“As per Karbi custom, the wife must lead her husband, and the husband must follow her when a couple goes outside home. Accordingly, the time of my birth preceded Long's nativity. That means Long came to this mortal world just after me. In that sense, we were married since we were born, and hence I see no reason for further formality.” [1]

The oral or folk narratives are the cradle and the breeding ground from where the soul of the unique Karbi cultural identity has emerged, and that typically unique cultural heritage of the community is the repertoire of various wise, pious, prophetic and exemplary words and deeds of a host of great individuals belonging to the community at different junctures of time. The Karbis, so far as their oral history provides records, were and still in most cases are primitive naturalist, if not animist, by their religious faith. They still practise this cult of Nature-worship in order to appease the fury and evil eye of various malevolent supernatural beings like ghosts, spirits and deities, omnipotent gods and goddesses, propitiate them through various rites and rituals accomplished by using various prayers, invocations, magico-religious chants and incantations as a proud legacy bequeathed to them by a good number of predecessors. The belief of the Karbis upon these preternatural beings is more than belief but a faith that the entire community shares with one another, more than a theory but a practice. The attitude through which they perceive the natural and supernatural worlds has evolved into a systematic belief system. The domain of this attitude and belief system, faith and practice has assumed the material expression in the form of rituals, ceremonies, propitiation and sacrifices. To a common Karbi the way that Nature follows is not only indecipherable but also beyond human control, and the strange beings as well as the elemental forces intensify the enigma. All the objects of Nature are inhabited by many malevolent and benevolent ghosts and spirits, their relationships with that of human beings may
either be antagonistic or mutually sympathetic, competitive or co-operative. The lingering presence of the eerie atmosphere coupled with a haunting sense of fear and violence while living in the deep forests, hills and mountains and other intractable spaces has taught the Karbi people to be apprehensive of evil and danger all around, and thus to be suspicious and cautious about them. Their first-hand experiences of daily and recurring mishaps and occurrences like diseases, bereavement and death have led the Karbis into believing in the invisible ghosts and spirits and other supernatural powers. However, may be out of compulsion, or for their fear and apprehension, faith and reverence, the Karbis have learnt to establish a kind of equilibrium in their relationship with that of the supernatural beings and powers, sometimes by controlling or overpowering them through charms, incantations and invocations, and at times by offering prayers and propitiations.

However, the rich repository of such belief-system propagating strong cultural values had been established in the yore by a good number of farsighted social thinkers and visionaries who strove to enlighten the ignorant masses by transforming their practical and mundane experiences to some spiritual, ethical and philanthropic ideologies. Those ideologies, on the other hand, must have been shaped and influenced by their immediate material or mundane concerns while living in the society and by the recurring and enigmatic mysteries of Nature beyond their comprehension. Thus, the belief-system giving a tangible shape and unique intrinsic entity to their cultural identity is actually an amalgamation of mundane and spiritual folk wisdoms transmitted down from generation to generation by a good number of social thinkers and prophetic personalities through a strong oral tradition, which is perpetuated by the majority of the old generation with the help of responsible racial reminiscence till date.

We should not, however, consider this belief-system to have stemmed out from their mere ignorant or fearful, irrational or superstitious mindset; rather, viewed from another analytical perspective, we may very justifiably assert that the
beliefs of this kind render a corporeal entity and tangible shape to their divergent ideologies of life and worldviews, for believing is knowing, knowing believing, which is the source of all truths. Hence, it will be improper straightaway to nullify their beliefs as merely newfangled or completely unfounded, and to interpret them as figments of their uninstructed minds. It is so because those scholars who claim to possess authority over them and the races asserting superiority over the rest, themselves are not free from such beliefs. Human mind and its trajectories and curious yearnings are ineffably mysterious and effervescent, reciprocal and reactive, and there is no yardstick that can measure its depth.

Words and Deeds of the Sages- Source of Mundane and Spiritual Edifications:

The ‘Hemphu’[2]myth stating the Karbi cosmogony presents an archetype to the occidental Christian concept of the universe with its analogous events like creation of the natural world including the plants, birds and animals, reptiles and insects and other objects of Nature prior to human beings, and the creation of the first human couple in a significant manner by the almighty Brahma[3]. This cosmogonic myth teaches the Karbis about the necessity and benefit of the peaceful co-existence of both human and non-human world which composes the vast ‘Oikos’[4]we belong to. The ethos inculcated by this notion of cosmogony permeates the philosophy of the Karbi culture and religion and the quintessence of their ecosophy.

The legend related to Sot Recho,[5]the first formally ordained yet the most miserable king of the Karbis, reminds the Karbis of an unfortunate incident of regicide which they reminisce with remorseful heart, but instills in their minds a sense of devotion and obedience for kings. The regicidal incident had undoubtedly inspired the Karbis to introduce traditional monarchy thereafter which was carried forward for centuries probably because of their knowledge that chaos and disorder prevail in absence of a king. That is the reason why the Karbis still retain the
traditional form of monarchical administrative system along with democratic governance of the nation of which they are a part and the ‘Lingdokpo’ possesses the same administrative power, though it is hardly political, rather socio-cultural in nature, with a bit etiolated luster and gravity.

*Hār Bāmon* is the legendary narrative which tells us as to how the first ‘jirkedām’ had been founded in Karbi society under the leadership and patronage of the great social thinker and reformer, Hār Bāmon. The co-operative run by the youths after forming ‘jirsong’, had fruitfully contributed to the welfare and all-round development of the contemporary Karbi society of his time, and this system is perpetuated at least in spirit till date by the community. ‘Sok Keroi’ and the ‘Hāchā Kekān’ dance form and the ‘Hāchā Ālun’ genre of folk songs introduced during his time are observed and performed with utmost love and reverence by the Karbis till today.

Ru-Kāsen is another great legendary Karbi social thinker and reformer who carried forward the legacy of philanthropy left behind by his precursor, Hār Bāmon, with stronger enthusiasm and dedication. The Karbis feel proud of themselves by respectfully remembering him as a social reformer as great as Hār Bāmon.

The *Ru-Kāsen* narrative can very justifiably be regarded as a compendium of catechistic edifications which in itself speaks a volume of the mature mundane wisdom pertaining to socio-cultural spectra of the Karbi society. The founding of the ever-first Karbi village, *Miring Rongsopi* accommodating one thousand families near the Kopili river during those nomadic days of the community had certainly been the testimony of the unmatched worldly intelligence of that great innovative leader of the people who fairly deserved to be sharing the same by tacit obedience. Ru-Kāsen thus is rightly credited to have bequeathed the Karbis an organized social system. The Karbis learnt to live in organized villages and towns only after his time.
However, it was Basapi, the consort of Ru-Kāsen who helped her husband a lot in translating his dreams of laying down the foundation for permanent living and promotion of art and culture into tangible reality. The earnest plea that she had made to induce her husband to carry out the philanthropic agendum to teach their subjects the art of living by establishing permanent and disciplined villages so that they could keep pace with other civilized societies of the world, the ambitious scheme of establishing an ideal village with one thousand families, the strategic arrangement and architectural action-plan of the nature of that village all testify the richness of worldly wisdom of the great lady. The appointment of Rāngmukrāng as the Sārthē[13] and the formal authorization of him with administrative responsibilities at par with Karbi custom and convention clearly bespeaks of the socially sanctified worldly wisdom shared by the entire community.

The Karbis have preserved the wide range of social activism and reformatory agenda accomplished by Ru-Kasen through the oral narratives as a fond reminiscence and strive to emulate his example while living an integrated community life.

King Rengbonghom, a very wise and benign person was the greatest among and the father to all Karbi kings without any smattering of doubt so far as his lofty and farsighted socio-cultural, moral and political ideals were concerned. He had enlightened the somewhat ignorant Karbi people by bringing about a sea-change to the old and superstition-ridden Karbi social systems through his unparalleled administrative acumen and dexterity and the changing scenario and progressive ideology of the present Karbi society owe much to that great social reformer.

