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**The *Mosera* Epics in Karbi Ritual:
Documentation and Problem of Textualization**

Master's thesis

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Introduction

Karbi are linguistically a Tibeto-Burman¹ speaking group with an estimated population of 5,11,732 as per the 2011 census.² They are one of the significant indigenous groups of Assam, and the majority of the population are concentrated in the Hills districts of Karbi Anglong; however, the community is scattered all over Northeast India. The Karbi community is divided into two main groups, namely Hills Karbi and Plains Karbi, the latter are also known as Dumrali. Depending on their settlements, minor dialectal differences and cultural variations may be present as distinctive features and may be attributed to migration, cultural contacts and historical trajectories.

Traditionally the Karbi are an endogamous group of people with strict clan exogamy. Prescriptive asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage is the standard norm. For, e.g. 'A' is the father's clan, and 'B' is the mother's clan, then 'C' - the male kids have the option to choose mates from 'B'. The division of the Karbi community is clan specific, and there are five clans, namely, Teron, Terang, Ingti, Ejang and Timung. Also, these clans comprise of sub-clans.



Fig.1 Map of Karbi Anglong in Assam. Marked in yellow are my fieldwork areas of study.

¹ See <http://www.languagesgulper.com/eng/Tibeto.html>

² See <https://nezine.com/info/bnhUV3NpcjlsUkxwVTvKkNkFhdFJKdz09/census-2011-language-data:-assam-records-decline-in-percentage-of-assamese,-bodo,-rabha-and-santali-speakers.html>

This figure however does not mention anything about Karbi living in other districts such as NC Hills, Kamrup, Morigaon, Nagaon, Darrang, Sibsagar, and Cachar within Assam and in the neighboring states of Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

Furthermore, there are two distinct divisions of Karbi people based on location resulting from migration:

1. Hills Karbi (*Inglong* Karbi) - Amri, Chinthong, Rongkhang and Killing³.
2. Dumrali (Dimoria) - Plains Karbi settled in the plains of Kamrup and Morigaon districts of Assam, and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya. They are also referred to as Thoi Karbi among the Hills Karbi.

The first-ever full-fledged written account about the Karbi is the colonial ethnography titled *The Mikirs* by Edward M. Stack, a civil servant in the British colonial era, edited by Sir Charles James Lyall, published more than a century ago in 1908 (Stack and Lyall, 1908). This monograph by Lyall and Stack is commendable in presenting a concise attempt at the documentation of Karbi people as this work explores numerous topics ranging from the language, domestic life, laws and customs, folklore and folktales. They offer a wide range of viewpoints, as the book also contains a few pages dedicated to illustrations of the Karbi people along with maps. However, the book's title itself is an indication of labelling and misinterpretation prevalent in the ubiquitous usage of the term 'Mikir' in the historical representation of the Karbi people since the pre-colonial era. *Terrorism in India's North-east: A Gathering Storm, Vol. I* by Ved Prakash records the colonial administrative structural policies of classifying indigenous communities of pre-independence period. Mikir Hills Tract was recognized as a district under Assam Frontier Regulation Act in 1884 (Subba, TB and Ghosh, GC, 2003:318), subsequently included in 'Partially Excluded Areas' as per Government of India Act, 1935 (Datta Ray, B and Agarwal, SD, 1996:58), which finally led to the creation of Mikir Hills Autonomous District in 1951. Political awareness played a significant role in the assertion of cultural identity among Karbi which led to the struggle for a territory. After independence, the Mikir Hills and neighboring North Hills districts were clubbed together into a single entity known as United Mikir and North Cachar Hills (UMNC) which was created on November 15, 1951. Subsequently, the UMNC was bifurcated into two districts - Mikir Hills, and North Cachar Hills (later renamed as Dima Hasao), on February 2, 1970. Mikir Hills was later renamed as Karbi Anglong in 1976 (Prakash, 2008:151).

The compilation of the accounts of Stack on the Karbi was made partly possible due to the missionary contacts and mainly done for administrative purposes. Even after obtaining an autonomous district, the Karbi couldn't do away with the label 'Mikir' considered derogatory was "given to the race by the Assamese: its origin is unknown." (Stack and Lyall 1908:3-4)

³ These are traditional geographical units of West Karbi, parallely at the same time people from these areas and batches of Karbi from other areas migrated to the present day east Karbi Anglong. Present day Karbi Anglong is divided into Karbi Anglong- Samelangso, Rongmongwe, Nilip, Langsomepi, Howraghat, Bokajan, and Lumbajong and Karbi Anglong West- Amri, Chinthong, Rongkhang, and Socheng.

Karbi who have been indigenous to the land of Assam, till date are referred with an exonym. Dharamsing Teron a Karbi activist and folklorist in his book *Karbi Studies (Vol.2) Reclaiming the Ancestor's Voices* notes that "Only a few decades ago, Karbi were called Mikirs, which was 'accepted' for nearly five centuries. It took almost as long to realize that the term Mikir is of unknown origin, given to them by the Assamese neighbours." (Teron, 2011:15). The word Mikir is a misnomer, and it points to historical power relation, subjugation and marginalization faced by the Karbi despite the desperate efforts of the Karbi elders to counter such misrepresentations. There is no meaning of the word Mikir and holds no significance to the community. Misrepresentation and misinterpretation by the dominant communities had impacted the progress of the Karbi society and intellect. The representation of the community has always been a one-sided affair and the dominant view has contributed in constructing the Karbi image.

This thesis will focus on the Karbi epic narrative popularly known as *Mosera* among the Hills Karbi and *Karbi kevang/Arleng Kevang* (lit. coming of Karbi/ Karbi origin) among the Plains Karbi. To enumerate what an epic is, I will quote here Lauri Honko, a famous Finnish folklorist, in order to support my argument:

Great epics are powerful repositories of myth, religious worldview, and history. It is through them that many details of past forms of religion and society have come to us...Most great epics are widely considered as embodiments of oral tradition, folk poetry, myth and ritual (Honko, 1990:1).

As Honko states that epics incorporate the oral tradition of a community which sheds light to the past and in doing so, illuminates the present of a community. Epics are the bedrock of a tradition where the seeds of culture germinate and come to life through the oral transmission handed down from generation to generation. I am categorizing *Mosera* in the genre of epic due to the components discussed above by Honko which are present in the oral text; it contains creation and migration myths, oral history, and origin of funerary customs which relay a lot of information about the Karbi oral tradition.

Mosera is sacred and is associated with ritual performances which will be discussed in the later chapters. In this context, I may mention the work of Tolheishel Khaling on the *Epic of the Uipo (Khoibu)* (Khaling, 2018). Khaling's thesis titled, *Tlou Rachaanaad* is noteworthy in capturing the oral tradition of the Uipo people through the epic tracing the community's origin, history, rituals and culture. The Uipo epic is well presented with a short historical background, notes on the epic performance, translation and summary, finally concluding with the epic. Undeniably, this is one of the pioneer works on the Uipo (Khoibu) people. However, in the discussion of the epic, there is no mention whether it is a sacred text or not although it is performed during a ritual. My primary concerns regarding *Mosera* is the transmission of the sacred text, a commentary or a short note on the process

of treating the epic would have testified to the recording and the production of the text. But undeniably, this is one of the pioneer works on the Uipo (Khoibu) people.

There are three different versions of the *Mosera* epic: two Bhoi Mynri versions and one Dumrali version. During my fieldwork, I have collected a Bhoi Mynri version during my fieldwork called *Jutang* (lit. culture) of *Mosera* from Mai Kramsa village bordering Meghalaya, another state in North-east India, on January 27th 2020. Additionally, I received two other versions from my contributors/resource persons who had previously recorded the performance. One is again a Bhoi Mynri version called *Jutang Kihir/Keron* (lit. culture transmission/recounting) recorded by Dharamsing Teron at Diphu in the year 2012. The other is a Dumrali version called *Arleng Kevang* (lit. the coming of Karbi) and was recorded by Dhireshwar Ronghang in the year 2012/2014. I will be examining the three variants to see if the concept of *Mosera* is uniform or varied. *Mosera* is mostly present in fragments, scattered among the Hills and Plains Karbi, and the versions exhibit similarities in their (about 3/4) thematic structures and topics. The existence of fragmented *Mosera* is discernable from the angle of migration as each group of Karbi carried with them their unique encounters and experiences, who later formed these geographical units after settling in the Northeastern pockets of India. Each group represents slightly different versions of their migration story which, when compared with one another, can account for more invaluable information. For example, a performer hailing from Bhoi Mynri region of Dumrali will have a different version of *Mosera* when compared to any other geographical units. I may reiterate that the version obtained for this study of *Mosera* is not taken from its ritual context, as the epic narratives were recorded outside of the ritual performance.

Mosera has various names like and *Jutang Keplang* (lit. culture creation) subjected to numerous usages purely based on regional/local adaptations. As part of the verbal repertoire, it holds a significant position in the Karbi culture and it is an integral part of the Karbi life describing creation myths, oral-cultural history, migration memory and the origin of death rituals. *Mosera* incorporates various topics and sub-topics representing the rich oral tradition of the Karbi people's ingenuity. However, there has not been an in-depth study on *Mosera*.

In chapter 1 a concise descriptions on Karbi folk genres and religious practices are discussed to give a background to the Karbi socio-religious and verbal repertoires which will entail necessary information in regards to the understanding of *Mosera*. Literature review of previous works, the fieldwork context, and the process of recording, transcription, transliteration and publication of the epic will follow, incorporating ethnopoetics as a method for reference in evaluating the recorded materials of the oral text and performance in chapter 2. A importance of frame and metacommunicative cues as a key terms in the interpretation of *Mosera* in sub-chapter 2.1. A comparative examination, contexts of ritual and performance analysis, and detailed descriptions of the versions will be discussed in chapters 3 to create a more substantial understanding of the texts. I will thus try to put forth the data

collected in examining the relevance of the epic and analyze the funerary context and aspects of harvest festival *Mosera* is associated with—further exploring the modern-day adaptations and the social life of *Mosera* in chapter 4. The appendix has two sections: the transcriptions and translations of the three versions of *Mosera* alongside the contemporary adaptation are present followed by an interview section with Longsing Bey, a ritual performer, conducted on June 20, 2020 on the topic of *Mosera*.

1. The Karbi Cultural Context

In this chapter, the Karbi folk genres and the Karbi religious practices are briefly enumerated to give an additional context of Karbi worldview and beliefs in the study of the *Mosera* epics. The examination of the Karbi vernacular genres necessitate in determining the position of *Mosera* by evaluating the analytical categories in conceptualising ethnic terms of Karbi folk repertoires. Traditionally, *Mosera* is recounted during rituals, and the knowledge of Karbi religious practices will give a broader scope in the performance of *Mosera* and elucidate the religious and cultural context.

1.1. Brief Description of Karbi Folk Genres

Karbi oral tradition contains a vast repertoire of expressive forms. But the contemporary encounter with modernity has led the cultural practices in a state of transition, or even disappearance.

Oral tradition, also called orality, the first and still most widespread mode of human communication. Far more than “just talking,” oral tradition refers to a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas. It is typically contrasted with literacy, with which it can and does interact in myriad ways, and also with literature, which it dwarfs in size, diversity, and social function. (Britannica Encyclopaedia, 2019)

Some expressive forms become unnecessary to the community that owns them, thus helping them evolve—the adaptation of culture and the process of acculturation, where certain elements transform into new ones. At the same time, the other aspects are discarded to suit the culture bearers better. Tradition as such is a platform of shared meanings that brings people under the same roof who have common beliefs and similar cultural traits. For any oral tradition, language not only becomes the primary communicative tool but a mechanism that shapes the outlook of the culture bearers becoming the mode of access through signs and symbols. It is debatable as to if text-oriented cultures are better suited for evolution than their oral counterparts.

For millennia prior to the invention of writing, which is a very recent phenomenon in the history of humankind, oral tradition served as the sole means of communication available for forming and maintaining societies and their institutions. Moreover, numerous studies—conducted on six continents—have illustrated that oral tradition remains the dominant mode of communication in the 21st century, despite increasing rates of literacy. (Ibid, 2019).

There following are the Karbi vernacular genres:

1. *Arlos-Pinso Alun* (lit. female and male songs) are the two broad categories when it comes to the song, specific to female and male melodies. Even though females are allowed to sing most male songs, it is sung in female-oriented melodies.
2. *Se Patam* (lit. healing incantation)
3. *Keplang Kephi Alun* (lit. creation songs) these are ritual songs that narrate the creations of everything by divine intervention (or without it) sung only by male.
4. *Pangri-pangdon Alun* (lit. wedding songs)
5. *Lun Keding* (lit. long songs/epics/ballads) include genres such as legends and myths, cautionary tales, taboos, and it has both secular and sacred properties depending on the song.
6. *Charhe* (lit. funeral song/ epic dirge) also a ritual song sung only by female practitioners on both the primary and secondary cremation ceremonies. But *Kacharhe* or *Charhe* also comes under the *Lun Keding* category.
7. *Ove Alun* (lit. songs of the youth) there are multiple folksongs on this genre including ballads and love ballads.
8. *Mosera kihir* (lit. recounting of *Mosera*) an epic, sacred chanted narrative that also talks about etiological narratives, migration memory, and funerary custom.
9. *Tomo* (lit. folktales or stories in general) also includes legends.
10. *Tomo Patar* (lit. riddles)
11. *Kepa'er Alun* (lit. erotic songs)
12. *Sar-lamthe* (lit. proverbs)
13. *Lun Kore* (lit. creative songs) an on-spot performance, without ritual connotations, where two people or groups compete to show their poetic skills on any given situation.
14. *Oso Padok Alun* (lit. lullaby)
15. *Hirjir* (lit. modern Karbi poetry).

The Karbi vernacular genres are not fixed to a particular category. They are always overlapping one another, adjusting to the mode of performance which is dependent on the context (spatial and temporal) which dictates the role of the performer. Karbi culture is based on an oral tradition, and the study of oral genres become essential in ascertaining the importance of verbal repertoires which shape the beliefs and cultural universe of the people. Genres are hierarchical, and by discerning

one form from the other can clarify the content and functions a particular ethnic term serves in the creative expressions of the community. The cataloguing of oral genres, in turn, can specify the purpose and context of verbal communication within the community conventions. *Mosera* as an epic is one such example of overlapping genres which incorporates several genres point at the historical or socio-cultural relationship with other categories of ethnic genres. The main issue of misunderstanding the ethnic sacred terms stem from my incompetence to locate the ethnic genres widely found not just in the *Mosera* epic but in various ritual performances. It is necessary to know the ethnic genres to identify and work systematically before entering the field. To constitute the criteria for ethnic genres I will be borrowing from folklorist Dan Ben-Amos's article "Analytical Categories and Ethnic Genres":

1. Grammar of folklore
2. Cultural affirmation of communication rules
3. Cultural specific context (Ben-Amos, 1969:285).

The above-discussed factors help in the understanding of the messages relayed in the Karbi's cultural expressions within the community's ethnic system of genres. Ethnic system of genres is a system that defines the society's experiences, creative imagination, and social evaluations regulated by the community's conventions. By accounting these factors in the analysis of oral genres offer cultural specific viewpoints in the study of *Mosera* epics and by establishing the connection between the features, themes and the purpose, it serves in the circulation of Karbi verbal expressive repertoires.

During my transcription process, I made up about 50-60 new Karbi words, which meant nothing because to my incompetent ears, I assumed terms that were created as a result of pauses or breathing noises. Often, mispronounced words by the ritual performer were one of the biggest challenges I had to endure. In my mind, it all sounded sacred whether the names were mispronounced including even the breathing noises. External support from my informants (who are the culture bearers) and constant consultation helped me in understanding and specifying the Karbi ethnic terms and their usages. "The summation of thematic and behavioural attributes of genre and its position in the folkloric system are best indicated by the terms people call their expressive forms." (Ben Amos, 1969:295). Ethnic terms behave in numerous manners within the cultural convention, these expressive forms are allocated in the vernacular category depending from situation to situation, the classification of these ethnic terms either into sacred, secular, or social can be inferred from the knowledge of the communicative system adherent to the community's cultural universe. The ethnic terms operate within the community genres and will lose meaning and interpretation outside of the cultural context.

1.2. An Overview of Karbi Religious Practices

Karbi traditionally follow an indigenous religion, and to clarify the concept of indigenous religion, I refer to the typology proposed by Bjørn Ola Tafjord, a scholar in religious studies. His article, “Towards a Typology of Academic Uses of ‘Indigenous Religion(s)’, or Eight (or Nine) Language Games That Scholars Play with This Phrase”, delineates the types of indigenous religions. The typology is based on the notion of ‘Language games’ developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein ([1953] 2009, cf Tafjord, 2017:26-27), a tool to look into the different types of uses of different language. Tafjord proposed eight types of indigenous religions out of which Karbi religious practice falls under Type 6 (As a geographically and historically contingent relational concept). According to Tafjord Type 6, [is] “Indigenous religion(s)’ [that]... means the opposite of ‘foreign religions’ or ‘exogenous religions... the settings are encounters between different religions, or between carriers of different religions, in specific places at specific times.”(Ibid, 2017:39) Tafjord uses the example of America, where Native Americans’ religious practices may be seen as being ‘indigenous’ before the conquest of the Spaniards. So is the case of the Karbi indigenous religion before its encounter with organised religions. Karbi religious practices revolve around the propitiation of ancestor spirits and strengthening kinship ties forming a chain of memory that can be further explicated by incorporating the explanation by James Cox, a scholar of indigenous religion, on indigenous religion as the practice of tracing the link to ancestors. (cf. Ibid, 2017) This link of tracing ancestry substantiates the practice associated with the Karbi belief in ancestor veneration and the shared experiences of alternate realities of the living and the dead that regulate the Karbi way of life.

The Karbi follow multiple religious practices like Christianity and Hinduism alongside an indigenous religion that can be seen as a belief system based on primary kinship linkages. Majority of the Karbi still practice a form of propitiating ancestor spirits and other protective spirits. Conversions to Christianity and the emergence of new religious movements associated with Hinduism (*Aronkimi*, *Honghari*, and *Bhaktitom*, for example) are on the rise. The Hindu wings of Karbi religion is a mixed bag of Hinduism and Karbi religion, where Hindu religious elements are incorporated in the traditional Karbi worship and belief practices.

The followers of traditional Karbi vernacular religion believe that the souls of the dead family members must be reunited with the souls of the ancestors in the *Phi-Phu Arong* (lit. village of grandparents). *Phi-Phu arong* is diversely known as *Chom-Arong* (lit. village of the ancestors) as well, which also emphasizes the connection that people share with the otherworldly entities and continue to maintain ties with the ancestor spirits. There is no concept of heaven and hell in the Karbi belief system, the souls of the deceased are not barred from going to a better place in the afterlife, i.e. *Phi-*

Phu Arong. The only requirement being the observance of the secondary cremation ceremony. There is no direct distinction between benevolent and malevolent deities as there is no such concept and dichotomy. *Hi'i* and *Arnaam* are both generous and malicious entities in the Karbi ontology depending on the situation, but both are referred to simultaneously in rituals.

Although for a secure and safe passage of the dead to the village of the grandparents, the family members must ensure and conduct secondary cremation ritual known as *Chomangkan* (lit. dance for the dead). Etymologically speaking, *Chomangkan* or *Chomkan* refers to *Chom*, i.e. the realms of the dead, and *Kan*, i.e. dance. While the term *Chomang* separately also means the Khasis in Karbi language, there are also several possibilities for cultural parallelism of the name and the ritual practice. The terminology can be interpreted as the celebratory dance for the dead. Two funeral ceremonies must be performed after a person dies. Firstly, there is the regular cremation ceremony, called either *Keplong* (lit. to cremate) or *Me'An kepi* (lit. giving fire and food to the dead/ food to the fire). Second is the grand ceremony, i.e. *Chomangkan*, which is the practice of elaborate death ritual among the Karbi. The status of the dead may be understood in terms of the *Chomangkan* from Victor Turner's work (1969) on liminality, this word is derived from the *limen* meaning a threshold. In context to *Chomangkan*, after the first cremation, the soul of the dead is in the state of in-betweenness and does not hold the pre-ritual status. The soul is in a state of transition or limbo until the completion of the ritual when a new ritual status will be attained. So is the case of the dead among the Karbi: unless the *Chomangkan* is performed the soul of the deceased is trapped in a liminal phase unable to move to the ancestor's village.

The Karbi believe in the indestructibility of *Karjong* loosely translated to a 'soul' and *Menchi-Menvang* (lit. endless cycles of rebirths). While *Karjong* in Karbi has the following forms: 1. *Pharlo* (lit. dream 'soul'),

2. *Karjong* (lit. normal living 'soul' that a person has),

3. *Harchi* (lit. shadow 'soul'),

4. *Chamburukso* (variously used to mean 'soul' of the dead or the non-human entities in the afterlife)

5. *Thi-Phalangno* (lit. souls of the bad/unnatural death).

Pharlo is the state of the soul moving to alternate realities. *Karjong* is what all living beings possess. *Harchi* is the shadow or the extension of any creature that exists between the tangible and intangible realms that can be seen and physically encountered. *Chamburukso* is the soul of the dead, and often the souls on whose behalf the *Chomangkan* is not performed are trapped in a liminal space known as *Ritlo Pharla*. Lastly, *Thi-Phalangno* is the soul that is trapped in a liminal space between the living, *Ritlo pharla* and the afterlife. I may mention that, apart from these categories, Karbi venerate *Tirim* (lit. ancestor spirits) along with a large number of non-human entities regularly.

2. *Mosera*: Interpretations and Theoretical Considerations

This chapter deals with the textualisation process and the methodological approach in sub-chapter 2.1. To find a correlation of structural, contextual, and performative aspects between the three oral texts, the understanding of how one relates to the other would entail the geographic conditions responsible for the reproduction and the adaptation of *Mosera* in the modern context. One of the main focuses of this chapter will be to discuss the merits and demerits of collecting data outside of the original performance context (2/3 of the material gathered on a secondary basis) and a brief background of data collection and studying the narrative description from a distance. A literature review of previous works on *Mosera* is presented in sub-chapter 2.1, which will then be followed by the fieldwork context in sub-chapter 2.2, analysis of the *Mosera* versions in sub-chapter 2.2, and classification and the methods applied in the process of ‘writing’ the oral texts in sub-chapters 2.3 and 2.4.

2.1. Textualization and the “problem” of finding a methodological approach

To appropriate the best way to understand *Mosera* is from the Karbi context keeping it relevant to the community while making sense to the outside world. The problem with finding the a methodological approach in the scripting of the texts of *Mosera* will be discussed in the this chapter.

An in-depth understanding of the *Mosera* recital depends much on the entire sequence of *Chomangkan* ceremony and the competence of ritual language by the observer, which is elucidated best in terms of culturally appropriate metacommunication. Catherine S. Quick writing on ethnopoetics observed that “It requires a thorough knowledge of the original language and [an] in-depth, even intimate, understanding of the culture, probably more so than a typical ethnographic, observational study” (1999:100). Jerome Rothenberg coined ethnopoetics in 1969 for “better means of translating oral poetries” (Ibid, 1999:95). In the context of the Karbi *Mosera*, the ritual language used by the performer during the ritual performance separates the form of meaning outside the ritual performance context, which cannot be perceived using a spoken language. The understanding of the ritual language or *Lamlir* (poetic language that the performer employs) is the most crucial aspect necessary in finding out the content and context of the performance within the ritual sequence.

Further, folklorist Richard Bauman in his article, states

that each speech community will make use of a structured set of distinctive communicative means from among its resources in culturally conventionalized and culture-specific ways to key the performance frame, such that all communication that takes place within that frame is to be understood as performance within that community (Bauman, 1975:295).

Familiarization with the culture is primary when it comes to framing a performance within the context of the ritual. Bauman enumerates the term frame, [explaining that it was] Gregory Bateson [who] first developed systematically on the notion of the frame as a defined interpretive context providing guidelines for discriminating between orders of message” (Ibid, 1975:292). Being able to distinguish the order of messages, the process of meaning-making explicates the frame of culturally defined communicative patterns. The ability to interpret the ritual language of *Mosera* is associated with the competence of the customary background and frame helps in the identification of necessary information on the performance.

I also cite anthropologist Gregory Bateson on the concept of ‘frame’ as employed by the speaker in relaying the information to the listener. Bateson holds that a “frame⁴ is metacommunicative. Any message which is either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, [and] gives [the] receiver instructions or aids in his attempt to understand the messages included within the frame” (Bateson, 1972 [1955]: 295; cf. Bauman, 2009). To be able to make sense of the sacred chanted narrative in the context of the performance frame, the ritual and the ritual language are the main points of focus. The information relayed in the oral text of the epic is conducive only in relation to the ritual and the community involved in the performance. It is essential to frame the performance of *Mosera* since my research is based on the study of the performance outside of the ritual context. Without understanding the frame of the performance, the message of the ritual is lost and will lead to a misinterpretation of the performance.

Karbi ritual language for an outsider or even a native speaker would be incomprehensible without the ability to understand the communication gestures. As my supervisor pointed out the significance of ritual language in one of the discussions, that it is a communication between the practitioner and god. Speech in itself is a multilayered structure filled with overlapping genres which shift with the situation and cognitive interpretation. When thinking of *Lamlir* or ritual language, understanding of metacommunicative cues of a ritual and the language establishes a connection between the performer’s speech, the ritual context (the performance), and the observer (audience or researcher in my case). Charles Briggs’s concept of metacommunication (1984) enables the observer or researcher in my case, to perceive the information (while analyzing a particular situation) of a language about the knowledge of the ritual language within the frame of the temporal and spatial aspects of the

⁴ By frame I am referring to interactive messages within the temporal and spatial aspects, which was presented by Bateson.

ritual. The process of understanding the ritual language becomes transparent in the textual analysis keeping in mind the researcher's competence of the native language, followed by some amount of knowledge on Karbi ritual language and conduct.

