CHAPTER- 1

POETIC INGENUITY AND IMAGINATIVE FACULTY OF THE KARBIS:

"O! ri’ pen ro’
Irindi thü no’
Sum pheleng et jo
Thurjo dei thrurjo
Veng veng chukret. [1]

(O! mother and father,
Enemies have arrived in the courtyard,
With weapons for chopping heads
Escape stealthily
Veng veng chukret.)

The Karbis as a race possess tremendous poetic ingenuity which is convincingly revealed through a large amount of their oral narratives. The oral narratives are, in reality, verse narratives sung or recited and are constructed upon moving and melodious notes of enthralling music teeming with rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and symphony. In fact, they are the perfect folk-ballads indicative of their exuberance and "the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility" depicting their simple, rural and idyllic lifestyle lived in conjunction with that of the ever-mysterious Nature. The ethos and pathos, joy and sorrow, loss and gain, success and failure of the Karbis are vividly reflected through various personae of the oral narratives and they are shown to be having keen and intuitive poetic sensibilities that are born out of their innate psychic consciousness. Thanks to Rangsina Sarpo, the first mentor of music, art and culture of the Karbis, who was believed to have enlightened them and brought a renaissance in the domain of art and aesthetics by acting like a sauntering folk singer assisted by the Mirjeng[2] brothers. As a stanza from a folk song perpetuated through oral tradition would have us believe that it was Rangsina who first had blessed the Karbis by introducing music and songs:
"Judet Rāṅgsinā Sārpo
Mo pirthe' longle' ingtāṅgko
Kārbī lun āṅgthun do' po'":[2]

(The Karbi music wizard Rangsina had blessed the people by assuring them of the creation of music in the world of the mortals, i.e., the Kārbis)

According to a myth, Lunse' Keplāṅg[3], it was Brahma[4] who had sent Rangsina, the Karbi music guru, to this (Karbi) world with a view to inculcating and preaching knowledge of music and art to the people. As the saying goes, having taken some rest after accomplishing the mission of creation, almighty Brahma observed, quite to his dismay and discontent, that the Kārbis were suffering from restlessness and an unknown agony. Having failed to sense they could neither give an outlet to their pleasure or pain, joys or sorrows. Nevertheless, a sense of deprivation of something seemed to be hovering on their eyes and faces. Brahma further observed that the people started imitating the buzzing sounds of the wind, the musical cadences of the streams and rivers, the melodious chirpings of the birds and the variety of animal cries being completely self-oblivious. The people were not able to express their pain of not getting something, their joys and sorrows, cares and anxieties in a meaningful way, and those lingering and recurring sense of incompleteness induced Brahma to send Rangsina Sarpo to the world (of the Kārbis) to fulfil his lofty vision of creation. However, we must corroborate the above observations about the folk narratives of the Kārbis by analyzing them from synchronic perspective.

The Oral Narratives and the Inherent Poetic Ingenuity of the Race:

Prior to the invention of letters and when spoken words had ruled the world, human beings must have lived in the magical influence of music and melodies being guided by their imitative instincts. The sights and sounds produced by myriad animals and creatures, natural and elemental entities and forces must have appealed
their latent poetic selves to imitate Nature. That is the reason why the oldest form of poetry happened to be the epics and the most popular genre was the ballads, both being verse narratives. This corroborates that all the human beings of the entire world, irrespective of culture and nationality, had been poets either by imitation or by intuition, and the Karbis also were no exception. However, the Karbis had keener interest and predilection in expressing their sensory experiences through poetic languages than many races of the world. Song and dance propelled by a spontaneous poetic instinct permeate the life world of the Karbis. That is the reason why they sing, when they are sad; they sing, when they are happy; when a child is born or even someone dies, they sing and dance too. So strong is the singing and dancing tradition in this community that it can be described as lubricating oil that the Karbis apply on their ‘Wheel of Life’ as they transact different facets of their being. The veracity of this inherent poetic ingenuity and intuitive faculty possessed and inherited by the race since time immemorial, and the transmission of that folk wisdom generation after generation can be seen vividly manifest in many of the oral narratives owned as well as preserved by them. This is so because apart from the existing folk epic and ballads owned by the community many of the oral narratives were handed down to the later generations in the form of songs, chorus and chants covering a wide range of their socio-cultural, metaphysical, religious and economic spectra.

A. The Domain of the Karbi Myths:

(i) The Karbi Cosmogony: Hemphu or Songsār Recho\(^5\), according to the Karbis, is the creator of the universe along with the human and non-human worlds. He is also known as Lāngmeng (Lāngming), Lāngmingpo Vo’hāng\(^6\), Phuthe-Phithe\(^7\), Āhem Ārī\(^8\), Kim Ārnām\(^9\), Bochē Ārnām\(^10\) etc. As narrated in the myth the universe did not exist or have any organic shape in the distant past. Hemphu, therefore, speculated upon the necessity of creating the same. That 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, however, 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 have discovered that there was none to appreciate the beauty and the creator of such a grand universe. The reason behind this was that he had not endowed 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.

The Rongkikim Alun[11], which is a tribute to Ru-Kasen as master musician, narrates before us the Karbi cosmogony identical with that of the ‘Chaos’ theory. This mythical ballad is replete with beautiful passages of verse, which evince the poetical ingenuity possessed by the Karbi people in general. The verse that narrates the story of the origin of the universe out of nothing moves with the rhythm and pace of the phases of creation accomplished by Hemphu:

Chudi pîrbi thävi velâng
Iru Bormâ po’ märng;
Läsi pirthe’ kim nääng räng
Achein häng chijädi aläm /…
Phiju-kärle’ srojon phang,
Srojon lo’ läbit-lächäi än/
Srojon lo’ thengpi pen thengphräng //…
Täsäm nätsi länği länɡ,
Chethäk äbäŋg ätäsäm /
Änsi näängthip-theng pängjang,
Änsi thip-theng srojon täng /……
Kärbi long sting ong täsäm,
Ongong hi-i pen ārnäm
Mähusi räikomji äbäŋg?
Irä Längmingpo’ vo’häng,
Läsi räikomji äbäŋg /
Kärbi voleng rengdok jäm,
Nängdo’ don suri pleng räng // [12]

(Brahma, the creator, had created this world after a deep cogitation. Then he created living creatures, birds, elephants, tigers, bears, fishes, tortoises, ants, trees, creepers, mountains, hills, rivers, rivulets and so forth. But he realized that the creation of man (i.e., the Karbis) remained unaccomplished. Creation could not be complete without man. But, the creation of man appeared to be challenging for there was no any perfect and ideal model which could help in this connection. However, finding no other alternative, Brahma resolved to create man on the model of his own person. He then divided his body into two halves and from one of them he created man. But he had to confront with yet another problem, because the creation of man led to the creation of demons too. Due to the awful oppression of the demons, it became well nigh impossible to survive. Thus, the creation of Brahma proceeded towards destruction. Being unable to save the creation, Brahma created grandfather Lengmingpo to look after the creation. He created one thousand families of the Karbis, i.e., man).

