tradition. **The tale of We Longbi and Har Longbi** introduces an old woman named 'Marongpi' who made We Longbi and Har Longbi understand the ills of war, values of cultural assimilation and contributed to the traditional wedding system of the Karbis. **The myth of Thireng-Wareng**

portrays Kawe Timungpi as the symbol of eternal love and contributor to their traditional cremation ceremony 'Chomangkan'.

The women figures seen in the Karbi legends are Rongpherpi Rongbe, Kareng Teronpi, Larbin and Lirbon, Didimur, Serdihun, Dengrali, Larta etc. The legend of Rengbonghom projects **Kareng Teronpi**, the good and kind-hearted queen who loved her subjects and encouraged the king to construct the capital at Socheng and abolish capital punishment. The legend of Waisong portrays a **Khasi woman** as a betrayer and the **queen** as a friendly, kind hearted, far sighted lady who helped Waisong to establish a Karbi kingdom. The tale of **Rongpherpi Rongbe** has been told to the young generation of her community throughout the ages with a view to energizing the marginalized sections especially the women folk and the subdued ones of the community to protest and raise their voice against injustice and to live with respect and identity. The heart rendering tale of **Larbin** and **Lirbon** is meant to inculcate in the mind of the young a sense of patriotism and self-sacrificing attribute, love for and readiness to die for the community. In legend of Disumai Rongpi, selection of **Didimur** as member of the Jirsong reflect Karbi folk values of giving respect to women and their involvement in community affairs. At the same the legend records the sufferings of Didimur and the society's teaching that community service should always be preferred to woman's aspiration. Her death is a protest against the life of a woman meant to live for the community and tradition at the cost of her own wishes and aspirations, love and desire. The legends of **Dimmir** and **Larta** are also expressive of the voice raised against exploitation and marginalization of women in their society. The legend of **Serdihun** projects weaving as a proud women-centered tradition providing not merely the costumes for the households but a visible symbol, uniformity and identity to the community. The legend of **Dengrali** portrays a victimized girl seduced by her maternal uncle, made pregnant and compelled to commit suicide for doing a sin. Her tragic end is also a protest against sexual colonization of a female's body and marginalization of woman-self in the name of culture and tradition. The Karbi legends are reflective of women characters fighting for the establishment of their self-respect and dignity, contributing to their culture and tradition, sacrificing their lives for the community and protesting against exploitation of woman self in their patriarchal social structure.

The gallery of Karbi women seen in their folktales is constituted of queen living a life like the folk, beautiful princess expert in weaving and other household works waiting to be taken away by unknown strong male, poor widow suffering a lot in upbringing the orphans, kind-hearted and responsible mother, caring and loving wife, cruel and inhuman

step-mother, old wise women, affectionate or cruel sister-in-law, dutiful daughter-in-law supposing her household works her religion, obedient daughters even agreeing to get married to a dog or a pig, over-worked and suffering from malnutrition, orphan girls, trickster girls, women sympathetic towards poor and needy, religious women, savior to husband's life and fortune, betrayer to and conspiring against husband and she-demon and nymph representing so called 'bad' side of women etc. Karbi folktales project women with their liking and disliking, wishes and aspirations, duties and obligations, their predetermined roles, their place and position in their family and society as well. The study reveals that a Karbi woman respects dignity of labour and likes to be self-dependant. She is simple but becomes furious when her self-respect is in danger. In a Karbi society division of labour between male and female is strictly maintained. The womenfolk have to do the works like looking after children and fowls and pigs, collection of food items and fire-wood from forest, cooking and serving meals, weaving cloths, fishing, preparation of rice-beer, other household works such as cleaning, washing, agricultural and religious activities, activities in festivals and rituals etc. How sincere and particular the womenfolk are in their household works is clearly seen from the words of the eldest daughter of the Sun god in the story of Harata Konwar. When the day becomes cool she tells her sisters-"O my dears, it is cooking time! Time to serve up the food: time to house for the night our fowls and our pigs".¹³³ In another context she says - "O my sisters, let us go! it is time to pound the rice, time to clean it after pounding: time to cook, time to serve up : time o heat the beer, time to squeeze it from the rice grain".¹³⁴ It shows that the Karbi women, even of a higher rank and status, are very much sincere and particular in their household duties. The Karbi women are expert weavers and are proud of clothing their husbands and family members, warriors by themselves only, reflected in 'The Tale of She-Demon' where Arlengpi refuses to leave her loom before giving final touch to the cloth of her husband and in the tale 'The Legend of All Women Village' Lirbon deceives the enemy by clothing the warriors in a dog-skin like cloths. A Karbi woman's devotion to her husband and her family is well reflected in 'The Tale of a She-Demon' where Arlengpi even after her death keeps on supporting her family. 'The story of Harata Konwar' too reveals the Karbi women's faithfulness to their respective husbands. The youngest one agrees to the proposal of Harata Konwar only to relieve her married sisters from the humiliating position. The pains and sufferings of a poor widow mother encountered in upbringing of a child in a patriarchal society are evident in almost all the tales dealing with 'Jangreso' the orphan. The story of Harata Konwar portrays a kind-hearted, witty and caring sister-in-law who kills the insect seen on Harata's body giving a symbolic gesture of the coming danger and saves his life from

her own men revealing her possession of milk of human kindness, commitment to domestic relation, love and affection. On the other hand 'The Tale of a Dog' portrays a cruel sister-in-law who for political benefit, wealth and power transforms her brother-in-law the prince into a dog. The Tale 'The Orphan and Vulture's Feather' reveals quarrelsome mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The tale 'Karham Jungreso' portrays the hard-hearted, cunning, villainous step mother while the tale 'Orphan and the king of Vices' projects a betrayer to her lover and husband only to meet her tragic end.

Representation of women in Karbi folk tales is reflective of Karbi folk society and its perception and treatment of and attitude towards women. The society has no objection if the strong male having a wife at home goes in search of a beautiful lady and takes her away to get married paying little attention to her willingness (Ingru Tulapi) but punishes the faithless wife to roam forever with the cloud in the sky (The Orphan and the King of Vices). The husband the prime agent of the patriarchal society is not sympathetic towards the pains of the over-worked woman, instead physically assaults her for being pitiless towards the males wasting time in idle. (Dog, Hyena and She-Elephant) Looking through a vulture feather the husband discovers animal spirit in mother and wife and considers them the real source of familial and domestic disorder. He never looks at himself through the feather supposing the society's conviction that the male is always right, restores his life getting rid of the old one and married to a new one (Orphan and Vulture's feather). Reacting to similar situation in Assamese folk tales Neelakshi Goswami and Parag Moni Sarma say thus – 'Continuous reiteration of such motif result in the internalization by society of such ideas and thus, such narratives can be seen as conditioning narratives that determine gender position in society.an uneven world order generated by forces of patriarchy is ironically sustained, fostered, reinforced and transmitted by women.'¹³⁵ Thus the Karbi folk society, as reflected in the women centered tales, appears biased against women and leads the young girls to understand the unequal man-woman relationship and their traditional role in sustaining that sort of unequal relationship or uneven social position in present day context and provides them scope to reconstruct their character in their own way.

The picture of a victimized girl, as seen in a few tales, who is sexually exploited and humiliated, is also reflective of the humiliated place and position of a Karbi girl in a Karbi folk society. The maternal uncle who made Dengrali pregnant and left her to a state of committing suicide goes unpunished ('The Myth of Dengrali'). The beautiful girls are bound to suffer whose parents are poor and ignorant, who do not have a brother or brother-in-law ('Origin of Toe-Sore'). The male leaders of 'Jirsong' go unpunished who sexually seduce

the beautiful girl members and compel them to commit suicide or make their life pathetic ('Origin of Toe-Sore', 'The Legend of Baby-Hill'). In spite of taking separation from the careless husband the wife cannot get herself fully free from the so called emotional-sexual bond of marital relationship and makes her husband happy assuring that he would be the first to suck her nectar in her next life. (The Sunbird and his Wife) The society is indifferent towards the pains of the young mother feeding a baby who is compelled to work hard ('The Legend of Baby-Hill'). Dejection of the new born baby girl in a jhum field is another example of injustice done to women ('Womu Langlupi').

Characterization of grandmothers or the wise old women is another trait of the tales of the Karbis reflecting their society's attitude towards women. Reacting to similar situation in the world of Assamese folktale S. K. Nath says that the wise old women of wit and intelligence, practical knowledge and wisdom, secret and special knowledge who can play crucial role in changing other people's lives are marginalized by the society ¹³⁶ The old wise women who can show the way to success live all alone like begger in a wretched hut in a deep forest. ('Sita Kamar', 'The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri', 'Orphan and Earth Princess', 'The Prince and Prime Minister's Son', 'Two Orphan Brothers', 'Story of Harata Kunwar' etc.) If the old woman fails to please the ear of the strong males she is brutally punished, made blind and deaf and led to a more pathetic life. (The Winter-Summer Way') Such inhuman attitude towards women, marginalization of the old wise women, unequal man-woman relationship, sexual exploitation and humiliation of the poor and powerless girls, injustice to new born girl, inhuman treatment of a mother feeding a baby etc. may lead the young minds to realize that their folk society is a male chauvinistic one. No where it is seen that the society is trying to listen to the tales of owes and sufferings of women and address properly. The society is neither ready to take any cause of women's suffering to its account nor to punish the males for their polygamy, violence towards women, for being untrustworthy and carelessness but assigns her every misfortune to fate or to badness in her character and thus warns the young girls not to be like the bad women portrayed. Instead the minds of the young girls are trained to be submissive, patient, eager to please others not themselves and are convinced that finally triumph of so called goodness of women over evil forces within the periphery of women is established ('Tale of a She-Demon', 'The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri').

The tales are also reflective of the fact that the Karbi women, in spite of living in a male chauvinistic and male dominated society, enjoy certain advantages as compared to their counterparts among the non-tribals. They are not seen suffering from dowry, bride price,

child marriage etc. Separation happens easily and there is no taboo in widow marriage. The good Karbi woman can restore familial and domestic peace and order ('Orphan and Vulture's Feather') and be the protector of husband, community and culture ('Vokronso', 'The Legend of All Women's Village', 'Mangbon the Brute'), can establish triumph of goodness over evil force through her wit and intelligence ('How the Hornbills Originated'). The woman can live being free from the conventional order, pose a challenge to patriarchy and male domination and leave their husband's house in search of herself ('The Sunbird and his Wife', 'Dog, Hyena and She-Elephant') The 'Tale of a Dove' portrays the Karbi woman, represented by the female dove, as the voice raised against colonization, exploitation and humiliation of woman self. The simple and submissive female force in the tale suffers a lot in the hands of her strong male neighbour, the intruder who consumes her children again and again, compels her to shift from one place to another and kills her husband and is finally killed and his colonization is overthrown by the so called weak female force.

Conclusion: The Karbi folk prose narratives are the artistic product of the Karbi folk society told to the young generation with the objectives like satisfying the need of the youngsters to listen to tales, giving pleasure, knocking at their thinking zone, informing of their past and forefathers and structure the selves of the young boys and girls, their ideas and ideals, perception and personality. The Karbi Folk prose narratives right from the myths to the tales reflect the Karbi folk society and its folk life since its inception up to this present form going through different stages of evolution. If the myths document the earliest Karbi worldview and process of living together the legends give birth to national spirit and community consciousness in the minds of the Karbis. On the other hands the tales depict a Karbi folk society with the community's wish fulfillment, dreams and fears, sociology and psychology, culture and tradition, socio-cultural religious phenomena, political crisis and hope for a better day. The main contribution of those narratives lies in its role of transmitting their folk way of life and the total indigenous environment, introducing them to their original worldview and familiarizing them with their mythical and legendary figures socializing the younger generation of the community and assimilating them with their own culture and tradition. The narratives are told to the young minds with a view to making them know their past, understand the present and preparing them for the future inculcating in them the socio-ethical, religious, environmental values nourished by the community for long. Almost all the narratives are of the view that nature and human are complementary to each other and may be retold with a view to developing in the younger generation a sense of interest in and love and

affection for nature and non-human others. The tales no doubt may be used as a tool for developing a sense of belongingness, commitment and accountability towards their own land, community and culture. It is the real and natural companion of the Karbi folk, fertile land for the seed of the Karbi literature to get birth and grow up and socio-culturally, historically, linguistically resourceful asset of the land.

Notes and references:

1. Linda Degh, 'Folk Narrative', in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, ed. Richard M Dorson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972, p.53.
2. Ibid, pp. 60-72.
3. Ibid, pp. 59-60.
4. Ibid, pp. 54-58.
5. N. C. Sarma, 'Puran: Myth', Souvenir, Asomia Sahitya Sora, Guwahati, 1997, p.26.
6. S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, University of California Press, Berkley, London, 1977, p.82.
7. Sir Charles Lyall (ed), 'The Legend of Creation', in *The Karbis from the Papers of the Late Edward Stack*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Delhi, 1997, pp.70-72.
8. Longkam Teron and Karen Das, *Karbi Krishtir Utsha*, Assam Institute of Research for Triblas and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 1998, p.2.
9. Informant: Kave Lekthepe, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Age-67.
10. Informant: Amar Kro, Borghat Karbigaon, Chapanalla, Nagaon, Assam, Age- 55.
11. Longkam Teron and Karen Das, Op. Cit., pp. 2-40.
12. L. Teron and D. Gogoi, *Karbi Ratnamala*, Karbi Anglong Zila Sahitya Sabha, Diphu, 2004, p. IV.
13. Ibid., pp. 5-11.
14. Ibid, pp. 15-20.
15. Longkam Teron (ed.), *Karbi Kimbadanti Sankalan*, First Part, Diphu Sahitya Sabha, Diphu, 1998, pp. 1-8.
16. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., pp.30-35.
17. Longkam Teron (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 21-23.
18. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., pp. 21-29.
19. Ibid., pp. 12-14.
20. Ibid., pp. 36-41.
21. Ibid., pp. 42-48.