Adopting the method of framing the performance will enable me/observer to comprehend the necessary 'codes' and conduct of the ritual language by acquiring the knowledge of the ritual. This method forms the first essential step in the textualization process of performance. The frame of the performance becomes the backbone during transcription and the resource ground for transliteration of the epic. The frame creates cohesive and coherent structure in the textualization process, so that the themes, verses are in order and in relation to one another.

The urban context has created a distance between traditional cultural forms and present/western/mainland influences. By 'frame' I mean the category which incorporates the knowledge of traditional Karbi language, belief system and ritual. The lack of an orienting frame which I interpret to be made up of knowledge of language, Karbi expressive forms, rituals, customs are absent within my own personal ontology. This is an indicator of the greater social processes that characterise the Karbi society in the previous decades. In the previous decades the Karbi have been stigmatised and were marginalised throughout all known Karbi history that provoked the Karbi to disassociate from their own culture into becoming 'modern'.

Moving on to the incorporation of ethnopoetics in the study of *Mosera* which may help create information on the epic, I discuss the merits of this folkloristic and linguistic method. The understanding of the performative context comes to light by determining the grammar and poetics or ritual language (Quick, 1999). A "Folkloric analysis has proved helpful in understanding the folkloric content of numerous novels; [while an] ethnopoetic analysis could attune a reader to structural and auditory elements that contribute to a richer reading of such works" (ibid, 1999:99). Ethnopoetics as a tool will facilitate in examining the context of the epic by focusing on the narrative in their original language to unearth the inherent qualities of individual elements within the cultural frame of performance.

Quick asserts that aesthetic standards are not universal and stands firm against the western print-oriented judgements of poetic standards of 'primitive' cultures. "Ethnopoetics must concern itself not only with the text, the words of the poem but with the performance of the poem within its situational context ... role of poetry in the society ..., but also the aesthetic value of the poem". (Ibid, 1999:96) The utility of ethnopoetics in my research of *Mosera* enhances the capacity of viewing the text in a vernacular level (more from a cultural point of view). It does not suffice entirely in a sense, the nature of the recital, arrangements of verses and the social and sacred meanings of the text are unique and applicable only within the Karbi context. The narrative structure of *Mosera* may not be

clearly understood from an external viewpoint while comparing to other cultural forms of poetry. One reason being the versions of *Mosera* inherently present both in the ways of sung epic and prose narrative, which give it a unique quality. Secondly, the concept of ethnopoetics acts as a reference point in the study of *Mosera* in regards to other forms of epic poetry by accounting for the epic's composition, structure, performance and cultural context. "The basis of ethnopoetics, an interdisciplinary construct that attempts to correct the Eurocentric and chirographic bias against non-Western, oral traditional ways of speaking and meaning by deriving an interpretive frame from discourse in its own cultural context." (Ibid, 1995:95)

Dell Hymes a famous folklorist, linguist and anthropologist while analyzing the methods of oral-formulaic theory⁵ (Foley, 2005) and ethnopoetics observes further that the "Oral-formulaic theory and ethnopoetics are both concerned with composition in the course of performance" (Hymes, 1994:330). He talks about the constraints present in the process of interaction between performance and tradition, as the role of the performer/narrator is to chant or sing the piece tackling the obstacles of metrical lines as one of the requirements of oral formulae and the relationship established within the lines. Verses in turn, play an essential role in determining the theme, and form the sequence within the frame of the performance repertoire specified with the main intonational contours of the language. Hymes argues that "if the organization in lines is a general definition of poetry, then these narratives are poetry" and denotes necessary features. (Ibid, 1994:331) While the other qualifying features of indigenous narratives when looked at in terms of repetition and parallelism that stand out as markers either signaling a new verse or the recurrent themes in the performance frame.

It is a given that all performers carry a particular style of delivery while performing known as idiolect (speech of the performer), which is appropriate to the culture and can only be understood right from the lenses of the original language. But ethnopoetics as a tool for analyzing the text and performance of *Mosera* not only complements in understanding the format of the narrative but also helps in exploring its role and value in the society concerned.

Mosera follows a strict delivery pattern where a given segment must be sung in one breath ending with rhymes. Verbal 'meaningless' syllables, 'hmm' or a cough signals a way to control breath because *Mosera* singing is not easy. A performer may utilize throat clearing or the articulation of 'meaningless' syllables that often sound like a cough but have a very significant meaning within the greater repertoire of Karbi generic ritual chants. The singer's ability to remember these vast corpuses of oral text maybe attributed to Honko's idea of 'mental text' where the singer recalls themes and

⁵The study of epic poetry in oral traditions based on the poet's ability to improvise by drawing from the store of formulas and conventionally linking them to compose verses on spot. Developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord and expanded by John Miles Foley.

plots and creatively narrates them and in case he forgets mnemonic devices are used. In this case, the repetition of line or the oral formulae. (Ibid, 2000)

The performer deliver lines and concludes a thought while he exhales and with the followed inhaled breath follows the next section. Thus, the breathing patterns help to separate sections, it is the repetitive *Umm Dei* that signals the shift from one theme, segment, or topic to another. In the Bhoi Mynri version 1: the oral formulae that I have identified that help close a given narrative thrust is, *Mosera la pini an ningke* which translates to 'this has been the story until today'. In Bhoi Mynri version 2 the formulae is: the opening sequence, *Umm Dei*. The closing sequence, *La pani ningke* which translates to 'This is what has been until today.' More important than this closing formulae is the repetition of *Umm Dei*, which acts to summon attention and to communicate to the audience be it human or non-human and the next part of *Mosera* begins.

The delivery of the lines in rhythmic patterns alone accounts for the uniqueness of *Mosera*, which does not follow the forms of poetry. Ethnopoetics as a method was first developed to aid the scripting of oral poetic forms. Nevertheless, actual ethnopoetic renditions of oral text at best are very difficult to read. However, I have learnt that an ethnopoetic analysis requires a sound knowledge of some linguistic tools and a firm grasp of the English language. Perhaps I will attempt an ethnopoetics that could be a future endeavour.

Within *Mosera*, what remain constant in the structure of the performance are the singer's idiolect, epic register, and a pool of tradition as suggested by Lauri Honko (2000). For the observer, the process of meaning-making incorporates the performer, performance, audience and the ritual or rituals associated. Without any of these elements, the data obtained of the event would not constitute the whole truth but partially a biased one. Quick (1999:100) points out that involving a translator acquainted with the language and culture of study when the observer or researcher has no direct access to the cultural practices is necessary, as the only information present can be in the form of secondary, third-hand data and so on.

These data can only be put to use when a translator and contributor are affiliated with cultural knowledge. Here, the role of the indigenous community not only is significant to the position of the main contributor and consultant other than being the subject of study while negotiating cultural aspect. But it is only the agency of the indigenous community and their initiative that can shed light into the matter and illuminate deeper concerns. It is a process of constant dialogue and negotiation between the observer and the indigenous community working as a team to achieve a symbiotic goal, much like the performance setting of *Mosera* recital, which engages both the performer and audience (visitors of the ritual, in this case, participate in a dialogue format.)

2.2. Literature Review on *Mosera* with an Emphasis on the Works of Dharamsing Teron

The goal behind this literature review is to present information on the epic based on the previous research works done on *Mosera* by various scholars, most noteworthy of who is Dharamsing Teron, a Karbi folklorist cum political and cultural activist. The juxtaposition of Teron's work and my research material will reveal a broader cumulative approach in the interpretative analysis of the epic.

In the following, I will enumerate the previous studies on *Mosera* by the first beginning with the work by Jayanta Das who on his PhD dissertation titled *Folk literature of the Karbis of Assam: A Study* which briefly talks about *Mosera* outlining the essential performative features in respect to *Chomangkan*. Das observes the parallel between *Mosera* and *Kacharhe*, which seems quite evident that he borrowed the descriptions from Dharamsing Teron. All the descriptions of *Mosera* in Das' text are a repetition of Teron's work. (Das, 2002)

The other two mentions on *Mosera* can be found in two websites, namely Karbi WordPress (<https://karbi.wordpress.com/2007/10/04/the-dumrali-karbis/>) and IAS Gateway(<https://iasgatewayy.com/karbi-anglong/>). The information provided on the IAS Gateway is the same material that can be found in the Karbi WordPress, interestingly the data in KarbiWordPress website seems to have the information recorded since 2007. In contrast, the IAS Gateway updated the information in 2019. Both the sites present the detail on the Dumrali version and delineate the ritual associated with the recital of *Arleng Kevang*. There is a noticeable variation in the different themes used in this version and the version I collected while looking at the migration narrative of the Karbi which begins with the playing with moon in this version and the playing with sun in the one I have collected. This points at the folklorised state of the narrative. The gist of the migration memory is briefly mentioned with reference to *Kleng Mekar* and *Teron*, divine beings, who aided the Karbi during their migration ordeal. The websites also observe that *Kleng Mekar* is missing from the Hills version. Interestingly, in the Dumrali version I collected, there is no reference to *Kleng Mekar* which points at the omission of the character by the performer or loss of information.

Dharamsing Teron is the first Karbi researcher who conceptualised the *Mosera* epic and articulated the underlying purpose it serves as an oral history and the meanings attached to migration memories of the Karbi people. Teron's article (Teron, 2012) is by far the most accurate and eye-opening analysis, which meticulously documents the Karbi migration routes and encounters with different cultures by supplementing historical records to substantiate the references from the epic. *Mosera* cannot be treated as just a Karbi creation myth. Still, Teron has been able to piece the fragments

and interpret the poetic language of the epic by giving meaning to it with historical facts about migration. Teron's work on *Mosera* is a precursor to my research, and it is a humbling effort for me to be able to produce similar standards of scholarship.

Teron has written on the *Mosera* in two published works, i.e. *Karbi Studies Vol.1* (Ibid, 2012) a collaborative efforts of various scholars, and in *Karbi Studies Vol.2* (Teron, 2011) wherein he makes a brief commentary about the epic. Teron notes that "despite the lack of documentation, these verses have managed to survive in rural Karbi Anglong to this day. The Karbi 'history', therefore, continues to be trapped in the realms of myths, legends, and hearsays." (Ibid, 2012:175). He addresses *Mosera* through the context of the epic lament known as *Kecharhe* performed during the primary and secondary funerary rituals to provide extra information. He compares the two epics, i.e. *Mosera* and *Kacharhe* as the former talks about Karbi origin and migration while the latter is a sung epic about how women dirge singers (*charhepi*) escort the soul of the dead to the land of the dead. Teron provides his understanding of how *Mosera* and *Kecharhe* are connected by comparing the narrative structure and examining the toponyms mentioned in both narratives. "In Karbi tradition,... if *Mosera* is the coming, funeral song ... is the return." (Teron, 2011:38). Teron establishes a connection between *Mosera* and *Kacharhe*, but this serves only one aspect of *Mosera* from the funerary ritual context.

Despite the fact that the funerary ritual being the background for the study of *Mosera* Teron doesn't account for the myth of funerary custom *Thireng-Vangreng* (although it is mentioned with a brief illustration, the interpretative correlation is missing), which is the main anchor behind the recounting of *Mosera* during the *Chomangkan*. Teron's focus in the analysis of the epic is only limited to the origin story (accounting for creation of other neighbouring communities), the migration myth, and encounters with different ethnicities, whereas my results show that *Mosera* is much more than that. The epic of *Mosera* is the foundation of the Karbi tradition, and it talks about the origin of the Karbi alongside the neighbouring ethnic communities, migration memory, the human-non-human relationships, kinship, the creation of culture, and the inception of funerary custom. From the standpoint of *Chomangkan* without the prominence of the funerary custom episode, *Mosera* is incomplete in its rendition.

The other drawback of Teron's research is the treatment of the sacred text; maybe it is, for this reason, the verse of funerary custom is omitted from the main text. While dealing with research gaps like this, Honko points out the ethical challenges and decisions to be made while presenting epics since,

"The multitude of variants and contexts of performance is impossible to transmit within one text and its commentary... The textualization of oral epics leads to a situation where we read oral epics that were narrated or sung and, more specifically, we read them in forms that were never actually used in real life. The performance

and textualization of epics are, then, quite separable processes which follow different sets of rules." (Honko, 1990:5)

There is no description on Teron's document under what circumstances the collection of the epic was done, which raises a significant question in the treatment and transmission of the sacred text. Ethical responsibilities come to the foreground while dealing with any ritual associated text as it is sacred and must be treated sensitively privy to the community.

2.3. Recording *Mosera*: The Fieldwork Context

The fieldwork was carried out in the month of January 2020. During my fieldwork, the primary fieldwork revolved on a trip for the collection of a *Mosera* recital (27/01/2020). At the same time, the week comprised of group discussions with the natives, multiple telephonic interviews, and an online survey where I circulated a questionnaire to a group of Karbi youth.

Within the given time frame for my research, I had to rush for collecting and recording the narrative. The reason behind such a rush was again the rarity of the performers because many have died of old age and last year two of the performers passed away who could have been potential cultural informers and performers. Luckily, my contributor was able to get hold of one performer from the Bhoi Mynri region of West Karbi Anglong who had agreed to perform. With the help of my contributor and informants, I set up a recording session with one of the ritual performers Sarmo Lekthe from Mai Kramsa village, Bhoi Mynri region. However, due to his old age, he offered us a day for the recording of *Mosera* and interviewing him. Also, financial constraints were the other reason why I could not revisit for the second time.

To explain the recording process, I will describe the background of this performance which is called *Jutang* or *Thireng-Vangreng*⁶ *Ahir*. For this set-up, an omen and culturally sanctioned custom were observed before and during the recording of the performance. It is mandatory to note omens as they determine the course of the initiation of the ritual and wards off any negative influences. By doing so, the ritual practitioner appeases the ancestor spirits and other protective deities. Failing to do would cause unparalleled consequences to the ritual performer and might even affect the participants. It is the role of the ritual practitioner who creates to maintain the sacredness of the ritual at all cost. By observing the omen, the practitioner is creating a liminal space and time which exists between the realms of the living and the dead, making it an ideal place for the recounting of *Mosera*.

⁶A mortuary ritual in this context is when a deceased body is kept inside a room for three days when the mortuary ritual is performed. When it is done, the body is finally cremated.

It is traditionally tabooed to talk about death in the Karbi belief system. If a situation calls for a discussion about death, the uttering of a sacred chant is believed to keep off negative influences. ‘*Hemthur mo suri arnaam, heno arnaam pachetok, me arnaam pachetho, voku-voki pangthur*’ which translates into, ‘Let a thousand gods come to the house, disrupt the flow of malevolent gods, open up the flow of benevolent gods, be awakened by the birds’. The chanting of this sacred prayer keeps the speaker at a distance from actually being in the same space and time with the dead. In Karbi belief system, death and life have their domains and must not be mixed up.

The pre-requisites of such an arrangement necessitate an isolated location outside of the village. Preferably, near the paddy fields in this case. Due to its auspicious nature, it must be during the winter season. And in such cases, random listeners are not welcomed as a restriction from the public viewership: *Mosera* deals with the ceremony of the dead, which when performed outside ritual without the proper propitiation rituals, has negative consequences.

Choklim is an initiation ritual for aspiring ritual performer/s. The aspiring ritual performer must offer to (his) their *Kurusar* (lit. ritual master) a list of things. Namely, *Hor Tibuk* (lit. pitcher of traditional alcohol), *Banta* (lit. betel nut wrapped in banana leaf), and *Volok Ejon* (lit. white fowl) are to be offered to become a master ritual performer. The ritual practitioner offered *Banta* and *Hor Tibuk* as a tribute to his masters minus the white fowl since I was there to record the recital of *Mosera* and not become a practitioner in the process. The betel nut wrapped in banana leaf along with traditional alcohol (in bottle gourd) are the offerings made before every ritual practice.

The exception of this ritual observance is purely on the mode of teaching or traditional knowledge transmission. In the olden times, the sole intent of such practices implied dissemination of knowledge, making this gathering a solemn pact between the learners and the spiritual deities, ancestors and the ritual practitioner.

After the observance of the omen, the rapport was established between the ritual performer, me and my local guide, Longkiram Phangcho. Then the ritual performer begins with the first section where the creativity of the performer’s idiolect is evident in (presented in the later chapters) his ability to address the situation of recounting *Mosera* by appeasing his masters and ancestor spirits. It is not part of the narrative in a sense rather an improvisation by the ritual performer to suit the conditions of my request to perform the sacred chant. The performer re-adapts the context of the first section of the *Mosera* which is known as *Riso Chihut* (lit. formal conversation between the host and the visitors) into the one suited for the observance based on recording the material. Traditionally, there are four sections (again presented in its entirety in the later chapters).

Lastly, when the recital of the sacred chanted narrative concluded, I asked him a few questions as to how he had acquired the competence for performing this narrative and what the scenario was

back then. He responded, “Out of 10 learners, only two learned it skillfully, lots of alcohol in 3 days/nights (during *Chomangkan*). (The)... others didn’t become ritual performers because (his) their masters passed away untimely.” The ritual performer affirms that *Chomangkan* was very popular during his time, celebrated abundantly in every neighbouring villages and often he would travel to other far off Karbi communities to witness the festival. His active participation in the ritual gave him competence during his youth, through observance and extra help from his masters.

After about almost two hours of the recording session, a passerby from the village came to the spot of our congregation. As soon as the ritual performer felt the presence of an outsider, he switched the mode of communication, transforming the atmosphere of the gathering from something sacred into a more secular one. When the passerby enquired about the happening, the performer indicated that it was a gathering to record folktales and folk songs (masking the actual purpose). So the passerby grew interested and lingered on for a couple of minutes to see if he could obtain anything more. But when there was nothing, the passerby ventured off to do his bidding.

At this point, I turned to my informant and then to the performer, to see if the session was to continue. To my surprise, the performer declared the session over, and so we packed our belongings and left the site. Only in retrospect, I realised that the unwelcome presence of the passerby in that liminal space disrupted the flow of the ritual procedure concluding the recording session. This incident in itself marks the continuity and discontinuity in temporal, spatial and mental states for the participants, performer and observer during a ritual observance. Rituals exist only in the space-time of its occasion even in the Karbi belief system which amplifies the sacredness of the text and the performance. Honko, in his study of epic highlights the importance of variation in the ritual setting, which considers external factors and affects the holiness of the practice entailing the adaption of the performance to a changing audience or context (Ibid, 2000). This process of variation in ritual settings is essential in the understanding of *Mosera*, as the epic is observed outside of the ritual context the adaptation of the performer, performance and context add extra information to the repertoire offering a scope of change and transformation.

Stepping in the role of a researcher proved to be the most delicate experience while documenting the sacred chanted narrative. While entering the field, the only thing I reminded myself was to respect the ritual practitioner, the norms of the Karbi rituals, discard any preconceived notions about the routine and to refrain from transgressing the ritual set-up. Conduct was the first thing that came to mind and not to interrupt the ritual practitioner. During the ritual performance, I made sure not to get involved with the ritual aside from asking questions relevant to the routine once the performance ended and adopted the role of a passive participant.

A note on the ritual proceeding, where I made sure to inform the ritual practitioner my role as a researcher and the collection of the sacred chants of *Mosera* solely for academic purpose. Upon reaching an agreement, the ritual practitioner addressed the opening of the ritual dedicated to his masters, and ancestors negotiating for the transmission of the sacred knowledge, Lines 5-22 of the preliminary verse of the epic text,

Nangliphan kuru kulak / You my master

Nanghumri-nanghumpat alam / Seeking you because

Nangliphan nangcharchung / (I) rely on you

Nangliphan nangcharchak / (I) depend on you

Alamthe k / The crux of the matter is

Ei jo bang, / That this person (referring to the researcher who came to collect)

Dorbar along, sorbar along / In August gathering, assembly

Peklang dunji, Mei along, / will present in congregation

Thei along peklang dunji / In the gathering

Alamthe si lasi jo / The purpose therefore is

Jutang nangji tangho / That culture is needed

Jubat nangji tangho / That tradition is needed

Ili karbi aso, karbak aso / We Karbi people, Karbak people

Dukjir aso, duksang aso / Keeper of the tradition of tattoo

Thireng ephi charhi-ephu charhi akhei ke / *Thireng* (who initiated funeral rites), we are people who keep funeral rites for ancestors

Ilitum ke lasi lahai ajutang, / That is why, for us, such culture

Lahai ajubat / Such heritage

Rim nangkok, bi nangkok / Such customary practices, must be retained and transmitted

The ritual practitioner's negotiation with his masters and ancestors before every ritual performance is a procedure that every ritual performer must adhere to before initiating any ritual performance. Without the opening verse of propitiating ancestors and masters, a ritual cannot commence. From the above-sacred text, we can infer that this recording of *Mosera* is a specific event addressed for the sole purpose of Karbi oral tradition documentation, with an exception made for me to record the performance. This version of *Mosera* is a very peculiar one since it is an adaption of the traditional format meeting the demands of the transformation of a culture, and coping with changes. The purpose is only for scholarly research and Karbi sacred knowledge transmission to a broader audience.

2.4. Text of the *Mosera* Epics

Here in this section, before examining the different parts of *Mosera*, I would like first to give a brief synopsis of each version for a better understanding of the texts. There are three different versions of *Mosera*, one from the Dumrali area of Kamrup District of Assam and the other two from Bhoi Mynri area in Karbi Anglong which borders Meghalaya. For reference, the texts of the epics are present in the appendix section. Interestingly, while tracing the location of these narratives via settlements, it occurred that all these oral texts come from the same people, i.e. Dumrali or Dimoria Karbi. Dumrali Karbi are referred to as the Plains Karbi while the Bhoi Mynri Karbi, in this context, are referred to as Hills Karbi due to their settlement in Meghalaya. In this chapter, analysis of all the three oral structures of the texts are presented, section by section to see cross textual linkages and nuances by examining the themes.

My interlocutor Longsing Bey, who is a ritual practitioner, explains the concept of *Mosera* and the difference it bears when contrasted to (tangible aspects of) culture,

(*Mosera is*)...to commemorate the lifetime of people all over the world when they are no more. And the other is the account about Karbi people's memory as far as remembered, the recalling of the past, unearthing the roots, recounting of the episodes. It is to commemorate all these things, that is called *Mosera*...it is referred to the things that cannot be seen. *Jutang* (lit. culture) on the other side for Karbi is what can be perceived by everyone. What cannot be seen, that is concealed to our sight, for example, *Chamburukso* that which is not visible but that on whose behalf the work is done. (telephonic interview on May 25, 2020)

Mosera is known by different names throughout the various Karbi geographical settlements. It is widely known as *Jutang Keron* (lit. culture transmission), *Mosera Kihir* (lit. recounting of *Mosera*), *Karbi Kevang* (lit. the coming of Karbi), and *Karbi Keplang* (lit. creation of Karbi) to name a few. *Mosera* stands for numerous things, as it accounts for etiological narrative, oral history, cultural history, migration memory, and the customs of *Thireng-Vangreng* (I will discuss this in details in the following chapters). *Mosera* is narrated on two separate occasions, in respect to the Hills Karbi, once during *Jir-kedam* where the ancestor spirits are venerated and the migration narrative is retold/sung towards the end of the ceremony—performed by the *Klengsarpo*, the head of village youth. The second instance is during the secondary cremation ceremony or *Chomangkan*. In case of the Dumrali Karbi, *Mosera* is recounted only during *Mono Ke'en* (lit. ushering of rice spirit). The funerary context of *Mosera* is my primary field of study as my fieldwork data is only limited to the *Chomangkan* context. On the other hand, the practice of *Jir Kedam* (youth cooperative/traditional youth dormitory) declined in the course of cultural transformation through the ages among the Hills Karbi. I was only able to collect some aspects of it and not completely.



Fig. 2 Padum Ingti

For the documentation of *Mosera*, in addition to the three primary versions, I examined different narratives available via monographs, field materials, and social media. Out of the three main versions of the *Mosera* oral texts analyzed in this thesis, one was during my fieldwork on January 27, 2020, to the Umsawai region known as Bhoi Mynri version, chanted by an older man Sarpo Lekthe (as stated above). Further, the other two versions collected as secondary data are acquired as recordings (of the *Mosera*) made by my local guides with the intention of cultural documentation. The second version is a variant of Bhoi Mynri version recorded at the AIR (All India Radio) Diphu at 2014 performed by another ritual performer from the Bhoi Mynri, namely Longsing Bey recorded by

Dharamsing Teron. And the last is the Dumrali version from the Plain

Karbi, performed by the now-deceased Padum Ingti, Kamrup region, which was recorded and documented by another contributor Dhireshwar Ronghang of Guwahati city.

From the three oral texts, the Bhoi Mynri versions exhibit the chanted poetic pattern, arranged in such a way that each section has to be recited in a single breath. In comparison, the Dumrali version is a narrative which follows the regular oral storytelling style. It appears that the Dumrali version also exists somewhere in the verse form as revealed by Dhireshwar Ronghang.

