

## THE IMPORTANCE AND STATUS OF CLAN IN THE CUSTOMARY LAW OFFICE AMONG THE KARBIS OF KARBI ANGLONG DISTRICT OF ASSAM

HARWE INGTI KATHARPI<sup>1</sup> & MAHUA BHATTACHARJEE<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant: Profacer, Department of History Rukasen College, Bokolia Karbi Anglong, Assam  
Affiliated to Assam University, Silchar, Assam

<sup>2</sup>Assistant: Profacer, Department of History Assam University, Silchar Diphu campus, Diphu, Assam

### ABSTRACT

The Karbis are one of the major tribe of Assam mostly inhabiting the district of Karbi Anglong, the largest district of the state. They are also found in other parts of the state – Nagoan, Morigaon, Kamrup, Sonitpur, Golaghat, N.C Hills and are also found in other parts of the North Eastern States. The “Mikir” or the Karbis is one of the Scheduled Tribes of Assam as given in the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe list modification order, 1956. The Karbi called themselves as *Arleng* or ‘Men’ also called the “Mikirs’ by the plains people. Racially the Karbis are Mongoloid and linguistically belong to the family of Tibeto Burman of Indo Chinese languages.

**KEYWORDS:** Clan, Customary Law Office, Importance

### INTRODUCTION

Originally the district came into being on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1951 as United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district, by the govt: notification No TAD/R 31/50/201, carved out from some part of Sivasagar (now Golaghat) district, Nowgoan, Cachar and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district of present Meghalaya State. It was separated into distinct district in the year 1970 as Mikir Hills district and North Cachar Hill District. The district took its shape in the name as Karbi Anglong on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1976 by the govt: notification No. TAD/115/74/47 dated 14.10.1976. The district was formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

As the main base of scheduling those tribes under the Sixth Schedule were their customary laws and practices and their distinct culture. The community is governed by their customary laws. The tribe solves their social issues, differences, divorce, crime, quarrel etc through their customary law officers. The main land constitutional is not applied on them, unless it is a Govt: matter. The offices are divided into three levels – Village, Provincial *Longree* and the Central, with different sets of officers in each level. The village is the basic unit of the society.

Other than the village headman, all the law officers in both the provincial and central levels are appointed according to the clan lineage of that specific post, which had been set for them by their ancestors, which are not changeable. Besides in the customary law office, the society is based on the clan system, weather marriage, sharing of relations, cremation etc. on one hand one can say that the society is completely based on the clan system.

So, without knowing the clan system of the society, it is impossible to know and understand the karbi community. This paper is an attempt to understand the working system of the customary law office of the Karbi community in specific and society in general in terms of clan.

### Statement of the problem

The Karbi community is the least studied community, besides being one of the most dominated and the tribe occupying the largest district of the State- Assam. Many scholars have tried to study the community, but the studies are only on the general aspects of the community and every one has studied on the same topic – dress, housing, economy etc. But those studies carried out were not an an depth study. This paper is an attempt to study on the clan system and clan structure of the society which is regarded as the base of the community.

### Methodology

For the study mostly primary source in the form of interviews is used, so that the topic could be understood from their view points and from base, and few secondary sources available.

### Objective of the Study

- To understand the clan system of the hill Karbis of Karbi angling district.
- To know the extent of its believes and practices, based on the clan system.

### Research Questions

- Is it justified to say that the base of the community is their clan system?
- How far the clan is controlling the Karbi society?

The Karbis are known as the “Mikir” in History and to the non Karbi people. They are one of the Scheduled tribe given in the Schedule caste and schedule tribes list modification order, 1956. Racially they are Mongoloid; linguistically belong to the family of Tibeto Burman of the Indo Chinese languages. The life of the tribe is governed by their customary laws.

The tribe is found in all parts of the state and even in other states of the country and in other countries too. But they are in majority in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, which was constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. It is the largest district of the state and has a geographical area of 10,434 sq kms. Originally the district came into being on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1951 as “United Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills”., with Diphu as its head quarter for the “Mikir Hills”. The district took its name as Karbi Anglong on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1976 by the Govt: notification No. TAD/115/74/47.<sup>i</sup>

A clan is a group of people united by actual perceived kingship and descent. Even if lineage details are unknown clan members may be organized around a founding member or apical ancestor. The kingship based bond may be symbolical where by the clan shares “stipulated” common ancestors that is the symbol of clan unity. When these ancestors are non human, it is referred to as a ‘Totem’ which is frequently an animal. Clan can be most easily described as tribes or sub group of tribes. Clan in indigenous society likely to be exogamous, meaning the members cannot marry one another. Clans preceded more centralized form of community organization and government.<sup>ii</sup>

### The Clans

There are 5 main Kurs or clans in the society which is sub-divided into several sub clans. The different clans and sub clans of the community are:-

### **LI- JANG (L- EH)**

Under it there are two main clans the Ingti and Engleng. The Ingti has five sub divisions which are: - Kathar, Hensek, Taro, Killing and Engleng. Traditionally there was no Ingti Killing in the Lijang sub division but the people who came from the Kiling area introduced themselves as Ingti killing.

### **HANJANG (DING-E)**

Under it there are three main clans which are:- Bey, Kro and Terang. They are sub divided into:-

Bey (ding eh or ding jang)- Ke-Et, Ki-Ik and Dum.

Kro (lo eh) - Nilip, Nihang and Khamu.

Terang (hang jang)- Dilli, Rong-chei-cho, Engnar.

and Ingjai (moi eh or moi jang).

