

Digitalisation of Oral Traditions and Documenting Contemporary Social Issues: A Study on the Little Known Karbi Films of Karbi Anglong Assam

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KEYWORDS Digital Anthropology. Folklore. Karbi Films. Oral Tradition. Social Issues

ABSTRACT This paper reviews critically the relevance of social interaction and social relations as the core foundation for all human endeavours, making it possible for people to live together in every existing society. This is with a view to give a clear understanding and to demonstrate its centrality in the existence of human societies and in the emergence of the discipline of sociology. The objective of this paper is to create an understanding of social interaction and social relations. The paper employed the symbolic interactionist perspective to review the components and types of social interaction, socialisation and how it has evolved over the years. The study reveals that social interaction and social relations are very important, and form an integral part of human societies and this is why stigmatisation and ostracism are very effective as tools of social control and regulation. The study also reveals that social interaction and social relations form both micro and macro sociological orientations and have evolved over time, and this evolution has been facilitated by advancement in technology and globalisation. The paper concludes that the development of human beings and their societies depends on social interactions and social relations. The study recommends that the turn that social interaction and social relations takes can determine the level of development because if, social interaction is chaotic, it will bring about confusion and conflict and there will be little or no development. But, if social interaction were that of cooperation, more development would be recorded by society.

INTRODUCTION

Digital anthropology is the study about the inter-connection between the aspects of human livelihood and the digital era technology, and extends up to various areas where technology and human livelihood blends with one another. In contemporary anthropological researches digital anthropology plays a vital role in the preservation of auto ethnography and oral folklore (Johannes 2002: 778).

Fieldworks in anthropology are mostly based on the ethnographic account, the empirical field study, the observation through participation, and those experiences that data collected through fieldwork, which are documented. The fallacy in the field notes is that they fail to express the overall experience, which the researchers have experienced in the field, and so, this is where digital anthropology in the form of photography, videography, voice records and cinematography could make a lively representation of the empirical researches.

Cinematography on the other hand is the science or art of motion picture photography by recording light or other electromagnetic radiation, either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light-sensitive material

such as film stock. The result with photographic emulsion is a series of invisible latent images on the film stock, which are later chemically “developed” into a visible image. The images on the film stock are played back at a rapid speed and projected onto a screen, creating the illusion of motion (Horst and Miller 2012: 15).

The word “cinematography” was derived from the Greek word *kinema*, meaning “movement, motion”, and *graphein*, which means, “to record”, and together they mean, “recording motion”. The word was used to refer to the art, process, or job of filming movies, but later the meaning was restricted to “motion picture photography”.

Folklore can be described as traditional art, literature, knowledge and practices that are passed on in a large part through oral communication and examples. The information thus transmitted expresses the shared ideas and values of a particular group. The academic study of folklore is most often known as folkloristic, although it is sometimes also termed “folklore studies” and “folk life research”. As an academic discipline folklore shares method and insights with literature, anthropology, art, music, history, linguistics, philosophy and mythology, and the study of folklore has also sometimes itself

been termed “folklore”. Folklorists gather data by studying folklore first hand, through what is termed as fieldwork. This entails questioning and interviewing people about their own folklore. In some cases, the folklorist remembers what their interviewees say, allowing them to later recollect it either orally or in writing (Vidyarthi and Rai 1976: 308). According to Cohen and Salazar (2005), digital anthropology is a method to make the excluded as participated. Horst (2013) had stated digital anthropology as a principle of holism and materiality. She had stated the method as a way to preserve the things, which are about to get obsolete. Ghosh (2020) had analysed in detail about the application of digital ethnography during the COVID-19 pandemic period and how it can be applied to the grass root level of social system in particular. Góral ska (2020) focused in detail on the methodological aspects associated with digital ethnography. She had also framed the pathway of anthropological researches through the digitalisation method in the post pandemic period.

