

Summary and Conclusion

From the study it has been found that the Karbis have a very rich legacy of their folk literature which is unique in itself. Their folk literature, like those of some other tribes and the greater Assamese community in general, has all the essential features of folklore. Their folk life and folk literature are complementary to each other. The folk literature is the creation and also the reflection of their folk life which has remained the same in the rural Karbi villages with sporadic influences of modernity. Their folk life and literature are treasure houses of Karbi worldview, wisdom, experiences of an agrarian economy centering round the jhum cultivation, trials and tribulations of migration and settlement of a tribe who came to this part of the world through difficult terrains and through various phases of suffering. Their folk literature has survived centuries through the mouths of the generations of Karbi forefathers. It has assimilated with the greater and more general current of Assamese culture. Their myths, memories, metaphors, legends, chants, ballads, incantations, charms, riddles and proverbs, etc. talk highly of the imaginative prowess of the great Karbi forefathers. These also reflect on the peaceful, tranquil, agrarian, god fearing and abiding, nature-loving, self-dependent nature of the Karbis. It is notable that the Karbi folk literature is basically in metrical and there are songs regarding the origin of songs.

The study was divided into six chapters. In the first chapter an introduction has been given about the background to the choice of the

topic of research. The thrust has basically been on their folk literature and culture.

In Chapter II available literature on the Karbi folk literature and culture has been reviewed. Almost all materials which could be collected and collated have been reviewed and appreciated here. The greater number of available literature on Karbi literature and culture are in Assamese or in Karbi. Only a few works are there in English. Apart from the books and other printed materials, some other sources like blogs, official websites, etc. too have been reviewed which dwell on Karbi art, literature and culture.

In chapter III an introduction has been given to the Karbis, their migration memories, the clans and sub clans, settlements, sociology, political system, their oral history, the folklore, the present turmoil due basically to ethnic clashes, questions of ethnicity, language, religion and identity, etc. A glimpse of their folk life has been provided in this chapter. A glimpse into the difficult times Karbi Anglong has been passing through for a few decades due to extremism has also been provided in this chapter.

In chapter IV a description has been given on Karbi traditions pertaining to their various cultural events, markers, festivities and rituals, times of their celebration, basic features of these festivities and rituals etc. An introduction has also been given on the Karbi literary tradition or their folk literature which contain reliable material about their migration, their history, their settlements and their sufferings during various phases of times. Moreover, an introduction

has also been provided as to their folktales, the *keplangs* or the stories regarding the origin of various agri-products and cultural and food icons.

In chapter V an overview and a brief analysis has been provided on the folk literature of the Karbis and its various forms. A list has been prepared on the available Karbi folk tales. There is a description on the present trend in Karbi literature and major Karbi literary personalities who have been associated with Karbi literature as it is today.

In chapter VI, an analysis of Karbi life and culture as reflected in their Folk Literature has been provided. Literature has always been described as a mirror of society and is also regarded as the life-blood of a community's corporate life. Literature is said to reflect a community's real life and culture. In this chapter a brief description has been given on how Karbi folk literature has reflected the tribe's life and culture over the passages of time. An analysis has been made as to how the Karbi folk literature truthfully preserves the migration memories, the ordeals, the sufferings, the final settlements, the stories of their clans, origin of various prime agri-products, the age old beliefs, the myths, etc. down the ages in the forms of folk tales and songs.

From the study the following major findings regarding Karbi folk life, literature and culture were observed:

Karbi Folk Literature is the Product of the Assam Valley, mostly the Kolong-Kapili-Dhansiri valley

From the available material evidence about Karbi folk literature, particularly the folk songs, folktales, legendary figures, etc., a conclusion has been drawn that Karbi folk literature is primarily the product of the valleys of Assam. Their folk literature has indelible marks of the origin and growth in the valleys of Kolon, Kopili and Dhansiri, besides other rivers and rivulets. The original, mainstream Kuki-Chin link is lost somewhere, though not denied. More researches can establish the lost link.

Besides, as regards Karbi legendary figures and heroes, some such figures have been lost due to the lack of written record. Here again, researches can trace back the lost heroes.

Orality has been the hall mark of Karbi folk literature

Orality is a defining feature of all folk literature. It is more so in that the Karbis did not have any written record of their life, history, literature and culture till the twentieth century. Their written history is of recent development.