The creation myth recounting the origin of human race along with Karbis known as ‘Karbi (Munit) Kepläng’, which can be taken as a sequel to the cosmogony of the race interlinked by the mythical bird, Vo’ Pläkpi[13] and the eggs
she had leid, is indicative of the amount of poetic ingenuity possessed by the community. The origin myth is recited by the Klengsärpo\textsuperscript{[14]} or Klengdun\textsuperscript{[15]} during the special ritual, ‘Riso Chaojun’\textsuperscript{[16]}, which is known as the ‘Moserā Kihir’\textsuperscript{[17]}. This ‘mosera’ also is sung during the Karbi funerary ritual called ‘Chomāngkān’ or ‘Thi-kārhi’ in a question-answer fashion between the Heads of the village youths (terang) 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. An excerpt of the Chinthong version of this myth can be cited as specimen:

\begin{verbatim}
Om...dei...Tiji le’ ākeng:ri lepu
Timur le’ ākeng:ri lepu
Longchong le’ ākeng:ri lepu
Long:e’ īā ākeng:ri lepu (Doublet)
Kārbi īā chetibin lepu
Kārāk īā chetibin lepu (Doublet)
Nāngphijijji nāngphī āhī’ lepu
Nāngphliṅgijji nāngplāṅg āhī’lepu (Doublet)
Bāṅg āsim tāṅgṭe’ lepu
Lā bāṅg Āhōm tāṅgṭe’ lepu
Lā bāṅg chomāng tāṅgṭe’ lepu
Lā bāṅg kechē’tāṅgṭe’ lepu
Lā bāṅg nākā tāṅgṭe’ lepu
Lā bāṅg nārā tāṅgṭe’ lepu (Dpublet)
Bāṅg ke’ plāṅkvuk āti lepu
Lā bāṅg plāṅkvuk-sō’ āti lepu
Āti ā pum-surī lepu
Āti ā pum-phārō lepu
Epum longchong pātī lepu
Epum long:e’ pātī lepu (Doublet)
Epum thepāi pātī lepu
Epum thereng pātī lepu (Doublet)
Epum kong-longvoivoi phiphlot chomāng māndet lepu
Epum kong-longvoivoi phiphlot keche’ māndet lepu
Epum kong-longvoivoi phiphlot Āhōm māndet lepu
\end{verbatim}
Epum kong-longvoivoi phiphot nákā mândet nārā mândet lep
Lā chinām läle'
Lā pāni ningke'...

(Once upon a time there was a tall tree called *Teji-Temur* standing upright at the base of huge stones and steep cliffs. A mythical bird, *Vo’plākpi* had laid thousands and hundreds of eggs at the base of the tree. The other non-Karbi races along with the Karbis were hatched out of those eggs one after another. The other race, namely, the Ahoms, the Khasis, the other non-Karbis, the Nagas were born out of the hundred eggs laid and hatched by the bird. On the other hand, the Karbis were hatched out of the last of the eggs.)

*Lunse Keplāng*, the folk narrative stating elaborately about the origin of songs and music and teaching of the same by Rangsina Sarpo to the Karbi people with the help of the *Mirjeng brothers*, is tinged with poetic excellence:

(i) Ethāk songārpo’ recho’
Chārnām bāŋ jādi pāme’ o’
Nāngtoike’ Mirjeng mūso’so’.
Nāngtum Mirjeng muso’so’
Nāngtum Mindār lo’ nāngpo-
Kārbi thān non lūn-temo.
Ānsi nānghir Mirjeng muso’so’
Mirjengke’ pārjān jāngreso’.
Longjengke’ pānāplurrā do’.
Kārū phonglongbi lāngdo’
Sokpām āmeisi nāng pho’.
Mirjengke’ chongmimerā do’
Judet Teron rong so’po’.
Sodār phāndiri recho’
Jili chām-ingthi non to’
Hākir pen tulohi meso’
Jili chām-ingthi koi lo’.
Limpi jili ātārso’.
Judet Sing Mirjeng recho’;
To’ lotun āmet nāngthān pho’.
(Rangsina Sarpo 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 Kedam’, 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 Miijeng brothers taught the Karbis about the origin and development of music and songs and returned towards heaven after getting necessary offerings and receiving due honour. And from that time onward music and songs came to the Karbi society.)

ii) Ān Kārbi keplāng āko’
Kārbi ke’ käve īn tomo
Kāngkoibeng ālun hānjo’
Iru bāngke’ Rāmsinā Sārpo
Lāsī lotum āphu do
Lotum ke’ dolo’ mung phāro
Lotun bāng ājāt jāt thānpo
Ili sokārbi āso
Iru Rāmsinā Sārpo. [21]

(Before the creation of the Karbis there had been no music. At those times people used to imitate some frightening roars of the clouds and the discordant sounds of the
frogs. Our father, Ramsina (Rangsina) Sarpo 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 Ramsina Sarpo.

(ii) Si urmi kāngdukso'  
 Si Šum Kārbi āso' / Āve' lun temo'  
 Si kedo ki pen ko' / Si bāng ru songśār recho'  
 Si bāng iphārli tāngpho / Bāng Šum Kārbi āso'  
 Ave' lun temo' / Si nāŋg Mirjeng musoso'  
 Le' sopirthe' chelo' / Rā pā rijān jāngreso'  
 Jā sun Telehor lāngso' / Bāng āpunso chokpho'  
 Eru Rāngsinā Šārpo' / Kedo run māro'  
 Si āsengkun re':o' / Si ālē thāndāmnoŋ lun temo'  
 Pu ru songśār recho' / Si bāng nāŋgtoī musoso'  
 Mirjeng musoso' / Bāng somindār nāŋlo'  
 Si bāng juidun lo rongro' / Si pānāphl rā do'  
 Si ru Šārāngsinā Šārpo' / Chitīn ārāplu so'  
 Si Rāngsinā Šārpo' / Chepon run māro'  
 Si bāng Mirjeng musoso' / Lāmbīdī ārju pho'  
 Si Rāngsinā Šārpo' / Nāŋg thekmā lun temo'  
 Si Rāngsinā Šārpo' / O'k āngthiān ārlo'  
 Mirjeng musoso' / Ke' bāng ju pinkhādētlo'  
 Si Rāngsinā Šārpo' / Nāŋgthek lun temo'  
 Si ru Rāngsinā Šārpo' / Si li Šum Kārbi kurpho'  
 Tā bāng thān nāngmum kānglo'.....[22]

(When the earth was young, the Karbi progenitors of Šum 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 Rangsina, they taught the art to the tribe as wished by the Lord of the Universe, that is, 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’ Keplāg repository are:
(i) **Lokhi Keplāng: (the origin of the paddy):**

Kāthi vāngve’ āko láng  
Long:le’ āngkor pāchorān  
Sining Āṅgkor jihur mān  
Lāsi pāchorān jorlāng // [23]

(This is the story of the time when the world was in its nascent stage and paddy was yet to be discovered. The Karbis used to eat wild yams and arums and to celebrate wedding ceremonies by preparing (rice) beer out of them.)

The above excerpt from a popular folk song occurring in Ru-Kasen cycle of songs pertaining to the story of the origin of the paddy is expressed in a very lyrical tone which is indicative of the poetic ingenuity of the entire community.

(ii) **Sok Keroi- the festival of the Corn Deity, ‘Pi-Lokhimi’: [24]**

Kuki Chin dāipo’  
Teron rongsopo’  
Chārnām chepinto’.  
Ve’ kāthi ve’ so’  
Konāt si do’?  
Lāng Kuleng si do’.  
Kuleng ābi so’  
Chupi pām rūṅ phro’;  
Dāndivār Sārpo’  
Lo’ māthum dāmpo’.  
Tim pen im ārlō’  
Nāṅg do’ tābe’ o’.  
O’ āmi chok lo’  
Rūn rūṅ si chelo’po’.[25]

(It was a person named Teron-Rongsopo who first preached about the virtue and glory of the paddy through songs. He had come across a host of ripe corns of paddies covering the entire banks of a stream while roaming in the jungle and could understand the utility of the crop. He therefore welcomed this precious life-
sustaining grain with due honour being accompanied by a large number of people of his village on a pious and auspicious day.)