Often during the fieldwork the researchers find it difficult to document the data in written form. Meanwhile, if it is digitally documented then it can be a permanent source of data, which can be always reviewed as per requirement. However, in some cases particularly during folk cultural performances the best way to preserve the data is the digital documentation and its qualitative explanation. However, in the contemporary period due to several global forces and Western media the youths are drowned away from their rich ancestral heritage. Oral tradition as is known is the only transmitted orally, thus one can learn it from the practitioners by listening to the songs, stories, tales, etc. Due to the absence of records the oral traditions are very hard to preserve. The utilities of these folk tradition are also not made significant resulting in ignorance of the learning of the folklores. It is an emerging problem in most of the tribal societies of India and the Karbis are one of them.

Aims and Objectives

The Karbi Anglong District is situated in the central part of Assam. The Karbis were the indigenous community of the said region. The studied people were all belonging to the Karbi tribal group, which was the numerically dominant group of the district (Bey 2004: 1).

The present study has been done on the basis of empirical data collected through different levels of persons attached with the Karbi film industry. The study was conducted during the period of January 2016 to December 2019 with the objectives as follows:

1. To know about different Karbi folklores and folk cultural performances.
2. To know about the emerging challenges related to the preservation and transmission of folklores in the Karbi society.
3. The possible role of digital anthropology and cinematography in preserving the folklores of the Karbi people.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been done on the basis of empirical data collected through different levels of persons attached with the Karbi film industry. The study was conducted during the period of January 2016 to December 2019. The data about Karbi oral tradition were collected from the secondary sources. The information about different Karbi films and their prime focus was collected through structured interviews taken from different producers, directors and actors.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Karbi Films in the Celluloid Era

Filmmaking in Karbi language primarily aimed for Karbi viewers is a recent development. In the celluloid era, filmmaking used to be very expensive and required huge financial support. One of the main reasons for the slow start of Karbi language filmmaking may be attributed to this factors as there was clear absence of producers willing to take the risk of huge investment and suffer from the lack of facilities where these films could be shown for profit. However, the first attempt at promoting Karbi language filmmaking was initiated by late Samsing Hanse who formed the ‘Karbi Cine Trust’ sometime around 1975-1976. It was the first such attempt among Karbis as per available records. Samsing Hanse’s attempt however did not produce any immediate result. The opportunity came in 1981 when Prafulla Baruah, an Assamese filmmaker, made an offer to late Hanse to include a segment of the legendary

Karbi story about 'Ha'imu' in his black and white Assamese film named 'Rajanigandha'. Late Hanse had published his version of the Ha'imu story named 'Nam Tair Ha'mu' (her name was Ha'imu) in 1974. Fascinated by the legendary story, Prafulla Baruah asked late Hanse to prepare the screenplay and also direct the segment. The lead roles of Ha'imu and Long Teron were played by Mithila Ronghangpi and late Mensing Terangs and the segment was filmed in the fresh and green locations of Karbi Anglong. This experiment by late Hanse and Baruah may be termed the first step in the Karbi filmmaking process. However, the first celluloid projection of a Karbi themed film as part of a plot of the main Assamese film was entirely made in Assamese language. Ha'imu was entirely in Assamese language and may not be therefore called the first Karbi language film. However, the attempt may be called the foundation of future Karbi language filmmaking.

Another film society named 'Karbi Anglong Film Enterprise' under the leadership of late Samsing Hanse was formed, though no date when the organisation appeared could be traced due to lack of documentation. Late Hanse, together with late Prafulla Saikia, made a short Assamese film named 'Nagorik' (The Citizen). It has to be noted that late Prafulla Saikia who married prominent Karbi singer Kadam Terangpi, sister of late Sarthe Terang of Diphu, settled permanently at Diphu who had contributed to the process of filmmaking in Karbi language, as one shall see. Late Dilip Sur of Diphu directed a documentary sponsored by KADC's department of Fisheries which was named 'Ok Langteng'. Technically, 'Ok Langteng' may be regarded as the first Karbi language film though it is only a documentary. Late Prafulla Saikia also directed documentary films in Karbi language called 'Jirsong' in 1987 and 'Rit Angtong' in 1988. The Department of Agriculture and Department of Cooperation under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council sponsored 'Rit Angtong' and 'Jirsong', respectively. Another documentary named 'Okpi', which he made, however, was never released. A documentary film named 'Ser Alang' was produced by the agriculture department under KAADC, which was directed by Timothy Das. But the celluloid era's big break for Karbi language film came with the production of 'Wosobipo' (The Cuckoo's Call) in 1989. The film was awarded the 'Best First Film of a Director' or Swarna Kamal and a cash prize of INR 25,000 to the director and producer

