

CHAPTER: I

1. Introduction:

From the moment we are born, our world is patterned by our culture, and this includes not only what we eat or wear or say or do, but also some extent of ability to perceive. What we know or believe and how we think. These things are basic and instilled so early that it is so hard to think beyond that. In folkloristics, folk belief is a broad genre of folklore. This category includes a wide variety of behaviours, expressions, and beliefs. Examples of concepts included in this genre are magic, popular beliefs, folk religion, taboos, the supernatural and folk medicine etc (Green, 1997:89). Folk belief and associated behaviours are strongly evidenced among all elements of society, regardless of education level or income. In turn, folk belief is found in an agricultural, suburban, and urban environments alike (Green, 1997:97). The term folk, implying informality, lack of sophistication, and lack of skill, is quite rightfully, contested by scholars sensitive to conventional construction of the beliefs and practices of women and lower status men. The term folk religion, common religion, popular religion, domestic religion, peasant religion and the little tradition are all used, sometimes interchangeably, often, often vaguely, by anthropologists, folklorists and historians of religion. Anthropologist Eric Wolf sees folk beliefs as utilitarian and moralistic but not ethical or questioning. Folk belief represents a type of conscious mental thought, a subclass of many kinds of mental activity of folk. Like many other elements of folk culture, folk belief also has come down from generation to generation.

Folk beliefs are older than the primitive society of human race. Even before the men and women used to live in groups which turned into society. While primitive people living in groups they followed some rules under the impulse of folk beliefs. These folk beliefs are related with the culture and tradition and gradually it transformed into social culture. Hence, folk beliefs are basically community oriented. Folk beliefs are supposed to be the identification mark of a community; social system and the social structure of a community are reflected through folk belief. A group of folk people live in a common geographical environment and it nourishes their culture, customs and rituals in a year. Their folk beliefs reflect these culture, custom and rituals in a systematic way. The proper study of folk beliefs of a particular group of people throws light on their social, cultural and economic aspects, identifying the structure of their society (dutta, 2013). Folk people believed that every objects that exist in nature abstract or concrete has life. Therefore they believed in some supernatural and cosmic power that shows them the right path. Hence these beliefs lead the folk people to do their activities with some rules and regulation sustain their society in a systematic way.

However from the analytical view, Primitive people developed their stories, myths and legends on the basis of the presence of super natural powers that originate from the concept of animism. In many places of Assam, folk people worship the forest God when they go for hunting. Similarly, folk people, who plough land, always believe earth to be the form Goddess (*Aai Dharitri* in Assam). They also believed that fertility of seeds is determined by some fertile Gods.it seems that folk groups in almost all parts of the world believe in the presence of power in all objects (dutta, 2013). All folk beliefs cannot say to be false. It is an important subject, makes one conscious, alert him and makes the village or the social life systematic. Don't go, don't eat, not good are commonly used words in folk beliefs which have a hidden meaning of scientific view. Many cultural groups take the folk beliefs in the form of light hearted axioms and other comprises it as important social rules and traditions

and is fear that if broken the rules, it constitutes a serious breach of respect and even the groups well being.

I seek to understand women's identity in their everyday lives and local knowledge's that has been passed down to women through oral tradition, reveals the consequences of having no information and identifies methods that families and social groups have used to communicate beliefs and practices concerning women's health issues and the female body. Main purpose is to study beliefs and practices regarding women's health issues and the female body among the Karbi's and want to examine the beliefs and practices regarding menstruation, pregnancy, abortion and menopause etc. The stereotype notion of women being inferior to men is still clearly seen in the traditional karbi community of assam as the traditional idea of being women confined to domestic domain only. Women are restricted from various types of the functioning of customary law.

The Karbis formerly known as Mikirs is one of the ethnic groups of assam, and constitute and third largest groups in the state. Racially being a mongoloid group, they belong to kuki chin group of tibeto burman linguistic family, they entered assam from eastern portion of khasi jaintia hill.

The demographic pattern of Kamrup district is a heterogenous one with tribals and non-tribals. Bodo, Dimasa, Kachari, Khamti, Tiwa, Karbi, Missing, etc. are living together for centuries and there exist a noticeable degree of mutual love, respect and inter-religious tolerance amongst them. Along with tribals the non-tribals staying together for many years in harmony in the district.