### **KRONJANG**

It has only one main clan which is Teron. It has six sub divisions

Millik, Kongkat, Rongcheicho, meeji, Dengja and Langne.

### **EJANG**

There are 6 main clans under it which are again sub divided. The main clans are: - Enghi, Hanse, Rongpi, Ronghang, Kramsa and Tisso. The sub divisions under it are:-

ENGHI- Duhuidi, Hemso, Senot, Hempi.

HANSE- Chinthong, Nongpli, Kiling, Pherangke, Durong, Nong Kirla, Miji and Rongcheicho.

RONGPI- Senot, Lindok, Himtok, Pherangke, Miji

RONGHANG- Umaha

KRAMSA- Kiling, Chongkhili, Bongrung,

TISSO- Rongphu, Rongchitim, Borsenot, Rongling.

Other than these there are:- Ronghee, Lekthe and Ke-aap.

### **TUNGJANG**

It has 30 Sub-Clans under it.

Timung- killing, chinthong, chongkhili, Dera, meji, senot, Rongpi

Rongphar- Phura Dilli

Kiling- Miji, Rongphar

Tokbi,- Toktiki, Senot, Duhuidi, Dera

Senar- Phangcho, Pator hemso- hempi, Muchiki.

Phangcho- langteroi, Juiti, Hemso, Hempi, Ke-Aap

Rapati, Habepi, Amri, Nokbari, Khanalong, phura.<sup>iii</sup>

## **THE CLAN AND THE CUSTOMARY LAW OFFICE.**

Karbi Anglong district is divided into several areas - circles, Moujas etc but the community has their own traditional division of the land and the practice of customary governance system are based on this division. It is divided into 5 areas traditionally, which are:- Chinthong, Rongkhang, Nilip, Amri and Lumbajong. The three areas- Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri follow Kingship system in administering the community people of their areas. The other two areas too is administered through their customary laws but kingship system is not practiced, and is ruled by the village headman Rong Aasar and the Hima Aasar (in charge of boundary).

In the Rongkhang, Chinthong and Aamri areas the Lindokpo/king and the other officials has a strong control over its people and area. The Chinthong area is still realishing taxes from the community in its areas where the Rongkhang officers had stopped doing it, it is called Bhet Keter. The tradition of giving tax is called the Rongbang Sok Thon. This is a tradition of giving the yearly poduced to their clan officers in the core village in the form of cash and in kind for protecting and looking after their well being as the law officers in the core village donot have time for economic activities and busy solving social issues.<sup>iv</sup>

Like any other office the Karbi customary has the same herirchal structure for the smooth functioning and to provide better governance to their people. There are three divisions in each area. They are: - 1. The central, headed by the Pinpos, The head of each cluster is called Lindok and the head of all the clusters of the specific area is called the Lindoksarpo, who rules along with other subordinate officers. 2. The Longree, headed by the Habe/Habaii and 3. The village (rong) areas, it is headed by the Rong Aasar (village headmen). In each of the areas there are several officers appointed to look after the governance and welfare activities of the areas and their concerned subjects.<sup>v</sup>

The karbis still follows the traditional pattern of administration only system known was that the village headmen (Rong aasar).The king and ministers are selected by taking verbal opinion of support of the representative of the people; however there is no definite tenure of the post. It may be terminated any time on finding his inability, misconduct or other un-social behavior from the office. When any of the functionaries dies or is removed from the post, the responsibility goes to the nearest male relative belonging to his clan. Who so ever may be the person he must be unanimously chosen by all other representatives. In appointment of the officers other than the village level, clan lineage is followed. If there is no eligible member from that very clan lineage than the post remains vacant.

They lives or dwells in a specified location or area which is called the Rong Arak or core village. The Rong Aarak (core village) is generally located in high lands like on a hill or mountain top.

For the smooth functioning several officers or ranks were appointed of which the highest is the Habe or the Habai in the longree followed by the subordinate officers, and in the village level the village headmen is the most superior one whose decision is binding on all regarding the developmental work at the village level also on the social order. The power and function will be discussed while explaining the regional administrations.

All social problems in the society are solved by their customary officers. If any such problems arise then it is first solved at the village level headed by the Rong Aasar or village headman, if he fails to solve the problem it is referred to the longree level i.e. to the Habe or Habai, and if they fail to solve the problem then it is referred to the central body i.e. to the Pinpo. When the pinpo fails to solve the problem then the matter or issue is taken to the King (Lindokpo). But there are certain procedure and steps to approach the higher officers. The matter cannot be taken directly to the higher officer.

All the five areas have their own different hierarchical structure of officers based on the Clan. This Clan based hierarchical structure is not changeable, and the ascendancy is done or made according to the clan lineage set in the past. The studies will be basically on the status of clan in the customary law office of the community and its importance and applications in the society.<sup>vi</sup>

### The Clan Structures Arranged in the Central Body in the Three Rong-Arak are

**RONGKHANG:** of all the 5 customary areas, the Rongkhang is highest in position. As the main Lindokpo (king) of the Rongkhang area belong to the Ronghang clan. It is also called the Ronghang Rongbong.

There are 4 Aartus or clusters and 30 members (Pinpo) in the Ronghang Rongbong.