(iii) **Botor Kekur- Invocation to Rain Goddess:**

The Karbis worship various deities for good harvest as per 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 Kāpherang* 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 Katharbura on the last day of the ‘Volo Keter’ 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 *Rāsimgjā*, though the invocation to *Hāi-i*, the rain goddess assumes more importance as indispensable and sacred fertility rite among the agrarian and hill-dwellers, Karbi people who keep anxiously waiting for the soothing and life-giving drizzles during the dry month of February.

The chant or the song recited by the royal priest, *Kāthārburā*, on this occasion sounds very much poetic in tone and texture:

Kāthī āphek o’
Jeng ārnoi nāng lo’
Chikung nune’ so’
Kāthī āphek o’.
Rāi pāpon pho’
Rā-i hākir recho’
Āngdume’ dumso’
Dungme’ chāmphi pho’
Rā chārnām thān-i non. [27]
(The chaffs of the paddy are being offered by us on the currents of the rivers and the streams. O, Dorikona fishes, carry this tiding to the king of the seas.)

The song recited by the Kathārbura turns more poetic when he goes on to persuade the fishes further to convey the news to the king of the seas for bumper harvest and appeal the deities to accept his prayer:

Jo ser phe-e', rup phe-e'
Aroi nāngkelo ājeng nāngkelo;
Chīkung āsong nune' āsong
Pābu ponrā pārbāk ponrā,
Hākir recho ākengri
Ipi ākengri ipo ākengri,
Birtā thāndām non
Chālā thāndām non.
Lokhi keme' āphān
Serong keme' āphān
Jāngnei keme' āphān
Hīpī keme' āphān
Bīrik keme' āphān
Inghum kedok pi nāngji
Ārve' kedok pi nāngji.

(O the prawns and the shoals of Dorikona fishes we are offering chaffs of golden and silver hue for you by spraying them in the currents of the rivulets and streams. Therefore, convey the tiding to the king of the seas so that he can bless us with an affluent harvest by helping the brinjals and chilies to grow healthy. Please send the innocent clouds and the rain to our world. O! the deities of the streams and the rivulets, please accept our offerings.)

(iv) Bong Kemān: (the origin of the bottle-gourd):

'Bong', signifying the bottle-gourd, had its origin, as intended by Great Hemphu, in a very interesting way out of a creeper germinated from the teeth of Rangmukrang, and it became an indispensable and most revered cultural item of the Karbis since then. The Karbis have recorded this mythical phenomenon in the racial
memory, which is sung as ritualistic hymns during various socio-cultural occasions, especially during ‘Adam Asār', and the hymns associated with this cosmic event testify the poetic ingenuity of the entire community.

(v) ‘Thāp Kemān’: (the discovery of the yeast):

‘Thāp Kemān’ or the myth associated with that of the origin of the rice cake used for fermenting rice beer is also a glaring example of the proficiency for poetic sense possessed by the Karbis as a race. As the myth has it, the rice cake originated from the faeces discharged by the pair of ‘Kongching’ birds (actually the disguised shapes of the two sons of Hemphu), which was coincidentally discovered by the two daughters of Rangmukrang, Kareng and Kading when they were taking bath in the Kuleng river. The following excerpt intimates us with the generous decision of Hemphu or Songsārpo (the king of the world) to introduce the divine nectar, ‘horlāng’ or wine into this world (of the Karbis):

Songsārpo māhin
Bāng ipārlip tāngding;
Jādi sāmphlir ding
So’ pirbi āhin;
Kāvedet kongching
Jorlāng āvepin;
So Kārbi āhin
Pidāmnon kongching. [32]

(The God of Heaven came to learn that no ‘jorlāng’ (Rice beer) was prevalent in the Karbi society. Even no herbal cake was produced till then. Hence, God directed his two sons to teach the art of preparing the same to the Karbi people.)

During ritualistic invocations to Hemphu, Mukrāng and Rāsingjā (the Trinity of Karbi religion) along with other minor gods and goddesses for the well-being of the concerned family as well as the entire society the following hymn is chanted:

Iru rāng si-im /
Ājāng reng pen ding //
(As directed the duo came down to the mortal world and flew towards the Kuleng river, on the bank of which the village of Rangmukrang, Miring Rongsopi was located in the guise of a pair of kingfisher birds to execute their father’s errand.)

It is believed that ‘horlang’ or rice beer tastes sweet only then when it is prepared in the name of God, and we get a reference of this practice in a popular folk song:

Lābāngso āhormu mo pirthe’ kāngtāng
Longle’ kāngtāng āntā ārmām
Ārni āphān kāngdun-kāduve-i
Lāpen kethe’ keding āphān mān-i
Peng-i longji tāngte’ nemāng kethēk
Ātēng pen nāng cheplāng non
Āhok nāngmān non dei.......[

(Kareng and Kading prepared the rice beer as shown in the dream by offering prayer to God.)

In the same folk song we also come across a beautiful poetic description of the ecstatic pleasure experienced by Rangmukrang after having a sip of that nectarine ‘horlang’ being prepared by his own daughters, and from that time onward that divine thing was regarded as an indispensable item for propitiating the gods and goddesses:

Rāngmukrāng lābāngso’ āhor jundet pen /
Ā-ōk rengmejir lāpen //
Āning ārong āje āning ke-oi āsun āvepīn /
Kāngchir-kelāk āvepīn //
(After taking a sip of the 'horlang', Rangmukrang felt very happy both physically and mentally. All the cares and anxieties, fatigue, hunger and thirst seemed to have vanished in no time. He felt that this 'horlang' brewed out of rice was like nectar in taste. Further, he realized if that particular object was to be used in the rituals then all the gods and goddesses would certainly be satisfied.)

(vi) 'Nihu Kāchiri' and the 'Vo'kārtāp' Ritual:

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 uncle (maternal). 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) ‘Andum Kehang’[36], 2) ‘Ārṇān Kehom’[37], and 3) ‘Vo’kārtāp’ provided he/she wants to enjoy complete recuperation. Among these rituals ‘vo’kārtāp’ is the most expensive one. The person (or his family) seeking blessing is required to approach the village-head with ‘hor bong’, (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 ‘shluka’ (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.

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'Vo' (country fowls) and 'horlang' (traditional Karbi wine) are indispensable requisites for this ritual without which it cannot be performed. The following are the specimens of the songs to be sung by both the parties in turns, which are loaded with exquisite poetic elements:

a) Thelu (the maternal uncle):

Ja sänglin pen klirme'
Pāni rāni le'
Rālong ārni me'
Thelu ārūn me' (le')
Lo'humri nängle'.
Nāṅg jorlāṅg bongme'
Dengkho' pālīngche'.
Nāṅg sipong phung pāme'(rā)
Nāṅg jorlāṅg bongme'.
Rideng von pāme'(rā)
Thelu ādungme'.
Rideng nāngpāle'
Soron nāngtongche'.
Pot chārnām mā he'?'
Pālāt āphongme'(tong)
Loji ālāmthe' (rā)
Rūn-so le' un-e'
Mālin non ningve'
Chong bāsān lāmthe' (mā)
Sänglin pen klirme'?
Mā nongsim āpor le'
Chili pen ār-e'
Dorde' ālāmthe' (si)
Ong nihu hemthe'
Seng chiki lāmthe' (ma)
Sänglin pen klirme'? 
Non sār ānghāṅg phuhe'
Boi phārān kāve' (si)
Rī sele' lāmthe' (mā)
Sänglin pen klirme'?
(O, my dear brother-in-law and sister, may I know what is the purpose behind your prayer to me by wearing turban (headgear) on this auspicious moment accompanied by offerings placed before me? Are you going to take some rest being exhausted by a journey to a distant place, or to seek some seeds of corn during this season for cultivation, or in quest of caretaker, i.e., a daughter-in-law, at this old age?)

b) Sānglin (the brother-in-law):

Jā thelu kāme’
Thelu bārt̪a’
Pālāt ṣophōngme’.