The acid test for his fertile worldly wisdom can be gauged from his administrative and diplomatic relationship with that of the Ahom and the Jaintia kings. The act of building impenetrable wall around the capital city of his kingdom, Socheng, situated in Rongkhang region under the present Hamren sub-division in 181.
order to ensure complete security from external invasion was another evidence of his farsighted worldly wisdom.

Rengbonghom’s dream and untiring efforts to lead the superstition-ridden Karbi society towards the path of progress through democratic ideals and the genuine urge for offering a golden opportunity to everyone to enjoy his good governance could have been nothing but the indication of the maturity of his heard-earned mundane as well as spiritual wisdom. In spite of being the mighty, most influential and the earthly representative of God Hemphu he was neither an audacious nor a despotic ruler and used to seek opinions and counsels from the delegates of a forum of counsellors who used to offer counsels whenever the king had faced a problem with utmost promptitude, and the king also used to accept their counseling with due regard. The deep faith that the king had shown towards his intelligent wife in administrative matters testified the ripeness of his worldly wisdom.

Rengbonghom had envisaged a united and peaceful Karbi society by undertaking a couple of reformatory social agenda propelled through the effective use of his mature worldly wisdom.

He had determined to uproot a good number of rigid social customs especially intra-clan or endogamic marriage and erotic verbal exchange that could be made between the male and female youths belonging to the same clan, i.e., ‘Läisenem’[^14], prevalent in the Karbi society prior to his ascension to the throne. The punishment awarded to a person committing ‘Läisenem’ was very severe amounting to death-sentence causing misfortune to thousands of young hearts and detriment to the entire society and the king was partially successful in his mission by reducing the magnitude of such unjust social custom amidst much opposition. Such a reformatory act accomplished by Rengbonghom unmistakably evinces his strong
courage, intelligence and ingenuity, and the present Karbi society has been enjoying the fruits of the reformative actions of their revered king.

Yet another unjust custom was prevalent among the Karbi society prior to his rule was the parochial belief that only one particular clan of the community could live in a particular place which stood as a main obstacle before the racial integrity of the Karbis. The wise and farsighted king had advocated for the urgency of eradicating it so that all the clans belonging to the community could live together in unity, peace and fraternity, which, as a matter of fact, would help them build a united and mighty ethnic identity.

He had ushered in a golden era of enlightenment and reformation and had persevered to bring in an ideal society in which he succeeded to a considerable extent, and for that contribution, perhaps, the Karbis still respect the king by addressing him as ‘Phu Rengbonghom’ and by imitating his lofty and humanitarian ideals.

Rangmukrang was the Head of the Miring Rongsopi village, which was consisted of more than one hundred houses. The village in which he used to inhabit was situated on the bank of the river, Kuleng (that is, Kiling). He had three sons, namely, Longmukrang, Bangmukrang and Hangmukrang, and two daughters, Kareng and Kading. He had been ruling over the people of his village in conformity with a few benevolent principles, which could not, however, be called self-sufficient in themselves. He showed his magnanimity in offering generous hospitality to Langmingpo, i.e., Hemphu, who disguised himself as stranger asking for help and shelter. He also evinced his love for peace and sense of assimilation in giving consent to his son, Langmukrang, to marry the daughter of a stranger, that is, Langmingpo or Hemphu without knowing his real identity. As a result he and the entire society were blessed by Hemphu in imbroglio with a good number of good ideals, which the Karbis still try to cultivate to an extent possible. The valuable
ideals which Hemphu had instructed to Rangmukrang and his people and subsequently brought in reformation to the entire Karbi society are as follows:

i) ‘Sotbot’ (One should not envy anyone).

ii) ‘Āthik läpen kāngduk kejem’ (Self-control and humility).

iii) ‘Ingsāmjin läpen benghon seroi’ (Peace and unity).

iv) ‘Ningding läpen māthāpāngching’ (Tolerance and foresight).

v) ‘Ningärlo pen kekroi läpen māthāthikā’ (Devotion and self-confidence).

vi) ‘Kāngthir läpen pāngri’ (Purity and sense of equality) etc.

Thi-reng Vāng-rēng[^16] was not a king proper but became very famous as a prominent social reformer in true sense by propagating many rites and rituals for the welfare of the Karbis. They still believe that Thi-reng Vāng-rēng could convey the message of the underworld among the denizens of the mundane world by acting as spy and by frequently sojourning to it and thus he can rightly be dubbed as the ‘Karbi Lazarus’. He is believed to have introduced the Karbi rites of passage called ‘Chomāngkān’ or ‘Chomkān’— the soul of their culture. The Karbis still have deep faith in the existence of underworld and re-incarnation which the daring reconnaissance as stated in the mythical narrative had induced them to nourish. The superhuman and demi-god stature attributed to the personality of Thi-reng Vāng-rēng’ and his sporadic conference with the denizens of the worlds of human beings and the spirits and the consequent introduction of the uniform rites and rituals bespeak of his deep mundane as well as spiritual wisdom which he intended to disseminate to his community suffering from the utter lack of socio-religious order.

Kareng and Kading were sisters and were the daughters of Rangmukrang, the great Village-head and reformer. They were not only beautiful but also very skillful in every field. Both the sisters are believed to have first invented the cake for brewing home-made rice beer in the Karbi society. As the folksong has it, there was no ‘horañg’[^17] in the society in the beginning. The lack of such an indispensable
socio-cultural item disappointed Hemphu to the extreme and hence he once decided to introduce the same among the Karbis by sending his two sons to the human world. Obeying their father’s behest with promptitude, therefore, the duo descended to this earth in the guise of a pair of ‘kongching’ birds.

Ever since that occasion ‘horlāng’ has been used while worshipping the gods like Hemphu, Mukrang and so on, and to show respectful hospitality to the honourable dignitaries like Lingdokpos and Pinpos in the Karbi society till today. Apart from the religious rituals it is also used during ‘Chomāngkān’ and ‘Ādām Āsār’. By and large, ‘horlāng’ is regarded as one of the very indispensable and revered thing in the society.

Rāngsinā is regarded as the pioneering maestro (Guru) in the domain of Karbi music, art and culture. So far as their folk-belief is concerned he is revered and worshipped as an incarnated divine personality. As narrated in the ‘Lunse Keplāng’ the great personalities like Rāngsinā Sārpo, Long Mirjeng and Sing Mirjeng, Longbichedu and Longduve had played a pioneering and revolutionary role in ushering Renaissance in the field of Karbi cultural world. However, one notices the existence of variations in the narrative with exaggeration and interpolations in case of some of the prevailing versions. If we closely examine these tales, we become familiar with two archetypal versions, and Rangsina Sarpo is featured as a passive in one, and in the other as most active and dynamic revolutionary force behind the propagation and popularity of Karbi music, art and culture.

The contributions that Rangsina had made towards the enrichment of present Karbi culture as stated in both the archetypal versions of the narrative, Lunse Keplāng, such as, ‘Ādām Āsār’ (Traditional wedding ceremony), ‘Piso Pāngri’ (episode regarding the origin of Karbi marriage and ritualistic formalities associated with it), ‘TheluĀlun’ (nuptial songs); ‘Thāp Keplāng’ or ‘Porom Ālun’ (songs
regarding the origin of cake for rice beer); ‘Bong Keplāng’ (songs regarding the origin of the wild bottle-gourd); ‘Rongkikim’ (songs about founding of villages); ‘Sok Keroi’ (songs regarding harvesting); ‘Sābin Ālun’ (Karbi Rāmāyanā) etc. had originated from the fertile brain of the great cultural guru indicative of his knowledge and concern about both mundane and spiritual affairs in the societal life.