After acquiring the field materials, the transcription and translation sections to be the most robust and most time-consuming. The textualization of the sacred chants was a vast and a Herculean task, as the transcription took nearly one month of back and forth consultation between my supervisor, contributors, and me. The sacred chants were basically in *Lamlir* (*lit.* ritual language) or known as ‘refined language’ as suggested by Dharamsing Teron (2011), and not in a usual conversation language. One of the other struggles I had encountered during my formulation of the data was to allocate *Mosera* in the Karbi vernacular genres and specifying it. As per my informants and contributors, there is no other sacred chanted narrative like *Mosera*. One of my informants proclaimed that the melody of *Mosera* is very peculiar because it is sung, chanted and spoken at the same time distinguishing it from any other folksongs and folktales in general. After much examination, I may safely say that it falls under no distinct category but a distinctive collection of overlapping genres in its own.

In terms of the thematic arrangement, the Bhoi Mynri versions both follow the themes divided into four sections, namely *Riso Chihut* (lit. formal youth conversation between the host and the visitors), *Karbi Karbak Keplang* (lit. origin of Karbi/creation myth), *Thireng-Vangreng* (lit. creation myth of mortuary ritual), *Chong Avan Nok Avan Kepadon* (lit. the repayment of the shield and sword's respect). The themes remain constant in both versions, although the formulation of the performance and interpretations of the plot developments vary. Another vital aspect of the Bhoi Mynri versions is that they are performed only during *Chomangkan*.

In comparison, the Dumrali version is performed during the ushering of the Rice Spirit. In the older times, the epic associated with the practices related to farming, youth dormitories, and nurturing of the youth with cultural-historical backgrounds. Also known as *Jir kedam* among the Hills Karbi and *Mono ke'en* in regards to Dumrali Karbi. This version is a prose narrative in the performative aspect which explores the migration memory of the Karbi in the thematic context, unlike the previous versions. These three narratives imply a connection on a structural level of recurring themes of recounting memories of origin, albeit from different lenses. Variations found in the texts suggest the adaptations of the narratives developed over the ages.

According to my informant, Longsing Bey, *Mosera* can be recounted by anyone. As long as it is performed by an accomplished ritual performer during a ritual.

Even female can recite if they are well versed. Several females are adept. Yes, during my youth some females performed, but at present, it's very rare or none. (He also adds)... Whatever religion you may practice, but if you're a Karbi in real sense, *Mosera* should be recounted, because in the past, after the creation of Karbi and how it came to be, it is only in the present that people have converted to different religions. But in the beginning, we were all one, that is why the recounting of *Mosera* is a need for every Karbi, in my opinion. Because it is not a ritual but only a way to recount the past, that's why it is a necessity. (Ibid, May 25, 2020)

To fill the gaps in my research, I carried out an online interview post fieldwork with Longsing Bey on March 25, 2020, via Dharamsing Teron, who helped in the translation of both the Bhoi Mynri texts alongside Dhonison Lekthe, a lawyer and a ritual practitioner. The online interview further aided in clearing misconceptions about *Mosera* and the ritual associated. While on the other hand, for the Dumrali account, the performer Padum Ingti, unfortunately, passed away in March as soon as I got hold of the material. So an additional correspondence could not be established. The Dumrali version was narrated in the Assamese language which was not an issue while translating, but it unquestionably spoke volumes about the meagre usage of Karbi language among the Plains Karbi.

2.5. Textualising *Mosera*

While textualising the versions of *Mosera*, one of the main concern was the translation of the transcripts. Due to the sacred nature of the Bhoi Mynri versions, it was inaccessible to approach single-handedly because these oral texts were not in a spoken Karbi language but instead in *Lamlir*. In the initial phase of translation, I came across many words and sentence constructions which made no sense as I lacked the ritual connotations and had never heard before. Some words which made no sense were not supposed to make sense, as these words were reduplication, for example, *Karbi-Karbak*, *Ahom-Asim*, *Khasi-Keche*. As mentioned in the earlier sections, I am not equipped with the ritual competence of the language.

I learnt that even among Karbi, reduplication is part of the creative process a performer possesses in their idiolect, which is usually structured in the forms of two sentences. These sentences come in the form of parallelism, for example, '*Eli Karbi tema, Oli Karbak tema*'. Now, these two sentences practically are implying the same meaning 'That we are Karbi'. The parallelism in sentence structures also presented with similar sentence formations with a word or two difference changing the point of reference while maintaining the meaning of what is addressed in both the sentences. For example, '*Do tame nangpu tema, O thak tame nangpu tema*', i.e. 'They allowed us to stay, they allowed us to remain', '*Hidi bang nangpekpedet tema, Kume bang nangpekpedet tema*', i.e. 'Land they did not give, farming they did not allow'. The changes either in the form of a prefix or a word determine the outcome of the meaning of similar sounding sentences. The position of the suffix in every sentence of a verse is mostly constant, ending with the same word, making the verse into a rhyming pattern. For example, '*E phu chephuk nangpathek dunon, E phang chephuk nangpathek dunnon*', i.e. 'Make me remember when I scratch my head, Make me remember when I scratch my shoulder'. However, there are exceptions when a particular suffix of a line does not rhyme with the following sentence. Here is an example when both the prefix and suffix do not rhyme, '*Anke, bang Thireng pinchong, Bang Vangreng pinchong lepu*' i.e. 'And so *Thireng* created, *Vangreng* created'.

After transcription was done, during the process of translation, an initial problem I had faced was the arrangement of the verses within a section. There are four sections in the 1st Bhoi Mynri version, while three sections in the 2nd version. I am not an expert in arranging the lines, so I chose the most straight forward way of arranging the lines of the verses depending on the opening and closing oral formula the performer employed. These mnemonic markers helped me in structuring the lines within every verse. The opening sequence of every new thought or pattern begins with, '*Umm dei...*' i.e. '*Umm then...*' and the closing sequence varied sometimes, but mostly remain constant with '*Mosera lapu pini an ningke*', i.e. 'This has been the story until today'.

2.5.1. Performance Context of *Mosera*

The Karbi cremate their dead accompanied by the compulsory dirge singing performed by *charhepi*, a female ritual performer assigned to guide the souls of the dead. This is a role-specific to only female practitioners during both the primary and secondary cremation ceremony. The last day of *Chomangkan*, *Mosera* is recounted as part of the closing ceremony in the gathering of youths. This solemn event is graced by all the visitors, particularly the youth, led by the host of the village youth chief. It is recounted on other occasions known as *Jir Kedam* amongst the Hills Karbi and *Mono ke'en* in the Plains Karbi as mentioned earlier. The fundamental difference in the performative structure between the *Chomangkan* and *Jir Kedam* is that the former is about death and the ritual dealing with the cycles of life and death while the latter ceremony is dedicated to the process of life, rebirth and the teachings associated with living.

The oral text remains the same for both the ceremonies where the origin stories, migration memory and creation of culture are narrated, except for the *Thireng-Vangreng* verse narrative missing from *Jir Kedam*. Dumrali version is an example closer to the *Jir Kedam* version. The significance of *Mosera* during the re-cremation ritual centers around *Thireng-Vangreng* – an etiological narrative, part of a belief narrative which emphasises on the customs of Karbi mortuary culture. *Mosera* is the leaving and the return; it narrates the movement of a journey undertaken by the Karbi during the waves of migration which is paralleled with the journey of the souls of the deceased from the realm of the living to the realm of the dead (*lit. chom-arong*) popularly known as *phi-phu arong* (*lit. ancestor's village*).

2.5.2. Performance Strategy and the Narrative Structure

The reasons behind my inability to transcribe and translate the words effectively were due to my lack of contextual understanding and lack of experience in the field of translating sacred chants. The first Bhoi Mynri version contains 487 lines; in contrast, the second version contains 641 lines. Here is a brief examination of the performance strategy employed by the ritual practitioner. Usage of metonym and adverbials can be found throughout the texts. While narrating, within the themes, characters are introduced earlier on in the starting verses. And then each character keeps making their appearance within the following sequences. Furthermore, one by one, the characters or traits are ex-

plained as the verse progresses. Character development or plot development is one of the key elements in the repetition of phrases and terms, aside from the mnemonic markers of opening and closing sequence, individual characters and traits within the theme play a role of logic and consistency for the audience.

However, it is a device the performer adopts of repetition and through retellings of crucial elements, the content of the theme sinks in the minds of the audience. Every closing lines of the verse gives hints for what is about to happen in the next verse. To resolve confusion in the minds of the audience, while narrating a long epic the performer adopts a multiple plot introduction strategy, and then just like a movie the motifs associated with certain important events keep overlapping one another. The performer takes the role of the director in creating landscape and setting the mood of the recital. Simultaneously, the performer takes the role of the editor to adjust the scenes so that the audience does not lose out on the context as it is impossible to keep track of so many elements within the epic narration.

3. Thick Description of *Chomangkan*

Mosera in contemporary times is performed only during *Chomangkan*. It is performed by youth chiefs, initiated by the host expressing gratitude to the visitors and asking for forgiveness for lapses if any which may have been committed during the three days of festivities. During *Chomangkan*, this section of the *Mosera* is given prominence. It is a tribute to *Thireng-Vangreng* who initiated the funerary tradition that ensured the reunion of the dead with their ancestor spirits in the *Phi-Phu Arong*.

For a more specific analysis of the narratives, the funerary context of *Mosera* will be the main emphasis in this chapter. The source materials gathered from the Bhoi Mynri versions of *Mosera* are concerning the secondary cremation ceremony only. Before proceeding, there are mainly two reasons for the inability to collect data during the ritual observance. Firstly, *Chomangkan* is a costly ceremony spanning for three to four days, include enormous food and beverage stocks and other ritual prerequisites; years go by in preparation for a single *Chomangkan* depending on the ritual requirements. Accommodating shelter to the visitors is another demanding condition, and it is these conditions that have resulted in the rarity of the ceremony. There is a sporadic observance of this ceremony amongst the town dwellers; on the contrary, it is widely practised in the villages of Karbi Anglong. More and more Karbi in this age are getting attuned to western forms of education, and the influences of mainstream cultures via television sets and internet have in a way affected the ways the present generation views the cultural norms as something subordinate as my research shows. Albeit in the positive light when the world is caving in as a product of globalization, there's a trend of a growing distance between the youths and the traditional cultural knowledge.

The Karbi perform the funeral ceremony at the time of the cremation of the deceased; they also perform the death ceremony called *Chomangkan* at a later date for the eternal peace of the deceased. It is the most elaborate and expensive socio-religious ceremony of the Karbi, which continues for four days and four nights non-stop. The ceremony does not require any formal invitation, and all are welcome to it. In spite of the sad undertone, it is an important occasion for the family to welcome all with great warmth. They come in batches, and everyone carries a symbolical and ceremonial totem with 5 (five) branches. At the top of the main totem, there is a wooden *Vo-jaru* (racket-tailed drongo). The totem is called *Jambili Athon*. This is the symbolical representation of the tribe, and it is also the symbol of clan unity. (Festivals of Karbi as listed in Karbi WordPress, Phangcho, 2007)

The following is the ethnographic description on *Chomangkan* based on the information provided by my informant Dharamsing Teron via an online discussion through WhatsApp on May 20, 2019.

At the time of the occurrence of death, the body is symbolically bathed and the hair shorn. The dead are not immediately disposed of, and it is generally kept and cremated on the third day. During this time span, kin and relatives from far and near 'pay' their last respect to the dead. The *Charhepi* performs in verses, one of the longest dirge singing ranging up to 32 hours over three days with breaks, narrating the journey of the soul through predestined resting places. The dead are cremated in the assigned spot for the clan. At the end of the cremation, a bone is retrieved and buried near the feet of the funeral pyre. In certain regions, food and eatables are again brought to the cremation ground for the dead on the third day by the family members and close relatives.

It is believed that the souls of the dead do not spontaneously join the souls of ancestors after the cremation and wander outside in the periphery⁷. The family members, therefore, must re-cremate the dead or perform the secondary cremation ceremony at an opportune time which may take years depending on their financial ability. The *Chomangkan* tradition is also alternatively known as *Karhi* which takes the form of an elaborate festival to which both the male and female kin members are compulsorily invited. The *Karhi* festival is therefore expensive and sophisticated, which lasts for three to five days, depending on the nature/class of the ritual. A *Karhi* is performed for all the dead family members to minimize the cost. It begins with the ritual collection/retrieval of the bones of the dead called *Ru* (*lit.* bone) or *Ser* (*lit.* gold) which is represented by *Sobai* (*lit.* cowrie shells), guided by drummers and the female dirge singers. A series of dramatic performances are enacted recreating the death of the re-animated. The 'bones' are considered as the re-animated forms of the dead which are brought back home in a procession. Effigies are made, and the *Sobai* are inserted into them after elaborately dressing and feeding them. All the while, the *Charhepi* is engaged in performing the dirge which elaborately narrates and offers food, water, betel nut, clothes and gradually guides the soul through the land of the dead. The *Duhuidi* or the sacred master drummer also simultaneously drums to guide the dead. During the festivity, explicit erotic verses and verbal exchanges are mandatorily sung within the precincts of the host village. Goats, chickens and pigs are sacrificed for the dead during the festival. The festivity concludes with the re-cremation of the dead amidst continuous lament singing and wailing, mostly by women.

The festivity continues throughout the days and nights accompanied by dances performed by boys and girls from neighbouring villages. On a concluding day before final re-cremation is performed, chiefs of village youth engage in a duel of verses with the host youth team narrating and recounting *Mosera*. This event is performed in a dialogue format where the narrative is chanted, sung, and recounted by a group of *Klengsarpo* and *Klengdun* (*lit.* village youth chief and youth leaders respectively)⁸ and composed of the host and visitors; the gathering spectates while the chiefs perform. This solemn ritual is supervised by *Sarbarim* (*lit.* super

⁷ *Rong Kangsam* (*lit.* land of the silent, a liminal place).

⁸ Village youth chief and village leader are democratically elected by the village elders during the *Rongker* festival celebrated during the winter to appease the territorial deities for the welfare of the village and harvest. Village youth chief and leader serve for a term of three years in minimum, most of their works are associated with the works of youth dormitories.

visor of the youths) of the youth chiefs and leaders who has the right to intervene and guide the repertoire. Whereby the host and the visitors indulge in a to and fro discussion recounting the verses of *Mosera*.

When asked about the process of learning *Mosera* Longsing Bey responded,

Yes, I learnt during my youth when *Chomangkan* was very prevalent. On attending the festival, the elders would dictate the youth and the leaders to learn the repertoire of *Mosera* and promote the culture as it was known as *Jutang Keron* (lit. dissemination of culture). That other would know more about their culture that's why the elders who amongst the very well versed would teach the youth... and I got my teachings. (Ibid, May 25, 2020)

The following section will be detailing the re-cremation ceremony to provide a background of the ritual practices as *Mosera* is just one of the ritual events. It is to be noted that, there are numerous branches of minor rituals running parallel amidst the main events assigned to days of the ceremony.

A three-day *Chomangkan* is loosely divided into *Aru/Ru Kehum* (lit. bone collection) on the first day, *Rong Kepado* (lit. lying-in-state) on the second day and *Arong Kethon* (lit. cremation) on the third day. *Ru Kehum* is a ritual of 'bone collection' of the deceased from cremation ground by a large entourage of *Charhepi* (lit. female dirge singers), *Ubokpi* (lit. baby sitters), *Chong-Nok* (lit. male shield and sword dancers), and *Duhuidi* (lit. master sacred drummers) accompanied by clan members, blood relatives, friends and villagers.

On the first day, after procuring the symbolic bones known as *Ru* from *Rong Kangsam* or 'silent village'⁹, these are inserted into straw effigies representing each of the deceased. This ritual signifies the 'bringing back to life' or the re-animation of the dead who are fed and dressed lavishly, albeit in a representative manner using straw effigies. The next stage is a ritual when the re-animated effigies 'fall seriously ill' and brought to a male *Sang Kelang bang* (lit. priest or diviner) one by one by *Charhepi* and her associates. The priest performs mock divination which is a hilarious exchange between the priest and the female dirge singers. The exchanges, sung or verbal, are heavily loaded with sexual/erotic connotations performed to a packed audience. This unusual communication pattern reflects the inversion of societal norms during the ceremony as part of the ritual conduct condoned as a rite within that liminal space. The usage of obscene language is not used in daily verbal exchange, and it is believed that the dead come from a different reality which makes vulgar language a medium to communicate with the dead. It is believed in the Karbi universe that what is good for the living is bad for the dead and vice versa.

The next stage involves the dead being bathed, dressed, and laid to rest. The *Charhepi* instructs each stage of the complex rituals through her singing. The cook *Rantini* prepares food *Anjam*

⁹The outskirts of the village, in most cases a cremation ground *Thi'ri* although there are other connotations as well.

for the dead and feeds them. The night of *Ru Kehum* holds special significance which is called *Kanso Aningve* (*lit.* night of the little dance). Unmarried youth take part in the dance performed at night. Simultaneously, an essential ritual of entreating the invited clan maternal *Ong-Nihu* (*lit.* maternal uncle), *Ingjir-Arlo* (*lit.* cousin sisters), *Sosu-Phili* (*lit.* cross-cousin sisters), and *Duhuidi* is performed with due solemnity.

The second day is loosely called *Rong Kepado* when the deceased are ‘rested in the village’. The morning is dedicated as *Kanso Adap* (*lit.* the morning of the little dance) a program running in a sequential basis. The second day is full of activities which are mainly performed by female functionaries of the host village led by *Uchepi* (*lit.* female ritual practitioner) and *Rantini* (*lit.* assigned female cook). Ritual sacrifices of fowls are performed too, with the distribution and consumption of the meat and homemade brew among assigned persons of various hierarchies. Women perform *Theng Ketu* ritual when they bring firewood to the host house. They also perform community making of *Sangpher* (*lit.* flattened rice). Flattened rice is packed in several banana leave wrappings for ritual distribution. *Ingti* (*lit.* salt) is also packed in similar banana leave wrappings called *Ingti Ahok*. A number of *Voti* (*lit.* egg) are stored in a specially woven structure called *Voti A'um* (*lit.* egg basket). Besides, a *Banta* of five betel leaves and five betel nuts wrapped in banana leaves is prepared. All these items are prepared for the deceased. Village women, one from each household, bring cooked food for the deceased accompanied with bottles of wine. During the day, the male folks also have specific functions. They go to the ‘silent village’ and prepare the pyre in a ritual called *Thiri Hemkim* (*lit.* cremation-house). They also build *Manduso*, which are tiny replicas of ‘temporary farming sheds’.

Male youth also perform *Banjar Kekan* with different erotically suggestive stages which describe constructing a house. The night of the second day is called *Kanpi Aningve* (*lit.* night of the big dance). Visiting village teams with unmarried youth carrying drums, swords and shields, *Jambili Athon*¹⁰, accompanied by elders reach the host village to take part in the *Chomangkan*. These visiting villagers are accommodated in different allotted households of the host village. Towards late night or daybreak, a colourful procession is taken out with the participation of these outstation villages. The procession called *Rongketong* (*lit.* the great village gathering) is accompanied with erotic songs and verbal obscenities. Taboos on verbal obscenities are lifted during the *Chomangkan*, from the beginning till the end, within the confines of the host village.

The third and final day of the *Chomangkan* is also called *Kanpi Adap* (*lit.* morning of the big dance). Unmarried youth take part in this community dance, but they strictly maintain the rule of clan exogamy when pairing the sexes. Drummers provide the *Cheng Kepalodok* rhythm (*lit.* drum pattern

¹⁰Traditional woodcraft object that represents cultural identity essential in *Chomangkan* ceremony

associated with *Kanpi Adap*). After the dance disperses, normally 3-4 hours later, all visiting youth chiefs take part in a formal and solemn ritual called *Phak Aphu Cholang* (lit. to look at the pig head). The visiting youth chiefs, representing villages participating with drums and *Jambili Athon*, are honoured with *Banta*, and *Horpo* or rice beer. Here is where a lengthy verse of *Mosera* performed on this special occasion. The host youth chief initiates and supervises the proceedings. It is a form of thanksgiving ceremony for the help and cooperation of the visitors when pardon is also sought for profusely, on a very general note. Fowls and pigs are sacrificed in another ritual which is called *Kelo Avo/Kelo Aphak* (lit. released fowl/pig). *Banjar* dance is also performed on this concluding day before the funeral procession is to begin. The final ritual is the cremation, called *Arong Kethon* (lit. seeing off to the village). *Duhuidi*, *Charhepi*, *Uchepe*, *Rantini* etc. accompany the procession with soulful wailing, heartrending cries, loud weeping. And so the great big re-cremation ritual concludes.

When talking in terms of *Chomangkan*, one of my informants from the Dumrali region explained that *Chomangkan* is not prevalent in their ritual practices. Instead, they have just one cremation ritual known as *Thi-Karhi*:

On the day of the dead, the body is kept, and prayer is offered near the *Nungpe Armu* (lit. main sacred pillar of the house). Then after the body is being cremated, all the people move to a place *Long-e-ari* (lit. place of burial stones) where a big standing stone will be placed in the name of the departed soul. Then at the same place, they would do *cho jun* with *Phak A-ok* (lit. pork), and all the visitors will move back to their places from there. Every year on the day of dead *Sar Kidung* (lit. remembering ancestors) is performed near the Nungpe Armu, remembering the forefathers and the departed souls. (Online correspondence, female, on January 30, 2020)

From the above citation of my informant, it can be affirmed that geographical separation plays a vital role in the practice and observance of ritual practices. Some traits are carried while the others discarded as part of cultural developments and the group's requirements. Another exciting term employed by the Dumrali Karbi for the final resting place of the soul is *Long-E-Ari* (lit. place of burial stones), a euphemism which is variedly called as *Rongsopi* (lit. big village) or *Chom-arong* (lit. village of the dead).

Before the epic is performed the host dedicates the first section as a prelude to *Mosera* addressing the masters/teachers, ancestors asking for their guidance and support while extending gratitude and courtesy to the visitors for their participation. The youth of both *Ari-Phang* and *Chom-Phang* (lit. host and visitor respectively) are initiated in the course of the event where the customs and cultural knowledge are transmitted via the oral repertoire. The middle verses narrate the creation myth, origin stories, migration memory and the customs of *Thireng-Vangreng*. Bearing in mind, motifs associated with creation myth remain constant, while the verses related to the inaugural and concluding sections are flexible and situation-specific. After the completion of all the sections of the narrative, the *chief village youth of the host village* would ask the *chief village youth of the visiting village/s*

to clarify the verses. In case of any lapse, the visitors are allowed to recount the verses and make necessary changes depending on the performance, although it is of rare occurrence. When all the errors in the recounting of *Mosera* are settled, and agreement is met by both the parties, the host would then supplement acknowledgements and token of appreciations to the ancestors, visitors and the protective deities as the final section.

3.1. The Narrative of *Thireng-Vangreng* in *Mosera*

Mosera also serves as the foundation ground elucidating the back story of how things and customs came to be in the Karbi traditional practices, from the point of origin to the point of the afterlife and everything in-between. *Thireng-Vangreng* means, “to die-to live, to come-to live”. One such origin narrative behind *Chomangkan* is explained further from an excerpt taken from the works of Dharamsing Teron, on the funeral custom:

Funeral customs were introduced to the Karbi by *Thireng-Vangreng*. According to a beautiful legend of Kethoi Mirlok (a cat that plucked flowers), a happy couple named Haya Bey and Che Li'e lived in a certain village with a beautiful garden in front of their house. The couple planted beautiful flowers, who loved them dearly. But fate took away Che Li'e plunging the life of Haya Bey in sudden darkness. Strangely, Che Li'e even after her death would send Kethoi, 'a wildcat to pluck the flowers she loved from the garden. One day, Haya Bey apprehended the kethoi which explained to him all about his wife in the ancestors' village (*lit. Phi-Phu Arong*). The wildcat took Haya Bey to the village and arranged for him to meet his wife. Thus Haya Bey continued to remain with his wife for some days but had to return home as he still had 'not exhausted his rice'¹¹. Che Li'e could afford to escort her husband till the doorway between life and death. However, Haya obtained a new power to commute between the worlds of the living and the dead, and he became known as *Thireng-Vangreng* (*lit. dead alive-come alive*). He saw in the world of the dead how funeral rituals were performed for the departed and taught them to Karbi. The tradition initiated by him became known as *Thireng-Vangreng a-Jutang* or the 'customs of *Thireng-Vangreng*', and since then, Karbi have continued with the funeral rituals. (Teron, DS, 2011 [unpublished])

Another version of the *Thireng-Vangreng* narrative was collected by folklorist Margaret Lyngdoh in 2013:

The bodyguard of the King, Mai Thengrak, was a person called Bura Bey. His wife's name was Kasang Ingtipi and his son was There Bey. Bura Bey died while his son was still young. After his death, Kasang Ingtipi carried on by working hard so that she and her son had means and self sufficiency. When There Bey grew up to a marriageable age, his mother arranged a match for him with Kave Timungpi, a girl hailing from the same village. The match was arranged in the Karbi tradition.

¹¹ The non-exhaustion of rice is a Karbi euphemism for life

With good fortune, Kave and There Bey were in love with one another ever since they were little children. But fate intervened and Kave fell very ill. She summoned her beloved to her bedside and gave him instructions. She said, “Dear There, I know that we will not be together in this world and I will depart from here very soon. But here are my instructions and maybe our love can beat death after all. When my corpse will be carried for the cremation, hide in the bushy grove. After the funeral party departs, a wild cat will appear there, which is a messenger from the nether world. If you hold on tight to this animal’s tail. You will be able to return to the world of the dead easily. Nothing will harm you...we will begin our life together there”.

