

Chapter II: Literature Review

During the last few decades, there has been an increased interest, particularly from the academics, to study and document Karbi literature and culture. There has been also a remarkable rise in the number of enlightened Karbi youths who have taken seriously to study, document and disseminate the repertoire of information and knowledge on various aspects of Karbi life, literature and culture. Growth of societies and forum like Karbi Young Writers' Guild, Karbi Lummet Amei, etc. are very praiseworthy developments in the trouble-torn district of Karbi Anglong where the greatest number of Karbi people live. Besides, there has been blogs like karbiwordpress.com where very learned articles about various aspects of Karbi society, life, literature, art, culture, polity, folklores, etc. are regularly uploaded and shared by all interested persons. In a nutshell, there has been a remarkable growth of literature on the folklores, myths and memories, art and culture of the Karbis. But however, most of these growing pieces of writings are in Assamese only. Except a few numbers of scholarly books written in English, most of the available printed books on literature and culture of the Karbis are either in the Karbi or in the Assamese language.

Among the most notable books on the Karbis that touches among others on Karbi literature and culture, special mention may be made first of the book by Lyall and Stack titled '*The Mikirs*' (1908). It is an authoritative book on the Karbis and it basically touches on the

ethnography of the tribe. The most notable aspect of the work from the folk literature point of view is that it included a few specimens of Karbi folktales. Of course, the book was mostly the brainchild and work of Edward Stack, the original author who unfortunately died before the book was published. Lyall 'edited, arranged and supplemented the book' the materials of which were collected, systematically written down and organized by Stack and another young and bright Karbi named Sardoka. More than anything else, this scholarly book gave the impetus to further serious works on the Karbis with academic rigour.

Bonglong Terang's book -'*Aron Ateng*', a combination of two of his published works titled Rukasen and Adam Asar along with the additions of a few songs and customs of the Karbi society can be regarded as the foundation of Karbi literature.

"Tomo Puru", (Comp. and Published by William Ralph Hutton for the American Baptist Mission, Guwahati 1930) is stated to be the earliest known folktale collection in Karbi. The book added another jewel to Karbi folk literature.

"Karbi Loka Xadhu" in Assamese (ed. Kamini Das, published by Diphu Sahitya Sabha, 1983) is an important work on Karbi folktales. It is also a collection of Karbi folk tales.

LA Waddell's book **"The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley: A Contribution on their Physical Types and Affinities"** (1975) is also basically sociological in nature. It has discussed to some extent the

Karbis and their similarities with some other tribes of the Brahmaputra valley including literature and culture.

“Phisar-Phusar Atomo” or the Ancestors’ Tales (Comp. Bapuram Teron, Karbi Lammet Asong, 2001) is another important collection of Karbi folktales.

“Jangreso” or the Orphans’ Tale (Comp. and ed., Bidorsing Kro, Karbi Lammet Amei, 2006) is another feather to the growing but still scanty number of literature on the Karbi folktales.

“Phi-Phu-Atomo” or the Grandparents’ Tale (comp. and ed. Bidorsing Kro, Karbi Language Development Board, 2009) was a book containing another collection of Karbi folktales in Karbi. The book, sponsored by KAAC, is a noteworthy collection of folktales.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji’s book **“Kirāta Jana Krti, The Indo-Mongoloids: Their contribution to the History and Culture of India” (1974)** (Reprint) discusses the contribution of the Karbis, among others, to the composite cultural fabric of India.

Suren Kramsa’s book **‘Karbi Kristit Ebhumuki’ (2004)** is an authoritative book in the area. Comprising of 19 articles, it is a valuable document on various aspects of Karbi literature and culture. Kramsa has particularly dwelt at length on the clans, death rituals, folk beliefs and rebirth, village life and customary laws, folk story about the origin of Chomangkaan, Jambili Aathon, the most popular dance, marriage

system, religious festivities, etc. He has provided very informative insights into the cultural life of the Karbis in this book.

Dr. PC Phangcho in his book *'The Karbis of North East India'* (1st Edition March 2003), has provided much useful insight into the corporate life of the Karbis. It is an authoritative book and is a must readable one on the tribe where we get much useful information on the language, literature and culture of the tribe.

"Tribal Folk Tales of Assam (Hills)" (Comp. SN Barkataki, Publication Board, Assam, 1970) is a noteworthy collection of tribal folktales of undivided Assam. The book also contains ten Karbi folktales contributed by reputed Karbi literateur Longkam Teron.