22. Basanta Das, *Karbi Sanskritir Etihash*, Aank-Baak, Guwahati, 2010, pp. 90-93.
23. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., pp. 1-4.
24. Basanta Das, Op.Cit., pp. 115-119.
25. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., pp. 72-77.
26. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., p. IV.
27. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1986, pp. 161.
28. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, Op. Cit., pp.162-163.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid, pp.161-162.
31. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., pp. 62-68.
32. Informant: Kave Lekthepi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Age-67.
33. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., p.83.
34. Ibid, pp.53-62.
35. Ibid, pp.81-82.
36. Ibid, pp.83-84.
37. Basanta Das, Op. Cit., pp. 30-32.
38. Ibid, p.252.
39. Longkam Teron and Deben Gogoi, Op. Cit., pp. 69-73.
40. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., p.40.
41. Ibid, p.59.
42. Ibid, p.73.
43. Charles Lyall (ed), Op. Cit. p.44.
44. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., p.40.
45. Ibid, p.62.
46. Sir Charles Lyall (ed), Op. Cit. p.44-45.
47. R. Terang, 'Patoni' (Preface), *Karbi Sadhu*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 1976, pp.8-9.
48. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., pp. 62-72.
49. Ibid, p.63.
50. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), *Karbi Studies*, Vol.3, Folktales from the Fringe, Assam Book Hive, Guwahati, 2012, pp. 19-26.
51. Ibid, pp.35-37.
52. Ibid, pp.119-123.

53. S. N. Barkataki, *Tribal Folk Tales of Assam*, Publication Board, Gauhati, Assam, 1970, pp. 110-111.
54. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 167-169.
55. Ibid, pp.173-181.
56. Ibid, pp.228-230.
57. Ibid, pp.239-242.
58. S. N. Barkataki, Op. Cit., pp. 103-104.
59. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 307-310.
60. Informant, Jinong Millick, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
61. Charles Lyall (ed), Op. Cit. p.55-69.
62. S. N. Barkataki, Op. Cit., pp. 105-107.
63. Rongbong Terang, OP. Cit., pp.36-38.
64. Ibid, pp.1-9.
65. Ibid, pp.10-14.
66. Ibid, pp.20-22.
67. Informant, Chinthong Millick, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
68. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., p. 67.
69. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 57-62.
70. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., p. 68.
71. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 1-2.
72. Ibid, pp.148-158.
73. Ibid, pp.274-275.
74. Rongbong Terang, OP. Cit., pp.34-35.
75. Informant, Jirmi Millickpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
76. Informant, Junaki Bongrungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
77. P. Goswami, *Ballads and Tales of Assam*, G. U., Assam, 1970, p. 80.
78. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 5-7.
79. Ibid, pp. 14-15.
80. Ibid, pp. 92-94.
81. Ibid, pp. 99-102.
82. Ibid, pp.107-112.
83. Ibid, pp.138-142.
84. Informant, Kareng Ingtipi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Age-60.
85. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 283-285.

86. Informant: Bina Tokbipi, Longkoi Lekthe, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.
87. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 295-296.
88. S. N. Barkataki, Op. Cit., pp. 107-109.
89. Ibid, p.109.
90. Rongbong Terang, OP. Cit., pp.31-33.
91. Suren Kramsa, *Puwa aru Kukurar Dak*, K. L.A, Karbi Anglong, 2008, pp. 6-8.
92. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., pp. 70-71.
93. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 10-11.
94. Ibid, pp. 220-223.
95. Ibid, pp. 259-260.
96. Padumi Gogoi, *Karbi Loka Sanskritir Abhash*, Assam Institute of esearch for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2011, pp.72-73.
97. Champak Laii Boissya, *Karbi Sadhu*, TRI, Guwahati, Assam, pp. 1-5.
98. Informant, Jirmi Millickpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
99. Informant, Rupjili Beypi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
100. Informant, Junima Timungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
101. P. Goswami, Op. Cit., p. 116.
102. Stith Thompson, Op. Cit., p. 319.
103. S. N. Barkataki, Op. Cit., pp. 117-121.
104. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 41-45.
105. Ibid, pp. 69-80.
106. Informant: Bina Tokbipi, Longkoi Lekthe, parkup, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.
107. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 207-209 .
108. Ibid, pp. 212-215.
109. Informant: Samilee Timungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.
110. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 299-302.
111. Ibid, pp. 323-326.
112. Informant: Bina Tokbipi, Longkoi Lekthe, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.
113. P. Goswami, Op. Cit., pp. 143-145.
114. Padumi Gogoi, Op. Cit., p.70.
115. Suren Kramsa, Op. Cit., 9-11.
116. Champak Laii Boissya, Op. Cit., pp. 12-16.
117. Informant: Rumila Beypi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
118. Informant: Avinash Rongpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.

119. P. Goswami, Op. Cit., p. 111.
120. Sir Charles Lyall (ed), Op. Cit. pp. 46-48.
121. Padumi Gogoi, Op. Cit. p. 74.
122. Ganesh Pegu, *Brahaputra Upatyakar Mising Janajati Aru teolokar Moukhik Sahityar Samikhatmak Adhyan*, N.L.Publications, Guwahati, 2010, p.196.
123. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 225-256.
124. Ibid, p.289.
125. Informant: Amar Kro, Borghat Karbigaon, Chapanalla, Nagaon, Assam, Age- 55
126. Linda Degh, Op. Cit., p.60.
127. Lawrence Bull, *The environmental Imagination*, Harvard University Press, London, 1995, pp. 7-8.
128. Richard Kerridge, 'Environmentalism and Ecocriticism', in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, p. 530.
129. Ibid, p. 537.
130. Dharamsingh Teron and Sikari Tisso (ed.), Op. Cit., pp. 10-11.
131. P. Goswami, *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Assam, 1983, p.16.
132. Sanjeev Kumar Nath, *The World of Assamese Folktales*, Bhabani Print & Publications, Guwahati, 2011, 29-30.
133. Charles Lyall (ed), Op. Cit. p. 59.
134. Ibid, p.62.
135. Neelakshi Goswami and Parag Moni Sarma, *Gender in Folk Narratives Theory and Practice*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2013, p. 57.
136. Sanjeev Kumar Nath, Op. Cit., p.30.

Women in Karbi Folk Songs

Introduction: Folksongs are generally defined as songs which exist in the repertory of a folk group. The folksongs are essential part of birth, marriage, process of purification, festival, death etc. in any folk society. According to the content and form of the folksongs and the occasion of singing, the folksongs are classified into the sub-genres such as epics, ballads, lullabies, worksongs, playsongs, lovesongs, songs connected with feasts and festivals, songs associated with rites and rituals, songs of worship, songs with philosophical idea etc. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried define a folksong as a lyrical, short and simple, less artistic but rhythmic song of a folk community which reflects the social heritage, the environment and the folk life in a particular territory. It has the capacity of frequent addition, subtraction and modification and has no known originator or possessor. It is transmitted, circulated and perpetuated spontaneously through oral tradition from person to person or from generation to generation. ¹ The folksongs not only help in understanding the socio-cultural and religious life of the community but also human psychology and the adjustment of an individual to his culturally constituted world. ² It is no matter how a folksong was composed, but its prime characteristic is that it is the creation of the community and has been transmitted orally from generation to generation and in the process of its oral transmission throughout the ages it may own lots of variation. To understand a folksong one needs not to search for its composer but must know its history, its various forms and style of singing in different time and place and more importantly its relation to the community and its function in the socio-cultural religious environment of the folk society to which it belongs. Deep Punia observes – "...the most cherished and followed social values of any rural community can be understood by analyzing its folksongs. In other words, folksongs depict social values and thereby explain the dynamics of their life. In the course of time, these folksongs are modified to imbibe and reflect the changing values of society and its cultural heritage." ³ The prime objective of this chapter is to make a thematic analysis of Karbi folksongs with a view to understanding place and position, role and status of women in a Karbi folk society from different perspective.

Karbi Folk Songs: The Karbis have folksongs for almost every important socio-cultural religious occasion in their folk society. In traditional Karbi society, every occasion is

a ritual and every ritual is an occasion. And the presence of a huge number of oral verses associated with every minute practices of a day-to-day Karbi life seems to confirm this statement.⁴ They have folksongs narrating the deeds of their mythical heroes and legendary figures, tales of creation, tales of love and hatred, joys and sorrows of their remote and recent past. The folksongs of the community are related to their feasts and festivals, rites and rituals, season and agriculture, practice and belief, tradition and enriched with traditional values. There are folksongs in Karbi folk society befitting different occasion of their socio-cultural life such as birth, purification, death, marriage, work, play, old age, worship etc. The Karbis of the hills and the plains as well use the same term 'Alun' to suggest a folksong. The folksongs of the Karbis may be classified into the following sub-genres:

- I. Songs of Creation.
- II. Songs of social formation and administration.
- III. Songs of feasts and festivals, seasons and agriculture.
- IV. Songs of rites and rituals.
- V. Songs associated with children.
- VI. Songs of Love and Nature.
- VII. Songs of the Aged.
- VIII. Work Songs.
- IX. Folk Epic
- X. Folk Ballad

(I) **Songs of Creation:** Every community has its own creation songs or origin narratives which deal with the myths narrating the origin or creation of the world, different objects of nature or of different things associated with the folk life of the community concerned. The creation stories narrated in the creation songs 'recount how the world was formed, how the things came to be, for contained within creation stories are relationships that help to define the nature of the universe and how cultures understand the world in which they exist'.⁵ In Karbi folk society the folk songs narrating origin or creation are commonly known as 'Keplang' or 'Keplank'. The Karbi origin narratives are linked, complementing and supplementing each other and the Karbi worldview is constructed around these origin narratives.⁶

Hemphu Keplang⁷ is associated with the creator Hemphu himself who taught his followers the Karbis how to live together in peace with certain rules, codes, ideals, values, process of purification, the ways of worship and made them learn the rituals of marriage

arranging the marriage of his sister Rasinja. According to Karbi Keplang⁸ the Karbis came out off the biggest ones of the eggs laid by the mythical bird Plakvutpi with a sort of hesitation. It is reflective of their ethnocentrism and a sense of hesitation generally seen with Karbi women in their folk society. Lunse Keplang⁹ with all its variants narrates the origin of song itself in which Ramsina, the divine Lunche of the Karbis, sat on 'deng hangthar' a special bamboo bench and started to sing a song addressing two girls through the song and told that that was the first song of the Karbis. Sok Keplang¹⁰ narrates how Kathipi the daughter of the Sky-god had come down to earth, took the form of rice and through Harbamon started to nourish the community. The song 'Thap Keplang'¹¹ narrates how the two sisters Kareng and Kading discovered the droppings of vo-kongching (a kind of bird) and devised the fermentation and prepared the magical brew as explained to them in their dream. Origin of 'Thap' is the origin of 'hor' or traditional rice-beer without which hardly any ritual can be performed in Karbi folk society and through the song the Karbis acknowledge the contribution of the women Kareng and Kading to their culture and thus respects the ancestors and tradition as well. 'Phelo Keplang'¹² narrates the origin of cotton and beginning of weaving in Karbi folk society and acknowledges the contribution of Long Kamar and his wife to their folk life. 'Lo Keplang'¹³ narrates the origin of plantain leaf, one of the daughters of the creator, and sustains environmental values projecting the non-human beings as the sons or daughters of the creator and keeping all beings accountable to each other for survival.

The realm of Karbi creation songs dealing with the origin of right from the creator to the various objects of nature used in their daily life construct the Karbi worldview. These songs can reorient the younger generation towards a better understanding of their earliest indigenous environment and healthy human-nature relationship. The creation songs name the Karbi women like **Rasinja, Kathipi, Kareng and Kading, wife of Long Kamar, Lo** etc. and project contribution of women to their culture. These songs with women involved in the earliest stages of creation inculcate in the young minds of the community the importance of women in their earliest folk society and equal man-woman relationship.