As Kave had foreseen, a few days later, she died. After the cremation was over and the funeral party had departed, there was only silence and There Bey at that place. A wild cat appeared suddenly and There Bey caught hold of its tail and, thus he was led into the underworld by the cat. There he met all his dead family members and life in the world of the dead was not much different from the world of the living. People are born, marry and enjoy a normal life. But in order for a soul to be allowed entry into the world of the dead, certain rituals have to be performed. There are no exceptions. The inhabitants of the underworld thus taught There Bey all that needed to be done for a soul to be allowed into the Chom Arong. Accordingly, There Bey came back to the world of the living and news about the miraculous event spread far and wide. A relationship was thus established between the world of the living and the dead with There Bey as the go between who would impart news to both worlds about the going-ons on either side. In time, There Bey came to be known as *Thi-reng Van-reng* which means, “to die-to live, to come-to live”.

While there is another creation narrative that I collected about the same custom, which is a slightly different tale bearing a similar motif with different characters, this version of the tale is a widely circulated text with supernatural elements.

Long long ago before the *Thireng-Vangreng* custom was known to the Karbi, there lived a family of four. Due to some unforeseen circumstance, the father-in-law had passed away, leaving the mother-in-law, husband and the wife. Things went on usually, until one day the wife acquired a piece of very surreal information about her mother-in-law still meeting her father-in-law. This news thoroughly amused the wife, and so she confronted her mother-in-law out of curiosity and asked her mother-in-law to permit her to meet the father-in-law. But the mother-in-law denied her request warning her that she would be scared to see the dead. And it wouldn’t benefit anybody, but on another occasion, the wife was home alone and out of the blue came the father-in-law from the land of the dead. When the wife saw the ghastly sight of her father-in-law’s rotting corpse walking right up to her, she got so frightened she panicked and created a big mess of the unrealistic situation. Much later after the event, the family had discovered the occurring and so to avoid any such unpleasant happenings they decided to establish the custom of *Thireng-Vangreng*. (telephonic interview, group of three females, January 24, 2020)

During an interview, I asked my interlocutor about the practice of *Thireng-Vangreng* and how the custom came to be associated with the secondary cremation ceremony, Longsing Bey remarked,

That once upon a time there was a pandemic of death like Covid-19. During this pandemic it infected many, but in the meantime, there was one who was very strong and remained unaffected. Even after death, the person rose and travelled to the *Chom-Arong* (lit. the realm of the dead) and learned plenty of things on the other side as he was dead for a long time. That he acquired all the knowledge about the spirits and their whereabouts, that’s why when he came back to life, he retained all the knowhow and transmitted the news to everyone. Thus, *Thi-reng*,

i.e. to come back to life as soon as one dies and so to compound the word it got elongated as *Thireng-Vangreng*. But *Thireng* implies the living after death. Yes, it is needed during *Chomangkan* cause it deals with death. Also, the custom of *thireng* talks about how to do away with the dead, the necessary rules and norms to be observed and to finally be assured that the dead will also reach the better resting place/.../ it is also to revere and recount for the deaths of our ancestors/.../ and to drive away from the fear of death from the departing souls. By the way, this should be re-enacted and rehearsed for you to grasp the content better. (Ibid, May 25, 2020)

Thireng-Vangreng is the creation myth associated with the funerary custom of the Karbi. The concept of *Thireng-Vangreng* is attributed to the phenomenon of a person named There Bey in most of the myths responsible for initiating the funerary tradition among the Karbi. The narrative is sung as an episode in the *Mosera* repertoire. *Thireng-Vangreng* is an etiological narrative that functions as a parable that informs the Karbi about life and death. The peculiarity of this narrative is that it exists separately as part of the creation myth and also recounted during *Mosera* by giving the information necessary for the observance of *Chomangkan*.

From the numerous *Thireng-Vangreng* excerpts shown above, the theme remains constant. At the same time, nuances are in the forms of minor plot and character changes in the patterns of the narratives, i.e. an indication of the adaptations and circulations, making it rich in its transmission. The theme enumerates topics such as life after death; demarcation of realms between the living, the dead and the in-between; and finally, the establishment of funerary custom to distinguish the status of a soul. The narrative explores the human-non-human relationships and explains the negotiation of human curiosity with the afterlife and the human emotional longing for their loved ones who have passed by extending kinship ties to the realms of the ancestor's village.

3.2. *Mosera* in *Jir Kedam* and *Mono Ke'en*

The following section will elaborate upon information about *Jir Kedam* keeping the context of the ritual observance of *Mosera*. Here an excerpt is taken from the works of Dharamsing Teron to exemplify the background of *Jir Kedam*:

The narrative is sung by head of village youths, the *Klengsarpo* or his deputy, the *Klengdun*, during the special ritual of *Riso Chojun*. The ritual is observed to mark the end of the compulsory tradition of 'youth cooperative' known as *Jir Kedam*. Unmarried members of the primitive Karbi tradition of 'youth dormitory', known as *Terang*, participate in the *Jir Kedam* for a three-year duration. The *Jir Kedam* therefore serves the purpose of practical training to adulthood, a kind of 'rite of passage'. The conclusion of the *Jir Kedam* is therefore observed with due ritualistic importance. *Riso Chojun* is the occasion when the unmarried youths of the *Terang* formally part company from each other and begin a new life thereafter as adults, capable of taking on the complications and responsibilities of the society. Another important occasion when the *Mosera* is sung is during the funerary

rituals, called *Thi-karhi*. It is sung in a ‘question and answer’ fashion between the heads of village youths (*Terang*)— and this when they vie among each other in how much they can prolong the ‘breathlessness’. The *Klengsarpo* of the host village of *Thi-Karhi* apologizes to the visiting *Klengsarpo* praying for their forgiveness for any lapses or irregularities, which might have been committed during the festivity. (Teron, DS, 2012:150)

It should be noted that *Jir Kedam* was a youth ritual associated with initiating the young into cultural norms widely practised in the past among the Hills Karbi, and presently the custom has disappeared. The non-practice of *Jir Kedam* could be attributed to the shift in the modes of education from the traditional transmission of knowledge to the western education system, making the customary knowledge void in the face of institutional job affiliated sectors. While in terms of the Dumrali, it is almost the same ritual practice on the structural level with nuances present in the performative level. A variant of *Jir Kedam* known as *Mono Ke'en* among the Dumrali Karbi is enumerated below:

Literally *Mono* means Paddy or Rice and *Ke'en* means to take. It is generally an affair of 2 days, once in five years. All unmarried males and females of the village are to take part in the occasions. In the house of *Riso Bangthe* (an authority concern with the affairs of the youth of the village) the traditional folklore about the origin of rice and the route of migration taken by the Karbi from the place of their origin is retold. It is very much the same story which is told amongst the Hills Karbi (*Mosera-Kihir*) but with the name *Karbi Kevang* (*lit.* Karbi Coming) with some addition like the reason for the Karbi to start moving out from their ancestral village somewhere near *Inglong Kelok* (*lit.* White Mountain), which is unmistakably the Himalaya mountain range. There is a mentioned of Lhasa also on the way. The mentioning of *Kleng Mekar*, on whose head a flame of fire always glow to lead the Karbi during darkness is intriguingly interesting and to be noted. He is not mentioned anywhere in *Mosera-Kihir*, the hill version. *Terang* was supposed to be the porter who carried all the essential items needed for the whole village. The reason mentioned for the Karbi to move out of the ancestral village is also very interesting. It is said that the Karbi being very poetic and romantic once tried to touch the moon and play with it, seeing it stationed beautifully on the top of the *Inlong Kelok*. But when they climbed up to the top of the mountain and found the moon to be still afar and unreachable, then only did they realized their mistake. Since they felt ashamed to return to their ancestral village they decided to move forward towards the east and settled down somewhere else, which is not found in *Mosera-Kihir*. The mention of the river *Teron Longso*, where the *Teron* with divine power helped the others to cross a river with huge width by stretching himself like a bridge is also very interesting, which has again no mention in *Mosera-Kihir* with the exception of the river *Teron Longso*, where the paddy was supposed to be discovered by the Karbi which coincide very much with the version of the hills Karbi. (KarbiWordpress, Phangcho, 2012)

This change in the forms of ritual practices is the result of migration and the process of cultural exchange with the neighbouring communities, which is predominantly the Assamese. *Mono ke'en* is one of the only rituals among the Dumrali Karbi when *Mosera* is recounted. However, in this version of the Dumrali's *Mosera* otherwise known as *Arleng Kevang*, there is a mention of *Kling Mekar* or *Kleng Mekar* a supreme deity which is missing in the Dumrali version of the same narrative. While *Mosera* is recounted during the secondary cremation ritual amidst the Hills Karbi in the present scenario, it is observed on the occasion of harvest ceremony signifying fertility and rebirth.

The *Arleng Kevang* narrative is more about the retelling of the migration narrative of the Karbi and the origin of rice as two main themes deployed in the observance of *Mono Ke'en*. *Jir Kedam*, on the other hand, is a more elaborate ceremony connected with the youth dormitory. The youth dormitory or dormitories are usually located close to the villages in the past, where it was a mandatory affair for the boys to stay. Still, the girls after every day's learning would return by night to their households. This facility has an uncanny resemblance with a modern-day boarding school. This period of three years is marked as a period of growth and transition from childhood to adulthood. By the end of the youth dormitory, as part of the closing ceremony, *Riso Chojun* is observed where *Mosera* is recounted as a procedure to accustom the youth before they take on their individual lives as adults.

Another essential feature of both *Jir Kedam* and *Mono Ke'en* ceremony is the omission of *Thireng-Vangreng* episode as it is not deemed relevant for the occasion. The focus of both traditions relies on the notion of imparting traditional knowledge to the youth. In terms of *Chomangkan*, the ceremony can be very well understood in the words of my informant Morningkeey Phangcho, “[*Chomangkan*] which is the propitiation of the dead. The ritual which allows the dead to go back to the village of origin.” (telephonic interview, June 17 2020). For no other ritual, there is so much effort, energy and time spent at the perils of one's economic position.

3.2.1. Bhoi Mynri Version of *Mosera* (1)

Sarpo Lekthe (aged 96), a ritual practitioner and resident of Mai Kramsa village, Bhoi Mynri, performed a version of *Mosera* which I recorded. Here is a summary of the performance, the ritual practitioner starts by acknowledging his teachers, revering ancestors and protective spirits asking for their guidance and blessings to attain strength to recite the sacred narrative and recount in a just manner. The opening section constitutes a homage paid to the earlier teachers by the performer, a standard norm in the beginning of every ritual chant. The first sequence is known as *Riso Chihut* (lit. formal conversation between the host and the visitors). I played the role of the ‘visitor’ during the ritual performance, and my request for a formal performance of the *Mosera* was acknowledged and incorporated into the opening sequence.

The narrator/ritual performer first pleads for forgiveness in advance incase any lapse or inconvenience were to occur in the course of the recital. This opening sequence serves the function of ensuring a smooth progression of the narration by appeasing the ancestor spirits. The ritual performer was well aware that his performance existed outside the typical circumstance, and so he prepared his

delivery according to the scenario removed from the funerary performative context. To begin, Sarpō Lekthe clarified the situation of the performance for the ancestors and teachers by stating the purpose as part of cultural preservation. He then poured a bottle gourd of alcohol over a banana leaflet placed with a betel nut as an offering to the spirits.

Once the performer is through fulfilling the necessary obligations as part of the ritual, he ended the first part by summarising the content of the sacred chant stressing on '[from] the time of birth and the time of creation until the return to the ancestor's village'.

The second section or episode of the narrative is known as *Jutang* (lit. culture) and *Thireng-Vangreng ahir* (lit. the custom of 'to die and to live, to come back to life'). The central theme of the verse enumerates upon the origin story of the Karbi and other neighbouring cultures and recounts the migration memory. The creation myth denotes that Karbi and other humans emerged from the eggs of the bats under the Teji tree in the vast universe on the surface of the earth filled with water bodies, infested with non-human entities and spirits at the very beginning. There's an explicit mentioning of the emergence of the Assamese, and the Khasis from the eggs alongside Karbi who came last. According to the epic, all humans came from a single mother and father. The Karbi originated first at Varche and Varkong when the earth was young and the soil soft, and the spirits dwelled the surface. But in time, the humans evolved and progressed, establishing Kings and forming kingdoms. These humans found ways to fend themselves from the malevolent spirits and offend benevolent spirits, driving them away by developing guns,¹² cannons, arrows, and bows. Then the humans all split in various factions and fought for kinship ties and supremacy among themselves. Chaos and unrest brewed with tensions making the humans unable to live together. Unable to live alongside one another the Karbi fled to the east, to the west and embarked upon a perilous journey through difficult terrains crossing the river Kupli/Kopili/Kopli¹³ and the river Diyung¹⁴. Once again, after crossing the rivers, the migrating Karbi were met with the Assamese people with whom they befriended. At first, the Assamese people showed generosity and offered the Karbi oars and a place to stay by the river-side. For some time, the Karbi lived together with the Assamese, but then again they did not give the Karbi land to claim and farm, snatched the betel nut garden, usurped trade, and seized commerce. The Karbi could not continue with oppressive and hostile treatments and decided to leave for the rising sun, for the setting sun.

¹² Guns and cannons could be a recent modification in the narrative

¹³ A river that flows through the states of Meghalaya and Assam

¹⁴ A river that flows through Dima Hasao district in Assam



Fig. 3 Sarpo Lekthe

They ventured far until they arrived at Longprui and Labang¹⁵ where they stayed for a while amidst the Khasis and the Keche. At this point, many of the Karbi died adjusting to the terrain, succumbing to reed and straw cuts. Death plagued the Karbi, unaware of what to do with the dead bodies they left the bodies to the streams which would carry away the dead not giving a proper resting place. The rotten bodies eaten by the forces of nature made the Karbi grieve and prompted them to carry back their dead inside the sanctified shelter. Then emerged a deathless person who came to be known as *Thireng-Vangreng* who could cross over life and death simultaneously, according to the myth *Thireng* was the usher of funerary customs to the Karbi. Thus, began the tradition of *Thireng-Vangreng*, i.e. a custom that informs the Karbi about cremating the dead – that the dead must return to the village of grandparents, whence they came from. So the custom of *Thireng-Vangreng* must be remembered until the earth becomes strong and the soil fertile.

Then came the cultural reform when the Karbi assigned specific roles and positions to suit themselves as a community better and distribute work accordingly. Soon, they learnt about cultivating the paddy and got acquainted with the agricultural process. The brewing of alcohol began, so did the

¹⁵ Labang-gahtawng, village in Bhamo district in the Kachin State of Northeastern Burma. (Although, the name Labang could be a reference to some other place.)

forms of music and dance forms flourished. But the journey continued, and they next ventured to Nongkirla and finally journeying to the land of Dumra.

Finally, the last section is known as the responsive verse called *Chong Avan Nok Avan Kepador* (*lit.* the repayment of the shield and sword's respect). The host and visitors engage in a dialogue in this section of the epic, where the host would extend courtesy and express gratitude for their participation in the secondary cremation ritual. Also, in case of any shortcomings, the host would ask for the visitor's forgiveness. If any inconsistencies were observed during the recounting of *Mosera* or the entire observance of *Chomangkan*, the visiting youth head chief of the villages are allowed to point out. This concludes the recital of *Mosera*.

3.2.2. Bhoi Mynri Version of *Mosera* (2)

This version of *Mosera* was performed by Longsing Bey at AIR (All India Radio), Diphu Karbi Anglong district, Assam, on 22/02/2014 recorded by Dharamsing Teron. Another version of Bhoi-Mynri which is known as *Jutang Keron* (*lit.* culture transmission) otherwise called *Mosera Kihir*. This recital is once again recorded outside of its actual context by my contributor Dharamsing Teron for preservation and study. The narrator assumes the roles of both the host and visitor's position as the narrative is in the format of dialogue. The narrator first began with the section *Riso Chihut* (*lit.* formal conversation between the host and the visitors) which in the ritual scenario pertains to the inaugural ceremony where the host of the village offers their courtesy to all the visitors, dignitaries from the neighbouring communities, and clan members. Also mentioned their village names, Du-Nongkirla, Nili, Kongka giving additional information about the visitor's locality who were presumably present during the last course of the event from the memory of the performer, as a reference. The performer then addressed the elders and chiefs, asking for an apology to compensate for any lapse in the verses. Towards the end of the verse, a reference to the ritual, i.e. *Chomangkan* was made in regards to the offerings for the dead. At this point, the narrator, through his verse, enacted the recital of *Mosera*, where when the host group and the visitor group are engaged in dialogue. Once both groups come to terms with the rightful display of the event and the chant, then proceed to the next section of *Mosera*.

The second section of this narrative is *Karbi Karbak Keplang* (*lit.* origin of Karbi/creation myth). The segment began with the dialogue where the host stated the importance of recounting the *Mosera*, to trace the origins of Karbi. The next verses in the section beautifully depicted the beginning of everything started with the creation of the vast universe, then came the planets, earth, and the surface of the planets. But there were no living organisms until that time. Then the tremendous divine

entity *Songsar*¹⁶ (an almighty creator in the Karbi belief system often referred to as *Songsar Richo*, *lit.* King of the worlds) willed to create micro-organisms, organisms of various forms. Then came the bats who procreated and laid a thousand eggs, put in the cave, in the crevice, precipice and the gorge. However, one pure egg was laid under an upright rock at the feet of Teji and Timur plant. One by one the eggs then rolled over and hatched; one became the Khasis, later became the Nagas, then became the Assamese. Even though the Karbi were the firstborn, they feared the forces of nature, the vultures, crows, maggots, and flies. While the Assamese, not fearful of the effects of the environment, occupied the lands and the homestead. In due time, the humans started growing in numbers, the plant lives flourished. Malevolent spirits and benevolent spirits lived among humans at that point of time, which was followed by the season of the great epidemic¹⁷. Soon, the malevolent and benevolent spirits took over the lands as they possessed authority and power, forcing the Karbi to flee. So the Karbi marched on journeying across difficult terrains.

As the Karbi fled to newer terrains for the first time, they encountered death. The next section is the verse of *Thireng-Vangreng* (*lit.* creation myth of mortuary ritual) which is joined with the creation of culture episode. Here, the Karbi in their migration are met with terrifying deaths due to grass cuts, insect bites, falling and so on. Many died along the way and unaware of the cremation customs, the corpses laid all over wherever they walked. The pandemic of death swarmed all over, turning Karbi into dead bodies and the forces of nature; vulture, crow, fly, and maggots fed on the rotting remains. Until then there was no tradition of cremation which could lead the soul of the dead back to the grandparent's village. The smell of death reeked and covered the mountains and valleys as the Karbi were on the verge of extinction.

Then came a person could not die and came to be known as *Thireng-Vangreng* who brought the knowledge of funerary custom to the Karbi. Thus, the custom of *Thireng-Vangreng* came to existence. To initiate the funerary ritual, *Songsar* appointed leaders and elders, but that was not enough to ward off death. Then *Ucha* (*lit.* tiger priest), animal tamers, big ones and the tall ones were created, and that sorcery and witchcraft came to be and must be done in a just manner. Young men and women were created to represent the age of beauty and youth, the ones who wiped tears and sorrows. And so *Duihudi* (*lit.* sacred master drummer) and *Duhoijang* (*lit.* assistant of the master drummer) were created to play the rhythm that would guide the souls of the dead to the land of the dead. *Uchepi* (*lit.* caretaker of the dead) and *Ubokpi* (*lit.* baby caretaker) were made to look after the funerary rituals. These essential roles were appointed by the divine being so that the Karbi offsprings would have abled chiefs and leaders. The next step was to build a village, and so the search for suitable mountains

¹⁶A lone Hindi word meaning The world.

¹⁷ When the migrating Karbi died in numbers while encountering the forces of nature. Death plagued the people in the form of epidemic.

and precipice began. To protect the offsprings from further falling into death, a place for the grandchildren to gather was found somewhere where others have been and lived. A site brought the Karbi to, *Longle Ache' te* (*lit.* the navel of the earth) where the first Karbi village was established, and *Sot Richo* became the first king. And so the recital concludes.

3.2.3. Dumrali Version of *Mosera*

The *Mosera* is called *Arleng Kevang* (*lit.* coming of Karbi) or *Jutang* (*lit.* culture) among the plains Karbi or Dumrali and it is performed in a storytelling format. In the following, the Dumrali version of *Karbi kevang/Arleng Kevang* will be presented which in its original performance was narrated in the Assamese language. The name of the performer is, Padum Ingti, now deceased, recorded by Dhireshwar Rongpi at Phong-Ari, Sonapur district, 2013-2014.

The *Karbi kevang* narrative amongst the Dumrali Karbi is narrated to the youth by the elderly during the harvest ritual known as, *Mono-Ke'en* or the harvesting of paddy. The narrator starts off the great Karbi migration story with the concept *Arni Aso Kelem* (*lit.* to play with the sun) which was the result, one of the central legends or myths behind the great migration. As a consequence of the chasing of the sun, the Karbi population split up into small groups branching out all over the present-day Northeastern region of India. The Karbi people moved from its original habitat, i.e. Mongolia.

Along with the chase, the sun kept shifting its position more towards the east compelling the people to follow the route leading them to Japan. In quest of the sun, the people kept moving further exploring the farthest grounds in the east until there were no more lands to set foot on and where mighty oceans roared marking its territory. Oceans meant that it was impossible to reach the other side hindering the quest for the ever-moving sun. This hindrance did not stop the people from chasing the giant ball of fire, so they continued to follow the trail of the sun by moving alongside the coasts of the seas and reached China. But the migratory route did not stop there, and the chase for the sun beckoned them to advance deeper into the terrains of present-day Burma.

After ages of moving from places to places in pursuit of the giant ball of fire, the naive Karbi people had finally realised their defeat as the sun would keep revolving and hovering over the skies. It dawned to the people that at this point, it was not possible to keep chasing the sun or either make a journey back from where they started. This intuition prompted the Karbi to travel across Burma or then in the olden days formerly known as *Brahmadekh* (*lit.* trans. Big country/Brahma's nation), amidst all the excursion they started cultivating along the way. Agriculture did not stop the people from voyaging, so the migrating hoard of Karbi kept moving until they reached the present-

day Dimapur, Nagaland India, whereby they lived temporarily amongst other tribes and communities then later advanced to Diphu, Karbi Anglong in Assam, and then to Hamren, Karbi Anglong.

This epic journey is the reason why the Karbi elders assert that at one point of time, all Karbi groups lived together, namely *Amri and Chinthong*. Although during further migration, the Karbi king remained seated at Hamren while the subjects chose to live at Diphu. After several years, it was noted that the Kachari/Kosari had been following a similar route migrating from distant lands directing them next to the Karbi's current habitat. For many years to come, the two communities had co-existed, and the Kosari population grew in leaps thriving in the suitable conditions for life. With the growth in number, the Kosaris felt the need to form a kingdom and crown a king mirroring the Karbi's way of being governed by a King at that time, who was seated at Chinthong. Eventually, the Kosaris established their newly found kingdom, North Cachar/Kachar also known in the present day as N.C. Hills, and crowned a king.

And then, a dispute broke out between the Karbi and the Kosari resulting in a war where the latter were defeated. But due to the humble nature of the Karbi, the Kosaris were not driven out immediately. So the Kosaris lived, but they hatched a plan to get even. And so the Kosari King's daughter devised a strategy to propose for a marital alliance with the warrior of Karbi known as Nokbe who belonged to a *Terang* clan. Without any objection, the Karbi agreed, and so the marriage alliance was forged between the Rongkhang king and Kosari king. And soon the days passed, but the Kosaris were not done with their revenge, and so the Kosari King proposed a new scheme of hosting Swayamvar¹⁸ which is known as *Kamai* to the Dumrali Karbi. In this celebration, the main catch was to entrap the Karbi warrior at whose hands they had previously faced defeat. And so the condition of the ceremony for the suitor was to acquire the biggest fish. Upon fulfilling the task would be granted a marriage with the Kosari princess. However, the main motive behind this condition was the cunning idea of obtaining a fish big enough to conceal a big *Nok* (*lit. machete*) and a small one within.

And so the search for the big fish began and continued for several days. The Karbi warrior was one of the suitors on the lookout. On the hindsight, the Karbi warrior's wife also a Kosari princess realised the ploy and forewarned Nokbe telling him that this was a conspiracy against him. That whenever the Nokbe went to bathe at the river Kolong¹⁹, the Kosaris would inspect the fishes for concealing Nokbe's machetes both big and small. But Nokbe dismissed the warning and continued

¹⁸ A practice in ancient India, where a girl would choose her husband from a list of suitors. This practice among the Kosaris indicate a hinduism influence.

¹⁹ Kolong or Kailang, a tributary of Brahmaputra river.

the hunt for the biggest fish, and went to Deepor Beel²⁰ where big fishes were to be found, and so the warrior emerged successful in finally finding the biggest fish. That fish was carried across through Brahmaputra river over the water it was transported until Kolong and then through Itila Ghogora (a place in Sonapur, Dimoria) it was taken to Puronigudam²¹ and then brought to the Kosari King. The big fish was then meticulously checked by the Kosari subjects making sure that the machetes would fit in perfectly. The Kosari king took the Nokbe aside far away from where the fish was being examined. Thanking him by offering alcohol, flattened rice and grained rice as a sign of mock courtesy for his service.

On the other side, the Kosari subjects inserted Nokbe's machetes (without his knowledge, stealing from him) inside a big and small fish and deliberately acted surprised by the finding and immediately informed the Kosari King. The Kosari king then waged war upon the Karbi, Nokbe was awestruck, but he had to prepare for war, so he rushed back home to get his machetes, which was missing. Eventually, Nokbe fought bare hands, killing many Kosari soldiers that his hands were soaked in blood which solidified joining both his palms together. Making it impossible to part his palms, and Nokbe slowly grew tired, thirsty and worn out by the battle. He went to a nearby pool of water where he bent down to drink water, that's when the Kosari soldier ambushed him from behind decapitating his head. Nokbe lay dead and slain; the Kosaris finally emerged victoriously. Still, they discussed the aftermath and realised that the legacy of warriors would be born over time and chose not to do anything about it. Instead, the Kosari king decided to dictate the Karbi with an iron fist.

