Do not long for war, o! my favourite grand children! (You) should rather witness the wedding ceremony in the village Miring. (This act of yours) will be a model for the new generation.

There can be no dissension to the fact that the belief-system of the Karbis are the sum total of various socio-cultural, magico-religious rites and rituals, practices, customs and traditions propagated by a good number of great social philosophers and reformers in the bygone past who had left behind them a unique and rich cultural legacy for their offspring. One must but wonder to think that this unique and rich cultural legacy inherited from the past has been so long been perpetuated by the community only through a strong racial memory in the form of different genres of oral literature. It is surprising to observe further that the act of perpetuation is achieved through a very facile means of oral tradition strengthened by reminiscence and practice, but in a very successful manner for centuries since time immemorial. All the paraphernalia of this common yet complex belief-system prepare a common platform where religion, culture, and philosophy merge together and consequently give birth to a typical worldview of the people covering every aspect of their community life. However, with much pain we notice a deviation from that rich cultural heritage among the budding generation as well as some erring or disillusioned elders over the recent decades owing to various probable reasons.
The parameter of religion in a tribal community is an integral part of the totality of life that cannot be experienced or deemed as something isolated from the rest of the complete pattern, and the belief of the Karbis in the existence of ghosts, spirits and other evil agents is a mere cog in the revolving and evolving ‘wheel’ of their unique socio-cultural and religious identity, which does not require any external favour for its nourishment and subsistence, and does not deserve any censure and defamation. It is so because the belief of the Karbis upon these evil forces dominating every nook and corner of the world around them 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, which are, barring few aberrations, are perpetuated even by defying the change of time and situation and the momentum of attitudinal shift triggered by the advent of scientific point-of-view since the dawn of the modern era. Edward Said pertinently observes:

"Knowledge no longer requires application to reality; knowledge is what gets passed on silently without comment, from one text to another. Ideas are propagated and disseminated anonymously; they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become idées reçues: what matters is that they are there to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically."[2]

However, these observations will remain ever hypothetical unless we examine their veracity by making an analytical evaluation of the existing cultural and socio-religious customs observed by the Karbis till today.

The Rites and Rituals:

The ‘Karbis’, popularly known as the ‘Mikirs’ in the government official records and notifications of pre-colonial as well as independent India and the state of Assam till 1976, (vide Govt. of Assam Notification No. TAD/115/74/47 dated
The Karbi people had considered the term ‘Mikir’ as derogatory exonym and hence could not accept it without any demur. “The name ‘Mikir’ is that given to the race by the Assamese; its origin is unknown. They call themselves ‘Arleng’ which means man in general….”[4] (Loyll and Stack) “Arleng” denotes a hill slope, and since the Karbis used to inhabit in those places, they were known by that name. However, the term is used not in a generic but in a very strict and limited sense, and hence they use the term ‘Munit’ to imply man in general. “Arleng means properly only a Mikir man, not a man in general, who would be called ‘monit’ or ‘munit’.”[5] However, the actual genesis of the term to denote the people erstwhile known and designated as ‘Mikir’ and who love to identify themselves as ‘Karbi’ or ‘Arleng’ hitherto remains hypothetical. The attempt to find the proper etymological meaning and implication supposed to be enshrined by these terminologies to designate the race occasions a good number of scholarly hypotheses. The most noteworthy among them are- ‘meng+kiri > mikir’; ‘me’ ākār+kibi > kārbi’; ‘thekār+kibi >kārbi’; ‘mekār+bi > kārbi’; ‘so’+ākibi > kārbi’; ‘ve’+thekār+bi > kārbi’; ‘kārbi > one of the sons of King Bisokoida’; and so forth.[6] However, considering the prevalent ritual where the ‘thekār’[7] must be offered or kept apart for the gods or goddesses, and without which no ritual or ‘puja’[8] can be performed, we can come to the corollary that the race who used to adhere to the custom of offering ‘thekār’ and still follow the same ritual to propitiate gods and goddesses, deities and spirits are the race called the ‘Karbis’. This, however, may not be the main genesis of the term, but at least the most convincing hypothesis. The ‘thekārs’ are also used for purification or de-infection of impurity, adulteration, and effect of evil supposed to be contained by objects collected for consumption and rituals meant for preventing the impurity and evil from influencing the life and fate of the human beings. Some such important ‘thekārs’ introduced by ‘Hemphu’ in the guise of the human god, Lāngmingpo, are illustrated below to see as how the Karbis are still practicing these cults and accepting them with utmost reverence as their prescribed ways of life.
i) *Klongklo Áhekār*: ‘The term ‘Klong’ means ‘floor made from bamboos’, whereas, ‘Klo’ denotes ‘to fall’ and the compounded form of these words, ‘Klongklo’ metaphorically indicates the act of falling of a child on a floor made from bamboos, or the usual act of childbirth. The Karbis used to, and still do in the remote villages, dwell in the houses having stilted platforms with chopped floor made from bamboos the providential event, i.e., ‘Klongklo’, must have been a usual phenomenon. After the birth the baby must be purified in order to avoid impurity and evil influence of the ghosts and spirits. The ritual for purification of this kind is called ‘Klongklo Áhekār’ by the Karbis who believe that only by performing this purification rite the baby can get the blessing of Hemphu. This rite of passage is still in vogue among the Karbis who consider it as a pious ritual bequeathed by Hemphu for the well-being of the new-born child, which certainly is no less a hygienic exercise.