"Arleng Alam: Die Sprache Der Mikir" (Grussner, Dr. Karl Heinz, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1978) is another significant work on Karbi folktales, among others. The book however, has not been available here nor has it studied. Only discussions about the book have been seen. The book is stated to contain a number of specimens of Karbi folktales.

Basanta Das' book *'Karbi Sanskritir Itihas'* (2010) is a monumental work on the language, literature and culture of the Karbis. Das had a long time association with the tribe as he had travelled to various parts of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District and North Cachar District necessitated by requirements of his service in the Department of Economics and Statistics. He had very closely observed

Karbi literature and culture. The book is a comprehensive history of Karbi culture and literature dedicated to those who have endeavoured for research and development of Karbi language and culture. The book provides a comprehensive history of the tribe from its migration to the present times and devotes a long chapter on Karbi folk literature. The book has been hailed as a very monumental one not only by the Karbis but also by the cross section of people in Assam.

In the book titled '*Asomor Loka Sanskriti*', *Vol II, (2011)* Chao Lokeswar Gogoi has given useful and reliable research based information on various areas of folk culture of the tribe, among others including the hunting styles, draught in their folk culture, food items, country liquor in their culture, sooth saying, ethnobotany and vegetables, herbs as medicines, folk religion, village and other social organizations, birds in folk belief, festivals, drums, funerals, costumes, bamboo culture, Jambili Athon, house building system and materials, ornaments, etc. It is an authoritative and comprehensive book on various tribes and communities in Assam including the Karbis.

'Asomor Loka Sanskriti' (2005) by Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barua, is a study on the popular culture of Assam which incorporates the folklore of fish, serpents, fowls, betel-chewing, food and medicine, oaths and curses, ceremonial dances and festivals, house building, dress, ornament and handicrafts, touching on those of the Karbis.

“*Asomiya Loka Sanskritir Abhas*” (2007) by Dr. Nabin Chandra Sarmah is a comprehensive study of the folklore of Assam and the book touches on important features and various aspects of the composite Assamese folklore including those of the Karbis. It is one of the most authoritative books on folklore in Assam as Dr. Sarmah is a celebrated name in the area of folklore in the state.

“*Tribes of North East India, Biological and Cultural Perspectives*” (2008) by Sarthak Sengupta devotes a complete chapter on the ‘*Economy of the Karbis*’ written by BK Medhi. The book also includes a chapter on ‘*Land Alienation among the tribes in North Cachar District of Assam*’ written by T. Bhattacharjee. These chapters have ample references to the Karbis and their life as it is today.

“*Asomor Janajati*” (1991) ed. by Pramod Chandra Bhattacharjee is another authoritative book which includes scholarly articles on the Karbis. The chapter on ‘Mikir’ by Jagyoram Gogoi provides brief description of the tribe including their folk literature and culture.

Prafulladatta Goswami’s book ‘*Hindu and Tribal Folklore in Assam*’, (1967) touches upon the Karbi folklores which are unique in their own ways even though they have similarities to those of some other tribes of Assam and the North East.

The study and documentation of Karbi folk literature and culture got a new impetus with the publication of the four volumes of edited books by Assam Book Hive, Panbazar, Guwahati titled ‘*Karbi Studies*’

Vol I-IV. These volumes are published in the special initiative of Dharamsing Teron and Sikari Tisso, among others. Dharamsing Teron in particular has been an indefatigable researcher and writer on the Karbis who has contributed immensely to the growth and development of researches on the Karbis. Vol I and Vol III in particular have done a commendable job in documenting the Karbi memories, myths, metaphors and Karbi folktales. These volumes have put together and collated much informative inputs hitherto scattered and thus, they have filled a long felt vacuum in Karbi studies, specially in the areas of literature and culture.

‘Karbi Sanskritir Probah’ (2003) by Sailen Das is another reliable and informative research based book on the culture and folk literature of the Karbis. Das has tried to put together various pieces of Karbi culture-its folk songs, art forms, worship, folk belief, Sabin Alun, the reflection of Karbi ways of life in its ballads, etc. in brief. The chapter on folk literature in the book needs special mention.

‘A Glimpse of Karbi Literature and Culture’, originally written in Assamese by Rongbong Terang and translated into English by Dr. Dilip Kumar Kalita, published by Diphu Sahitya Sabha in 2010 is another most remarkable work on Karbi literature and culture. The book is a holistic approach to document the new Karbi literature, nature of folk literature, ballads in Karbi literature, regional characteristics in Sabin Alun, life of the Karbis as reflected in the folk songs, Karbi

lullabies, Chomangkan and its significance, Jambili Athon and Karbi culture, the place of fish in Karbi society, origin of paddy and the assimilation of Assamese and Karbi culture. The book contains all essential information on Karbi literature and culture for a basic knowledge for those who are eager and interested to know about Karbi literature and culture. The book is authoritative on these aspects of the Karbis since it has been written by none other than Padmashree Rong Bong Terang who is a colossal figure in Karbi life, literature and society.