The belief of the Karbis upon these good or evil forces dominating every nook and corner of the world around them is more than belief but a faith that the entire community shares with one another, more than a theory but a practice. The attitude through which they perceive the

natural and supernatural worlds has evolved into a systematic belief system. The field of this attitude and belief system, faith and practice, is supposed to be the material expression in the form of rituals, ceremonies, propitiation and sacrifices, which are, except for few aberrations, are maintained even by defying the change of time and situation and the momentum of attitudinal shift triggered by the advent of scientific point-of-view since the dawn of the modern era.

1.2 Aim of the study:

I seek to understand women's identity in their everyday lives and local knowledge's that has been passed down to women through oral tradition. Main purpose is to study and examine the beliefs and practices regarding puberty, marriage, pregnancy, maternal and child care practices among karbi women. The stereotype notion of women being inferior to men is still clearly seen in the traditional karbi community of assam as the traditional idea of being women confined to domestic domain only. Women are restricted from various types of the functioning of customary law.

1.3 Objectives of the study:

The present study is carried out keeping the following aims and objectives in mind:

1. To find out Indigenous knowledge in form of beliefs prevalent in karbi community.
2. To find out and examine the beliefs and practices associated with womanhood among karbi communities of Demoria block of kamrup district.
3. To find out women's status in their community through these beliefs and ritual practices.
4. To understand the values of folk beliefs scientifically in the context of puberty pregnancy maternal and child care practices.

1.4 Methods and Methodology:

In order to achieve the objectives of the studies, I am relying on primary source of data as well as secondary source of data, for collecting secondary data. I have gone through some related books, articles, magazines, journals, e-journals, internet sources on socio-cultural and folk life of Karbis. And for the primary data I have visited the field selected for the study and observed the folk cultural life of Karbis and also interviewed the aged person and traditional bearers of Karbis to know the belief and ritual practices prevalent among them.

For the field work

- 1) The questionnaire
- 2) Interview method
- 3) Observation methods will be used

1.5 Importance of the study:

The Karbi belief system is marked by nature worship. These beliefs, invariably informed and defined by rituals are based on a body of oral traditions. These oral traditions have also generated a huge corpus of legends and tales which constitute the mythic consciousness in the Karbi mind. It may be of some help in understanding human psychology and balancing nature of individual to his culturally constituted world. There are so many beliefs and rituals are practiced by the Karbis related to womanhood but never came into light in front of the world. The present study wanted to cover these indigenous beliefs and ritual practices.

1.6 Scope of the study:

Assam is a land where large numbers of tribes and non-tribes are staying together and having their indigenous knowledge and folk beliefs, There can be no dissension to the fact that the

belief-system of the Karbis are the sum total of various socio-cultural, magico-religious rites and rituals, practices, customs and traditions propagated by a good number of great social philosophers and reformers in the bygone past who had left behind them a unique and rich cultural legacy for their offspring. The proposed study is an attempt to throw a light on socio cultural life of Karbis through ritual practices and beliefs mainly associated with womanhood such as puberty, pregnancy rituals and beliefs. However, there are much more scope for further studies on folk life of Karbi community and women folk of Karbis. In addition to the socio cultural issues, there are lot more provision for the study which is not included in the time constrained study.

1.7 Limitations of the study:

Due to modernization and advancement of technology the young Karbi people are not aware of these folk beliefs and rituals. These are only confined within the aged village folks. There are lot more provisions for study which are not included because of limited time period of the M.phil program.

1.8 Review of literature:

Some important studies related to this topic have been given below:

In the last few decades, there has been an increased attention particularly from the academics, to study and document Karbi literature and culture. Therefore, significant rise in number of Karbi youths who came forward to study, document and give information and knowledge on various aspects of Karbi life, literature and culture. There has been a remarkable growth of literature on the folklores, myths, art and culture of the Karbis. However, most of these writings are in Assamese. Except a few number of scholarly books written in English, most of the available printed books on literature of Karbis are either in the Karbi or in Assamese.