ii) ‘Ādām Áhekār’ is another important rite of passage observed by the Karbis. It is believed by the Karbis that a bride bids farewell to her parents’ tutelage with a pure heart and a sweet dream to begin a peaceful conjugal life. But on the eve of entering into the wedding bond by separating herself from the love and friendship with that of her childhood companions and in order to get the mistakes (supposed to have committed by her inadvertently) purified, the bride has to share a feast with them. After offering separate share for the ‘Klensāpo’ the newly-wed couple take the preparation along with the bride’s childhood friends, but before they do so the bride-groom seek blessing for purification from Hemphu, which is known as ‘Ādām Áhekār’. This ritual is considered indispensable part of the peaceful journey of their conjugal life without which the newly-wed couple is believed to be deprived of happiness in life.

iii) *Kethi Áhekār*: Once a person is born, he is compelled to die one day or the other, which is the characteristic feature of the life of the mortals. One must, willy-nilly, obey these cycles of life on earth since ‘Birth’, ‘Marriage’, and ‘Death’
are inevitable facts about human life. As per Karbi belief, if a person dies because of old age, it is considered as natural death, but, on the other hand, if the death occurs because of sudden accident, it is deemed as unnatural or ill-fated death. In such tragic cases, therefore, the influence of 'evil' must be removed or driven away, failing which, one is deprived of re-birth as per Karbi religious belief. The ritual meant for purification of this kind is called ‘Kethi Āthekār’ in Karbi.

iv) Kecho Āthekār: The Karbis have the custom of offering some morsels or a little amount of food of other edible objects on the ground before eating them during 'pujas' or worships, or during feasts among a huge gathering, or even at the time of eating lonely at home. This is also a kind of purification measure before anything is consumed, and the process is known as 'Kecho Āthekār' or 'Ārnām Kepu'. The Karbis still believe in this ritual of purification of food and other objects before consuming them by offering a portion to God or uttering His name, because they believe that everything that is to be taken must be pure or hygienic.

v) Klārki Āthekār: It is another method for purification during public feasts or community worships in which the offerings made before gods and goddesses like sweets or snacks or meats of sacrificed animals and creatures are purified by chanting their names and then are made available for public consumption. This ceremonial procedure is called ‘Klārki Āthekār’. There is a story behind the origin of this ritual, which may rightly be considered as a myth narrative. As the narrative goes, the ritual had first been initiated at the house of a village-head named Borli-e. During those days the Karbis did not have any proper ceremonial procedure for performing a ritual or 'puja', and on one particular occasion the eatables objects were offered before the guests outside the house without any formality. At such a juncture of time, a report about the delivery of a child by the daughter-in-law of the village-head came from inside the house. In response to that news a girl busy serving the eatables to the gathering had been directed to cleanse the dirt and impurities caused by the childbirth. The particular girl was taught the art of
cleansing the dirt and she did everything accordingly. Meanwhile, Lāngmingpo instructed the other girls to resume their duty of serving the offerings among the people. The offerings were almost exhausted when the girl appointed for cleansing the dirt could not get her share. On being reported by that girl, Lāngmingpo offered a tiny portion of eatables from his share and asked the other people to do the same. Then the village-head told the girl that the offerings shared by him and the other people were her due, and that the impurities that might infect the offered items would turn pure, since none among them had eaten his share till then. From that day onward, as it is believed, the procedure for purification of this kind entered into their custom and has been followed till today.