The narrative associated with Sumphong and Sumphi popularly known as Ve’ Longbi and Hār Longbi can be regarded as a repertoire of worldly and moral principles conducive for leading a peaceful social life. They might not have been famous personalities, but their wedding rites are believed to have been the first formal wedding ceremony ever performed by the Karbis as per rites prescribed and shown by Hemphu through the wedding knot between his sister, Rasingja and Longmukrang. That is the reason why the duo are remembered as tradition bearers and as the first ones to perform the Karbi traditional wedding ceremony perpetuated till date as stated in ‘Ādām Āporom’[25].

The leading role in preaching the sermon on morals and manners was played by an invalid old woman named Morongpi whom the due happened to meet coincidentally en route upon the bank of the river Marlé. The two bosom friends were almost up with arms to retaliate the villagers of Ākli Rongsopi for adulterating the downstream water of the river shared by the two contiguous villages for drinking water, but the old woman advised them to witness the very wedding ceremony of Rasingja[26] and Longmukrang[27] being performed at Miring Rongsopi village by shunning the idea of the proposed war. In addition to that, the old wise woman also helped the duo to identify the three special things, such as, ‘bongkrok’, ‘dāmdām’, and ‘kāngsir ārjolān’[28], they had seen at Hemphu’s house after their return from the wedding. The old woman then offered the two friends some seeds of ‘bongkrok’[29], which she had collected from person, named Musimulong, and asked them to sow the same in their croft. The creeper consequently bore the fruits of wild bottle-gourds—the indispensable cultural items, and by using them the wedding
between the daughter of Ve’ Longbi and the son of Hār Longbi was celebrated in conformity with the rites as they had seen at Hemphu’s house.

Thus, the wise old woman had transformed the vindictive mundane desires of the two friends into tradition bearers instilling in them deep spiritual devotion and cultural consciousness.

Kareng Rongpharpi, popularly known as Rongpharpi Rongbe, known also as Omphu Rongpharpi, is one of the many historical personalities and Karbi heroines, whose sagacious feats and patriotism have not been given due recognition by any historian. Nonetheless, there are a good number of references to one particular courageous act of resistance being demonstrated by her against the atrocity and despotism of the Kachari (Dimasa) king derogatorily dubbed as ‘parok’, i.e., the ‘Other’, though they differ in opinion about the exact time of occurrence for the very incident. The brave protest by her against the cruel and inhuman act of extracting milk forcefully from the breasts of the Karbi (Mikir) women on the pretext of feeding a pet lion cub by the Dimasa soldiers and the consequent hacking of them by her as an act of defence betoken the worthwhile application worldly wisdom. The historic act of resistance and murder was not only the spontaneous instinctive gesture of protest against barbaric despotism of the Dimasa king, but also a symbolic act of saving the chastity and self-respect of women in the society which served as an index to the exalted morale possessed by Rongpharpi Rongbe. The manner in which an urgent and secret meeting was convened by her at the moment of grave predicament the community was facing as an inevitable consequence of the assassination of the Dimasa chief Akola (Hokla), and her prompt decision to flee from the village, Rongteplong, the saving of the villagers from certain death and destruction and the challenging task of establishing new villages in the vicinity of present Amreng by crossing the Kopili river, all testify her undaunted courage and prudence for which Kareng is remembered till date by the Karbis, and is known as
Rongpharpi Rongbe[^30] and further, the Rongteplong village was later known as Rongkerpi Rongbe.

Rongpharpi Rongbe symbolizes democratic freedom, humanitarian justice, and selfless patriotism, and every Karbi woman loves to identify or to imitate her undaunted courage. The male beings of the present Karbi society also regard her as an icon for indomitable courage, strong will-power, love, liberty and social justice, which are invariably the spontaneous manifestation of the unmatched mundane and moral intelligence possessed by her.

Thong Teron, almost a contemporary to Rongpharpi Rongbe, was popularly known as ‘Thong Nokbe’ because of his fabulous and unmatched valour and heroism. In Karbi ‘Nokbe’ denotes ‘hero’ and hence Thong Nokbe stands for ‘Thong, the Hero’. The hero was quite unfortunate to have lived during those turbulent days hitherto aggravated by Rongpharpi Rongbe’s daring confrontation with the Dimasa king and consequent massacre of the King’s soldiers, and to live under the subjugation of the Jaintia King[^31].

The amicable relationship that the Karbis used to enjoy with that of the Jaintias in the beginning after their migration from Rongteplong was gradually deteriorating due to the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the latter, and it was now Thong’s turn to embark on to action to tackle the issue though by resorting to measure for measure. The way that Thong had adopted in addressing the serious issue can never be commendable, but all the same, the sense of responsibility and sel-esteem which had induced him to opt for such extreme measure also cannot be underestimated. Having acknowledged his good intention with some amount of surmise and impartiality, we cannot call his act of retaliation an unbridled expression of unfounded anger, hatred and cruelty. Had it been so, the Jaintia king would never have spared Thong’s life for his offensive act of chopping off the heads of a number of the King’s subjects and have appointed him the Chief of the Jaintia
army. The ferocity he had demonstrated in injuring and killing the malignant Jaintia labourers snatching their ‘dao’ igniting a quick communal feud and tension; the consequent registration of a courageous protest against the exploitations exercised by the Jaintias and his retaliation in a fitting manner; the defensive measures he evolved out to protect the boundary of in the Karbi inhabited areas by erecting rock walls at Ghilani, Tirkim, Jantapur, Amreng and Borpu areas of Rongkhang province; the declaration of truce by the powerful Jaintia king and the eventual placement of Thong as the Chief of the Jaintia soldiery after being influenced by the latter’s valour and prowess; the military skill through which he manoeuvred the Jaintia regiment to the complete satisfaction of His Majesty; the cowardly conspiracy hatched against him by the jealous soldiers leading to his death; the King’s reaction for that and the the due honour and justice he had shown towards his dead Chief, not only make Thong the greatest hero in our eyes, but also compel us to properly evaluate his peerless worldly wisdom, high morale and true patriotism.

Yet another legendary Karbi hero and a patriotic revolutionary just like Thong Nokbe was Vaisong. Compelled to live under the subjugation of the Khasi kingdom and being surrounded all around by mightier races like the Ahoms, Kacharis and the Jaintias, the Karbis in those days had to tolerate ineffable cruelty and exploitation from the surrounding enemies. Since it was unthinkable to challenge the might and influence of those mighty forces in one hand, and being unable to bear the acute pang of conscience born out of humiliation and exploitation perpetrated upon them by the enemies, Vaisong went for a temporary self-exile.

Arriving back to the village, on the other hand, he started mobilizing the villagers, but none seemed to have understood his latent motive, and those who did, showed no encouragement or willingness to join his mission. Therefore, he tried his best to provoke them in strong language against the despotism exercised by the then Khasi king calling upon them to prepare for war, but none dared to comply with his request to do so against the mighty Khasi king. Vaisong left no stone unturned in
inducing and instigating at least a sizable number of youths to rebel and fight against
the Khasis by making provocative statements about the cruelties and injustices
exercised upon them, but he failed to elicit any response or garner any support from
them too.

At last being all depressed and helpless, Vaisong entered into the Khasi
villages like 'Labang' and 'Nongphlut' located on the bank of the Am-i river and set
fire on the houses, beating those opposing him black and blue and dragging into the
burning fire who tried to withstand him and returned to his native village satisfied
and triumphantly after completely destroying their village according to his heart's
content.

As anticipated the chase began spearheaded by a group of stalwart Khasi
soldiers and after a long search the hot-blooded hero was finally caught alive by
hatching a cowardly conspiracy during the night of Nongkrem[33] and finally
produced before their king with a sense of pride and he ordered the beleaguered hero
to be confined in the cell without any fair judgment. Vaisong then began to recite the
names of the Karbi gods like Ārnām Kethé, Hemphu Ārnām etc. silently in his heart
being unable to imagine no escape.