(II) Songs of social formation and administration:

a. **Rukasen Alun:** After Wafong Be, Jangfong Be and Ridem Be, finally it was Kasen Be the most intelligent, far-sighted, accomplished, influential of all who led all into one platform, brought order into chaos, introduced lots of rules and regulations, appointed village chief and established permanently the Karbi village in true sense of the term at

Nongkula. Later, Kasen Be became popular as Rukasen or the Grandfather Kasen. The song 'Rukasen Alun'¹⁴ narrates how one day Basapi, the wife grandfather Kasen, honoured him with 'Jorlang' and requested him to make the Karbi folk learn how to live together in peace, orderly and permanently and thus she persuaded him to establish a village. So Kasen made the folk learn the social rules and regulations of living together in peace and planned for establishing a village for the people of his community. Next day morning Kasen summoned Ferangke, the office bearer of their bachelors' dormitory, and instructed him to collect equal amount of rice from each and every house and ordered to produce their traditional rice-beer 'horlang'. As instructed, Ferangke collected rice and Basapi with other women produced the necessary amount of rice-beer within three days and three nights. Kasen, through Ferangke invited all the folk and honoured them with the rice-beer and disclosed to them his wish that if they were to develop they should shift from their present habitation either to Rongrengsang or to Nongkula and then he waited for their response. The folk discussing the matter among them informed Kasen their wish to go towards Nongkula and accordingly Kasen planned and marched ahead towards Nongkula with his subjects and necessary articles. It is said in the song that arriving at Nongkula Kasen first honoured their god with holy 'jorlang' and prayed for better future of his people. As instructed by Kasen almost one thousand Karbi families made their traditional house 'Changghar' in an order and at both sides of the way which were constructed up to the river Kopili. The Kopili river-bank cemetery was decided to be used as the prime 'ghat' for the people. Then Kasen appointed Rangmukrang the village chief of the village and placed upon him the responsibility of administering the village smoothly with the rules and regulations already introduced. This way the first Karbi village Miring Rongchopi was established at Nongkula on the bank of the river Kopili. Thereafter other Karbi villages like Teron Rongchopo, Akli Rongchopi, Boroli-e etc. came into force under the strong leadership of the first social organizer of the Karbi community Harbamon.

b. **Sar kebat Alun:** It is said in the 'Sar Kebat Alun'¹⁵ that after being ordained the village chief Harbamon organized the village and with the help of an example of a creeper asserted the villagers the importance of a village chief and showed them how a village could be developed in all around. Then Harbamon constituted the village council with the portfolios like Sarthe (village chief), Deori (priest), Richobacha (Assistant village chief), Ferangke (messenger) and Webarim (coach). With the introduction of clan system and the codes of conduct associated with, rules of civility, rules of offering honour to deities, office bearers, maternal uncle, elders etc., rules associated with birth, marriage and death etc. and the

prescribed punishment for breaking laws the Karbi folk society started to flourish and run smoothly.

c. **Jirsang Alun:** Harbamon understood well that the sustenance and development of a community, its society and culture basically depends on the youths and hence it is the necessity of the society to train up the young Karbi boys and girls in all aspects of life –socio-cultural, economic, religious and agricultural, handicrafts etc. So, being patronized by Grandfather Rukashen Harbamon introduced batchelors’ dormitory for the youths of the Karbis known as ‘Jirsong’ and the folk songs associated with Jirsong can be collectively labeled as the songs of Jirsong.¹⁶ The heart touching song related with jirsong is the one which talks about the tragic incident of suicide committed by all the members of the Jirsong together of the village Dokoik. The song¹⁷ glorifies the members of the Jirsong, the workforce of the society who committed suicide protesting against the atrocities done on them by the village head, on the marginalized by the powerful, and transforms them into Richo Arnam, the young gods of the community.

Thus the Karbi folksongs on village formation like the ‘Rukasen Alun’, ‘Sar kebat Alun’ and the songs of Jirsong introduce the new generation of the community with their legendary figures inculcate in the younger generations a quest for their past and reading their history, sociology of their fore-fathers, a sense of respect for their ancestors, culture and tradition. The song ‘Rukasen Alun’ portrays **Grandmother Basapi** in the process of village formation and thus sustains the value of woman’s participation in policy making in homely or public affairs in a Karbi society. It is found in the ‘Jirsong Alun’ that even the girls are trained up and made them skilled in all aspects of life. Here selection of a **woman as member or leader of Jirsong** is reflective of participation of woman or marginalized section in their indigenous institution and policy making body. In the present day context Jirsong (may be in a sophisticated form) and its values may address the present needs of the younger generations giving them exposure to the global world in their indigenous socio-cultural structure where they will understand their richness and limitations in global perspectives. The song narrating the tragic incident of suicide committed by all the members of the Jirsong together of the village Dokoik sustains the value of raising a **voice against exploitation and marginalization of the weaker sections** of the society.

(III)**Songs of feasts and festivals, seasons and agriculture:** The Karbis of hills or plains, are fond of feasts and festivals. The harvest festival of the Karbis of the hills is known as Hacha Kekan, the festival of the corn deity or ‘Lakhimi utsava’, and the songs associated with the

festival are known as Hacha-Alun¹⁸ in Karbi society. In the festival unmarried young boys and girls sing Hacha-Alun and dance together from evening till morning. The Lunce or the main singer starts the song and the boys and girls repeat the song and dance ‘Hacha-Kekan’ together. In the festival ‘Domahi’¹⁹ the unmarried young boys and girls sing Domahi-Alun and dance together. The ‘Johang’²⁰ festival is celebrated with a view to appeasing the war god, welcoming the New Year with benign power and bidding farewell to the evil forces. The festival continues for two days. It starts with incantation and ends with songs and dance performed by only the men folk at the houses of the local people. The worship of rain god with songs and dance is known as kurmi worship or Kurmi festival²¹. The unmarried young boys and girls in the kurmi worship sing Kurmi Alun and dance Akkaral Kekan on bamboos for the whole night. The Karbis of the plains celebrate Na-Khowa Utsava, the festival of eating new rice in the month of Aghon and the songs associated with the festival are known as An-Kimi-Kic Alun.²² At the end of the feast marriageable boys and girls spend the whole night together singing and dancing. The Karbis of the plain, especially in the plains, perform a ritual ‘Monuki en’, worship of goddess Lakshmi. The dance form and songs associated with the worship are known as ‘Amoi Moi Kikan’ and ‘Amoi Moi Kikan Alun’²³ respectively. The songs of ‘Amoi Moi Kikan Alun’ narrate the beauty of the golden paddy. These songs of festivals and agriculture project **woman as the deity of corn**, compare the **beauty of Karbi girls with that of the golden paddy**, remain witness to **marriageable boys and girls singing and dancing the whole night together**, reflects **society’s liberal attitude towards woman** and thus provide a **respectable position to woman** in a Karbi folk society.

(IV) **Songs of rites and rituals:** The Karbis celebrate various rites and rituals with singing and dancing of which a few are considered here for discussion.

a. **Songs of Marriage:** There is a folksong narrating a legend which talks about the origin of the marriage system in karbi folk society. According to the legend Har Longbi and We Longbi of Arkling village **on being advised by an old woman** of the community finally gave up their plan of war against a neighbouring village for polluting water and instead visited Mirring village with a view to learning the marriage ritual prevailing in that society and introduced the same to their own community. It is said in a folk song –

‘Ma durmi ingtangri (ta)
 Mahuchi pincang aniti
 Tung-e Har Longbi pen
 Lie We Longbi chi
 Pinacang aniti pu

Nang param daji.’²⁴

It is said in the above lines of the folk song that one day future generation would be eager to know who actually introduced beautiful marriage custom to their community and would always be grateful to and respect Har Longbi and We Longbi for their contribution who listening to the advice of an old woman discarded violation and learnt a few rules of marriage from a neighbouring village. The song projects the **Karbi woman with intercultural tolerance, mutual understanding and cultural assimilation.**

The Karbi marriage ceremony is a musical one and naturally most of the functions related to their marriage are done through or associated with songs. These songs sung in their marriage are collectively called Thelu a-lun or Adam-asar songs. There cannot be a wedding ritual in a Karbi traditional society without reciting the ‘adam-asar’²⁵ song. The song makes the progression of various stages of the ritual and concludes with the final words of solace, blessing and filial instructions given by departing parents to their daughter in her in-laws house. The thelu alun or adam-asar songs of the Karbis are sung in question-answer form and characterize the developments of their wedding ceremony and lead it towards its desired end.

(b) **Vokartarp Alun:** The songs associated with the ritual known as ‘Wokartap’ done with a view to getting a child free from the disease called ‘searching for Maternal uncle’, are collectively called vokartarp alun.²⁶ The ritual is based on a the myth of Binong Vopo who was ill treated and humiliated by his sister and finally he left home and standing at the source of the Kumphang river he cursed his sister out of pain and sufferings. In due course of time he became rich and the youngest son of his sister suffered from an unknown disease. On being advised and helped by a squirrel, who got her kid cured worshipping tree as maternal uncle, she finally met her brother and did the proceedings according to the ritual and got her boy cured. In the ritual the maternal uncle asks the reason of his sister’s visit and the honour offered through song. Similarly the visitors reply through a song that only the maternal uncle can seve their child who has been suffering from an unknown disease for a long time. The maternal uncle does the needful for the recovery his niece.

(c) **Funeral Songs:** ‘Chomangkan’, cremation ceremony of the Karbis, is associated with various songs and lamentations. While the songs of marriage are sung by the males the funeral songs of the Karbis are sung by female singers. The songs sung in the death ritual of the Karbis are of such nature –

i. **Kacarhe Alun:** The lamentation songs sung in Chomankan are collectively called Kacarhe Alun among the Karbis. These songs are sung by professional weeper or wailer known as Charhepi. The Charhepi or the wailer narrates the entire sequence of the rituals of Chomankan right from the beginning till the end through the songs made for the occasions. Kacarhe Alun or the lamentation songs may be classified into various sub-classes. For example – the Charhepi narrates the preparation of bed for the dead person through Dim-Klong Kesei²⁷ alun while sings Lang Kepanglu²⁸ alun describing how the dead is dressed in mourning attire after ritual bathing. In the An kepi alun²⁹ the Charhepi narrates the origin of rice, preparation of the food for the dead called ‘anjam’ with rice, salt, egg, dry fish and mustard seeds and narrates offering of food to the dead. In the song it is said that the dead is on its way from the world after death to the world before death and is offered food on the way and requested to have food and go home. Lamentation continues and the Charhepi sings Lang Ketung alun³⁰ narrating offering of water to the dead. The song Ingtat Kepi³¹ narrates offering of betel nuts and leaves to the dead. The Charhepi sings Tover Kethan alun³² which narrates the journey undertaken by the dead to reach the ancestors’ land. This lamentation song projects an imaginary high hill named ‘Mukindan’ in a symbolical way which demarcates heaven and hell, the worlds for honest and dishonest respectively. The Charhepi through the song requests the dead to be alert in the journey especially in making the choice of the right way to arrive at the ancestors’ land where they live happily with their supreme soul. Rong Kepado³³ alun narrates the state of the deceased between death and cremation. Pe Amar³⁴ alun narrates how the dead is dressed with new attire while Thiri Hemkim³⁵ alun describes how the pyre is constructed. Dola alun³⁶ is about the origin of dola (stretcher) through which the dead is carried to the cremation. Then the Charhepi sings Arong Kethon alun³⁷ through which she bids farewell to the deceased. This song narrates the last journey of the dead from its earthly state to the cremation ground. When the Charhepi sings this final farewell song the family members and relatives cannot remain calm and bids the dead with their heart-rending weeping. The song An Kethon³⁸ is sung on the third day of the cremation and in the concluding lines of song it is said that the living beings remain in the world and live here while the dead is requested to leave the world and go to the world after death. Here the world after death does not refer to the hell or heaven but the ‘ancestors’ land’ where their ancestors live happily with their gods and through the Chomankan the soul of the dead is guided back to their ancestors’ land, their ultimate destination.

ii. **Kepa-er Alun:** The erotic songs sung by unmarried young boys addressing unmarried girls of different clan along with dance during the first three days of Chomangkan

are collectively called Kepa-er Alun which makes the Karbi funeral ceremony a unique cultural phenomenon on Indian soil. According to a myth, Rongbini and Chombini, two gods appointed by the creator, could create man but failed to generate in them the urge to procreate. So another god Sai-deri was entrusted with the job and as a result Rongbini's wife and Chombini's wife gave birth to a male and a female respectively who were the first Karbi mortal babies. They grew and entered into wedding and raised a family. On the death of the first Karbi mortal Sai-deri with a view to balancing death with birth and sustaining the Karbi race on earth let the people who came to attend the first funeral to eat a kind of betel nut and leaves and as expected 'the art of procreation' began to talk among the couples and they became inseparable. Thiren Wareng, a legendary social reformer of the Karbis, introduced to Chomangkan Kepa-er alun associating with Nimcho Kerung dance, a kind of verbal obscenity through songs and dance, a symbol of living tradition, creativity and regeneration. The beauty of female body, art of procreation and sexual pleasure become poetic imagery in Kepa-er alun.³⁹

Death for the Karbis is neither opening the way for heaven or hell nor it is the end of a soul in itself. Rather, death for the Karbis, implies a two fold journey one is spiritual and the other is earthly. On one hand the soul is guided to the 'ancestors' land' through 'Kecharhe alun' while regeneration or rebirth of a Karbi soul is expected through Kepa-er alun. Dharamsing Teron says – 'This funerary ritual that embodies the philosophy of death and rebirth, eroticism and fertility, the art of music and dance, and a communal cultural activity – is in essence the cultural edifice of the Karbis'.⁴⁰ Thus Chomangkan the ritual of death in Karbi tradition becomes a celebration of life itself.

iii. **Muchera Kehir:** Recitation of Muchera Kerir is an important aspect of Chomangkan festival. At the day break of the third night of Chomangkan the Muchera Kerir is sung or recited under the Jambili Athon. Muchera Kehir can rightly be called the Oral History of the Karbi community with the sense of historicity prevailed throughout, historical life of the community with reference to their legendary figures, historical characters, events and relation with other communities of the region, their establishment of kingdom and migration, of their battles won and lost, their socio-cultural custom, economic condition, cultural assimilation etc. The sorrows and sufferings of the Karbis have been going on. What have been needed are their courage, sacrifice and unity. So Muchera Kehir narrates the legend of Larbin-Lirbon⁴¹ who saved the lives of her villagers and sacrificed her life for the sake of her community. Muchera Kehir also narrates how they were tortured and humiliated by the Kachari king through the story of Rongferpi⁴² with a view to energizing the marginalized

sections especially the women folk and the subdued ones of the community to protest and raise their voice against injustice and to live with respect and identity. Here the Karbis, listening to the tales of their legendary women like **Larbin-Lirbon, Rongferpi etc.** have been expected to understand themselves, their worldview, their past and present and thus develop in them a sense of belongingness to their community. Undoubtedly **Muchera Kehir is in itself a respect to Karbi women and recognition of their commitment to the community.**

(V)**Songs associated with children:** Every community has its own children song sung to make the babies to sleep or to pacify the weeping child or sung in traditional children games. Like that of other tribes of North East India the Karbis too have rich treasure of children song. They in their language use the term ‘Acho Kebai Alun’ to suggest the genre of children song. The Karbi folk songs associated with children can be sub-divided into – Lullabies or cradle songs, Game songs and Cowboy’s song.