vi) Okhung Āthekār: The Karbi people always use spears, harpoons and poisonous roots while setting out for hunting or fishing in the forests or rivers. They consider it as a taboo to eat the animals like deer or pigs and fishes during hunting expeditions by cooking them straightaway, then and there. The reason is, the meats might contain poison or impurity, and if taken instantly, the people might fall ill and get contaminated all of a sudden. Therefore, the meats should be taken after purifying them by the name of our saviour. This particular mode of purification is known as ‘Okhung Āthekār’.

vii) Chomāngkān: This beautiful custom of Karbi funerary ritual had been introduced by the great socio-religious reformer, Therē Bey, popularly known as Thi-reng Vāng-reng, the Karbi Lazarus, who is believed to have undertaken a reconnaissance into world of the dead as instructed by his ailing wife, Kavē Timungpi. It is believed without any smattering of doubt that the ritualistic formalities observed during ‘Chomāngkān’ had been introduced by that great social reformer, and the ritual has been observed since then both in letter and spirit.

viii) Vo 'kārtāp: This ritual is the most expensive one among three pious rituals performed at the residence of the maternal unce of a particular child suffering
from a protracted unknown or incurable disease or from eccentric behavioural syndrome in order to receive blessing and recuperation. ‘Andum Kehāng’ (asking for a morsel) and ‘Ārnān Kehom’ (putting a ring round the finger) are the other two rituals which are preliminary diagnostic and remedial measures for an ailing child, nephew, to be more precise. As per the existing belief of the people the person must seek blessings from his or her uncle (maternal), if the activity, behaviour, movement, and other characteristics of a person appear before other sane persons in the society to be different or eccentric, exceptional or idiosyncratic, or permanently ailing. However, such strange symptoms need be confirmed through the help of the priest. After fulfilling the first two ritualistic mores, the family members of the concerned ailing child must go for the most expensive, extensive, and effective ritual called ‘Vo’Karṭāp’ provided they want to enjoy complete recuperation of their suffering child. As per codes prescribed, The person (or his family) seeking blessing is required to approach the ‘Gaonburha’ (village-head) with ‘horbong’ (bottles of wine) after completing necessary arrangements for the ritual and on the very day of the ritual he/she has to invite all his/her kith and kin and family members. During this ritual the party seeking blessing (the cousins or nephews) and the maternal uncle exchange their mutual feelings through songs. The maternal uncle recites a long ‘shlukā’ (chant) seeking blessings from almighty God, and the thematic implication of the song bespeaks of the close attachment, respect as well as love and affection that exist between them. ‘Vo’ (country fowls) and ‘horlāŋ’ (traditional Karbi wine) are indispensable requisites for this ritual without which it cannot be performed. This disease can very rightly be designated as autism which might have appeared quite strange to the consciousness of the collective social psychiatry of the Karbis and, therefore, might have taken recourse to psycho-religious treatment when known medical remedies had failed, and hence pertinently called ‘Nihu Kāchiri’ (crying for [the blessing] for maternal uncle). This interesting ritual is believed to have originated long ago, as the folk tale, ‘Binong Jāngreso’, would have us believet,
which pertains to the agonizing tale of an orphaned boy of a particular Timung clan named Binong and his relatives.

“This belief has prevailed to this day. Persons suffering from ‘nihu kāchiri’ are therefore not treated as social outcasts. The belief has permeated the religious barriers as well and even the Christian converts perform the ritual as a cure of persons suffering from ‘nihu kāchiri’. Madness is attributed to an evil spirit, which can enter a person, irrespective of the person’s social status, as it is believed to be a pre-ordained happening. It is destiny or fate that is responsible.”[14]