Gautam Bora by the Karbi Anglong District Council. Citation of the Indira Gandhi Award for the Best First Film of a Director for the year 1989 is given to the Karbi film for its fresh and original evocation of the collective unconscious of a hill tribe whose way of life has been disintegrating over the last four decades. This 156-minute colour film was the first full-length feature film in Karbi language, which was also screened as the lone Indian representation in the 41st International Film Festival held in Berlin in 1990. Gautam Bora, the director of the film, called 'Wosobipo' his 'best film', which received critical acclaims for portraying 'a sensitive and realistic film dealing for the first time with a tribal society, its evolution, its changing values and relationships in the face of modernism and changing times as also the impotence of a supposedly welfare state'. Music director Sher Chowdhury with the assistance of Chandra Kanta Terang bagged the 'best music score' award for the Karbi film. The main characters of the film were played by Romon Rongpi (the main protagonist), Elisha Hanse (the grandfather of the protagonist), Bubul Terang (childhood character of the protagonist) and Longbiram Ingti (father of the protagonist). Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinema described the film in these words, "It told the story of a tribal community on the verge of disintegration because of the modes of change on agriculture patterns from shifting to settled cultivation and land grabbing tactics adopted by merchants. The protagonist had recourse to the administration to retrieve his land from an immigrant moneylender. However, this story was constructed within a highly flexible, non-narrative structure, as the protagonist recollected fond memories of how as a child he was taught about nature in the hills by his grandfather, their exchange touching the periphery of metaphysics." It may be mentioned that Dhaniram Tisso, who is a filmmaker in the digital era in fledgling Karbi film fraternity, also played an important role who as then the Executive Member (EM) in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council (KAADC) during the period, facilitated the making of the film by providing the required fund from the KAADC's revenue department under him.

In 1990, a celluloid documentary film named 'Ser Alang' was produced by the Department of Agriculture (Horticulture) under the KAADC, which was directed by Indra Narayan Dev. The Karbi language film was awarded 'Rajat Kamal'.

A 16 mm celluloid film was made in 1999, which was called 'Rongbin', basing on the popular Karbi myth of an invisible village. The film was produced by Ramsing Timung, who is currently an MAC (Member of Autonomous Council) from the Langphor Constituency. The film was directed by an award-winning director Gautam Chatopadhyay, who could not however finish the post-production activities, as he died on 20th June 1999, the day after he returned to Kolkata from his 2-month long hectic shooting schedule in Karbi Anglong. The film was eventually released in 2003 but due to complications in the final stages of editing, the expectations generated during the production were betrayed. In the lead roles were Bibhu Teron, Bobby Ingtipi and Rani Kropi.

Probably the unreleased 'Rongbin' was the last celluloid experiment in Karbi language, as the old format was rapidly being replaced by the emergence of digital filmmaking. It may therefore be safely assumed that Karbi language filmmaking in the celluloid era was rather brief and not very eventful except 'Wosobipo' (1989), which was successful in creating a benchmark and attracting both national and international attention. The celluloid era for Karbi films lasted barely five years or so and accounted for only 6 or 7 films and none of the films produced during the period was commercially shown. The high cost of celluloid filmmaking and the absence of exhibition facilities also were important factors, which negatively impacted the promotion of Karbi language films. It may be pointed out that all these films that were made during the period were funded by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District Council. There was however one independent initiative by Mr. Ramsing Timung who invested his own money in the making of 'Rongbin', which sadly failed to do much business.

