CHAPTER – III

PLAIN KARBIS OF ASSAM:
AN ACCOUNT
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3.1: Introduction: The Karbis

The Karbis constitute one of the most important ethnic groups of Assam. Formerly known as the Mikirs, the Karbis prefer to be called as the ‘Arlengs’ or hill dwellers. This is true only in case of the Karbis of the hills; the Karbis living in plains do not give much importance whether they are living in hills or in plains. The most important attempt to compile an account of the Karbis during the British rule was made by Edward Stack, (ref: Section 1.9.1) an Indian Civil Servant during the eighties of the nineteenth century. The monograph titled ‘The Mikirs’ was edited, arranged and supplemented by Sir Charles Lyall from the papers of late Edward Stack under the directive of the then British Lt. Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Sir Bamfylde Fuller’s (1902-06) administration. This attempt at writing monograph for official purpose provided a pertinent and authentic introductory note on the people. The British took note of their existence but systematically neglected their development (Bhattacharya: 1997). Since the Independence of India, studies have been made on the hill Karbis by various scholars.
The Karbis are basically a hill tribe concentrating mainly in the Karbi-Anglong hill district, “between the Brahmaputra on the north, the Dhansiri valley on the east and the Kopili and Jamuna valley on the west and the south” (Lyall, 1908:2). However, they are now distributed over a wider area covering both hills and plains from Sibsagar and Golaghat to Nagoan and Kamrup districts of Assam. They have settled in the plains and taken to plough cultivation in Nagoan and Kamrup (Lyall: 1908).

The Karbis belong to the Mongoloid group and linguistically they belong to the Tibeto-Burman group (Bordoloi, Preface: 1982). They are divided into four regional divisions, Chinthong, Ronghang, Amri and Dumarli showing some linguistic and cultural modifications of the common Karbi ethos. The Karbis are divided into five major clans called ‘Kur’, namely Terang, Timung, Enghee, Ingti and Teron. Each of theses clans is divided into a number of sub-clans (Bordoloi, Thakur, Saikia 56:1987). These clans are exogamous and marriage within the clan is prohibited. Monogamy is the general rule and widow remarriage though rare is permissible. Cross-cousin marriage is the preferred type of marriage and ‘the Karbis do not have the system of bride price’ (Bordoloi, Thakur, Saikia, 1987:56). After marriage the wife continues to use the surname of her father while her children assume the surname of the father.

The Karbis follow the patriarchal system of family structure and the descent is traced through the father’s line. The inheritance
of both movable and immovable property after the death of the father is through the sons and not the daughters. If a man dies without any male issue, his nearest male relative inherits his property.

Karbis are basically animist, but elements of Hinduism have percolated into the religious lives of those living along the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Although the Karbis speak their own Karbi dialect, they also have a working knowledge of Assamese, the language of the state of Assam.

3.2: The Karbis of Plains:

Many anthropologists / ethnographers have while narrating the accounts of Karbis of the hills has casually made references about their plains counterpart. No effort or data could be available as to whether the people referred to as plains Karbis are really plains section of the Karbi tribe or not or a faction of some other tribe. This is necessary to be ascertained in view of the fact that Assam is the house of innumerable tribes most of whom are categorised under the broad category of Bodo-Kachari. Let us first examine how far the tribe under study satisfies the necessary criteria for a tribe?

3.2.1: Tribal Characters:

Before going to discuss the basic characteristics of a tribe, it is necessary to clarify certain point in regard to the tribe under
study. First, all the people commonly known as plains Karbis, residing in segments of Sibasagar, Sonitpur, Nagaon and Kamrup districts are taken as belonging to the same tribe living in hills for the simple reason that they manifest the similar social characteristics, e.g.

- They speak the same language as that of the hills Karbis with slight local variation here and there.
- Their proper nouns are similar.
- Their clans system is similar.
- Their clan characteristics, functions and names of the clans are similar.
- Their political institutions are similar although these are addressed differently.
- Basic characteristics of their language is similar,
- Their religious practices are similar and above all,
- Their festivals are similar with variations in names only.

These similarities were observed while conducting field study in rural Kamrup and Nagaon district in order to bring up the basic characteristics of the social system of the Plain Karbis. During the fieldwork, ample information was gathered- some are contradictory to each other, some are mythological and some are valuable but never recorded before. This section is compiled only with those facts which are found more or less common to all the plain Karbis visited. From what have been gathered from the field study and the available data pertaining to the hill Karbis, leads to believe that both the tribe at some point of time lived together as one tribe and in course of time a section of them had to descend to the plains for some reasons and started their settled life in plains.
The descension rather than ascension is most probable, as those living in plains still cultivate the nearby hills by slash and burn method, which perhaps they learnt while living in hills. There is therefore scope to believe that the tribe under study is of the same stock although with the passage of time large scale changes have taken place in their social, political and economic organisation and this study is made to assess these changes.

Beteille (1987: 63) in his essay on ‘Tribe and Peasants’ concluded analysing various definitions of “Tribe”, that “There is thus no one way of defining a tribal society. Definitions may be either very broad and loose or very narrow and restricted. The former would apply not only to the tribes but in many ways also to the peasantry. The latter would exclude many societies which have been conventionally regarded as tribal.”

Ghuriye (1963:19-20) is one of the earliest writers who examined the characteristics of tribes in his famous book the scheduled Tribes. His basic contention is that, tribes cannot be called the aboriginal, as we have no proof that they are the original inhabitants of India. He describes the tribal people as the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society and can be termed backward Hindus. Ghurye’s contention was not based on any intensive studies of the tribal people of India and therefore has no acceptability at least not in the present case.
Naik (1968: 86) provided some criteria for a tribe. Among these, the least functional interdependence, economic backwardness, geographic isolation, common dialect, independent political organisation, absence of desire to change customary laws, etc. are the main attributes. It is true that some of the characteristics as mentioned by Naik are prevalent among the tribes – but not all of these factors are always present. Similar is the case with Bailey's (1957) definition or Sahlin's (1968) segmentary definition of tribe, which cannot comprehensively describe a tribe. Beteille (1987) opening up a discussion on the definition or characteristics of a tribe finally concluded it upon analysing his study on Oraons, Haimendorf's study on Raj Gonds of Adilabad and Bose's study on Mundas. Thus, his essay could not arrive at any comprehensive definition of tribe.

For this study, and also for the North East India's tribes, the closest definition could be the one as treated by the Anthropological Convention. (Beteille, 1987: 78) For them the tribe as a whole, completely organised society. Such a society is characterised by:

i) a self perpetuating system having within its boundaries all the resources necessary for the continued maintenance of a particular mode of collective existence.

ii) It is a whole culture.

iii) Each tribe has its own territory to signify that they are politically autonomous.
iv) It also has its own language or dialect to mark the distinctiveness of its culture.

The Constitution of India which specifies certain tribes as Scheduled tribes also has not provided any criteria or definition for considering a community as a tribe under the list of Scheduled Tribe. However, the criteria adopted for specifying communities as Scheduled tribe are i) traditional occupation of a definite geographical area, ii) distinctive culture which includes whole spectrum of tribal way of life, i.e. language, customs, traditions, religious beliefs, arts and crafts, etc., iii) primitive traits depicting occupational pattern, economy, etc and iv) lack of educational and economic development (Verma, 1990: 11).

Considering, the two sets of criteria discussed above for the purpose of the present study, we would find that the community under consideration fulfills the basic criteria for a tribe. These characteristics are discussed in detailed in the succeeding paragraphs, which would make it clear that they are in fact a tribe in transition.

Few studies have been made on the physical traits of the Karbis – both hills and plains. The most recent among them is the study conducted by Deb (1979) comparing the physical measurements of hill and plains Karbis. He conducted the study assuming the tribe in plains as Karbi and thereafter proceeded to compare the physical traits of both. His findings on somatometric measurements show no significant variation between the two sets
of tribes. He took 39 somatometric measurements from which thirteen indices were derived. He concluded that out of the thirty nine metric characters, only in respect of 10, significant differences could be observed. Similarly, out of the thirteen indices, only in respect of 5, the differences were found significant. From this he concluded that somatometric measurements do not show any significant variation. He observed that, between both hill and plains Karbis, ‘B’ blood group is more frequent than ‘A’. In the frequency distribution of ABO blood group, the two sets of populations are similar. But in respect of some somatoscopic characters, such as, skin colour, eye fold, nasal depression, prognathism and chin form, both the sections differ significantly. Deb has not specifically explained as to what could be the reasons for such variations although he raised the issue of habitat and environment as the reasons. Deb’s study, on the whole remained indeterminate in saying whether the samples he used belong to same stock of population or not. A comparative chart is presented below which would show that not much of difference could be observed between the hill Karbis and the Karbis of Plains.