ix) ‘Botor Kekur’: The Karbis worship various deities for good harvest as prescribed rites on the eve of sowing or planting the crops. When the entire villagers or the people of the vicinity perform such a ritual it is called Chili Kāpherāng or Botor Kekur, which is done by spraying chaffs of the paddies in the rivers and streams and invoking the rain goddess, Hāi-i, with a view to propitiating the concerned deities for making their lands fertile and driving away the possible evils and myriad other malevolent ghosts and spirits from the crop fields. This invocation to the rain goddess, Hāi-i, is made by the Kāthārbarā on the last day of the Vo’lo: Keter, a sacred annual worship of the Karbis normally held during the bright half of the moon in the month of February. The King and the subjects offer sacrifices to the Karbi Trinity—‘Hemphu’, ‘Mukrāng’ and ‘Rāsingjā’, though the invocation to Hāi-i, the rain goddess assumes much importance as indispensable and sacred fertility rite among the agrarian and hill-dwellers, the Karbi people, who keep anxiously waiting for the soothing and life-giving drizzles during the dry month of February.

“The Volo Keter is still prevalent among the Karbis in its capital which is surrounded by rivulets like the Umrasi, Umkhem, Amlong etc. and has been observed without any break. The social history, social systems, religion, philosophy, culture and folk belief of the Karbis have been expressed through its observance.”[15]
(i) The Karbi Cosmogony: Hemphu popularly known also as Songsār Recho is believed to have been the creator of the universe along with the human and non-human worlds. He is also known by various names ‘Lāngmeng’ (Lāngming), ‘Lāngmingpo Vo’hāng’, ‘Phuthé-Phithé’, ‘Āhem Āri’, ‘Kim Ārnām’, ‘Bochē Ārnām’ etc. depending upon his various incarnations.

It is believed that the universe did not exist or have any organic shape in the distant past. Therefore, it induced Hemphu to speculate upon the necessity of creating the universe. That great act and urgency necessitated him to share views and counselling with that of the other gods and goddesses, and consequently created this world along with its mountains, valleys and plains; rivers and other water bodies; trees, plants and creepers; animals and other creatures; birds and reptiles as a part of this vast universe. After accomplishing his intended task, Hemphu then went back to heaven. Having a bird’s eye view down this universe from above he found it very fascinating and was elated to the extreme. However, he was saddened to discover no one to appreciate the beauty and the creator of such a grand universe. It was so because he had forgotten to endow the faculty of feeling or reasoning upon any creature. Thus, out of necessity, he came down to this universe again to render the Nelson touch to his creation. With that purpose in mind he intended to create human beings—the greatest of all beings, and accordingly appointed the god, Rangbeni, to carry out the process of creation further on. He proceeded on to the works of creation with utmost devotion. First of all, Rangbeni moulded two different shapes of human beings having different organs—male and female. The shapes became attractive after being endowed with life. Thus, he kept on propagating human beings pairs after pairs. At a stage when he started facing shortage of materials of creation Rangbeni intimated Hemphu one day that he found no increase in his earlier creations, and therefore, they ought to think about proliferation of their
family. Consequently, Hemphu empowered the human beings with the knowledge and ability to procreate, and thus their number started growing ever after.

According to another version of the Karbi cosmogony\(^{23}\), long long ago, the gods, Hemphu and Mukrang, took counsel together and created the universe. They demarcated the boundaries of their by setting up four posts and fastened them tight with their mother’s hairs. Then they looked for seeds to produce the earth, but having failed in that venture consulted one hundred other gods and their wives. One of those wives, i.e., Bāmon’s wife, was sent to beg for some earth from the god, Hilong Recho\(^{24}\), but the latter refused to show generosity for the fear that a rival world might be fashioned out of his world and hence he sent her away empty-handed. However, on her way back home Bāmon’s wife stole a cast of earth worm, which, however, proved inadequate, until the god, Hilong Recho worked up a huge amount of earth which later became the world of ours. The help of the blacksmith, Kāprāng also was taken. After the completion of the creation of the earth, Rākbepi, the goddess, brought seed from the west and sowed it. Yet in another version, Rākbepi was believed to have spread the seeds on the banks of the Kolong river, which later germinated to be bamboo plants without joints. However, the goddess later collected them and tied with threads and hence from that time onward bamboos have scars on the joints.