The Queen grew restlessly curious to have a look at the renowned and brave
Karbi hero and after personal and secret interview with him discovered a really
courageous person blessed with undaunted patriotic zeal, self-respect and honesty,
and consequently being deeply impressed and showering sympathy upon him
influenced the King to stop to pronounce death sentence to the great hero. The King
came to understand the deep implications of Vaisong's feelings and emotions after
Vaisong's revelation of seething grievances over the injustice, his love, respect of
his fellow beings, high sense of patriotism, the expression of peace loving nature. He
confessed all the previous and present wrongdoings before the Karbi hero, and
released him from the thralldom and punishment.

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The self-exile of Vaisong being agonized by a mixed sense of humiliation and self-respect; his sagacious act of arson; his honest surrender; his faith and devotion to Karbi gods and goddesses inside the cell; his fearless revalation of deep self-respect, honesty, and deep patriotism before the compassionate Queen; the Queen’s plea to her husband to release the hero; the King’s offer for friendship after shameless confession of all his misdeeds and injustices done towards the convict and his people; the offering of gold teeth by the Khasi, Ahom and the Dimasa kings and finally the final twist of his destiny by being ordained as the independent Karbi king—the ‘Ser Hongthom’ are doubtlessly the evidences of the mature worldly and spiritual wisdoms possessed by the most honest and valorous legendary Karbi hero.

The legendary tale, *S-ir Vo'mu* is a narrative intimating us about the extraordinary intelligence and physical strength of Si-r Tokbi, ‘Si-r Kāngtāng’ or ‘Si-r Nokbe’, who was popularly known as ‘S-ir Vo’mu’ for killing a man-eater bird called ‘vo’mu’ at Chelengthepai. He acted as the saviour to the entire people of Rongmarthu-Rongmarle village by killing that man-eater bird when the mass had to migrate towards the Amcheng hill in quest of fertile lands for jhum cultivation and while trying to establish an ideal village there.

The assurance that Si-r Tokbi had given to the scared and horrified villagers; the way he convinced them to mould a ‘chong’ using a ‘rengreng’, the arrangement he made to procure a ‘nok’ of his own; the great courage, patience and strong resolution and skill that he had shown in climbing up the steep and breathtaking height of the rocky cliffs of Chelengthepai with a view to delivering his race from the certain defacement; the invocation to the mighty Chintong Ārnām and Langpi Deity for divine aid and blessing, and above all, the presence of mind and unmatched manoeuvering skill he had evinced in tackling the critical time of predicament, without any inkling of doubt, are indices of his inherent mundane and spiritual wisdom.
The most traumatic and catastrophic incident that had once taken place at Cheleng ĀthepāI, a very high cliff on the gorge of the river, Karbi Langpi near Boithalangso due to the cruel and despotic rule of an anonymous ‘Sarṭhé’ (Village head) of a particular village is yet another narrative designed to serve mundane and spiritual wisdom.

The particular ‘Sarṭhé’ had been very cruel and so was not liked by the members (juvenile boys and girls) of the ‘Jirkedām’ who grew quite intolerant towards their king. He refused to understand the pains and sufferings, joys and sorrows, sentiments and feelings of those young people. Therefore, the depressed youths of the ‘Jirkedām’ decided to register protest against that oppression by committing collective suicide by jumping from the steep, high and slippery cliffs of Cheleng ĀthepāI. Accordingly they tied their waists with one another through the help of a ‘vāmkok’ under the leadership of the ‘Klengsārpo’—their trusted leader.

The daring act of collective suicide committed by the youths of the ‘jir kedām’ symbolizes their love for individual freedom and love of democratic ideals and a strong resistance against earthly tyranny represented by the anonymous village-head. The Karbis still show their obeisance by commemorating that ill-fated incident by performing a ritual called ‘Riso Ārnām’ during the ending ceremony of the ‘jir kedām’, and that catastrophic incident always evokes in them an inexplicable sense of repulsion against any kind of cruelty and injustice.

The narrative acquaints us with the sad story of subversion of worldly wisdom by whimsical abuse of power by a cruel and corrupt individual along with the internecine as well as inevitable outcome. The pleading for leniency and democratic justice by the youths before the despotic village-head, the final resolution to die together than to live a live of endless slavery, the perfect execution of the plan of committing mass-suicide, the prudence of one among the group to escape only to apprise of the mishap, the introduction of ‘Riso Ārnām’ ritual to
commemorate and for the well-being of those deceased souls, all speak a volume of the mundane and spiritual maturity of the youths.

It is believed that the system of floral designs in Karbi weaving art had first been invented by a maiden named Dihun. Prior to her, it is said, the Karbi women did not know the art of imprinting floral designs upon their clothes though they used to weave their traditional dresses by installing looms in every household. Dihun was the first to do so and paved the way for others in this complicated miniature art. Thus, very pertinently, she is endearingly called ‘Ser’, that is, ‘gold’ or ‘Serdihun’ which implies ‘Golden Serdihun’ or ‘the maiden with a golden mind’.

The eager responses shown by the youths of the two jir kedam; the daily indoor and outdoor work schedules; making of various handicrafts and other manual artefacts; meeting of the two lovers in the midway without hampering their allotted duties and responsibilities; the final disappearance of Dihun in the deep and desolate forest as stated in the narrative, strongly contribute to the making of this pathetic tale a compact storehouse of mundane and spiritual wisdom and devotion in case of the youths of both the jir kedam.

‘Hai-imu’ is unquestionably one of the most pathetic and harrowing tales ever told in this world, which depicts the unexpected predicament and ruin of the simple and happy conjugal life of a traditional Karbi couple, Thong Teron and Hai-i Ronghangpi, as a consequence of the lewd and despotic feudal lord, Longdili of Socheng. The most popular and influential folk ballad of the Karbis, which is of anonymous origin, can also be categorized as mythical and historical ballad on the basis of the theme and content. Hai-i is not only remembered as a miserable victim of the lustful desires of the royal power of Socheng, but also as an epitome of chastity and true love even at the cost of one’s life, and worshipped as the rain-goddess with reverence.
The narrative can be taken as a fine example of the amalgamation of both mundane and spiritual wisdom of the entire folks. The willingness shown by the lover, Thong, to undergo the customary probation in the jirsong being separated from his newly betrothed fiancé, Hai-i; the formal negotiation and solemnization of their wedding; Hai-i’s comment on their pre-ordained marriage; Longdili’s obnoxious surrender before the undaunted resolution and strong will-power of Hái-I not to submit; her farewell from this corrupt mundane world along with the incidents causing that unprecedented catastrophe; Thong’s mourning and agonizing death; the dreams experienced by both Thong and Hai-i’s hapless mother, all strongly contribute to the veracity of the above observation in a convincing manner.

Larta was a very virtuous and beautiful Karbi maiden, and there are a good number of folk-tales in the society, which are woven around her enamouring qualities. She was so famous that certain numbers of folk-songs also were created which are associated with her virtues, and they are known as ‘Lärtä Áłun’[42] These various cycles of folk songs revolving round Larta thematically reveals before us the same story—the unbearable tragedy of the untimely death of a girl, who possessed versatile personality enriched by enviable worldly wisdom, as a result of the sinister design engineered by her own mother.

As we go through the plot and characterization of the various ‘Lärtä Áłun’ then we notice that they are designed to serve as a tool to conveying one conspicuous moral edification—hatred is a sin leading to self-ruination, and it can impede the growth of intelligence and enormous worldly wisdom.

