

PREFACE

The Mikirs or the Karbis are one of the most notable tribal groups in Assam, next only to the Mishings and the Bodos. They have a rich cultural heritage and their simple but extraordinarily charming life-style is really praiseworthy. Racially speaking, they belong to the Mongoloid group. Linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. They primarily occupy the Karbi Anglong District under the administrative reigns of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. They also occupy parts of the district of Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and the districts of the Borak Valley besides some other places outside Assam. They are believed to have migrated originally from China near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and the Howang-Ho rivers and from these places they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered India and Burma. They entered Assam from Central Asia in one of the waves of migration like other tribes.

Ever since their migration the Karbis have formed a rich cultural heritage unique in their own ways. They do not have a written history to trace their origin, their lineage, their development down the times, the changes of fortunes and sufferings in various periods of history. All these things, however, have been kept

alive by the folk-tales, legends, myths and popular beliefs. They have a very rich legacy of oral history in which their past, their migration memories, their tumultuous period and trials and tribulations on their way of migration, settlement and in the hands of the Kachari and Ahom kings as well as during the times of the Mann attack are truthfully recorded. It is notable that almost all of the oral history is in the form of songs and lyrics through which a tone of melancholy is evident. Their folk literature is marked by a pervading tone of longing for the past and a yearning to be reunited to this past and forefathers.

The Karbis are a very simple and charming tribe. They have always suffered from lack of understanding from the ruling classes. In the recent year there has been a renewed interest in the studies of various aspects of their corporate life, though not very large in number. We feel that there is a need to highlight their life, belief, culture, mores, etc. as reflected through their folk-literature which is as good and notable as other people of Assam. Their culture including art and art forms, dresses, food habits, habitats, modes of farming, social pattern, literature, and even their ethnobotany and ethnozoology are very remarkable and rich which have added to the composite culture of the greater Assamese culture and identity. Their folk literature and culture is so varied and rich that they have few parallels in Assam so far as their comparison to many other tribes are concerned. They have their own stories worth telling and exploration. Researches in this field have been

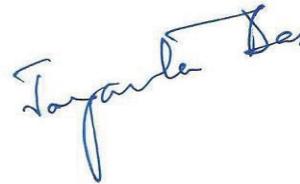
rather scanty. They deserve their stories told to the world which may open up new vistas of understanding the tribe, their past, culture, sociology, beliefs and mores, rituals as well as the root of bloodshed in the otherwise tranquil hills.

The research on the topic has been undertaken with a number of objectives in hand. First of all it aims to highlight the rich literary heritage of which any tribe can be proud of. It has been undertaken with a view to studying their folk-literature running across many centuries and also to have a glimpse of their cultural life which is unique in itself. One of the objectives of the research has been to make an endeavour to re-orient the greater Assamese society in particular to the common cultural lineage all tribes in Assam share together. Besides, an attempt has been made to cataloguing various forms of Karbi folk literature in one place.

The methodology of research used has been a descriptive and introductory one collecting data from field studies, interviewing some elderly village people and studying selected books, journals, magazines, e-resources and newspapers. Field studies were taken to ten Karbi villages to meet, interact, interview and to photograph people and events. The emphasis has been to introduce various aspects of Karbi literary tradition, its folk-tales, other genres of folk narratives, culture and modern Karbi literature. Another focus is on analyzing and highlighting the reflection of Karbi social life in their folk-literature and reinvent their long period of grief and suffering over the centuries starting with the migration memories as

expressed in Mosera Kihir. As stated, the area of research has been an introductory and descriptive one where glimpses are cast on the above mentioned aspects of Karbi folk-literature for the state, national and international readers who might be interested in literary, cultural, social and ethnographical descriptions of a distinct tribe. The attempt may be significant in that research on this aspect has been scanty. Whatever research has been there, the great chunk has been in Assamese.

But it is unfortunate that most of the people whom the present researcher met during field visits, mostly from the present generation, are unaware about the folklore. They expressed ignorance even after the names of various genres of folk literature were mentioned. People of these places had to be convinced regarding the purpose of the visit, data collection and documentation.



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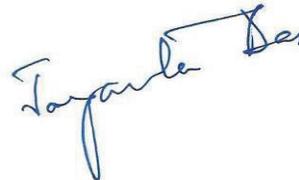
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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jayanta Das". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline for the letter 'J'.

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