



The Festivals Of Karbis Reflected In The Novel '*Rongmilir Hanhi*'

Dr. Mitali Devi
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Behali Degree College, Biswanath, India

Abstract: The Karbi tribe is one of the most significant ethnic groups living in Assam. The novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* by the prominent Assamese novelist Rongbong Terang is based on the lives of the people of the Karbi tribe. The novel is set against the backdrop of a riverine village called Rongmili in Karbi Anglong district during the pre-independence period. It beautifully reflects the social customs, religious beliefs, festivals, folk beliefs, dress, trade and agriculture of the Karbi society. Many notable festivals of the Karbi society such as 'Chajun puja' or 'Sarag puja', 'Chamangkan', 'Hemphu puja', 'Haccha Kekan dance', 'Wal Keter puja' etc. are portrayed nicely in this novel.

Key Words: Chajun puja, Chamangkan, Festival, Karbi, Rongbong Trang etc.

0.1 Introduction: People of different ethnic groups of the world celebrate their own festivals at different times. Festivals and events reflect the culture of an ethnic group. Festivals are the ceremonies that are traditionally celebrated by people of certain ethnic groups time to time through rituals, worship, songs, dances, musical instrument etc. *Festivals are the ceremonies that people celebrate with each other from time to time, taking into account the main elements of the traditional agricultural society, such as rituals, festivals, customs, songs etc.*¹ (trans.)

There are different types of festivals celebrated in Assam. These festivals are celebrated in different parts of the world as well. The festivals of Assam can be divided into four categories:

- (i) Seasonal festivals
- (ii) Calendar Dependent festivals
- (iii) Festival with limited participation
- (iv) Sacramental and Domestic festivals

Assam is a melting pot of the people of different ethnic groups. Every ethnic group living in this land of confluence has contributed to the formation of the greater Assamese community. Therefore, Assamese culture is a mixture of different ethnic groups. However, despite being part of the larger Assamese culture, these ethnic groups have identified their ethnic identity through their own festivals and events. The Karbis are one of the ethnic groups of the greater Assamese community. The Karbi people, like other ethnic groups, celebrate various festivals at different times of the year. Prolific Assamese novelist Rongbong Terang's novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* describes the various festivals that are celebrated in the Karbi society.

0.2 Objective of the study: In this research paper an attempt has been made to focus some festivals of Karbi community which are reflected in the Assamese novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* by Rongbong Terang.

0.3 Methodology: The neo-classical method of close text reading and the analytical methods are followed to write this paper.

0.4 Data Collection: The primary data has been collected from the novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* and secondary data is collected from different books on greater Assamese culture, critical books on Rongbong Terang's novel and websites etc.

0.5 Scope of the Study: The scope of the study of Rongbong Terang's novels or Karbi culture, tradition, custom, heritage, festivals etc. are very comprehensive. To discuss Rongbong Terang's novels or Karbi culture and society in the limited range of a research paper is not an easy task. Therefore, for the convenience of the study, only the festivals of Karbi society which are reflected in Rongbong Terang's famous novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* are attempted here to focus on.

1.00 Discussion: The Karbi people celebrate various festivals according to the seasons. Seasonal festivals are usually associated with the agriculture. They celebrate many festivals along with agriculture like 'Jahang festival', Damahi festival', 'Chajun puja', 'Wal ketar', 'Lakshmi Keplang or Haccha Kekan' etc. *Rongmilir Hanhi* also contains beautiful descriptions of some of these festivals.

1.01 Chajun Puja: Chajun Puja is also known as 'Arnam Kathe' or 'Sarag Puja'. The Karbi people usually celebrate this festival in the Assamese month 'Magh' or 'Fagun'. They organize this puja for the welfare of their families or village. The main deity of this puja is Barithe, the god of Heaven or Indra. They also worship the gods 'Char Devata' (the first man of the house holder), 'Harata Devata' (Varuna), 'Birane' (the messenger of Indra), 'Arani' (the Sun god). Pigs, cocks, betel nut, betel leaf, rice flour, etc. are offered as offering during this puja. The invited guests are treated with wine and meat. The novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* is having a vivid description of 'Chajun Puja'. In page No. 28 of this novel, the novelist depicts a vivid picture of the celebration of 'Chajun Puja' with references to 'chang' on the branches of 'karang' tree, the crabs and fish on the main altar, the altars of the gods Barithe, Harata, Arni i.e. the Sun, the statue of the God Char with a bow in his hand, betel leaf, rice, rice flour etc. Regarding this beautiful description one critic rightly opines, *such a fascinating expression of the collective joy of national life is rare in Assamese literature.*²

1.02 Lakshmi Keplang or Haccha Kekan: Lakshmi Keplang or Haccha Kekan is a dance and song festival associated with agriculture of the Karbi people. The people of this tribe celebrate this festival collectively in the Assamese month 'Magh' after the harvest. After the rice is transported to the storehouse the Haccha Kekan dance is performed. This dance is limited to men only. Women cannot participate in this dance. No musical instruments are used. Lunchep, the main person dances with the sound 'A-ha-cha-ha' when he says 'tang'. The dance ends before the sun rises in the east. These songs are the treasure of Karbi literature. In the discussed novel, the novelist portrays a vivid picture of this dance: *The rhythm of the soft dance brought great joy. The singer of Rongmili village asked the old man Lunchep to dance. Lunchep could not sit still when he heard the call of the young men. He danced with his hands up and clapping. Everyone rejoiced to see Lunchep's dance. The autumn moon came overhead and stopped. There are many ways in which you can enjoy the Haccha dance. There are thousands of stars in the cloudless sky dancing to the rhythm of the dance.*³ (trans.)