**TABLE- 3.2.1: Comparative Measurements of Hill Karbis and Plain Karbis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurements</th>
<th>Height Average</th>
<th>Tallest</th>
<th>Shortest</th>
<th>Head length</th>
<th>Head breadth</th>
<th>Cephalic index</th>
<th>Nasal index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Waddel’s (hill)</td>
<td>5.354</td>
<td>5.583</td>
<td>5.108</td>
<td>181mm</td>
<td>141mm</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>85.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deb (Hillman)</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>184.6</td>
<td>146.4</td>
<td>78.96</td>
<td>82.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deb (Plains Karbi)</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>203 mm</td>
<td>157 mm</td>
<td>78.35</td>
<td>80.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the above table, it is clear that the difference in measurements among the hill and plains Karbis in respect of their heights are not significant. The observed difference between Waddel's measurements of hill men and that of Deb's, could very well arise due to sampling fluctuation. But of course, variation is notable in respect of head measurements and cephalic and nasal indexes. There is scope for further study on this count. Thus, from the point of view of the physical measurements, although it is yet to be ascertained whether plains Karbis belong to the same stock of population to which the hill Karbis belong, yet from the point of view of social customs and beliefs, this could be easily ascertained that they are fact, belong to the same stock of population.

3.2.2: The Origin:

It is difficult to ascertain as to when and how this group of Karbis started their permanent settlement in this locality of Guwahati, which has been a known urban centre since 17th century AD. There are various stories in circulation about their migration to this area - most of which have no historical support. As they appear, Karbi settlements under study do not seem to be older than one and a half century. They talk about the king and queen of Beltola who was here since 17th century AD. First land settlement in Guwahati started in the year 1918. The land records prepared during that time bears proof that many among the Karbis were then landholders.
As per one theory, the Karbis proceeded towards east from the southwestern side of Assam i.e. Garo Hills region due to the torture meted out to them by the hostile Garos. They started their journey along the south bank of Brahmaputra and in the process got divided into several groups. Some of the groups reached various hilly terrains crossing Nagaon; but a few groups preferred to stay back in the plains. After moving round from place to place, they finally settled down in the foothills located at the outskirts of the town Guwahati. The present Karbis are the descendents of those groups. This analogy is believable; but this does not give any evidence about the time of migration and final settlement. Moreover, most of the previous writers have attempted to establish that the migration of the Karbis to Karbi Anglong occurred from the North Cachar hills. Robinson (1841&1849 : 308-312) opined that they had settled along the Barail range of North Cachar hills; but they were driven out by the Angami Nagas and Kacharis of the area. This made them to enter the Jaintia hills region. Dalton (1872) also believed that the Karbis were driven out from the Tolarams country, which was located between Nagaon and Cachar from where they entered the Jaintia country. Lyall (1908: 4) determined that “The traditions of the race point to the Eastern portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, bordering on the Kopili (or Kupli) river (where many still remain), as their original abode.” Lyall’s confirmation is based on the data available at his time. It is difficult to accept the territory he suggested as the original abode. The tribe reached the spot through Nagaon either from Cachar or
from Garo hills region and finding it uninhabited by other tribes, settled down there. Nothing could be definitely told about their affinities with the Jaintias or the Khasi tribe presently in Meghalaya. The common cultural traits prominent among them could be acquired by the either tribe. As the Karbis are the most adoptive tribe who accepts the customs of other culture quickly and when finds it difficult to maintain abandon these, their possibility to acquire the traits is greater.

3.2.3: Village pattern

In their domestic life, the Karbis in the plains are very much similar to that of their Hindu neighbours to whom they are closely allied. The houses are mainly thatched, one storied houses of which walls are made of reeds or bamboo strings. The houses are not built closely – and therefore the village does not appear to be a compact one. Almost every village in plains are located at the foothills or hillocks except in Nagaon districts where few villages are located in close proximity to the tea gardens. In other villages, people earlier used to cultivate the hill lands frequently using slash and burn method (Jhum). But gradually, the system has been abandoned.

The Karbi settlements under study also present the same picture. Most of the villages are at the foothills and although now there is no trace of original shape, yet, looking at the original Karbi houses, it can be said well that initially the village had a pattern
where people lived nearer to their paddy fields. The Narakasur, Sarusajai and Moina Khurung villages are still in their earlier shape of a village.

The Karbi concept of village is a simple one. Their village set-up has no impact of their clan system and neither separate plot is reserved for clans nor does their land holding pattern have any reflection on their village set-up. In every village, the individual land boundaries are perfectly defined as each such plot has corresponding land records. But the boundaries of unsettled lands are not perfectly defined and many villagers are in occupation of such lands. Except that in Sorusajai and Narakasur, the other villages are not significant as village in their appearance. One can enter the village without actually knowing that he/she is entering a tribal locality. The houses continue to be built along the busy main road in the Japorigog and Hengerabari villages. As homestead land is falling short due to further construction or extension, new houses are being built leaving either no space or marginal spaces between two such buildings. In some cases, the plots of land are so small that the families do not even have a kitchen garden. In certain other cases, the adjacent plot is sold out and is owned by a non-Karbi, non-tribal Company official raising his/her own huge building. Within the original compound, existence of two or three houses usually indicates that there are married sons. The sons, usually before marriage, start up their own separate residences. This is a recent phenomenon. Earlier, after marriage, if condition arises
married sons get separated raising their own house either within the compound or in a separate plot. Now after the shortage of homestead land, the village scene presents a picture, which is gradually transforming into a slum locality especially in the Japorigog and Hengerabari.

Four other sites are generally common to all the villages studied are used as traditional public places i) village Than, – a sacred area where the village gods are believed to reside, ii) an open space around the Than which is usually chosen as the centre of the village. In this open space, the “Khels” meet and other important events take place. The third area is the Sil Puta area where the memorial stone monuments are erected and slabs are set-up to commemorate the dead. In this place it is believed that the souls of the dead takes rest. The fourth is the residence of the Burha Bangthai, who is the head of the traditional village council. His house, the courtyard and the Borghor which is the sacred room used for rituals and religious purposes, form spaces for community congregation, performance of community rituals and festivals and a place for the keeping of community’s sacred objects.

3.2.4: Dwelling pattern

The housing pattern of the Karbi villages may be described as dispersed units. Like any other tribal communities, the Karbis of the plain also prefer to live in villages usually away from urban disturbances. Unfortunately, most of the Karbi settlements in plains
in Assam are now either gradually coming closer to urban centres either due to extension of existing urban areas or are already within the grip of urban areas like in Guwahati. This has great impact on the housing pattern of the plain Karbis. A typical Karbi house is made of bamboo and thatch. Most of the Karbi villages can be seen having gradually converted their houses from thatch roofed to tin roofed. Some such conversion has already been completed. In Guwahati, in almost all the target villages, houses are constructed with tins (CI sheets).

Usually the dwelling houses of Karbis consist of four rooms - one bedroom- Ingkam or “Keahem”, one guest room or “Aatsali”, a kitchen or Ingkut or Pakahem and a granary or Raak or Maal hem. In addition to these, cowshed or Charangathali and poultry house or Waaral or Phakahem is also seen at the back of the house. The main house where the head of the family resides is constructed on the east-west side of the courtyard maintaining its length in the eastern direction. This is traditional pattern. But in towns, the housing pattern is mostly influenced by their occupational pattern. Where rented house is the main income-earning source of a family, the main house finds less preference than the rented house. The rented houses are constructed in the front panel with an expectation to get more rent. The main house of each Karbi family is raised according to their economic ability. But the concept of minimum four-room structure has been kept intact in respect of the main house.
One of the rooms adjacent to kitchen is called the *Borghor* (or the big house to mean that significant importance is attached to it although the room may not be a big one). Karbis of plains erect a post made of *Xunaru* tree (*Cassia fistula*) in this room performing specified ritual on a specified day. This sacred post is called the *Nungpe-aarhi (Mudha Khuta)*. This has become a sacred symbol of the Karbis of Plains like that of the *Jambili Aathon* of the hill Karbis. Each and every Karbi family must have a *Borghor* and a *Nungpe-aarhi*. If any sons of a family set-up new separate residence and willing to set up a *Borghor*, the matter is to be put up in the village *Mel* for consent. If the prayer is accepted by the *Mel*, only then the *Mudha Khuta* and *Borghar* are built, otherwise they are to use their parental *Borghor*.

3.2.5: Livelihood:

Agriculture is the primary occupation of the Karbis living in plains of Assam and majority of them are orthodox cultivators. They usually raise common crops but they also cultivate other crops and vegetables as mixed crops. *Aijong* is the main among the paddies cultivated, as its yield is higher than other types. In Nagaon, in different areas, they also grow sugarcane in sufficient quantities. There are instances, of practicing jhum cultivation where a hilly land is available for raising maize. They are basically subsistence cultivators and could not save anything from their produce.
In town areas, gradual shifting in the occupation from farm to non-farm sector has almost annihilated the primary sector. Local boys have not gone back to their ancestral paddy fields. As a result, abandoned paddy fields can be seen in rows - some of which have been sold out at lucrative prices. In urban localities, cash in return of labour is preferred than working in paddy fields. Young ones – who have not completed their schooling find opening in various small establishments like PCO operators’ assistant, sales boy in grocery shops, bus handyman, etc. There are also instances of plains Karbi boys and girls having successfully completed higher and professional education and engaged in various professions although their numbers are very few.