Thelu ārūn me’
Lo’humrī nāṅgłe’
Āńchot ālāmt̪e’
O, thelu kāme’.[39]

(O, respected uncle, we are not taking rest to go on a journey, nor are we coming to ask for any seed of corn, nor is it our purpose to search for any caretaker. Our child has been ailing since years, and hence we are begging your blessing for his/her speedy recuperation from bedridden state.)

B. The World of the Legends and Tales:

The legends and tales of the Karbis are usually couched in prose but many of these narratives are often referred to in the popular folk songs of the community and sung in commemoration of the sagacious heroes and heroines almost like the Icelandic ‘Sōgur’ and ‘Rimur’ in which the prose narratives were transformed into chant cycles. It cannot, therefore, be established with confidence as to whether the folk narratives were originally prose or poetic compositions, but there is a strong reason to believe that those narratives were basically rendered in prose and gradually they were transformed into poetic forms. This tendency of transforming the prose oral narratives into poetic tales is indicative of the unmatched poetic ingenuity of the
Karbis. As for example, the legend pertaining to Ru-Käsen, the prominent social reformer and village organizer is recounted both in prose and poetry:

Ru-Käsen lo’ri
Iru Sar longki(pen)
Iri Bäsäpi
Thur voku voki.
Jorläng chimāni
Iru pen iri
Jorläng kintin ri.
Iri Bäsäpi
Nāngju ālamdi,
O: māchor longki
Mekār don suri
Chārmām thānnonti.
Käsen ārāni(si)
Chiphon seng nāngji
Pirthe’ mo: kāntāng durmi
Māhu ārāni(si)
Lāson āniti
Kāpinchong pinthi.
Käsen ārāni(si)
Kāpinchong pinthi.
Iru Sar longki(pen)
Iru Bäsäpi
Chārmām chimāni. [40]

On a particular pious day, Ru-Kasen and his consort had taught their people (Karbis) the art of living habitation by founding permanent villages and thus laid the foundation stone of artistic and cultural civilization. As in a folk song, Basapi, the wise consort of Ru-Kasen appealed to her husband by offering him with holy ‘jorlāng’ in the very dawn of a fine day:

“O my adorable husband, please pay heed to my appeal. We should teach our subjects the art of living by establishing villages permanently and with proper discipline so that they will be able to keep pace with other civilized
As suggested by his wife Ru-Kasen inculcated all the essential know-how for living a civilized life by founding villages and societies. And from that time onward, the Karbis began to live a permanent community life by founding villages and societies. The folk song refers to it as under:

Jome’ ingthāngsi
Ru-Kāsen longki
Judet ālāmdi
O: pherāngke chuti
Mekār don suri
Seng erong nāngji
Longki ne rindi
Jorlāng bochesi
Mūseng ārāni
Mekār don suri pen
Krung kāchingsājit. [42]

(As suggested by his consort, Ru-Kasen summoned for the ‘pherāngke’ (convener) and commanded him to collect equal amount of rice and to prepare ‘horlāng’. He also asked the ‘pherāngke’ to invite each and every one to a meeting to be held at his residence.)

The great deeds accomplished by Har Bamon, one of the greatest priests, organizer, artist as well as reformers, are referred to in the folk song known as ‘Jir Pāngcheng’ (the beginning of a Jirkedām) to this effect:

Thelule’ lori
Iru Bāmon longki
Judet ālāmdi
O pherāngke’ chuti
Mekār donsuri
Humri lo’thāti
Krungchingsāi nāngji. [43]
(The farsighted Karbi mass leader thus advised the convener (pherāngke) to invite the villagers for a public assembly so that worthwhile measures and welfare schemes could be adopted for the betterment of the entire society.)

As the legend goes, Har Bamon had formed the first-ever Karbi ‘jir kedām’ in that very meeting, which proved to be very helpful in bringing the people of the society together and a new lease of life to their ethnic as well as cultural identity.

In yet another folk song we come across a reference to King Rengbonghom’s amity with that of the king of Jaintia kingdom described in excellent poetic language as under:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kethē’ ānmi Rengbonghom,} \\
\text{Kethē’ ānmi me’ ong} \\
\text{Kethē’ Jāntā pen vāngbon,} \\
\text{Socheng pāt ārong thirklong} \\
\text{Rong kung supokāp lokbong} \\
\text{Āsim ājāt etāng phrong.}[44]
\end{align*}
\]

(The King Rengbonghom of Socheng was a very respectable and renowned king. His capital city was well-protected and eye-catching. He was able to enjoy the favour of the Jaintia king. Even the foreign kings were attracted by his might and influence and used to expect assistance from him.)

As legend has it, Rengbonghom was not only a pro-democratic monarch, but also a powerful and influential Karbi king, who had left no stone unturned in ensuring safety of his kingdom as well as the welfare of his subjects. He gave adequate importance to the beauty and safety of his capital city, Socheng, and we find a bewitching poetic description of the same in a folk song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ārāng ādētā rongkhelān} \\
\text{Socheng helo’ enokor āphrāng} \\
\text{Dovār hini do’nihar pen niŋāŋ} \\
\text{Karlu nāŋji pekek pekāŋ} \\
\text{Bātkrāk te’ phopo’ thong āklām} \\
\text{Ākindeng dothulāŋ lā nokor keluṭām.}[45]
\end{align*}
\]
The capital of Rengbonghom's kingdom was located in a place called Socheng. It is believed that he got the boundary of his kingdom buttressed with impenetrable walls with a view to ensuring its safety. There were only two entrance gates for entering into the heart of the capital city. One of them was built in the east of the city, and the other in the west direction. There was another zigzag route which led to the capital.

C. Folk Ballads of the Karbis and their Poetic Talent:

The Karbis are born poets with their inherent and unmatched intuitive faculty and poetic talent, and it is presumed that they had composed and owned a good number of folk ballads. However, the treasure trove of these folk ballads is yet to be explored, if we are to save these precious gems of folk narratives from extinction.

"The ballads have helped a lot in enriching the coffers of Karbi folk literature. The Karbis, who love the rhythmic jingling sound of the meandering streams through hillocks from the core of their hearts, have composed many ballads. All the songs have not yet been compiled. Because of this, many songs are on the verge of extinction and many have survived only in fragments instead of their full form."

Thanks to some pioneering and prominent Karbi writers like Bonlong Terang and Samsing Hanse who have preserved few of them in written form, such as, 'Hāi-i' and 'Romir'. Apart from these two, we can include some identical folk tales like 'Mir Tāhin', 'Ser Dihun', 'Lārtā', 'Dinmir', and 'Dengrāli' into the ramification of the Karbi folk ballads by considering their forms and contents. It is so because the common Karbi folks enjoy singing them rather than narrating them in prose, and the intense pathetic stories that all of them bring before us certainly deserve to be called ballads. Having said this, what arrests our attention is that all the above folk ballads are charged with intrinsic poetic grandeurs and intensity of feeling.