The selection of Larta as the leader of the ‘Jir Kedám’ at the time of reconstitution of the organization by all the members; their confidence in her leadership virtues and caliber; her expertise in the art of weaving; her accomplishment of all the activities of the institution in a very fair and perfect manner; her founding of a ever-expandind village; her role as the dynamic female
leader of the jirsong of that village; the spectacular procession led by her during ‘Ritnong Chingdi’; her act of exploring the forests even braving through the incessant rainfall and footprints of the wild elephants and blood-thirsty lice with a resolution to lead the jirsong; her intelligence in ordering the male members of the ‘Jirsong’ to build rafts with banana plants in order to cross the teeming hilly streams on the way and successful overcoming of the obstacles, are examples of excellent worldly wisdom as believed to have possessed by Larta.

On the other hand, the inveterate hatred nurtured by Larta’s mother towards Kronihang for being an orphan; hatching a conspiracy with a view to murdering Kronihang by the scheming mother; the unanticipated death of Larta by falling down the big hole meant for her lover; Kronihang’s failure to rescue her despite his sincere attempt induced us to think about the mysterious role being played by destiny which is always pre-ordained.

Thus, we can justifiably assert that the cycles of various ‘Lārtā Ālun’ are sources for mundane as well as spiritual lessons helpful in knowing and accepting life as it is without trying to meddle with the divine influence upon worldly affairs of human beings. Had it not been the purport of the folk-poet, the pathetic catastrophe that had overtaken the unfortunate Larta would not have remained as a legend and a popular fire-place narrative among the old folks of the community living in thatched stilted houses located in the intractable hilly terrains till today. Further still, the fascinatingly dynamic personality adorned with excellent leadership qualities that Larta possessed would not have remained a source of inspiration for every Karbi girl.

*Dinmir* is yet another pathetic verse narrative which is a heart-rending tale of her separation from her loving husband as intense as *Hāi-imu*. It is an unwritten tragic verse narrative that had taken place in the life of a simple-hearted Karbi maiden in which the anonymous folk poet strives to show the disparaging impact of
a vindictive conspiracy, which has the toxic venom strong enough to ruin a happy conjugal life and consequently can obliterate the mutual love and affection, goodwill, respect and trust by sowing the germ of split among the people of the society. In its ultimate analysis, therefore, this narrative is a rich repository for mundane and spiritual edifications.

Mai Longbi is depicted as an ideal village-head enriched with deep worldly wisdom who had once established a hamlet at Batchen hill accommodating one hundred families. Long, the lover happened to be the son of her paternal (cross) aunt and the sanctity of cementing marital relationship with the son of the paternal aunts was (and still is) a universal custom among the Karbis. The binding of ceremonial threads around the wrists of the boy and the girl as bride and groom and the act of giving of social sanctity as husband and wife at the very nascent stage of their life in order to avoid any probable calumniaion was not only done in conformity with the prevalent custom of the society, but also was indicative of foresight and worldly wisdom on the part of the parents.

The hypnotist, Sar Mangbi, appears as a jealous and lewd person, and his shameless act of proposing Dinmir, mother of a child by now; his senile imaginations and fantasies; his vindictive conspiracy against the innocent Dinmir and instigation to Langteroi, who was a goldsmith by calling and popularly known to the people as 'Tānti Ābini'– the goldsmith from Tanti; the act of proffering the reserved pair of bracelet to Dinmir by Langteroi inducing her to feel a kind of excitement and erotic experience; the consequent elopement and the infuriated villagers' retaliative move leading the awkward aftermath and the consequent poetic justice given to the victim; the expulsion of Mangbi, the abettor, from the village and the society as a whole, certainly are moral lessons consciously incorporated by the folk poet that evince the maturity of his worldly wisdom.
On the other hand, Dinmir’s solicitation of Mangbi with utmost respect and reverence, the youths’ decision to form the ‘jirsong’ on the very day of the ‘Rek Rongker’[44] as advised by the ‘Gaonburha’; Long’s willingness to join the same; his gleeful acceptance of the probationary servitude at his maternal uncle’s house in conformity with the prevailing custom of the community and by obeying his parent’s dictation, endorse the necessity of cultivating manners and sentiment of culture as well as its perpetuation by the youths of the society.

The villagers’ offering of propitiation seeking blessing from the gods and goddesses before they decided to chase Mangbi and Langteroi to Tanti in order to avenge the coercive abduction of Dinmir; their belief in the efficacy of exorcism possessed by a ‘Lunsé’ and summoning of such a singer from Rongchikli village as advised by the ‘Gaonburha’ are undoubtedly the manifestation of the villagers’ spiritual faith.

Thus, the narrative of Dinmir not only is a pathetic tale of an innocent maiden entrapped by the sinister conspiracy of the two notoriously lustful men, Langteroi and Sar Mangbi, but also is a didactic tale intending to inculcate morales, both mundane and spiritual, to us.

‘Dengrali’, named after a tree, is a symbolic narrative which provides us a pathetic story of a chaste yet unfortunate maiden named Kache, who had a pre-marital conception with a boy, Soineri, during her stay in the jirsong. It was the auspicious occasion of ‘Riso Chojun’[45] when the secret became public and being unable bear the stigma the virtuous woman committed suicide and eventually got transformed to a tree to the much wonder of her friends. Kaché then told to them that in case she should participate in the Chojun then they should cut a leafy tangle from a Dengrali tree with proper prayer and reverence and place the same before the altar meant for the ceremony. Further, they should keep all the offerings made for the ritual and should distribute the same to everyone proportionately which should
be taken by sitting under the leafy tangle. The friends kept the words of Kaché and did as she had desired. Ever since that time and occasion, a leafy tangle of Dengrāli tree is installed before the earthen altar performing proper ceremonial rites during the ‘Riso Chojun’ festival every year, which is observed with utmost reverence till date.

This narrative is very much didactic in nature and is a pulpit for preaching of worldly, moral as well as spiritual lessons to the teenagers and youths of the Karbis. It evokes a sense of mystery and eerie atmosphere governing the world of human beings vis-a-vis Nature, a sense of remorse and remedy to it, guilt and purgation, punishment and reward, and above all, the strength of being honest and virtuous.

The observance of ‘Riso Chojun’ by the youths of the jirsong with much ceremonial enthusiasm must be taken as a sign of the youths’ cultural consciousness and sense of belongingness to tradition, which in turn, make them competent individuals inculcating in them the most indispensable worldly wisdom through a collective learning platform and training ground.

On the other hand, Kaché’s plea to her friends to cut a leafy branch from a Dengrali tree with proper prayer and reverence; her request to install that branch on the altar prepared for the Chojun and to serve the offerings proportionately to everyone; the compliance being shown by her friends with that of those pleas and advices speak a volume of the spiritual ethos of the youths.

‘Korhon Jāngreso’ is a pathetic tale at par with numerous other narratives associated with the familiar theme of step-mother archetype so far as its tragic intensity is concerned.

Korhon and his sister, Sāng-et, were the unfortunate children of Barim and Karik, who became orphans after the premature demise of their biological mother and the consequent second marriage of their father. The second wife, Jangmi, was very cruel and stony-hearted and used to inflict inhuman torture upon Korhon and
Sang-et. Barim could not bear her ill-treatment to his children any more, out of compulsion he went to the forest and left his children in lurch on a tall rocky plate.

The orphaned brother-sister duo had to live a miserable life of loneliness and starvation. They were extremely scared in the deep forest and so kept on praying before God and at last a tangle or an offshoot came out from the bamboo grove nearby toward their direction, which helped them climb down from the rocky plate. Later on, they took to 'jhum' cultivation and developed a close relationship with Nature. However, Sāng-et died because of a snake-bite, brought back to life by a quack at the behest of the King, and eventually became the Queen.

Jangmi can be taken as an archetype to cruel step-mother, a common evil character featured in many of the tales of the world irrespective of cultural ideology and worldview. This folktale is certainly designed to inculcate some moral lessons, emphasizing, however, on the utility of worldly wisdom in achieving success in life without underestimating the talismanic influence of luck or destiny.