Domestication of animals is their traditional habit and it is still found among the town dwellers under study. Animal products provide a family their subsidiary incomes. Most of the plain Karbi families rear cow, goats, pigs, dogs, fowls, etc, which are the major domestic animals. Another subsidiary source of income is brewing rice bear which fetch a good income in the town market although till now remained a secret trade mostly ran by women.

3.2.6: Food habits:

Although racially diverse, the Karbis of plains are geographically very close to their neighbour – the Assamese people and thus have abundant influence on their cuisine. Food plays a central role in Karbi culture – in both hills and plains; it represents prosperity, generosity, and community support. Hospitality is
extended to visitors, who are usually asked to share a meal. Even if a visitor is not hungry, he or she will generally eat a small amount of food so that the host is not disappointed. Food is also often given as a gift, and a refusal of food is considered an insult to the host or giver.

The manner of taking food and also food schedule varies from society. Similarly, type of food taken on various occasions is controlled by the ethics, norms and taboo of that society. The food taken on daily basis may not serve the purpose during a ceremonial occasion or a festival. In traditional societies, people strictly follow their food habits on all occasions. This is also observed among the plains Karbis. They are very sincere and devoted to their customs pertaining to food habits.

Rice in various forms is traditionally eaten by the Karbis living in plains. Their diet also includes various other cereals such as dal & fresh vegetables, fish and nuts. Fruits, fruit juices, vegetables, and nuts (e.g., peanuts, macadamia, and litchi) are eaten in abundance, while milk and other dairy products are not common. Coconuts and banana are plentiful.

Rice is the main item of food. From different varieties of rice, not only the two principal meals are prepared but also other preparations for breakfast and snacks viz., muri, akhoi, chira are also made. In rural areas, hundreds of species of fishes are available in the nearby Brahmaputra or Kolong river, local canals,
streams, ponds, and beels. Rice and fish, therefore, figure prominently in the food habits of the Karbis of plains.

Karbis eat rice every day and at every meal. At daybreak an agriculturist or a fisherman starts his long day with a meal of *panta*, plain boiled rice soaked overnight in water and allowed to ferment a little. This watery rice, mixed with salt and chilli, makes a filling breakfast for the poor. *Muri* or, *cheera* (flattened rice) are some other items of a traditional breakfast in most Karbi homes. These items are taken with milk or yoghurt and seasonal fruits like mango, banana or jackfruit. They are also taken with *gur*, raw country sugar made of date juice, palm juice, or cane juice. A great variety of *pithas* (homemade cakes) is made of sweet rice (Bora rice), especially new rice harvested in the autumn.

Thus, for them, rice is the main food. It is taken with other subsidiaries such as vegetable curry, pulse curry fish meat and egg, *dal* and various other green vegetables. Usually they take food three times a day, i.e. morning, noon and night. However, there are also families who take meal twice a day. Some of them also take rice as their breakfast followed by plain tea. Apart from the morning meal with *panta bhat* and dry or roasted fish sometimes biscuits and other light items such as bread, *roti, puri*, etc also taken these days. The morning breakfast has no hard and fast rule; it may be different for different members of the family.
Apart from the meals, the villagers also have a schedule for light refreshments. Usually in the afternoon, after coming from the jobs or paddy fields, they take red tea. This is a new habit. Sometimes the tea is taken with biscuits. Some of the male folks of the village throng the village chowke (crossroad) where a small tea stall is usually found. They sit there and discuss various matters till the night falls taking tea from time to time.

During the festive occasions, food occupies an important place. Every ritual or festivals have specified food and drink according to the availability of a particular food item. But the traditional likes and dislikes have now tended to disappear under economic pressure and several other factors. The consumption of rice bear is also gradually coming down due to the strict enforcement of the excise laws, which is a healthy sign for the socio-economic growth of the society.

The impact of urbanization on the plains Karbis in their food habit is enormous. In the villages under study, food habits have undergone drastic changes. Earlier they used to take rice prior to their leaving for paddy field, then again at noon time and finally in the evening; but now due to change in occupational pattern, their food intake has been reduced and they are now habituated in taking only two major meals a day – one in the afternoon and the other at night. This has necessitated making a provision for breakfast in their food schedule. Apart from this, their list of food items has also undergone change with packed food making way to the list.
They are now used to take different urban packed food like noodles as Chowmein, Maggi, roti, bread, etc.

3.2.7: Material Culture:

Man wrests from his habitat by means of his technology, foodstuff, shelter, and clothing application for survival. The objects he makes and uses for these purposes are termed material culture. In short, the term material culture means all objects used for his survival or for supporting and improving his life.

The detailed study of all the aspects of material side of an individual life seems to be of great interest and importance not only from the intrinsic interest for the artifacts themselves, but for the source of new invention and techniques of manipulating the object. It has a close resemblance with the entire social organization and other religious and ceremonial practices.

Anthropologists on many occasions have warned that many items of material culture are fast disappearing without leaving a trace behind. More and more traditional artifacts and techniques are outmoded by accelerating technological changes. To study material culture, the study of ecology is very much important as an interrelation between ecology and material culture. Man's material culture is a product of technology, which comprises of tools and implements, weapons, cookery, drum and ornaments, houses, etc.
The plain Karbis use several forms and types of material culture items, like any other community. These material cultural items are also decorated with various designs. In the following table some of such items are outlined.

**Table: 3.2.7: Material Culture Items of the Karbis of Plains**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Items</th>
<th>Materials used</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>A kind of basket trap, used for fishing purpose. In shallow water this is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Kind of basket, and to keep fish, while fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laan</td>
<td>Thread and iron balls</td>
<td>A net used for fishing in larger water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jakhoi</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Fishing implement, this is narrowed down at both ends having its entrance at the middle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukhura</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Used as a barrier or covering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luhi</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Fishing element.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choroh</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Acts as a kettle where the rice bear is filtered after preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingkrung</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>A round shaped implement with square holes to let the rice dust out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baleng</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Round shaped rice cleaning implement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duli</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Big squared basket to keep grains of rice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paching</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Baskets to keep daily and things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lang</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Used for pounding rice or paddy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hap</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Measuring rice a small basket.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Used for weighting rice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaksili</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Used for scattering and spreading out paddy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hak</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Basket used for carrying all the belonging at the time of marriage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujurah</td>
<td>Clay</td>
<td>Large earthen vessel used for keeping rice bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhengki</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Used for husking and pounding grains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harpong</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Like a glass used in serving rice bear to the guest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Material</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbong Skin of dried guard</td>
<td>Skin of dried guard</td>
<td>Used for storing rice bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Used for filtering rice bear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inghol Bamboo/wood</td>
<td>Bamboo/wood</td>
<td>Used for sitting purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taar Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Used for drying grain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijap Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>A hand made fan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khangra Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>A cage-like to keep fowls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janga Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo vessel where the rice beer is filtered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konchhor Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Rice is stored here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baclongsiri Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Conical shaped basket where the acid 'Pholo' get filtered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chacha Bamboo</td>
<td>Bamboo</td>
<td>Fishing implement with spitted mouth end to catch fish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilai Iron</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Traditional gun used for hunting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatakan Iron and Bamboo</td>
<td>Flat, sharp, pointed and poisonous hunting implement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nokpak Iron and Bamboo</td>
<td>Sharp and heavy Dao used for sacrificing animal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuh Iron and Bamboo</td>
<td>Kind of hoe, common agricultural implement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nokchok Iron and Bamboo</td>
<td>Sharp implement used for cutting vegetables, betel-nut etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkengketokalong Iron and wood</td>
<td>Used for grinding betel nut and betel leaf.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choaghai Iron and wood</td>
<td>Used for cutting and chopping wood of big tree.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noh Iron and wood</td>
<td>Sword.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kareik Clay</td>
<td>Kind of earthen vessel used in pouring rice beer to the deities worshipped.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saamlohar Wood</td>
<td>Used in serving vegetable or meat curry.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aamlohar Wood</td>
<td>Used in serving rice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Making of these items are the favourite past time of the aged persons of the Karbis. They do not make these items for commercial use – but for their own household use only although they know that these are in great demand and they can prepare these in large scale.
In the villages under study, most of the items listed above are bought from the markets, which are easily available and also cheap. Families having an aged person still enjoy using few of such items of their own make.

