Preface

The Karbis, officially known and designated as ‘Mikir’ till 1976, are undoubtedly among the richest tribes of Assam as well as the entire Northeast India who have a unique and vibrant cultural heritage. The kind of culture that the Karbi people own are made up of divergent yet colourful spectra of folk wisdom and racial consciousness which are bequeathed generation after generation as a rich legacy through oral practices. In such society, buttressed upon the rickety structure of oral tradition, the philosophical, psychological, sociological, economical, political, religious and ecological concerns are interwoven into such a ‘complex whole’ that no activity can distinctly be encapsulated within a specific domain and can be segregated from the rest of the ‘social pattern’. This ‘complex whole’ can be very pertinently called as an abstract yet synchronized belief-system, which in turn represents the typical worldview of the people. This belief-system, on the other hand, is concretized in the forms of various rites and rituals, verbal and performing, art forms only to make their culture beautiful and panoramic.

However, human memory can be deceptive and therefore the rich and beautiful cultural tradition of the Karbis must be preserved in durable formats.

But unfortunate that such a huge repertoire of the oral narratives so carefully preserved and lovingly treasured by the Karbis in the past are often whimsically being distorted and neglected. As a natural consequence, they are on the wane and are about to be merged into oblivion, partially due to disinterest and apathy shown by the budding generation, and mainly because of the deplorable lack of proper exploration and studies, scientific analyses and data-based or purpose-oriented research in this field. Thus the crying need of the hour is to give a serious thought on the preservation of these precious gems of folk wisdom because these narratives are intrinsically pregnant with a great amount of mundane, spiritual, and philanthropic knowledge and ideals. They may be of
immense help in retracing the ‘roots’ of migration, ethnological, linguistic, cultural and religious past associated with the tribe, if studied and analyzed methodically. Such an endeavour will help in reinforcing the ever-eroding beliefs and worldview of the Karbis, and will propagate keen awareness about them in the minds of the coming generations. This venture further will grow in their minds a sense of love and patriotism, and will help them live a well-ordered, decent and civilized life at par with the valuable teachings of the past by many social thinkers, reformers and prophets of the yore. Most importantly at last, such studies and the findings thereof will de-intensify the growing propensity of many modern Karbis for deviating from the traditional religion and culture practiced and believed in since time immemorial by their forefathers.

The above are the reasons which induced me to think about choosing the area of the folk narratives of the Karbis and provoked my unschooled mind to undertake the present research work. The domain of the oral narratives of the community is too extensive which is next to impossible for any researcher or even an erudite scholar to attempt an all-inclusive or exhaustive writing on it. Therefore, I have tried my best to focus on only some quintessential yet hitherto unexplored aspects pertaining to the theme in general, which I sincerely believe, will render a small service to those who are interested in knowing about the oral tradition of the Karbis, especially the future researchers in this field.

However, I am indebted to a good number of wise and benevolent people in achieving my goal. I must offer my gratitude to Dr. P. C. Das, my guide and source of inspiration, whose dynamic personality will always keep me inspiring even in the time to come and his family. Thanks and gratitude are also due from my end to Dr. K. Bhatta sir, Dr. A. Bodo sir, Dr. M. Medhi sir, Dr. D. Kalita sir, Utpal Hajong, Hoen, Ananta, Marak, my wife, Mrs. M. Millickpi and only daughter, Kayum (Perdita), rmy colleagues, my in-laws and many known and unknown village folks living in the hilly terrains of Hamren
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Place: Guwahati

Date:  

(Kamala Kanta Bori)