Folk Literature in Song Form

The written script of the Karbis being of recent origin, it is remarkable that they preserved their folk literature through mouth from generation to generation. They did so with remarkable folk memory. Since they had to preserve these orally, probably because of that they did so in the form of songs so that it facilitates memory. It is equally remarkable that in Karbi folk literature, songs are there about the origin of songs.

Almost all rituals are performed through songs. Even proposals of marriages are also placed through songs. The tradition of Lunsepo and Charhepi need special mention. In the death rituals the role and importance of the female dirge singers is very remarkable and it is an exclusively female affair. On the other hand, it is also remarkable that in Karbi folk literature there are songs regarding the origin of songs which is unique from other tribal folk literature.

A Plaintive Tone pervades through all folk narratives, songs, etc

It is seen that a deep sense of pain, suffering and tribulations are evident in Karbi folk literature which truthfully depicts the difficult times the tribe had to pass through in the long history of their migration and settlement.

Trials of the migration memory afresh in all songs

As stated, the Karbi folk memory, myths, metaphors, etc. very often reflects on the various phases of their trials and tribulations in all Karbi folk literature. They even recount their past memory with great reverence. This past recounting is an essential aspect of Karbi folk narratives.

Animist in character

The Karbi folk literature and culture show beyond doubt that as a community they are animist in nature. They worship demon and deities equally and also believe that there is life even in the stone, the

trees, the jungle, in the air, etc. They sacrifice animals to propitiate the gods and goddesses, demons and evil spirits. Though at present Karbis are polarized in matters of religion into Hindus and Christians, the essence of animism still characterizes them.

Striking similarities with mainstream Assamese literature and culture

The Karbi folk literature reflects a striking similarity with the greater Assamese literature and culture. The Karbi Ramayana Sabin Alun, though it includes the elements of Karbi folk life with regional characteristics, has similarities with the Ramayana. The Karbi folk life and beliefs have been very beautifully adapted and included in the Dumahi Alun as well.

With the death of the old generation of Karbi people, there has been a marked decrease of people with depth of knowledge about Karbi folk literature and culture

It was noticed with a little grief that as the older generation of Karbi people leaving this world, there has been dearth of Karbi people with deep, thorough knowledge of their literature and culture, particularly their folk literature and culture, with a few sporadic exceptions. The English educated modern generation of Karbi youths, though very keen and respectful to their past and tradition, know only a little about the rich legacy of folk literature and culture again with a few exceptions.

Some version of the genre of Karbi folk narrative *Mosera Kihir* is disappearing

As the older generation of Karbi people is leaving this world, some versions of the *Mosera* have also been lost. Hence, as Morningkey Phangcho says, “the possibility of restoring the comprehensive and undiluted version of the migration-myth seems to be receding even further. Particularly, with the rapid disappearance of the performances of the ‘*chomangkan*’ or death-rituals due mainly to economic and other social reasons, the practice of the complete rendition of ‘*mosera*’ too is also beginning to disappear into oblivion. For example, the ‘*klung*’ version of ‘*chomangkan*’ has totally disappeared.”

Gradual encroachment of Christianity and Hinduism

It was noticed that though the majority of Karbis practiced Hinduism or its crudest form, they had an animist religion of their own. But gradually, most of the Karbis have come under the concerted influence of Christianity and Hinduism. For this, the apathy and long standing chauvinism of the mainstream Assamese Hindus may be basically held responsible.

Rich oral tradition

The Karbis have a long and glorious history of their oral tradition. It is unique of the tribe in that the history of their written script and literature is of recent origin and development. Even till now

the Karbi forefathers have kept the oral tradition alive and rich through mouth from generation to generation.

Striking prevalence and importance given to women in all activities

One notable aspect noticed in Karbi folk life is the high place and prestige women enjoy here. They are esteemed and are accorded respectable positions in life. Though the Karbi society is not matriarchal like some other tribal societies, women here are highly regarded and they play an important role in all affairs. In Kecharhe or in dirge singing, only women can wail and sing the all-important dirge song. Thus, the position of women is remarkably high in Karbi society.

Like many other tribal cultures, abundant use of country liquor, eggs, pigs, bottle guards, branches of trees, etc.