The Hai-i ballad is the most popular and influential folk ballad of the Karbis ever since its unknown origin.
“Hai-i is a matchless ballad. It is a rare creation in verse in the Karbi language. One’s head bows down in reverence and mystery to the creator of this ballad once one delves into the unparalleled mode of expression of the ballad.” [47] (italics removed)

The exquisite poetic beauty of this folk ballad can be realized when we go through the particular three stanzas being usually recited by the Katharbura, the royal priest during the Botor Kekur ritual invoking the rain goddess, that is, Häi-imu for divine aid to bring sufficient rainfall for their crops, and to save them from draught, disaster, famine and epidemics:

(i) "Chi chi mā neng neng
    Chi chi nāng hāngjeng
    Bāng bor ruve’ hāngjeng.” [48]

(O, Crickets, the harbingers of rain, the streams, bring down the goddess of rain to this earth)

(ii) "Krokchur mā krukchur
    Krokchur nāng kekur,
    Bāng botor nāng chingthur
    Bor ruve’ nāngkur.” [49]

(O, Krokchur bird, bring down the goddess of rain down this earth by dint of your divine melody).

(iv) "Khroso’ mā khroso’
    Khroso’ nānghāngjio’
    Vāng botor sārpō’
    Rām nong āporlo’
    Pīni rāni pho’
    Dān di pi etlo’.
    Loti āngdengso’ (si)
    Ser làngthe meso’ (si)
    Photung phojāngso’
    Nāng āpun kechok sō’ (si)
    Nāng ser làngthe mānlo’.” [50]
(O the King of Frogs! bring down the goddess of rain through your incessant melody to this earth. This is the season for cultivation. We have completed the ritual of offering prayers before thousands of gods and goddesses on this auspicious day for propitiation. Thus, on the eve of entering the house and as a witness to this great ritual we are going to chop off this pair of ‘längthe’.)[51]

It is interesting to observe that despite the strong faith and deep regard the Karbis have for Hai-i as the goddess and harbinger of rain they seem to have equal degree of faith in the king of frogs as the means, if not the bringer of rain into the world of the mortals. James G. Fraser pertinently observes:

"Frogs or toads have earned a widespread reputation as custodians of rain in different cultures of the world, and hence they very often play a part in charms designed to draw needed showers from the sky." [52]

It is further interesting to note, willy-nilly, that excepting the Katharbura and this particular occasion, no one can sing or recite any part of this Hai-i ballad under any circumstance and at any place, and that the contravention to this custom invites fatal or ominous consequence upon him. The closing song to be sung by the Katharbura speaks of this as given below:

Hāi-i älotun
Nāng jiroi do’ ātum
Lunri po’ ātun
Socheng do’ ātun
Kāthārpo’ ālun
Āsek seksi lun
Bāng ruve’ kur ālun
Ijirpet kilun
Sengpi mārengkrung
Jirni nāng kelun.
Ser māhun thurlun
Jirthom pāchok dun
Bor ruve’ thokdung.[53]
(O! dwellers of the jiroi, do not sing Hai-i’s song even by mistake. This song belongs to the people of Socheng only. The Katharbura alone can sing it invoking the weather. This song is very great. Singing one verse of this song makes the clouds gather in the sky. Two verses lead to a cloudy sky. And singing of the third verse brings flood to the world with the tears of the rain goddess.)

However, it is not only the invocation to rain goddess in which the anonymous folk poet shines, but also in his vivid and photographic description of the nativity of the heroine of the ballad—her fascinating physical beauty, heart-rending pathos while being coercively separated from her husband.

Romir is yet another folk ballad in Karbi in which the inherent poetic ingenuity and intuitive faculties are vividly expressed. "Romir is one of the most pleasant ballads created in the twentieth century. There is similarity of Romir with Hai-i in respect of the narrative as the story in it also centers round the theme of love." The story of the ballad is about the intolerable agony and pathos grown out of unpredictable parting between two young lovers, Romir and Sam Longki hailing from a village near the river Amtarpeng. Sam Longki had to obey the behest of the Village Headman and thus to join the ‘jirsong’ to remain there for six long years. How poetic is the language employed by the Village head:

"Sām Longki ejāng
Pen ājirsong do’ān,
Non sengkān throk âkān
Jirdāt o ālām (ke)
Jādi longle làng." [55]

(Sam Longki and the rest of the boys do not think of deserting the ‘jirsong’ before six years)

Consequently Romir attained maturity and her parent tried in vain to marry off their daughter with another boy only to see their daughter dead out of starvation and depression. Sam Longki, on the other hand, joined the army and fought for the
country at Ladakh to forget the tragedy but could not stop recalling the fond memories of their immaculate love affair. The folk poet of Romir, who is a true representative of the community, succeeds in evincing his unmatched poetic excellence when he describes the Nature which bears affinity with that of the mental commotion and turbulence of the dejected lover, Sam Longki:

Hun melān kevān
Ru ār-e’ totpīlān
Romir ser āthān
Nāng mekri ben bān
Neseng māthā dām. [56]

(The silvery drops of dew have beckoned the fog. O my love! I feel as if they are your teardrops)

Lārtā, a Karbi folk narrative about the tragic death of a virtuous, bold and beautiful girl unintentionally wrought by her own scheming mother, may, very justifiably, be clessified as a folk ballad though it is remembered more as a legendary narrative. Larta was so renowned that a cycle of folk songs were created glorifying her virtuosity and captivating beauty, which are known as ‘Lārtā Ālun’ quite eponymous to her name itself. Even, the legendary Karbi mentor of art and music, Rangsina Sarpo named one of the rhymes of his music as ‘Lārtā’. The old people of the community living in the remote and intractable villages of the hilly terrains reminisce that unanticipated catastrophe pertaining to Larta in a very poetic tone:

Thengtom rungpāngtui rongbāng
Lārtā dōngplet lo’ inghān
Klolintāhut chenām nām (le)
Chomāŋkgān tā chomāŋkgān
Cherāp dun jānghre’ Kronihāng
Rijāk ot Lārtā āphān
Lārtā vungphrui ser ārnām. [57]
(In the dark of the moonless night as Larta and his lover, Kronihang were going for a funerary festival (chomangkan), Larta fell deep down that culpable ditch, and though Kronihang had tried to save her by holding her smooth hands, only the finger rings of his beloved remained with him.)

*Dinmir* is yet another Karbi folk narrative, which may also be reckoned as a ballad though is usually treated as a legendary tale, if we examine its form and content. What is fascinating about this ballad is the beauty of poetic expression that it embodies. Sar Mangbi, the treacherous and lewd old man is fittingly retaliated by the furious mob of the Batchen village and the inveterate hatred that they had developed for him is given vent to in a poetic language:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Judet Bâtchen âlongki} / \\
\text{Nângphri non Mângbi ârindi //} \\
\text{Cho'koinâng ãvo'pi-phâkpi /} \\
\text{Thurpâk Bâtchen rong isi //} \\
\text{Phrilâp Mângbi ârindi /} \\
\text{Cho'koi ãvo'pi-phâkpi //} \\
\text{Nângkâi nâng dândelo' Mângbi /} \\
\text{Dâmnoi nâng Mângbi dâk do'ri //} \\
\text{Nângdetlo so' Kârbi käli /} \\
\text{Pirthe do' o'so' Kârbi ///}&[58]
\end{align*}
\]