Next came the creation of animals. Hemphu and Mukrang were the leaders, but they were assisted by ‘Pitē’ and ‘Pothe’\(^{25}\). The elephant was first created to be a servant of man. Then the tiger was made and bidden to eat the wicked. Then a great council was held, and it was decided to create a being called ‘ārleng’ meaning ‘man’. The first ‘ārleng’ was Bāmonpo who had two wives— one Mikir and the other Assamese. The two wives of Bāmonpo had remained barren for long years, but after eating the oranges fetched by him from the garden of the elder brother of the Assamese wife, each of them had a son. The son begotten by the Mikir wife was named as Rām, who was very strong and valiant; on the other hand, the son of the
Assamese wife was named Chaputi, who was very weak and puny. As the myth has it, Rām got an egg during one of his hunting expeditions, which he carried home. It was a large egg and for some days he forgot to look at it. Later on, when he went to see it, he found that the egg was broken, and a beautiful woman came forth from it. The demons tried to seize and carry her off, but Rām vanquished them all, and made her his wife. She was very fruitful, and her children multiplied until they were numbered by the thousands. Thus Rām’s fame spread throughout the world.

ii) Kārbi Keplāng and the Moserā Kihir: The creation myth recounting the origin of human race along with Karbis known as ‘Kārbi (Munit) Keplāng’, which can be taken as a sequel to the cosmogony of the race interlinked by the mythical bird, Vo’ plākpi and the eggs she had laid, is indicative of the amount of poetic ingenuity possessed by the community. The origin myth is recited by the Klengsārpo (the Head of village youths) or his deputy (Klengdun) during the special ritual, ‘Riso Chojun’ (a ritual observed to mark the end of the compulsory tradition of ‘youth co-operative’ (jir keädām), which is known as the ‘Moserā Kihir’ (literally meaning recalling the past from memories). This ‘moserā’ also is sung during the Karbi funerary ritual called ‘Chomāngkān’ or ‘Thī-kārhi’ in a question-answer fashion between the Heads of the village youths (terāng) vying against one another to show their capacity to hold breath while reciting the verse narrative. ‘Moserā’ is, in reality, a mythical ballad re-enacting the entire history associated with that of the migration and origin of the race and a lengthy verse narrative with a distinctive style of rendition sung in a breathless manner.

The ‘Kārbi Keplāng’ or the ‘Munit Keplāng’ offers us a comprehensive knowledge about the egg cosmogony of the Karbis who still believe to have descended from ‘Vo’ plākpi’, which is recited during Chomāngkān and Riso Chojun, both the rituals being very important for the community.
iii) Lunse Kepläng: It is the folk narrative that states elaborately about the origin of songs and music and teaching of the same by Rāngsinā Sārpo to the Karbi people with the help of the Mirjeng brothers\(^{26}\). The legendary music maestro had directed the Mirjeng brothers to descend to the world (of the Karbis) with a view to preaching among the Karbis about the history of origin of various rituals and music or songs. Accordingly, the duo landed into the world of the mortals and started teaching the people about the necessity of giving various offerings. The youths of the ‘jir kedām’, after adorning themselves with new dresses and by presenting a few offerings, entreated the Mirjeng brothers to instruct the Karbis living in this mortal world about the origin of music or songs and further to inculcate about the art of acquiring necessary skill in this field. The Mirjeng brothers then taught the Karbis about the origin and development of music and songs and at last returned towards heaven after getting necessary offerings and receiving due honour. And from that time onward music and songs came to the Karbi society.

That is the reason why, the Karbis still pay due homage to Rāngsinā Sārpo by acknowledging the debt the society owes to him:

Ān Kārbi keplāṅg āko’
Kārbi ke’ kāve lūn tomo
Kāngkoibeng ālūn hānjo’
Irū bāṅgke’ Rāmsinā Sārpo
Lāsi lotum āphū do
Lotum ke’ dolo’ mung phāro
Lotun bāng ājāt jāt thānpo
Ili sokārbi āso
Iru Rāmsinā Sārpo. \(^{27}\)

(Before the creation of the Karbis there had been no music. At those times people used to imitate some discordant sounds of the ‘kongkoibeng’\(^{28}\). Our father, Rāmsinā (Rāngsinā) Sārpo had initiated the tradition of music and culture in the land of the Karbis. He was the progenitor of music. We (the Karbis) were taught music by Rāmsinā Sārpo.)
Rängsină Särpo, who had left behind him a number of ritualistic songs to his Karbi offspring, is not only the great maestro of music but also an untiring social organizer and a farsighted reformer, and hence has been acknowledged as the heartbeat of culture by them. The devotees of that very versatile genius therefore have immortalized their ‘guru’ in the form of legend which has been transmitted from centuries after centuries through oral means:

Si urti kängdukso’
Si Sum Kärbi äso’ / Äve’ lun temo’
Si kedo ki pen ko’ / Si bäng ru songsăr recho’
Si bäng ephărli tângthu / Bâng Sum Kärbi äso’
Ave’ lun temo’ / Si nâng Mirjeng musoso’
Le sopirthe’ chelo’ / Râ pârjân jängreso’
Jâ sun Telehor lângso’ / Bâng âpunso chokpho’
Eru Rängsină Särpo’ / Kedo run màro’
Si äsengkun re’co’ / Si läle’ thândâmnon lun temo’
Pu ru songsăr recho’ / Si bäng nângtoi musoso
Mirjeng musoso’ / Bâng somindâr nânglo’
Si bâng juidun là rongro’ / Si pânâplur râ do’
Si ru Rängsină Särpo’ / Chitin ârâplu
Si Rängsină Särpo’ / Chepon run màro’
Si bâng Mirjeng musoso’ / Lâmbidi kârju
Si Rängsină Särpo’ / Nâng thekmâ lun temo’
Si Rängsină Särpo’ / O’k änthhin ârlo’
Mirjeng musoso’ / Ke’ bâng ju pinkhâtdetlo’
Si Rängsină Särpo’ / Nângthek lun temo’
Si ru Rängsină Särpo’ / Si li sum Kärbi kurpho’
Tâ bâng thän nângmum kânglo’ .....[29]

(When the earth was young, the Karbi progenitors of Sum had no knowledge of music, the Mirjeng brothers in the guise of snotty kids descended by the bank of river Telehor where together with the grand Rängsină, they taught the art to the tribe as wished by the Lord of the Universe, that is, Great Hemphu.)

This myth is wholly about the origin of songs and hymns in the Karbi society, and presents a rich repertoire of different genres of songs sung or recited during various ritualistic occasions. Some of the most important songs incorporated in the
Lunse Keplâng repository, which are still in vogue present a cornucopia of myths. These myths are not only preserved as mere reminiscence of some past incidents but also as mores and beliefs deep-rooted in the present as if "the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence..."[30]

The myths providing etiological raison de'être for the theory and praxis of the belief and practice of the Karbis as bequeathed by Rângsînâ Sârpo are given below:

i)  Ādām Āsâr Kemānchang / Piso Pāngri: Thelu Âlun – Ve'Longbi and Hār Longbi narrative.

ii)  Lākhi (Sok) Keplâng: Teron Rongsopo narrative.

iii)  Sok Keroi: The festival of the Corn Deity, 'Pî-Lokhimi'; Hâchâ Kekân and Hâchâ Âlun.

iv)  Bong Kemān: The origin of the bottle-gourd and songs associated with it; Rangmukrang narrative.

v)  Thāp Lāpen Hor Kemān: The discovery of the yeast for rice beer and the songs associated with it, i.e., Porom Âlun; Kareng – Kading narrative.

vi)  Birik keplâng: Origin of the chilies and songs pertaining to it; Terong Rongsopo narrative.

vii)  Sābin Âlun: The Karbi Ramayana and its recital; Bamonpo, Ram-Lakhan-Sinta Kungri narrative.

Apart from the above and outside the Lunse Keplâng repository, we can also notice the existence of a good number of oral narratives, i.e., legends and mythical ballads authenticating the origin of many ritualistic practices in the Karbi society, which are still remembered and observed with reverence and pomposity. They are:

i)  'Binong Jāngresâ' necessitated the introduction of the ritual called 'Nihu Kâchiri' or 'Vo 'kârtāp'.
ii) 'Hāi-imu' helped to initiate 'Botor Kekur' ritual—Invocation to Rain Goddess, 'Hāi-i'; 'Hāi-i Ālun'; 'Long-Hāi-i' mythical ballad.

iii) 'Āron Jutāng Kemān': the origin of mores, rites and rituals; Lāngmingpo (Hemphu)-Rangmukrang narrative and songs associated with it.

iv) 'Mān Peng Kepnāngcheng': the introduction of the hierarchical structure in the society; Kaku-Sam Teron (ideal couple) narrative.