- **I.Ronghang Aartu:** - The artu where the Ronghang lindokpo (king) dwells is called the Ronghang artu. There are 30 members (pinpos) in the Ronghang Aartu, including the lindokpo (king). They are:-
- **Lindok Sarpo** or Ronghang Lindok (the King). He is the supreme of all the pinpo's in the Rongkhang clusters Aartu, as well as of all the five longree. He must belong to the Ronghang Clan. He is responsible for the smooth functioning of the social rituals and customs in the society also for the economic welfare of the society.
- **Kathar sarpo/Kathar Bura:** He must belong to the Ingti Kathar clan. He is regarded as the royal priest of the 'Ronghang Rongbong'. He is responsible for performing the customary ritual called 'Botor Kikur'. This ritual is performed to please the weather god so as to bring forth a soothing climate (Rain) so that they can have a good harvest. He is also responsible to look after the activities in the 'Rong Arak' in absence of the king 'Lindok Ronghang'.
- **Dilli:** He must belong to the Terang clan. He is regarded as the body guard of the king. He also acts the prime minister. It is his duty to safe guard the king, which is to give physical protection.
- **Bor Pator :** He should be from Phangcho Clan. His main duty is to look after the king and give him protection in absence of the Dilli (body guard).
- **Dengja Kethe:** He must be from the Teron Kongkat (Hongkat) Clan. In olden days the Karbi like the other tribal communities of the North East, has the tradition of human sacrifice to please God. The Dengja Kethe performs this work. But after the penetration of the British in the areas this ritual is practiced no more, instead this ritual of human sacrifice is replaced by sacrificing 5 black Goats every after 5-7 years.
- **Lindok Riso:** He must be from the Kramsa clan. He assists the Kathar Bura during performance of any rituals in the core village.
- **Dengja Riso:** He must be from the clan of Teron Kongkat. His main duty is to assist and attend the Dengja

Kethe., during the sacrificial ritual as 'Borva' helper.

- **Kathar Riso:** He must be from the Ingti Kathar clan. Earlier he was in the Rongpi aartu, but latter he was accepted in the ronghang Aartu by the Kathar Bura.
- **Borsenot Rongchitim:** He is head of all the 'Senot', He is one of the guard in the core village
- **Rongphar Senot:** He must be from the Timung Rongphar clan. He is also known as 'Senot Miji'.
- **Senot Rongling:** He must be from the Tisso Rongling clan.
- **Enghee Senot:** He must be from Enghee hemso clan.
- **Rongphu Borsenot:** He must be from the Tisso Rongphu clan. He is the head of all the Senot. the Senot of all the clan stays under him.
- **Bor Miji (Engleng):** He must belong to the Engleng Hempi clan.
- **Phura dilli:** He must be from the Timung Phura clan.
- **Kro Nilip:** He must be from the Kro Nilip clan and not from other Kro clan.
- **Kro nihang Miji:** He must be from the Kro Nihang clan. His does the same work like the other Miji.
- **Phura Ingjai:** He must be from the Ingjai clan. He is also a messenger.
- **Bey Miji:** He must be from the 'Bey Ronghang Hemso' clan, Then it is his duty to perform traditional rituals as to wash away all the evil happening "Honi", and also can help and assist the 'Teron miji' in his work.
- **Teron Miji:** He must be from the Teron Millik clan.
- **Engleng Miji:** He must belong to the Engleng hemso clan.
- **Khanalong or Borsenot Rongphar:** He must be from Rongphar clan. Also it is his duty to teach the 'klengdun' and 'Kleng Sarp' during the 'Jir kadam' or Dometry days.
- **Pheranke (Rongpi):** He must be from the Rongpi Pheranke clan. and not from any other Rongpi clan. He is also a messenger.
- **Buretemen (Bey):** He must be from 'Bey Ronghang hempi' clan. He has to conduct trials.
- **Ingti Pherenke:** He must belong to the Ingti clan. His main duty is to intimate all the 4 artu's or cluster's of the 'Ronghang Rongbong' or the core village in the Rongkhang division.
- **Cheprong Dera:** He must be from the Dera clan. He also is messenger.
- **Borchalai:** He must be from the Ingti Hensek clan. He is also a messenger and also helps in the works in the core village.
- **Duhuidi (Enghi):** He must belong to the Enghi Hemso clan. His main work or duty is if in sometime, there arises a situation to hold the ritual 'Chomkan', the festival of dead in the 'Rong Arak'. It is him who only can beat the

traditional drum “cheng” during the entire occasion. And in normal days, like the ‘Senot Miji’ he is also asked to inspect the governance in the subordinate areas.

- **Himtok(Rongpi):** He must be from the Rongpi Himtok clan and not from any other Rongpi clan. In the Karbi society rice powder is an indispensable part of any sacrificial offerings to God. It is a must in all types of offering to propitiate God. It is the primary duty of the Rongpi Himtok (him = rice powder, Tok = to pound) to pound the rice to make the rice powder, <sup>vii</sup>
- **Terank:** There is a bachelor dormitory system in all the 4 Artu’s in the Ronghang Rongbong or the core village. It is headed by the ‘Klengsarpo’ and ‘Klengdun’. They are directed or commanded by an officer called ‘Uvebarim’. This dormitory acts as a training period or schools, which is generally a preparation for meeting any types of challenges in the future. This entire period of training is called ‘Jir Kedam’. A specific period is fixed for the ‘Jir Kedam’ during which they are not allowed to marry. They do all the economic activity. Besides working in the ‘Ronghang Rongbong’ or the core village they also offer their service to the villagers at a nominal rate. The other main work of the ‘Terank’ is to provide food to their respective ‘Artus’ in the Ronghang Rongbong’. As all the pinpo’s, Senot’s, Miji’s and other officers are busy solving the social problems and do not have the time for any economic activity. <sup>viii</sup>

In the Rongkhang Aartu the officers from number 1-21 all are the main member of the central committee and from number 22 they act as helper to the superior members. Even if their position may be minor, but their post cannot be ignored as the work performed by them cannot be done by the superior or subordinate members.