The children songs sung either to make a baby sleep or to pacify the weeping child are known as Cradle songs or Lullabies. These songs are characterized with humming or repetition of sounds and are sung softly until the baby goes asleep. The Karbi folklore too is enriched with its beautiful lullabies. The Karbi cradle songs or the lullabies are simple in form and content. The songs sung to coax the babies to sleep begins with ‘Tu-va-e’ while the songs meant to pacify the weeping child starts with ‘Aladung...ladung’. Such utterances like ‘Tu-va-e’ and ‘Aladung...ladung’ etc. are though apparently meaningless but travelling throughout the centuries have become the mark of identity of Karbi cradle songs. These songs are short and musical, rhyming and rhetorical. Repetition, rhetorical question, conversational mood etc. are other features related to the form of Karbi cradle songs. Generally **the Karbi cradle songs are sung by the mother and elder sister of the baby or grandmother or a female baby-sitter.** Dharamsing Teron says – ‘The performer is almost always a female, but there is no bar to a male performing this. And the narratives may vary depending on who is performing the lullabies. Some texts are like riddles. Some are funnily gibberish. But generally, the lullaby tunes are soporific with the charm of their own.’⁴³ **The Karbi cradle songs projects the Karbi woman, especially the mother with her position in her family, her dignity of labour, her sense of humour and her hopes and dreams, longing and expectation with her child. The Karbi cradle songs or lullabies also project the Karbi women with her understanding and as a hard worker who prepares food, weaves cloth, makes the hill ready for Jhum cultivation and builds their house. The Karbi mother or the performer hopes and expects that her boy child soon will be a man, be a**

member of Jirkedam, take part in community cultivation, make the store house full of rice and bring enough fish to their home. The mother or the performer hopes and expects that her girl child soon will be matured, look beautiful with dress and ornaments, prepare rice-curry and rice beer, take care of all house hold works and thus she will make her parents happy and proud of her. She sings thus -

‘Tuwa e-a-a-a

Mekacha nang jangtha tha;

Thare cha longki ... ki

Mekach jangthati ... ti’⁴⁴ (Rong Bong Terang, 1982:40)

Here the hope of **the mother represents hope of the community that values like household duties, family responsibilities, community services and especially work culture are to be inculcated in the girls of their community.**

(VI)**Songs of Love and Nature:** The folk songs with the prime theme or motif of love constitute the genre of love songs or the songs of love. In Karbi language the term ‘Lumpharo alun’ is used to mean the love songs. The Karbi love songs are sung by the young boys and girls in their different socio-cultural religious contexts such as Chomankan, Jirsong, Jhum field, Retkinong, fuel collection etc. A study of a few of the Karbi love songs or part of those songs through translators or secondary sources reveals a few characteristics of Karbi love songs and the values associated with. Love, in a Karbi traditional society, is a journey through body and soul. It listens to the song sung by the soul but never rejects the call of the body. So the songs deal with the aspects associated with love such as union and joy of love, separation and pangs of depression, longing and dejection, earthly and spiritual, transience and timelessness etc. But more importantly the songs portray influence of nature on love and lover and beloved as well. For example – in spring season how the youthful nature with its new leaves and flowers makes the Karbi lover and beloved mad to meet each other is recorded in a song thus –

‘Mong wepi nangle

Pharkong pen pharse

Kangthu sibate

Lasine sengwe

Ingjarji mon e

Cheng siber un e.’⁴⁵

Here it is said that the Karbi lover with the coming of spring and the flowers of Shmolu and Madar blossoming is mad to meet his beloved. Working in the jhum field he is thinking about his beloved and longs to listen to her and feel her presence. He further says-

‘Nangpen ne ili
Siren long arni
Ne sose lokhimi’⁴⁶

The lover is so mad to meet his sweet-heart that he can subdue his hungry state of his mind and body. The Karbi beloved too yearns for her lover –

‘Patwe nemang
Thek lok nang mumang
Totlun ne phutang
Ot dong ne hongjang
Ne mekcho nang prang
Reprai ne sitang ta
Kawe kangthai dang’⁴⁷

Here the beloved is frank enough to disclose that she too can not stay away from the man who loves her madly and in his absence she meets him only in her dream. They are mad to listen to the call of the body -

‘Konak, wachak pe sal ba
Nedukoch alam kithanayak,
Tike thokwam aleman
Nangpen nepen kilangyak nenghangman.’⁴⁸

But they feel the obstacles on their way in form of tiger and bear of the forest and the approaching day light. The shy Karbi beloved no longer avoids the mating call of her lover. It is said in the song that for the lover and beloved there is no one more beautiful than each other for themselves. Glorification of the beloved’s body continues –

‘Keng charati nubai
Kangrai ma kangrai
Langkhaicha ayareya’⁴⁹

The end of love in Karbi love songs is often characterized with separation of the two owing to some unavoidable socio-cultural economic reasons resulting in much depression, sorrows and sufferings.

‘Chami rubin ne pen nang
Ranam ewan ke ewan –

Ewan ta loti ereng an.’⁵⁰

Here love is characterized with the pang of separation giving birth to unbearable sorrows and sufferings, distress and depression.

‘Jat jat le kimo

Ta nangphanchi chengdo

Ne ram thi le silo

Ta jang thek the mekcho

Hai woi to ra do’⁵¹

Here love transcends the yearning mind and fragrance of the body and starts to sing the song of the soul. The lover and the beloved feel that the memories of their love are the most valuable property for them and should be nourished and looked after wherever they go. Now they realize that love is not merely a union of the two bodies but of the two souls that lasts forever –

‘Chami nangpen ne

Ruretik Pirthe

Cheng sio nangne

Ruretik Pirthe

Pu ke pu un e

Dotik esithe

Cheng se o nangne’⁵²

The song states the final realization of the lover and the beloved that their love never ends with their separation but will continue till the destruction of the world i.e. their love is eternal and will live forever.

From above discussion it is clear that in a Karbi folk society love is the song of mind, body and soul sung in a melodious, erotic tone with a melancholic undertone. Sometimes the songs are energized with the passion of yearning or call of the body, sometimes the weeping of lover and beloved giving birth to a stream of their unending tears. These songs are integrated with joys of love and union, endurance of the pangs of separation and depression, a sense of fear and doubt, glorification of body and physical love, eroticism, longing for the permanent, apotheosis of human soul and soul of nature and its objects, eternity of love etc. The songs glorify physical love but acknowledge the eternity of love through soul.

Further the ‘Phak ak arsak alun’ narrating the myths of ‘**Didi-Dirsumai**’ and ‘**Kase-Choineri**’ also reveal the eternal relation between love and nature in a Karbi folk society.

Both the myths narrate the unsuccessful love affair resulting in the tragic end of the beloveds. In the myths the beloveds Didi and Choinari out of the pains of separation and humiliation thereafter finally sacrificed their lives and willingly transformed themselves into dengrali tree. Since then the youths of Jirsong worship dengrali tree singing the ‘Phak ak arsak alun’. Thus through the song the Karbi folk society sustains and transmits the value that **love and nature are inseparable; worship of nature is the worship of love and love for nature is the love for the dear one and love for all.**

(IX)**Karbi Folk Epic:** Folk or oral epic songs are long narrative poems in formulaic and ornamental style dealing with the adventures of extraordinary people.⁵³ The Karbi folk literature is enriched with two Karbi folk epics. Both are oral narrative or story poetry - one is ‘Sabin Alun’ and the other is ‘Ha-i-mu’.

a. **Sabin Alun:** ‘Sabin Alun’⁵⁴, the Karbi Ramayana, is a long oral narrative or story poetry sung in formulaic metrical order. It contains 2775 lines with 7 syllables each. According to Rong Bong Terang the tale of Ram in Sabin Alun may be taken as the echo of Madhva Kondali.⁵⁵ In Sabin Alun Janaka is a peasant king and Sita is born out of an egg of a peacock who becomes an expert weaver. It is a purely Kabi world where the King and subjects are all peasants and the daughter of the king is proud to be an expert weaver. There is no mention of the banishment of Rama in the Karbi Ramayana. From reading of ‘Muchera Kehir’ it can be said that banishment in Karbi context had hardly any relevance where the community itself had to move from one place to another under compelling situation. Further here Ravana has many hands instead of many heads which metaphorically implies that the greatness of the Karbi Ravana refers not to his intellectual strength but in physical strength and workforce in Karbi context. The major deviations in respects of theme, characterization and situation found in Sabin Alun from original Rama story are owing to the ethno-cultural mores of the Karbis and Sabin Alun is called a beautiful synthesis of the original Rama-story with the typical Karbi cultural elements.⁵⁶ In Sabin Alun the epic story of the Ramayana is retold in typically Karbi style for Karbi audience with Karbi setting.⁵⁷ According to Birendranath Datta the basic theme of Ramayana the victory of goodness over evil force had direct appeal to the Karbi mind and the tragic element running through the story takes us to the most fascinating characteristic of Karbi folklore and Karbi folk mind – a virtual obsession with tragedy.⁵⁸ Thus the Karbi folk epic ‘Sabin Alun’ is one of the means of understanding Karbi folk culture and folk mind and remains instrumental in inculcating in the youngsters of the community the values like socialization with their own culture, work-culture, longing for

goodness, life of endurance, a sense of victory of goodness over evil force and thus ensuring of justice in society.

b. **Ha-i-mu:** Ha-i-mu,⁵⁹ a popular folk epic of the Karbis, is a long oral narrative poem consisting of 2625 lines with 5 syllables in each line dealing with pains and sufferings of Ha-i-mu. Ha-i-mu, the daughter of a poor farmer, got married to her childhood sweetheart and had a son. Unfortunately she became the victim of a conspiracy made by an intruder and consequently was forced into marriage with a powerful official of the ruling Karbi gentry. Ha-I instead of submitting herself to the cruel official embraced death. After her death her tears of her anger and anguish, pain and suffering brought forth incessant rain. Since then the Karbis believe that the complete performance of the Ha-i-mu epic brings down heavy rain. Thus the Hi-mu alun, the oral epic, records the plight of the Karbis, their anger and anguish, pains and sufferings at the hands of the powerful and promises hope in form of rain.

The folk epics ‘Sabin Alun’ and ‘Ha-i-mu’ are the cultural document of the Karbs. **The unending tale of pains and sufferings sustained in the epics is reflective of obsession with sense of hesitation and tragedy especially of Karbi women.** The Karbi setting to which the Rama tale is contextualised reflects the socio-cultural, economic and political structure of the community of remote past. These epics are integrated with the values like community’s love for metre, rhyme and order, longing for goodness, justice and honesty, the victory of goodness over evil force, endurance, glorification of physical strength and workforce, work culture, equality of king and subjects, love for culture and tradition, a voice against injustice, exploitation and marginalization etc. and locate the Karbi nationalism or identity in Indian context.