v) 'Riso Ārnām': the initiation of the veneration of the young god; the Cheleng Āthepai mass suicide tragedy and song sung in sad nostalgia.

vi) 'Rong Keseng': the organization of village co-operative; Ru-Kasen-Basapi narrative and songs associated with it.

vii) 'Sār Kēbāt': conferring the title of honour, i.e. 'Gaonburha'; Hār Bāmon narrative and songs associated with it.

viii) The first 'Jirsong': Karbi youth co-operative; Hār Bāmon narrative and songs associated with it.

ix) 'Jirsong Chekāk': the closing ceremony of a jirsong; 'Bey hempi' and Dichumai Rongpi narrative.

x) 'Jāṃbili Āthon': The symbol of unity among the youths as well as the five clans of the Karbis; Sār Vo'pong- Lakhan-Long Teron-Sār Rongbong narrative; the indispensable cultural artifact for the Chomāṅgkān; the reflection of the aesthetic excellence of the community.

Festivals of the Karbis— the Watchdog of Culture:

The Karbis are lovers of music and dance which are the external manifestation of the inherent poetic sensibility possessed by the people of the community. The festivals whether they are related to fertility or harvesting or to death of a person have the vivid bearing upon the optimistic view of the world which is expressed through frolicsome merry-making accompanied by music and dance, and articulated through a deep and innate poetic talent.
i) 'Chojun': 'Chojun' is yet another Karbi worship which is performed both privately by a particular family and by the entire villagers collectively for three consecutive days with a view to bringing welfare to the family members or the society. Whenever it is observed collectively it is called 'Rek-Āpirhāt'. In any case, however, it is associated with a particular myth. According to the myth, this ritual is related to a great boar incarnated in human form as 'Kining Kirip'. When the ritual is conducted to propitiate that particular god, it is called 'Chojun Ārnām Kēthē Klārki' or 'Swarag Puja', i.e., the worship of heaven. The prayer that is offered by the 'Kurusār' or the priest is actually a hymn or an invocation to heavenly or household gods for divine assistance.

ii) 'Rongker': The Karbis celebrate Rongker ritual before the start of the jhum cultivation, and hence this ritual can be termed as a pre-harvest fertility magic or rite. This ritual is a kind of community prayer with a view to appeasing the god called 'Ārnām Phārou' so that evils can be driven away from the society. The typicality of this ritual is that only the men folk, no woman, can take part in it.

iii) 'Sok-keroi': Sok-keroi, etymologically meaning 'carrying of the paddy' is a Karbi festival observed at the end of every harvesting season. The ripe paddy is mowed and taken to a place specially cleared in the field. Then the paddy is husked on the floor and is collected. A large number of young men go and store the husked grains in bags and bring them home. In no time there ensues a great rejoicing and the young ones dance to their hearts' content. During this festival one person is selected as the leader who provides the leadership in dancing and singing. He is called 'Lunsepo' who acts like the director of frolicsome moments of folk life replete with singing and dancing, musical cadence and vibrant rhythm of life.

iv) 'Hāchā-Kekān': The 'Hāchā-Kekān' is not exactly based on the folk tales. It is a festival associated with post-harvest rejoicings. There is no fear element in it and hence no propitiation to any god is needed. It is to be assumed that the
ˈHāchā-Kekān’ is secular in its ‘activities and so differs substantially from that of ‘Rongker’ in which propitiation is an indispensable mores. ‘Hāchā Kekān’ is also a dance form performed by the folk and the genre of song that is sung in tune with the music and dance is called ‘Hāchā Ālun’.