## RONGCHAICHO ARTU

This artu is headed by Teron Clan and there are 15 pinpos including the Lindokpo. They are:-

- **Lindok sarpo/ Lindokpo:** He is the head or king of the ‘Rongcheicho Artu’. He must be from the Teron Rongcheicho clan and cannot be from other Teron sub clan. He in the absence of the karbi traditional king ‘The Ronghang Lindok’ can take his charge; He also helps the ‘Ronghang Lindok’ in his work (offerings, traditional rituals, social decisions etc).
- **Kathar:** He must be from the Ingti Rongchaicho clan. He is the main priest of the Rongchaicho Artu and performs all the religious sacrifices and offerings to God.
- **Lindok Riso:** He must be from the Teron clan.
- **Phura Dilli:** He must be from the Terang clan.
- **Borsenot:** He must belong to the Tisso Rongchaicho clan.
- **Bor Senot:** He must be from the Terang Rongchaicho clan.
- **Phura Senot:** He must be from the Terang Rongchaicho clan.
- **Tokbi Senot:** He must be from the Timung Tokbi clan. Like other Senot his main work too is to inspect the governance of the ‘Jiroi’ area. He also is one of the main members of the king’s court.

- **Bey Miji:** He must be from the Bey clan.
- **Bor Miji:** He must be from the kro clan.
- **Pheranke:** He must belong to the Hanse Pheranke clan. His main work is to intimate other member of the Rongchaicho Artu
- **Duhuidi:** He must be from the Tokbi clan.
- **Rongphurui Burutemen:** He must be from the Terang clan.
- **Terang Senot:** He must be from the Terang clan.
- **Terank:-** Like the Klengsarpo of the Ronghang Aartu/cluster he is responsible to look after the members of the dormetary system. Their main work being agricultural activities, which is laso like a training period for the young male members who are a part of it. He is assisted by the Uvebarim/old generation.

### RONGPI AARTU

This artu is headed by the Rongpi Clan. And there are 6 Pinpos in the Aartu.They are:-

- **Lindokpo:** This 'Artu' as named as Rongpi Artu is headed by the Rongpi clan and cannot be from any other clan. He acts as the king in this 'Aartu'.
- **Timung Senot:** To be a Timung Senot he must be from the Timung Rongpi clan.
- **Teron senot:** He must be from the Teron clan.
- **Bor Miji:** He must belong to the Kro clan.
- **Katharpo:** He must be from the Ingti Kathar clan.
- **Phura Senot:** He must be from the Ingjai clan.

### KILLING ARTU

This Aartu is headed by the Timung (killing) Clan. There are 9 Pinpos including the Lindokpo. They are:-

- **Lindokpo:** He is the head/king of the Killing Artu. He must be from the Timung Killing clan. His main work is to perform the customary sacrificial offerings (pooja) to the Killing God "Killing Arnam". He like the other Lindokpo can discuss with any member of the 'Ronghang Rongbong' or the core village for the well beings of the locality and society.
- **Lindok Riso:** He must be from the Bey clan.
- **Katharpo:** He must be from Ingti Kathar clan. The priest.
- **Teron Senot:** He must be from the Teron clan.
- **Bey Senot:** He must belong to the Bey Killing clan.
- **Bor Miji/ Longpinpo:** He must belong to the Timung Killing clan.

- **Killing Miji:** He must be from the Killing clan.
- **Burutemen:** He must belong to the Kramsa Killing clan.
- **Pherangke:** Messenger.<sup>ix</sup>

## CHINTHONG

There are 13 pinpos in the Chinthong Rong Arak, including the Lindokpo (king). There are 3 groups/cluster (artu) in the chinthong Rong arak. Each families or artu has sub members.

### Chinthong Artu

**There are 5 lindok in the Chinthong Artu.**

- **Lindokpo:** He should either be from the Hanse Chinthong or Lekthe Chinthong clan. He is the senior most or the traditional king of the chinthong longree as well as the Chinthong Artu. All the powers in the chinthong longree are vested in his hands.
- **Dilli:** He must be either from Teron Millick or the Teron Kongkat clan. He was the priest of the 'Ok Chono Rongker' (ok = meat, chono = cannot eat, Rongker = religious festival) or human sacrifice which like most of the tribal community had. This is practiced no more but is replaced by 5 black goats and is observed in a gap of every 6 to 7 years.
- **Bor Pator:** He must be either from Senar, phangcho or the Timung Pator clan. He acts the spokes person of the Chinthong Longree. He allocates the portfolio to the subordinate's officers.
- **Kro Senot:** He must be from the Kro clan and not from other clan. He is head of all the Senot in the Chinthong longree. His main duty is to assist the Dilli during the sacrificial procedure or the rituals.
- **Miji:** The Miji in Chinthong Artu must be from the Ingti Hensek or Engleng clan. He too is like the Senot but acts as his assistant.