*Mir Tahin* is yet another Karbi legend which can also be classified as a historical folk ballad so far its form and content, background and treatment of the subject matter, are concerned. It is basically about the sad tale centering round a beautiful Karbi maiden called Mir Tahin who had been made captive by the Burmese soldiers being irresistibly attracted by her fascinating beauty. However, the narrative also throws adequate light upon the patriotism and daring feats demonstrated by two legendary Karbi heroes, namely; Bikha Kangbura and Chalut Sengnot (supposed to be Tahin’s brother) in rescuing Mir Tahin from the clutch of the Burmese soldiers like medieval knights. The following stanza from the folk song
is tinged with moving poetic appeal capable simultaneously of telling a pathetic tale resulting into euphoria in the end:

"Tāhin mir jābā,
Tāhin nāngrāje’ mepā(ṛ);
Ruphā bāṅg nāngpon det dāt nā.
Iber pen vāṅg āmān kālā,
Tāhin pondet chur korā.
Māhusi lo hūṅ dūṅ hāi mā,
Hūṅ dūṅlo iru Sār Bikhā.
Rohā pen voi dūṅ phāk Mānjā,
Tāṅgho Tāhin mir jābā.⁵⁹

(The maiden called Tahin was stunningly beautiful. That was the reason why the people had advised her to remain very careful. Unfortunately, the Burmese soldiers who had come from the south took her away with them. Nobody came forward to rescue her. Consequently, Bikha Kangbura extricated her from the clutch of the soldiers within a single day and brought her back from Raha (presently located in Nowgaon district of Assam) to Manja of Karbi Anglong).

D. The Oral / Folk Epics of the Karbis:

Oral or folk epics are anonymous narrative poems composed in formulaic yet ornamental style dealing with the adventures of extraordinary people. They are traditional transmitted by words of mouth from generation to generation. They heroic or legendary tales composed and preserved by oral means, recited and transmitted through memory. They can also be regarded as folk ballads since an oral or folk epic is synonymous with that of a long ballad. However, oral or folk epic is an important sub-genre of verbal art.

"It is very often seen that heroic exploits, mingled with adventures from myth and legend, naturally became the favoured theme of epic recitation, whose measured cadences and memorable phrases could keep past glory alive for the edification of the present and the emulation of the future."⁶⁰
The Sabin Álun and Hāi-i Álun may rightly be reckoned as oral or folk epic of the Karbis, for both of them are long ballad or verse narratives. We notice the presence of exquisite poetry in both of them tinged with music as well as song. Sabin Álun may be considered as a glocalized and beautiful fusion of the original Ramayana with the typical Karbi cultural ethos and worldview, because it may retain the mere skeleton of the Ramayana but certainly adapts it with Karbi folk motifs. As the myth has it, Rangsina Sarpo, the first mentor of the Karbi music and culture, had taken active initiatives in popularizing Sabin Alun by singing the epic in Karbi villages with the help of the Mirjeng brothers. The episode describing the birth of Rama and Lakhana is given below which provide us an idea about the distinctive poetic style and beauty:

Hākir ārei rongsopi //
Kechām Dhorom longki ///
Sot bot Dhorom pensi /
Chākri-chākor Kosāri (tā)
Sengve’ keoi jo’pārni
Hemphi bāngkethom thompi /
Serjāng āve āserli //
Hemphi pen Dhorom longki /
Kāike nāngju kāsengri //
Kethe’ Dhorom longki /
Kāngtāng-kāngsāk kom kāli //
Chejān cherāli thāi isi /
Sāmpri ārani ni //
Ākhung che’lo’ jopārni /
Kethe’ Dhorom longki //

(There was a king whose name was Dhorom, i.e., Dasaratha. He ruled in a kingdom situated near a sea. He sustained his subjects with peace and non-violence. But he had no peace of mind, since he had no child and hence no heir to succeed him despite marrying three queens. King Dhorom was a great hero and an expert hunter. One day he happened to arrive at the residence of Hemphu while he was on a hunting expedition. God Hemphu enquired of the reason behind the king’s
unexpected arrival to his place. The king then explained before Hemphu that he had come to ask for a boon of getting sons from the latter since he was childless. In response to the king’s appeal Hemphu then assured him not to be worried since he would get his desire of having sons fulfilled. Hemphu then reflected inside his mind that two heroes will take birth in the house of Dhorom and they will destroy Ravana.)

Hāi-i, like Sābin Ālun, is another long ballad, which contains eleven chapters encapsulating a compact story sustaining unity of impression and consistency of the story in a succinct manner as if in an oral epic. This ballad can also be thematically designated as a historical oral epic since it deals with quasi-historical events, and simultaneously as a romantic oral epic because of its treatment of the theme of the passionate love story pertaining to the hero and the heroine, Long and Hāi-i. In its deeper analysis, this ballad also can be established as a mythical ballad for it provides the convincing etiological justification regarding the coming of the rain, i.e., praying or invoking the rain goddess, Hāi-i, who is ultimately transformed to that celestial state. However, what is more absorbing is its exquisite poetic qualities attuned to portray the pathetic love story of the duo and it is the tone and texture of the poetry which more than its theme that moves our heart and immortalizes it in the racial memory of the community. The following stanzas from the ballad may serve as specimens:

(1) Nejāŋ neserjāŋ (le’)
   So’pinso’ nāplāŋ (rā)
   Nāngjang nāngserjāŋ
   Soarlo nāngplāŋ
   Jonpān therā phudāng (te’)
Pācheren vek nāŋg. [62]

(If I give birth to a male child, and you to a female one; and if they become young (juvenile), then both of them will be united through nuptial ties or process of marriage.)
(Hai-i comes to this world at the dawn and Long takes birth at the time of the sun rising as if they have come to this earth as wife and husband.)

E. Socio-Religious Rituals, Institutions and Ceremonies:

(1) ‘Klongklo Ātekār’:

The ritual meant for purification of the newborn baby is called ‘Klongklo Ātekār’. The name of the very ritual is onomatopoeically derived from the dropping sound the babe produces at the time of delivery on the floor made of chopped bamboo inside the stilted traditional Karbi house. The ritual of Klongklo Ātekār is performed with a view to purifying and protecting the newcomer from any kind of impurity and all kinds of evil ghosts and spirits as well as Satanic forces. The ritualistic chant that is recited just after the delivery of the baby clearly evinces the poetic ingenuity of the community:

Kārbi āso’, kārbāk āso,
Hu āso’ kālī, bāng āso’ kālī.
Bāng ong kehāṅ ji(si)
Lok kehāṅ ji(si)
Pirthe’ kāhāčhe’,
Mindār kāhāčhe’.[64]

(O, God! the baby just delivered is a human child, not animal. It has come to this world to establish relation with that of the human beings and to become human in all respect etc.)
The first marriage between human (Karbi) couple, as the folk song called 'Adam Aporom' states, was performed by Sumphong and Sumphi known popularly as Ve-Longbi Ingti and Har-Longbi Timung who belonged to Li-é and Tung-é clan respectively. It was, however, Hemphu (God) who had first solemnized the holy conjugal bond between his sister, Rasingja and Longmukrang, the son of Rangmukrang. The marriage between the son of Har-Longbi and the daughter of Ve-Longbi in conformity with the custom first introduced by Hemphu at Miring Rongsopi town as advised by a wise old woman named Marongpi and that customary rite has been prevailing in the Karbi society till today. There are three different systems of marriage observed by the Karbi people, which are (i) Ādam Āsār (ii) Horhāk Kāngthur and (iii) Ādam Thonkok. However, despite slight ritualistic differences perceived among the three different systems of Karbi marriage the nuptial songs sung during these socio-cultural occasions are almost alike. The Karbi nuptial songs are beautiful dialogues of verse replete with moral exhortations exchanged between the parents or relatives of the bride and the groom maneuvered through proper ceremonial proceedings, which doubtlessly indicate the inherent and fertile poetic faculty possessed by the community as a whole. The nuptial songs called 'Thelu Ālun' in Karbi abound in poetic imageries, tender feelings and touch of realism.

