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Pallabi Saikia<sup>1</sup>



## A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE KARBI TRIBE IN KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT OF ASSAM, INDIA



Pallabi Saikia<sup>1</sup> and <sup>2</sup>Pronob Gogoi

<sup>1</sup>Department of Assamese, Assam University, Diphu Campus,  
Assam (India).

<sup>2</sup>Department of Life Sciences, Dibrugarh University, Assam (India).

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### ABSTRACT

The present study deals with sociological study among the Karbi Tribe of Karbi Anglong district. The information was collected through semi-structured questionnaire and interview schedule among the common people of different localities. The study will highlight the history and origin, settlement pattern, family structure, present socio-economic status along with cultural practices of Karbi Tribe of Karbi Anglong district.

**KEYWORDS** :Sociological study, Karbi Tribe, Karbi Anglong district.

### INTRODUCTION

Sociology is the study of human social relationships and institutions. It is an exciting and illuminating field of study that analyzes and explains important matters in our personal lives, our communities. Social change is the significant alteration in the social order of a society. It includes change of social behavior, social relations, nature, institution etc. It may also refer to the idea of social progress, the socio-cultural evolution. There are some importance of sociological study such as development of the individuals, understanding and planning of society, solution of social problem, draw our attention to the intrinsic worth and dignity of man.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Karbi Anglong district is situated in the central part of Assam. The district is administered as per provision of the Sixth Schedule of the constitution of India having an autonomous district of their own since 17 Nov, 1951. It is bounded by Golaghat district in the East, Meghalaya and Marigaon district in the West, Nagaon and Golaghat district in the North and North Cachar Hills district and Nagaland in the South. The district lies between 92 50´ to 94 25´ East longitude and 25 05´ and 26 15´ North latitudes. The total geographical area of the district is about 10,434 sq.km. On the basis of the area, it is the largest district of Assam. The forest area covered is about 4,299.019 sq.km. The district is divided into two parts; one is Eastern part comprising Diphu and Bokajan Sub-division and another one is Western part consist of Hamren Sub-division. The climate of the area is humid in nature. The temperature ranges between 8 C to 12 C in winter and 23 C to 32 C in summer season. The average annual rainfall is about 2416 mm. The district is mostly inhabited by various ethnic tribal such as Karbi, Bodo, Dimasa, Mech, Garo, Kuki, Rengma, Naga, Jaintia, Tiwa, Hajong, Rabha, Hmar etc. and a few plain tribes. Among these ethnic tribes, the Karbis are the principal tribal community in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam.

Besides of these, non-tribes are also live together in this hill district. Majority of the population are generally dependent on agriculture. They are cultivated different types of agricultural crops out of which, paddy is the main crop. Except for plain areas, the people prefer the Jhum cultivation. Different types of ethnic communities have their different sociological practices. From this point of view, sociological study is most necessary for understanding the life style, settlement pattern, cultural practices, economy etc. for every community.

However, several workers have been worked on sociological study of different tribes from time to time. But, very little works have been done on sociological study of Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong district. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate and document the ethnography of Karbi tribe of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The ethnography covers of this study like history and origin, settlement pattern, family structure, house, economy, the marriage system, festivals, dress, food and drinks, language, literature etc.

### METHODOLOGY

The present investigation was carried during 2012-2014 based on field survey in various villages of Karbi Anglong district. The survey was undertaken among the 250 respondents randomly selected from different locations. As in any other social science research, the information was collected through observation and semi-structured questionnaire and interview schedule among the common people of the different locations. As the secondary sources are limited on this topic, the available literatures in relation to this are taken for the study.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE KARBIS

The first home of the different individuals speaking Tibeto-Burman dialects was in western China close to the Yang-Tee-Kiang and the Howang-ho streams. From these spots, they went down the courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy and entered India and Burma. The Kabis, alongside others entered Assam from Central Asia in one of the rushes of movement. The Karbis too trace their origin and existence in China and South-east Asia.

### SETTLEMENT PATTERN

The Settlement example of the Karbis is as a town. Every income town has a headman called 'Gaon Bura' or "Sarthe" who is named by the District Autonomous Council Authority. Each Karbi town is named by the town's headman's name. Like, the other slope tribes, the Karbis tend to live on the highest point of the hill. In the plain portion of the district where the Karbi people practice permanent wet cultivation called 'panikhethi'. But, the interior areas of the district where traditional 'Jhum' or shifting cultivation method is practice. The Karbis who practice Jhuming or Shifting cultivation very often shift their village to new Jhum sites. Sometimes the new place of shifting might be 10 to 20 k.m. away from the present sites.

### THE FAMILY STRUCTURE

The Karbis live in joint families and for economic reasons, the family is split and a new unit is formed. The nuclear family consists of husband and wife with or without unmarried children. The vertical family consists of man and his family and their children. This type includes grand children. The horizontal family consists of the above members and also brothers and sisters. In the Karbi society, all the three types are present.