Among the most prominent books on the Karbi is *The History of Karbi* by Barelong Terang, published by Kaweso Rongpipi, Diphu in 2003, tries to bring out a widespread history of the origin, migration and the contemporary state of the socio-political life of the Karbis

The Karbis of North East India by P. C. Phangcho is yet another book advancing scientific and holistic approaches towards spacio-temporal analysis of tribal (Karbi) geography. It has also provided useful insight into the corporate life of the Karbis. It is a must readable one on the tribe where we can get much information on the language, literature and culture of the tribe.

The Sociology of the Karbis, the master thesis of Tanmoy Bhattacharjee, published in book form in 1986, is an attempt to highlight brief summary of the social systems and prevalent folk beliefs and rituals with major oral narratives of the Karbis.

With the growing awareness of women's position and their status in the society, researchers have started doing researches

Study of Social Change and its Importance on Tribal Women of Karbi Anglong District of Assam, by Bhugeswari Gohain Roy, 1999. Where she discusses about the changes found in Karbi women in modern era, and also mentioned that Karbi women are found enjoying equal rights in all even in rituals, males and female both are attending temple, when a Karbi woman takes vow to work for the religion she is not coming home on that very day, women can raising voice in illegal and many examples are found there. For women also, doing unlawful is not tolerated.

In *the second sex* by Simon De Beauvoir, she has made an important critical point about folk religion. In religion, a woman 'struggles only by means of images and words: and that is why she accepts the most contradictory assertions without a problem'.

In the article 'Rites of passage of the karbis and the role of women: on seeing unlike a feminist by dr. Kamala kanto bori attempts to explore the rites of passages performed by the

Karbis establishing the prominence of the “second sex” in performing and sustaining some indispensably important rites and rituals- the life force of their culture. The author on seeing unlike a feminist and throwing light on Beauvoir’s conviction, it is realised that the Karbi women are not marginalized much by their male counterparts in the society regarding ritualistic domains of the tribe by playing a pivotal role in the rites of passages.

In the book ‘folk medicine of Karbis of Assam’ the Dr. Indranoshee Das deals with the concept of diseases and illness prevalent among the Karbis, author covers the various aspect of beliefs and practices prevalent both the hills and plains Karbi. It is found that the book mainly concern about the women and their health status and related folk beliefs and practices.

Karbi Bhasa Sahityar Rengoni is a researched based book on Karbi community by Pallabi Saikia. There she has written various aspects of Karbi Culture such as Karbi popular culture, their death rituals, ballads, marriage systems, riddles, their cultivation, assimilation of Karbi and greater Assamese culture.

Besides these books and theses, there are a number of journals, magazines, E-sources on these aspects of the Karbis, and there are Project Reports for M. Phil degree carried out and submitted in Gauhati University are:

- 1) *Input of Development Activities in a Karbi Village* by Padmeswar Baruah, 1984.
- 2) *Folk Perception of the Environment: A Study Among the Karbis of Kamrup District* by Geetima Choudhury, 1994.
- 3) *Food Habits and related folk belefs with special reference to nutritional status among the Karbi women of Kamrup District of Assam* By Ritu Geo Goswami, 2015.
- 3) *Brief Study of the Role and Social Status of Women Among the Karbis of Morongabari Village, Kamrup* by Anita Basak, 1995.

From the above discussion about available literature on Karbi culture and tradition, it is evident that there are still few works done on Karbi woman

1.9 Chapterization:

The study was divided into five chapters. In the first chapter an introduction has been given about the background to the choice of the topic of research and there are four sub chapters which include

1. aims and objectives
2. importance of study
3. selection of study area
4. scope of study
5. methods and methodology
6. review of literature

Second chapter contains the socio-economic profile of the study is consist of

1. History of Dimoria
2. The plain Karbis: a profile of the community
3. religion
4. Environment
5. Marriage system
6. Political status
7. Occupation
8. Types of family
9. Women status in Karbi community of Demoria block
10. Means of communication

Third chapter would be folk beliefs and ritual practices of Karbi community.

Fourth chapter would be folk beliefs and practices associated with womanhood among Karbis
this chapter will discuss about

1. Beliefs and practices related to menstruation
2. Marriage
3. Pregnancy
4. Food habit related beliefs and practices
5. Agricultural related
6. Participation in Religious rituals
7. Traditional belief practices concerning health problem among Karbi women

Fifth chapter is a concluding chapter where the observation and analyses made in the previous chapters will be summarized.