"The Karbi marriage ceremony is also musical, since music takes an important place in the various situations of the marriage. Most of the functions related to the marriage rites are done through songs. Unlike the other cultures, the Karbi women do not sing marriage songs in actual context, since the men folk sing these songs in the actual context of the marriage ceremony. The term Thelu-Alun is used in Karbi language to suggest the meaning of marriage song. Many marriage songs current in Karbi societies may rightly be called ballads, since these songs invariably are story content." [65]

Some examples of such nuptial songs are quoted below for corroboration:
(i) Sung by the bride’s parent/party before negotiation:

"Ja sánglin pen klimre’,
Än, sär ānghāng phuhe’,
Bongsuk pāngphārche’
Khimā rimreche’,
Dengkindu tokche’ (le’)
Thelu ārunme’.
Lo’hümri nāngle’ (ke’)
Piching āłāmthe’? [66]

(O my Sanglin and Klirni (relation between the parents of both the groom and the bride), where are you leaving for with the support of stick at this old age characterized by weak eyesight and why are you showing such respect by stepping in to our poor hut?)

(iii) After the negotiation:

Non singkreng muntale’
Thembleng ārnime’,
Thelu ārunme’
Dāmsār āłāmthe’
Lo humri nāngle’,
Nāng, sipong pāt āpe’
Phung ābi pār-e’
Nāng jorlāng bongme’
Rīdēng nāvonle’ (rā)
Soron nāngtongche’,
Nāng thelu tāngte’
Sāmpūng pāłāmthe’
Nejāng kādure’
Tāng chojāk meme’. [67]

(On this auspicious moment/day of this Spring, putting on beautiful silk turban round your head, you have offered us so much respect and devotion by bringing a marriage proposal before us. But, albeit, we are still of the opinion that our daughter is very young (and so is not marriageable). Therefore, please, do not humiliate us anymore (by harping on this issue.)
(iii) On the eve of the final consent:

Sängin pen klirni
Nejāng nāserli (ke’)
Klimme’ tāineri,
Bāng rongro’ jui pārni
Pi sengioimeji!
Bāng-ju pālāmthe’ i’
Hemāi hānsāri
Thip-theng āno’ki
Mato pareri(ta)
Rere anoki
Chinhāk nāngchili (rā),
Ruphā āserli
Etapli āngdi (te’)
Pū chojāk ūnjil

(O Sanglin and Klirni, our daughter is so young that she still beguile away her days by playing with her friends. She has not learnt anything as yet. Under this circumstance, if you send her back to our home after being unable to teach her the requisite art for house-keeping, we shall become the subject for calumniaion in the society. Then, how shall we cover our face before other people?)

(iv) ‘Oso’ Kāchinem’- the father’s (bride’s) admonition before parting:

O’ serli jāng serme’
Nāng hājong ātumke’
Bāng lo’ māthum lo’he’,
Nāng hārchi kāme’
Ān sār ānghāŋ phuhe’
Bongsūk pāngphārche’
Khimā rimreche’
Boi phārān kāve’
Tāng ingjin meme’,
Nāng hājong ārunme’
Lo’ nāngpo’ serme’. [69]

(O! Darling! Your in-laws (usually maternal uncle) have come to take your hands, since there is none to take care of them at this old age. Therefore, O! Darling! Please comply with their request by going along with them.)
(v) ‘Mun Chärne’- Welcome song sung by the groom’s father:

Jii räsün ri-e’
Jon räje’ vängle’ (rā)
Pi ärje’ litke’
Hühü äserme (tā)
Hümmesi chingbe’,
Nime’ rānikē’
Eriin ehumme’
Lo’ik lo’nānghe’. [70]

(O! Darling, the other women also go to their real home (the house of the in-laws) as they attain maturity. Since you have also grown old enough to do so, let us go to our own home at this opportune moment of this auspicious day.)

(vi) ‘Oso’ Ängjür Chepāré’- Admonition-cum-Blessings offered by the bride’s parents/uncle:

O, serjāng serme’,
Nāng hārchi kāme’ (pen)
Nāng tokli kāme’
Āchārmām keme’
Thirji nāng humme’,
Nāng rindi keme’
Phāndār pālokre’.
Mo’ singkreng muntāle’
Nāng rūn nānghumme’
Hümri vāngji ne,
Jorlāng birtike’
Hing āhor keme’
Rideng nāvānre’ (non)
Serjāng serme’. [71]

(O! Darling, may your conjugal life and home fill with wealth as a result of your obedience to your father/mother-in-law’s good advice so that we shall be able to come to your house next year (and can taste ‘jorlāng’ prepared by your own hands.)

(3) ‘Rongker’- The Karbi Pre-harvest Fertility Magic:

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 appease 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. The prayer that is offered to the god, ‘Ārnām Phārou’ is replete with fine poetry:

Nettöm nāngthān si kedo’
Nāngthili si kedo’
Nettöm nāngso’ keplāng
Nāngsu keplāng
Nāngrāt keplāng,
Nāngdet keplāng
Nerāi pāmetu,
Nekom pāmetu /
Rong ārlo’,
Rup ārlo’,
Hāvār ārlo’,
Hāpāt ārlo’ /
Teke’ nāngtoi ri,
Ingnār nāngtoi ri,
Ningkān āsek,
Ningkān ājang,
Nāngthok bomji,
Nāngjir bomoji /
Bāngso’ ālam dei,
Bāngso’ āki dei,
Keso’ vānri,
Un-e’ vānri // \(^{72}\)

(O, revered gods, we take shelter at your feet and supplicate before you. Please don’t bring any kind of evil to our village. Kindly don’t send ferocious elephants and tigers. We will worship you every year. Please do protect us from all sorts of evils and dangers.)

(4) ‘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-Āpirthāt’. 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 Ānām Kethē 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. It is also like a chant or an incantation which is tinged with musicality of a song or poem and a seriousness of intention:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{E-hem hem ānām} \\
&\text{Ānām kethē' ārni kethē'} \\
&\text{Bārithe', bāri-e'} \\
&\text{Loru ānām phongrong ānām} \\
&\text{Kekim ānām kerāk ānām} \\
&\text{E-hem hem hem ānām.}
\end{align*}
\]

(5) ‘Kāchārhe’ - the Karbi dirge:

One of the most important rites of passage in Karbi socio-cultural life, without any demur, is the Kāchārhe or the death-wailing. The wailing or lamentation might sound intensely pathetic and heart-rending, but it is musical too. The tradition of inviting a professional wailer at the event of the death of a man is not uncommon in various cultures of the world and the Karbis also invite such an expert wailer who wails on behalf of the bereaved family. She is known as the ‘Uchepi’ or ‘Chārhepi’ in Karbi who in reality leads the dead back to the place whence he had come or had once belonged to, which by metaphorical implication hints at Heaven. The genre of this song of lamentation is known in Karbi as ‘Kāchārhe Ālūn’ through which the Uchepi actually retraces the original homeland (metaphorically called as ‘long-le’ āchete’ or ‘navel of the earth’) with the help of memories for as comprehended by the community death is like a ‘return to the
village'.