Digital Filmmaking and the New Era of Karbi Films

It can be noted that, Goldhahn and Ricciardo (2021) focused on the preservation of discarded documents, through visual methods as an art history in relation to the narratives of migration. Fierz (2021) focused on the significance of visual and digital documentation, to bridge up the gaps in relation to the history of migration of different indigenous groups, particularly in the era of globalization. Pauwels (2021) focused on the pivotal

role of expression and expressiveness as closely intertwined with aesthetics and in the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Digital filmmaking was emerging as the dominant format towards the end of the 20th century, which drastically transformed the ways cinemas were to be made. Digital technology was 'serving as an affordable and easy-to-operate way to shoot, edit and distribute' the films. It is rightly said by the author that digital technology has brought in the freedom and 'right of every filmmaker, ranging from an unknown newcomer to a recognised cineaste, to have full and equal access to the technological means to produce, post-produce, and project this work, and being cost effective and user-friendly, it can be accessed by filmmakers with varying budgets and experience.' Consequently, within a very short span of time, a crop of new and virtually unknown filmmakers in the Karbi language film fraternity has emerged equipped with home studios and production gadgets. This new breed of Karbi filmmakers does not depend so much on studios and editing facilities and is becoming gradually more self-sustained and confident.

The first Karbi language film digitally made was 'Ove Alir', which was produced by 'Mukak Cine Club' of Dokmoka in 1985. The full-length video film (in VHS format) was directed by Arun Teron in association with Probbhat Teron, Joysing Rongpi, and Khorsing Rongphar who were all novices and did not have any kind of formal or informal training in the art of filmmaking. Importantly, the filmmakers did not have the required budget, but their enthusiasm and commitment to make the film contributed to the first digital Karbi language film. A string of VHS format video films emerged after this experiment and producers with shoestring budgets jumped in to take advantage of the new technology. A full-length video film named 'Boche Kangthim', directed and produced by Ashwini Doley, was released in 1998. Budding artist Katharson Ingti was cast in the lead role together with Semson Terang, Joyram Tisso, Punyaram Teron, Monjir Rongpipi, Reshima Timungpi, and Dipali Amphi Chetia (Teron 2011: 25).

In 1987, the 'Karbi Film Society' (ad-hoc) was formed on the initiative of Atur Films following a consensus opinion arrived at in a meeting at Diphu Club convened by Semson Terang. Following a resolution, Semson Terang himself entrusted as the President while Katharson Ingti was elected as the General Secretary. Other members included

Shashikala Hansepi, Queen Hazarika, Late Basanta Das, Longki Timung, Lindok Ronghang and Suren Bey. In the following year, that is, in 1988, the First Artists' Festival was held and on the occasion, a full-fledged committee of the KFS was formed with Bidyasing Rongpi (the EM, KAAC) president and Semson Terang as the General Secretary.

Basanta Das (1940-2012) contributed in a substantial manner and wrote screenplays for some of the early Karbi language video films such as *Boche Kangthim*, *Jimtim*, *Kanghon Killingchongkret*, *Hem Akarjong*, *Mr Ding'eh*, etc. besides *Doordarshan* (Guwahati) productions such as *Rangsina Sarpo*, *Rongpharpi Rongbe*, *Ha'imu*, *Thongnokbe*, etc. His demise has been acknowledged by the cultural fraternity as a 'big loss.'

The craze of video filmmaking among Karbi producers can be understood from the fact that a number of independent banners emerged during the period. A whole new effort was initiated by Karbi Film Society (KFS), formed in 2007 (as mentioned above) which organised the '1st Karbi Film Artists Festival' in 2008 at Diphu on 13 to 15 June, as numbers of artists and producers started to grow, which demanded an independent platform in order to guide and strengthen the fledgling Karbi film fraternity. The 'Rangsina Sarpo Award' was instituted as a result of this initiative to encourage the artists and producers. A project called 'Eru Rangsina Sarpo Karbi Film Artists' Complex' was also proposed. The second edition of the Festival was held four years later at Joysing Doloi Auditorium in 2014 on 24 to 26 October.

A string of independent banners emerged to take advantage of the affordable and user-friendly digital technology, as Karbi viewers demanded their own version of entertainment. Mentions may be made of the following independent banners, which began producing Karbi language films with limited budget, namely, *Rangsina Cine Enterprise* (Boche Kangthim), *Atur Film Production*, *Diphu* (Thama, Bokolapo Kali Ne), *Karbi Film Craft Society*, *Phuloni* (Ove Aharchi), *KK Production*, *Kheroni* (Don Barim, Sintu Hemepo Kali Ne), *Sintu Film Production*, *Bokulia* (Pi Longri Apharman), *Malong Cine Production*, *Diphu* (Rongbin), *SK Production* (Kanghon Amekri, Eng'ang Do Ekai Ave, Nekai Akanghon, Tene Un'e-1, Tene Un'e-2), *Simsere Production*, *Phuloni* (Jinong Athare, Rongbang), *Harchi Motion Pictures*, *Diphu* (Kanghon Angrong Ruplinso), *Tungjang Cine Enterprise*,