3.2.8: Clan Organisation:

Like that of the hill Karbis, the plain Karbis also have several groups, which they call *Ghar* or *Gharia* or sometimes *Kur-* as used by hill Karbis or sometime *Faids* as used by the Assamese. They have classified themselves broadly into five groups or *Gharias* - these are Terang (or Terang gharia or Terang faid) Teron (or Teron Gharia), Ingti, Inghi, and Timung. Each of these five clans has many sub-clans. While Inghi and Timung have 30 sub-clans each, Terang and Teron have 6 sub-clans each and the remaining clan Ingti has only 4 sub-clans. They follow the patriarchal system of family structure and the line of descent is traced through the male members only. Thus, every Karbi must belong to the clan of his or her father. The clan members are believed to have descended from the common ancestor.

These clans are completely exogamous and marriage between a boy and a girl belonging to the same clan can never take place since the children of the same clan are considered as brothers and sisters. Such happening is considered as the greatest offence. It amounts to incestuous union between the brothers and sisters and the prescribed punishment for such an offence is excommunication.
from the community. The punishment is awarded by the Mel. In such cases, the parents of the wrong doer also suffer indignities. They are considered as polluted and can be taken back to the fold after performing the ritual and giving a feast. Such things happen very rarely.

The clan differentiation could be visible only in respect of the life cycle rituals. Otherwise clan feeling is not so prominent among the plain Karbis of Guwahati. Even in the cremation ground called Smasan or Thiri, no such area is kept demarcated for each clan among the plain Karbis as can be viewed in case of the hill Karbis. Although, all the five clans are socially placed on the basis of equality, Ingti, being a priestly clan is supposed to have a higher status in earlier times while it is also a fact that the clan having majority of the population in the village enjoys a dominant status. The clan system also plays an important role during the death rituals and mortuary practices.

Every clan has their own Puja, which they popularly call Faidor Puja. In these clan performances, all the clan members from all neighbouring villages are supposed to be present. They select a village for observing the Puja and usually such a village is chosen where the clan has considerable numerical strength. This is for no competitive reasons but for obtaining the best assistance possible. The Rongsongs observes the “Chutal Puja” in every 3-5 years in Jagiroad in the month of Bohag, which is actually Johong puja where the Durga-asur is worshipped. Most of them are vague
about the god they worship as they all try to equate their Karbi gods with that of the Hindu god *Mahadev/Siva*. The Bungrungs perform the Johong puja near Narengi. The Tumung performs in Dholboma in the residence of the Clan “Ata”. The Terangs are not sure. Each community/*Khel* which is a socio-political functional unit also observes this puja at their *Khel* level. This comprises a reaffirmation of affiliation and solidarity within the various reference groups.

3.2.9: Social Life and Institution

The social life of the Karbis living in plains is simple and based on honesty and adherence to social norms. Like the Karbis of the hills, Karbis of the plains also follow the patriarchal norms in their society. Marriage within the clan is prohibited and property is transmitted through the father’s line. Mothers’ movable items are shared between the daughters.

a) Family structure:

Plains Karbi clans, as discussed above are although kinship categories, they do not form any compact residential units. The household units, among the plain Karbis, are the families and they are also the smallest residential units in their social system. Patriarchal social system is dominant among the plains Karbis. Male member is the head of the family and he gives the final decision on every matter.
The common family norm for them is a nuclear family consisting of father, mother and unmarried children, having a common hearth. In the study area however, various types of joint family system is observed, though few and such families remained more or less stable till they were pursuing agriculture as their main occupation. Shortage of agricultural labour and homestead land happen to be the main reason for raising separate residential units and thus for this deviation.

The father is considered the head of the unit like in any other patriarchal society. Traditionally, the females take charge of the domestic chores and are entrusted with the family treasure. Males leave home and take part in different external activities whereas females are confined within the walls of home. This tradition has now not been followed strictly even in rural areas. Except in the interior areas of Nagaon and Sonitpur, plains Karbi women in urban and semi urban localities are now taking part in the supplementing family income by taking paid jobs and self employing mechanism. There is a tradition of respecting old people and women among the Karbis. Males have been playing a dominant role in raising educational awareness among their people. Women are given much importance and without the consent of the woman no marriage takes place.

Apart from the nuclear families, they also have larger family units which include other kins – who are agnatic and rarely affinal. Although among the Karbis, such joint family system is not very
common, yet it was prevalent among them in the past due to the lack of alternative sources of income except agriculture. In the nuclear families, after the marriage of the son, he brings his wife to live in the parental residence. This is how a joint family starts. In the study area, such joint families are not very stable. Usually the death of the father or the marriage of the second brother terminates the 'jointness' of the family.

In the earlier days agriculture was the main source of living and father being the head of the family all the immovable properties are put in the name of the father. The rule of inheritance suggests that without the consent of the father not a portion of immovable properties can be transferred to the name of the sons during the lifetime of the father. This is one reason why the families remain united till the property is divided. But these conditions now no longer exist. Due to the increase in population and the availability of alternative sources of income, people desire freedom from the cares and responsibilities of joint family. Moreover, immovable properties are also shrinking in areas with the passage of time either due to the transfer by sale or due to fragmented holdings. Apart from these, individualistic thinking is also one reason for the change. A tendency to live separately after marriage has developed and they are moving toward nuclear family structure. The people of new generation do not like to adhere to the norms and values of the joint family structure.
(b) Karbi marriage:

For the Karbis of plains, marriage is an important life time event and they attach great significance to it. Marriage is also a moment of great rejoice. As stated earlier, marriage is regulated by the prevailing exogamy rules of clan system, which are imposed by the village Khels. It is not necessary that in marriage village endogamy should be maintained. In marriage by negotiation they travel quite a far to bring qualified girls home so as to make a successful family life. There are also instances where girls from Nagaon are married to boys of Hengerabari or Moina Khurung. Therefore, distance traveled for marriage is not always significant in the Karbi society.

(c) Age at marriage

Child marriage is not prevalent among the Karbis. Girls are considered very important in the family and without their consent no marriage takes place. Even when a person elopes another person's wife, such wife is formally asked whether she likes to continue with the earlier marriage. Her negative answer leads to dissolution of the earlier marriage. It is due to importance of girls in the family that age at marriage for girls is high. They prefer 20+ age as marriageable age for girls and most of the marriages take place between the age 24 and 28. For the boys also similar age group is preferred but boys enter into marriage contract once they start earning.
d) Types of marriage

The Karbi marriage system is complex but interesting. They talk about two types of marriages – 1) arranged marriage/marriage by negotiation marriage, and 2) marriage by kidnapping or marriage by elopement. The latter two types of marriage can also be converted to arranged marriage if the Mel so orders. Arranged marriages are of two types, (a) Dangor or Bor-biya, (b) sewa choron biya / siyachoron biya, and (c) secret or confidential marriage performed in the presence of close relatives that is why it is also called ‘bapek make dekha raije nedekha biya’ i.e. the marriage held before the parents but remains secret for the villagers.

Marriage by Negotiation or Arranged Marriage

In arranged marriage, the boy’s family consisting of the parents and immediate senior kins visits the girl’s family at least three times. On the first day of the visit, no proposal is formally placed. The purpose of the visit is to “see” the girl and get acquainted with the girl’s family, as to whether it will be a suitable match for their son and the family. This happens when the boy’s family is led into this match making by some kins or acquaintance. The second visit is made exactly one week after the first visit. Although the formal proposal is not yet placed and in case the girl’s family has not yet been informed beforehand, the repeated visits at such an interval gives enough hint to the girl’s family so as to provoke them to ask formally the purpose of their visit and on
disclosure by the boy’s family of the purpose, the girl’s family invites them on the next week, same day to discuss about the matter. In this interval the preliminary background exercise on deciding on the match is carried on, the parents shall check on the clan of the boy so as to adhere to the norm of clan exogamy, check on the information of the boy’s character and his family, seeking of the girl’s opinion on this match and once approval is given by her the parents shall further the matter. The proposal however is formally placed on the 3rd visit only and on that day the date of marriage is fixed. The boy may join his parents on this visit if he has not made any visits earlier because the consent of the boy also is considered necessary.

On the 3rd visit both the parties discuss, fix a date and then decide on the ritualistic and practical matters of the solemnisation of the marriage as ritual items that the boy’s party must present to the girl’s side. Since the marriage is solemnized in the residence of the girl where the household gods(s) and any god(s) they believe needs to be worshipped / puja, the paraphernalia for these has to be provided by the boy’s family and the girl’s family prepares and presents the list to the boy’s family. This forms an important part as non-adherence to the list on the day of marriage leads to ridicule and humiliation of the boy’s family.

On the day of marriage, the bridegroom’s party goes to the bride’s place and the party includes the bridegroom, his intimate friend (who carries an umbrella for the bride groom), a bride’s
‘friend’, and tamul chamari - who is a responsible maiden of marriageable age. Previously the standard age of a girl performing the role of tamul chumari happened to be early 20’s; but now it has gone to mid twenties- as girls do remain unmarried till that stage. The position is not fixed on anyone, but the bride groom’s family selects and requests someone of their kins or acquaintances who is a responsible girl and on receipt of her consent, she is entrusted with the role; the villagers prefer to encourage new girls for this position to enable them to learn the customs. She carries the ritual items of betel nut and betel leaf while the other items are carried by the elders. The number in boy’s party is according to the number as decided by both the parties before hand, yet the number always tends to increase.

In Borbiya or Dangor Biya, an elaborate list of items is prepared. It seems that the entertainment of the guests in such a marriage is a prominent feature unlike in other forms of marriages such as sewa choron biya where it is minimal.

On the day of marriage, the boy’s side has to carry several items in a basket known as “thapa” (it is essentially a Garo basket). Among the items carried are 100-200 gourds full of horlung (rice beer), dry cakes made of sweet rice (bora chawol), items made of dry fish, powdered rice (Xandoh guri), etc. – for the guests to be attended at bride’s place. The items are very expensive indeed. The tamul chamari from boy’s side carries the items for the several Gossain puja that constitutes of horlung, the betel nuts and betel
leaves and are presents to the girl’s family. These are to be carried by her carefully under a shawl (Chador) in such a way that that it stays neat all along and no bird excreta may fall on it.

For each Gossain a set of horlung, betel leaves and betel nuts are presented and usually this numbers nine – but sometimes more deities are also worshipped. These items are to be folded in a front part of a banana leaf (aagloti kol paat) in specific styles. The quality of the items and even the modor lao or Harlung are to be very good. If they erred in any way in this presentation, it has to be rectified by offering betel nut and leaf to the girl’s party. Apart from these, the bridegroom’s party also present the bride hand-woven mekula chador and related items – the traditional dress of the bride.

Usually the bridegroom’s party reaches the bride’s place at night where they present the items they brought. It is at this time that girl’s side invites the boy’s side and their khel elders to visit them on the 9th day of marriage (aath mongola) and negotiate the ‘dai’ (a type of bride price) that the boy’s khel has to give to the girl’s khel for taking away their girl. While they are entertained, the bride’s friend from the groom’s side dresses up the bride in the bridal dress presented by the bridegroom and puts vermilion on her mid hair parting. At the same time all the household gods and ancestors in the Mudha Khuta and those that the girl’s family believes like Manasa, Bisahari, etc. are worshipped. This is followed by feasting of the guest. By around 3.00 a.m. the bride
being escorted out makes her appearance to where the guest have gathered where both bride and groom exchange garlands in front of the guest usually in the courtyard and prostrates before the elders gathered around taking their blessings.

Then the girl is brought to the boy’s place where she is cleansed with *porachit* (purification rite) and then enters the house where she is kept in the *Borghor* accompanied by girls. By around evening the villagers and other guests come and are entertained accordingly, if it is *bor biya* then by pig feast or else by *hor*.

On the other hand in *Sewa choron* or *siyachoron* marriage, the boy’s party (small in number) visits the girl’s house taking only betel nut and betel leaves and hor, and cash fine usually of Rs. 100. The former carried by the *tamul chamari* and the bride after being dressed with the traditional dresses by her friend from the groom’s side, both, prostrates before the elders, and after exchanging garlands and offering *puja* to the household gods, the bride is taken to boy’s home. On the next day, in the boy’s village, guests are entertained with *tamul paan* and *hor*. The role of *tamul chamari* in both types of marriage is same. The invitation for paying the ‘dai’ on the 9th day (*aath mongola*) is also given to boy’s side.

On the day of *aath mongola* (9th day after marriage), in both types of marriages the boy’s *khel* elders arrive to negotiate the *dai*. The payment of *dai* is so important in inter-*khel* relations that in case of elopement of the girl, the boy’s *khel* informs and sends
invitation to the girls to come and negotiate the *dai*. In earlier days this penalty or the *dai* was a pig or Rs. 900/- i.e. the value of pig, in negotiation the payment is much less. Nowadays, between two *khels*, the cash rate is fixed and this standardised rate is fixed by both *khel* members deciding in a *Mel* or during the first attempt, when the ball was in the girl’s (bride’s) *khel*’s court. This rate is then accepted whenever girls are exchanged from one *khel* to another this rate is to be paid. *Dai* is therefore different for different *khel*. As a corollary, marrying from one’s own *Khel* is free of any *dai*. Also marrying (arranged or eloped) with a non-Karbi ordinarily does not lead to payment of *dai* until and unless the girl’s side seeks redressal.

The secret or confidential marriage is performed in the presence of close relatives of both the immediate families of the bride and bridegroom only and the newly wed couple take the blessings of both the families. This may later be followed by offering of *hor*, betel leaves and betels nut to the guests who visit them on getting the news. However, even in this marriage the boy’s family has to pay the *dai* to the girl’s *khel* as long as the girl is not of the same *khel*.

**Marriage by Elopement**

If a boy elope a girl from same *khel*, it is not considered as a punishable offence (*dondoniyo*). Also, if a boy brings a girl by elopement it is he and his parents who commit a “*duxyh*” (offence) and not the girl. Not negotiated by the parents of both the boy and
the girl, it could be initiated by (a) the boy along with his parents or (b) by boy, his parents with the co-operation of some of the kins or acquaintance of the girl or (c) by the boy in connivance with some kin of the girl or (d) by the boy simply and even (e) the girl, if she is an acquaintance and often a guest to this house could simply be wooed not to leave her host’s place and stay back to get married.

Such a marriage usually takes the form of *sewa choron biya* or occasionally some version of *dangor biya* as the villagers prefer to call. After the girl arrives at the boy’s place, the boy’s family and *khel* sends message to the girl’s *khel* about the elopement (even when other tribal or Assamese girls are brought, they try to send information). In Karbi practice, the boy’s *khel* elders send emissaries to the girl’s *khel* and on a scheduled date invite them to the boy’s place. The girl’s side then arrives and straightway do not disclose the reason of their arrival formally. Rather, they would enquire whether some cows or birds from their village have strayed into theirs (boy’s village). After such discussion, the matter comes up and then they seek the opinion of the girl as to what she wants. If she expresses her wish to stay back the alliance is accepted and *dondo* for having taken their girl is negotiated; a list of items prepared for the boy’s side to give to girl’s side and then invites the boy’s side on a date set by them. Both boy and girl take sewa from the elders gathered there, *puja* is offered at *bor ghor* and sometimes the boy puts vermillion on the girl also. They may exchange garlands as well. *Tamul pan* is offered by the bride to the guests (no tamul chamari on such an occasion). Guests are entertained
with hor and betel leaves and nut. This is the solemnisation of their *sewa choron* marriage in the presence of both the parties.

Sometimes at this stage, the *Bor Biya* may be solemnized where the boy’s family throws a big feast to the guests (comprising of both boy and girl’s side). That makes it a *bor biya*.

If however, in case of elopement of a non-karbi girl and the girl’s side do not come even after the receipt of the message, the boy’s side does the ritual on their own involving only their guests which may take the form of *bor* or *sewa choron biya*. On all occasions, whether arranged or eloped, Karbi or non-Karbi, the marriage needs to be preceded by a *Parachilt* (purification) as required to facilitate her living as a new member in the boy’s house and family.

On the other hand, as scheduled, the boy’s side with items as per list and *dondo* reaches the house of the girl’s (this usually is also the *aath mongola* day) where the purpose of the visit is formally enquired by the girl’s *khel* elders on statement of the purpose the items are produced and the girl’s side checks the items listed. On this visit the bridegroom also comes along with the girl and does sewa of the elders. In any kind of marriage it is required that if the girl is not the daughter of the boy’s maternal uncle then she needs to be adopted by the boy’s maternal uncle or any one from his mother’s clan and thereon, for all practical and ritual purposes the foster parents will play the role of being her parents.
Marriage by Capture

In this type, at the community level, after a girl is captured, the girl’s khel will seek her out and both khel elders will sit in a Mel where the girl’s opinion is sought. If she wishes to stay with the boy, then the respective khel will accept this relation and give consent to their marriage and boy’s khel still will have to pay the dondo, which was 1 or 2 pigs, 10 -12-palla rice (1 palla = 5 kg), rice beer, betel leaf and nut, etc. to the girl’s khel. If the girl does not wish to stay back she is taken back by her community members. Also at an individual level, the girl’s side may recapture her back and in such a situation it becomes shameful for the boy.

MBD Marriage

‘Nohou (mama) suna biya’ is an integral part of Karbi culture and as long as this society lives this practice will survive”- says Naren Rongsong. In Narakasur, it was reported that any one could capture and marry MBD, which was not offensive in any way. According to them, in whatever way MBD is married, there is no penalty.

Elopement of a Married Woman:

Elopement with a married woman is an offence that is resolvable with the annulment (pan sira siri) of her previous marriage. But she cannot claim her children by her previous marriage. Usually her wish is sought and if she does not want to
return back to her previous husband she cannot be forced to go back.

On another occasion, when the informant was asked what happens when a woman wants to annul her marriage it was reported that her husband's wish is sought and if he does not want to divorce, then she can't leave him. Perhaps in the changed context of elopement of a married woman her decision becomes more important!