The wonderful sylvan life of the orphans; the close relationship they developed with that of the entire ecology around them consisting of springs, wild arums and yams, bananas, mangoes, jackfruits and various wild animals and creatures; the art of cultivation; their peaceful coexistence and interdependence with the ecology bespeak the vast worldly wisdom.

There is an aura of spiritual mystery in the sudden death of Sāng-et which may be interpreted to be an act of penance for Korhon for his unintentional killing of the snakes opposing the principle of co-existence. The bamboo tangles sprouting out suddenly; the spring appearing before the orphans like manna dew; the taming of the wild creatures by the duo; their peaceful life amidst the wilderness; Sāng-et's death due to a snake-bite and coming back to life as a result of the charm of the quack and her becoming a queen, all are diffused with an enigmatic sense of mystery, which characterize the tribe's spiritual wisdom and worldview.
'Phāksokoinek' is yet another Karbi folktale which deals with the vicissitude and miraculous change of fortune of the hero, Phāksokoinek. He was one of the three children of a family, physically deformed boy with a face resembling that of a pig and hence was always neglected, abused and insulted by all the members of the family as being lethargic and useless. Under such compelling circumstance he went to a nearby forest and started cultivating paddy crops and informed his brothers about the bumper crops he had grown and requested them to reap the same. On hearing that, the brothers laughed at it jeering at him instead of being happy. But being insisted by Phāksokoinek they went to the crop-fields and was surprised to the extreme to see for themselves the health and affluence of the crops cultivated by their youngest brother. Phāksokoinek was reunited by his brothers after that incident. The king of the state once organized a 'Sayambara' after that incident. Interestingly, Phāksokoinek was chosen by his daughter as the competent suitor, and consequently married him by putting the floral garland round his neck among many well-built and rich aspirants.

The narrative, Phāksokoinek, is about proper recognition of the true worth of a person and the recognition of the same, and thus like so many other tales is didactic in purpose. The simple Karbi people excepting few urban dwellers still consider farming as their way to success in life far away from the hullabaloos of the cities as if real treasure lies hidden in the lap of generous Mother Earth, and hence, there is a strong ground to take it for granted that the purport of the the anonymous author(s) of this tale must have been to represent Phāksokoinek as a model for an industrious Karbi person who is the staunch believer in 'Honghari' (i.e., traditional) way of life. Further, God helps those, who help themselves; and it is not money but hard work that can buy fortune. Thus, Phāksokoinek climbs the ladder of fortune and the rest are lagged far behind. The relationship between God and human beings is indecipherable, and so are one's birth, marriage and death.
If the activity, behaviour; movement, and other characteristics of a person appear before other sane persons in the society he belongs to as different or eccentric, exceptional or idiosyncratic, or permanently ailing, then as per the existing belief of the people the person must seek blessings from his or her maternal uncle, i.e., ‘Ānihu Kāchiri’. However, such strange symptoms need be confirmed through the help of the priest. The ailing person or his/her family members will have to follow three different stages of rituals to be performed at the house of the maternal uncle, such as, 1) ‘Āndum Kehāng’ (asking for a morsel), 2) ‘Ārnān Kehom’ (putting a ring round the finger), and 3) ‘Vo’ kārtāp’ provided he/she wants to enjoy complete recuperation. Among these rituals ‘Vo’ kārtāp’ is the most expensive one.

The ritual, ‘Vo’ kārtāp’, and the myth-narrative associated with it, namely, ‘Binong Jāngreso’ tells us about the strong sense of kinship and family ties to which the Karbis give adequate importance. In both the cases, i.e., the narrative and the ritual associated with it, the mundane and spiritual wisdom of the community are clearly revealed. Here again, the dignity of labour and its potential to earn fortune are emphasized as it is the case with ‘Korhon Jāngreso’ and ‘Phāksokoinek’.

The orphan, Binong’s prosperity amidst the wilderness to the great surprise of his idle and jealous sisters, for example, tells us about the secret of hard labour and dedicated industry on the part of the unfortunate boy. The role of the lone hen in bringing his fortune; the death of one of his brother-in-law and sidter in an attempt to spy; the sudden drizzle and the appearance of the stranded mother-daughter duo and exchange of help all signify the importance the Karbis attach to spiritual affairs.

On the other hand, the observation of the various manifestations of symptomatic diseases in a person and the diagnoses done through various rituals; the approach to a village-head and the prognosis and remedies that he devices; the use of traditional rice beer and country fowls; the chanting and singing; gathering of all
the kith and kins of the family as shown in the ‘Vo’ kartāp’ ritual, all indicate the worldly and spiritual wisdom the community possess, inherit and share with one another.

‘Lokhi Keplāng’ is yet another didactic narrative which amalgamates both mundane and spiritual wisdom of the entire Karbi community in a very conspicuous manner. It unfolds before us at important phase of history of civilization of the community—a shift from the people’s nomadic lifestyle to somewhat permanent settlement as agro-based rural community. The coming of ‘Lakhi’ or ‘Lakhimi’, the dear daughter of Barithe and the subsequent discovery of paddy or rice, as narrated in the folk song, ‘Lokhi Keplāng’, brought a revolutionary change into the lifestyle of the entire tribe.

The discovery of paddy by Rongsopo Teron, who had first dreamed of this paddy-turned Lakhimi being aided by a person named Dandiwar Sarpo discovered it and the miraculous act of rescue by the orphan Ronsing after Lakhimi’s short disappearance; the offering of pots of rice beers in order to welcome Lakhimi to human society; the propitiation to the deity named ‘Lāngjon’ at ‘Pengjā’ hill until Lokhimi expressed her willingness to dwell at the clearing of the ‘jhum’ field (jimtim); the welcoming of Lakhimi with due respect and reverence and consequent prosperity; and the celebration of ‘Hāchā Kekān’ dance (a post-harvest festival); the replacement of wild yams and tubers with that of rice used as staple food and for preparing traditional rice beer all evince the mundane and spiritual wisdom the community share together.
In its penultimate analysis, the discovery of the paddies and the subsequent respect shown to her by the Karbis form the main corpus of their cultural ethos and motif which bespeak of the agrarian and eco-centric worldview involving both worldly and spiritual experiences of the community throughout their prolonged journey of civilization. The worldview buttressed upon agro-based rural economy is still preserved in the form of 'Sok keroi'—a post harvest festival, and through the 'Hāchā' dance form. 'Rongker', a magico-religious festival, can also be associated with the healthy growth of 'Lokhimi'—a pre-harvest fertility ritual performed both individually and collectively by the villagers.

_Thāp Kēmān_, the myth associated with the discovery of yeast by two sisters named Kareng and Kading leading to the preparation of Karbi traditional rice beer, 'horlāng' and the coincidental and mysterious origin of bottle-gourds from the tooth of Rangmukrang, the village-head of a very famous village called Miring Rongsopi situated on the bank of the Kuleng river as well as the father of the two sisters, is a repertoire of mundane and spiritual wisdom.

The discovery of the yeast following the phenomenal aroma diffused by the excrement discharged by a pair of _Kongching_ (kingfisher) birds; storing of the yeast above the rafter; sharing the dream with their father; the preparation of sweet rice beer invigorating both body and mind following a dream by the two sisters; feeding the sweet nectar to their father which exhilarated and removed all the cares and anxieties, fatigue, hunger and thirst from the old man; the father's opinion about the usefulness of the drinks in worshipping and propitiating the gods and goddesses, indicate the extraordinary worldly wisdom possessed by the two wise and obedient sisters.

On the other hand, the sudden appearance of the pair of birds on bank of the river; their disappearance from the scene after discharging stools; the diffusion of mysterious aroma from it; the excitement and invigorating energy the two sisters
experienced; the wonderful dreamed they dreamed; offering of prayer and reverence before the prepared the nectar; the sudden disappearance of the cares and anxieties, fatigue, hunger and thirst that the old father was experiencing; the falling of one of the teeth of Rangmukrang into the river water; germination of a creeper out of it after its burial; bearing of two bottle-gourds named bongchim and ‘bongdām’,[50] and ‘bongdām’,[51] support the fertility of the spiritual ethos of the community as a whole.