(X)**Karbi Folk Ballad:** A ballad is a song, transmitted orally from generation to generation, which tells a tale. It is relatively a short narrative in comparison to an epic. The gems of Karbi folk literature lies in its ballads. The Karbi ballads can be classified into the categories such as Mythical Ballad, Legendary or Historical Ballad, Love Ballad etc.

a. **Mythical Ballad:** The Karbi creation songs such as Hemphu Keplang, Karbi Keplang, Lunse Keplang, Sok Keplang, Thap Keplang, Bong Keplang, Phelo Keplang, Birik Keplang, Nok Keplang, Lo Keplang, Nihu Keplang, Ingti Keplang etc. may be considered Mythical Ballads of the community. Further Rong Kekim alun or Rukachen alun, Sar Kebat alun, Jambili alun, Jirsong alun etc. belong to the category of Mythical Ballad. These ballads are already discussed under the category of ‘songs of creation’ and ‘songs of social rules’ and it is realized that the songs reflect the Karbi worldview, their understanding of the origin and nature of their world and its objects and its relation to their folk life. In a deeper sense these

songs carry their sound understanding of human-nature relationship and sustain certain human and environmental values to be inculcated in the new generations of the community. For example if Karbi Keplang narrates creation of their world and their origin, Hemphu Keplang provides them the ideals and moral principles, rules and codes, Lunse Keplang lets them to beautify their world through songs, Rong Kekim alun and Sar Kebat alun makes the community learn how to organize a village or a society and formulate its rules and above all how to live together in peace with rules, codes, ideals and values.

b. **Legendary Ballad:** The Karbi legendary ballads or historical ballads, based on legendary figures or historical events of recent past, are found in fragmentary form. For example the ballad of Reng Bangham reflects the glorious past of the community when Reng Bongham was their king. He was the pride of the community who could protect their beautiful kingdom and villages well from their strong neighbours. It is also said in the song that even the powerful Jayantia king became the friend of the Reng Bongham and other neighbours were frightened to see his valour. The ballad of the legendary Rangpherpi also narrates a historical episode –

‘Ingtong lokbong kelong
 Ingkrong lokbong kelong
 Phandar lokbong kelong
 Puru lokbong kelong
 Bang achim atum
 Bang ahom atum
 Plang elang un-e woifit
 Jar elang un-e woifit
 Teke aso pangreng woifit
 Ingnar aso pangreng woifit
 Sulang erung woifit....’⁶⁰

This ballad narrates the plight of the Karbis especially of their women community at the hands of a powerful neighbouring king who ordered his soldiers to bring human milk from the breasts of Karbi women to feed his pet tiger. The song narrates how **Rongpherpi, the legendary woman of Karbi community symbolizing women’s power and strength, sense of self-respect and dignity, killed the soldiers of the king who demanded milk from her breast.** The following translated version of another Karbi historical ballad refers to their bitter relation with the Ahoms –

‘O Karbis, there is no end to our misfortunes,

Tears of sorrow are our friends,
Rise, O Karbi young men and women of the villages
Let us kill in thousands,
The soldiers of the giant Ahom king.⁶¹

This ballad registers the voice of the Karbis raised against the Ahom king who tortured and exploited the community. In reality this ballad has been inspiring the youngsters of the community not to tolerate or compromise with but to raise their collective voice against any sort of injustice to and exploitation of the community done by powerful internal or external forces. Metaphorically this song can be read as a voice of the subdued, exploited, powerless raised against the powerful the exploiter or the ruler. It is the voice of the Karbi community striving for respectful and peaceful living and identity throughout the ages.

Thus these legendary ballads or part of the ballads sustain historical significance and leave scope for historical research with a view to understanding the community since its arrival in Assam. The songs narrating their migration and subsequent settlement at Choseng, their glorious days with RengBongham, Thong Nokbe, Waisong etc. and depicting peace, security and beauty of their kingdom reflect the community's socio-political awareness and their search for peace and security, self-respect and identity, love for freedom and beauty. These ballads are also informative of their relation to the other tribes of the land or their neighbouring communities. **Further the ballad of Rangpherpi, the voice against harassment of women, is enough to inculcate in Karbi women a search for self-respect, dignity and identity.**

c. **Love Ballads:** The Karbi love ballads are the life force of Karbi folk literature. Of all Karbi balladas **Romi alun, Hanri alun, Larta alun, Kaching alun, Changlin alun, Cherdihun alun, Didi alun** etc. are popular among the folk. Apart from the Romi alun full texts of other ballads are not available. The full text of Romir Alun is found in 'Romir Alun' compiled and edited by Samsing Hanse while the other ballads are found in fragmentary form in 'Karbi Pranayee Geet' by the same author. In the ballad 'Romir Alun' Sam Longki and Romir, who became youth playing together on the sands of the river Amtarpeng and fell in love, could not get married owing to the strict rules and regulations of Jirsong imposed by the autocrate village head. Longki was kept busy in the works of Jirsong while **Romir** was compelled to get married with another man. She succumbed to the pains of separation and her tragic end brought doom days to the life of Longki. Similarly in the ballad 'Larta Alun', **Larta** who was in love with Kronihang but could not get married with him and fell victim to her mother's conspiracy while going to attend Chomangkan. In the ballad 'Kaching Alun' the

lover, who was in love with **Kaching**, could not get married with her and remains waiting in pain of separation watching her footsteps on the sands of the river. The ballad ‘Hanri Alun’ too is a melancholy song of unreciprocated love. The ballad ‘Ser Dihun’ records of pain and suffering, anger and anguish, agony of solitary **Dihun**, an expert weaver, who had to lead a lonely life being the leader of Jirsong. These ballads are reflective of the symbiosis of Karbi folk life and nature. The passion and compassion of love are felt through nature and its objects. For example- in ‘Romir Alun’ the silvery dew drops are seen as the tears of the beloved. In ‘Kaching Alun’ the physical appeal of Kaching is in tune with the aesthetic appeal of the meeting point of the Dera and kopili rivers and the scenery around. The presence of unseen Kaching probing deeper in the heart of the lover and causing pain is understood through her known footsteps going far away.

Thus an understanding of these ballads or extracts of the ballads makes it clear that these songs of love and separation are also the representative of Karbi folk mind and folk custom. Every aspect of Karbi folk life gets reflected in their ballads. These songs are reflective of the way of Karbi folk life meant to assimilate the younger generation of the community with their own socio-cultural customs, institutions, closeness of their life to nature and values of life. **The sense of pathos associated with the ‘melancholic strain’ that runs throughout these ballads is the melody of Karbi folk mind and suggestive of the pains and sufferings of their suppressed or subdued Karbi women exploited and humiliated by their comparatively stronger males or their neighbours throughout the ages.** These ballads are meant to inculcate the human value that socio-religious rules and regulations should not be formulated or used to make people lonely and depressed, separate from each other or dear ones and make the life miserable but be flexible enough to let all live together in peace, listen to the song of love and make life beautiful. These songs also give birth to a sense of justice in the minds of the youngsters and encourage them to raise their voice against marginalization of the weaker and their familiar melancholic strain. What is more a sense of sacrifice of life for the sake of love, and of personal wishes and aspirations for the sake of greater interest is also tried to inculcate in the younger generations of the community through these ballads. These songs suggest that life, love and nature are inseparable. The Karbi love ballads, the life force of Karbi folk literature, sustain the symbiosis of karbi folk life and nature, passion and compassion of love felt through nature, endurance of pain and sufferings, anger and anguish and a ‘melancholic strain’ that is the melody of Karbi folk mind.

Conclusion: The world of Karbi folk song is rich and varied. These are transmitted, circulated and perpetuated spontaneously through oral tradition from person to person or from generation to generation. Every occasion or every ritual of their folk life has its own song which is meant to get the folk involved in the situation concerned and make the occasion lively. Hardly any celebration of wedding, childbirth, any cultural-religious function, any rite and ritual, work or play in a Karbi traditional society is considered complete without singing the folk song meant for the occasion. The songs are spontaneous, lyrical and rhythmic expression of the folk resulting from their accumulated aesthetic sense and socio-cultural responsibilities. These songs reflect their folk society with traditional knowledge and practical wisdom, rules and regulations of their socio-religious, political world, rites and rituals, codes of conduct, taboos, their religion, gods and goddesses, faiths and superstitions, their ancient socio-political economical institutions, patriarchal society and feudal feature, their animism, totemism, relation to nature and non-human physical environment etc. in a simple language, form and style. The world of Karbi folk songs reveal dominance of women characters and their role in sustenance of their folk society, their honoured participation in almost all socio-cultural affairs on one hand and their pains and sufferings on the other hand constituting the complex texture of their social structure and questioning the patrilineal system in their domain.

The Karbi folksongs are the treasure-house of knowledge and wisdom of the folk and naturally are one of the means of educating the younger generation of the community. These songs projecting the mythical and legendary women figures, narrating the tales of creation and destruction, love and hatred, norms and practices, beliefs and tradition, moral and discipline, household and agricultural duties etc. teach the young girls to feel oneness with the community, adopt culture and how to lead a social life in peace and harmony. These also impart worldly wisdom and practical knowledge related to everyday life. These songs have been capitalized by the folk for adopting and adjusting its younger generation to its socio-cultural religious environment, building their behaviour and inspiring them to lead the approved way of life. The real value of the folksongs, as a source of sociological data, lies not in its concern with particular persons or incidents, but in its typical portrayals of situations, relationships and attitudes towards life. These songs are reflective of typical pictures of Karbi familial relationships, social institutions, relation between an individual and society, society and nature etc. and these pictures, when synthesized, provide a more balanced and comprehensive view of the Karbi folk society and its values. Thus the folksongs of the Karbi

community, the most poetical and musical of all elements of their folk literature are related to their socio-cultural religious environment and have been playing the vital role in sustenance of the traditional role, position and status of a Karbi woman in socio-cultural religious structure of the community.

Notes and References:

1. Maria Leach and Jerome Fried, *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1950, p.1033.
2. Deep Punia, *Social Values in Folklore*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1993, p.12.
3. Ibid. pp.19-20.
4. Dharamsingh Teron, *Karbi Studies*, Vol.-2, Assam Book Hive, Guwahati, 2011, pp.21-22.
5. Devy, Davis & Chakravarty (ed), *Indigeneity–Culture and Representation*, Orient Blackswan, 2009, p.76.
6. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit., p.22.
7. Jorsing Bey, ‘Hemphu Keplank’, *Lun Barim Aphar*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2004, pp. 1-5.
8. Ibid, pp. 84-89.
9. Dilip Kalita, *Rangsina Charpo aru Karbi Samaj*, Diphu, 1982, pp.2-50.
10. Jorsing Bey, op. cit., pp. 11-16.
11. Ibid. pp. 41-44.
12. Ibid. pp. 51-52.
13. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit., p.27.
14. Phulmati Teronpi, Chomlin Aloti, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2006, pp.113-118.
15. Jorsing Bey, op. cit., pp. 24-29.
16. Basanta Das, *Karbi Sanskritir Etihash*, Aank-Baak, Guwahati, 2010, pp. 112-113.
17. Ibid. p.118.
18. John Ingti Kathar, ‘Karbisakalar Basanta Utsav’, *Basanta Utsava Aru Asamar Janagosthir Loka-Nritya*, ed. N.C. Sarma, Bina Library, Guwahati, 1993, pp.73-74.
19. Sar Rajendra Timung, *Ret Kinong Alun*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Bakalia, Karbi Anglong, 2004, pp.25-30.
20. Tirtha Phukan, ‘Bhoiyam-Karbi Git-Padar Bharalat Ebhumuki’ in *Siphung- Gungang*, ed. Birendranath Datta, Directorate of Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1986, pp. 95-96.

21. Rajen Tar, 'Bhoiyamar Karbi Samajat Pracalita Git-Mat' in *Siphung- Gungang*, ed. Birendranath Datta, Directorate of Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1986, pp. 114-115.
22. Ibid. P.114.
23. Murulidhar Das, *Bhaiyam Karbir Lokaparampara Aru Git-pad*, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2007, pp.96-97.
24. Rong Bong Terang, *Karbi Sahitya-Sanskritit Ebhumuki*, Jorhat, 1982, p10.
25. Bidorsing Kro, *Karbi Sanskritir Ekhila*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2008, p.18
26. Basanta Das, op. cit., pp.90-93.
27. Phulmati Teronpi, op. cit., pp.8-9.
28. Ibid. pp.12-16.
29. Basanta Das, op. cit., pp222-223.
30. Phulmati Teronpi, op. cit., p22-27.
31. Ibid. pp.20-21.
32. Ibid. pp.28-32.
33. Ibid. pp.33-39.
34. Ibid. pp. 40-46.
35. Ibid. pp. 49-52.
36. Ibid. pp. 54-78.
37. Ibid. pp. 89-95.
38. Ibid. pp. 98-100.
39. Padumi Gogoi, *Karbi Loka Sanskritir Abhash*, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2011, p.44.
40. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit., p.82.
41. Padumi Gogoi, op. cit., p49.
42. Basanta Das, op. cit., p217.
43. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit., p.47.
44. Rong Bong Terang, *Karbi Sahitya Samskritit Ebhumuki*, Jorhat, 1982, p.40.
45. Padumi Gogoi, op. cit., p.59.
46. Bhabani Kumar Sharma, 'Karbi Loka-Sahityar Puwalmoni', *Karbi Sanskritir Ruprekha*, ed. Rong Bong Terang, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 2010, p.60.
47. Deben Gogoi, op. cit., p43.
48. Rajn Tar, op. cit., p.113.
49. Rong Bong Terang, op. cit., p.35.
50. Langkam Teron, op. cit., p 25.

51. Padumi Gogoi, op. cit., p 61-62.
52. Padumi Gogoi, op. cit., p 62.
53. Felix J. Oinas, "Folk Epic" in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, ed. Richard M. Dorson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972, p.99.
54. Samsing Hanse, ed., *Sabin Alun*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 1986.
55. Rong Bong Terang, op. cit., p.28.
56. N.C.Sharma, op. cit., p.213.
57. Dharamsing Teron, op. cit., p.53.
58. Birendranath Datta, *Cultural Contours of North-East India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p72.
59. Bonglong Terang, ed., *Ha-I*, Korte Publishers, Diphu, 1937 (3rd print 1984).
60. Basanta das, op. cit., p217.
61. B. Datta, N.C.Sarma & P.C.Das, (ed.), *A Handbook of Folklore Material of North East India*, Anandaram Barua Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Guwahati, 1994, pp.100-101.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is not always safe to make generalised comment on nature and character of womenfolk of a particular community based on their folklore material. Karbi folk literature is to a great extent an index to social reality and serves as windows to make a study of their folk society and their folk women. Representation of women in Karbi folktales and folk songs is reflective of man-woman relationship in their society, their society's perception of and attitude towards woman, and more importantly the construction of woman self in their folk society. Karbi folk literature tells us a good deal about women, their nature and temperament, their liking and disliking, wishes and aspirations, duties and obligations, household businesses and agricultural works, social and religious activities, their conjugal life, their interpersonal relationships, their role as a daughter, member of Jirsang, as a wife, mother, old women etc. It also talks about their place and status in their family and society as well.

A good number of women-oriented ones accessible from the Karbi folk tales, myths, legends and songs are examined with a view to understanding the women self constructed and voiced in their narratives, her socio-culturally constructed roles and values associated with, her reaction to those roles and circumstances and its impacts on the target group. What is felt that these tales and songs, women-oriented in terms of being centered on women or narrated by women, are told especially to young girls not merely to entertain but to socialize them, make them disciplined and complete adult women, to mould their behavior in the expected way to suit the mind of the narrator or the demands of the patriarchal society, to teach them how to live for others, to make them bearer of tradition and culture and finally to transgress the situation into a means of 'search for self' for the young girls.

The women gallery seen in the Karbi myths is constituted of Karbi women deities or divinely bestowed and mythical-historical women characters like Rasinja, Panjok, daughter of Barithe, deity of Rice, Basapi, Velibon, Kareng, Kading, Kase, Marongpi, Kasang Ingtipi, Kawe Timungpi, Kase Ingtipi, Kanong etc. These deities and human figures contributed to creation and organization, constitution and composition of the Karbi world. For example, the myth 'Legend of Creation' portrays Karbi women the mother, Bamonpi, Rekbepi, Rek-kropi, wives of Bamonpo, Rama's wife etc. contributing to the creation of the Karbi earth and the Karbis. The myth of Rukasen portrays far sighted Basapi as the organizer of village who was

instrumental in establishing the first Karbi village Miring Rongchopi at Nongkula on the bank of the river Kopili and reflects woman's participation in policy making in the earliest process of their village formation. The myth with Rang Mukrang narrates the contribution of Kareng and Kading who getting fascinated with the smell of the droppings of kongching (a kind of bird) devised the fermentation and prepared the magical brew as explained to them in their dream and prepared for the first time their traditional rice-beer 'hor' without which hardly any ritual can be performed in a Karbi society. The myth of Hemphu projects woman deity Rasinja in human shape and through her marriage traditional wedding system was introduced to the Karbis. The tale of Teron Rongsopo portrays another woman deity, the deity of rice who came down to earth to address the hunger of the poor Karbi people. The myth of Borli e projects women deities like Rasinja, Panjok etc. who appear in human shape and help in performing Hemphu worship for the first time in a Karbi tradition. The tale of We Longbi and Har Longbi introduces an old woman named Marongpi who made We Longbi and Har Longbi understand the ills of war, values of cultural assimilation and contributed to the traditional wedding system of the Karbis. The myth of Thireng-Wareng portrays Kawe Timungpi as the symbol of eternal love and contributor to their traditional cremation ceremony 'Chomangkan'.

The women figures seen in the Karbi legends are Rongpherpi Rongbe, Kareng Teronpi, Larbin and Lirbon, Didimur, Serdihun, Dengrali, Larta etc. The legend of Rengbonghom projects Kareng Teronpi, the good and kind-hearted queen who loved her subjects and encouraged the king to construct the capital Socheng and abolish capital punishment. The legend of Waisong portrays a Khasi woman as a betrayer and the queen as a friendly, kind hearted, far sighted lady who helped Waisong to establish a Karbi kingdom. The tale of Rongpherpi Rongbe has been told to the young generation of her community throughout the ages with a view to inculcating values like self respect and self prestige, rejection of the exploitation of the poor and powerless, energizing the marginalized sections especially the women folk and the subdued ones of the community to protest and raise their voice against injustice and to live with respect and identity. The heart rendering tale of Larbin and Lirbon is meant to inculcate in the mind of the young a sense of patriotism and self-sacrificing attribute, love for and readiness to die for the community. In legend of Disumai Rongpi, selection of Didimur as member of the Jirsong reflect Karbi folk values of giving respect to the position of women and their involvement in community affairs. At the same the legend records the sufferings of Didimur and the society's teaching that community service should always be preferred to woman's aspiration. Her death is a protest against the life of a

woman meant to live for the community and tradition at the cost of her own wishes and aspirations, love and desire. The legends of Dimmir and Larta are also expressive of the voice raised against exploitation and marginalization of women in their society. The legend of Serdihun projects weaving as a proud women-centered tradition providing not merely the costumes for the households but a visible symbol, uniformity and identity to the community. The legend of Dengrali portrays a victimized girl seduced by her maternal uncle inculcates and made pregnant and compelled to commit suicide for doing a sin. Her tragic end is also a protest against sexual colonization of a female's body and marginalization of woman-self in the name of culture and tradition. The Karbi legends are reflective of women characters fighting for the establishment of their self-respect and dignity, contributing to their culture and tradition, sacrificing their lives for the community and their protest against exploitation of woman self in their patriarchal social structure.

The gallery of Karbi women seen in their folktales is constituted of queen living a life like the folk, beautiful princess expert in weaving and other household works waiting to be taken away forever by unknown strong male, old and young poor widow suffering a lot in upbringing the orphans, kind-hearted and responsible mother, caring and loving wife, cruel and inhuman step-mother, old wise women, affectionate or cruel sister-in-law, dutiful daughter-in-law supposing her household works her religion, obedient daughters even agreeing to get married to a dog or a pig, over-worked and suffering from malnutrition, orphan girls, trickster girls, women sympathetic towards poor and needy, religious women, savior to husband's life and fortune, betrayer to and conspiring against husband and she-demon and nymph representing so called 'bad' side of women etc. Karbi folktales project women with their nature and temperament, their liking and disliking, wishes and aspirations, duties and obligations and their multi-dimensional and predetermined roles, their place and position in their family and society as well. The study reveals that a Karbi woman respects dignity of labour and likes to be self-dependant. She is simple but becomes furious when her self-respect is in danger. In a Karbi society division of labour between male and female is strictly maintained. The womenfolk have to do the works like looking after children and fowls and pigs, collection of food items and fire-wood from forest, cooking and serving meals, weaving cloths, fishing, preparation of rice-beer, other household works such as cleaning, washing etc., agricultural and religious activities, activities in festivals and rituals etc. How sincere and particular the womenfolk are in their household works is clearly seen from the story of Harata Konwar. The tales show that the Karbi women, even of a higher rank and status, are very much sincere and particular in their household duties. The Karbi women

are expert weavers and are proud of clothing their husbands and family members, warriors by themselves only, reflected in 'The Tale of She-Demon' where Arlengpi refuses to leave her loom before giving final touch to the cloth of her husband and in the tale 'The Legend of All Women Village' Lirbon deceives the enemy by clothing the warriors in a dog-skin like cloths. A Karbi woman's devotion to her husband and her family is well reflected in 'The Tale of a She-Demon' where Arlengpi even after her death keeps on supporting her family. 'The story of Harata Konwar' too reveals the Karbi women's faithfulness to their respective husbands. The youngest one agrees to the proposal of Harata Konwar only to relieve her married sisters from the humiliating position. The pains and sufferings of a poor widow mother encountered in upbringing of a child in a patriarchal society are evident in almost all the tales dealing with 'Jangreso' the orphan. The story of Harata Konwar portrays a kind-hearted, witty and caring sister-in-law who kills the insect seen on Harata's body giving a symbolic gesture of the coming danger and saves his life from her own men revealing her possession of milk of human kindness, commitment to domestic relation, love and affection. On the other hand 'The Tale of a Dog' portrays a cruel sister-in-law who for political benefit, wealth and power transforms her brother-in-law the prince into a dog. The Tale 'The Orphan and Vulture's Feather' reveals quarrelsome mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The tale 'Karham Jungreso' portrays the hard-hearted, cunning, villainous step mother while the tale 'Orphan and the king of Vices' projects a betrayer to her lover and husband only to meet her tragic end.

Representation of women in Karbi folk tales is reflective of Karbi folk society and its perception and treatment of and attitude towards women. The society has no objection if the strong male having a wife at home goes in search of a beautiful lady and takes her away to get married paying little attention to her willingness (Ingru Tulapi), but cannot tolerate if a brother spends a night with his sister-in-law (Kongso and Bongso) and punishes the faithless wife to roam forever with the cloud in the sky (The Orphan and the King of Vices). The husband the prime agent of the patriarchal society is not sympathetic towards the pains of the over-worked woman but physically assaults her for being pitiless towards the males wasting time in idle. (Dog, Hyena and She-Elephant) Looking through a vulture feather the husband discovers animal spirit in mother and wife and considers them the real source of familial and domestic disorder. He never looks at himself through the feather supposing the society's conviction that the male is always right, restores his life getting rid of the old one and married to a new one (Orphan and Vulture's feather). Thus the Karbi folk society, as reflected in the women centered tales, appears biased against women and leads the young girls to understand

the unequal man-woman relationship and their traditional role in sustaining that sort of unequal relationship or uneven social position in present day context and provides them scope to construct their character in their own way.

The picture of a victimized girl, as seen in a few tales, who is sexually exploited and humiliated, is also reflective of the humiliated place and position of a Karbi girl in a Karbi folk society. The maternal uncle who made Dengrali pregnant and left her to a state of committing suicide goes unpunished ('The Myth of Dengrali'). The beautiful girls are bound to suffer whose parents are poor and ignorant, who do not have a brother or brother-in-law ('Origin of Toe-Sore'). The male leaders of 'Jirsong' are not considered the guilty who sexually seduce the beautiful girl members and compel them to commit suicide or make their life pathetic ('Origin of Toe-Sore', 'The Legend of Baby-Hill'). In spite of taking separation from the careless husband the wife cannot get herself fully free from the so called emotional-sexual bond of marital relationship and makes her husband happy assuring her that he would be the first to suck her nectar in her next life. (The Sunbird and his Wife) The society is indifferent towards the pains of the young mother feeding a baby who is compelled to work harder ('The Legend of Baby-Hill'). Dejection of the new born baby girl in a jhum field is another example of injustice done to women ('Womu Langlupi').

Characterization of grandmothers or the wise old women is another trait of the tales of the Karbis reflecting their society's attitude towards women. The wise old women of wit and intelligence who can play crucial role in changing other people's lives are marginalized by the society and let to live like beggar women living all alone in a wretched hut in a deep forest. ('Sita Kamar', 'The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri', 'Orphan and Earth Princess', 'The Prince and Prime Minister's Son', 'Two Orphan Brothers', 'Story of Harata Kunwar' etc.) The old woman who can satisfy the strong males with her wise words is restored life, beauty and strength and so brought back to the society for being transformed again into the state of use and relevance. If the old woman fails to please the ear of the strong males she is brutally punished, made blind and deaf and led to a more pathetic life. (The Winter-Summer Way') Such inhuman attitude towards women, marginalization of the old wise women, unequal man-woman relationship, sexual exploitation and humiliation of the poor and powerless girls, injustice to new born girl, inhuman treatment of a mother feeding a baby etc. may lead the young minds to realize that their folk society is a male chauvinistic one. Nowhere it is seen that the society is trying to listen to the tales of owes and sufferings of women and address properly. The society is neither ready to take any cause of women's suffering to its account nor to punish the males for their polygamy, violence towards women,

for being untrustworthy and carelessness but assigns her every misfortune to fate or to badness in her character and thus warns the young girls not to be like the bad women portrayed. Instead the minds of the young girls are trained to be submissive, patient, eager to please others not themselves and are convinced that finally triumph of so called goodness of women over evil forces within the periphery of women is established ('Tale of a She-Demon', 'The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri').