The family of the Karbis are following the patriarchal system of family structure. Father is the head of the family. All the important decisions within the family are taken by the father or joining by parents. At the death of the father, his son inherits the properties, not by his daughters. If the father dies without any son, his property is inherited by the nearest male relative of his own clan.

### HOUSE

The house of the Karbi tribe is generally rectangular shape. The Karbi houses are generally built of split flattened out bamboo, sun grass and wood. The house is divided into two parts (i) Kut and (ii) Kam. The kut is the number of apartments where the members of the family live and contains fire places and also stored paddy. The other part is called Kam which meant for guest. By the side of the Kam, there is Tribung which is partition off for sleeping purposes. On the left side of the Kut, a portion with its floor at a lower level is partitioned off for the fowl and goats(vo-roi). There is a verandah at the front of the house is called Hongkup and another at the back of the house is called Pang-Hongkup. The unroofed platform on the back is simply called Pang. The open space before the house is called "Hongpherla". The fire place is called Mehup. The place where firewood is stored called Theng poi rai.

The furniture of the houses is mostly made of bamboo and block of wood. Baskets of bamboo generally used for various purposes like wardrobes, household goods and cloths are kept.

After completion of the construction of the house, the family members enter the house ceremonially and invited village head man and others for the opening ceremony of the occasion. The family members pray god "Homphu" in presence of all and enter the house.

### ECONOMY

The village economy of the Karbis is based on agriculture. Like, many other hill tribes, the Karbis are traditionally adopt in 'Jhuming'. The term is used in the North-East India for slash and burn method. From the beginning to the ending, there are different phases of operation in Jhum cultivation which are as follows:

Rit Kesam: Choose the proper land in the slaps of the hills.

Rit Kepan: The feelings of trees and undergrowths.

Rit me-Kekai: The burning of the rubbishes.  
Arhek karhi: The clearance of half burnt logs.  
Rit Kenang: Dispersal of different seeds.  
Bap Karlu: The weeding of the plants in July-August.  
Sok Kerat: Harvesting.

They cultivate different types of crops like food grains, vegetables and fruits like rice, maize, potato, tapioca, beans, ginger and turmeric. They have homestead gardens with betel nut, jackfruit, oranges, pineapple, etc. which fulfill their nutritional as well as food items. They are generally giving importance on rubber plantation.

Karbi people have the highest HPI (Human Poverty Index) value of 33.52, indicating that this tribe has the highest number of people in human poverty. (Assam Human Development Report, 2003).

#### THE MARRIAGE SYSTEM

Marriage is a universal social institution. Monogamy is the general practice in the Karbi society. Generally the act of polygamy is not favored. Marriage by transaction (Adam Achar) is the normal routine of the Karbi. The Karbis are exogamous at the group level and marriage among the persons of the same family is entirely disallowed. The marriage inside of the same group is illicit and the wrongdoing is called 'Lai Chenem'. Unbalanced Cross-Cousin marriage is a particular framework among the Karbis. The marriage between a kid and his maternal uncle's little girl is a broadly perceived tradition in the Karbi society. In the event of marriage, by transaction the assent of the young lady is important since a Karbi maiden can't be persuasively hitched to a kid of her hating. Like, other tribal groups of Assam, the Karbis don't have the arrangement of lady cost.

After marriage, the wife keeps on utilizing the surname of his dad. Be that as it may, the youngsters accept the title of their dad. Dowager marriage is likewise permitted by Karbi society. Notwithstanding, by no means, the senior sibling is permitted to wed the dowager of his more youthful sibling. Separation is extremely uncommon in the Karbi society, yet reasonable through the town chamber just when the partition of the life partner is unavoidable. Now a days, the list position marriage additionally permit with Karbi Community. Tyke marriage is obscure framework among the Karbis.

#### FESTIVALS

There are some festivals among the Karbi society like Rongker, Chomangkan, Sok-kerroi, Chojun puja or Swark puja etc. Among these festivals, Rongker and Chomangkan are the most important festivals among the Karbi society. The beginning of the cultivation is marked with a great annual compulsory festival known as Rongker. Rongker is one of the annual festivals which is held around January-February. This festival organized by elderly folklore male in the village individually or socially. They pray to God for good harvest and well being of the community. Similarly at the end of the harvesting they celebrate another festival known as Sok-kerroi. Chomangkan is another festival which is primarily a death ceremony. It is a non-stop four days ritual. It is performed by family members for the peace and safe passage of the soul for died person.