In addition to this, the use of ‘horlāng’ while worshipping the gods like Hemphu, Mukrang and so on, and showing respectful hospitality to the honourable dignitaries like ‘Lingdokpos’ and ‘Pinpos’ in the Karbi society till today; its use in various religious rituals, in ‘Chomāṅgkan’ and ‘Ādām Āsār’, by and large, indicate the firmness in perpetuating that cultural legacy enriched by the cumulative mundane and spiritual experiences indicative of exalted sensibilities which had once been bequeathed by the great mythical family.

‘Sāбин Ālun’ can rightly be considered as an outstanding epic loaded with mundane as well as spiritual edifications which were deemed proper and indispensable for the agrarian Karbi society. The appropriation in case of the main plot and the atmosphere that it is built around is more interesting for it is tinged with the imagination and worldview which is typically Karbi. To be more precise, the typical Karbi socio-cultural atmosphere and background, plot and characterization, various rites and ceremonies incorporated in the ‘Sābin Ālun’ vividly reflect the Karbi lifestyle of the past in particular, and of the present in general.

The episode of the birth of Sita (Sīntā Kungri) from an egg of a peahen (Vo’ plākpi) instead of a plough as in the Hindu epic; King Janaka’s (Rāmāṅpo) occupation as a farmer who cultivates in the ‘jhum’ field and drinks rice beer; his act of living in an ordinary thatched house instead of the gorgeous royal palace of King Dasharatha (Dhorom) all go to showcase the cultural milieu and context of the worldly lifestyle of the Karbi people in those mythical days. Further, Sīntā Kungri
also is depicted as an ordinary Karbi maiden who performs the daily household chores, carries lunch to the ‘jhum’ field for her father, and of course, weaves clothes as if she were projected to be presupposed as a role model for a true Karbi woman. Thesomāhādi (Surpanashā), on the other hand, is designed to be the just opposite feminine character who gleefully shoulders upon the responsibility entrusted upon her by the great ‘Hemphu’ to assist Rama in killing Ravana, her brother as preordained by the almighty. The dichotomy in the feminine psyche representing the universal ‘good’ and ‘evil’ here is in reality accepted and glorified with respect, which formed the backbone of the worldly wisdom of the Karbi folk life of the yesteryears.

In addition to the above, another noteworthy aspect of the grand Karbi epic is the inclusion of various Karbi rites and rituals and other spiritual mores meant for the collective well-being of the society.

In its ultimate analysis, therefore, Sābin Ālun reveals before us a typical Karbi worldview which is an amalgamation of the mundane or practical and the spiritual or ideal envisagement of life, and the ideological implications are being made conspicuous by the manual labour that the major characters of the folk epic indulge into in one hand, and the spiritual connection they have with that of the omnipotent ‘Hemphu’, on the other.

‘Moserā Kihir’ being recited during the pious occasions like ‘Riso Chojun’ and ‘Thi-kārhi’ or ‘Chomāŋkān’, which, in reality, is a re-visit to the actual place of the origin of the community in retrospection to which they have been emotionally attached since time immemorial, or recounting of their strenuous migration ordeal affecting the fate of the community. Symbolically the ‘Moserā Kihir’ recital indicates the diasporic trauma of being separated, for reasons whatsoever, from their original ‘homeland’ which still keeps on haunting them. However, the use of the adjectival phrase like ‘long-le‘ āchete’” provokes our inquisitive minds to cogitate
some probable allegorical implications it might encompass, and the implications seem to allow us to have glimpse of the deeper spiritual wisdom possessed by the community. Further, the egg cosmogony that it brings forth provides a convincing etiological justification regarding the origin of the community, and unmistakably points to their metaphysical, if not spiritual, knowledge beyond the realm of the mundane, but albeit, the mundane wisdom inherent in the collective psyche of the people gets vividly manifest through the undying racial memory of their migration ordeal and the phenomenal experiences it involved.

Karbi wedding ceremony, ‘Ādām Āsār’ enshrines three-phased rituals known as ‘Piso Pāngri’ prescribed by tradition, which demands the groom’s family to approach the bride’s family (house of the maternal uncle) three times taking necessary offerings along with them, which, however, is the women’s affair. The pivotal role that the women play throughout the entire ceremony clearly indicates their unquestionable importance in the sustenance of the culture and tradition of the community. However, what is of paramount importance is the amalgamation of both mundane and spiritual wisdom of the women folk that the entire cycle of the rituals evince.

The diplomatic move of the mother of the groom to the house of the would-be bride as a casual guest or visitor along with two or three married women and one bottle of ‘Ārāk’ (a kind of distilled home-made wine); the disclosure of her intention before the bride’s mother after harping on various stray topics during the initial phase of negotiation, ‘Nengpi-Nengso Kāchingki’; the repetition of almost all the ritualistic formalities during the rest phases of negotiations, ‘Kepātini’ and ‘Ārjo-Ārni Kephā’ respectively with a view to getting the prospective date for the contemplated marriage confirmed and for fixation of the date for the wedding; the formal visit of the groom’s party to the bride’s house; the exchange of aphoristically meaningful verse dialogues between the two parties; the recital a couple of chants by the maternal uncle’s (bride’s father) party by holding the ‘horbong’ and the wine
offered to him asking for blessings from the gods and goddesses; the exchange of melodiously significant nuptial songs by both the parties; the valuable admonitions given by the bride’s father to his daughter regarding household responsibilities and obligations while playing her role as a bride so that she can be happy in her conjugal life and all the related ritualistic formalities adopted and performed during ‘Ādām Āsār’ especially the thematic implications of the ‘Thelu Ālun’ bespeak both of the mundane and spiritual wisdom of the community accumulated since time immemorial through ages of observations and experimentations.

‘Sār kebāt’ is a ritualistic myth which tells us about the phenomenal circumstance that had occasioned the introduction of social hierarchies into the past Karbi society by a devout couple, Kaku and Sam Teron, transforming it to order and discipline from chaos and disorder. The narrative is also a compact storehouse of mundane and spiritual wisdom that the peace-loving Karbi people shared together in the past.

The substitution of order in place of chaos in the society by the great couple; the subsequent existence of law and order, unity and integrity, happiness and peace; the meaning of life that it brought forth; distribution of important offices and positions as kings, village-head or the Gaonburha, the leader of the youths (Klengsārpo), the Convener or the Messenger52, the Priest53, the rich people, the common people and so forth after the introduction of such socio-economic and politico-cultural hierarchical divisions enshrined by the ‘Sār kebāt’ system in the society in the past; the formalities obeyed during it; the aspirant village-head’s offering of country fowls, pigs and other goods, before God with due reverence; the song that is sung by the village-head or the appointed singer commemorating the great contribution of Har Bamon and implication it makes54 indicate, without any iota of doubt, the consciousness of the entire community in the domain of mundane and spiritual matters.
Thus, the farsighted initiatives undertaken by Kaku and Sam Teron by virtue of their mundane and spiritual enlightenment introducing hierarchical divisions in the Karbi society in the time of the yore had knowingly or unknowingly laid the foundation for the democratic structure of the present Karbi society, with the traditional king in the center of the socio-cultural domain and the rest of the community contributing to the welfare of the entire race though placed in the periphery.