The tales are also reflective of the fact that the Karbi women, in spite of living in a male chauvinistic and male dominated society, enjoy certain advantages as compared to their counterparts among the non-tribals. They have full freedom to move about in their house, fields, farms and forests. They are not considered a burden and free to make choice of their life-partner. They are not seen suffering from dowry, bride price, child marriage etc. Separation happens easily and there is no taboo in widow marriage. As it is seen in the supernatural tales that getting married to a rich lady or princess ensures prosperity similarly the tale 'Orphan and Vulture's Feather' shows that only a good woman can restore familial and domestic peace and order. Women are also projected as the protector of husband and village, culture and community. The tale 'Vokronso' shows the wives of the orphan representing different forces of nature save their husband from the forces of the tyrannical king and finally make him the king. In the tale 'The Legend of All Women's Village' the women are the protector of the village and Lirbon especially weaves dog-skin like dress for the warriors to deceive the enemy. In the tale 'Mangbon the Brute' the female force in the form of an old tigress makes the end of the life of the strong Brute who brought danger to the lives of the Karbis and their culture. The tale 'How the Hornbills Originated' portrays an orphan Karbi girl with wit and intelligence, as a trickster who can deceive and killed a witch and her daughter and establishes triumph of goodness over evil force through her wit and intelligence. The tales like 'The Sunbird and his Wife', 'Dog, Hyena and She-Elephant' etc. are reflective of female expressive behavior different that of the males. The tales show that women are capable of leading their life being free from the conventional order, pose a challenge against the patriarchy and male domination and leave their husband's house in search of herself. The 'Tale of a Dove' portrays the Karbi woman, represented by the female dove, as the voice raised against colonization, exploitation and humiliation of woman self. The simple and submissive female force in the tale suffers a lot in the hands of her strong male neighbour, the intruder who consumes her children again and again, compels her to shift from one place to another and kills her husband and is finally killed and his colonization is overthrown by the so called weak female force. There has always been a willingness in the

minds of the independent Karbi women to challenge male domination, being unable to give justice to Hi-mu, Dengrali, Larta, Lirbon, Kave and Kadom, Marpi etc., finally the traditional Karbi female force has fulfilled its wish and desire through the female dove and encourages the minds of the young girls listening to the tale to raise a voice of protest against any sort of exploitation and humiliation, colonization and marginalisation of woman self and to fight for respect and dignity of women, equal place and position of women in their society.

This is a rapid survey of Karbi folk tales and folk songs made with a view to seeing how Karbi womenfolk do appear in those folklore materials. It is difficult to say that Karbi women are such and such and do and behave this way in all cases. We only arrive at such realization that though Karbi society is basically a patriarchal one yet a Karbi family revolves round the mother and girls with their active participation in singing and dancing give true colour, variety and spirit to their socio- cultural religious activities and the wise old women with their wisdom of age try to lead the new generation in the right way. The study reveals that a Karbi woman respects dignity of labour and likes to be self-dependant. She is simple but becomes furious when her self-respect is in danger. A Karbi woman, of higher or lower rank and status, is true to her household duties and never searches for her fortune beyond her loom or fied, 'Kam' or 'Kut'. Mutual co-operation between Karbi males and females in their homely affairs or in their socio-cultural, agricultural activities is clearly seen from the folk tales, songs and their festivals. The Karbi women apart from doing their duties also extend their help to their male partners in their agricultural field, in their socio-religious matters. A Karbi woman is always devoted to her husband and her family. The tale world projects Karbi women as kind-hearted, witty, affectionate, loving and caring Karbi woman who do their best to maintain conjugal peace and harmony. The tales and songs portray jolly girls working, singing and dancing ; loving, caring witty daughter-in-law ; devoted wife caring for husband's honour ; kind-hearted, strict, responsible mother; wise old women, social organizer and pacifist and at the same time the cunning, jealous, villainous step mother and betrayer to lover and husband. The tales and songs also talk about the sufferings of women and the victimized girl. No doubt to attend certain functions is a taboo for Karbi women especially in their 'Rongker' festival. Karbi women enjoy unrestricted participation in their festivals like 'Hasa Kekan', 'Domahi', 'Johang', Chomankan etc. The folk songs sung in Chomankan are the sole property of Karbi women. A Karbi old woman, known as Uchepi, sings for the salvation of the soul of the dead. Uchepi goes on singing her melancholic songs and Charhepi performs her activities right from 'Ruhkehun' to 'Nonker', cooks and offers 'Anjam' at the

cremation ground and invokes the spirit of the dead. Uchepe in her mournful song refers to the past activities of the dead person and also his/her life after death and makes the listeners sad and weep. The roles played by Uchepe, Charhepe and Obkepe undoubtedly give Karbi women a reasonably high status.

. Contribution of Karbi women to their folk life is well acknowledged by their folk society. If The “Legend of Creation” talks about the involvement of women such as the mother, Bamonpi, Rekbepi, Rek-kropi etc. in the process of creation of the world the story of “Rang Kesheng” projects the wife of Kashen as a social organizer. If “Thap Lapen Har Keman” acknowledges the invaluable contribution of Kareng and Kading in enriching their folk society with the introduction of Harlong (rice-beer), the tale of Serdihun records her contribution to weaving. If the tales of Larbin and Lirbon reflects how Karbi women can sacrifice their lives for the community, the legend of ‘Rongpherpi Rongbe’ tells the world that a Karbi woman never compromises with self respect and dignity of women and always raises a voice of protest against marginalization and exploitation of weaker sections of their society. The character of widow found in their tales associates on one hand sufferings of womenfolk and on the other hand raises a hope for the wronged individual or the oppressed community with her wise sayings. If the tale of Har Longbe and We Longbe portrays an old Karbi woman who raises her voice against war and encourages for cultural assimilation the role of woman in their socio-cultural religious celebrations makes her tradition bearer and develops community consciousness. The Karbi children songs (Oso Sepadak Alun) reflect depth of feelings and imagination, intensity of motherly love of an uneducated Karbi woman and the Karbi love lyrics portray the picture of a beloved whose existence is sought in the spirit of nature. If the tales of Hi-mu, Dengrali, Larta, Lirbon, Kave and Kadom, Marpi etc. are reflective of the unending tale of owes and sufferings of Karbi women, the tales of Basapi, Kareng, Kading, Marongpi Rongpherpi Rongbe, Kareng Teronpi, Larbin and Lirbon, Disumai Rongpi, Dimmir etc uplift Karbi women from their victim position to a state where they can assert their voice. A rereading of Karbi folk tales and songs with a feminine sensibility and from the perspective of women is surely to help the young girls of the community to understand construction of woman self in their patriarchal folk society and reconstruct the same of their own in changing scenario.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1) Athparia, R.P. 'Traditional Institution of the Alongri and Ethnic Solidarity among the Karbis, Assam', *Paper of Golden Jubilee of Anthropological Survey of India*, Shillong, 13-14 September/1996. (Ethnic Situation in North East India, Fields and Frontiers).
- 2) Athparia, R.P. and Mishra, S.S. 'Karbi Folktales: The Study of Marriage Prohibition, Restriction and Prescription', *Jr. NEICSSR, XVII(1)*, April,13-5, 1993.
- 3) Bani, Phukan. 'Karbir Dehal Puja', *Asomia khabor, Budhboria Paripurika*, 5th March, 2003.
- 4) Barkataki, Satyendra Nath (compiled), *Parbatia Sadhukatha*, Publication board of Assam,Guwahati, Assam, 1990.
- 5) Barkataki, S.N. (compiled), *TRIBAL FOLK-TALES OF ASSAM (HILLS)*, Publication board of Assam, Guwahati, Assam, 1970.
- 6) Barkataki, S.N. *TRIBES OF ASSAM*, NBT, New Delhi, 1969.
- 7) Barua, B.K. *A Cultural History of Assam*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 1951, Fourth Edition 2003.

- 8) Barua, B.K. *Asomar Loka Sanskriti*, 1961.
- 9) Baruah, Dr. Prahlad Kumar, ed. *Asamia Loka Sahitya*, The Reception Committee, 66th Conference of Assam Sahitya Sabha, Dibrugarh, 2001.
- 10) Barua, H. and Baveja, J.D. *Fairs and Festivals of Assam*, Guwahati, 1956.
- 11) Barua, Surendra. *Karbi Loka Samaj- Sahitya Sanskritit Abhumuki*, 1998.
- 12) Batsyayan, Kapila. *Traditions of Indian Folk Dance*, New Delhi, India Book Co. , 1976.
- 13) Bejbaruah, Lakshminath. *Burhi Air Sadhu*, Guwahati, 1973.
- 14) Bey, Jorsing. *Lun Barim Apha*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2004.
- 15) Bey, Mondal Sing. *The Karbi Belief*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2009.
- 16) Bhattacharya, Birendra Kumar, ed, *Janajatia Sadhu*, 1997.
- 17) Bhattacharya, Promud Chandra, ed, *Asamar Janajati*, Lawers Book Stall for Assam Sahitya Sabha, Assam, 1999.
- 18) Bhattacharya, Promud Chandra, ed, *Asamar Loka Utsav*, 1969.
- 19) Bhattacharjee, T.K. *Sociology of the Karbis*, B.R.Publication, Delhi, 1986.
- 20) Bhattacharjee, T.K. 'Some Socio-Religious Aspects of the tribes of North East India', *All India Tribal Conference*, 1976.
- 21) Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan (edt.), *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Tenth Session, NEIHA, 1989.
- 22) Bhattacharjee, N.N. *Ancient Indian Rituals and their Social Contents*, Manohar Book Service, Delhi, 1975.
- 23) Bhowmik, K.L. *Tribal India: A Profile in Indian Ethnology*, The World Press, Calcutta, 1971.
- 24) Bhuyan, B.C. *The Tribal Women*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1995.
- 25) Bhuyan, S.K. *Studies in the History of Assam*, 1963.
- 26) Boissya, Champak Laii. *Karbi Sadhu*, TRI, Guwahati, Assam.
- 27) Bordoloi, B.N. *Chomangkan*, TRI Guwahati, 1982.
- 28) Bordoloi, B.N., Sharma Thakur, G.C., Saikia, M.C. *Tribes of Assam*, Part I, Guwahati, TRI, 1987.
- 29) Bordoloi, Nirmalprabha. *Karbi Samaj aru Sanskritir Aserenga*, 1982.
- 30) Borpujari, H.K. *Assam: In the Days of the Company*, Guwahati, 1980.
- 31) Bull, Lawrence. *The environmental Imagination*, Harvard University Press, London, 1995.
- 32) Changma, Dipti Rani and Phukan, Bani , *Bhaiyamar Karbi Loka-Sanskriti*, Sabdarshi Prakashan , Sivsagar and Guwahati,2006.

- 33) Chaudhari, Nagen (Ed.), *Asomar Janajatia Loka-Sanskritit Abhumuki*, 1993.
- 34) Chaudhari, Dr. P.C. *The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.*, 1966.
- 35) Chatterjee, S.K. *Kirata-Jana-Kriti*, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1951.
- 36) Chib, Sukhdev Singh. *Caste, Tribe and Culture of India, Vol. 8: North Eastern India*, Ess Ess Pubns, New Delhi, 1984.
- 37) Coffin, Tristram. III. (Ed.), *American Folklore*, Washington, 1968.
- 38) Cohen, A.R. *Attitude Change and Social Change*, New York, 1964.
- 39) Crooke, W. *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Vol. II, Reprint, Delhi, 1968.
- 40) Das, Basanta, ed. Ajit Singnar, *KARBI SANSKRITIR ETIHASH*, Aank-Baak, Gandhibasti, Guwahati, 2010.
- 41) Das, Bhuban Mohan, *Asomia Sanskriti Sansrakhyan aru Ananya*, 2000.
- 42) Das, Bhuban Mohan (Ed.), *Asomar Manuh*, Jorhat, 1986.
- 43) Das, Jugal. *Asomar Loka Kala*, Guwahati, 1968.
- 44) Das, Kamini. *Karbi Loka Sadhu*,
- 45) Das, Murulidhar. *Bhaiyam Karbir Lokaparampara Aru Git-pad*, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2007.
- 46) Das, Murulidhar, *TIWA ARU KARBI LUKO-SONSKRITIR LESERI BUTOLI*, Folk Cultural Centre of North East India, Nagaon, 2011.
- 47) Das, Murulidhar. *Bhoiam karbi Loka Sanskritit Abhumuki*, 2001.
- 48) Das, Murulidhar. *karbi Aitar Sadhu*, 1997.
- 49) Das, Jogesh. *FOLKLORE OF ASSAM*, National Book Trust, India, New Delhi, 1972.
- 50) Datta, B.N., Sarma, N.C. and Das, P.C. *A Handbook of Folklore Materials of North East India*, ABILAC, Guwahati, 1994.
- 51) Datta, Birendranath. ed., *Siphung-Gungang*, Directorate of Tribal Research Institute, Assam, 1986.
- 52) Datta, Birendranath . *Cultural Contours of North-East India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012.
- 53) Deben Gogoi (Ed.), *Karbiprasanga*, Diphu Shahitya Sabha, 1971.
- 54) Degh, Linda. 'Folk Narrative', in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, ed. Richard M Dorson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972.
- 55) Devy, Davis & Chakravarty (ed), *Indigeneity–Culture and Representation*, Orient Blackswan, 2009.