Diphu (Mr. Ding'e, Hem Akarjong, Hem Amihi, Binong Vopo, Ne Kali Lajo), *BK Film Production*, Cultural Affairs Department, *Diphu* (Didi Mulori), *Dillai Cine Production* (Hiju Phan), *Timung Cine Production*, *Diphu* (Sambepo), *Bithilangso Production*, *Den'arong* (Theng Richo Asopo), *Longjon Cine Production*, *Diphu* (Kanghon Athir, Lamsam, Honthe), *Sar Ejang Production*, *Bokulia* (Mantusi Vangji), *Karbi Creative Films* (Akoï), *Karbi Film Centre*, *Diphu* (Kanghon Abinbu) and *Inglongkiri Film Production*, *Diphu* (Kertang).

Unfortunately, chronologically arranging the productions has proved to be a hard task since sources used in this dissertation could only provide names of the productions and production houses. However, efforts have been taken to provide dates of the production wherever possible so that a historical timeline may be created for future references. During the period, as can be seen from the list of production houses and their films, there has been a hectic pace of filmmaking inaugurating a new era of Karbi language movies.

Some of the productions, which could be dated include, 'Atur Kimi', produced by Jirsong Asong (Catholic Church, Diphu), which was directed by Br. Jesu Das, featuring Semson Terang, Renu Beypi, Katharson Ingti, and Hori Timung. During 2001-2002, a video film called 'Thama' was produced by 'Atur Films' under the directorial venture of Semson Terang.

A video film of feature length named 'Ove Aharchi' was produced by Robi Kr Phangcho and directed by Sarthe Terang in 2003, which became a big hit by Karbi standard. The video film featured fresh talents like Raju Rongphar, Mamoni Beypi, Longsing Ingti and Dilip Bey.

In 2007, Dhaniram Tisso, an empanelled director of Doordarshan, Guwahati, produced and directed a hugely successful video film named 'Kanghon Killingchongkret' based on the popular legend about the Karbi tiger man. In Karbi folklore, 'killingchongkret' is a phenomenon when a human is transformed into a tiger by rubbing himself with a piece of stone, which is said to have a magical power.

A new crop of young, virtually unknown and self-taught filmmakers has emerged during the period, which is gradually making bigger ripples in the Karbi language film fraternity. These young filmmakers are willing to risk their money and getting financial returns from seasonal exhibitions of their productions in makeshift theatres. Among

the new directors and producers, mentions may be made of Jibon Teron (director) 'Lamsam', Rajiv Kro (director) 'Kai Ke Ekopai' (2008) and 'Kanghon Amekri' (2008) and producer Paul Hanse. The sequels of 'Kanghon Amekri' (2015, 2016) were produced by Paul Hanse and Bhaiti Ingti. The team of Paul Hanse and Jibon Teron as producer and director gave a string of 'commercially successful' films, which included 'Ekai Amongve' (2010) and 'Ing'ang Do Ekai Ave' (2013). The two have teamed up to produce 'Tengne Un'e' and its sequel in 2013 and 2014. Jibon Teron has also produced hit video films 'Ahir' (2015), which was produced by Mohan Taro. Jibon Teron went solo with 'Kanghon Athir' (2013), 'Honthe' (2014), and 'Kirla' (2016). Jibon Teron and Ratan Engjai (producer) teamed up to produce the hit 'Lekha' (2017).

As already mentioned, the initiative of KFS and the Karbi Film Artists Festivals produced a significant development as the Rangsina Sarpo Film Award was instituted from 2012 onwards, which began to be held on every 23rd June with the aim to encourage and promote the video film artists by honouring them with awards and cash prizes. A film preview committee, something on the lines of the Film Certification or Censor Board, was also instituted by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council since 25th April 2013.