## NONGDA ARTU CLUSTER

- **Lindokpo:** He is the head or Traditional king of the Nongda Artu, but position lesser to the Chinthong Lindokpo. He must be from the Tisso Rongchitim or from Bongrung clan.
- **Tokbi Senot:** He must be from the Tokbi clan.
- **Bey Senot:** He must be from the Bey clan.
- **Senar Miji:** He must be from the Senar or the Rongpi clan.

### Nongpli Artu Cluster

- **Lindokpo:** He must be from the Rongphar clan. He is the head or the traditional king in the Nongpli Artu, but subordinate to the Chinthong Lindokpo. Unlike the Chinthong Aartu the clan of the Lindokpo cannot be changed. He has all power and function in his own artu like the Chinthong Lindokpo. But he along with the Nongda artu Lindokpo both works under Chinthong Lindokpo.

- **Rongphar Senot/ Rongpi Senot:** For this post the pinpo must be either from Rongphar or from the Rongpi clan.
- **Ingti Senot:** H must be from the Ingti Kathar clan.
- **Hanse miji:** He must be from the Hanse Nongpli clan.<sup>x</sup>

## AMRI RONGBONG

Amri is the third unit of division, where there are two Lindokpos. Amri division is also known as Ar-Langdo.

### Durong

It is one of the subdivision of the Amri Rongbong (Rong Aarak), where six Pinpo's including the Lindokpo stays, they are:-

- **Lindokpo:** - In the Durong subdivision the Lindokpo or the traditional head/ king must be from the Teron Langne clan.
- **Lindok Riso:** The Lindok Riso must be from the Ronghang clan.
- **Dilli:** The Dilli must be from the Teron Millik clan.
- **Senot:** The Senot must be from Terang clan.
- **Patorpo:** The Patorpo must be from Phangcho clan
- **Miji:** The Miji must be from the Engleng clan.

### Nongkirla

The second sub unit of Amri is the Nongkirla, where six Pinpo's along with the Lindokpo dwells. They are:-

- **Lindokpo:** In the Nongkirla sub division, the Lindokpo must be from the Teron Langne clan.
- **Lindok Riso:** The Lindok Riso must be from the Ronghang clan
- **Dilli:** The Dilli must be from the Teron Kongkat clan.
- **Senot:** The Senot must be from the Ingti clan.
- **Pator:** The Pator must be from the Phangcho clan.
- **Miji:** The Miji must be from the Ingti clan.<sup>xi</sup>

The main purpose of appointing all the clan officials in the Rong Aarak/core village is that as it is the central or final place of appeal and as the community is based on the clan structure it is to see that all the clan member of the of the area gets equal opportunity to appeal also to defend their respective clan people and get justice at the end. As in the core village an aggrieved person cannot approach the king directly and have to be approached through their clan officers in the core village, who represents them in front of the king and defends and act as a protector to their clan members during the trial if any.

Besides these when a person pays visit or goes there for some works with the Lindokpo/King or other official not

of their clan. It is a must for that person to visit or have interaction with their clan officer before visiting the other member in the core village, if not it is taken as a breach against the law and may be entitled to pay fine.

## **NILIP**

In the Nilip area the people are from Chinthong and Rongkhang area and got settled there. Here they were not allowed to become king, so there is no kingship system in the area. Few says that, during due to the torture of the Jaintia king in west karbi Anglong as earlier it was a part of the Jaintia kingdom, people fled from that area. They first setteled down in Rongchedo and latter spreaded to the entire Nilip that is to Dhansiri area where there was also domination of the Kachari king. There is no Lindokpo, Pinpos and Habes in the Nilip region. There is also Myth relating to the shifting of the Karbis to this area, which is still believed by the community people, and is said that the system of administration is still followed as introduced by their ancestors as revealed in their oral tradition and Mythology. It was said that there was mutual understanding between the people of both the Chinthong and Rongkhang region thus both has the highest authority in the Nilip region initially. But in the latter period with the mutual concent of both the Rongkhang and the Chinthong areas and on the willingness of the people the customary system was introduced in the areas.

There are 6 classified areas (Longree) in the Nilip region. They are:- Langmili, Borpathar, Nihang, Duar Bagori, Duar Dikharu and Langlokso. In each area there is one Hima Aasar and two Longree Aasar in each area. One each from Rongkhang and Chinthong areas The Hima Aasar look after the boundary issues and the Longree Aasar performs the same functions and duties like that of the Habe/Habaii of The Rongkhang, Chinthong and Amri areas in West Karbi Anglong.

## **LUMBAJONG**

There is no Lindokpo, pinpo and Habe's in the Lumbajong area. Instead the Longri Aasar rules the area. The administration is controlled by the Longri Assar with the assistance of the Achom Assar or the Sarthe.

The term Longree has a different meaning in Lumbajong area, unlike in west which means area, but in Lumbajong Longree means administrator. Traditionally the one who is appointed by the Lindokpo of Chinthong and Rongkhang authorizes rules for the areas. But the Lindokpo of both Chionthong and Rongkhang promises not to take any share or interfere in the matter of the area. But they rule in the name of the Chinthong and the Rongkhang Lindokpo's. Another post or term in the Lumbajong area is the Bikhoi or Mojadar. The powers of the Longree were seized by him and act as a Longree in the Lumbajong area, so since than the Mojadar or the Sorkari Gaon Bura is the highest authority in the Lumbajong area. Even though the Mojadari system was prevalent in the entire areas inhabited by the Karbis the than 'Mikir' they were just a representative in the Karbi administration systems and was more or like responsible for collecting revenues in the areas for the British in West Karbi Aglong. But in the Lumbajong area they had power to administer. All social performance is done by him. <sup>xiii</sup>Lumbajong as a traditional division is a recent creation unlike the other areas.