It takes two or three consecutive hours to complete Kacharhê Àlûn and there are a few sub-classes of this genre of song: Lâng Pänglu; Àn Kepi; Tôvâr Kethân; Rong Kethân; Kechâm Kangthi and so on. In all the cases, however, the songs resemble that of elegies in rhymed verse. A short excerpt of one such song is given below as specimen:

(i)

Iru chom ärong,
Choki po'chênglong,
Lo'ti nängjâ pon /
Mukindon ânglong lo'ti kepâ pon
Borlon kebât jong, iru chom ärong
Ketâng chechâr dong //

(The soul of the deceased will have to cross a very high hill named Mukindon with great difficulties).

(ii)

Nânginchi hâmpûr mâ
Ârleng âpok long
Nângching dâkong,
Pipot âduk cho' ânit mâ
Chün Chûnâyok tikâng. //

(You were born as human being at the cost of strenuous religious performances. Why have you gone to unknown land leaving us alone?)

The Karbis are so fond of dance accompanied by musical cadence that they wish the peace and salvation of the deceased soul through merriment, and this predilection for such attitude is vividly reflected through the ‘Nimso Kerun’ dance form performed as a part of the Chomângkân festival:

Non âkai â karjâng
Thekthe hi-i pen ponglâng
Thekthe kitun pen kedâng
Choklem thekthe theng pen lâng...... oi lângsâm. 
(O, maidens, your age is for merriment through music and dance. Come and join us in this revelry, and experience how pleasant it is doing so. Our forefathers also have been wishing salvation of the soul of the dead through such practice. Let us, therefore, we, the youths wish the peace and salvation of the unhappy soul of the deceased by means of music and dance.)

(6) ‘Kepā-er Ālūn’ of the ‘Chomāṅkān’:

*Chomāṅkān* is both funerary ritual and a festival full of music, song and dance, which reflects the complete profile of the culture of the Karbis and their worldview, and thus can be considered as the ‘soul of their culture’.

“Although the Chomangkan was originally a death-rite, nevertheless it appears as an important festival of the Karbis. Dances and songs are also an essential part of the Chomangkan. The genre of Kepa-er Alun, i.e., Kepa-er song is sung by the unmarried Karbi boys along with dance during the first three days of the Chomangkan. Kepa-er Alun is full of eroticism and this can rightly be linked up with the fertility rites........Like other rites, the Chomangkan is also based on a myth called Thireng Vangreng or Vang Areng traditionally current among the Karbis.”

*Moserā Kihir*, a distinctive genre of mythical ballad by itself, is recited by the *Klengsārpo* or his deputy, *Klengdān*, during the daybreak of the third night of the Chomangkan festival. It is characterized by matchless spontaneity of expression and constant melody. The first stanza of the *Moserā Kihir* is cited below as an example:

Ili Kārbi tāngtē,
Ili Kārbāk tāngtē
Niti ke’ kedo’kok
Nihāt ke’ kedo’kok /
Keplāṅg chinthūm nāngkok,
Kiphi chinthūm nāngkok /
Keplāṅg lāpu helo’
Kephi lāpu helo’’

[[78]]
Apart from this, other frolicsome songs associated with juvenile emotions and feelings are also sung during the Chomāngkān festival, which are characterized by erotic love, captivating cadence of music, moving dance and exquisite poetry. A couple of such songs are given below as specimens:

(i) Non eboi āḷāsākān
Lāsākān neseng oīlām
Bāi theklongle' nāngphān // [80]
(My mind was disappointed having not seen you at the Chomāngkān arena)

(ii) Mongvepi nāngle'
Phārkong pen phārche'
Kāṅgthu chibātē';
Lāsī nē' sengye',
Ingjārji mon-e'
Cheng cheber lūn-e' // [81]
(The spring season has come. The competition between Simolu and Modar in respect of blooming has started. Due to the influence of this season my mind gets restless and impetuous. O my dear sweetheart, I am unable to control my mind.)

Thus, from the above discussion it has become crystal clear that the Karbis as a race possess an inherent poetic ingenuity and strong intuitive faculty. This typically unique poetic virtuosity of the race is transmitted from generation to generation, inherited and perpetuated as if it is genetically conditioned since time immemorial. Poetic sense and sensibility accompanied by strong imaginative and intuitive faculty perpetuated by a tremendously retentive racial memory shared by every member of the community prepare the unique cultural heritage and ethnic identity for the budding generations. From those perspectives, the Karbi oral narratives, so closely and inseparably woven around the beliefs and practices, customs and traditions, are like indices of the civility of the race, or to be more
precise, they can be said to be the clear reflection of the shared worldview of the entire community. In its penultimate analysis, the oral or folk narrative of the Karbis can very justifiably be estimated as the precious product of the poetic ingenuity, intuitive faculty and imagination, which represent the quintessence and immortal soul of their rich oral as well as cultural tradition. The matchless resourceful female character portrayed in the historical narrative called *Veng Veng Chukret*, which glorifies the ingenuity and intuitive mind of the Karbi women, is indeed praiseworthy and will keep on appealing people across the world. She not only had saved the lives of her family members from being slaughtered by the Naga enemies (head-hunters), but also could save herself by dint of her ingenuity manured by inimitable poetic sensibility:

> “O, jirpi mārāŋ
Ne’ mithong rūm jāŋ
Ne’ Chihūm dāmji lāŋ
Veng veng chukrel.”

(O, my dear friend, the spinning pool has fallen down (from the raised platform) and hence I am going out to pick up the same. ‘Veng Veng Chukret’.)

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**Notes:**

3. The myth about origin of the artist in Karbi.
4. The Creator and Sustainer of life, i.e., Hemphu in Karbi.
5. Another name ascribed to Hemphu, literally- the king of the universe.
6. Incarnation of Hemphu in human form literally signifies 'a man coming from the water in search of country fowls'.
7. Great grandfather and grandmother and hence the great progenitor of all.
8. The God of Household, the sustainer and saviour from evil and danger.
10. The God of
11. The cycle of songs pertaining to the founding of villages.
13. The mythical bird from which the Karbis are believed to have originated.
14. The Head of the Karbi village youth co-operative called 'Jirsong'.
15. The deputy of the Head of the youth co-operative.
16. A ritual observed to mark the end of the compulsory tradition of 'youth co-operative' 'Jirsong'.
17. Literally means 'recalling the past from memories'.
19. Long Mirjeng and Sing Mirjeng, who had assisted Rangsina Sarpo in popularizing music in the then Karbi society.
23. Terang, Rongbong. *A Glimpse of Karbi Literature and Culture*, pp 70. (Translation mine)
24. Grandmother Lekhimi
26. A sacred annual worship of the Karbis.
30. Traditional Karbi wedding.
31. A species of Kingfisher
35. Rongpi, Ajit Kumar, *Karbi Kimbadanti Sankalan*, pp 33. (*Translation mine*)
36. Asking for a morsel.
37. Putting a ring round the finger.
41. Ibid (translation mine)
45. Ibid, pp 45. (Translation mine)
47. Ibid, (pp 13)
49. Ibid, p 51; 69.
50. Ibid, p 51-52; 70.
51. Bamboo pipe for collecting water.
52. Fraser, J.G. *The Golden Bough*, pp 73.
57. Das, Basanta. *Karbi Kimbadanti Sankalan*, 82-83. (translation mine)
61. Ibid, p 213.
63. Ibid, p 217.
64. Das, Sailen. *Karbi Sanskritir Prabah*, pp 20. (translation mine)
73. Sarma, N.C. op. cit., pp 193. (translation mine)
74. ‘Arong Kächevoi’ – a Karbi euphemism for death as ‘return to the village’.
75. Sarma, N.C. op. cit., pp 186.
78. Sarma, N.C. op. cit, p 188.
79. Ibid, pp 189.
80. Ibid, p 189.
81. Ibid, p 189.

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