Socio-economic and Socio-cultural Dimensions of the Karbi Movies

There are local ingredients in the Karbi films and the producers are seen taking efforts to provide stories based on local themes. There are attempts to create cultural awareness through these movies by way of presenting the struggles against drunkenness, poverty, lack of education, corruption, and the importance of sustaining the cultural ethos.

This in general seems to be the 'formula' for most of the Karbi video films to ensure safe returns of investments. According to a random survey, the Karbi video film fraternity spends about Indian rupees one crore annually for about a dozen productions. The investment is not small by local standard with an average of rupees ten lakhs per production. Some producers travel to far off locations such as Goa and Sikkim with huge numbers of crewmembers and artists spending huge money. All producers do not manage to get a profit on their investment but some do. Lack of

proper venues limit the exhibition of the movies in festive seasons like Durga Puja, Bihu, Christmas or the Karbi Youth Festival. There is a problem of piracy, as CDs can be so easily copied and sold to all equally, which easily destroys the producers economically. This has forced all producers to exhibit their films and make sure that they earn profit with the 'master copy' before piracy can kill them. The viewers who are already fed with so much of Hindi 'masala' and 'formula' films through televisions and various accessible digital media, they easily accept the Karbi versions and there are always demands for such Karbi video films within and outside Karbi Anglong where there is Karbi population, such as Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Kamrup, Morigaon, Nogaon, etc. In the process, a few artists are getting 'star' like attention in rural areas where people often jostle to have a glimpse of their favourite heroes and heroines.

All said and done, the reality is that Karbi filmmaking is still in its infant stage, which is suffering from various ailments such as lack of good scripts, directorial expertise, funding and exhibition venues. How long these issues will take to be resolved is anybody's guess but organisations like Karbi Film Society and Karbi Film Artists Festival have a lot to work in tandem to impress upon the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council authority to open its eyes. At the current rate of filmmaking, the fraternity is not well placed to go on. During the celluloid period, it was the KAAC authority, which came out to produce memorable films like *Wosobipo*, and the same must also be done now so that money, proper planning, and proper technical inputs can promote Karbi filmmaking.

The digital documentation and celluloid preservation of the age old material cultural objects in the Karbi movies and documentaries, narrates very clearly the history of migration among them Karbis. They also reveal the symbolic meaning of such material objects.

Karbi Films as Cultural Products

Karbi films are loaded with cultural codes, or at least such attempts to promote the cultural heritages of the Karbi people are inherent in all the films made so far. Some films like 'Kanghon Killingchongkret', 'Theng Richo Asopo', 'Sambepo', and 'Didi Mulori' to cite a few examples, are directly inspired by Karbi myths and legends. These

legends are associated with Karbi folklore and the new generation of young people are generally not very aware of them. Through these films, the producers are trying to recreate a new awareness about Karbi history and culture, symbols and ritual practices, particularly among the new generation who are mostly exposed to the cinematic world of Hollywood or Bollywood. There are also films, which deal with prevailing economic underdevelopment, poverty and violence, which have been creating a lot of social tension in the society during the last decade. There is however glorification of violence in some films by way of showing the effects of insurgency. But all these movies at the core are also attempting to give some social messages to the viewers.

Songs also play an important part in the promotion of Karbi language films. Karbi video film music these days is becoming more sophisticated and professional, which holds a promise of a brighter future. A host of 'reality show' style singing and dancing competitions is also emerging in the towns and other urban areas, which cater to the aspirations of budding singers and dancers. A foundation for Karbi filmmaking is therefore gradually building without, however, so much of conscious planning.

Another important aspect of Karbi filmmaking is the traditional dress and costume. These movies are aware of this fact and are employing home grown designers to create designer outfits with traditional motifs for the heroes and heroines, which in a big way is also promoting the Karbi traditional dress.

It is a foregone conclusion that Karbi language films are catering to the community that speaks the language. This may be considered as an important USP for these video films. But so far as promoting the language is concerned through these movies, there is a lot more to be done, as dialogues are often coarse and do not reflect the cultural expressions of the native speakers. The good thing about these movies is that the language has received another popular media through which it can hope to get popularised among the new generation youngsters. It is definitely one of the good results from the Karbi language films, which are taken as national pride for the viewers who otherwise are always swamped by mainstream languages of Hindi and English cinemas.