The times that followed after was filled with the wrath of the Kosari king; the Karbi incurred tremendous ordeals. One misery in particular imposed by the Kosari king was the demand for breast milk from the Karbi women to feed his tiger cubs. This inhuman treatment carried on for a period reflecting oppression and humiliation of the Karbi people by the Kosari king. Until one day, when the Kosari subjects were on their usual job collecting breast milk from the Karbi women that they encountered Rongpharpi, a mighty woman (who is popularly known as Rongpharpi Rongbe otherwise). At first, Rongphari asked for their permission to allow her to keep the woodstock that she was carrying from work, but the Kosari subjects declined and started harassing her. This altercation infuriated Rongpharpi who grabbed hold of her *Cho*(axe) and swung it across the two Kosari subjects splitting their heads and killing them.

The news of the killings spread fast echoing into the Kosari king's court in no time who was enraged and ordered his subjects to torture the Karbi immediately. This rebellious act by Rongpharpi elevated the spirits of the Karbi who were suppressed by the Kosari dominance. The Karbi king and

²⁰ Fresh water lake at the south of Guwahati, Kamrup district in Assam.

²¹ A village in Nagaon district in Assam.

subjects at Rongkhang and Chinthong²² also got the news of this uprising and the atrocities inflicted by the Kosari king, and so the Karbi king and subjects discussed and debated. To fend and free the Karbi from the Kosari rule, the Chingthong and Rongkhang banded together and devised an escape plan. The Chinthong Karbi were well known for their magical abilities, and so they cast a spellbinding chant on the Kosari king. The spell altered the images of Karbi into trees and plants in the Kosari King's eyes during the daylight, while the Karbi fled during the night. This journey led the Karbi to the Khasi territories and during that time, the Amri²³ Karbi who were in a state of warfare.

Further driving the Karbi migrants from settling in one place, so the travel continued until they reached Lumding²⁴, from there again they moved to Kopili²⁵. From there they once again moved forward crossing Kolong, finally settling in the Dumra state. "Those Karbi residing in the plains of Kamrup and Morigaon district of Assam, and the Ri-Bhoi districts of Meghalaya identify themselves as the Dumrali or plains Karbi" (Ibid, Phangcho, 2007).

The Amri Karbi were the first settlers in the Kamrup region. So they established their Dumrali *Recho* (lit. Dumrali king). And the custom of *Son-Sirkep Son-Thongkep* (lit. nine kings and thirty chiefs) was sanctioned and together the kings and chiefs governed the Dumrali people. In the past, each king was assigned small states to administer, the names are as follows, 1. Tikira Recho, 2. Dengja Recho, 3. Borkuchi Recho, 4. Panbari Rrecho, 5. Mayong Recho, 6. Kwanchi Recho, 7. Bel-tola Recho, 8. Pirla/Pirlo Recho. Amongst them all, the supreme king the Dumrali or Dimura Recho. Soon after, the Dumrali king and Khasi king established friendship, the Khasi king was called, 'Bhoi/Bhor Manik Si'im'. There was a close and cordial relationship between the communities, and for this reason, in the past, the Dumrali territory extended from Umroi to Barapani.

Two brothers named Milyiem and Khyrim who lived in those areas discussed their shares of the region. The younger brother Milyiem demanded to his elder brother Khyrim to give him this share. Due to the elder brother's inability to map the land, the demarcation of the area was brought below the Nurshi Mountain where three poles were erected to denote the boundary. 10 km from Kamyung to Murumai (Raid Marmain in Ri Bhoi). Those three poles till date exist as a testimony. During this time the prime minister of Assam was Gopinath Bordoloi who held a commission which mapped the territories which resulted in a part of Dumrali land being drafted to the Meghalaya. Dumrali Karbi are to be found in the Kamrup region as well as the Bhoi Mynri region of Meghalaya for this reason.

²² Karbi geographical unit.

²³ A geographical unit from where the group of Karbi broke off to form Dumrali.

²⁴ A city in Hojai District, Assam.

²⁵ Largest south bank tributary of Brahmaputra flowing through Assam and Meghalaya.

4. Contemporary Adaptations of *Mosera*

When looking at *Mosera* from the lenses of the present-day context, the observance of this sacred chant is still very limited to the context of *Chomangkan*. From the several correspondences that I had made through social media sites I found that the trend of the contemporary Karbi society, especially among the youth, reflects a state of unawareness when asked about *Mosera*. A disconnect from the cultural practices result from the lack of traditional knowledge transmission and this is the case of the kids growing up in urban dwellings. As most of my informants have pointed out that one major condition is the non-popularity of traditional practices within the Karbi urban society.

Many of my informants have also pointed out that tradition vs modernity is one essential factor, I am repeating my argument that certain cultural traits are either adapted to suit the conditions of existence or simply left behind as a thing of the past. The sustenance of any traditional practices is a case of an ongoing negotiation between the culture bearers and the culture itself in every step of evolution. Survival of the fittest is not just applicable to humans and animals as such but even to traditions. Tradition either transforms or just ceases to exist.

However, there have been new developments with the circulation of *Mosera* which can be found in the practices of different Karbi religious groups namely, Bhaktitom and the emergence of cultural revival tendencies circulating in the social media platform Facebook. My supervisor Margaret Lyngdoh during her fieldwork earlier this year recorded a snippet of *Mosera* which was performed by Phuningding Kathar, who is part of the Bhaktitom trust which is an amalgamation of Karbi traditional religion and Hinduism and a Karbi folksinger and musician. Below is a snippet of the performance, a modern-day adaptation of *Mosera*:

Umm dei, / Umm then

Chenam te la Mosera pini anke / It is true, the story of Mosera until today

Li Karbi ante / That we are Karbi

Li Karbi ante / That we are Karbi

Lapu nang plang mati / This is how we originated

Lapu nang phi mati / This is how we were created

An teji li akeng'ri tema / That it was under Teji tree

An timur li aKeng'ri tema / That it was under Timur tree

Plakvuk'pi ati tema / That it was the egg of the mother bat

Plakvuk'po ati tema / That it was the egg of the father bat
Ati pum kre'hini tema / There were twelve eggs
Apum kre'hini tema / There were twenty two eggs
Durmi le kangkovi tema / The earth was hollow
Urmi le Kangkovi tema / the soil was wide open
Nang'phi rang rang nangpi haihe / About to be born, but afraid to be born
Nang jok rang rang nang jok haihe / About to be released, but afraid to be released
Chenam te Mosera lale bise ningke / It is true, the story of Mosera until today
Li Karbi ante / That we are Karbi
Li Karbak ante / That we are the people
Pu nangplang lo ke / This is how we were born
Pu nangphi lo ke / This is how we were created
An timurli akeng'ri tema / That it was under the Timur tree
Plakvuk'pi ati tema / It was the egg of the mother bat
Plakvuk'po ati tema / It was the egg of the father bat
Ili Karbi ante / That we are Karbi
Ili Karbak ante / That we are the people
Eli nangplang ke / We were created
Eli nangphi ke / We were born
Hemphu a'ok pensi / From the flesh of Hemphu (supreme deity)
Pothe a'ok pensi / From the flesh of the great father
Eli nangplang lo ke / That we were born
Eli nangphi lo ke / That we were created
Dei / Then
Lasi pini / that today
Jo keplang chingthum / That we are tracing the past
Maan kephi chingthum / That we are tracing the origin
Si Mosera chingthum / That we are recounting Mosera
Dei / Then
Chenam te Mosera lale bise ningke / It is true , the story of Mosera until today

An organisation called Karbi Loh-Charli Jutang Aterank (*lit.* Karbi Student's Cultural Club) KLJA organised an online Karbi traditional song competition called, *Karbi Lunbarim Chepate* from (June 26-27, 2020) which has garnered a lot of following in the social media circuit. The list of

songs sent by the participants ranged from folksongs, lullabies, ballads and *Mosera* in particular. A total of 25 Karbi youth participated, fascinatingly there were four candidates who performed snippets of *Mosera*. It is a noteworthy effort of the KLJA amidst the COVID situation to organise an online cultural event that not only evokes the Karbi people's interest but at the same time captures their imagination with the representation of cultural practices. Another snippet of *Mosera* performed by Longbini Rongpi from Den-arong studying at Diphu B.Ed college is also present in this text. (See appendix)

The re-emergence of *Mosera* is a recent phenomenon, social media is the new mode of cultural transmission, as more and more part of our lives become digital. Here is a brief analysis of the above two snippets of *Mosera*. A modern-day adaptation and rendition of the performance style have not changed much from the traditional form. But when examining the themes, both these two snippets converge on a common theme of the creation myth and there's a reference to the egg and bat motif responsible for the origin. The first snippet is a very brief recitation of *Mosera* but in its recitation, it attributes a divine intervention in the creation myth like the second Bhoi Mynri version. Both the snippets talk about the origin of Karbi from the eggs of the bat, a similar reference is made in the 1st Bhoi Mynri version. While the second snippet is a minute longer and manages to cover one more theme, namely the sections dedicated to the conversations between the host and the visitors, the thanksgiving part. In the creation myth verse, it refers to the creation of Langlu or Lalung which is a reference to the Tiwa²⁶ tribe.

The mnemonic markers are present in both the snippets, although it is variations the second snippet uses the oral formula of mnemonic markers more extensively. Even though, from the video source obtained it shows that the second performer read out much of the repertoire. These two snippets can be treated as a short version of modern-day adaptations, even though it does not account for the entirety of *Mosera* it is safe to say that in the present it has revived the essence of cultural knowledge.

Social media is a platform that stimulates the interest of the young and old generations. Social media is an easy access hub and the best tool for transmitting information to a large population and storing traditional knowledge. India is a country where poverty and basic amenities are a major concern, but not the case of internet and mobile connection, which is on the rise. On a brighter note, the internet made access to information and transmission of traditional knowledge possible at some level. What becomes of these modern-day adaptations of *Mosera* is still a far sight.

²⁶ An indigenous tribe spread all over Northeastern India, recognised as a Scheduled tribe in Assam.

Conclusion

The different versions of *Mosera* two Bhoi Mynri and one Dumrali versions presented in this thesis reflect the richness of the narrative and its highly folklorised nature. *Mosera* is an umbrella term used by the various settlements of Karbi throughout Assam, Meghalaya and parts of Northeast India indicating their versions of Karbi traditional understanding. I may safely conclude with this thesis, that there is not one *Mosera* but multiple variations that are as diverse as the migration of Karbi people. As such, the three versions point strongly to the centrality of the oral tradition in the Karbi worldview. *Mosera* is not just about the etiological narratives; it is about the human-non-human relationship observed between the Karbi and ancestor spirits, indicating strong kinship ties that bind the community beyond life and death. The human-non-human relationship is best understood in the word of my informant, “*Mosera*...is referred to the things that cannot be seen... that which is not visible but that on whose behalf the work is done.”(Ibid, May 25, 2020) The Karbi indigenous religious practices in general also point at the human-non-human continuum in the Karbi ontology, the propitiation of ancestors and protective spirits are a central theme in the Karbi way of life.

In the *Mosera* texts I documented, performances vary from one to the other while remaining cohesive at the thematic framework implying a common cultural background. Studying the different performance contexts, mainly on *Chomangkan* and briefly drawing from *Mono Ke'en*, and *Jir Kedam*, of *Mosera*, contributed in the conceptualization of the narrative meaning and the ritual performance associated with the epics. The primary purpose in the collection of three variants of the epic is to show a comparative analysis of the texts and find out whether it is an epic about the Karbi oral tradition. But it goes on to show that while the institution of the Karbi Youth Dormitory does not exist in the present day, the ritual associated with it, i.e the *Mosera* has survived. Bateson's concept of frame aided in interpreting the meanings behind the Karbi traditional custom and ritual associated with *Mosera* taking Karbi language as the primary source for interpretative analysis of the oral epic texts.

While scripting the oral epics, I turned to ethnopoetics as a method, and it integrates the approaches from folkloristics and linguistics. Ethnopoetics seemed promising theoretically, until the

working on the texts began, due to time constraints and the lack of linguistics' background I did not use the scripting method of ethnopoetics instead fell back to Honko's textualization method.

Textualization was the most accessible and helpful approach not just in the scripting of Mosera but as a methodology, and it offered essential steps, namely, recording, transcription, translation, and publication. One of the drawbacks while textualizing the *Mosera* was the study of variants outside its ritual-performance context that prompted the condensing of the materials into one streamline.

To remedy the problems faced while textualizing the epics Honko suggested that the employment of empirical research in the study of epic traditions require a contextual approach combined with an interdisciplinary discourse. The inability to incorporate interdisciplinary method in the study of live ritual performance context is yet another setback in my research. Nonetheless, it is a learning process for me in this scholarship. In the future, I hope to carry out a contextual and interdisciplinary approach in my research.

The other challenge while textualizing the epics was the treatment of the sacred texts. *Mosera* epics possess sacred knowledge which is both 'secret' and 'sacred', and without the proper culturally sanctioned regulations, the transmission of the epics is a taboo and violates the customary norms. *Mosera* is a ritual associated with sung, chanted, and narrated epic, and for this reason, with the guidance from my supervisor, I chose to present only one complete translated version of the epic. For ethical concerns, while transcribing the texts I took the help of my informants and contributor to avoid interference and misinterpretations of the sacred text. The translation of the ritual language into another language, i.e. English, helped me maintain the distance from disrupting the sacred nature of the oral verses. Under no circumstances, I want to breach the Karbi ritual convention, so keeping distance with the sacred text enabled me to present the narrative as it is.

Tradition is something that accumulates over time, a reservoir that stores the collective memories and practices of the community, and it can be looked at as a communal habit that distinguishes one group from another. Tradition is a collective expression be it in written or in an oral form constitutes the cultural origins albeit patterned in a semi-historic or mythical fashion it bears great importance for the community as it is a way to make sense of their environment and come to terms with reality. However, the flow of cultural practices are never linear, and so is the case with the Karbi, transformations in the cultural practices have catapulted the community in the backseat due to the lack of traditional knowledge transmission.

Mosera is fragmented, just like the fragmentary memories the current generation have about the traditional Karbi religious practices. Much of the conventional knowledge is left in the realms of

‘autopilot’²⁷ (by this term I am trying to imply the unconscious embodiment of culture); it is like doing something because it is the societal norms and not understanding why it is done because it is so innate and ordinary that the underlying meaning behind such customs and practices are unquestioned and ignored. Cultural practices are taken for granted most of the times because it is all around us that people forget to ask ‘why we do what we do?’. This growing tendency of ‘autopilot’ is due to generation gap which leads to the loss of cultural interpretation faced by the youth who are socially distanced from the communal sanctioned activities. The social distancing between the traditional knowledge and the present Karbi generation is evident as more and more youth are drawn to the urban lifestyle and global trends.

Karbi can be said to have a rich oral tradition, and the significance of this research lies in the transmission of cultural knowledge to the modern Karbi audience (at the earliest) and international readership. Since the Karbi gained the Autonomous district status in the early 1950s, the community thrived in politics and other social affairs, but some aspects of the culture started eroding from the Karbi memory. The concept of *Mosera* is one such cultural trait that took a back seat in the contemporary Karbi psyche until it resurfaced after almost sixty years in 2008 with the works of Dharamsing Teron who documented Karbi oral tradition and succeeded in bringing it back to the people's attention. It is not that *Mosera* lost its prominence in modern times as it is still performed in the secondary cremation ritual. Again, the problem in recognizing *Mosera* lies with the loss of cultural interpretation, lack of reasoning and negligence by the generations that came afterwards. In general, many customary practices are practised by contemporary Karbi without the adequate knowhow of why it is even done due to fast-changing and diminishing relevance of the cultural heritage. The formulation of oral text into written forms creates a structure and cohesion of the epic necessary for people in the present times. On this note, it is my concern to represent it to the Karbi people in a detail-oriented and orderly manner for access to such cultural routine. Also, I hope that my attempt at analyzing the details of the concept of *Mosera* and the ritual associated will become a reference point for future scholars.

²⁷ This term developed while discussing about culture with my friend Boycha Yengkhom, who brought up this term. This terminology does not apply to or borrow from any disciplinary discourse.

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Mosera eeposed Karbi rituaalides ja suulises traditsioonis: dokumenteerimine ja tekstualiseerimise probleem

Mosera on Karbi eepos, mis tähendab 'möödunu meenutamine'; see on Karbi kultuuri, põlvnemispärimuse ja rändemälu alusmüür. *Mosera* esineb Karbi Anglongi piirkonnas ja laiemalt Kirde-Indias paljudes versioonides, millest igaüks esindab erinevat narratiivi. *Mosera* eepost esitatakse teisase matmistseremoonia *Chomangkan* ja lõikusfestivali *Mono Ke'en* ajal, mil küla noorte pealik *Klengsarpo* peab eepost laulma toetatuna abipealik *Klengdun* poolt. Käesolev *Mosera* uurimistöö on võrdlev analüüs eepose kolmest variandist, mille ma kogusin, et saavutada laiemat arusaamist ning leida sarnasusi ja variatsioone. Uurimistöö keskendub teisase matmistseremoonia kontekstile, kuigi ajalised piirangud ja antud rituaali harv toimumine ei lubanud mul seda ise vahetult vaadelda. *Chomangkan* on taas-kremeerimise rituaal, mis järgneb tegelikule matusel. *Mosera* ei käsitle ainult põlvnemislugu; see räägib ka inimeste ja mitte-inimeste suhetest, mida Karbi rahvas ja esivanemate vaimud järgivad, ning osundab tugevatele sugulussidemetele, mis seovad kogukonda üle elu ja surma. Esivanemate ja kaitsevaimude austamine on Karbi eluviisi keskseks teemaks. Uurimistöö keskendub *Mosera* mõistmisele, pühade tekstide edasiandmisele, etnopoeetikale kui eeposte analüüsi võrdlusmeetodile ning narratiivide tekstualiseerimise probleemidele.

Uurimistöö põhineb välitöödel, mis tehti Karbi Anglongis jaanuaris 2020, kus mul oli võimalus koguda üks *Mosera* versioon. Teised kaks versiooni on kogutud minu kaastööliste poolt, kes lubasid mul oma materjale kasutada. Välitööd seisnesid Bhoi Mynri versiooni dokumenteerimises fotode, audiosalvestuse ja intervjuu vormis. Samas välitöö muud aspektid hõlmasid põgusaid arutelusid kogukonna liikmetega ning elektroonilist küsitlust *Mosera* kohta. Andmestik ilmestab erinevaid eepose ettekandmise viise, esitamise kontekste, muutumist ja tänapäevaseid adaptatsioone võrreldes neid varasemate töödega eepose kohta.

Materjalide analüüs toob välja ettekandmisviiside variatsioonid esitamisel. *Mosera*t esitatakse nii proosanarratiivina (Dumrali versioon) kui skandeeritud narratiivina (Bhoi Mynri versioon), mida kinnitavad eepose kolm varianti. *Mosera* laulmine toimub ühe hingetõmbega 'küsimus-vastus' moel vastuvõtjate ja teistest küladest tulijate juhtide vahel. *Mono Ke'en* ajal eepost jutustatakse. Bhoi Mynri versioonide narratiivne struktuur hõlmab teemasid nagu loomislugu, matmiskombestik ja rändemälestused. Seevastu Dumrali versioon keskendub rändemälestustele ja kultuurilistele kokkupuudetele. Ränne on ühine teema, mis esineb kõigis kolmes kirjelduses ning jagab mõnesid sarnaseid koha- ja veekogude nimesid.

Mis puudutab tänapäevaseid *Mosera* adaptatsioone, siis käesoleva COVID-19 pandeemia ajal ilmus eepos hiljuti esmakordselt sotsiaalmeedia platvormile, kui *Karbi Loh-Charli Jutang Aterank* (KLJA) korraldas Facebookis Karbi lauluvõistluse. Kultuuriline repertuaar, mis on pikka aega järjest hääbunud, on taas Karbi kollektiivsesse teadvusesse tagasi tulnud.

Mosera on kõrgelt folkloriseeritud Karbi suuline repertuaar, tavade kollektiivne väljendus ja kultuurilise pärimuse kehastus. *Mosera* on lugu Karbi rahvast. Tänapäeval on teadmine *Moserast* Karbi teadvuses vähene, sest põlvkondade lõhe Karbi ühiskonnas on loonud sotsiaalse distantssi kultuuriliste praktikate ja rahva vahele, mille tõttu pärimuslik teadmine on puudulik.

Appendices

In this section, two appendices were developed to give extra information about the texts of *Mosera* epics. These appendices are further subdivided onto sub-appendices to better show the information according to the transcripts, translations and a sample of fieldwork interview. The data presented in the appendices are qualitative in nature and give adequate knowledge in the understanding of the epics of *Mosera*.

SECTION A

Transcripts and translations, the data presented under this section are the three versions of *Mosera* texts alongside a version of the modern-day adaptation. Note that, The 2nd Bhoi Mynri version was acquired from Dharamsing Teron only for research. The representation of sacred texts in the public domain without the right circumstances of documentation would infringe the Karbi norms. Hence, the transcript of the 2nd Bhoi Mynri version has been omitted from showing due to the sensitivity of the material. The translation of the material is present for only research purpose.

SECTION B

Interviews, the transcript of the telephonic interview with Longsing bey, a Karbi ritual practitioner, conducted on the 25th May 2020 is shown under this section.

A. Transcripts and translations

i. *Mosera / Karbi Kevang/ Jutang* (1st Bhoi Mynri Version)

Ritual performer: Sarpo Lekthe (aged 96)

Father's name: Lt. Basa Lekthe

Location: Mai-Kramsa village (adherents of traditional belief system, identified as Hindu in Electoral Roll)

Recorded on: 27/01/2020

The performer called this Bhoi Mynri version as either, *Jutang* or *Thireng-Vangreng Ahir*

0. Prelude Section, (Lines 1-74)

The propitiation of ancestors and gods before the recitation of the actual narrative, the ritual performer sets the conditions and puts forward necessary attributes in the form of sacred prayer pertaining to the actual performance)

Umm Dei, / Umm so,

Kuru mar, kulak mar / O my masters, o my teachers

Suri alam kali, Pharo alam kali / Not a matter of thousands, neither a matter of hundreds

Arvi alam kali, Ar'e alam kali / Not about the left, neither about right

E jo pini arni jo / This day, an auspicious day

Nangliphan kuru kulak / You my masters (6)

Nanghumri-nanghumpat alam / Seeking you because

Nangliphan nangcharchung / (I) rely on you

Nangliphan nangcharchak / (I) depend on you

Alamthe k / The crux of the matter is

Ei jo bang, / That this person (referring to the researcher who came to collect)

Dorbar along, sorbar along / In august gathering, assembly

Peklang dunji, Mei along, / Will present in congregation

Thei along peklang dunji / In the gathering

Alamthe si lasi jo / The purpose therefore is

Jutang nangji tangho / That culture is needed (lines 16)

Jubat nangji tangho / That tradition is needed
Ili karbi aso, karbak aso / We Karbi people, Karbak people
Dukjir aso, duksang aso / Keeper of the tradition of tattoo
Thireng ephi charhi-ephu charhi akhei ke / Thireng²⁸, we are people who keeps tradition of funeral rites for ancestors
Ilitum ke lasi lahai ajutang, / That is why, for us, such culture
Lahai ajubat / Such heritage
Rim nangkok, bi nangkok / Such customary practices, must be retained and transmitted
Jutang-jubat nangkok / Culture-custom must be revived
Lasi neli jutang kethandunji / That's why I am reciting our culture
Jubat kethandunji / Reciting our tradition (lines 26)
Karbi keplang atomo / The creation story of Karbi
E lasi bang / Here (this researcher)
Nangkiri nangkarlan / Come looking for
Lasi bang recording keponji / To take the recording
Bang dorbar sorbar along keponji / To display/promote in public forum
Lasi pini arni, pini ajo jo / That is why on this day, on this night
E jo ilitum, neli kethan dunji / That we have gathered, that I will transmit
Sita neli lam let, / I may falter
Neli ki let na, / I may deviate
Ae anghun vir na, ave vir na / Continuity may suffer (lines 36)
Kelet dona, kephet dona / There may be mistakes, inconsistencies
Nangli ning thiri, nangli ning oiri / Spirits and guardians be not angered, be not unhappy
Nangli ta nangpare dunhunon, / You sharpen us
Nangpakeng dunhunon / Straighten us
Ae' de nang arso dun-non / Sharpen our tongue
Tur nang arso dun- non / Sharpen our lips
Ning nangpare dunnon / Bless my heart with knowledge
Ingthin nangpare dunnon / Sharpen my heart
E phu-chephuk nangpathek dunnon / Make me remember when I scratch my head
E phang chephuk nanapathek dunnon / Make me remember when I scratch my shoulder (lines 46)
Ri chephuk, moi chephuk, nangpathek dun-non / Make me remember when I scratch my arms and back
Ansose nangli nong, nangli thang, nangli ta / May glory be with you, in your wellbeing
Ansose la hem along ongsar lo / In relation my brother-in-law (you may leave this part)
Onghai lo ta / My maternal uncle (performer's master)

²⁸ The person who initiated funeral rites

Pini nangli phan, charchung, charchak / Today you are my support, my guide

Lasi kuru kulak... / My teachers, my masters

Kedung ave, kechor ave puna dei / Here is in your honour rice beer, water and fire

Kuru lalo kulak lalo / Here is my master, my teacher

Lam let na, ki let na / Lest there be mistakes, inconsistencies

Angkung ave'et na / Segments may be disoriented/forgotten (56)

Ha kivi, ha keman pen / From the time of birth, the time of creation

Ha varche, ha varkong kedo pen / Since when we were at Varche-Varkong

Nang ingthum thei nangji, / All the verses must be recollected in its fullest

Dei, / Then,

Mo phi-arong, phu-arong thon'et an / Until the return to ancestor's village

Neli than ji / So I shall narrate

(The performer poured a bottle gourd of alcohol over the banana leaflet placed with a bettle nut as an offering to the ancestor spirits)

Ae jo aman ave puna, / Say not (you were) not offered (your due) respect

A asan ave puna / Homage not paid

Horme ave, horthei ave puna / Alcohol and fire not offered

Ae klempik puna, dampik puna / Say not, deeds done in excess, of paths treaded astray (lines 66)

Klemthuna, damthuna puna / Redirect our course of actions

Ronthuna, bakthuna puna / Redirect our course of interactions

Seta, nangli de sele / But, reliever of your tongue

Nangli tur sele / Reliever of your lips

Lasi, neli ta than dunji-pudunji / Therefore, I take this opportunity to share our story

Neli le kethek, neli le kere kali / Not because I know this myself

Nangli dak, nangli tur anat lo dei arnam / It is only under your guidance and light of benevolent beings

Arak adhir lahenlo... / Here is the beer, here is the *arak* (lines 74)

The performer formally introduced himself on this section before reciting the sacred verses of *Mosera* prevalent among 'Chinthong-Amri' group otherwise known as *Karbi Kiphi*, *keplang Ajutang* or simply known as *Jutang* among the Bhoi Mynri section.