- 56) Don Yonder. (ed.), *American Folklife*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976.
- 57) Dorson (Ed.), *Folklore in the Modern World*, The Hague, 1978.
- 58) Dorson (Ed.), *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- 59) Duwara, Dharmeshwar. *Uttar Cashar Paharar Loka Sanskriti*, 1988.
- 60) Dundes, Alan. *Essays in Folklorists*, Folklore Institute, Meerut, 1978.
- 61) Dundes, Alan. *The Study of Folklore*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. , 1965.
- 62) Dutta, Birendra Nath. (Ed.), *Karbi Aitar Sadhu*, 1997.
- 63) Dutta Ray, B. and Agnihotri, S.K. (Eds.), *Dynamics of a Tribal Society*, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1993.
- 64) Elwin, Verrier. *Myths of North East Frontier of India*, 1958.
- 65) Fuch, Stephen. *The Aboriginal Tribes of India*, Macmillan Company, Delhi, 1973.
- 66) Gait, E. *A History of Assam*, Calcutta, 1963.
- 67) Gargi, Balwant. *Folk Theatre of India*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1966.
- 68) Goodenough, Ward H. "Folklife Study and Social Change", in Don Yonder's(ed.) *American Folklife*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1976.
- 69) Goswami, Neelakshi and Sarma, Parag Moni. *Gender in Folk Narratives Theory and Practice*, DVS Publishers, Guwahati, 2013, .
- 70) Goswami, P.D. *Ballads And Tales Of Assam*, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, Assam, 1960.
- 71) Goswami, P.D. *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Assam, 1983.
- 72) Goswami, P.D. *Asamia Jana-Sahitya*, Bani Prakash P. Ltd, Guwahati, Assam, 1994.
- 73) Goswami, P.D. *Songs and Tales of North East India*, (Essays) Guwahati, Assam, 1976.
- 74) Gogoi, Chow Lokeshwar, *Asomar Loka- Sanskriti*, Chow Debjit Barua and Nang Bandana Barua, Nagaon, 2009.
- 75) Gogoi, Jibakanta. *Asomia Loka Sahityar Satsari*, Guwahati, 1955.
- 76) Gogoi, Jotin. *A Study on Religion, Belief and Practices of the Mikirs*, Unpublished M.Sc. Dissertation, Anthropology Department, Dibrugarh University, 1972.
- 77) Gogoi, Lila. *Asomar Sanskriti*, 1986.
- 78) Gogoi, Lila. *Asomar Loka-Sahityar Ruprekha*, 1968.
- 79) Gogoi, L.(ed.), *Asamiya Loka Git*, Gauhati University, 1957.
- 80) Gogoi, Padumi. *Karbi Loka Sanskritir Abhash*, Assam Institute of esearch for Tribals & Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 2011, pp.72-73.

- 81) Guha, Ranjit. *Subaltern Studies*, Vol-I, OUP, 1999.
- 82) Habib, Irfan, *Interpreting Indian History*, NEHU Publications, Shillong, Undated.
- 83) Hajarika, K. 'Traditional Administrative Set-up and social Contact in Karbi Society', *Resarun*, IV (2), Aut, and Winter: 30-40. Hodgson, Brian Houghton, 1978.
- 84) Hakacham, Dr. Upen Rabha, *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti*, Bani Mandir, Guwahati, Assam, 2005.
- 85) Handoo, Jawaharlal. "Towards a Theory of National Folklore Planning", *Journal of Indian Folkloristics*, Vol. 3.5/6(1980).
- 86) Handoo, J. *Folklore: An Introduction*, Mysore, 1989.
- 87) Hanse, Samsing. ed., *Sabin Alun*, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Jorhat, 1986
- 88) Kakoty, Lukendra. 'Karbi Basanta Utsav', *Birina*, Ed. Mrinal Kr. Gogoi, 2002.
- 89) Kalita, Dilip. *Rangsina Charpo aru Karbi Samaj*, Diphu, 1982.
- 90) Kar Choudhury, Amalendu Bikash. *Tribal Songs of North East India*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1984.
- 91) Karotemprel, S. *The Tribes of North-East India*, Shillong, 1984.
- 92) Kerridge, Richard 'Environmentalism and Ecocriticism', in *Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Patricia Waugh, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.
- 93) Khiangte, Dr. Lalitluangliana, *FOLKTALES OF MIZORAM*, L.T.L. Publications, Aizawl, Mizoram, 2008.
- 94) Knuwar, L. *Karbiprasanga*, 1972.
- 95) Kosambi, D.D. *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Vikash Publishing PVT. LTD., New Delhi, 2010.
- 96) Kramsa, Suren. *Puwa aru Kukurar Dak*, K. L.A, Karbi Anglong, 2008.
- 97) Kro, Bidorsing. *Karbi Sanskritir Ekhila*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Diphu, 2008.
- 98) Leach, Maria. *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legends*, New York, Funk and Wagnals, 1949-50.
- 99) Lyall, Sir Charles (ed), *The Karbis From the Papers of the late Edward Stack*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, Assam, 1997.
- 100) Maranda, P. and Maranda, E. (Ed.), *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
- 101) Medhi, B.K., Athparia, R.P., SVD, K. Jose. *Tribes of North-East India: Issues and Challenges*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 2009.
- 102) Mikir(Phangsho), Phukan Chandra. *The Karbis: A Spatio-Temporal Analysis in Tribal Geography*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Gauhati University, 1990.

- 103) Miri, Mrinal (Ed.), 'Continuity and Change in Tribal Society', IIAS, Simla, 1993.
- 104) Mitra, Kalipada. 'A Mikir Tale and Its Santali Parallels', *JBORS*, pt. IV, March, 1928.
- 105) Moral, Dipankar. *Languages of North East India*, B.G. Basumatary Memorial Lecture, Bijni College Cultural Society, Bijni, Bongaigaon, 2003.
- 106) Nath, RajMohan. *The Background of Assamese Culture*, Shillong, 1948.
- 107) Nath, Sanjeev Kumar. *The World of Assamese Folktales*, Bhabani Print & Publications, Guwahati, 2011.
- 108) Padun, Nahendra. *Asomia Sanskritiloi Janajatia Barongani*, 1988.
- 109) Pegu, Ganesh. *Brahaputra Upatyakar Mising Janajati Aru teolokar Moukhik Sahityar Samikhatmak Adhyan*, N.L.Publications, Guwahati, 2010.
- 110) Propp, V. *Morphology of the Folktale*, Trns. Laurence Scott, Rev. and Ed. Louis A. Wagner, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2009.
- 111) Propp, Vladimir, *Theory and History of Folklore*, (Tr. Ariadana and Richard P. Martin), Manchester University Press, 1984.
- 112) Punia, Deep. *Social Values in Folklore*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi, 1993.
- 113) Rabha, Bishnuprasad. "Asamia Kristi", in *Bishnuprasad Rabha Rachana Sambhar*, Part-II, ed. Dr. Sarbeshwar Bora, Rabha Rachanawali Prakashan Sangha, Tezpur, 1997.
- 114) Rabha, Mukul Chandra. *Loka Sanskritir Subash Bichari*, 1995.
- 115) Rabha, Lalit Chandra. *Loka Sanskritir Subash*, 2001.
- 116) Rajbanshi, Paramananda. *Asomia Jati aru Sanskriti*, 2003.
- 117) Rajguru, Sharbeshwar. *Asomia Praband*, Nagaon, 1972.
- 118) Ratha, S.N. 'Matrilateral Cross-Cousin Marriage and the Kinship Terminology: The Arleng Case', in *Tribes in North-East India*, 1984.
- 119) Rangpur Sahitya Sabha, *Janajatia Lokageet*, 1978.
- 120) Ray, Debidas. 'Report on Socio-Economic Survey of a Mikir Village in Assam', Kanther Terang, Jorhat, AERC, 1962.
- 121) Roberts, Warren E. 'Folk Crafts', in *Folklore and Folk life An Introduction*, ed. Richard M Dorson, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1972.
- 122) Roy, Shibani and Rizvi, S.H.M. *Tribal Customary Laws of North-East India*, B.R. Publication, Delhi, 1990.
- 123) Saikia, P.D. Changes in Mikir Society (Socio-Economic Study of a Hill Tribe of Assam), Agro Economic Research Centre, Jorhat, 1968.

- 124) Samanta, R.K. 'Notes on Hill Tribes of North-East India', *MII*, 60(1-2), June:129-34, 1980.
- 125) Samanta, R.K. and Adhikary, M.M. 'Marriage Systems Among Tribals of North-East India: An Overview', *MII*, 68(4), Dec.:401-12, 1988.
- 126) Sarma, N.C. *Essays on the Folklore of North-Eastern India*, Bani Prakash, Guwahati, 1988.
- 127) Sharma, N.C. *Bharatar Uttar Purbanchalar Loka Shanskriti*, Bani Prakash PVT. LTD., Guwahati, 2003.
- 128) Sharma, N.C. *Asomia Loka Sanskritir Samu Abhash*, 1989.
- 129) Sharma, N.C. *Basantar Utsav aru Asomar Bivinna Janagusthir Loka Nritya*, 1993.
- 130) Sharma, N.C. *Asomar Sanskriti- Samikha*, 2000.
- 131) Sarma, N. C. 'Puran: Myth', Souvenir, Asomia Sahitya Sora, Guwahati, 1997
- 132) Sharma, R.S. *India's Ancient Past*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, Eighth Impression, 2010.
- 133) Sharma, Shashi. *Asomar Loka Sahitya*, 1993.
- 134) Sharma Thakur, G.C. *Selected Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam*, Part I and Part II, Directorate of Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, Assam, 2007.
- 135) Sharma Thakur, G.C. *Folklore in North East India*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1985.
- 136) Sharma Thakur, G.C. *Tribes and Castes of Assam*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1999.
- 137) Shashtri, Bishwanarayan. *Asomar Janajatia Sadhu*, 1962.
- 138) Sengupta, Sarthak (ed.) *Tribal Studies in North- East India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2002.
- 139) Sen, Soumen (ed.) *Folklore in North East India*, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, 1985.
- 140) Sen, Soumen (ed.) *Social and State Formation in Khasi-Jaintia Hills: A Study of Folklore*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1985.
- 141) Singh, Anil Kr. (Ed.), *Tribes and Tribal Life*, Vol.1: Aspects of Tribal Life in India, Sorup and Sons, New Delhi, 1993.
- 142) Singh, G.P. *The Kiratas in Ancient India: Spotlight on North-East*, Gyan Publishing House, Delhi, 1990.

- 143) Singh, L.G. *A Study of Material Culture of Mikir*, Unpublished, M.Sc. Dissertation, Anthropology Department, Dibrugarh University, 1972.
- 144) Srinivas. M.N. *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Blackswan Private Limited, New Delhi, 2009.
- 145) S. Thompson, *The Folktale*, University of California Press, Berkley, London, 1977
- 146) Talukdar, Dhruva Kumar, *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti*, Bani Mandir, Guwahati, Assam, 2005.
- 147) Terang, Bonglong ed., *Ha-I*, Korte Publishers, Diphu, 1937 (3rd print 1984).
- 148) Terang, Rong Bong(Compiled), *KARBI LAMTASAM*, Orunodoi Prakashan, Panbazar, Guwahati, 2010.
- 149) Terang, Rongbong. 'Karbi Lullaby: A Petal of Folklore', *The Assam Tribune*, April 23:04, 1982.
- 150) Terang, Rongbong. 'Karbi Kristir Akhila Pat Jambili Athan', *Asom Shahitya Sabha Patrika*, 3rd Issue, 1979.
- 151) Terang, Rongbong. *Karbi Sadhu*, 1977.
- 152) Terang, Rongbong. *Karbi Shahitya Sanskritit Abhumuki*, 1982.
- 153) Terang, Rongbong. *Sabin Alun: The Karbi Ramayana*.
- 154) Terang, Rongbong. *Samanbya Prabaha*, 1989.
- 155) Terang, Joysingh. *Ak Dristit Karbi-Mikir*, 1965.
- 156) Teranpi, Lado. *The Role of Karbi Women in Society: Past and Present*, n.d.
- 157) Teron, Dharamsingh. *Karbi Studies*, Vol.2, Assam Book Hive, Guwahati, 2011.
- 158) Teron, Dharamsingh and Tisso, Sikari (ed.), *Karbi Studies*, Vol.3, Folktales from the Fringe, Assam Book Hive, Guwahati, 2012.
- 159) Teron, Longkam and Das, Karen, (compiled and edited), *Karbi Kristir Utswa*, Assam Institute of Research for Tribals and Scheduled Castes, Guwahati, 1998.
- 160) Teron, Longkam. *Karbi Janagusthi*, 1974.
- 161) Teron, Longkam, *Karbi Kimbadanti Sankalan*, Part I, ed. Diphu Sahitya Sabha, Assam, 1998.
- 162) Teron, L. and Gogoi, D. *Karbi Ratnamala*, Karbi Anglong Zila Sahitya Sabha, Diphu, 2004.
- 163) Teronpi, Phulmati. *Chomlin Aloti*, Karbi Lammet Amai, Diphu, 2006.
- 164) Thapar, Romila. *Interpreting Early India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1992, 14th Impression, 2010.

- 165) Timung, Ajit. 'Kristi-Sanskritir Prati Karbisakalar Sasetanata', Wajaru Arhir, *Asom Shahitya Sabhar Smritigrantha*, 1982.
- 166) Timung, Sar Rajendra. *Ret Kinong Alun*, Karbi Lammet Amei, Bakalia, Karbi Anglong, 2004.
- 167) Informant: Amar Kro (55), Chapanalla.
- 168) Informant: Bina Tokbipi, Longkoi Lekthe, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.
- 169) Informant, Chinthong Millick, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 170) Informant, Jinong Millick, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 171) Informant, Jirmi Millickpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 172) Informant, Junaki Bongrungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 173) Informant, Junima Timungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 174) Informant, Kareng Ingtipi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Age-60.
- 175) Informant: Kave Lekthepe, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Assam, Age-67.
- 176) Informant: Rumila Beypi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 177) Informant, Rupjili Beypi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong.
- 178) Informant: Samilee Timungpi, Parkup Pahar, Karbi Anglong, Age-45.

Karbi Women performing various socio-cultural Roles