It can be noted that, in the era of globalization, Karbi movies and celluloid documentaries are the prime sources for the concerned young

generations, to know about their cultural history, age old traditional practices and social norms, values, customs. Such documentaries are playing the pivotal role, to bridge the gap between tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the Karbi society.

Cases of a Few Karbi Movies

Vosobipo (The Spring) in 1979, was directed by Gautom Bora, and is perhaps the first Karbi movie, which has won the national award. This movie was about the life and surrounding of the Karbi community, the jhum cultivation, their contact and trade relationship with the plain people, and the impact of modern amenities. The movie is based on a village on the bank of Amrenge River in Karbi Anglong. In the movie the protagonist is a man named Sarthe, who was leaving his village for a job in Diphu town, and he finds it emotional as he was attached with the village, fields, mountains and rivers. He had that feeling once in his boyhood when his father asked him to go to school away from their village, as their village did not have one, he was very close to his grandfather who is the *rong-asar* (head man of the village). On his way he heard the Cuckoo sing, which made him wonder what bird it was. His father said that was *Vosobipo* (cuckoo), and the Karbis believed that the cry of the bird is a warning for them to start the cultivation in the jhum fields. The Karbi interpret the cry of the bird as *Vosobipo Rit nongmelo*, which rhymes and is similar to the cry of the cuckoo. In the movie the scene like death, funeral, *Ka-Charhe* (funeral song), and Nimso kerung are also depicted in a realistic manner. It represented how the Karbis were duped of their land and property by the non-Karbi moneylender who on the verge of collecting his debt loots the Karbi people. Sarthe on returning to his village realises the lack of education and the need to open a school in his village, so that the children of his village can be educated and can fight against the atrocities that they have faced.

Kanghon Killing Chongkret was a very famous film directed by Mr. Dhaniram Tisso. The movie was about the myth of *Killing Chongkret*, the protagonist that was played by an eminent Karbi actor, who played the role of a simple-minded rural dweller, living in *Tekelangjun* village. One day when he went to the forest to fetch bamboo he found a hermit. He was then given a piece of rock with magical power, for which he can turn into a tiger when he rubs the stone on his hand.

Rongbin from 2003 was directed by Gautom Chatterjee, which was about the secret Karbi village where one cannot find the way to the exit, if the taboos are violated. The protagonist of the movie was played by Mr. Bibhu Teron, who landed in the mystical village unknowingly when he gets lost on the way when he was attending his uncle's funeral in the village. He fell in love with a beautiful damsel who is from *Rongbin*, and the literary meaning of *Rongbin* is the hidden village.

Rit Angtong, directed by Profullo Saikia is the first Karbi Film (uncensored), while Ove Alir (1985) is the first Karbi film made in VCD (uncensored), which is followed by Boche Kangthim (1st censored VCD).

Some folk movies like *Dengrali* (2015) and *Didi Mulori* (2014) were also made by the Karbi Film Society to make the viewers aware about the folk traditions. *Probotir Pothar* from Karbi Anglong (1975) was directed by Shivo Thakur, and was the first documentary made on Karbi.

The Karbi Film Society was established in 2008 by eminent filmmakers of Karbi Anglong with a view of promoting and preserving it through motion pictures. Their motto is '*Karbi lam'arjan lun Tomo pancho lonang*', which means to enrich the movies, songs and tales of the Karbis. The aims and objectives of the Karbi Film Society are, to advance the education of the public in the knowledge of films and to understand and enjoyment of the art of classic and contemporary films of all genres. Moreover, it was done to encourage interest in films as an art form and as a medium of information, education and health entertainment, as well as to bring together who bring a common interest in film and engage a larger section of people in the system of film production.

The Karbi Film Society in collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs and Art and Culture of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council holds artistes festival annual programme where they also conduct an award ceremony for the category of the Best Film Director, Best Actor (male and female), Best Choreographer, Best Singer (male and female), Best Supporting Actor (Male and female), Best Child Artistes, Best Actor in the Negative Role (both male and female), Best Music Director and Best Documentary. They also conduct workshops on acting, filmmaking, film direction and cinematography. The Rangsin Sapo Film Award and Rangsin Sapo Award are also awarded by the Karbi Film Society during this programme.