#### DRESS

The Karbis have their own conventional dresses which are aesthetically planned. There are particular dresses for both men and ladies. A Karbi man wears a loin fabric called 'Rikong'. The upper part of the body is secured by a coat whose front is open. It is called 'Choi'. On the head, they wear a top

which is called pohu. The old matured Karbi men utilize a masterfully composed shirt called Cho-nanpo and the shirt utilized by the young fellows is called Choy-hongthor. The Karbi ladies and young ladies by and large utilize Pinicamflak, a bit of fabric tied around the waist. A bit of creative material is utilized by them to cover the upper piece of their body and it is called Pe-kok. An exceptionally masterful waist band called Wan kok is additionally utilized by each lady and young lady. The women use shaded and striped Endi scarf called Khongjari amid winter. The Karbi women use on her fingers a good number of rings. The rings are made of silver. On the wrists of the hands, they wear bangles.

#### FOOD AND DRINKS

The Karbis are non-vegetarians. Rice is the most staple food among them and generally it is taken with the meat of fowls, goats and pigs. Silk worm, fern, bamboo shoot, bud of banana are also important food items among them. On the other hand, dry fish is an important food item and it can be preserved for many days and taken it, when it is necessary. Dry fish can be prepared in three ways: (i) okreng (the small fish dry on sun set or fire, (ii) tomang-menthu (cut the big fish to form various pieces which are dry on sun set and (iii) tibuk or langpong-menthu (dry the small fish and mixed with table salt and wine and kept it in bamboo ring). Drinks are produced from rice. There are three types of wines used by Karbi tribes such as, Horlang, Hararak and Horpok. Among these, Horlang is the common bear used by all of them.

#### LANGUAGE

Assam is a multilinguistics state of North-East India. There are four different families viz: Indo-Aryan, Sino-Tibetan, Astro-Asiatic and Dravidian. The Karbi language belongs to the Mikir group of the Tibeto-Burman sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language family. It have pointed out the similarities between Karbi language and the Kuki-Chin languages. However, in accordance to Linguistic Survey of India, conducted under the supervision of Sir George Abraham Grierson, the Karbi language has been categorized between the Bodo language group on one hand and the Kuki-Chin and Naga language group on the other.

Linguistically, they are generally bilingual. Karbi and Assamese are two prominent which play a great role in their society. The Karbi language has been introduced as medium of instruction. For the first time, the Karbi language was introduced in the primary level of Education in 1988 as a subject. On the other hand, it was introduced in the primary level of Education in 1963 as a medium. The Karbi Anglong district council authority has been taking some concrete steps for the spread of education especially at the primary stage.

#### LITERATURE

The Karbi have unique folk literature and are rich in folk tales and folk songs which are indigenous. The folk songs relate to the various aspects of social life such as origin of the human being, birth, death, marriage, love stories etc. Especially, The "Muchera Kehir". ('recalling the past'), a lengthy folk narrative that describes the origin and migration ordeal of the Karbis, is one such example. During the Chomangkan ceremony, the tale of Mochera Kehir is narrated to the people ussembled. The Sabin Alun, another traditional narrative, relates the legend of Prince Rama (Ram in Karbi), Lakshmana (Lokhon or Khon) and Princess Sita (Sinta Kungri) in the traditional Karbi and rural setting where Sinta Kungri is adept in weaving clothes and helps her father Bamonpo (Janaka) in his Jhum fields. However, the Sabin Alun is not a widely accepted tradition, and it seems to be of recent origin. Many Karbi

themselves argue that the Sabin Alun is probably an adaptation from the Ramayana, composed when some Karbi were converted to Hinduism in the sixteenth century CE.

Like most languages of the hill tribes of the North-East India, Karbi does not have its own script. Then the Christian missionaries adopted the Roman script for writing in Karbi. The earliest written texts in Karbi were produced by Christian missionaries, especially the American Baptist Mission and the Catholic Church. Rev. R.E. Neighbor's Vocabulary of English and Mikir, with Illustrative Sentences published in 1878, which can be called the 'first' Karbi 'dictionary', Sardoka Perrin Kay's English-Mikir Dictionary published in 1904, Sir Charles Lyall and Edward Stack's The Mikirs in 1908, the first ethnographic details on the Karbis and G.D. Walker's A Dictionary of the Mikir Language published in 1925 are some of the earliest important books on the Karbis and the Karbi language and grammar. In 1935, the first Karbi newspaper 'Birta' was published by Rev. William Ralph Hutton. At present four numbers of Karbi news paper are published from karbi Anglong district. During 1978 ,the Karbis adopted Roman script according Karbi Anglong.The Karbis have a store house of folktales and these are handed down to the present generation with remarkable freshness. These are mostly preserved in the mouths of old people.

#### CONCLUSION

The Karbis occupy an important position among the tribal communities of Assam. From the present investigation, it has been concluded that there is a radical change in the settlement pattern, family structure, food and drinks, agriculture, marriage system, language, culture of Karbi tribes due to the modern civilization. In spite of this rapid change, they are always try to live their ethnographical heritage among the society.

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