v) ‘Chomāṅgkān’: Although the Karbis perform the funeral ceremony at the time of the cremation of the deceased, they also perform the death ceremony called “Chomāṅgkān” at a later date for the eternal peace of the deceased. It is the most elaborate and expensive socio-religious ceremony of the Karbis and so the fixation of the date for this is dependent upon the convenience and economic solvency of the concerned family. This festival continues consecutively for four days and four nights. The ceremony does not require any formal invitation and all are welcome to it. In spite of the sad undertone, it is an important occasion for the family to welcome all with great warmth. They come in batches and everyone carries a symbolic and ceremonial totem with five branches. At the top of main totem, there is a wooden “Vo’jāru” (racket-tailed drongo). The totem is called “Jāmbili Āthon”. This is the symbolic representation of the unity and integrity of the five major clans of the tribe and is also the vivid representation of the perfect and interfusing aesthetic taste of the community as a whole. ‘Chomāṅgkān’ etymologically stands for ‘Dance of the Khasis’ (Chomāṅ+ Kekān), but albeit, considering the source of its origin from a myth associated with a superhuman, Thi-reng Vāng-reng who was believed to have learned the ritual from the underworld, it seems more probable that it is the ‘dance to please the ruler of the hell or the underworld’ (Chom+Ārong+Kekān). Whatever may be the meaning or implication, however, Chomāṅgkān clearly bespeaks of the belief of the Karbi people about the efficacy of rejoicing as the means of overcoming the myriad obstacles and trials of life and beyond, which otherwise, would remain ever indecipherable mystery beyond human comprehension compelling one to go for sad brooding.
There are three kinds of Chomāngkān, namely; i) Hārnē, ii) Lāngtuk, and iii) Kānplāphlā, the first one being the most expensive and hence performed only by the rich, and rest two being the most common and customary among the middle class Karbis.

The song form sung during Chomāngkān is known as ‘Kepā-er-Ālun’, and the verse incantation as ‘Moserā Kihir’, which is recited by the Klengsārpo in the third night of the festival.

In the first night of the Chomāngkān a procession, known as Rong Ketāṅ, is arranged from the residence of the Village-head which is participated by a group of old and young people irrespective of gender. Dance, music and song enhance the aura of merriment and pomposity of this mass procession. Some of the dance forms demonstrated during it are Nimso Kerung, Bānjār Kekān, Chongkāchīngnāṅ, Kengtir Kekān, Risomār Kāchīng, and so forth.

Thus, from the above corroborative illustrations we can come to the conclusion that the cornucopia of the beliefs and practices, rites and rituals, customs and traditions are synchronized ideological vision buttressed upon mundane as well as spiritual wisdom of the enlightened souls who had emerged at critical junctures of time and dedicated his/her precious life-span for the betterment of the community. Interestingly as envisaged by those holy souls those socio-cultural and religious beliefs concretized into various ritualistic practices had given tangible shape and stature to the worldview that the entire community shared with each other. Interestingly further, this worldview bequeathed by the forefathers of the community has been accepted as meaningful till today since those beliefs and practices that had once set their culture into motion are still observed by the people. The unique, vibrant and beautiful cultural tradition propagated through a strong ideological legacy thus has been perpetuated by the Karbi people till the post-modern era even by defying strong waves of change over the centuries, which certainly augurs well.
for the amelioration of their racial and cultural identity. In this context, the wise admonition of the legendary old lady named Marongpi to the duo, Ve’ Longbi and Hār Longbi, is worth mentioning:

Mo’ durmi ingtāngri (tā)
Māhusi pinsong āniti
Tung-e Hār Longbi pen
Li-e Ve’ Longbi si
Pinsong āniti pu
Nāng porom do’ji.[31]

(The future generation will put question as to who had introduced this beautiful custom. They will respect you, (Oh, Ve’ Longbi and Hār Longbi) after learning that both of you had first introduced it.)

Notes:


3. The date on which the term ‘Mikir’ was altered as ‘Karbi’ by the government.


5. Ibid.


7. A portion of eatable items offered to gods and goddesses being the people take it.

233
8. Worship of gods and goddesses for blessings.
9. A dress wrapped round the waist by a Karbi woman.
10. A dress wrapped round the bosom by a Karbi woman.
11. A dress wrapped round the bosom by a Karbi woman.
12. Throat.
13. A makeshift hut built at the site of the jhum-field.
16. Literally, the King of the world or universe.
17. Literally, one who 'came from the water'.
18. Literally, one who 'came from the water in search of country fowls'.
19. Great Grandfather and Mother.
20. Nucleus or the Heart of the House.
21. The Sustainer.
22. God of Fertility and welfare of the family.
23. Another version of Karbi cosmogony different from the Vo'plākpi concept.
24. The King of the Earthworms.
25. Great grandmother and grandfather.
26. Long Mirjeng and Sing Mirjeng.
28. Mere cacophony produced by the animals and various elemental forces of Nature.

**Works Cited:**


Web: www.karbiwordpress.com /2008/2/26/Understanding the Karbi Folk Religion; D.S. Teron/27/5/2012)