The Problems

In the Karbi culture, all of their songs, tales and stories are orally transmitted, and the Karbi people now are found neglecting their folklores, tales, songs, music and also their tradition, as their youth are more into the traditions, songs and dances of the West. The curriculum in the schools and colleges does not incorporate any of the folklores, resulting in abandoning their tradition so it creates a major problem in preserving and transmitting it to the next generation. Since it has a very less scope in the contemporary period, in the course of time the oral traditions are diminishing very quickly. The contemporary Karbi movies are more into modern stories and modern songs with a tinge of Western and Bollywood movies, as demanded by the public, because most of the Karbi filmmakers are into the commercial films rather than historical or educational ones. Although in some cases they try to co-relate the stories from folktales, stories, and epics, and also add folksongs and music into the movie. Meanwhile, depending upon the budget, often they have to select the story and location accordingly. Often, it is emerging as a major crisis for the successful and purposive completion of the films.

CONCLUSION

Karbi filmmaking is only two decades old, facilitated by the new technology. Expecting a big leap in this short period may be too much. There are willing investors in filmmaking guided not only by the motive of making a profit but also as an opportunity to promote Karbi life and culture. These two aspects cannot be said to have been compensated in full as of now. In order to achieve these two goals, there are more struggles awaiting the filmmakers. They have to first fight to get the adequate funding so that they can get good equipment, directorial and post-production technical abilities supported by good stories, scripts and music. Bollywood copies may not be the safest shortcut to success and what is important is that the filmmakers must strive to create their own special spaces if they want to fulfil the two goals of making money and promoting Karbi art and culture to the viewers and also to the outside world. The Karbi filmmakers may take a lesson or two from the experiments of other indigenous filmmakers. The Karbi filmmakers do have the passion in plenty but getting themselves exposed to the experiences of

those native filmmakers from other hemispheres may give them more ideas and inspirations. They just need to keep their minds and eyes wide open and be ready to do the hard work, because magic does not happen without this. It can be noted that due to the pandemic situation, for a wide circulation of oral tradition, its digitalisation has become immensely important. Due to lockdown protocols, local movie theatres are closed and the movies cannot be played. The platform of social media has been used significantly by the Karbi Film Society, to digitally telecast different Karbi movies, even of older times and very soon their oral documentations have been widely accepted by the grass root level of society. It has been reported that, through such digitalisation, the contemporary young generation for the first time came to know about a number of their little known oral traditions and cultural customs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Lack of informal education is one of the reasons for the diminishing trend of oral tradition. To preserve it, workshops and seminars about the oral tradition should be held more often and by various sections of the society. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council should include the oral tradition like folktales, folksong and stories in the curriculum of schools and colleges, and should encourage more researchers in the field of preservation and practice of Karbi folklore.

More stories, folktales, ballads and epics should be made into movies. Folksongs can be documented as a video album. These may be the possible ways to preserve the folklores. Again, some tales and collections of folk dances and songs could be made into a documentary. One can video record the social and cultural functions, funeral ceremonies where the activities of folklore takes place. In this way the original incident can be documented and preserved at the same time. Also the people will be acquainted with the rich cultural heritage of their ancestor.

Documentation and making films based on folklores can be a great source of earning as well, not only can they earn but one can get exposure and also showcase the world about the rich cultural oral tradition of the Karbi. The government should also encourage the film makers in making of such films. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Karbi Cultural Society and the Karbi Film Society should

collaborate and document the oral tradition in the form of movies, documentaries, albums, etc.

The films, documentaries and series should be broadcasted both, on national and regional television and radio channels, and also the makers, actors, technicians and several people involved should have an interaction with the people through TV channels, media, social networking sites, etc. If the proposed things can be materialised, then it will get a global platform to flourish its rich ethnic heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors highly acknowledge Ms. Chunmonika Engtipi and Ms. Ruppili Lekhtepi, for their significant cooperation all throughout the days of the research. Authors are also very much thankful to all the persons associated with the Karbi Film Society.

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Paper received for publication in April, 2021

Paper accepted for publication in August, 2021