## **LONGREE HABE (LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR)**

The next level of administration after the central body is the longree/Jiroi/ areas other than the core village level. The officers of Longree are called as Longree Habe. He is empowered by the Pinpo and to act on their behalf. for the smooth running of the society, as the pinpo stays in the Rong arak/core village and is not possible for him to come to the

Jiroi (plain) for inspection every day, so the Longri Habe are entrusted to see the functioning of the Jiroi/areas, and is asked to give information to the Pinpos in the Rong Arak about the situation and condition in the Jiroi in proper time. The Longree areas are governed by the Habe, Burutimen, Basapo and Motiyar, Habaii being the head in the Longree level. These officers look after their respective areas. They are entrusted to see that the basic social norms are practiced. They solve the problems given or referred to them by the Rong Aasar (village headman). In all the longree's of the customary ruled areas they have their respective officers to look after the local administration of the longree's.

There are 12 Longree's in the Rongkhang area. Traditionally there were only two Longree Habe in each Longree known as the "Deng Habe" they were the Habe Kong and the Riso Habe. But in due period the numbers were increased in accordance to the increase in population. In all the Longree, there is a senior most Habe who is entitled as HABA KONG or KONG HABA. The Kong Habe or the Habe Kong of the Rongkhang area is the Habe of Habepi Longree. He should be either from the Tisso or the Teron clan. The names of the Longrees in the Rongkhang area along with their clan are:-

- **Habepi** – He must be from the Tisso or Teron clan. He is the head of all the Rongkhang Longree Habe.
- **Rongcheicho** – He must be from the Ingti Kathar or the Tokbi clan.
- **Umlarong** – He must be from the Rongphar and Kro clan.
- **Ronghan** – He must be from the Teron clan.
- **Umaha** – He must be from the Bey clan.
- **Rapati** – He must be from the Ingti Kathar clan.
- **Rongpi**– He must be from the Rongpi clan.
- **Chongkhili** – He must be from the Timung clan.
- **Nokbare** – He must be from the Tokbi clan.
- **Dera** – He must be from the Dera clan.
- **Killing Bhoikleng** – He must be from the Bey clan.
- **Killing Bhoitre** : He must be from the Hanse clan.

**Umchera** is also generally regarded as one of the Longree but, originally it was called the "**Pinpo arit Lo**" which means the resting and cultivating place of the Pinpos.<sup>xiii</sup>

### Chinthong

Unlike 'Rongkhang Longree' there is no Longree in the Chinthong area. But the Chinthong area too has their own local administrator also called as Longree Habe or Habe. Traditionally there were only two Habe's in the entire Chinthong 'Jiroi' longree, the Sam-Am and the Sam-Im Habe, but latter with the increase in population, for the better and smooth functioning of the area, each Pinpo (Lindokpo, Senot, Miji) in the 'Rong Arak' started appointing their own Habe. This led to the increase in the number of the Longree Habe's. They are:-

- **Rong Habe/Pinpo Habe** – He dwells in the Rong Arak. (Rong= Village). He is the Habe of the Chinthong

Lindokpo (king). He is the seniormost of all the Habe and is all powerful.

- **Sam -Am Habe:** He must be from the Teron clan. In the Jiroi area he is the head of all the Habe in the Chinthong area. He is the Habe of the Dilli of the Rong Aarak/ core village.
- **Sam- im Habe:** He must be from the Kro clan of the Chinthong Aartu (cluster). He is regarded as the assistant of the Sam Am Habe. He is the Habe of the Kro Senot of the Chinthong cluster of the Chinthong area.
- **Senar Habe:** He must be from the senar clan and is the Habe of the Borpator of the Rong Aarak of the Chinthong Aartu (cluster).
- **Kro Habe:** He must be from the Kro clan. He is the Habe of the Kro Senot of the rong Aarak of the Chinthong Aartu (cluster).
- **Ingti Habe:** He must be from the Ingti Hensek clan. He is the Habe of the Chinthong Miji of the Rong Aarak of the Chinthong Aartu (cluster).
- **Tisso Habe:** He must be from the tisso rongchitim clan. He is the Habe of the Lindokpo of the Nongda Aartu (cluster) of the rong Aarak.
- **Bey Habe:** He must be from the Bey clan. He is the Habe of the Bey Senot of the Nongda Aartu (cluster).
- **Tokbi Habe:** He must be from the Tokbi clan. He is the Habe of the Tokbi senot of the Nongda Aartu (cluster).
- **Rongphar Habe:** He must be from the Rongphar clan. He is the Habe of the Lindokpo (king) of the Nongpli Aartu (cluster/group).
- **Rongpi/ Senar Habe:** He must be either from the Rongpi or Senar clan. If the Pinpo in the Rong Aarak is chosen from the Rongpi, then the Habe is to be chosen from the Senar clan and vice versa. He is the Habe of the Rongphar or the Rongpi Senot of the Nongpli Aartu (cluster).
- **Ingti Habe:** He must be from the Ingti Kathar clan. He is the habe of the Ingti Senot of the Nongpli Aartu (cluster).
- **Hanse Habe:** He must be from the Hanse Nongpli clan. He is the Habe of the Hanse Miji of the Nongpli Aartu (cluster).
- **Sorkari Habe.** He has no longree but the Lindokpos appoints him. This post is a recent creation. Traditionally there was no Sorkari Habe. He remains as a witness and spectator in the whole proceedings if any case appears before the law officers.