1.03 Wal Keter Puja: Wal Keter puja is a kind of agricultural festival. In Karbi Longri, the king is the supreme authority. This is the festival celebrated by the king to wish the good fortune of Longri. The gods Hemphu, Mukra and Raching are worshiped in this puja. The main purpose of this puja is to bring down the goddess of rain to the earth. Red and white cocks are sacrificed in this puja. At the end of this puja, 'Katharapo', invokes the cicada and sings a song for rain. The novel, *Rongmilir Hanhi*, contains a beautiful description of this festival. King Lindakop has arranged the Wal Keter puja to wish the good fortune of Longri. The old man Kathar, taking bath in the river Umrachi, offers puja. Under a 'khar' tree, he has established altars to the gods Hemphu, Mukrang and Raching. They are offering red feathered cocks to the Gods Hemphu and Mukrang and white feathered cocks to the God Raching. The description of this puja is a beautiful reflection of the Karbi society.

1.04 Chamangkan: Chamangkan is one of the popular festivals of Karbi community. This festival belongs to the **Sacramental and Domestic** festivals. Chamangkan is their festival, which is celebrated for the eternal peace of the souls of the dead of the family. The word Chamangkan means 'khasi dance'. The festival is probably named after the khasi customs of performing the 'shraddha' ceremony of the deceased with dance. There are three types of Chamangkan festivals- Kanflafla, Langtuk and Harune. Kanflafla is held by the people of lower financial status and Langtuk and Harune are celebrated by the upper classes of society. The first day of the three days festival is called Rukehum, the second day is called Kanas or small dance and the third day is called Kanpi or big dance. In this festival, the main role is performed by 'Ochchepi' (cook for the dead). There are several types of dances performed by young men and women in this festival. These dances are- Nimcho Keru, Changkedam, Kengtir Kekan, Banjar Keku or Kekan etc. Ochchepi cooks rice and curry and sings 'charhe' songs in a sad tone. In this novel, *Rongmilir Hanhi*, the novelist depicts a nice picture of this festival. The novelist explains how a realistic picture of the Karbi society is reflected through the Chamangkan- *Laughter and tears are the eternal truths of human life. Chamangkan is essential in the life of the Karbi society.*⁴(trans.)

1.05 Hemphu puja: The novel also describes another notable festival of the Karbi people, Hemphu puja. Hemphu is the greatest God of the Karbis. He is known as the guardian of God of the Karbi people. Hemphu puja is performed to protect the householders from danger when he does something good. The novel under discussion contains a vivid description of Hemphu puja as well. Saraik Terang has organized this puja on Tuesday, the seventh day of 'Suklapaksha', before Hema went to study in Kamrup. The novelist describes the scene of this puja as follows:

*They have decorated the altar with two leaves of banana. They chant mantras with rice, flour, basil etc. and offer to the god on the altar. A bamboo 'Trishul' is buried in the altar section. Next to the 'trishul' is a small gourd pot called 'Harbang'. He wrapped a stalk of basil in a banana leaf and put it tight into the mouth of 'Harbang'. He put a bronze ring and an old silver coin in the middle of the altar. He gently placed an egg on the table. Ring wood smoked with incense at the base of the altar. The red cock called as an offering was bothered by the smoke emitted by the incense.*⁵(trans.)

2.00 Findings: From the above discussion it is found that the novelist is quite successful in presenting the Karbi society artistically and realistically through the story of the novel *Rongmilir Hanhi*. The novelist portrays the essential elements of the Karbi culture and society in a lively and realistic way. The novel describes the main festivals of Karbi people such as Chamangkan, Hemphu puja, Chajun puja, Wal Keter Puja, Haccha kekan dance etc. which reflect the national identity of the Karbi community.

3.00 Conclusion: In conclusion, it can be said that the novel *Rongmilir Hanhi* is a novel based on tribal life in which the novelist Rongbong Terang vividly depicts various elements of social life and culture of the Karbi people, one of the ethnic groups of Assam, as well as their festivals.

4.00 Acknowledgement: The author is thankful to the Behali Degree College Library for providing library facilities and all individuals who helped in preparing this paper.

References:

1. Borah, Debajit (ed.) *Uttar Pub Bharatar Janagosthiya Utsav-Anusthan*. M.R. Publication: Guwahati, 2015, p. 18
2. Bora, Pabitra and Deka, Khanindra (ed.). *Samannayar Rupkar, Rong Bong Terang Abhinandan Grantha*. Garima Kalita. "Kalpakathar Arambhani, Prarambhik Samajik Sopan". Dihun Ghar No. 76: Guwahati, 2009, p. 86
3. Terang, Rong Bong. *Rongmilir Hanhi*. Asam Prakashan Parishad: Guwahati, 2004, P.132
4. *ibid.* p. 174
5. *ibid.* p. 82-83