3.2.10: Political life:

The political structure of the plains Karbi society shares the features of both traditional and modern elements. They are today at least part of three administrative agencies in addition to their traditional administrative set up. These agencies are the local police, local revenue authority and urban local body.

In rural areas, a Government appointed Gaon burha is made responsible for reporting all-important happenings in the village. This village headman covers several adjacent villages. As such, he may not be a Karbi also. But he earns a prestigious place in the Karbi society although with this capacity as Gaon Burha he is not allowed to decide on any social matters.

a) Khel system & the Mel

Before going to discuss their traditional political system, it is necessary to discuss the main body of the village political unit
called Khel. This is another important organisation in the social life of the plain Karbis. The system provides that members of each of the villages must be a member of a Khel. Each village has one prominent khel and usually the villagers are members of that khel. But some villagers may also opt out from their own village khel and join the khel of another village. The khel organisation plays an important role in the day-to-day life of the plains Karbis. In the life cycle events, it is the khel that takes care of the whole proceedings. In case of the death of a person, persons from the deceased’s khel must arrive and then only the proceedings start. This is true even when the deceased belong to a khel of a distant village. Thus khel system is a very strong organisation among the Plains Karbis and almost plays like a clan.

Each khel has a small council, which is similar like the executive body of a political unit. This small council comprises of five to six persons and this number varies from village to village. The council is headed by the Bangthai – or the village priest. He is assisted by a Riso Bangthai (Bisar Dhara), Talukder, a Kotowal, Oklengsar and a Bharali, etc. These posts are named differently in different villages. Each village has a traditional headman called Bangthai appointed by the elderly people of the village. All the village disputes are settled in the village through social norms. The dispute may be either very grave or of serious nature and any person who is at fault is inflicted with punishment according to the gravity of the offence made. A Court, commonly known as Burha Mel is called to settle such disputes which sits in a common place
usually in the Than. This Mel in a sense exercises customary judicial power where the person committing any offence is compelled to take oath in front of the Mel and say the truth. Burha Bangthai usually presides over the Mel. Apart from the interested parties, other villagers who wish may remain present in the Mel. The decision of the Mel is final. The punishment is inflicted in the form of fine, etc. Apart from the settlement of disputes, the Mel also decides about the performing of various festivals in the village and modifies rules. There is also another Mel called the Deka Mel.

For all the Mels held for puja etc, the venue is Burha Bangthai's place or the open space in the village; but for deciding a case of violation of norms, the venue is the Deohal/deoxal than; for the plaintiff has to take oath there. In one village there is a Naam Ghar near the deoxal than, where the plaintiff has to take oath. The Naam ghar has a Stone believed to be the image of goddess Kali and every year on Kali puja the village communally celebrates it here.

This Mel is called before any important occasions. Usually the Mel sits on the following occasions:

1. **Pre-Bohag Mel in last week of chot- Annual Meeting**

   **Activities:**

   (i) Deliberate on Johong puja celebration. Decides the amount to be collected per household for Johong puja, distribution of task and all related activities.
(ii) Take stock of the number of households till then and record of the increase in the number of households or otherwise.

(iii) The total amount collected in penalties and the expenses of the outgoing year: auditing.

(iv) To modify rules and regulations.

2. Pre – Dehal puja Mel.

3. Pre- Ai puja Mel

4. Pre- Are Jangphung arnem (mango jackfruit god).

5. Pre-Bat bheta puja

6. Any violation of norms.

7. Any community work as construction of puja ghor.

The system of bachelors’ dormitory (Dekachang) is absent in case of Karbis of plains although the hill karbis maintain this system. But the Karbis of plains have youth clubs which they consider as the institution of social work. It performs social services for the village in general and families in particular as and when such occasions arise. The members do not claim any monetary remuneration from the concerned family for the services rendered. For the invalids, destitute and widows and the poorest of the poor in the village, the services rendered by this institution can be considered as a boon.
b) **The Modern Political Unit:**

The modern political elements are manifested through the statutory institution called Gaon Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayats, in rural areas, Municipalities in urban areas and in Guwahati it is the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC).

c) **The Grain Bank:**

The grain bank is a notable institution among the Karbis run under the patronage of traditional political unit. They call this grain bank the "Rongkaching dam". Three types of grain dams are found to be prevalent among them. They are Kaceirok, Bhagiya and Lamkiradun. The needy families irrespective of their social status are given paddy or land to cultivate on loan basis, which must be returned after harvesting, is done. The primary objective of the grain bank is to teach people to help themselves and create a feeling of fraternity and brotherhood among the youths and divert their minds towards social works for the betterment of their village. In the urban villages under study however no grain banks are maintained now a day as farm sector is almost absent today in their economy.

3.2.11: **Religious beliefs:**

From the point of view of religion, the plain Karbis can be regarded as animists. Hinduism in its crude form finds manifestation in their worshipping of Gods, Goddesses and Deities. In their own way, they believe in the concepts of immortality of
soul, life hereafter and reincarnation. They believe the God as the creator of this universe along with the innumerable deities, some of whom are considered to be benevolent and some malevolent. Each disease is associated with a presiding deity. In their belief system God occupies the supreme position as shown in the sketch below:

![Diagram showing the relationship between God, deities, and earthly beings.](image)

For the appeasement of deities, the plains Karbis observe many religious rituals throughout the year when the sacrifice of pigs and fowls and use of rice bear are indispensable. They also believe in witchcraft and magic. That the basis of their religious philosophy is mainly based on animism cannot be denied even today, though under the influence of Hinduism a considerable number of plain Karbis have already assimilated with the neighbouring Hindu culture and have begun to take part in all religious festivals like *Durga Puja, Lakhi Puja*, etc. From this point
of view, this section of the tribe may be described as the followers of both saktism and saivism.

In the following paragraph a brief sketch of some Karbi religious practices have been discussed. The spiritual side of life pervaded every facet of daily living. Rituals are very often performed for even the most mundane tasks like cleaning the pigpen. Omens are constantly watched for, especially before long journeys or the start of important enterprises. They also practice blood sacrifice – usually of hen, or boar, but more common are bloodless offerings like the betel quid, or common gourd with prayers, supplication, praises, etc. The vegetable offerings are usually allowed to perish naturally. The Karbis of plains have “temples” known as the than. The structure of the temple, in most cases, is found to be temporary and usually small structures, but with enough open spaces for great feasts involving the whole village. The megalithic tradition is still in vogue among the plains Karbis.

Divination is very common. They resort to divination to ascertain the will of the gods, or the winds of fate. Male priests conduct divination by breaking eggs, observing liver of sacrificed pigs, hens etc. Their festivals could range from festivity rites, in which offerings are made and dances are performed in the fields; to rituals for good health, in which the community go for a sacred bath in the river where they would often sprinkle themselves with bundles of sacred herbs dipped in the river. The possibilities for
such festivals are endless, and this feature of Karbi society has been carried on since long past.

3.2.12: Languages and Literature:

So far as the Karbi language is concerned, it belongs to the great family of Indo-Chinese speech called Tibeto-Burman. Grierson’s Linguistic survey of India places it in the Naga-Boro sub group. It has also definite affinity with the Kuki- Chin group of languages. Moreover, fairly large numbers of words, mostly of Assamese and some of Khasi origin have been permanently assimilated into the Karbi language.

**Table – 3.2.12(A): Variations in Some Hills and Plains Karbi Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word in Assamese</th>
<th>In English</th>
<th>Plains Karbi</th>
<th>Hill Karbi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ami</td>
<td>We</td>
<td>Ili, Hali</td>
<td>Nelitum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teulook</td>
<td>They</td>
<td>Anagli</td>
<td>Alanglitum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabhoru</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>Menso</td>
<td>Akarjang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandor</td>
<td>Monkey</td>
<td>Kampi</td>
<td>Kipi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goru</td>
<td>Cow</td>
<td>Chorong</td>
<td>chainong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kukur</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Hik</td>
<td>Methan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akaxh</td>
<td>Sky</td>
<td>Su Neng</td>
<td>Si ning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It must also be pointed out that there are considerable differences between the speech of the people living in the hills and those in the plains. An interesting feature of the language is that there are many words or expressions, which are used, only in literary, particularly poetic compositions and not in ordinary speech. Language is a part of culture. The plains Karbis speak their
own dialect but when communicating with other people they speak in Assamese language. They do not have their script but are rich in oral literature; the Plains Karbi language has some distinctive feature of its own. In the following table presented are some words that are differently pronounced in hills and plains.

These are only few examples. There are hundreds of other such terms, which have variations. In some cases, the words are common but they phonetically vary. Numbers, name of the seasons, etc. are the example. Some such deviations are shown in the following table.