In the Chinthong longree of all these 13 longree habe, 6 of them are called the Botor Habe ( Botor= weather/ Climate), It is the duty of the Botor Habe to inform about the weather or seasons for cultivation, harvest etc. There is a special Ritual called the Menu Kekur which means offering or propitiating to Goddess laxmi, for which they go to a place called Pherengati/Berengati which is presently in Nowgoan District of Assam for bringing the seeds for cultivation. These can be done by only the Botor habe, 3 Botor Habe one each from each Aartu (cluster) is selected every year for the Ritual.<sup>xiv</sup>

The functions and duties of the Chinthong Habe are the same as that in the Rongkhang Longree.

### **AMRI AREA**

To control the Amri division there are six units at the grass root level (Durong) who are called as the Longree Habe. Unlike in the Rongkhang and the Chinthong areas in the Amri area the Lindokpo, Pinpos and the Longree Habe lives in separate villages and not in a clustered way. Here the post too are named after the clans. The longree Habes in the Durong are as follows:-

- Tisso Habe.
- Hanse Habe
- Teron Habe (millik)
- Phangcho Habe
- Terang Habe
- Engleng Habe

The Nongkhirla subdivision also has six units or Longree for rural administration, The appointment of the Habe is done according to their clan. The Nongkhirla Habe along with their clan are:-

- Kro Habe (senior most).
- Ronghang Habe.
- Teron Habe.
- Inghi Habe.
- Phangcho Habe.
- Ingti Habe.

These Habe look after the welfare of their people of the area concerned They also have the same powers and functions like the customary officers of the Chinthong and Rongkhang area. There are also few clans which cannot stay in the specific area.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Powers and Duties of the Longree Habe or the Local Administrator of the Jiroi.**

As it is not possible for the Pinpo (central officers) to look after the entire areas, so, for the smooth functioning of the law and order system in the Karbi society and in the village areas in each area "Longree" Longree Habe are appointed by the concerned Pinpo. These Pinpo appoints Habe of their respective clan. This is done in order to give Justice to all the respective clan in the Karbi society. If any problem arises between any members in the society, the people concerned approach to their respective clan Habe to look into the matter properly. But in general all the people in distress or in problem can approach any Habe who live in the nearest area. The Habe generally do not deal with the matter directly, it has to be referred by the Rong Aasar (village headman). When the Rong Aasar fails to solve the problem then only it is referred to the Longree Habe. If he is found to be going against the social norms or is found of doing unsocial activity, then

he is removed from the post. The powers and duties of the Longree Habe's are:

- The respective Habe's of their concerned areas appoints his subordinate officers: **Burutimen, Basapo, Motijar and Hemai** in order to assist and help him in due time of social work and duties. Clan structure is not followed in their appointment. He deals with the border issues, personal land and land boundaries issues, disputes, polygamy etc.
- He deals with the border issues if any situation arises in between two or more villages, personal, quarrel, divorce, polygamy etc.
- He performs the ritual of "Basa Kecham" – the purification ritual related with the union or affairs between the same clan and sub clan.

But he can perform or solve the matter on reference by the village headman.

#### **Duties and Responsibilities if the Rong Aasar Or the Village Headman.**

A person who settles first in the concerned area becomes the village headman, and the village is named after his clan. The village headman is the head of the village. His decision is binding on all his subjects regarding the welfare works in the village area. He along with the Riso Basa looks after the village activities and administration. Whenever there is any problem (murder, rape, quarrel, misconduct, misunderstanding, difference in opinion etc in the village. If he fails to solve the problem especially serious issues like murder, rape etc, then the matter is referred to the higher officer (Longree habe). His decision is binding on both the parties and his people. His presence is must in all societal, cultural, ritualistic etc activities of the village concerned.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### **The Importance and Relevance of Clan of Women in the Customary Law Office**

The Clans of women in the customary law office is as important as the men. In the Rongkhang Rong Aarak, the Lindokpi/ King's wife has to belong to the Teron clan ie she has to be Teronpi ("Pi" signifies feminine gender). The wife of Katharbura has to be Enghipi (Enghi clan). If the Lindokpo or the Katharbura marries the women hailing from the clan other than this, on some specific occasion<sup>1</sup> the Lindokpo or the Katharbura has to hire a girl of that clan. It is taken as the Lindokpo or the Katharbura having two wives, which is not regarded as a good. It is believed that intervening in the age old tradition may bring bad faith for the entire community especially natural disaster for the public.

#### **KUR KEPON or Clan Conversion**

This is a very unique feature of the Karbi community, which may be because the Karbi had a very long history of migration. This long history of migration may have made them to adjust and have a friendly relation with their own community as well as with other tribe or people with whom they came into contact with. It may be a political requirement or situational need, but this customs has made a unique contribution to the community.