1.1. First half of the 1st section (lines 75-280)

Umm dei, / Umm then,

tema pini Mosera la an ningke / The story thus told until today
Pirthe kangduk ahut tema / When the earth was soft
mindar kangduk ahut tema / When the earth was young
Li karbi nangplang tangte tema / Thus, Karbi originated
Li karbak nangplang tangte tema / Thus, Karbi originated
Teji akengri tema / Under the feet of Teji tree (Garuga Pinnata)
Timur la akengri tema / Under the feet of Timur tree
Plakvukpi ati tema / Eggs of female bat
Plakvukpo ati tema / Eggs of male bat
Teji la akengri tema / Under the feet of Teji (Lines 85)
Timur la akengri tema / Under the feet of Timur
Nangphi jiji nangphi haihe tema / Being born but hesitate
Nangplang jiji nangplang haihe tema / Being out but hesitate
Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story until today
Dei nangphi jiji nangphi haihe tema / Here they are born but hesitate
Nangplang jiji nangplang haihe tema / Here on the way to become but hesitate
Pirthe athak tangte tema / On the surface of earth
Mindar athak tangte tema / On the surface of this universe
Hii le pajohet tema / Full of non-human spirits
Arnam le pajohet tema / Full of spirit deities (lines 95)
Langbi le pajohet tema / Full of ponds
Langbong le pajohet tema / Full of water bodies
Chinam Mosera la pini an ningke / This is true the story until today
Dei bang asim nangplang lasi tangte tema / Ahom thus originated
Bang ahom nangplang lasi tangte tema / Ahom thus came
Ansi bang Ahom nangplang tangte tema / Ahom thus became
Bang ahom nangplang tangte tema / Ahom thus became
Hile bang aptham lesi tema / They fired guns
Kaman bang aptham lesi tema / They fired canons
Lasi hii bejap tema / Non human entities thus disappear (lines 105)
Lasi ranam bejap tema / Spirit deities thus disappear
Lale asim nangplang tema / Aism this became
Lale ahom nangplang tema / Ahom thus originated
Bang chomang nangplang tangte tema / Khasi thus became
Kече nangplang tangte tema / Kече thus became
Lithai bang ap charli si tema / They shot arrows

Litheng bang ap charli si tema / They shot from bows
Lasi hii bejap tema / Thus spirits disappear
Lasi ranam bejap tema / Thus spirit deities disappear
Ansi chomang nangplang tema / Thus Khasi became (lines 115)
Ansi keche nangplang tema / Thus Keche became
Dei ansi Karbi li nangplang tema / Then Karbi originated
Karbak li nangplang tema / Karbak originated
Varchi li alongle dodun tema / We lived in Varche
Varkong li alongle dodun tema / We lived in Varkong
Bang Varchi la alongle tangte / There in the land of Varche
Bang Varkong la alongle tangte / In the land of Varkong
Bang api si papidun tema / Called their mother our mother
Bang apo si papodun tema / Called their father our father

Um Dei chinam tema lapu tema / So here it is how it is told (lines 125)
Chu pirthe kangduk ahut tangke tema / When the earth was young
Longle kangduk ahut tangke tema / When the soil was soft

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Eli Karbi tangte, eli karbak tangte / That we are Karbi
Pu-nangphi tema, pu-nangplang tema / This is how we originated, we came out of
Eli karbi nangplang tangte / That we Karbi have evolved
Eli karbak tangte / That we have emerged
Pirthe-athak tangte, mindar athak tangte / On the surface of the earth
Hi'i le pajohet tema / All occupied by spirits
Ranam le pajohet tema / All occupied spirit deities (lines 135)
Si'im bang nangplang tema / So the kings have emerged
Ahom bang nangplang tema / Ahom thus became
Hele bang aptham lesi tema / Guns they fired
Kaman bang aptham lesi tema / Cannons they fired
Lasi hii bang bejap tema / Thus spirits disappeared
Lasi ranam bang bejap tema / Deities thus disappear
Anle bang asim nangplang tema / Thus Asim became
Bang ahom nangplang tema / Thus Ahom became
Chomang bang nangplang tangke / Thus Khasi became
Kiche bang nangplang tangke / Keche thus originated (lines 145)

Lithai bang apchor lesi tema / Bows they shot
Litheng bang apchor lesi tema / Arrows they shot
Lasi Chomang nangplang tema / Khasi thus became
Lasi kiche nangplang tema / Keche thus became
Anle Hi'i bejap tema / Spirits thus disappeared
Anle ranam bejap tema / Deities thus disappeared
Anle ili Karbi nangplang tema / That we Karbi have emerged
Eli karbak nangplang tema / That we have evolved
Varche alongri dodun tema / We lived in the land of Varche
Varkong alongri dodun tema / We lived in the land of Varkong (lines 155)
Mosera lapu pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Varche li alongle dodun tema / That we dwelled at Varche
Varkong le alongle dodun tema / That we dwelled at Varkong
Bang api papidun tema / We called their mother, mother
Bang apo papodun tema / We called their father, father
Richo bang chithi voiphak / That they fought for Kingship
Kethe abang chithi voiphak tema / That they fought to reign supreme
Li karbi tangte / Then we Karbi
O li karbak tangte / Then we Karbak
Dodun thekthe le pu tema / We no longer able to live there (lines 165)
Thakdun thekthe lepu tema / We no longer able to stay there
Dodun un'e lepu tema / That we could not stay alongside
Thakdun un'e lepu tema / That we could not live alongside
Nihang katnang lepu tema / We left for the east
Nijang katnang lepu tema / We left for the west
Chong angso teroi le dam / We walked on the edge of shields
Nok angso teroi le daam / We walked on the edge of the swords
Chong athak le li dam / We walked over shields
Nok angso athak le dam tema / We walked on top of the sword's edge
Mosera lapu an ningke... / This has been the story until today (lines 175)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Chong athak le dam tema / We walked over shields
Nok athak le li dam tema / We walked on top of the sword's edge

Chong angso teroi le dam tema / We walked on edges of shield
Nok angso teroi le dam tema / We walked on sharp edges of sword
La le Kupli nangpho tema / We reached river Kupli(Kopli/Kopili)
La le Diyung nangpho tema / We reached river Diyung

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
La le kupli nangpho tema / We crossed river Kupli
La le Diyung nangpho tema / We crossed river Diyung (lines 185)
Li karbi tangke / Thus Karbi
Li karbak tangke / Thus Karbaks
Asim pachini voiphak tema / Approached Asims again
Ahom pachini voiphak tema / Approached Ahom again
Huki bangchibi voiphak tema / Made friendship with them
Nari bangchibi voiphak tema / Became close with them
Bang asim tangke / Thus the Asim
Bang ahom tangke tema / Thus the Ahom
Bang langpi si bang nangpi tema / They gave us the riverside
Boitha lesi bang nangpi tema / They gave us the oars (lines 195)
Adim nangpi / Gave us place
Chenam Mosera la pini an ningke / this has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Longpi si bang nangpi tema / They gave us Longpi
Boitha lesi bang nangpi tema / Oar they gave us
Lasi li nangkai Kupli tema / We fled to Kupli
Lasi nangkai Diyung tema / We fled to Diyung
'Nokang' / Nokang (Nagaon)

Um Dei, / Umm then,
Asim alongle dodun tema / We lived with Asim (lines 205)
Ahom alongle dodun tema / We lived with Ahom
Bang asim tangke / That the Asim
Bang ahom tangke / That the Ahom
Do tame nangpu tema / They allowed us to stay
O thak tame nangpu tema / They allowed us to remain
Hidi bang nangpekpedet tema / Land they did not give

Kume bang nangpekpedet tema / Farming they did not allow
Kove artu bang cheraidet tema / Betel nut garden they snatched
Bithi artu bang cheraidet tema / Betel leave garden they snatched
Beha bang cheraidet tema / They usurped trade (lines 215)
Bepar bang cheraidet tema / They seized commerce
Thuli bang nangcheraidet tema / They occupied the scale
Pharla bang cheraidet tema / They owned the balance
O li karbi tangte / We Karbi
O li karbak tangte / We Karbak
Dodun thekthe lepu tema / We could not live
Thakdun thekthe lepu tema / We could not stay
Dodun un'e lepu tema / No longer possible to remain
Thakdun un'e lepu tema / Could not continue
Lale nihang katnang kepu / We left for the rising sun (lines 225)
Nijang katnang kepu / We left for the setting sun
Chenam / So it is true
Si Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Anle nihang nangkat tema / Then we fled toward the rising sun
Nijang nangkat tema / Then we fled toward the setting sun
O li karbi tangke / We Karbi, that is
E li karbak tangke (lasi) / We Karbak, that is
Longprui le alongle nangle tema / We reached the land of Longprui
Labang le alongle nangle tema / We reached the land of Labang (lines 235)
Bang Longprui le alongle dodun tema / We then stayed at the land of Longprui
Labang le alongle dodun tema / We stayed at the land of Labang
Li Karbi tangke / We Karbi
Li karbak tangke chenam / We Karbak truly
Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Longprui le alongle dodun tema / We stayed at Longprui
Labang le alongle dodun tema / We stayed ta Labang
Bang Chomang tangke tema / They the Khasi
Bang keche tangke tema / They the Keche (lines 245)

Tipli lap'ak kithi tema / (Where) people die of straw cut
Phelang lap'ak kithi tema / People die of reed cut
Bang langpi lelo / They leave it downstream of Langpi
Langpi pondet tema / Big water carried it off
Mepi pondet tema / Big fire carried it off
Langti le lo / Upstream carried it off
Langti pondet tema / Downstream carried it off
Langmang lelo / Release it downstream
Langmang pondet tema / Downstream carried it off
Takun bang karhi det tema / Vultures made bonfire (lines 255)
Vo'ak bang karhi det tema / Crows made bonfire
Bitu le karhidet tema / Flies made bonfire
Ingthan le karhidet tema / Maggots made bonfire
Bang chomang tangke / They the Khasi
Bang keche tangke / They the Kechu
Bang akambaha kamatha / They negotiated with supreme deity
Bang akambata chenam / They made the deal with supreme deity
Mosera la pini an ningke... / This is the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
O li Karbi tangte / We Karbi (lines 265)
E li karbak tangke / We Karbak
Tipli lap'ak kithi ningke / We died of grass cut
Phelang lap'ak kithi ningke / We died of straw cut
Langti le lo / If released upstream
Langti ponpe tema / It did not carry
Langmang le lo / If carried downstream
Langmang ponpe tema / It did not carry
Takun le karhihedet tema / Vultures did not make bonfire (cremate)
Vo'ak le Karhihedet tema / Crows did not make bonfire (cremate)
Bitu le karhihedet tema / Flies did not make bonfire (cremate)
Ingthan le karhihedet tema / Maggots did not make bonfire (cremate)
An le li karbi tangke / Thus Karbi
Li karbak tangke / Thus we Karbak
Arbung le ponlonang kipu tema / Taken (the dead) inside the house
Arphe le ponlonangkipu tema / Taken inside the dwelling (lines 280)

1.2. Second half of first Section (lines 281-371)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,

O li karbi tangke / We Karbi, that is

Li karbak tangke / We the people, that is

Li arbung chepon lasi / We took it to the house

Li arphe chepon lasi / Took it inside the sanctified shelter

Lale li karbi tangte / That we are Karbi

Eli karbak tangte / That we are the people, that is

Lale thireng pinchonglonang kepu tema / Thus, the tradition of Thireng started

vangreng pinchonglonang le pu tema / Thus, Vangreng initiated

Chenam... / So it is true (lines 290)

Mosera la pini an ningke... / This is the story until this day

Umm Dei, / Umm then,

Thireng le selamlonang le pu tema / Thus, Thireng initiated

Vangreng le selamlonang le pu tema / Thus, Vangreng initiated

Chinam Mosera la pini an ningke / This is true until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,

Li karbi tangke / We Karbi

Eli karbak tangke / We Karbak

Sar le che'elonang le pu tema / We ordained our chiefs

Lar le che'elonang le pu tema / We erected our chiefs (lines 300)

Sar le che'e voiphak tema / We created our own chiefs

Lar che'e voiphak tema / We created our own chiefs

Sar keman abang tangke / Elders who were ordained

Lar keman abang tangke / Chiefs who were ordained

Aphu chenghon abang punang tema / Is the one who respected his head

Akeng chenghon abang punang tema / Is the one who protected his feet

Lindok bang che'e voiphak tema / Lindok (chief) was ordained

Kathar bang che'e voiphak tema / Kathar (priest) was ordained

Lindok keman abang tangke / Who became Lindok

Kathar keman abang tangke / Who became Kathar (lines 310)

Likbuk peklam abang punang tema / (Are) those entrusted to fill up unevenness
Likvor peklam abang punang tema / (Are) those entrusted to straighten unevenness
Uchepi bang pinchong voiphak tema / Priestess they ordained
Ubokpi bang pinchong voiphak tema / Baby-sitters they ordained
Uchepi bang keman abang tangke tema / Priestess those who became
Ubokpi bang keman abang tangke tema / Baby-sitters those who became
Phi arantini punang / Ordained as cook for our grandmother
Phu arantini tema punang / Ordained as cook for our grandfather
Chenam / This is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today (lines 320)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Phi arantini punang tema / They became grandmother's cook
Phu arantini punang tema / They became grandfather's cook
Bang so-riso tangke / The unmarried youth
So ejang tangke / The young maidens
Bang... / They...
So-riso tangke / The youth
So-nimso tangke / The maidens
Mir le atiri punang tema / Flowers became their symbol
Mir jangthu le atiri punang tema / Flower and oil their symbol (lines 330)
Chenam / Is is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Phi arong kethon ahut tema / To send to grandmother's village
Phu arong kethon ahut tema / To send to grandfather's village
Pa nemphru abang punang tema / Let them be known as the fragrance givers
Pa nemlang abang punang tema / Let them be known as perfume givers
Chenam ... / This is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then, (lines 340)
Panemphru abang punang tema / Givers of fragrance let them be
Panemlang abang punang tema / Givers of perfume let them be
Li karbi tangke / We Karbi

O li karbak tangke / We Karbak
Mo pirthe kangtang ningke / When the earth becomes strong
Mo mindar kangtang ningke / When the earth becomes firm
Bang thireng bang pinchong asap pu nang / Let it be known as the tradition of Thireng
Bang vangreng bang pinchong asap pu nang tema / Let is be known as the tradition of Vangreng
Chenam... / So it is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today (lines 350)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Thireng bang pinchong asap punang tema / Let it be known as the tradition of Thireng
Vangreng bang pinchong asap punang tema / Let it be known as the tradition of Vangreng
O li karbi tangke / We Karbi
E li karbak tangke / We Karbak
Lapu henlo aron tema / This has been the tradition
Lapu henlo atang tema / This has been the culture
Lasi jutang bi nangji pu / That is why culture must be retained
jubat bi nangji pu / Let culture be preserved
Bang thireng bang pinchong ahut / When Thireng created this (lines 360)
Bang vangreng bang pinchong ahut tema / When Vangreng created this

#(Tone shifts from tune to speech mode)
Ae ne ari neke'man abang / I am that the host is
Aklong ne ke'maan bang / The support that the host is
Ae thireng bang ka'pin-chong / According to what Thireng created
Vangreng bang ka'pin-chong / According to what Vangreng created
Moh pirthe kangtang / When the earth becomes strong
Moh mindar kangtang cita / When the earth becomes firm
Ae thireng asap pu nang / Let it be known as the tradition of Thireng
Vangreng asap pu nang / Let it be known as the tradition of Vangreng
Thireng a jutang pu nang / Let it be known as the tradition of Thireng (lines 370)
Vangreng a jutang pu nang / Let is be known as the tradition of Vangreng

2. Second section (Lines 372-436)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Sokpam li kachepha tema / We have met at a paddy thrashing
Soksi li kachepha tema / We hae met at a oaddy harvesting

Muri ajir eli kachepha tema / We have the tradition of helping by turn of flute
Pongsi ajir eli kachepha tema / We have the tradition of helping by turn of reed
Horjun ajir li kachepha tema / We have the tradition of helping by turn of offering drink
O kan ajir li kachepha tema / We have the tradition of helping by turn of dance
Duhuidi kachetong tema / The meeting of *Duihudi*, thus
Nongkirla li kachetong tema / We meet at Nongkirla, thus (lines 380)
Chenam / So it is true
Mosera la pini aan ningke / This is the story of *Mosera* until today

Dei, / Then,
Ari ne keman abang jokta / The host that I am
Aklong ne keman abang jokta / Support that I am
Dumra ne lelo tema / We reached the land of Dumra
Daini ne lelo tema / We reached the land of Daini
Longprui ne leetlo tema / Longphrui that we reached
Larbang le lelo tema / Larbang that we reached
Avo le jerso vet sita / Fowl, even though a small one (lines 390)
Aphak le jerso vet sita / Pig, even though it is not big
Uchepi avan do lo tema / Is there *Uchepi*'s share
Ubokpi avan do lo tema / Is there *Ubokpi*'s share

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Uchepi avan do loma? / Is there share of the priestess?
Ubokpo avan do loma? / Is the baby-sitter's share there?
Cheng avan do loma? / Is the drum's share there?
Chong avan do loma? / Is the shield's share there?
Nok avan do loma? / Is the sword's share there?
Klengdun avan ke do loma? / Is the deputy youth chief's share there? (lines 400)
Klengsar avan ke do loma? / Is the youth chief's share there?
Chenam... / So it is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Cheng avan ke do loma? / Is the drum's share there?
Nok avan ke do loma tema / Is the sword's share there?
Chenam... / So it is true

Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story until today

Umm Dei, / *Umm* then,

Ari ne Keman abang / I represent the host (lines 410)

Ucha ne keman abang / I represent the tiger tamer

Avo le athikvet sita / Even though the fowl is not big

Aphak le athikvet sita / Even though the pig is not big

Chong avan do lo tangho / There is the axe's share

Nok avan dolo tangho / There is the sword's share

Muri avan dolo tangho / There is the flute's share

Pongsi avan dolo tangho / There is the flute's share

Riso avan dolo tangho / There is the young lad's share

Nimso avan dolo tangho / There is the young maiden's share

Klengdun avan dolo tangho / There is the youth deputy chief's share (lines 420)

Klengsar avan dolo tangho / There is the youth chief's share

Chenam... / It is true

Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story until today

(Tone shifts from tune to speech mode)

Ae e li Karbi tangke / That we are Karbi

E li Karbak tangke / That we are

Ae ephi arong chevoi / That we must return to our grandmother's village

Ephu arong chevoi / That we must return to our grandfather's village

Ae jo lun ajir chepha nangkok / (We are) bound to return the song in turn

Kan ajir chepha Nangkok / (We are) bound to return the dance in turn

Ae jo lun ajir, kan ajir, muri ajir / (We are) bound to return the song, dance and flute in turn (lines 430)

Pongsi ajir chepha nangkok / (We are) bound to return the flute by turn

E li Karbi / We Karbi

Thireng bang pinchong / (It was) *Thireng* that was created

Vangreng bang pinchong / (It was) *Vangreng* that was created

Thireng bang a jutang / The culture of *Thireng*

Vangreng bang a jutang / The culture of *vangreng* (lines 436)

(The next segment is known as the responsory verse, where the ritual performer engages in a dialogue posing question and answer to and fro with another ritual performer who is usually present at

the ritual ceremony. But in case of this recording, a re-enactment of the performance is done by a single performer adopting both the roles)

3. Third Section (Lines 437-487)

Umm Dei, / Umm then,

Duihudi kachetong tema / It is where master drummers meet

Nongkirla li kachetong tema / We meet at Ningkirla (name of cultural area)

Cho-arso li kachetong tema / We meet to sharpen each other (lines 440)

Cho arkom li kachetong tema / We meet to help each other by turn

Tema / So it is

Lun pangkai avelang ma? / Is the song divide not present?

Lam pangkai avelang ma? / Is the language divide not present?

Cheng pangkai avelang ma? / Is the drum divide not present?

Chong pangkai avelang ma? / Is the shield divide not present?

Muri pangkai avelang ma? / Is the flute divide not present?

Pongsi pangkai avelang ma? Is the flute divide not present?

Umm Dei, / Umm then,

Muri mesek avelang ma? / No flute was burnt, is it? (lines 450)

Musi mesek avelang ma? No flute was burnt is it?

Rengdok mesek avelang ma? / No good will was burnt, is it?

Chiru chepupe lang / No tears were noticed

Mo dor chepupe lang / No one kept waiting

Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Ae ari nang keman abang tema / (You) are the host support

Aklong nang keman abang tema / (You) are the ground support

Sokpam nang nangkepha tema / (You) invited us to threshing ceremony

Soksi nang nangkepha tema / (You) invited us to threshing of paddy

Lun jir chephatema / It is the turns of song (to be returned) (lines 460)

Kan ajir chepha tema / It is the turns of dance (to be returned)

Cheng ajir chepha tema / It is the turns of drum (to be returned)

Nok ajir chepha tema / It is the turns of sword (to be returned)

Muri ajir chepha tema / It is the turns of flute that we return

Pongsi ajir chepha tema / It is the turn of the flute that we return

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Phi arong kethon sita / Even if the return is to grandmother's village
Phu arong kethon sita / Even if the return is to grandfather's village
Lun pangkai ave tema / No partition of song created
Kan pangkai ave tema / No partition of dance created (lines 470)
Muri pangkai ave tema / No separation of flute created
Pongsi pangkai ave tema / No separation of flute created
Cheng pangkai ave tema / No partition of dream created
Chong pangkai ave tema / No partition of shield created
Nok pangkai ave tema / No partition of sword created
chenam... / It is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This has been the story until today

Umm Dei, / Umm then,
Tiru chipu ave tema / No ape said against anyone (taunt)
Bandor (Assamese word) chipu ave tema / No monkey said against anyone (lines 480)
Phui chipu ave tema / No bad temper shown
Phai chipu ave tema / No bad words spoken
Charso te charsosi chipu tema / To be told what was done as it is
Chorkom te chorkomsi chipu tema / To be told what was done as it is
Chenam, / So it is true
Mosera la pini an ningke / This is the story of Mosera till today
Choklo / It is through (lines 487)

ii. *Mosera/Jutang Kihir* (2nd Bhoi Mynri Version)

Performer- Longsing Bey

Recorded at All India Radio (AIR), Diphu

Date- 22/02/2012

Collected by- Dharamsing Teron

The Karbi texts have been removed from representation as the nature of the texts are sacred and I don't have the authority. I am refraining from putting them as I don't know under what circumstances it was recorded and if the necessary omen was observed to propitiate the Karbi ancestors by the ritual performer.