**Table – 3.2.12(B): Hills and Plains Karbi Words Having Slight Variation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word in Assamese</th>
<th>In English</th>
<th>Plains Karbi</th>
<th>Hill Karbi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tini</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Kithom</td>
<td>Kethom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chari</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Phili</td>
<td>Fli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xaat</td>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Thorksi</td>
<td>Throksi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gos</td>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Theng pei</td>
<td>Theng pi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teu</td>
<td>He</td>
<td>Anang</td>
<td>Alang,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chun</td>
<td>Lime</td>
<td>Sani</td>
<td>Saini</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The deviations as shown above are not quite significant. Such variations may also occur locally. But the most uncommon phenomenon between the hill Karbis and the Plains Karbis is that the plains Karbis use Assamese in their day-to-day conversation which is due to their close association with the plainsmen while this is not true in case of their hill counterpart who rarely use Assamese in their household conversation. Most of the hill Karbis do not know Assamese at all. In many villages, where this study has been conducted, people are found using only Assamese as
household language. Even while speaking Karbi, they frequently use Assamese words replacing the Karbi words. Many Assamese words have entered into the plains Karbi language. Following are the few examples.

Table – 3.2.12(C): Assamese words in Plains Karbi language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word in Assamese</th>
<th>In English</th>
<th>Plains Karbi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ai</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>aai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokai</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Kaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ata-Abu</td>
<td>Grand father &amp; grand mother</td>
<td>Ata-Abu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prithibi</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Pirthe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xika</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Hike</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.13: Festivals of the Plains Karbis

Karbis of plains celebrate various festivals some of which are traditional and some are acquired due to close contact with their neighbouring Assamese communities. All three Bihus are celebrated by them with enthusiasm. They also celebrate Na khuwa and various pujas like, Durga puja Lakshmi, Ganesh, etc. all in their own way.

Bohag Bihu:

This is the first festival of the year observed in the month of Bohag (April-May) with the festivities starting from the last day of the outgoing year. Paying of respects to elders, paying of social visits and communal celebration are the highlights of this festival, which enables reinforcing of social relations and goodwill among the people at a regular interval. The festival is observed almost like the neighbouring Assamese people observe it.
Johong Puja

On the first day of the month of Bohag and alongside Bihu, this Puja is performed to supplicate their local god Johong associated with agriculture, praying for a good agricultural year. As the season of spring connotes the beginning of the agricultural cycle and thus of a new year, it becomes important that the wellbeing of all is ensured for the entire year. Thus Johong puja is observed communally at the Burha Bangthai’s place. The puja begins with the making of a platform on the ground in the name of the god Johong. Plantain leaves are laid upon this platform with offerings of mango, jackfruit, sugarcane, banana, puffed rice, “hor”, i.e. local rice beer stored in a gourd pot known as ‘horbong’ and flowers. The paraphernalia is arranged and spells are chanted by the Kathar or Bangthai. Thereafter the Burha Bangthai sacrifices the fowls in the name of the god Johong. The sacrifice is made in such a way that the blood of the sacrificed fowls spills over the plantain leave and the offerings thereupon. The fowls are contributed by the people. Divination follows the sacrifice where the diviner, the Kathar, predicts the forthcoming year observing the nature of the intestine of the sacrificed fowls. These are later on cooked and offered to the people gathered around. But the main feast ensues the following day in the Bangthai’s house where the local people contribute the goats that are feasted upon amidst the rejoice of consuming ‘hor’. The lead is taken by the Kathar and the Burha Bangthai in ensuring the wellbeing of the community and every household contributes to the feast. The performance of this
puja, the celebrations therein and the Bihu has become an integrated festival for the Karbis pf Plains. It marks an important transition of nature through seasons and thereby of the entire community and hence its observance and arrangement is planned well in advance in the Khel that gathers in the month of ‘Puh’ (December-January).

**Ai Gossain Puja**

It is performed communally by the people on one Tuesday of the month of Bohag as decided earlier in the Khel. This is also a propitiatory form of puja wherein the Ai Gossani or Ai Gossain, i.e. the supernatural deity for pox and measles is worshipped and entreated to protect their ‘village’ from this disease. It is performed in the Than officiated by the Ai Paloni, a lady expert in this puja. Banana bark in the shape of a boat is made and therein offering to the goddess in the form of betel leaves, areca nut are laid which thereafter are set afloat in the nearby stream. No animal sacrifice is made. Rather a pair of pigeons is set free and ‘prasaad’ of pulses and grams are distributed among the people.

This puja is also performed when anyone suffers from measles or pox seeking immediate supernatural redressal.

**Bhel Puja**

In the month of Jeth (May – June), normally on the first Tuesday is the day for communal observance of the Bhel puja in the than. It is also performed to supplicate the gods associated with
agriculture so as to avert any misfortune that might befall them more especially through a failure of harvest and so on. The puja is so called as it involves the making of a 'bhel' or raft of banana stalk to be set afloat in the water and it is devoid of animal sacrifice.

The preparation starts with the making of two small raised platforms in the Than at right angles to each other. Nearby one such platform is placed the 'bhel' whereupon areca nuts, betel leaves, 'ezaru' and 'sonaru' flowers are placed along with vermillion, a lighted earthen lamp and incense sticks. Over the platform, pairs of plantain leaves are placed each in the name of the gods and goddess associated with agriculture with offerings of betel leaves, areca nuts, banana and pieces of sugarcane stalks. After the ensuing ritual the people proceed to the local stream where the 'bhel' is set afloat in the stream as an offering to the gods. This puja is conducted by the Burha Bangthai who then gives a feast to the village folks in his house and at his own expense. A sense of ensured wellbeing for the year ahead for the entire community accompanied by merriment and feasting marks this festival.

**Pogola Pagoli Puja**

This puja is performed on the Saturday following the Bhel puja. It is also a propitiatory worship of the god 'Pogola' and goddess 'Pagoli' who according to them are synonymous to
Mahadev and Parvati of the Hindu pantheon. This observance is devoid of animal sacrifice and instead 'prasad' is distributed in the gathering. Performed in the 'Namghar' it is a communal event where 'Naam Kirtan' is sung, 'ezaru' and 'sonaru' flowers are offered to the god and the goddess and a pair of white pigeons set free. It is one of the subtler form of religious observance performed communally aimed at entreating the supernatural entities to protect them from the diseases of summer.

Amoti

It is observed in the month of Ahar (June-July) for a period of seven days of 'xhat loga' when it is believed to be the menstrual period of goddess Kamakhya who signify fertility and thus the Earth is believed to be 'impure' during those days. Hence, daily work related to domestic production barring the basic ones is ritually suspended. The community too does not take up any fresh work. Farmers do not work in the fields. On the seventh day normal routine is resumed. People of the villages under study also participate in the 'Ambubachi Mela' in Kamakhya Devalaya like all Hindus in Kamakhya Temple. This is individually observed.

Janmastami

Like the neighbouring Hindus, Janmastami is also celebrated on the eight day of 'krishna pakhya' in the month of Bhada (August-September) to commemorate the birth of lord Krishna. This is individually observed by those who keep faith in Lord
Krishna. No elaborate ritual is observed and the Krishna devotees may observe fast the entire day and abstain from agricultural work. In the evening, they offer their prayers to the Lord and break the fast preferably with ‘payasa’ (item prepared with milk fine rice) and fruits. In some Karbi areas the people may congregate in the village temple, or nam ghar where they sing nam kirtans and thereafter distribute payasa among the devotees gathered. The expenses may be met together by the community members.

Lakhi Puja

It is observed on various dates of the months of Ahin-Kati (September-November) as according to the Hindu practice. Goddess Lakhi is the heavenly bestower of wealth and prosperity. Traditionally, Lakhi is believed to reside in the ‘Numpe Armu’/ ‘Mudha Khuta’, i.e. the main pillar of the household which is considered to be sacred, along with the Lakhi Koloh which is a sacred earthen pot.

It involves an individual observance of supplicating the goddess Lakhi performed by each household by lighting earthen lamps in the household entrance, cleaning of the homestead and preparing of sweetmeats.

Worshipping of the Goddess in a grand way may occur at the community level in the ‘Naamghar’/ Mandir where the image of the Goddess is installed. People gather there in the evening and sing hymns/‘naam kirtan’ supplicating the Goddess and then
Kati Bihu

It is celebrated on the last day of the month of Ahin, i.e. the day before the first day of the month Kati (October-November) in preparation for the changing state of the paddy fields that marks the month of Kati. Performed before the ripening of the paddy grains, this occasion is marked by the lighting of the paddy fields, the granary and the entrance of the houses with earthen lamps. This is to welcome goddess Lokhi to bless them with a bountiful harvest.

BiswaKarma Puja

This puja is observed only by those who have motor vehicles, machineries and workshops. The venue is usually these workshops. Those who own motor vehicles usually offer their prayers at these venues and decorate their vehicles. Biswakarma puja thus is not observed by the Karbis in their homes nor communally. But some members of some of the Karbi communities in Guwahati are recently celebrating this puja within the ‘village’ officiated by Brahmin priest.