Maj. John Butler's book, '*Travels in Assam—During a residence of Fourteen Years*' (Reprinted 1988) which was first published in 1855 under the title 'Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam', also provides useful information on the Karbis, their life, literature and culture.

'*Karbi Bhasa Sahityar Rengoni*', (2012) by Pallabi Saikia is a research based useful book on Karbi language and culture. Her book lays equal emphasis on the linguistic and cultural aspects of the Karbis. She has written with reliable data on various aspects of Karbi culture including topics like Karbi popular culture, their death ritual Chomangkan, ballads, marriage system, riddles, their cultivation, assimilation of Karbi and greater Assamese culture, etc.

Contribution of Bonglong Terang documenting Karbi literature and culture has already been stated. His book titled '*Karbi Loka Geet*', (2006) translated into Assamese by Longkam Teron is also a remarkable

work on the folk songs of the Karbis. In this book a total of seven *keplang* (stories of the origin) of the Karbis- Lokhi (goddess of fortune), Rong Kekim (village organization), Horbong keplang (bottle guard), etc have been included which bear immense literary value. These folk songs give us a glimpse of the rich and enchanting Karbi folk literature and culture.

'Sociology of the Karbis', (1986) by Tanmay Bhattacharjee, though basically sociological in nature, devotes a whole chapter (chapter eight) on 'Folktales, stories and Legends' of the Karbis. One remarkable aspect of the book is that it contains a portion on Oso Kebei Alun or the Cradle songs of the Karbis, which need more research and documentation.

'Asom Ancholor Janajatiya Sadhukotha: Upadaan aru Adhyayan', (2005) Compiled and published by Dr. Jagadish Patgiri is also a very remarkable book which gives us a lot of important information on Karbi folk tales and the book has recorded twelve Karbi folk tales.

'Karbi Lok Xadhu' (1983) by Kamini Das is yet another handy book on the Karbi folktales.

On Karbi folktales there are previous other books like *'Karbi Xadhu' (1976)* by Rongbong Terang which contain considerable material on Karbi folktales.

‘Asomor Bibhinna Janagosthir Bibah Paddhati’, (2011) ed. by Putoli Kayastha provides materials on the institution of marriage in Karbi society.

‘Asomor Bibhinna Janagosthir Lok Utsav’ (2004) by Dhruvakumar Talukdar documents materials on Karbi festivities which are remarkable.

‘Asomor Sanskriti’, (2006) by Leela Gogoi is an authoritative and old reliable book on Assamese culture with important insights into Karbi culture as well.

‘Asomiya Sanskritiloi Janajatiya Borongoni’ (1998) by Nahendra Padun records the contribution of the Karbis, like other tribes, to the greater Assamese culture of which every Assamese person is proud.

Apart from these representative books, there are many other books which have tried to document materials on Karbi literature and culture. But these books suffice to have a comprehensive view of the literature and culture of the Karbis.

Besides, there are a number of journals, magazines, souvenirs, pamphlets, e-resources, etc. on these aspects of the Karbis, scattered here and there which have also documented Karbi language, literature and culture in the right perspectives.

There is a blog which has most reliable materials on various aspects of Karbi life, sociology, politics, economy, literature and culture, etc. hosted on the web as the URL <http://www.karbi.wordpress.com> . The blog is run by a noted, avid, young Karbi scholar who has contributed immensely single handedly to collect, collate, document and disseminate information on all these aspects of the corporate life of the Karbis for a long time now. The blog has seen a lot of interactions and the administrator is always keen to further research and improvement. In his able hands and scholarship, the blog contains much useful, reliable and scholarly articles on almost all aspects of Karbi corporate life and culture.

There is another devoted blog for the cause hosted as <http://karbi.net> with a number of useful articles on various aspects of Karbi society.

From the above discussion about the available literature on Karbi folk literature and culture, it is evident that there are but few works in the English language and there has also been a very few number of research works on Karbi folk literature and culture. A comprehensive book covering all aspects of Karbi folk literature and culture in English is still wanting. It can be hoped that this humble report will aid or somehow contribute to inspiring some researchers to write such a comprehensive book in the near future where all aspects of the rich literary and cultural legacy will be documented.