The Karbi folk life and literature is marked by the use and mention of their ethnic liquor, bottle gourd, trees, eggs, pigs, etc. The Karbis have most of their daily needs filled from their natural surroundings. They are self-dependent to a great extent with most of the needs of their food, habitat and other activities being supplied by natural resources. Like many other tribes, the Karbis also have abundant use of rice beer or country liquor, eggs, pigs, fowls, bottle guard, branches of tree branches, etc.

Folk songs are marked by a praiseworthy combination of rhyme, rhythm and story

The Karbi folk songs are marked by a praiseworthy combination of rhyme, rhythm and story. Since the Karbis had to preserve these songs orally, they took care to add these aspects so that memory is aided so as to pass from one generation to another.

Colonial views still plaguing Karbi religion and culture

It is sad that the Karbis and their religion, folk life, culture, literature, etc have been firstly and mostly studied by English, American and other European scholars some of whom had tainted views of tribal cultures. They were also characterized by an unmistakable sense of cultural chauvinism. It is sad that since these scholars were the first to carry on research in these difficult terrains for which they must also be given credit, some of their records were coloured by the colonial feelings and perspectives which are noted in many research documents.

Karbi society has been less feudal since land has never been an issue at any point of time

The Karbi society shows that it has autocratic character in it. But, however, it has been less feudal because land has never been a factor at any point of time. In the words of Tanmay Bhattacharjee-“Although the traditional hierarchy exhibits autocratic characteristics, its broader working model was tempered with liberal overtone.”

Cultural variation in various parts of the same district of KAAC, not to speak of other areas

The Karbi society is a patriarchal society one. They believe in the fact that the soul of a dead person takes re-birth in his own family. This belief even pervades through their concept of death and rebirth.

Karbis differ from the other communities in that their most important festival is associated with death and not with planting or harvest or the advent of spring.

Having said that, however, does not mean or prove that the Karbi society is homogeneous in all parts of Karbi Anglong, not to speak of the Karbis living elsewhere.

It is felt that more studies are needed to collect the scattered Karbi riddles, proverbs, chants, magic, songs, etc. Books or articles on Karbi proverbs etc. are rare. Most of the members of the new generation do not know these proverbs and riddles etc. Hence, more rigorous and concerted efforts to study and document genres of Karbi folk literature are needed urgently.

Further research questions that the study opened up

It has been discovered that the present study had certain limitations. The first among them is that the area of study was limited only to the eastern and western villages of Karbi Anglong. More field visits could have been organized to other parts of Karbi Anglong and other areas of Karbi habitation to gather, among others, information about elements of folk literature and to discover regional variations of

culture and literature. The second limitation was that more people could have been selected who are well-versed with aspects of Karbi folk literature and culture. Most of the cross-section of the people interviewed during the study was reluctant to provide information. Some of them were not well-versed with the areas while some others had to be convinced regarding the purpose of the research. Thirdly, the areas in the study could have been narrowed down to one or two aspects of Karbi folk literature and culture.

But, perhaps, these limitations were also a positive outcome of the study itself. Whatever may be the limitations these taught the researcher that the present study is only one humble attempt which can be made into a fuller, more holistic and broad one in the future. Research of this sort is just a humble beginning. It has triggered in the researcher a renewed interest to explore further. Further researches might be carried out to discover regional variations in certain genres of Karbi folk literature and culture, to collect and document more Karbi proverbs, metaphors, riddles, legends, various folk songs or Alun, etc. some of which have got extinct due to proper preservation. Another unanswered aspect is the lost Kuki-Chin link in the Karbi folk songs which needs further research. Moreover, the Karbi migration memories contained in Mosera Kihir, an important genre in Karbi folk narratives, are silent on the plight of the tribe after they crossed over to the Cachar Hills. This and more further questions also opened up after this study which opens up areas of further research on these.

Limitations of the study

Ignorance of most of the people interviewed. The choice of villages was also limited to the south-east and south-west boundaries of Karbi Anglong. More villages across the boundaries could have been selected for showing more regional variations in literature and culture. It is also a limitation that more elements of folk literature, specially Karbi proverbs, riddles, charms, etc. could not be collected due to ignorance of people, paucity of time and reluctance of some villagers to participate.

Advantages/Delimitations

The study is a humble beginning. It taught important lessons for further serious, exhaustive and extensive studies. It triggered an inclination for more academic pursuits. The benefits of the study are to be transferred to the students in terms of systematic study and documentation. The basis of the questioning spirit has set in.

Unanswered questions

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