Ganesh Puja

Lord Ganesh is held in reverence. The ritual is observed in the Than on the day of ‘Ganesh Chaturthi’. The ritual proceeding
is performed by a Hindu Brahmin brought from the city. The mantras are in Sanskrit. Offerings consist of pulses and grams, fruits, lit earthen lamps and incense sticks. Vermillion is smeared on the forehead of the idol. The ritual ends with the distribution of the offerings among the people.

Saraswati Puja

The plain Karbis also participate in this puja held in the schools of villages observed communally by the residents.

Dehal Puja/ Deohal/ Deoxal puja

This is the festival of utmost importance in the life of the Karbis of plains. It assumes great importance in their social life and is celebrated in a grand way both at the level of their locality as well as participants at the level of the Karbis of the Plains, which is held at a predetermined place. The Dehal Rongker puja as it is called is held for the entire community of plains Karbi on the first Tuesday of Phagun (February-March). Accordingly, each ‘village’ Khel decides upon the date of their celebration of Dehal puja within the next three days of the main celebration so as to enable the people of each Khel to participate in the centrally performed Dehal Rongker puja, which is associated with a fair. In the Khel meeting held especially to arrange for the performance of Dehal puja, money to be collected from each household is decided and responsibilities entrusted. Each household is to contribute a fowl or pigeon for this occasion.
At the level of their *khel*, the puja is held communally at the local *Than* to supplicate the numerous Karbi gods and goddesses as *Tamolong, Bolia, Kuber, Samon, Duwari* and all the spirits and supernatural entities which they traditionally believed to influence their lives. It is participated by all.

The *Dehal Puja* is conducted by the *Burha Bangthai* of the *Khel*. The *Riso Bangthai* is entrusted with the responsibility over the girls at *Dehal puja*. Two *Talukdars* are entrusted with the financial responsibilities of the puja while the rest of the responsibilities are entrusted to two other *Talukdars*.

On the day of the *puja*, the young men of the *khel* carries the musical instruments as the *dhool, kali*, which are played at the *Than* while the *Deodhini* (a lady professed to posses supernatural powers) dances in the *Than*. The *puja* commences with the building of a long raised earthen platform on the ground of the *Than* whereupon plantain leaves are laid down each for the gods and goddesses. Thereafter, the *Burha Bangthai* places banana, coconut, areca nut, betel leaves and *horlung* (local rice beer) in their traditional *horbong* as offerings to each of the god and goddesses. The *Bangthai* then chants spells (*mantras*) in Karbi dialect entreating the god and goddesses to bestow their blessings upon the people and to protect them from misfortune. The *Bangthai* then sacrifices fowls one after another as offerings designated for the gods and goddesses in such a manner that the
sacrificial blood spills upon the offerings made. Goats are bought for the ensuing feast. The fowls and pigeons are contributed by the villagers either in kind on that very day or in cash beforehand. Divination follows the sacrifice of the fowls. The meat of the goats, pigeons and fowl are cooked and consumed with rice and the people, men, women, young and the old alike make merry over the consumption of Horlung in a grand way.

*Dehal Puja* is considered as a symbol of the Karbis of plains. It is an elaborate festival involving all the people of the Khel, all their gods and goddesses, and with an assurance for a good year ahead for all the people along with lots of merriment and fun.

*Dehal Puja* also marks the end of the calendric festivals of the Karbis.

**Festivals related to Life Cycle of Individuals**

**Nari Kata Suwa**

This is a kind of purificatory ritual / Parachit whereby the ritual impurity of child birth that extends to the mother, the new born and also the delivery room is removed and all the three entities thereafter become purged of the impurities which puts restrain on the normal affairs.

*Nari Kata Suwa* is preceded by the *Daini puja* performed for the welfare of the new born by thwarting off the evil eye from harming the newborn. The supernatural entity is Daini who, it is
believed, if desires might cast her evil eye on the newborn or even protect from all evil forces. Thus, it becomes imperative that the Spirit be propitiated through worship. It is performed by the Kathar (Karbi priest). The puja starts with the installation of the image of ‘Daini’ in the delivery room. Spells are chanted and she is requested to thwart off evil on befalling upon the newborn baby. At the same time a black bird which is believed to possess mystic powers against evil forces is sacrificed as offering to ‘Daini’.

This is soon followed by the Nari Kata Suwa ceremony observed in the same delivery room and by the Kathar. The paraphernalia includes the laying of a banana leaf in one corner of the room whereupon powdered rice and a lighted earthen lamp is duly placed with the Kathar then breaking an egg over this offering while chanting mantras to remove the ‘Suwa’ (impurity) from room, the mother and the baby. Guests are invited to a feast over horlung to rejoice the occasion.

Gasikinuwa

This is a name keeping ceremony individually performed by the concerned family for the new born, usually held within a year of the birth of the child, which sometimes may exceed this normal period. A priest who may be a Kathar, a Timung or Terang (people belonging to these clans are entitled to be priest) may officiate in this ceremony. However, the same priest cannot conduct both the
Nari Kata Suwa and Gasikinuwa ceremony. The priest is invited the day before the occasion.

In the early morning of the occasion the male family members has to collect certain particular types of grass namely tibong, bamboo, kusiakata from the nearby hill and when the priest arrives by mid-morning all of them proceeds to the nearby stream. The priest places the grasses on the corresponding banks of the shallow part of the stream with the grasses inclined towards the stream creating a passage underneath over the water. The male family members then have to pass through this walking along the flow of the stream. After this, while they take bath in the stream the priest makes a Hume/sacred fire out of dry bamboo and dhuna. The men after their bath walks near this fire letting the smoke touch their bodies. After this all of them returns home where the priest then sacrifices two fowls, one in the room where the baby lives and another in the verandah. The name for the baby suggested by the family members and finally decided by the priest is given ritually to the baby with the sacrifice of another two fowls, one over the Mudha Khuta and another over the Lakhi Koloh.

A feast is given to all and the guests to mark this occasion.

Death Ritual: Cremation of the Deceased

The death of a member of the community is very grave occasion and symbolizes a social loss for the community. Besides
the dead who are believed to live in their after life existence needs to be assisted by the living in this transition of status.

The dead is cremated. Before proceeding to the crematory ground known as “Longdang” situated just outside the village, the dead is laid in the household verandah while the kith and kins gather to mourn their loss and participate in the cremation ritual. In the Longdang the dead is placed on a pyre and the son or other male kin lits the pyre.

**Khar Mas Khuwa**

On the tenth day of the death / Doha as they have termed it a ritual Khar Maskhuwa is performed. It is meant for the living, i.e. the immediate kins of the deceased who from now onwards can resume the intake of meat and fish, which so far had been abstained as a part of their mourning.

**Sraddha and Silputa**

This is the Karbi equivalent of the Hindu practice of Sraddha and they often use the term *Sraddha* to indicate *Silputa* (erection of stones in memory of the deceased, a megalithic practice) ceremony observed within a year of the death as per their convenience. It is performed at the ‘Long-ae’, a ground where *Silputa* is performed. On the day of the ritual performance a male kin of the deceased plays the role of a ‘Deo’. Two stones gathered from the hills are covered with a piece of white cloth known as ‘sakatuk’, these are
taken to the *Long-dang* and half buried in the ground. On this day the kins and neighbours are invited for a feast. Boiled rice, boiled potato, fish, fruits, cooked vegetables, betel leaves, areca nut, etc. are laid upon a banana leaf and covered with the *Sakatuk*. These are offered to the Gods. The women folk weep mourning the loss of the deceased. Finally, the guests are given a feast.

3.2.14: Rituals of Purification:

The Karbis have well defined purification system. Purification is done as per the direction of the *Mel*. Various types of purifications are briefly described below:

1. **Berkilut** (*Lut* meaning flowing water, *Ber* meaning on the body of the person): It is the highest form and necessary to take up in the matter of grievous offence such as, i) Clan endogamy, ii) Marriage with Muslims and Christians. This also necessitates according to some a *Baro Gram* sitting, iii) Hitting a cow with a weapon, iv) Hitting a person of different religion.

2. **Abangkipalut**: It is a milder form meant only for milder offences as marriage with Hindu non-Karbis where the body of the couple is cleansed.

3. **Hemsibangthir**: This is the cleansing of the house. It is mandatory also in marriage with a Hindu non-Karbi.

4. **Abansibangthir**: It is a regular cleansing of the body for every member of the village on the following occasions:
(a) Before a Puja or funeral rite. It is mandatory for the head of the household and optional for other male members to purge themselves of all the wrongs that they may have committed without their knowledge.

(b) During every Bihu and community puja as Deosal, Jongora to be observed by the males.

(c) After the ‘village’ chases away evil spirit from the village as after the ai naam.

(d) When a villager returns back after staying away from the village for at least overnight or any place among non-karbis they are supposed to become polluted or suwa. But going to office and schools and colleges and eating outside in a day is not considered suwa.

Thus through the concept of suwa of various types the plain Karbis delineate the abnormal sphere from the normal and the observance of the porachit as a mechanism for a smooth re-admittance to the normal sphere.