The ‘Jirsong’ or ‘Jir kedam’ is an institutionalized co-operative known as ‘jirsong’ or ‘jir kedām’ (youth dormitory and learning platform) first founded by Hār Bāmon, the great priest, organizer, administrator and artist. The organization is a glaring example of the theory and practice of worldly and spiritual knowledge by the wise forefathers of the Karbis. The first ‘jirsong’ of the community, however, is believed to have been formed by Dichumai Rongpi in order to undertake the initial ‘jhum’ cultivation in the past at Amsekso in Resak hill. Whoever might be the pioneer, the dynamics of the formation of such a jirsong with the offering of ‘bāntā’[^55] as a token of honour and respect towards the village-head is undoubtedly an indication of worldly as well as spiritual enlightenment. The division of the portfolios and the distribution of labour with a view to running it in a systematic manner; the unity and dedication the chosen members demonstrate in carrying out their specified duties and responsibilities; the equal importance given to every individual of the society; the observance of ‘Risomār Chojun’ to mark the successful completion of the ‘jirsong’ are definitely the indices of the collective worldly and spiritual wisdom.

In its final analysis, the concept behind the formation of ‘jir kedām’ had been practical and worldly and its main purpose was to achieve self-complacency and independence through self-help and mutual co-operation, but the ritualistic formalities which are to be observed in sanctioning validity to its identity and functioning are certainly religious in nature. This fusion of both mundane and
spiritual experiences in forming ‘jir kedām’, thus, speaks of their knowledge about the indispensability of gaining Divine aid in achieving worldly success in life.

The ‘Risomār Choju’ ceremony observed after the expiry of the tenure of a particular ‘jirsong’, also known as ‘Jirsong Chekāk’, is yet another narrative packed with mundane and spiritual wisdom shared by the Karbis together as a community. It becomes crystal clear, if we trace the story behind such a beautiful convention.

The assembly of the youths at the residence of some Bey Hempi with a view to discussing about the prospective farewell to the specific tenure of a particular ‘jirsong’ spearheaded by a competent leader named Dichumai Rongpi; the act presenting offering for getting due permission from the village-head for the formal cessation of the ‘jirsong’; the prompt consent being given by the village-head; building of a make-shift hut to perform a rite called ‘Riso Ālāmki’ with a view to getting purged of any kind of blame or abuse because of the offences and wrongdoings unknowingly committed by them during their stay in the ‘jir kedām’ after inviting the villagers; the polite address the skilled leader, Dichumai Rongpi, made to the villagers and his apologetic admission of the probability of inadvertent wrongdoing during the tenure of the ‘jirsong; the leader’s appeal to his fellow members ‘not to nurture any kind of vindictive attitude and to show friendly behaviour’[56] clearly testify the mundane and spiritual wisdom of the community.

The origin story of ‘Jāmbili Āthon’, a kind of wooden artifact resembling that of a candle-stand which is regarded as the representative and symbol of unity among the youths is also a mythical narrative pregnant with the mundane as well as spiritual perception of the community as a whole.

The farsighted act of offering of a bundle of betel-nuts to the youths of Lāngtārē village as per prevalent custom to form a ‘jirsong’ during the ‘Rek Rongker’ by Sar Vo’pong; the dedicated engagement of the youths of the village in farming by forming a ‘jirsong’ in conformity with the behest and exhortation of their village-
head; the suggestion of the particular village-head to the youths to prepare a wooden artifact (peg) for keeping the bags of betel-nuts safely; the cutting of a ‘Bengvoi’ tree by Lakhan, Long Teron and Sar Rongbong and the art of smoothing the same and adorning it with beautiful stripes; engraving of four birds chiselled out of wood; the installation of a wooden Bhimraj bird on top of the main trunk and one bird upon each of the four branches of the tree; sticking of various multi-coloured pearls and nooses of thread as ornaments for further beautification; a perfect creative design; the use of the ‘jāmbili āthon’ believing it to be an indispensable means for gaining spiritual knowledge, the importance given to this material object during the ritual like ‘Chomāṅgkān’, strongly prove the worldly and spiritual insight that the Karbis as a community had possessed.

It has become crystal clear from the above illustrations that the oral narratives of the Karbis which have been transmitted orally from generation to generation are the living evidences of the cumulative mundane and spiritual wisdoms giving a unique and vibrant lease of life to their cultural identity. It is interesting to note that those vast repertoires of practical and ideal, material and metaphysical knowledge, which had so long been acquired and cultivated by the sages and social architects hailing from the Karbi community with a view to nurturing a rich, unique, beautiful and self-complacent cultural identity, are still preserved by some tradition-bearers through folklorization. However, a growing tendency of departure from such a unique cultural legacy characterized by typical socio-cultural belief-system and worldview is noticeable among the budding generation, barring few exceptions. The probable causes behind this gradual dwindling of faith in the rich cultural tradition bequeathed by a good number of wise and farsighted folk scholars may be the sense of purposelessness in life, lack of true knowledge about the real meaning and purpose of living, improper parenting and guidance, generation gap, changing value-systems, globalization and so forth. We must evolve out proper and efficacious mechanisms to check this ominous habit and attitude of self-negation or mass
oblivion before it is too late by undertaking meticulous and dedicated researches in order to bring back the status quo ante of this beautiful culture even by making psycho-analytical study of the social psychiatry influencing the young generation as well as the erring people belonging to various age-groups.

Notes:


2. Creation myth of the Christians as stated in the Holy Bible (Genesis: New Testament), the creation of Adam-Eve and the entire universe.

3. Hemphu or Songsar Recho.

4. The universe as “Shared Home” or a common ‘home’ to be shared by all beings.

5. The ‘truthful’ or ‘just’ king.

6. The most powerful royal dignitary in a traditional Karbi administrative hierarchy equivalent to a King.

7. The youth co-operative as well as the social institution for teaching and learning of traditional knowledge.

8. The group of youths enrolled in the ‘jirkedam’ for the duration of three years.

9. The most important post-harvest fertility festival of the Karbis.

10. Dance form performed during ‘Sok Keroi’.

11. Song sung during ‘Sok Keroi’ in tune with ‘Hāchā Kekān’ or dance.

12. Ru = Grandfather, Kasen = name of the person.

13. Village-Head.
15. Grandfather Rengbonghom.
16. Literally, came alive from the world of death or Hell.
17. Karbi traditional rice beer.
18. Pied kingfisher.
19. Royal dignitaries of highest order in a traditional Karbi administrative system.
20. Traditional Karbi marriage ceremony.
22. Popularly known as Mirjeng brothers who were supposed to have assisted Rangsina Sarpo in spreading music in the past Karbi society.
23. Chief of the ‘jirsong’.
24. Deputy Chief of the ‘jirsong’.
25. Cycle of nuptial songs and ritualistic hymns recited during traditional Karbi wedding ceremonies.
27. Son of Rangmukrang, the Village-head of the legendary Teron Rongsopo village.
28. Rice beer.
29. A kind of bottle-gourd with long neck.
30. Rong-village, Be-to flee, that is the absconder.
31. Referred to as Janta Recho by the Karbi subjects.
32. Machete, probably an axe.
33. Seasonal festival of the Khasis, a festival of merriment when the King-Queen, Prince-Princess dance together with that of the common people comprising young boys and girls wearing traditional dresses, which is identical with that of fertility festival or rite.
34. A man with three golden teeth.
35. An eagle or hawk (predator bird).
36. A kind of long machete or sword.
37. A king of hard wood or tree with hard stem or bole.
38. A machete.
40. A traditional cloth-belt used by Karbi women.
41. The Youth God and worship associated with him, which gained ritualistic sanctity after the Chelleng Athepai catastrophe.
42. Cycle of songs pertaining to the tragedy of Larta.
43. Charity works performed in gratis by the youths of the ‘Jirkedam’ as part of their usual schedule.
44. A collective community rite.
45. A collective festival of the members of a Jirsong.
47. A competition among all the youths (or suitors) of the vicinity for the hands of the King’s daughter.
48. The Head God of Heaven.
49. Addressed as Teron Rongsopo in the folk song.
50. Bottle-gourd with long neck.
52. Pherāngke.
53. Kurusar.
55. A heap of betel-nuts wrapped round by leaves as offering.
57. Racket-tailed drongo bird.
Works cited:
