

**MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT
ON
WOMEN IN KARBI FOLK LITERATURE**



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये

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INTRODUCTION

Folklore is a sociological science and studied in terms of folk literature, social folk custom, material culture and performing folk arts. Karbi folk literature like that of any tribe of North-Eastern India is very rich and varied. It can be broadly divided into five categories - a) folk tales b) folk songs c) riddles d) proverbs and sayings and finally e) charms. The folk tales of the Karbis cover their myths, legends, stories, jokes etc. Their folk songs include marriage songs, narrative ballads, spring festival songs, Chomankan songs, Hasa Kekan songs, love lyrics, children songs, play songs, work songs, religious songs, Ramayani songs etc. Karbi folk literature also abounds in riddles, proverbs, sayings, charms etc. Karbi folk literature reflects the life and thoughts of Karbi people, their folk mind, their interrelations, their socio-cultural ethos, their religious activities, their ideas, customs and beliefs, art and tradition etc. Karbi oral literature also tells us a lot about women, their nature and temperament, their likings and disliking, wishes and aspirations, duties and obligations, household businesses and agricultural works, social and religious activities, their conjugal life, their interpersonal relationships, their role as a daughter, member of Jirsang, as a wife, mother, an old women etc. It also talks about their place and status in their family and society as well. Yet it would not be easy to make generalised comment on nature and character of karbi womenfolk. The point is that Karbi folk literature which has survived time along with their social custom and material culture tell us a lot about Karbi women folk, their nature and character, their place and status in their folk society etc.

Statement of the Problem: Karbi folk literature can be read as an index to the place and status of a woman in the Karbi folk society. The Legend of Creation portrays Karbi woman as a source of creation and cause of continuation of their community, the story of the Karbi woman stands for pacifism and enculturation of her community. If the story of Harata Konwar portrays kind-hearted, witty, affectionate, loving and caring Karbi women y k v j " x c n w g u " q h " n k h g . " v j g " v -hearted, "cuñMg, viljainous" L w p i " u v g r " o q v j g t 0 " K h " v j g " u v q t { " q h " C t n g p i r k k " u j q y h c o k n { . " v j g " v c n g " õ Q t r j c p " c p f " v j g " m k p i " q h " U k story of Rongferpi shows the bold and brave Karbi woman who raises voice against the

powerful and even dares to kill the soldiers of the king when self respect is in danger. The Karbi women understand and respect dignity of labour. How sincere and particular the womenfolk are in their household works is clearly seen in the story of Harata Konwar and their social commitment in the u v q t { " q h " M c t g p i " c p f " M c f k p i " k p " ð

The role played by Uchebi in Chomankan undoubtedly gives Karbi women a reasonably high status. The songs like ÷ L R k c t p i " U g p i ø " c p reveal ÷ D e c p v g " M involvement of karbi girls in social institution, decision making body, community cultivations, handy-crafts etc. The Karbi children songs (Oso Sepadak Alun) reflect depth of feelings and imagination, intensity of motherly love of an uneducated Karbi woman. In a love lyric the beloved is compared to the humming of bees and her existence is sought in the spirit of nature.

V j g " e j c t c e v g t " q h " y k f q y " k p " ð Q t r j c p " c p f " of womenfolk. The story of Rumeer also portrays the plight of a woman. Sufferings of women are often seen in Karbi ballads. The karbi women are not allowed to attend the village e q w p e k n " * O g ø + " q t " v j g { " j c x g " v q " o c n j g g "" u: g r q p ti ø v g t " h g u v k x c n 0 " D w v " M c t d k " y q o c p ø u " w p t g u v t k e v g f " r c h g u v k x c n " w r n k h v u " v j g k t " r q u k v k q p 0 " O q t g q x g t " k are compared to the goddess Lakhimi (Fortune) signifying their high and lofty position in their home. The cross cousin marriage system of the Karbis signifies the importance of the maternal uncle enhancing position and status of the mother. Thus the Karbi folk tales and songs, their social custom and material culture etc. show the involvement of Karbi women in socio- cultural, religious affairs, agricultural and domestic activities. These folklore materials also reveal their independency and their role in the economy of their family. Though Karbi society is basically a patriarchal one, in reality a Karbi family revolves round the mother. Active participation of women gives true colour, variety and spirit to their socio- cultural, religious, agricultural activities.

So the prime objectives of this attempt is to see, read and understand how Karbi women folk do appear especially in their folk tales and songs and play role in their field of custom and culture with a view to evaluating their place and status in their folk society.

Review of Literature: The proposed project on Karbi Folk Literature with a view to studying the place and status of Karbi Women in their folk society is a virgin soil in the field of research. However different critics have studied Karbi folk literature and extended their views on woman in karbi folk society.

Dr. Birinchi Kumar Barooah in his pioneering book on folklore *Asomar Loka Sanskriti* paves the door for the study of folklore as an academic discipline in North-East India while P.D.Goswami in his books *Ballads and Tales of Assam*, *Asomia Jana-sahitya* and *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India* etc. shows the way how to make a scientific investigation to and systematic study of folk literature with certain objectives. P.D. Goswami shows in his book *Essays on the Folklore and Culture of North-Eastern India* how the songs and sayings, the tales and beliefs of a community tell us a good deal about the e q o o w p k v { ø The book *The Karbis from the Papers of the late Edward Stack* edited by Sir Charles Lyall makes a comprehensive study of Karbi community, throws a considerable light on Karbi folklore and narrates a few Karbi folk tales. In *Parbatia Sadhukatha* and *Tribal Folk-Tales of Assam* compiled by Satyendra Nath Barkataki a few Karbi folk tales are narrated. Further folklorist like Birendra Nath Dutta, Dr. Lila Gogoi, Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi, N.C. Sharma etc. make a critical study of Karbi folk literature. The books *Karbi Kristir Utshwa* edited and compiled by Longkam Teron and Karen Das, and *Karbi Kimbadanti* are of great help in understanding Karbi folk songs, tales, myths, legends, rituals, festivals etc and the place and position of women in their folk society and also the values associated with.

T q p i " D q p i " V g t q p " k p " j k u " c t v k e n g " õ M c t d k " book *Asamia Loka Sahitya* edited by Dr. Prahlad Kumar Baruah categorizes Karbi folk literature into groups and provides a glimpse of its lofty socio-ethical aesthetic values and shows how the Karbi children songs (Oso Sepadak Alun) reflect depth of feelings and imagination, intensity of motherly love of an uneducated Karbi woman. Jajnuram Gogoi in j k u " c t v k e n g " õ *Osamak Janajati* edited by Pronjug Chandra Bhattacharya talks about the Karbi, their origin and language, their folk literature, songs and dances, rituals and festivals, their social activities, role played by women in their socio-cultural affairs. Dr. G.C. Sarmah Thakur in his book *Selected Essays on Tribes and Castes of Assam* discusses Karbi folk custom, beliefs, deities, tradition, institution and also the status of women in Karbi folk society and shows hoe the Karbi males and females are not status conscious and there is mutual co-operation between the s g z g u " k p " g c e j D q U p n g R a b h a H a k a c h a m k x k v k g in his book *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti* making a comparative and contrastive analysis of the songs and festivals of Karbi with that of other tribes of North East India critically looks at v j g " t q n g u " r n c { g f " d { " y q o g p " k p " E j q o c p m c p " y j k position in the society and also at the cross cousin marriage system of the Karbis in which impotence of maternal uncle enhances position and status of the mother. . Dhruva Kumar

Talukdar in his book *Axamar Janajatiya Sanskriti* also deals with Karbi folk songs and folk narratives as an index to the evolution of their social life and critically looks at the role played by women in their social walks of life. Dipti Rani Changmai and Bani Phukan in their book *Bhaiyamar Karbi Loka-Sanskriti* deal with folklore of the Karbi of the plains where woman is regarded as the goddess of fortune.

The point is that there is ample scope to make a critical study of Karbi folk narratives, folk songs and dances, proverbs and sayings, riddles and charms etc. with a view to estimating the place and status of women in Karbi folk society.

Objectives: The objectives of the proposed project are as follows:

- a. To make a study of Karbi folklore and Karbi folk literature.
- b. To collect Karbi folk tales, myths, legends, songs, poems, riddles, proverbs, sayings, charms etc. and to categorise those into groups.
- c. To make a critical analysis of the Karbi folklore materials collected with a view to projecting the Karbi folk society.
- d. To see how Karbi folk literature reflects their folk mind and their attitude towards women.
- e. To see the place of women in their folk art and tradition, custom and beliefs, rituals and festivals, magic and practices, their ideas and ideals, fears and superstitions etc.
- f. To make a critical study of the role played by women in their folk society, in their socio-cultural, agricultural activities and indigenous institutions.
- g. Code of conduct for women in Karbi folk society, social norms and restrictions and also the values associated with women in their society.
- h. To make a comparative study of women of Karbi folk society with that of Assamese or other neighbouring folk societies. The present Karbi society will also be highlighted along with the place of women in it.
- i. To understand and estimate the place and status of women in Karbi folk society.

Methodology:

- a. Primary and Secondary Sources will be collected and thoroughly studied.
- b. Karbi villages of the Plains and the Hills will be visited and their rituals, festivals, cultural programmes etc. will be attended and folklore materials will be searched.
- c. Field-trips, interviews etc. will be taken, tales and songs would be collected and compared with those of recorded earlier.
- d. Comparative and contrastive approaches will be adopted in understanding women in Karbi folk society along with women of Assamese and other neighbouring folk societies. The present Karbi society will also be highlighted along with the place of women in it.
- e. The materials of Karbi folk literature collected will be critically analysed, the Karbi folk society will be projected and the role played by women in their folk society will be depicted.
- f. Methods and approaches like questionnaire, analytical, sociological, socio-cultural etc. will be used and the place, position and status of women in Karbi folk society will be estimated.

Hypothesis:

- a. Karbi folk literature may reflect a coherent, balanced Karbi folk society.
- b. A Karbi folk family, though patriarchal, but revolves round the mother.
- c. Karbi folk society, a rich treasure house of lofty socio-ethical aesthetic values, provides due respectable place to women and almost equal status with the males.
- d. The Karbi folk society with its values and the lofty place of women in it may appear instrumental in reorienting their new generation exhausted with unrest, materialism, consumerism etc. towards their age long values of life, their identity with rich heritage and also to live for the community and humanity as well.

Significance of the Study: The folk literature of the Karbis is the mirror of their folk life and folk values, traditional society and institutions, culture and tradition, indigenous knowledge and wisdom, individual and social behavior and adopting variations in different space and time it deserves systematic and scientific study. In present age characterized with technology and moral depravity the folk literature of the Karbis and their folk values are in a state of danger owing to different causes like urbanization, modernization, aggression of English language, lack of the narrators and singers of their folktales and folksongs etc. No doubt a

few books and articles are coming to light, yet a comprehensive work making a scientific categorization of every components of Karbi folk literature and systematic recording of those in written form is far reaching. The present study aims at a systematic study of Karbi folk tales and songs accessible in primary and secondary sources with a view to understanding and evaluating position and status of Karbi women in their traditional society.

Contribution of Karbi women to various components of their folk life and folk culture is well acknowledged by their folk society. Their folk literature is reflective of their various social roles and household duties, their involvements in their socio-religious activities and formation of society, roles as tradition bearer and protector of family and society, as a voice fighting for respect and dignity of women and protest against exploitation and marginalization of women. For example if the tales of Hi-mu, Dengrali, Larta, Lirbon, Kave and Kadom, Marpi etc. are reflective of the unending tale of owes and sufferings of Karbi women, the tales of Basapi, Kareng, Kading, Marongpi Rongpherpi Rongbe, Kareng Teronpi, Larbin and Lirbon, Disumai Rongpi, Dimmir etc uplift Karbi women from their victim position to a state where they can assert their voice. A rereading of Karbi folk tales and songs from the perspective of women is surely to help the young girls of the community to understand construction of woman self in their patriarchal folk society and reconstruct the same of their own in changing scenario.

Chapter - II

Woman in Karbi Folklife

Introduction: The culture and history of Assam starts with that of the ethnic communities in the state. Assam, in its present reduced form, is still the home of more than 23 tribes such as Boro, Mising, Karbi, Rabha, Dimasa, Tiwa, Deori, Sonowal-Kachari, Garo, Chakma, Hajong, Hmar, Naga, Lusai, Pawi, Synteng, Barman, Kuki, Lakher, Man, Mech, Hojai, Khasi-Jaintia etc. The areas of concentration of these tribal groups in the state are Kokrajhar, Udalguri and Baksa for the Boros, Dhemaji for the Misings, N. C. Hills for Dimasas, Goalpara for the Rabhas, Morigaon for Tiwas, Lakhimpur for Deoris, Dibrugarh for the Sonowal-Kacharies and Karbi Anglong for the Karbis. Apart from Karbi Anglong district the other areas inhabited by the Karbis are Nagaon, Dima Hasao, Kamrup, Morigaon, Golaghat, Jorhat and Sonitpur districts of Assam and Jayantia Hills, Ri Bhoi and East Khasi Hills in Meghalaya. The Karbis are racially Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman¹ and entered into Assam from central Asia in one of the earliest waves of migration². Bishnuprashad Rabha

e c n n g f " v j g " M c t d k u " v j g " ÷ f k u e q x g t g t " q ð OfC u u c o ø
e q w t u g " F j c t c o u k p i j " V g t q p " kv un "g ø q' w 'p jf c' u r { 'u y' kō N j k h
y g " M c t d k u " f k f " p q v " ÷ e q n q p k | g ø " d w v " í " j c x g " d
f g r t k⁴ However the title was not an imposition but recognition of a peripheral reality
made with a hope to understanding the identity of the greater Assamese community and
constructing the history of the state from the below.

Understanding the Karbi Woman through the Folklore of the Community:

The traditional or folk ways of living a life constitute the folklore of a community. According to Richard M. Dorson folklore and folklife may be placed under four large groupings, namely oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing folk arts which may not be all-inclusive or mutually exclusive but throw the general terrain of folklore and folklife studies.⁵ Here an attempt is made to understand the folklore or folklife of the Karbi community in terms of the four-fold dimensions of folklore as shown by Dorson, namely their folk literature, material culture, social folk custom and their performing folk arts with a view to understanding place and position of Karbi women in their folk society.

(i) **Karbi Folk Literature:** Karbi folk literature covers different types of myths, legends, tales, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, chants and charms transmitted orally from generation to generation. Karbi folk literature is totally local, deeply rooted in folklife and provides ample scope for understanding the woman folk within their periphery. It can be broadly divided into - folk prose narratives, folk songs, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters and chants and charms.

Karbi folk prose narratives refer to their myths, legends and tales. Karbi myths generally refer to their tales of remote past related to creation, gods and ghosts, birth of objects, festivals etc. The legends of the Karbis refer to their tales of recent past signifying historical importance. The Karbis have a good treasure house of folktales which can be sub-divided into supernatural, romantic, animal, humorous, trickster, cumulative, etiological tales etc. The Karbis have **folksongs** for every occasion of their socio-cultural life such as birth, purification, death, marriage, work, play, old age, worship etc. The folksongs of the Karbis may be classified into the following sub-genres - songs of creation, songs of social formation and administration, songs of feasts and festivals, seasons and agriculture, songs of rites and rituals, songs associated with children, songs of love and nature, songs of the aged, work songs, epic and ballad. A substantial number of **Karbi proverbs** contain practical and worldly wisdom and are considered in their society workable solution to problems and fruitful guidelines for getting success in life while a few are the wise instructions prescribed by the Karbi folk society to lead its approved way of life. If some of the Karbi proverbs are religious in nature while some of the others are secular in nature, some are originalized sections of the society. Karbi **riddles and tongue-twisters** are invaluable properties of Karbi folk society. The Karbi riddles are short folk expression often framed in the structure of a question starting with same phrases and designed in a way ensuring confusion on the part of listeners. The Karbi tongue-twister is a phrase or combination of phrases which is hard to pronounce quickly and clearly and naturally wrong pronunciation of the phrase(s) of a tongue-twister leads to much fun and amusement. The Karbis have a good number of household deities, territorial deities and agriculture related deities and worship them with particular **chants** made for the deity and occasion concerned. The **charms** of the Karbis are incantations or spells with magical power used to please a deity to get relief from disease, protection from evils, sickness and danger and for well being of crops and members of their community.

Karbi folk literature, rich and varied like that of any tribe of North-Eastern India, is reflective of folk life of the Karbis and an index to the status and position of women

aesthetic sense. In a traditional Karbi society pipe image and floral design are often used in their household tools. The Karbi women draw images from nature and their folk life and use as design in weaving their traditional garments. The turban worn by males on head called *÷ R q j q ø " y k v j " v j g " k o c i g u " q h " f k h h g t g f y, v t r e e s q d l g e v u* flowers etc is the expression of the inner beauty and aesthetic sense of the Karbi women. *V j g { " c n u q " k o r t k p v " v j g " k o c i g u " q h " v j g k t " v t c f k v v q " v k i j v g p " v j g k t " ÷ R k* Flower images are also used in their other *" v q " v j h q n m " i c t o g p v u " æ w e l e s s j t r i p e d u j a c k e t E s e d o p y k m a l e s . F u r t h e r " g e o m e t r i c a l f g u k i p u " u w e j " c u " u v t c k i j v " r c t c n n g n " n k p g u " c t g* worn by Karbi ladies. ⁸

Folk architecture of a community is concerned with the indigenous ways of building a house, a traditional sheltering place but meant to serve their folk ways of life. In a Karbi *h q n m " u q e k g v { " v j g k t i " j v c t t c ø " k k f u n c t i o n a l u n i t w i t h m e a n t t o s e r v e ÷ E j c p i* their socio-cultural, economic, religious aspects of their folk life and inculcate in the younger generation the values associated with. It gives exposure to their traditional kitchen, folk cookery, folk art and craft, household deity, rituals like purification of a new born baby, rituals for welfare of family members and property, traditional household items, fireplace, furniture, the sacred religious items, domestic animals, loom etc. It is the place where the woman self is constructed and made to learn how to receive a guest, worship a deity, cook a folk dish, how to sit, eat and sleep, how to take care of domestic fowls and animals, how to weave their traditional cloths etc. It is reflective of their male dominated folk society. As far as sleeping is concerned the household head, who is always a male . *" u n g g r u " k p " v j g " e n q u g " v q " ÷ O c t l q p i ø " v j g " u { o d q n k e " e g p v t g " q h " v r g t k r j g t c n " c t g c " n k m g " ÷ V k d w p i ø " v q " u n g g r 0 " K v " k* served and hence the first to eat *f o q f " r t g r c t g f " h q t " v j g " h c o k n { 0 "* passes from father to the eldest son or to the next in a compelling situation. If there is no male heir in the family a daughter can become a household female and inherit land and property, but cannot become a household head of the family and cannot inherit the religious artifacts *e q p u v k v w v k p i " ÷ O c t l q p i ø 0 " K p " u w e j " c " e c u g " k v " k u*

Folk costume is not mere an outward badge but reveals the inner self of the wearer, weaver and the community as a whole. The importance of Karbi folk costume lies to a great extent in its socio-ritualistic meaning, its role in their folk environment and the message *e c t t k g f " v q " v j g " q w v u k f g " a n d b e l o n g i n g n e s s w i t h t h e c o s t u m e g c t g t ø* and its manifold associations. Dharamsing Teron says that the Karbi loom is not just a piece

of cultural symbol but provides the Karbi women subsistence, self respect and pride and helps them to keep their homes and heritage alive. ⁹The Karbi women are the expert weavers.

V j g " v t c f k v k q p c n " f t g u u " h q t " v j g " M c t d k " o c n g u " c c t g " ÷ R k p k ø . " ÷ X c o m q m ø . " ÷ R g ú q V n j ø g "" gy v q e o 0 g " p U v y c g e c m t "" c c p " (pini), secured round the waist by an ornamental girdle (vamkok). The petticoat is of white c p f " t g f " u v t k r r g f " ÷ g t k ø " e n q v j 0 " V j u g q " ø w . r " r c g " t y " t r c c r t r passing under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts, the head is uncovered, and the hair is drawn back and tied in a knot behind. In the funeral dances, however, the head is covered y k v j " c " d n c e n s o k e a k e m ¹⁰ t h j "" g e ' c ÷ r n k g p f k " ø ÷ " l i k g p g t c n n { " k u " q h u k o r n g " n k p g u 0 " C e e q t f k p i " v q " v t j g g " v f " g v u { k r i g p u u . "" w u w g e f j R c l c p i t g ø . " ÷ R k p k " C u c p f w m ø . " ÷ R k p k " C r j k f q r ø . " J q o m t k ¹¹ C X k p k n ø t h ø " k u " c " e q n q w t h w n " y c k u v d g n v " h w y q o g p " v q " v k i j v g p " v j g h m ø R k p k ' ø "" n q q " p v i j " g r k t g " e y g c " k q u h v " O e h k z k p i " k v " q p " v j g k t " t k i j v " u j q w n f g t " c p f " m g g r k p ÷ R k d c ø " k u " c p q v j g t " n q p i " r k g e g " q h " e n q v j " w u g f " c n u q " k p " v j g k t " v k g w y j t v g R g g f " e n q v j " y k m w j ø ' . d ' h c e r v j g " d g f " e n q v j " y k v - j n g m j c p ' i ø g ' u k k p ø q h d t q ø g g d q p w u k x o c n g u " c p f " h g o c n g u " t g u r g e v k x g n { 0 " C p f " ÷ u L c t q p i ø designs taken from nature is used by the both. ¹² The Karbi women knew the art of making

natural dyes out of various species of shrubs, herbs, barks, roots, flowers, plants etc. Besides the basic three white, black and red, the Karbi weavers could produce yellow and blue. White colour naturally came from cotton. Black and blue colours were produced from the leaves of c " r n c p v " e c n n g f " ÷ U k d w ø " y j k n g " t g f " e q n q w t " y c u " k p u g e v u " t g v t k g x g f " h ø t . q " o ÷ " e r j n k c t p k v " u l " c u p w i e r j j " q ø u i " ø ÷ " v c j p g f m were collected and boiled in a container and the yarn is soaked in the water to produce the red f { g 0 " V j g " { g n n q y " e q n q w t " y c u " r t q f w e ¹³ f " h t q o " v w t

The Karbi women are fond of **folk ornaments** and since the ancient days they have been using natural objects as ornaments or silver and golden ornament with designs taken from nature with a view to beautifying themselves and looking attractive. They wear various types of p g e m n c e g " u w e j " c u " ÷ N g m f j q p ø . " ÷ N g m " R q p i v k p R g p i m j c t c ø . " ÷ N g m " T w x g ø . " ÷ N g m " D q p i j c p ø . " ÷ N g m E j c p i v k ø . " ÷ N g m " V j c p r g v ø . " ÷ N g m " U k m k ø b a n d ø N g m " L g ÷ T q k " R g p i m j c t c ø . " ÷ T q k " V c j w ø " c p f " ÷ T q k " U g v w p i t k p i u 0 " V j g " e q o o q p " M c t d k " v t c f k v k q p c n " g c t " t k p

R n k t r n c t ø . " ÷ P c v j g p i r k " C m q t q p ø . " s-wDre by Kabp i r k " E
y q o g p " c t g " ÷ C t p c p " m g " g v ø . " ÷ C t p¹⁴ A small knife with . " ÷ T w
a beautiful handle generally of ivory one has been an accessory of the Karbi women in their
folk society, an ornament strengthening their personality and the value of self-defense
associated with them. In a Karbi folk society till the days of recent past blackening of teeth
y k v j " v j g " c u j g u " q h " v j g " { q w p i " d t c p e j g u " q h " c " v
Karbi women. Another traditional ornament popular among the Karbi women in a folk
u q e k g v { " k u " v j g " e q p x g p v k q p " q h " v c m k p i " ÷ F w m ø . "
chin. Such natural ornaments like blackening of teeth and taking a black line on face
metaphorically reflect the wrongs done to Karbi women in a patriarchal Karbi folk society. In
present days of women empowerment such ornaments are read by the young generation of
the Karbi women as means of suppression and consequently rejected by them.

Folk Cookery is a work of folk art reflective of or associated with different aspects of
folklore and folklife. The Karbi women are in charge of their traditional kitchen placed in their
÷ M w v ø . " v j g " o q u v " k p p g t o q u v " c p f " u c e t g f " u r c e g "
are fond of three basic preparations ó ÷ M e ø q k ø " v j g " c n f c p k ø g v j' g M d q k p
÷ J -v p j q t ø " v j g " u q w q k' ø k a j f c' K p " k M'c p j i g " r t k o g " k p i t
various natural sources like dried and burnt ashes of immature bamboo, mustard plant,
corncoobs, barks of a local variety of banana etc. Generally smoked meat and dried fish are
e q q m g f " k p " c n m c n k p g " r t g r c t c v k q p 0 " D w v -ø k p ø Ot'k v w
÷ M c n f c c p p i i ø " k u " c " r t q e g u u " q h " r t t e i t e m t o b e c k e d i s' k p " y j k
d q k n g f " k p " y c v g t " y k v j " u c n v " c p f " t c y " v w t o g t k e 0
their traditional rice-beer without which hardly a Karbi ritual is performed. They are also
fond of wild potatoes like sweet-potato etc. They traditionally avoid use of mustard oil and
spice and use only a few locally available spices. In an alkaline preparation they never use
turmeric. The Karbi women, the tradition bearer of their male-centric society, always serve
the first spoon of rice to the head of the household at home and to the eldest male or the male
of the highest socio-cultural status in a ritual.

(iii) **Karbi Folk Social Custom:** Karbi social folk custom understood in terms of their
traditional rites and rituals related to birth, marriage and death, their folk institutions and
socio-political system, folk feasts and festivals, celebrations regarding seasons and
agriculture, games and recreations, their folk religion and modes of worship and their
indigenous healing system is t g h n g e v k x g " q h " y q o g p ø u " r ñ O g k ø k p "
the Village Council there is hardly any place for women while an unmarried girl can be the

o g o d g t " q t " n g c f g t " q h " v j g k € L k t m g f n q ø U The f € L k k v
Karbis strictly follow clan exogamy and consider a marriage between a boy and girl of the
same clan a sin. The children belong to the clan of their father and own his property. The
important point is that the clans of the girls after marriage are not changed and so they do not
v c m g " v j g k t " j v Karbi Customary Laws are guardian of their patriarchal
society. These are as follows ó

- a. They follow the patrilineal system tracing their descent in the male line.
- b. After the death of the father the eldest son becomes the household, the owner of the
h c v j g t ø u " c n n " o q x c d n g " c p f " k o o q x c d n g " r t q r g t
rites. But, if he marries a girl from the same clan he loses all right and in such a
situation the next son inherits the property and the household as well.
- c. If there is no son in the family, after the death of the father, a daughter can inherit the
parental property, but cannot become a household. In such a situation the nearest male
t g n c v k x g " h t q o " h c l d j n g o b l i g a t i o n t o p e r f o r m r i t e s . p u " j q w u g j q
is obliged to perform rites.
- d. Marriage is monogamy. Clan plays an important role in maintaining exogamy.
÷ M w t u g p g o ø " v j g " o c t t k c i g " d g v y g g p " c " d q { " c p
crime. There is no bride price or dowry system.
- e. Divorce is permissible. After divorce, the husband and wife get the custody of grown
up and minor children respectively. If she remarries, all her children are bound to go
back to the father.
- f. Widow marriage is permissible. Junior levirate and junior surrogate are permitted.
But at no circumstance the widow is allowed to marry the elder brother of her
deceased husband. If a widow or a widower gets married violating the prescribed
categories, they have to pay a fine fixed by the village head or council for acceptance.
- g. A widow is entitled to receive maintenance from the family of her deceased husband.
K h " u j g " t g o c t t k g u . " u j g " n q u g u " j g t " t k i j v " q x g

The **Codes of Conduct** traditionally followed by the Karbis reflect that their folk
society is conscious of r t g u v k i g " c p f " t g u r g e v " q h " y q o g p " k p " v
such rule through which males are compelled to respect the ladies like the wife of maternal
uncle. Further the society stresses on maintenance of a distance between a Karbi woman and
her father-in-law or the elder brother of her husband.¹⁵ Further the **social ethics** traditionally
followed as taught by Hemphu such as purification of body, mind and spirit, purity in whole
life, nobility, humble and amiable nature, rejection of ill temper, self dependent, competitive
spirit in mind and good sense, obedience, good dealing and self confident¹⁶ are instrumental

p g e g u u c t { " u v w h h " y j k n g " ÷ E j c t j g r k ø " e q p v k p w g u " j
 i t q w p f " h q t " v j g " h k p c n " h æmtggtywgpniñø""qfhc"pvejgg.""fygjcgft0g""
 c p f " i k t n u " q h " f k h h g t g p v " e n c p " v c m g " r c t v . " u k i p
 M g v j q p ø " u k i p k h k g u " v j g " h k p c n " h c t g y g n n " v q " v j g
 ÷ c p e g u v q t u ø " n c p f ø 0 " K p " v j g "hkup-M w t m d n q d h "" w j j g g "" th g r
 especially the sister-in-laws clean the environment and are honoured for their service. Further
 ÷ Q e j g r k ø . " ÷ E j c t j g r k ø . " ÷ F k j w k f k ø . " ÷ Q d m q r k ø . " .
 are thanked for their service in the who n g " t k v w c n " c p f " h q t o c n n { " i k :
 r g t h q t o u " ÷ O w p e j k p ø " v t c f k v k q p " y j k n g " t g e g k x k p
 fact that it provides opportunity for the individuals to identify and associate themselves with
 their rites and rituals, folk belief and tradition, art and craft, songs and music etc. and helps
 v j g o " v q " f g x g n q r " q p g p g u u " y k v j " v j g " e q o o w p k v {
 celebration of death and rebirth, fertility and regeneration, is one of the prime means of social
 cohesion in a Karbi folk society. Women can take part freely in ÷ **E j c festival** while do
 not take part in the worship and sacrifices of ÷ **T q p i n g t q 0' Mshv gotshp'** of the
 t c k p " f-igokwø{ "" q÷tJ"cy q t u j k r " q h " p c v wovegard fertility The v k p i " c
 magico-religious ritual called ÷ **P k j w " Mvestokytplace** to maternal uncle. Unmarried
 young boys and girls sing and dance together in the festivals like **Johang, Hacha Kekan,**
Domahi, Kurmi etc. The Karbis of the plain perform a ritual called ÷ **O q p w mkor'ship pf ø**
 goddess Lakshmi providing a respectable position to woman in Karbi society. Folk games
 and recreations are nothing but traditional forms of play practiced by a particular community
 with regional varieties. ÷ **E j q d æk'v n s g g** game generally played by the girls with
 mollusk shells and ÷ **L c v " l c ær' the gears of p r e o** recreations for the girls played with
 small bamboo sticks and in a palanquin respectively. ¹⁷

Karbi Religion is animistic in nature characterized with its own philosophy expressed
 k p " v j g k t " t k v w c n u " c p f " r w t k h k e c v k q p u . " y q t u j k
 worship of household and territorial deities etc. The Karbis do not believe in the concept of
 heaven and hell but think that v j g " h k p c n " f g u v k p c v k q p " q h " v j g " M c
 p c t t c v k x g u " q h " v j g " ÷ E j c t j g r k ø " t g o c k p " v j g " u c o g
 clan or nature. As far as the female Karbi folk deities are concerned **Rasinja, Kase** and **Kabe**
 are noteworthy. Rasinja is the deity of sunrays and rain, the deity of war and peace. Rasinja is
 worshipped on the first day of the year by offering red fowls, harlong and boiled rice in a
 bamboo pipe to her. Kase and Kabe are considered the presiding deities of crops grown in
 high land and low land respectively. The Karbi women folk are expert in using the plants for

curing different diseases, take initiative in magico- t g n k i k q w u " ÷ X q " m c t v c r ø " t the role of a diviner.

(iv) Karbi Performing Folk Arts: Performing Folk Arts cover folk drama, folk music, folk dance etc. The Karbis have a rich tradition in performing art especially in folk dance and music. The Karbis do not have folk drama proper but have certain performance-types or folk drama n k m g " r g t h q t o c p e g u " k p v g i t c v g f " v q " v j g k t " t k y j g t g " y q o g p " c t g " p q v " f g v c e j g f " h t q o 0 " V j g " h w p e j c t c e v g t k | g f " y k v j " c " x c t k g v { " q h " f c p e - g u " n k m Ketop i ø . " -U K p q p ø v -M g M g p ø v k t -M g p i v k t M'gM g v p c i ø g ø' . ÷ " D -æ P M g m c p ø " q h " y M g m c j p' ø -M g p f i v k M g p i v k t " M g d c p g ø " c t g " w p o c t t k g f " i k t -M g t v p p ø g y k P k ø w p ø c t t k The Karbis also have dance forms associated with agriculture and season. For example, the dance form r g t h q t o g f " k p " v j g " j c t x g u v " h g u v k x c n " d { " v j g " M c ÷ J c e j c " m g m c p ø " k u " c " f c p e g " h q t o " u g iformed by v g f " d { partners of opposite sex of different clan.

C p q v j g t " f c Længpūm-Uq t mœ " j k p ø " ÷ k p " y j k e j " c " i t q w r " M bamboos signifying production of rice from paddy in a folk way of their life. The dance form c u u q e k c v g f " y k v k j u "" -M p w q t y o p k " ø c " u y " q ÷ t C u n j m k c r t c n " M g m c p ø " c p c p f " i k t n u " k p " v j g " t k v w c n " u k p i " ÷ M w t o k " C n w p ø " c p Participation in a folk dance by a Karbi girl is a two-fold journey for the individual óan outward one wearing a folk costume following the motor movements to identify themselves with others of their community and inwardly a search for the self with a view to understanding the self in terms of their culture and patriarchal setup.

It is a humble attempt made with the objective of understanding the Karbi women in terms of their folklore or folklife read from the perspectives of folk literature, material culture, social folk custom and their performing folk arts. The varied ways of the folk life of the Karbis, the racially Indo-Mongoloid and linguistically Tibeto-Burman community, with their distinct geographical concentrations, indigenous socio-political institutions and customary laws, with their own culture and language, deities and religion, festivals and celebrations, customs and rituals, folk dance forms and music, diviner and healing system etc. form the Karbi folk society with its indigenous environment, where a Karbi woman-self is constructed in tune with their folk way of life and as designed by their male dominated folk society. Still they enjoy certain liberty in comparison to their non-tribal counterpart of this region and live a free, self dependent, courageous life. They hardly suffer from inferior

superior complexity in their social life but prefer to be busy in their household duties, cooking food or weaving garments for their family members, taking care of their children and their animals and fowls. The Karbi woman may experience certain restrictions in their folk way of life, but not a suppressed self, rather lives a respectable life enjoying their right on property and surname, access to widow marriage, ban on dowry etc. They are not merely tradition bearer and care taker of the values of life fostered by the community, but lead their families from the front and remain life force in their familial, socio-religious, ritualistic life.

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Women in Karbi Folk Prose Narratives

Folk Prose Narrative is one of the prime genres of folk literature of a community. The impulse to tell a story and the need to listen to it, according to Linda Degh, have made narrative the natural companion of man throughout the history of civilization.¹ The Karbi folk prose narratives comprise of myths, legends and folktales told in prose. Myth generally refers to those tales related to religion, creation of earth, man, ghost, gods, origin of different objects and birth of festivals. A legend is generally the story of a legendary figure or episode or a place of historical importance. The folktale, the highly polished and artistic story genre having a relatively consistent and finished form, may be sub-divided into Marchen or Magic or Supernatural tale, Religious tale, Animal tale, Etiological tale, Humorous tale, Trickster tale, Realistic tale, Cumulative tale, Historical tale etc.² However, it is not an easy task to differentiate the genres or the sub-genres each from the other for the intra and inter variations. A tale for one culture may be a legend for the other or a myth for one culture may be a tale for another. According to Linda Degh the greater their popularity, the greater is their inconsistency. They have p q " õ h k p c n ö " h q t o 0 " C u " n q p i " c u " v j g { blend.³ The prime objective of this chapter is to go through Karbi myths, legends and tales with a view to understanding of the place and status of women in a Karbi folk society from different perspective.

Women in Karbi Myths: A Karbi myth deals with the story about the creation of Karbis and their land, different objects of nature, birth of rituals, story about gods and goddesses, beliefs and religion etc. The Karbi myths constitute the realm of their earliest worldview, folk belief and reflect their folk society. The Karbis have a good number of **creation and origin myths** constituting their worldview. A few of their creation myths are legend of creation, creation of Karbis, origin of objects like rice, cotton, fish, salt, rice beer, chilly, pig, fowl, ginger, bottle gourd, tobacco, sward etc. Of course most of the Karbi myths have its origin in folksongs. The myth ÷ V j g " N g i g p f 7i nqrnt's Eht ngyth vfk q p ø creation of the Karbis and their land. It is said in the myth that Hemphu and Mukrang with v j g " j g n r " q h " v j g " f g k v k g u " n k m g " D c o q p ø u " y k h g . " land for the Karbis, planted various seeds of trees and plants and non-human beings with the help of Rekbepi and Rek Kropi, Pithe and Pothe. Then Hemphu and Mukrang created

÷ c t n g p i ø " D c o q p r q . " y j q " y c u " k p u v t w o g p v c n " k p " i c
to **another version of the creation myth**⁸ the gods of the Karbis after plantation and animal
g u v c d n k u j g f " c " h q t i g " c p f " e t g c v g f " ÷ c t **myth** i ø " v j g
of creation⁹ v j g " h k t u v " M c t d k " y c u " d q t p " h t q o " v j g " d k i r
came out of the egg slowly with much hesitation, fear and anxiety caused by presence of
inhuman and cruel people all around. These variants of creation myth show how
ethnocentrism and sense of hesitation have been with the national character of Karbi
community since creation, and so with Karbi women. Here acknowledge of the role of
women in their earliest policy making body or in creation of the community is reflective of a
balanced folk society where a healthy man-woman relationship and inter-dependence is
projected as the cause of creation. The Karbi **origin myths**, basically found in their songs of
creation, are related to the origin of bottle gourd, rice beer, rice, cotton, plantain leaf, chilly,
v q d c e e q . " h q y n . " u y q t f " g v e 0 " t g h n g e v " v j w a y " e q o o w p
of their folk life and healthy human-nature relationship.

The tales of Hemphu, Rukasen, Teron RongSopo, Rangchina Sarpo,
T c p i o w m t c p i . " Y g " N q p i t k " c p f " J c t " N q p i t k . " D q
Binongpo, Sat Recho etc. can be considered myth in Karbi oral literature. A study of these
myths shows various contributions of women deities and women to their folk life and their
position in their folk society. As it is found in the myth of Rukasen,¹³ the divinely bestowed
social organizer Kasen Be or Rukasen, listening to the advice of his wife established the first
Karbi village Miring Rongchopi at Nongkula on the bank of the river Kopili. The tale
portrays **grandmother Basapi** k p " v j g " r t q e g u u " q h " x k n n c i g " h q t
participation in policy making affairs in a Karbi society. The myth with Rang Mukrang¹⁴
narrates how **Kareng** and **Kading** getting fascinated with the smell of the droppings of
÷ m q p i e j k p i ø " f g x k u g f " v j g " h g t o g p v c v k q p " c p f " r t
traditional rice- d g g t " ÷ j q t ø " y k v j **ritual can be performed in Karbi** { " c p {
society. The myth of Hemphu¹⁵ narrates how the deity in human shape with his sister **Rasinja**
came to the village Miring Rongsopi and introduced social rituals and customs especially
marriage system and social ethics to the Karbis. The myth of Hemphu is integrated with
values like purification of body, mind and soul, keeping purity in whole life, nobility, humble
and amiable nature, giving up of ill temper, self-dependence, unity, obedience, good dealing
and self-confidence etc which have been the prime **values structuring the woman self** in a
Karbi folk society. However in present day context the values associated with purification
and purity can hardly attract the younger generation of the community and remain relevant

basically in ritual and religious activities. The tale of Teron Rongsopo¹⁶ takes into account the contribution of Teron Rongsopo to the origin of rice in Karbi world and narrates how **Rice the woman deity**, daughter of Barithe, came to village Teron Rongsopo with a view to addressing the hunger of the Karbi people. The tale of Harbamon¹⁷ makes the young Karbis learn their culture and tradition, the myth of Borli e¹⁸ projects their philanthropic deities and the myth of Rangsina Sarpo¹⁹ introduces song and music to Karbi society. The tale of We Longbi and Har Longbi²⁰ portrays the wise old woman **Marongpi** who makes the two friends learn ills of war and the values of discussion, cultural assimilation and healthy environment. The myth of Thireng-Wareng²¹ k p v t q f w e g u " ÷ E j q o c p i m c p ø " c for an individual gets transformed into love and concern for the community. The myth of Binongpo²² portrays **cruel sisters**, inculcates a sense of love and respect for maternal uncle, and importance of non-human environment in sustainability of human life on earth. The myth of the great Karbi ruler Sat Recho,²³ condemn while the myth associated with Richo Arnam Karkli²⁴ is a tale of sorrows and sufferings, reflecting the atrocities on the weaker sections of the society.

These Karbi myths give the new generation of the community exposure to their ancestors and their contribution to the earliest processes of formation and organization of M c t d k " x k n n c i g . " e q p u v t w e v u l e s a n d " r e g u l a t i o n s . E p p o i n t m e n t j c t ø . " q h " x k n n c i g " e j k g h " c p f " g u v c d n k u j o g p v " q p " v j g " d the youths, rites and rituals, folk dress and cookery, purification and sacrifice, clan system, songs and dance, creation of ric g . " e q v v q p . " ÷ D q p i ø . " ÷ J q t ø " g v e " c providing backbone to their folk society. These tales take the names of the mythical-historical figures like Rukasen, Rang Mukrang, Long Mukrang, Hemphu, Harbamon, Teron Rong Sopo, We Longbi and Har Longbi, Borli e, Rangsina Sarpo, Thireng-Wareng, Binongpo etc. and women characters like Rasinja, Basopi, Velibon, Kareng, Kading, Kase, Marongpi, Kasang Ingtipi, Kawe Timungpi, Kase Ingtipi, Kanong etc. Representation of women character as bold and courageous, taking part in policy making, contributing to culture and tradition is one of the striking features of the Karbi myths. These women characters, if read with feminine sensibility, may help the young girls of the community not only to socialize and assimilate themselves with their culture, but to compare and contrast role and position of women in their mythical social structure with that of their own in their present social milieu and thus to reconstruct their selves for their own sake.

Karbi Legend: If the myths of a community belong to a world preceding the present order the legends date to the early stages of the present order of the community. In comparison to the myths and tales the legends are more human and give exposure to real life of their recent past.²⁵ The Karbi folktales built on historical events and legendary figures are called the legends of the community. These are considered true by the community and transmitted orally from one generation to another with a view to making the new generations of the community aware and be proud of their glorious and eventful, happy and painful past and to live with their rich tradition and folk values. A few women centered Karbi legends are as follows -

1. **The legend of Rongpherpi Rongbe**³²: The legend of Rongpherpi narrates how the Kachari king tortured and humiliated the Karbi people and especially the Karbi women. Rongpherpi, a bold Karbi woman, violently protested and killed the soldiers of the Kachari king when they demanded milk from her breast to feed the tiger of the king. After the incident naturally the Karbi people suffered and searched for new destination.
2. **The legend of Larbin-Lirbon**³³: The legend belongs to the time when there was a cold war going on between the Karbis and the strong Khasias. Larbin and Lirbon, the Karbi girls, while playing on the bank of a stream in a hilly area and making a garland of ÷ V c o j k f k ø " v j g { " p q v k e g f " v j g " M j c u k " u q n f k g t u While guarding the villagers that night Lirbon got asleep and Larbin through her song tried to awake her and let the villagers know the presence of enemy soldiers. Larbin went on singing, kept the enemy waiting and saved the lives of their villagers. When her song came to an end after a prolonged time the Khasis entered and killed both of them.
3. **The legend of Disumai Rongpi**³⁴: The legend narrates how for the first time in a Karbi v t c f k v k q p " ÷ L k t u q p i ø " v j g " d c v e j g n q t u ø " f q t o Rongsopo with nineteen office bearers for six years. Disumai Rongpi was made the Klengsarpo, a Naga was posted as messenger and a few girls led by Didimur were made members of Jirsong. Disumai and Didi fell in love and decided to get married at the end of six years. But Disumai Rongpi wanted to go to his maternal uncle at the village Tanti Rongsopi to bring costume for him and promised to come back to marry her. Didi y c k v k p i " k p " x c k p " d g e c o g " f g r t g u u g f " c p f " e q o marriage was fixed with his mater p c n " w p e n g ø u " f c w i j v g t 0 " Y j k n g found the dead body of Didi near Amseng hill.
4. **The legend of Dimmir**³⁵: Dimmir, the beautiful daughter of Mai Longbi grew playing y k v j " N q p i " v j g " u q p " q h " O c k " N q p i d k ðing whitek u v g t 0

thread on the hand of Dimmir as a wife of Long was socially performed. The youthful beauty of Dimmir attracted the village head Sar Mangbi who with the help of Long Teroi, a magico-religious man, could hypnotize Dimmir through chants and charms and eloped with her. The villagers searched for Dimmir and finally recovered her from the hands of Sar Mangbi. Dimmir, the symbol of physical beauty of Karbi women, victim of

- v j g " u v t q p i " o c n g ø u " e q p u r k t c e { . " u j q y t h e " j g t " e
mouth of the loud village head.
5. **The legend of Larta** ³⁶ < " F w t k p i " v j g " h g u v k x c n " q h " ÷ T q p i m g
j q p q w t " e c n n g f " ÷ D c p v c ø " c n n q y g f " v j g " { q w v j u "
f q t o k v q t { " ÷ L k t u q p i ø " n e c f r o m e v e r y f a m i l y t s g o u l d j o i n t h e v " c v " r
Jirsong. No way was left for Larta the expert weaver, since she had no brother, but to
join the Jirsong. The girl had to stay and work with the boys and to perform all the duties
assigned to the members of the Jirsong. For six years she could not think of her personal
life and sometimes people laughed at her for staying with the boys. She had to live a life
of suffering and humiliation for the male friendly rules of their society and humiliation
of women.
6. **The legend of Serdihun** ³⁷ < " K h " ÷ E j k p v w ø " o c f g " v j g " e q v v q p " "
discovered the way how to make thread from cotton, Rimsipi introduced the art of
y g c x k p i . " c e e q t f k p i " v q " v j g " n g i g p f " q h " ÷ U g t f k
their indigenous dying system and for the first time floral design in their costumes. Once
Dihun danced Nimcho-M g t w p i ø " y k v j " D c p i r j w . " c " o g o d g t " q
c p f " h g n n " k p " n q x g " y k v j " j k o 0 " D c p i r j w " i c x g " j
Dihun wanted f " v q " i k x g " j k o " c " ÷ R q j q ø " c " v w t d c p " k p " t
few shrubs, herbs, barks, roots, flowers, plants etc. from nature and produced natural
f { g u " q w v " q h " v j q u g 0 " U j g " o c f g " v j g " d n c e m " e q n c
and v j g " d n w g " e q n q w t " h t q o " n g c x g u " q h " c " r n c p v "
h t q o " v j g " t g u k p q w u " u g e t g v k q p u " q h " v j g " ÷ n c e ø
{ g n n q y " e q n q w t " h t q o " v j g " t q q v u " q h " ÷ l a t o p i u c k n
y g c x g " v j g " ÷ R q j q ø " c p f " e q w r f a h , d e o r , c o n e p e r e t c . i n t h e c n " f g u
÷ R q j q ø 0 " U j g " y g p v " v q " o g g v " D c p i r j w " c p f " D c p
forever. With such invaluable contribution Dihun came to be known in Karbi folk
soci g v { " c u " ÷ U g t f k j w p ø 0 " V j g t g " k u " c " h q n m " d g n k g
the weavers caused by constant weaving for long time.

7. **The legend of Dengrali** ³⁸ < " ÷ F g p i ø " o g c p u " v t g g " y j k n g " ÷ T c n
 sister. Soineri loved Dengrali the daughter of his sister and made her pregnant. But a marital relation with the daughter of sister is considered a sin in a Karbi society and the marriage could not take place. The girl out of shame went to the forest and got herself transformed into a tree. Since then on the final day of a Jirsong the youths observe a ritual of worshiping a tree and offer pork to the tree.

The Karbi legendary world is obsessed with a sense of tragedy and sadness, especially of women being marginalized by internal and external negative forces, male friendly patriarchal rules of their society and oppressive neighbours. The women are projected as tradition bearer, keeper of household duties, care taker of children and other family members, savior of e q o o w p k v { " o g o d g t u 0 " V j g " M c t d k " n g i contribution to and sacrifices for the community and their sufferings in a patriarchal social structure. If the legends of Dimmir, Didimur, Larta and Dengrali record the tales of owe and suffering, anger and anguish, exploitation and humiliation of the Karbi women the tale of Serdihun is reflective of the contribution of Karbi women to culture and economy of the community. If the tale of Larbin and Lirbon shows how to sacrifice life for the community the legend of Rongpherpi projects Karbi woman fighting for the dignity of women and freedom of the community. The legend of Dengrali shows that the Karbi folk society never tolerates violation of codes of conduct and compels Dengrali to commit suicide. Of course v j g " M c t d k " h q n m " u q e k g v { " k u " c n u q " u g g p " d g k p i " x k n n c i g " j g c f " U c t " O c p i d k " h q t " p q v " t g u r g e v k p i figures through their contribution to and sacrifice in crucial juncture of their past inspire the young girls of the community to live, work and die for the community. These Karbi legends, if narrated from the perspective of feminine sensibility, may lead the young girls of the community to probe deeper into the pains and sufferings of women, and understand the causes of marginalization of women self and lead themselves to reconstruct their women self from their own perspective.

Karbi Tales and Women: A folktale, according to Linda Degh, is highly polished and artistic having a relatively consistent and finished form, fictitious and the creation of human fantasy and always a well-proportioned whole whether composed of one or many episodes.⁴⁴ Actors and actions are represented symbolically rather than as flesh and blood characters.⁴⁵ The Karbi tales are all about some imaginary episodes, fairy events, magical spells told basically to amuse and as a by-product to inculcate certain values in the

target groups of the community. Lyall is of the view that these Karbi folktales undoubtedly correspond in every respect to the general characteristics of folk literature and contain the same incidents or the same sequences of events or have the same forms what is peculiar to the folktale of all over the world; what is distinctive and characteristic is not the progress of

which he lends to the details of the story.⁴⁶ Rongbong Terang is of the view that Karbi folktales, one of the varieties of flowers of Karbi folk literature blossoming in different colour and in different forms, are reflective of their folk beliefs, ideals and their folk society.

environment as village or rural one etc. are the other features of Karbi folk tales.⁴⁷ The Karbi

a. Sita Kamar⁵⁰ : Sita Kamar, a man of great physical strength, went in search of wisdom and knowledge, wife and fortune. On his way he found a few super humans and took them with him. He performed a few supernatural activities and magical spells and got rid of

married his daughter and became the king himself and returned home with his wife and children.

b. The Pious Orphan and Dalimet Kungri⁵²: It is the tale of adventure of posthumous, pious orphan Jangreso who took away Dalimet Kungri, the daughter of his maternal uncle king Nihang Recho, but lost her to a nymph. At last the orphan got rid of the nymph, married Dalimet Kungri and became the king.

c. Kongso Recho and Bongso Recho⁵³: Kongso and Bongso were alike in appearance and fond of playing with wheels. Bongso entered into a competition with the demons and lost his life. Kongso defeated the demons and brought his brother back to life. But Bongso killed Kongso out of doubting adultery with his wife. However with magical power the elder is brought to life again. The two brothers destroyed the demon village and became the king and minister and lived happily with their people. The tale reflects commitment to tradition and customary laws, avoidance of relationship with the wife of younger brother, rejection of adultery and doubt and above all triumph of goodness over evil forces.

d. Vokronso⁵⁴: The orphan Jangreso being advised by a vokronso bird went on a journey for a fortune and on the way he got married to the daughters of the kings of bird,

goat, pig, pangolin, pigeon, tortoise, snake and finally the daughter of the king of vokronso. He returned home with the new wives and wealth and came into conflict with the king. Jangreso defeated the king with the help of his wives and became the king and lived with his subjects happily. The tale is an eco text signifying sustainability of human life on existence of non-human beings and coordination between the human and non-human environments.

e. The Orphan and the Earth Priences⁵⁵: The orphan Jangreso with the help of heavenly forces sang and danced with the princess of Earth Purthimi Kungripi, got married and came back home with her, defeated the king the oppressor and became the king himself and ruled his subjects wisely with his wife and grandmother. The tale shows that their folk society rejects treachery, envy, jealousy, social status but rewards the values like goodness, honesty, valour, will power, simplicity, kindness, work culture.

f. Ingru Tulapi⁵⁶: As advised by a parrot the king rejects his ugly wife and proceeds towards the east in search of beautiful Ingru Tulapi. The king and the parrot befool the guards and elope with Ingru Tulapi. On their way they make fire and cook on the back of a big fish in the middle of a river. The big fish goes deeper into the river and leaves the king and Ingru Tulapi drifting away in the water. Fortunately both of them are finally rescued by the people living around the area. The tale reflects a patriarchal folk society where woman is a commodity to be rejected or owned for its physical appearance. At the same time it is also shown that in a Karbi folk society every wrong doer whether he is king or a poor has to endure suffering for the wrong committed.

g. The Hingchong Twins⁵⁷: It is tale of twin brothers, the sons of a village head, who were left at forest after their birth by their step mother, a demoness, and recovered and looked after by a couple of tigers. In their youths the twin brothers as advised by the tiger parents came to the village chief as guests and informed them everything. The village head named his sons Hinchong brothers, punished his demoness wife and lived happily with his Karbi wife and two sons. The tale shows the demon or animal force within human, the Karbi society with village head and Jirkedam the youth cooperative, the tiger as savior and the harmony in human and non-human environments. The tale rejects envy, treachery, jealousy, greed, conspiracy etc. and inculcates the value that the wrong doer is always punished and the good may suffer initially but finally rewarded. The male centric society leaves the causes of familial problem to the credit of women and gets purified with her punishment.

h. An Orphan and a Vulture⁵⁹: A poor orphan helps a couple of old vulture, in return gets two feathers through which the orphan understands the language of trees, grasses, animal, birds etc. and raises his fortune. Finally the orphan makes his wife calm learning the

trick from a goat. Here the "M c t d k" h q n m " u q e k g v { " i k x g u " u v t g u between human and non-human environments and leaves the causes of familial disturbances to the credit of women.

i. Story Of Harata Kunwar⁶¹: Harata Kunwar, rejected by elders for his idleness and inactivity, finally left his land for a fortune. Listening to the advice of a wise old woman Harata Kunwar trapped the youngest daughter of Sun-god, visited the kingdom of Sun-god and won his favour, married her. Returning with wife and children he became the king of his own land and lived happily with all. The tale gives exposure to a Karbi folk society with its j g c f o c p u j k r . " f k h h g t g p v " r -tvqj hc gr uø u. k" qopc. k" | lg j"weow"n evwk n bank of river, folk deities, and deep forest with its local animals. The society believes that everyone should have a nest or a house at least, a place of their own like that of a sparrow or a dove. The society through the tale rejects laziness, conspiracy, treachery, greed and inculcates work culture, emotional bond in relation, love and affection, will power, boldness, courage etc. The women either princess or housewives of common folk are seen in their household works and weaving. The old wise woman who knows the way to success lives alone in the forest.

j. The Orphan and The King Of Vices⁶²: The orphan, who grew up without love, became rich getting married to the daughter of a heavenly deity. The king of vices seduced her, made her pregnant and then dejected her. The depressed orphan went to forest again to live on wild roots and fruits and his wife was compelled to be wandering in the clouds. The tale rejects timidity and fear, sense of hesitation, unfaithfulness to husband, illicit love affair and inculcates sympathy towards and protection of the needy and the poor, faithfulness and g p e q w t c i g u " u w e e g u u " c v " q p g ø u " q y p " u v t g p i v j " t c v

k. Tale of Womu Langlupi⁶³ < " K v " k u " u k o k n c t " v q " C u u c o g u g " F c w i j v g t ø 0 " K p "eagle found a new born"girl child in a "jhumj field, looked c h v g t " j g t " c p f " q p e g " d t q w i j v " v j g " m k p i ø u " c v v g p v king. The bird of prey the eagle is projected with motherly love and in present day context metaphorical of the loss of human values in human and importance of other beings in sustenance of human life on earth.

l. Tale of a She-Demon⁶⁴: A she-demon took Arlengpi to the deep forest for fishing and killed her through poisonous spider, centipede and snake, and returned in disguise of Arlengpi. However Arlengpi transformed herself into a kite and took care of her children. Finally Arlengpo killed the she-demon, could recover his wife and lived with her happily.

respect and dignity of female selves and shows that Karbi women are not born to be humiliated by others and can make sure of their security and livelihood by themselves.

q. The Tale of a Dove⁷⁴: A couple of dove with their kids lived happily in a forest. A wild cat stealthily ate the offspring of the couple and each time the couple suffered to see the tragic end of their children. One day the wild cat ate the male dove leaving the female in distress. But she decided to fight with the wild cat and one day she shifted her children to a safer place and kept only thrones in her nest. The wild cat jumped at the nest to catch the offspring and got himself hurt by the thrones and died. The tale reflects their folk belief that greed is a sin and sin results in death. More importantly the tale raises a voice against any sort of colonization and exploitation and to fight for own land and right. The male succumbs to the strong intruder but the female appears the successful avenger, reflective of a Karbi *y q o c p ø u " u r k t k v " c p f " e q w t c i g 0 " V j g " v c n g " k u " o g v* past and willingness to assert their voice.

c. Origin of Toe-Sore⁸⁰: Two sisters Kave and Kadom living without a brother had to join the Jirsong owing to the customary law that every household is to depute one. Though Klengsar and Klengdun the chief and deputy ensured security but seduced the girls. As a result a time came when the two could no longer appear in public. No one listened to the girls and at last they approached the river spirit to take their lives away and let them appear as sores on human toes. Since then during rainy season human toes gets infection and sores and if Kave and Kadom are remembered with dignity through chants and charms, the cure is assured. The tale is meant to inculcate a voice against marginalization of women, exploitation of the weaker in the name of tradition.

f 0 " Q t k i k p-U q h ø g Y k p e g ø " k p " v j g " o⁸¹: ~~Apagvised by~~ *q h " M c t* father Songsar Recho, to know who is the sharpest, strongest, fittest, perfect and knowledgeable, the two brothers as human visited different places on earth and transformed the wise old lady full of human kindness into a young beauty while punished the old lady of filthy tongue and evil heart totally blind and deaf. The tale reflects that the Karbi folk society rests on winter-summer way sort of mannerism and believes that women represent both destructive and creative forces.

e. A Dog, a Hyena and a She-Eliphant⁸²: Once on being scolded harshly by *L c p i t g u q ø u " y k h g " K p i p c t r k " h q t " d g k p i " k f n g " j k u* from home. Jangreso ill-treated his wife and she too ran away from home. At last Jangreso got Sibong, Mahar and Ingnarpi in the forest transformed into a dog, hyena and she-elephant respectively. He brought home the dog, but the hyena refused to come to his brother and the