Umm... then, (lines 1)

People are assembled

Groups are assembled

Boys are assembled

The girls have assembled

Young men chiefs are gathered

Youth chiefs are gathered

Gathering in completeness

Gathering of generations

Gathering of authorities (lines 10)

Meeting of authorities

Adorned with drongo feathers

Decorated with drongo feathers

Pillars of support to who are assembled

We are beams who support them who have gathered

Repaying the flute favour given

Repaying the reed favour given

Atoning for swear words uttered

Atoning for unintentioned spoken words/verbal slips

Repaying the debt of songs (lines 20)

Repaying the debts of dances

Ooo... this is true

This is what it has been until today

Umm...then,
 We who host, the youth
 We who host, the support
 That we are hosts we who are youth
 Host who support, that we are
 Though we are deputy youth chiefs
 Though we are youth chiefs (lines 30)
 Deputy chiefs though we are
 We may yet be adept fire keeper
 We may yet be adept water dispenser
 Grooming them though young
 Grooming them though they are budding
 Grooming them *Hambi* (karbi traditional game) age
 Grooming them spin age
 They may yet be adept at serving
 They may yet be adept at attending to
 So we are duty bound to inquire (lines 40)
 So we are duty bound to ask
 You, youths our guest
 You, youths from the visiting branch
 You, youths of the Du region
 You, youths from Nongkirla region
 You, youths from Nili (river banks)
 You, youths from Kongka (valleys)
 Elders with authorities
 Chiefs with authorities
 You are the youth, the keeper of home (lines 50)
 You are the youth, the keeper of hearth
 To compensate for the segment of swearing
 To atone for the cursing
 To atone for the foul words
 To atone for the swearing
 To repay the debt of flute
 To repay the debt of reed

Wiping the tears
Wiping the cries
This is true (lines 60)
This is what it has been until today

Umm... then
Does the fire hinder?
Does the water hinder?
Has there been a hindrance in our apportioning?
Has there been a hindrance in our obligation?
Were there lapses in apportion?
Were there lapses in our obligation?
Was there overstepping of limits?
Was there overstepping of boundaries? (lines 70)
Was our speech profane?
Was there slip of tongue?
Is there a violation of speech?
That is why (we must) inquire
That is why (we must) ask
You visiting youth too
You visiting young men too
Compensated the debt of flute
Compensated the debt of reed
Repaid the debt of songs (lines 80)
Repaid the debt of dances
Comforted (wiped) the tears thus
Comforted (wiped) the sorrows thus
If food was not enough
If drink was not enough
Was there any obstruction?
Was there any argument?
If the fire was not enough
If the water was not enough
That you are the visiting youth (lines 90)
That you are the visiting young folk
Today, for the youth of the host village

Youth of the host village
For the hosts
For the hosts
Objections may have been raised
Protest may have been raised
Today before the gathering is over
Today before the meeting is over
Today is the day (lines 100)
Today is the night
That is why we (must) inquire
That is why we (must) ask
This is true
This is what it has been until today

Umm... then
There was no fire obstruction/hesitancy
There was no water obstruction/hesitancy
Was there objectionable reception
Was there bad reception/service (lines 110)
There was no sexual misconduct
That there was no sexual offense
At this hour today
At this hour tonight
That youth have gathered in many
That young men have gathered in many
Deputy youth chiefs gathered in many
Youth chiefs gathered in many
Debt of songs repaid
Debt of dance repaid (lines 120)
Lapses of words atoned
Foul words atoned
Debt of flute repaid
Debt of reed repaid

Ummm... then
Having repaid the debt of flute

Having repaid the debt of reed/horn
 Having repaid the song debt
 Having repaid the dance debt
 Having comforted the tears (lines 130)
 Having comforted the sorrows
 Having asked (inquired) visiting youth
 Having interacted with visiting youth
 Youth guests of the neighborhood
 Youth guests of the localities
 Youth keeper of the boundaries
 Youth keeper of boundary markers
 Youth keeper of water
 Youth deputy chief in authority
 You chief in authority (lines 140)
 Youth deputy chief in authority all
 Youth chief in authority all
 We Karbi, how did we come to be?
 How Karbak came to be?
 How did the micro-beings come to be?
 How did the living things come to be?
 Why swearing was needed?
 Why cursing needed?
 The sacred master drummer is needed
 That the master drummer's assistant is needed (lines 150)
 Small packets were made for the the dead (by female priests)
 Large packets were made for the deceased (by female priests)
 Banjar dancers dug with sticks
 Banjar dancers pointed with sticks

 Umm... then
 Let's trace our origin
 Let's trace our beginning
 Of the group, you young man
 Of the branch, you young man
 You, my sibling of the youth (lines 160)
 You, young man, my younger brother

You, young man (of) my grandmother

You, young man (of) my grandfather

If we trace our origin

I, we trace our beginning

From whence we originate

From whence we became

That's how it has been

This is what it has been until today

Umm... then (lines 170)

Not for nothing we met today from groups

Not for nothing we met today from branches

Not for nothing we met all boys today

Not for nothing we met all girls today

Not for nothing we met from groups

Not for nothing we met from branches

Having atoned curses

Having atoned swearing

Having repaid debt of reed

Master drummer is present (lines 180)

His assistant is present

That *Uchepi* is present

that *Ubokpi* is present

That the *Ubokpi*, that is

The one that creates

The one that constructs

The master drummer

His assistant

The one who curses

The one who swears (lines 190)

What for is it necessary to curse?

What for is it necessary to swear?

What for is it necessary to sing?

What for is it necessary to part ways?

That it was necessary to send it to mother's village

That it was necessary to send it to father's village

Let us retrace Karbi origin

Let us retrace Karbak origin

Umm... then

We Karbi originated (lines 200)

We karbak originated

We micro-beings thrived

We organisms thrived

That earth is created

That universe is created

After creation of earth

After creation of planet

On the surface of earth

On the surface of planet

That humans were yet to be created (lines 210)

That humans were yet to emerge

That there were no micro-organisms yet

That there were no organisms yet

That micro-organisms must be installed

That organisms must be installed

That people must be created

That people must be molded

That is the will of Songsar (King of the world, divine being)

That is the will of the creator

Umm...then (lines 220)

But then, Karbi flourished

Karbak flourished

So, we Karbi, it is so

We the people, it is so

Karbi flourished as tradition goes

Karbak flourished as tradition goes

Songsar the king, he did create

He the elder king, he did create

Mother bat, he did create

Father bat, he did create (lines 230)

Female bat that were in thousands

Male bat that were in thousands

Mother bats

Father bats

Endorsed as partner

Endorsed as friend

Eggs were laid

Yolk was created

Eggs numbering thousands

Eggs numbering hundreds (lines 240)

One egg laid in the cave

One egg laid in the crevice

One egg laid in precipice

One egg laid in gorge

Umm... then

One egg remained which was pure

One yolk remained which was pure

It was laid under the feet of upright stone

That which hatched at the foot of an upright rock

Laid at the feet of Teji (a flower) (lines 250)

Hatched at the feet of Timur (a flower)

Hatched at the precipice

Hatched at the gorge

Hatched at the cave

Hatched at the den

One egg rolled over and hatched

Became the Khasis

One egg rolled over and hatched

Became the Kechu

One egg rolled over and hatched (lines 260)

Became the Nagas

One egg rolled over and hatched

Became the Naras

One egg rolled over and hatched

Became the Ahom

One egg rolled over and hatched
Became Asim
Why it's said, that is
Valleys they occupied
Vast plain they occupied (lines 270)
We Karbi
We Karbak
Dying naturally
Ebbing naturally
First born even though
First born that we were
Born hesitatingly
Hatch hesitatingly
Tried to be born
Tried to be hatched (lines 280)
Fearful of flies
Fearful of maggots
Fearful of vultures
Fearful of crows
The Asims
The Ahoms
The others
The unknown
Not afraid of flies
Not fearful of maggots (lines 290)
Not afraid of vultures
Not afraid of crows
They occupied the land
They occupied the homestead
We karbi
We karbak
Hesitating to be born
Dithering to be born
At the feet of Teji
At the feet of Timur (lines 300)
At the feet of an upright stone

At the feet of an upright rock
Hesitatingly born
Ditheringly born
Born after hesitation
Born after dithering
Karbi started increasing
Karbak started growing
Humans started growing
Humans started increasing (lines 310)

Umm...then
Karbi grew
Karbak grew
Grass weighed heavy
Reed weighed heavy
Asim weighed heavy
Ahom weighed heavy
Grasses weighed heavy
Reed weighed heavy
Deep forest weighed heavy (lines 320)
Deep jungle weighed heavy

Umm...then
Above that living together with unknown spirits
Living together with spirit deities
Living together with epidemic
Living together with endemic
Malevolent spirits there
Benevolent protective spirits there
Hi'i surrounded us again
Arnam surrounded us again (lines 330)
Why karbi exist?
Why karbak exist?
Usurped territory
Usurped space
Usurped land

Usurped settlement
 Here *Hi'i*
 Here *Arnaam*
 Surrounded Karbi
 Surrounded Karbak (lines 340)
 They possessed power
 They possessed authority
 We karbi
 We karbak
 Had no authority
 Had no power
 They walk on the edges of the shield
 They walk on the edges of the sword
 We cannot walk on edges of the shield
 We cannot walk on edges of the sword (lines 350)
 The karbi
 Then karbak
 The micro-organisms
 The organisms
 That's how it has been
 This is what it has been until today

Umm... then
 Died of grass cut
 Died of straw cut
 Died of ant bite (lines 360)
 Died of insect bite
 Erect stone shelter fell to kill
 Erect stone shelter fell to annihilate
 Falling all over
 Falling flat
 Corps unable to be cremated remained
 Corps unable to be cremated left
 Remember epidemics of death
 Remember pandemics of death
 Death occurred en masse (in epidemic) (lines 370)

Countless deaths occurred (in epidemic)
Un-burnt corps remained
Un-cremated corps remained
Big river rose
Big fire rose
Vulture will cremate
Crow took to cremation
Fly took to cremation
Maggot took to cremation
This will not lead to grandmother's village (lines 380)
This will not lead to grandfather's village
No tradition yet
No rite yet
The Khasi
The Keche
Flies cremated if so
Maggots cremated if so
Vultures cremated if so
Crows cremated if so
Will lead to grandmother's village (lines 390)
Will lead to grandfather's village
Will lead to good village
Will reach good village
That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today

Umm...then
We karbi
We Karbak
If vultures did cremation
If crows did cremation (lines 400)
If flies did cremation
If maggots cremated
Did not lead to grandmother's village
Did not lead to grandfather's village
Did not lead to good village

Did not reach good village
 Big river rose again
 Big fire rose again
 Eggs thrown not taken
 Eggs thrown not flown down (lines 410)
 They Asim
 They Ahom
 Eggs thrown accepted
 Eggs thrown down stream accepted
 Will lead to grandmother's village
 Will lead to grandfather's village
 Will lead to good village
 Will reach good village
 We Karbi
 We Karbak (lines 420)
 Will not lead to grandmother's village
 Will not lead to grandfather's village
 Will not lead to good village
 Will not reach good village
 Corpse remained un-cremated
 Corpse remained un-burnt
 Beyond that
 Un-cremated corpses remained
 Un-burnt corpse remained
 And so, (lines 430)
 We karbi
 We karbak
 Bad smell covered whole mountain
 Foul smell covered whole valley
 Karbi on the verge of extinction
 Karbak on the verge of extinction
 And so though the great Songsar
 And the elderly thought

Umm... then
 So *Thireng* appeared (lines 440)

Vangreng appeared
Even after death he re-animated
Even after sleep he re-animated
So *Thireng* said
Vangreng said
Thireng created
Vangreng initiated

Umm... then
What *Thireng* created
What *Vangreng* initiated (lines 450)
Thireng did was
Vangreng did was
They installed the elders
Installed the leaders
Installed the elders
Installed the leaders in turn
Today, build the elders
Build the leaders
Songsar created
Songsar built (lines 460)
Master builder master creator
Today
Build the elder
Build the leader
And so elder was installed
Leader was installed
Elder was built
Elder was built
After elder built
Leader built (lines 470)

Umm... then
When elder created
When leader installed
Elder that is

If you are leader
Build a village
Build settlement
Care for the crippled
Care for the disabled
Searcher of paralysed (lines 480)
Searcher of crippled
Searcher of blind
Searcher of deaf

Umm...then
Seeker of poor
Seeker of tired
That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today

Umm...then
Thireng created (lines 490)
Vangreng created
Thireng it is, *Vangreng* it is
Crafting the elder is not enough
Molding the leader is not enough
So this day this night
On the surface of the earth, Karbi may perish
Karbak may perish
So create tiger priest
Create tiger worshiper
Tiger priest, worshipper (lines 500)
Ucha and Kuru
The tamer of animals
The tamer of wildlife
The tamer of tiger
The tamer of leopard
The tamer of rhinoceros
The tamer of buffalo

Umm...then
 And so, the *Ucha* was created
 And so, the master was created (lines 510)
 That they created *Ucha* (tiger tamer)
 that created master
 Ucha exist, master exist
 And so, *Thireng* created
 Vangreng created
 And so, created the chiefs and leaders
 Created the big ones
 Created the tall ones
 And so
 There may be sorcery (lines 520)
 There may be witchcraft
 When sorcery occurs
 When witchcraft occurs
 Whoever adjudicates
 Whoever tries
 Do justice in equal measure
 Let justice prevail ounce for ounce
 Golden sieve was sent
 Silver sieve was sent
 Golden heart was sent (lines 530)
 Silver heart was sent
 Feast upon the moment of inception
 Feast upon the moment of clarity
 That's how it has been
 This is what it has been until today
 Umm...then
 That the males were created
 That the females were created
 You are the lads, if so
 You are the ladies, if so (lines 540)
 You are the ones that beautify, so told
 The ones that adorn
 The one that put fragrance

The ones that emit foul smell
The ones that drive the flies
The ones that drive the maggots
The one who wipes the tears
The ones who wipe the sorrows
That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today (lines 550)

Umm...then
So, master drummer was created
His assistant was created
You are *Duhuidi* (sacred master drummer)
You are *Duhoijang* (assistant of master drummer)
Quantity of the dead
Quantity of the deceased
As if epidemic today
As if pandemic today
Dead bodies in heaps (lines 560)
Deceased in heaps
Lead them to good village
Lead them to good settlement
That you are the one that curses
The one that swears
You are *Duhuidi*
Take your share due to maternal uncle
Take your portion due to maternal uncle
Take in weight in equal measure
Take in chika ounce for ounce (lines 570)
Thus *Duihodi* was appointed
Thus *Duhoijang* was appointed
Umm...then
So then *Uchepi* was appointed
Ubokpi was appointed
Here is *Uchepi* (dirge singer assistant)
Here is *Ubokpi* (baby sitter)
That you created small portion

That you created small package
Dancers performed digging (lines 580)

Dancers performed prodding
That the offsprings of Karbi
That the offsprings of people
That the offsprings of moss
That the offsprings of insects
To reach the good settlement
To lead to the good village

Here is *Uchepi*

Here is *Duhoidi*

Energy was bestowed (lines 590)

Power was bestowed
That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today

Umm...then

That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today
And then, The offsprings of Karbi, that is

The offsprings of Karbak
Found abled elder
Found abled chief (lines 600)
Having found abled chief
Having found abled leader
To build village, it was announced

Build a village
Started to search mountain
Started to look for precipice
No good mountain found
No good precipice found

Umm...then

Thireng was asked (lines 610)

Vangreng was asked
Where to build village

Where to build settlement
Karbi may perish
Karbak may perish
Will care for my offspring
Will care for grandchildren
A place for children gathering
A place for grandchildren gathering
Show us the place, *Thireng* (lines 620)
Lead us to the place, *Vangreng*
That others have survived
Others have testified, others have thrived
That others have spoken of sky
Here is the navel
Here is the navel of soil
Here is the navel of earth
Here is the navel of sky
Directed that village is built here
Settlement be built here (lines 630)
So village was set up
Rup (silver) was set up as example
In the navel of sky
In the navel of earth
That's how it has been
This is what it has been until today

Here it is
Longle ache'te bore the inception of the first village
That's where the King was conferred
Sot Richo will flourish then after
That's how it has been (lines 641)

iii. Modern day Adaptation of *Mosera*

Performer: Longbini Rongpi

Date: 22/06/2020

Source: Retrieved from Facebook page *Karbi Loh-Charli Jutang Aterank* (KLCJK)

Location: Denarong, Karbi Anglong

E... / E...

chenam te pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Eli karbi tangte / That we are Karbi

Eli sumsi tangte / That we are the people

Keplang chingthum nangkok / It is needed to trace our origin

Kephi chingthum nangkok / It is needed to trace our creation

Keplang alam tangte / It is about origin

Kephi alam tangte / It is about creation

Pirthe kangduk ahut / It was when the earth was younger

Mindar kangduk ahut / It was when the planet was younger

Bang plakvukpi ati / That it was from the eggs of mother bat

Bang plakvukpo ati / That it was from the eggs of father bat

Ati ke pum suri / The eggs were in thousands

Ati ke pum pharo / That eggs were in hundreds

E'pum nang konglong jir / One egg rolled over swiftly

E'pum nang konglong dak / One egg rolled over and broke

Ansi Langlu nangplang / And so originated Langlu (Tiwa tribe)

Ansi paarok nangplang / And so originated the other

Puthot nang konglong Jir / Again, the egg rolled over swiftly

puthot nang konglong dak / Again, the egg rolled over and broke

Ansi Karbi nangplang / And then originated the Karbi

Ansi sumsi nangplang / And then originated the people

Ansi Karbi aso / Thus, Karbi came to be

Ansi chanri kedo / And then we grew

Ansi sumsi aso / And the people came to be

Ansi chan'jai kedo / And then we prospered

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

tema, o tema / It is true, O it is true

Lale pusi ningke / This is the story

E... / E...

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Ari le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

A'klong le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Thekthe masi thekthe tema / Unable because not able

Re're masi re're tema / Un-smart because not smart

Kelu masi kelu tema / Unintelligent because ignorant

Kelom masi Kelom tema / Unaware because not aware

Oso a-pi o-e ahut pensi / Since the time when the child was still in the baby sling

Oso a-pi plokple ahut pensi / Since the time when the child was not released from the baby sling

Klengdun le kachehok tema / That the youth leaders are joyful

Klengsarpo le kachehok tema / That the youth chiefs are joyful

Phankri le kachehok tema / That the messengers are joyful

Motan le kachehok tema / That the boundary keepers are joyful

Achom le nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is

Aphang le nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is

Kethek masi Kethek tema / Able because you are able

Ke're masi ke're tema / Smart because you are smart

Chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Tema, o-tema lale pusi ningke / It is true, O it is the story

E... / E...

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Ari le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Aklong le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Thekthe masi thekthe tema / Unable because not able

Re're masi re're tema / Un-smart because not smart

Kelu masi kelu tema / Unintelligent because ignorant

Kelom masi Kelong tema / Unaware because not aware

Riso pangrum a'bang tema / The gatherer of youth

Ejang pangrum a'bang tema / The gatherer of youth

Muri pangrum a'bang tema / The gatherer of flute

Jangkek pangrum a'bang tema / The gatherer of flute

Riso pangdon a'bang tema / The agent of youth
Ejang pangdon a'bang tema / The agent of youth
A'ser pangdon a'bang tema / The agent who collects the bones
A'ru pangdon a'bang tema / The agent who collects the bones
Ser pangdon a'bang tema / The agent who collects the bones
A'ru pangdon a'bang tema / The agent who collects the bones
A'chom nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is
A'phang nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is
Kethek maksi thekek tema / Able because you are able
Ke're maksi ke're tema / Smart because you are smart
chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera
O tema, chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, O it is the story

E... / E...

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera
Ari le ariso tangte / The youth host that is
Aklong le ariso tangte / The youth host that is
Kelu masi kelu tema / Unintelligent because ignorant
Kelom masi Kelom tema / Unaware because not aware
Thekthe masi thekthe tema / Unable because not able
Re're masi re're tema / Unintelligent because ignorant
Kove ronkai ave tema / No lapse in the distribution of betel nut
Bikron ronkai ave tema / No lapse in the distribution of betel leaf
Alam pangkai ave tema / No lapse in conduct
Aki pangkai ave tema / No lapse in conduct
Dongthai ke thek longle tema / No runover was noticed
Dongplut ke thek longle tema / No trespassing was noticed
Ning karongsi do tema / In the joyful state of heart
Aning klarsapsi do tema / In the elevated state of heart

E.... / E...

Achom nang ariso tangte / The youth host that is
Aphang nang ariso tangte / The youth host that is
Kethek maksi thekek tema / Able because you are able
Ke're maksi ke're tema / Smart because you are smart
Chenam te pule Mosera / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

O tema, lale pusi ningke / O it is true, it is the story

E... / E...

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Ari le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Aklong le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Thekthe masi thekthe tema / Unable because not abled

Re're masi re're tema / Un-smart because not smart

Kelu masi kelu tema / Unintelligent because ignorant

Kelom masi Kelong tema / Unaware because not aware

E... / E...

chenam le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

Ari le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Aklong le ariso tangte / The youth host that is

Mo pa rongber lasa kan le do tema / Dance for the dead took place in a village below

Mo pa rongthak le lasa kan le do tema / Dance for the dead took place in a village above

Lale chetong lo nang tema / That's the place of meeting

Lale cheju lo nang tema / That's the place of conversation

Chedin adim ave tema / That's no place for arguments

Chebo adim ave tema / That's no place for quarrel

E... / E...

Achom nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is

Aphang nang ariso tangte / The youth visitor that is

Kethek matsi kethek tema / Abled because you are able

Ke're matsi ke're tema / Smart because you are smart

Chenam te pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / It is true, this is the story of Mosera

O tema, chena le pule Mosera lale pusi ningke / O it is true, this is the story of Mosera

iv. *Karbi kevang/Arleng Kevang* (Dumrali version) 3rd Version

Performer: Lt. Padum Ingti

Recorder: Mr. Dhireshwar Ronghang

Date of recording: 2012-2014

Location: Phong-ari, Sonapur district

Indicators: Not clear (?) Pause (...) Added information () Time stamp [] Parantheses { }

Summary: The recorded performance of the narration of *Karbi Kevang/Arleng Kevang*. Mostly told in the Kamrup region (central) of Assam amongst the Dumrali Karbi. Originally dictated in Assamese, here is the English translation in verbatim.

Transcription:

Performer: [00:00] In order to trace the history of Karbi race I will narrate to the point that is known to me. According to our folklore, in the olden times what elders had told when they were alive, it seemed that the Karbi tribe that is popularly known today as Karbi, in reality, is a new conception. In respect to ‘Arleng’ or ‘Mikir’s history that I will be talking about. The Arleng people at some point of time were at Mongolia, which we can confirm when we think. And so, in our language we have a phrase, ‘Arni Aso kelem’, Arni which means sun, and the people greatly wanted to catch the sun and showed a tremendous zeal to play with it. And for the sake of seeking the sun, the people kept chasing and kept moving, moving, and moving until they reached Japan. And when the people reached Japan, they proceeded to the direction where the sun was until they reached the oceans. On the ocean, the people pondered for a great deal realising that no one can cross the middle of the ocean. And so they thought that “would it be possible to somehow reach the shores?” basing on this notion they journeyed along the shorelines of the ocean consequently stretching to China. Despite reaching China, the fact that they still wouldn’t obtain the sun, they further persisted on their quest lastly ending on the Chinese terrain. After scaling entire China, they arrived at Burma and continued the chase along the shorelines but still, the sun would reside in the middle of the oceans. For this reason, it made them realise that to obtain the sun was an insurmountable feat.

And thus, “we ventured a long way and even though we went back the sun would still be far away/elsewhere. For this sake, we don’t have the capacity to procure the sun.”(here the narrator speaks on behalf of the characters in the story, simultaneously shifting positions between the narrator and the actor)Then and at that point, they further journeyed across Myanmar, known at that time as

“Brahmadekh”, through the midst of Brahmadekh they walked and walked and walked and also cultivated and farmed along the way. Which is not only of those days but wherever the people are, even now we(speaking on behalf of the entire population) the Arleng tribe settle in the mountains and practise agriculture, which is still in our traits. And through this, they strived, practising, practising, practising cultivation but also moving forward, walking, walking, walking. And that point of time, there were no people at ‘Dimapur’[2:33], and so they(the migrating Karbi group) appeared at Dimapur discovering the plains, upon finding the plains they began cultivation and farming again. And so, our(a peculiar way of speaking whenever in reference to one’s own tribe) Arleng tribe don’t find it suitable to stay on the plains, and therefore, slowly-slowly (a repetitive paired word is a manner of speech to determine the intensity of the situation) they kept walking-walking until they reached ‘Diphu’, from Diphu again they ventured and reached ‘Hamren’. And so, they (the Karbi elders in the group) discussed that in Hamren and in Diphu, there, the Karbi king would be seated at Hamren while the people would settle in Diphu. That is why it is said that ‘Chinthong’²⁹ and ‘Amri’³⁰ folks at one point of time resided together, so our elders tell (this is prior to further migration and splitting of the Karbi groups).

And just like that, after many years of living together, ‘Kosari’ people who are called, ‘Dimasa’ [3:11] were also coming behind, behind us, following the same route. Consequently they co-existed with us for several years, and in turn their population grew. As soon as their population flourished, while the Arleng people had a king seated at Rongkhang³¹ then. This made them speculate that, “if the Karbi people have Rongkhang king, then even we can confer a Kosari king”. Moving on with that talk, among the Kosaris they established a king. So when the king was made, the Kosaris among themselves formed a kingdom, which at present day is called North Cachar³². Then after, at one point of time, between us the Arleng and the Kosaris, a conflict broke out [3:57]. In this conflict, for many times, they (Kosaris) were defeated, heavily beaten. But then still, we, even now, the Arleng have this one trait, whoever we have defeated, immediately we don’t drive those people away (the narrator explaining the Karbi psyche of treating their opponents). “That you people stay under us”(that the losing community are kept under the Karbi watch, although without interference), this trait and kind of practice is present until this day. So on and so forth, for many years we (the Karbi) kept the Kosaris well.

²⁹ A Karbi province, territorial division.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Administrative district in Assam, presently known as Dima Hasao.