This Kur kepon or Clan conversion (Kur=clan) and (kepon=to take it to another) or taking or accepting into a clan ie any person can be converted into a Karbi or inter conversion of the clan within the community is a very part of the Karbi society. By performing this ritual people from all communities can be accepted into the community. After the completion

of the ritual the person is accepted in the very family and community accepting it respectively. The ritual through which this is done is called 'Hemphu vo Jonthom' karkli.<sup>xvii</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The Karbis follows an Exagamous system of marriage, which mean marriage between the same clan and sub clan is completely prohibited in the Karbi society. This is regarded as the greatest sin in the community as poople of the same clan and sub clan are regarded as brothers and sisters, even talking about it are also regarded as verbal crime/sin. If any such incident takes place they are ex communicated and the pairs are separated. In olden days the pairs were tied to a boat and let to flow in the river where their destiny will be decided. But from the time of Rengbonghom (traditional king) instead of taking the life of the couple, two Pigs (male and female) are taken and treat them to be the couple, the pigs are than killed by public, this symbolizes killing of the couple and the couples are separated for ever.. The demarcation of the clan is followed till the end in a sense that the place in the cremation ground thiri the burning place called the tipit is demarcated for each clan.<sup>xviii</sup>

It is seen that clan is the dominating factor in the appointment of the customary law officers. There are several criteria for the appointment of the law officers, but those can be adjusted, but the clan pattern cannot. In the community there are certain clans which donot preffer to stay together, as they believe that it may bring bad warth or incident to the couple or the family, viz Rongpipi and Hansepi, Ingti Kathar and Ingti Hensek etc. There are certain clans which are believed that they cannot stay in the specific locality eg The Teron Langne clan cannot stay in the Chinthong area. There are also some socil taboos relating to marriage in the society related with clans, viz Ingti and Teron, Ronghang and Engleng etc they are of a marriageable clans (different clans) but it is not prefferen one, as they atre tereated as siblings due to some prevailing myth in the society. These believe and practices are based on the Myth of the community.

The clan system of the Karbi is different from other community as no political submission is required, nor the subject has to fight for their ruler. The Karbi traditional king and his officers are only the legal guardian of the culture, tradition and customs of the community.

## FINDINGS

- The Karbi society is basically based on the clan structure or the clan system. The society is governed by this structure, weather kingship, marriage, sharing of position in the customary law office, sharing of relations, introduction with one another etc.
- There is no cast system in the community. The people of the community are more affectionate towards their clan and sub clan. Which they treats as their siblings
- . The Karbi customary law officers are the head of the moral and social order and not of political and military order. They have no military power.

## REFERENCES

1. Karbianglong.nic.in
2. The new Encyclopedia Britannica, Micropedia, Vol-3, p- 343.

3. Ingti Kathar Chondro '*Karbi Nem*' by p- 16-19, Parsik Publication, 2011, Diphu. "Karbi Customary Law" an unpublished book co-ordinated by Mr. Lunse Timung, sponsored by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. Bey, Mondol Sing, 'The Socio- Economic Life of the Karbis, At A Glance' published by Karbi Lammet Aamei, Diphu, 2004, Pp- 5-8. Interviews with Sar Sarsing Ronghang *Lindokpo* of Rongkhang in his office in Rongkhang *Rong Aarak* (core village) in presence of all his officers.
4. Interviews with Sar Jorsing Ingti *Senot*/central member. of the Chinthong area. in his house, Umchiken., Sar. Burasing Rongpi *Lindokpo* of Durong and Sar. Onchon Teron *Lindokpo* of Nongkirla aartu.
5. Interviews with Sar Kangbura Hanse the traditional King of the Chinthong area. interview with Sar Jorsing Ingti *Senot*/central member. of the Chinthong area. in his house, in Umchiken.
6. Interviews with Sar Sarsing Ronghang *Lindokpo* of Rongkhang in his office in Rongkhang *Rong Aarak* (core village),, with Sar Kangbura Hanse the traditional King of the Chinthong area., Mr. Chondro ingti Kathar, village headman of Badong, in Diphu,
7. Interviews with Sar. Chondro Ingti Kathar, in core village. He is the royal priest of the Rongkhang division. Interviews with Sar Sarsing Ronghang *Lindokpo* of Rongkhang in his office in Rongkhang *Rong Aarak* (core village) in presence of all his officers.
8. Interviews with Sar Sarsing Ronghang *Lindokpo* of Rongkhang in his office in Rongkhang *Rong Aarak* (core village).with Chondro Ingti Kathar (Kathar Bura), in core village. interviews with Harsing Ingti Kathar (Ex-Katharbura), in Hamren.
9. Interviews with Sar Kangbura Hanse the traditional King of the Chinthong area. with Sar. Sarthe rongphar (Nongpli *Lindok*), in Laram village.
10. Interview wit Sar. Burasing Rongpi *Lindokpo* of Durong and Sar. Onchon Teron *Lindokpo* of Nongkirla aartu.
11. Interviewsv with Bordai Killing and late: Boka Hanse *rong Aasar* of Lumbajong when alive Sar Lunse Timung of Lurulangso Diphu in his residence.
12. Information is based on intv with Killing *Senot* of the latter confirmed by KatharburaIntv with sar *Lindok Rongpi* (habe) in Rongmandu Hamare Hanse (longree Habe)
13. interview with Dilip Rongpi (Nongda Habe)-Baithalangso Dili[p Senar(Senar Habe)- Borpathar.
14. Sar. Burasing Rongpi *Lindokpo* of Durong and Sar. Onchon Teron *Lindokpo* of Nongkirla Aartu.
15. This information is confirmed by all resource person mentioned in the work.
16. Interview with Mr Lunse Timung (writer) in Diphu. with Chondro Ingti Kathar (Kathar Bura), in core village. interviews with Harsing Ingti Kathar (Ex- Katharbura), in Hamren.
17. Article "About the Karbis" by Tungjang, Morningkey in "*Karbi studies*- vol-1" edited by Teron, Dharamsing published by Assam Book Hive, guwahati, p-5