And then, the Kosari people [4:27] thought and worried alot as to how they can emerge victorious and avenge. Then after that, what they (Kosari) did was that, they decided one thing that, “we should approach the Arleng people’s ‘Thong Nokbe’ and to him we must press a proposal for a Kosari maiden’s marraige”. This was announced to the public, even then after, “for us (Karbi), we didn’t hear or even speak about it” {The narrator keeps switching between the third person and the person role while narrating. On the otherside, amongst the Kosari people, they had a meeting regarding who would be willing and able to set the marriage arrangement with the Arleng people. [5:00] This meant no ordinary person, but in regards to Nokbe, meaning the warrior, with whom a marital alliance can be formed, “is there a potential candidate?” {exclaimed the Kosari king} on this, nobody dare answered. At last, the daughter of the Kosari king said, “for they disgraced my tribe, and for disrespecting my father’s honour. I will go for the marriage. And marry that Nokbe, meaning the warrior”. This is what she proclaimed. And so the Kosari king said, “ Alright, if you truly love and honour your tribe, and honour your father. And that you are willing to do what you have said, then it is a wonderful proposition, so be it. Will have your marriage arranged”. [5:40] Further there was a dialogue exchanged with the Karbi Rongkhang king and matters discussed about marriage proposition and the warrior, about the fighter who belonged to ‘Terang’ clan.

Then, with the Karbi people, we have this habit that whenever someone poses something we acknowledge without further clarifying. “Whatever happened before happened in the past, we don’t look for the history (cause), and that characteristic is still present today” {the narrator explains the reason for the Karbi people’s acceptance of the Kosari people’s marriage proposal without investigating the matter}. And that for many times we (karbi) have defeated them, forgetting about the past he (Nokbe) speculated that, “if the Kosari Raja wants to offer me a marriage proposal then in that terms I have no objection”. And so the marriage proposal was accepted. [6:24] According to that, beautifully the marriage was orchestrated. Soon after the marriage, day by day new ploys started scheming, at last one said ‘Arson’³³ (?) Kosari recho, that the Kosari recho would host ‘Swayamvar’. According to us, it is called, “Kamai”, and the celebration of Kamai means the celebration of swayamvar. To host this swayamvar ritual, he (the king) consulted his daughter and said that, “daughter the suitor/son-in-law should be so mighty that he should be able to aquire one fish, which should be able to feed the entire swayamvar. [7:00] So this kind of fish finding should be the prospect.”

The reason behind this scheme was that, that he {the narrator is referring to Nokbe}, our mighty one had two machetes. ‘Nok’ is what we call, there were two machetes one long and the other short. And so it was told {the Kosari king} to the daughter that, “the fish which could conceal the

³³ Arson could be the name of the Kosari king, although it’s not mentioned.

machete is the fish that you should ask for. If the machete can be hidden inside the stomach, until the time the machete cannot be concealed inside the fish's stomach, then you should say that father doesn't approve and that a bigger fish would be needed." And just like that, one {fishes of various sizes} would be brought, where the short one {machete} would conceal but the long one wouldn't. Then, she {Kosari princess} would say that, "Father really desired, but that fish wouldn't suffice. Our swayamvar wouldn't happen with that fish {small variety fish}." Again in response, the suitor {Nokbe} would say, "Alright, then I should go and look". Just like that he would go back again searching, and he brought for the second time, where the shorter one would fit but the longer would just stick out. And the remark would be that, "a fish that is a little bigger than this would be needed". [8:02] At that time, on that same day, a Karbi girl was married. "All these narratives confirm that the girl, that Jongal Balahu³⁴'s first wife knew about the plan" {The narrator explains the background story of Nokbe's first wife who was also a Kosari princess}. So she told her husband, "Hey listen, the fish that they asked to search was not for any reason. If you noticed, whenever you went to 'Kolong'³⁵ to bath. They {Kosari king and subjects} would take the machete and try to hide it inside the fish stomach. So, at first they would try the shorter one which would get in, but the longer one would keep sticking out. Therefore, they would tell you to fetch another one. And even now the one you brought, the shorter one goes in but the longer one doesn't. And so when they asked for a bigger fish implies the longer machete should go in entirely."

What happened then was, due to our {referring to Karbi people} foolish nature, that the Karbi people have this gullible characteristic. So, in turn he {Nokbe} scolded his actual wife questioning her, "Why are you telling me? oh, is it so that I will have a bad impression on the Kosari girl {referring to the Kosari princess that is to be wed during the swayamvar}. [9:00] Is that why you are telling me all these stuffs? That I should despise her and to you I should love you more. Seems like your eyes are burning. Don't tell all these gossips to me." Saying these words, once again he set out looking for fish to the place where the biggest fishes are to be found, which is 'Deepor Beel'³⁶. From Deepor Beel a tail emerges that flows out in Brahmaputra, from where fishes can be taken, the one, something (sic), called a canal. Kinds of big fishes were to be found at Deepor Beel. Once caught at Deepor Beel, the fish was then taken through a canal, {the next line is a context the narrator provides for the listener} and that canal till day is attached to Brahmaputra.

³⁴ Fighter in Assamese language.

³⁵ Kolong or Kailang, a tributary of Brahmaputra river.

³⁶ Fresh water lake at the south of Guwahati, Kamrup district Assam.

That fish was carried across through Brahmaputra, across, across over the water it was transported until Kolong. While transporting from Kolong, even now ‘Itila Ghogora’ (?), freshwater area which is there {the narrator is justifying to the audience regarding the location he mentioned}. Through Itila Ghogora it was taken, to then, ‘Puronigudam’³⁷...then, Puronigudam where our people inhabited {a side information, the narrator feels necessary to provide to the listener}. It was taken and from there, [10:00] upon the finding, now the fish was checked meticulously... {the Kosari subjects inspected the fish’s length} the machete was nicely hidden inside the fish and taken...hidden and taken to the Kosari people’s swayamvar where they reached. Once reached, and the stuffs brought by the search party was unloaded... means... (sic)all...(sic) {which was presented to the Kosari King by Nokbe} then spoke, “Son-in-law, you have worked such a hard labour, therefore now we will felicitate you” said the king. And then, from the place where the fish was kept, he {Nokbe} was taken far from that sight where he was offered *mod* (alcohol), *seera* (flattened rice), *handok* (grained rice) etc..and fed him. Then what happened³⁸, *Dhoom dham*³⁹ the public uncovered two machetes from the fishes, at once it was taken out spontaneously and the Kosari girl went and informed to her father.[10:42] On an impulse upon hearing the news, they {Kosari king and subjects after discussing the matter} all proclaimed war... war violence (?). “Now we are against the Arleng people. We are at war” {The declaration of the war by the Kosari king}.

So as soon as the war was announced amidst the festivity, he (Thong Nokbe) came running... to his house to find that those two machetes were missing because those two machetes were smuggled by them (The Kosari King and subject).[11:01] Then at the point, he (Thong Nokbe) had no clue, what could he do. And so at the time he ...with... with his own bare hands how much ever he could, killed as many Kosaris. Feeling helpless and mismatched, his two hands... {the narrator gestures}... like this...the thing is...the thing...is like this {the narrator folds his arms} those two hands were smeared with blood... which had dried up... making it impossible to part the hands. Tired and worn out by the war, he was also very thirsty, prompting him to go next to a pond...(the narrator bends over to show the action) where he stooped down to drink water bending over. Behi— (sic)...Behin — (sic) from behind... silently one Kosari soldier snuck in and cut out his neck... decapitating his head. Just then, as Nokbe lay dead and slain the news quickly spread to the public and the war ceased. On the otherside, they {Kosari king and subjects stood discussing the aftermath of the war} thought that it was evident that such warrior would be born... just because one died didn’t mean the legacy ended, just like that again someone will be born again. And so they felt it would be fair not to stop them. [12:00]

³⁷ A village in Nagaon district Assam.

³⁸ A typical expression of storytelling

³⁹ Assamese expression for shock and surprise.

And the times that followed after, everyone present... our Arleng people incurred tremendous difficulties...(unintelligible word)... means...means, one misery in particular to be noted is related to the atrocities they (Kosari) imposed. Shockingly, while all this took place, the Kosari king raised tig (sic).. two tiger's cubs. In order to raise the tiger's cubs, it had to be fed milk which was skimmed from our Arleng people(breast milk). The milk procured from Karbi women under subjugation would be taken to feed the tig (sic) means... the tiger cubs. {Which carried on for a period of time reflecting the oppression and humiliation of the Karbi people by the Kosari king} One day, just like that {since milking Karbi women was the law then} they {Kosari king subjects}...aaa....to obtain milk when they went on their usual drill. They encountered a 'Rongpharpi',... one mighty woman who was there. So they approached Rongpharpi asking for the breast milk, Rongpharpi in response told them, "I will give, I didn't object from giving milk, atleast let me take down the logs, the bundle of logs. After putting down the heavy logs I will give the milk, its not that I won't give... I didn't say I won't give". As this was the rule which was created, [13:00] therefore she can't break the law {the narrator explains the reason for the milking scheme}. So she said, "That I will give the milk, but kindly allow me to put down the log bundle". In spite of several please, those....a... 'Tekela'⁴⁰ didn't even allow the putting down of the log bundle and by force they held her aggressively trying to milk her.

Then that woman, who was Rongpharpi was no ordinary woman... she got furious in anger and with her *Cho*⁴¹, that we say {the narrator raising his fist to mimicking the shape of the axe and portraying the situation}. For us, the cho is a tool. What it is in Assamese is not known to me. The *Cho* is like this {the narrator curves his fingers towards his palm showing the shape of the axe}... specially characterised for chopping woods. That is cho... and information about it I have sent it to the PhD students {the narrator deviates slightly to explain the meaning of the axe embarking on the PhD students who approach him for Karbi oral history}. That *Cho*... with that *Cho*, the one called Rongpharpi, that woman, killed those two tekela with the *Cho*. And then, as soon as the two tekela were killed, consequently the Kosari king got enraged then immediately started torturing the Arleng people. Despite of all these, that woman elevated the spirits of the people instilling hope (sic) [14:00] but here they {the karbi king and subjects at Rongkhang and Chinthong} upon acquiring the news discussed and debated, and spoke amongst themselves, " just after the death of our commander {referring to Thong Nokbe}, another one couldn't emerge to fend for our people. That's why people became powerless."

⁴⁰ Kosari king's subjects.

⁴¹ Axe.

{After much speculation} they started planning vengeance (inaudible in the recording) and that's where Chinthong and Rongkhang people {these two groups come to the picture of freeing the Karbi people}, especially the Chinthong people because they knew sacred chants and possessed abilities to curing ailments...(sic)... even now they are expert. Even now they are {referring to the Karbi ritual practitioners and experts} at Rongkhang.. aaa...amidst the Chinthong people. So at that time they {Chingthong ritual practitioners} uttered sacred chants {the narrator shifts from giving the context to the Chinthong ritual practitioners to the plot of the narrative} ,to protect the Karbi. Whenever the Kosari people would come to drive us, that's when...they...aaa.... The Chinthong {ritual practitioners} would spellbind the king and everything around him, where houses... would appear as hill (?), people would appear as trees. Just like this somehow during the day they (the Karbi) would be saved and cloaked and by the night {the Karbi would flee}...means...a... leading them inside the Khasia⁴². But then, where Amri is (?)... the Amri territory was at the state of warfare, in that warfare state, battles were fought, fought, fought and {further driving the Karbi people from settling in one place} they reached Lumding⁴³, from Lumding travelling, travelling, they reached Kopili⁴⁴.

Coming, coming from Kopili they reached Kolong⁴⁵. [15:00] After crossing Kolong they came to our, what is known as Dumra state, where we settled and live now. And that, this is where we, the Amri are inhabiting today. And at that time, there were no living beings and we the Amri folks were the first who came here. That is why, in the words of U.C. Gohain's (?) ... that today...or the words from China's Hiuen-Tsang (sic), they {referring to the books written by the authors} have today...in their works it can be found that the first adivasis in Assam are the Amri Karbi folks. And U.C. Gohain said (the narrator paraphrases) that a...hundred... more than hundred its said... meaning...prior to hundred years before Christ's birth out here that the Amri Karbi have settled which has been written in history... Just like that here in our place, our Dumra raja in respect whom we call recho. Dumra recho (sic)... was established, and after the establishment, then after, "Son-sirkep Son-thongkep" {this custom was initiated}. Son-sirkep means nine kings, even now we have the count {implying that those titles still exist} and Son-thongkep means thirty chiefs. [16:00] And together they governed the entire race (people). Therefore, at that time they had small small states (sic)...to every kings were given one state each. For example, 1.Tikira recho was given a state,...aaa... then after 2. Dengja recho was given... a state, 3. Borkhuchi recho, just like that 4. Panbari recho, and like that our 5. Mayong recho, and like that 6.Kwanchi recho, and like that 7.Beltola recho, and like tha 8.Pirla/Pirlo

⁴² The Khasi territory.

⁴³ A city in Hojai district Assam.

⁴⁴ Largest south bank tributary of Brahmaputra flowing through Assam and Meghalaya.

⁴⁵ Kolong or Kailang is also a tributary of Brahmaputra.

(?) recho. And just like that, there were nine sets... nine... nine kings were instated. That nine kings were given those small-small states. And among them, the supreme one was there, Dimura (also known as Dumra) king. And to all the people, they were goverened by the thirty chiefs and that's why in our language we call it *Son-sirkep Son-thongkep*. *Thongkep* means thirty and *Sirkep* means nine. And exactly just like that, even today that custom is still prevalent among us. That is why now, within the people, whenever there's a get together, meeting, or somebody's adjudication to be carried out. Its based on the words of Dumra king which is truth and the words of *Son-sirkep Son-thongkep* [17:00] are told to be truth {just}.

For us karbi, since our historical past we have been living this way, coming upto this point today. For whatever reasons, call it our misfortune or fortune but at that point when we came, as soon as we arrived the Khasia king established a friendship with us. And this history when we look for... there also we will find. It's written in our history. Ja...(sic)...mmmm.....what was it ,that book's name? {the narrator talks to himself}... 'Agreement of the Northeast'⁴⁶ a book titled is there where this can be found. At some {stammers} point of time... right, and then a king named 'Bhoi/Bhor Manik Si'im' {referring to a Khasi king} along with Dumrat— (sic) our Dumra king, together we used to live together and called elder and younger brother to one another which was told. But then, for this reason, we until this day have been...(sic) living this way and we wonder that in the future it would continue this way.. that our race and...according to our history. And so this is what happened of us, this is our own property, our own land. [18:00] Therefore, Amri...its Amri's place of dwelling not only of today but we were here before no other population. That this was the dwelling place of the Amri and which is until today. And if we look at history, we...mmm...we went to Shillong... to the king. And according to that document (?)⁴⁷ first and foremost, there was the territory line of our Dumra king [18:21] 'Umroi'⁴⁸ ... from 'Barapani' to Umroi. That is why until this day, that's why our people... are found at Umroi..mmm...Amri Arleng are present until today out there. Then after, they reached incourse of time. They were Milyiem and Khyrim, they were two, younger and elder brothers. Then the younger brother said, "elder brother, even I will need property,...(sic) give mmm...me also territory". The person called Milyiem demanded to his elder brother. The {elder} brother's ability to map land was limited. And for this reason from Umroi it {demarcation of the land} was brought little below to our mountain called "Nurshi"⁴⁹ where three poles [19:00], which

⁴⁶ Sadly haven't been able to locate this book.

⁴⁷ Not sure what document the narrator was referring.

⁴⁸ Located at Meghalaya.

⁴⁹ Needs to be clarified, since I couldn't locate this place via internet.

have been erected there are still present. Now this is known properly to the entire Meghalaya fellow kings (?) and even maps exist. Then from 'Murumai' (could be Marmein) to 'Kamyung', it would be about 10 kms. In that area, those three poles are still there and until that our boundary exist.

But then when Gopinath Bordoloi who was prime minister, he was Assam's prime minister⁵⁰. That time, that Gopinath Bordoloi during 1950s/57s {not clear in the recording} held a commission named, 'Das Commission'. And through that commission...mmm...the area was measured according to the river (sic) and the area was mapped. Due to which this part of the land went to the Khasia. And the other piece came to us {Dumrali karbi}. Now, for us and the Amri folks (or for us the Amri folks)⁵¹ and it was divided into half and two parts were made. That is why, for us these things {oral historical historical record}, which is {referring to the impotence and speculating the legitimacy of oral history and folklore of the region}...what came from folklore and what is not folklore. For us, here we can check it in documents or we can find it in history that has been written, in that also we have found {pointing to the written historical records of Karbi people's settlement in the plains of Assam}. [20:20] Therefore, in today's day until here, our ,which is Amri Karbi or the Karbi peoples relation to history. I will conclude at this point. And if there's something to say afterwards I will say which can be told in short or if there's to say then it can told very far. Therefore, until this is spoken, today in this segment I am concluding. Kardom.

⁵⁰ Before independence era.

⁵¹ Got confused in the sentence's meaning. Hence, I put up both the possible sentences.

B. Interviews

In this section, I attached the most relevant interview transcript to my research. A telephonic interview on the background of *Mosera*, the chanted narrative.

Interviewer - The'ang Teron

Interviewee - Longsing Bey, (app. 56) a ritual practitioner from Bhoi Mynri.

Recorded - 25/06/2020

In the following initials of the names would be used to represent the interviewer and the respondent.

T.T - "What is *Mosera*?"

LB - "*Mosera means*, it has been given two connotations namely. One is that it has been called, *Jutang Keron* (lit. transmission of culture), and the other one, *Mosera Kihir*. What *Mosera Kihir* is trying to imply that to commemorate the lifetime of people all over the world when they are no more. And the other is the account about Karbi people's memory as far as remembered, the recalling of the past, unearthing the roots, recounting of the episodes. It is to commemorate all these things, that is called *Mosera*."

T.T - "Is *Mosera*, a Karbi word or what word is it?"

LB - "Yes, it is a Karbi *lamlir* (lit. ritual tongue)... it is referred to the things that cannot be seen. *Jutang* on the other side for Karbi is what can be perceived by everyone. What cannot be seen, that is concealed to our sight, for example, *Chamburukso* (lit. spirit of the dead) that which is not visible but that on whose behalf the work is done. Is an example of *Mosera*."

T.T - "What are the important elements? How many segments are there? What are they called? What does each segment represent?"

L.B - "The important segment starts with 1. *Riso Chihut*, which is followed by 2. *Karbi Karbak kep-lang nang chingthum*..... after that, it deals with the time when we lived together with *Hi'i Arnaam* that's when most died and then emerged 3. *Thireng-Vangreng*... and the concluding segment deals with 4. *Chong avan Nok avan kepa dor*.... And this is a constant question and answer session that follows between the host and the guests....a to and fro discussion on the topics related

to Karbi. If one group fails to address the sequences in entirety and the other group reiterates and corrects the segments.”

T.T - “In your understanding what is *Mosera*, what is it about?

L.B - “ It is related to our past. Just like how I was recounting about our creation, our inception until today how we came to be. How we lived together, how we separated, of land accumulation and divide in sum it is the history of all those things.

T.T - “Why is it important to perform this chanted narrative?” [14:14]

L.B - “*Mosera* is the most important, essential and necessary because it pertains to curb the deaths of Karbi-Karbak in order to avoid deaths incurred by wild animals... It is to omit the resuscitation of the dead and to relieve the souls... It is the bargain with *Chamburukso* which is why the chanting is *Mosera* is needed.”

T.T - “ So this narrative is not just for this world but for the next too?” [15:18]

L.B - “ Yes, it is not just for this world,... the first two segments are in regards to this world,... the segments that follow are divided for the dead. That is why there are four segments.

T.T - “The version you’re recounting is only chanted during *Chomangkan* (*lit.* secondary cremation ceremony)?” [15:46]

L.B - “Yes, it is only recounted only during *Chomangkan* from the early days.

T.T. - “On what other instances is it performed? How does it differ from the *chomangkan* version?” [16:00]

L.B- “I haven’t witnessed the recounting on other events, only and only during *Chomangkan* that it’s being recounted. But then during *Riso Chekak* that is *Jir kedam* which now is not observed by anyone. And if *Jir Kedam* was still practised, the underlying premise deal with how *Riso Chekak* or the separation between ages occurred leading to the creation of all things up to Karbi-Karbak formation. But it wouldn’t be touching on the later segments... and it is known as *Kangthir Kihir*.

T.T - “So it recounts for only segments of the creation of Karbi and how it came to be”? [16:50]

L.B - “Yes, and it covers only those segments and so it is about how the customs and cultural traits were formed. And how we came to be ancestor revering people and the attributes to our mothers and fathers for teaching us the way. And these are what’s recounted.”

T.T - “Is *Thireng-Vangreng* only recounted during *Chomangkan*?” [17:26]

L.B - “ Yes, Yes”.

T.T - “What is *Thireng-Vangreng*” [17:35]

L.B - “That once upon a time there was a pandemic of death like Covid-19. During this pandemic it infected many, but in the meantime, there was one who was very strong and remained unaffected. Even after death, the person rose and travelled to the *Chom Arong* (the realm of the dead) and learned plenty of things on the other side as he was dead for a long time. That he acquired all the knowledge about the spirits and their whereabouts. That’s why when he came back to life, he retained all the knowhow and transmitted the news to everyone. Thus, *Thi-reng* i.e. to come back to life as soon as one dies and so to compound the word it got elongated as *Thireng-Vangreng*. But *Thireng* simply implies the living after death.

T.T - “What is the significance of *Thireng-Vangreng* in the chants of *Mosera* during *Chomangkan* in your account?” [19:29]

L.B - “ Yes it is needed during *Chomangkan* cause it deals with death. Also, the custom of *thireng* talks about how to do away with the dead, the necessary rules and norms to be observed and to finally be assured that the dead will also reach the better resting place...it is also to revere and recount for the deaths of our ancestors... and to driveaway the fear of death from the departing souls. By the way, this should be re-enacted and rehearsed for you to better grasp the content.” (laughs)

T.T - “How did you learn *Mosera*? Did you have any prior training?” [22:15]

L.B - “Yes, I learnt during my youth when *Chomangkan* was very prevalent. On attending the festival, the elders would dictate the youth and the leaders to learn the repertoire of *Mosera* and promote the culture as it was known as *Jutang Keron*. That other would know more about their culture that’s why the elders who amongst the very well versed would teach the youth... and I got my teachings from Ra Ronghang. I learnt in a day’s time because those days it was very popular and very well

circulated, as bits and pieces of it were known to everyone. So when the time came of actual learning, it came naturally as parts of it was known already. Those days people would sing during cultivation and other activities.

T.T - "How is the recitation of *Mosera* different or similar to other chanted narratives since you're well versed in other chants as well? If there are, what are the other chanted narratives?" [23:36]

L.B - "... yes, there are many chants, stories, songs etc but *Mosera* is peculiar...and during my time, there were four students including me who learnt the chant out of which two are already dead. And for your sake, you have to write your thesis, that's why it's needed, isn't it? (chuckles) You did not learn. Just like that also you should have learnt.

T.T - "Is there any other narrative like *Mosera*?" [26:09]

L.B - "This is it, there's no other"

T.T - "Is *Mosera* only performed by male or even female can also perform? Can anybody learn the chants and perform or it is strictly for the ritual practitioner?" [28:17]

L.B - "Even female can recite if they are well versed. There are a number of females who are adept. Yes, during my youth there were females who recited, but at present, it's very rare or none. In the olden times, the leaders and experts would compete with one another who has the most knowledge about one's own culture. That there used to be cases where a female who was very skilled superseded the elder on recounting *Mosera*."

T.T - "Why is *Mosera* sung in lamlir or ritual language?" [23:20]

L.B - "it is because that which you cannot see but the symptoms can be observed. For that fact, even air is invisible, but it can be felt... that is *Mosera*. That which is hidden from the sight"

T.T - "Do you reproduce the chant in verbatim or by heart? What is the process of reproduction?" [30:39]

L.B - "Yes by heart, but also there's written format. The parts which are forgotten are written down, so it assists me when I forget I can re-read. And since I can write a little, I noted them down. But

it's not in print format, but written on my personal register from where I can see. If need be, I can send you the xerox."

T.T - "What do you make out of *Mosera* as a practitioner and a cultural bearer? What is the need for it in the Karbi community and the future of *Mosera*?" [31:37]

L.B - "If you consider yourself to be a Karbi and own yourself as a Karbi. Whatever religion you may practice but if you're Karbi in true sense. *Mosera* should be recounted, because in the past after the creation of Karbi and how it came to be, it is only in the present that people have adopted to so and so different religions. But in the beginning, we were all one, that is why the recounting of *Mosera* is a need for every Karbi in my opinion. Because it is not a ritual but only a way to recount the past. That's why it is a necessity."

T.T - "In your opinion and understanding how will the new generation learn or acquire *Mosera*?" [32:30]

L.B - "It is easier for the present generation to learn, in my understanding. In the present, it is possible for example to record from people like me... Which can later be put to use in the library for further studies. This practice should be given more importance and attached with values that in turn would baffle the other people. And if this practice is preserved well, the rich Karbi tradition and heritage will bear its mark."

T.T - "Lastly, on what occasions can *Mosera* be performed, or is it only during *Chomangkan*" [33:19]

L.B - "As I have told you before, one during *Chomangkan* and the other during *Riso Chekak* (during *Jir kedam*) are the two occasions when it can be performed."

List of mentioned informants

Contributor: Dharamsing Teron (male, 63) Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India.

Contributor: Direshwar Ronghang (male, 57) Guwahati, Assam, India.

Informant: Longkiram Phangcho (male, 28)

Informant: Dhonison Lekthe (male, 36) Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India.

Informant: Longsing Bey (male, 70) Murap, Karbi Anglong, Assam, India.

Informant: Morningkeey Phangcho (male, 38)

Informant: Anonymous (female, 27) Guwahati, Assam, India.

Informant: Group of three females: Kabin Teronpi (55) Diphu, Karbi Anglong, India.
Maya Teronpi (52) Diphu, Karbi Anglong, India
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