CHAPTER IX

DEITIES OF THE KARBIS, THE GAROS AND OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Introduction

In this chapter we shall discuss the deities of the Mikirs or Karbis, the Garos and the Majangs. They all belong to the same ethnic group of people i.e. The Mongolian or the Indo-Mongoloid. The Karbis have their own District known as Karbi Anglang which is not covered by our field study. But there are some Karbi people residing in the District of Kamrup with their distinctive culture. Their concentration is mainly on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra beginning from in and around Guwahati to Khetri area of the District of Kamrup.

The Garos, to be studied, are not the Garos of the Meghalaya majority of whom have already accepted christianity; but the Garos of the Districts of Goalpara and Kamrup. They are known as Sansarik Garos. Their number of population is very few. The young generation is accepting christianity day by day. Their traditional beliefs and customs are almost in the verge of extinct due to acculturation. Only four or five persons are remained as Sansarik in any Garo village of Goalpara and Kamrup Districts.
The Hajangs are living in the southern part of the District of Goalpara. Their number of population, according to the Handbook of Statistics, 1978 is 386. Now they are reinforced by some refugees from Bangladesh. The Hajongs have no distinctive dialect of their own; they speak Assamese–Bengali mixed dialect. They are much more acculturated than any other group of the Tebeto-Burma family.

A. Deities of the Karbis

1. Budha Gossain

Budha Gossain is the common deity of the Karbis of the plains. He is a very powerful deity and he must be propitiated yearly for the welfare of the villagers and domestic animals. The time and date of worship is any Tuesday of the month of Keti.

Four Patela containing leaves of basil tree, areca-nut and betel leaves, soaked grams, unboiled rice and garland of white flowers are offered. Four containers (Karbi) of country liquor are also offered in the name of the deity. Then all the villagers make invocation. There is a custom that every family must offer a pair of fowls. A goat, to be sacrificed is bought from the public fund. Then the animals are sacrificed.
Songs and dances are done by the experts. A boat made of banana stem is pulled by a devotee and another devotee sprinkles water on the boat.

Budha Gosain seems to be a non-Karbi deity. The deity may be adopted from the Bodo-Kacharua. The banana stem boat reminds us of the Rkhitli function of the Bodo-Kacharua.

2. Sahang

Sahang is a powerful deity of the Karbis. The method of worship of the deity varies place to place. He is worshipped in the month of Behan. At first a small thatched shed is constructed. A long altar of about one foot in height and about ten inches in breadth is made by mud. A bamboo of the same length is placed over the altar. Three marks are given in equal distance of the bamboo and three bamboo posts are erected in every mark. Two branches of bamboo are tied with every post. Vermillion is put on the posts. Then garlands of flowers, soaked gram, unboiled rice, areca nut and betel leaves are offered in four naibeddas (Pateli) country liquor and water are poured on the posts. Dried fish and boiled eggs are also offered. Then the priest belonging to the tribe, chants some invocations in their Karbi dialect. All the votaries bow before the deity. Fowls and goats are sacrificed. A curry of the flesh of the sacrificed animals prepared with Pachala
without mixing chilli is offered as bhog. Drums and flute are played. Shamanistic dance was essential in the past.

The deity is propitiated to protect the village from any epidemic diseases both human and domestic animals.

Some magical device is practiced to learn the omens or welfare on the eve of the day of worship. A piece of bamboo having knots on both sides, is tied with the branch of a mango tree. On the following morning the villagers examine the bamboo. If wabbar's net is found over it, it is assumed that the villagers will have to suffer from any disease. If some insects are found the paddy field will be attacked by some insects and if it remains clean then nothing will happen.

In some places white goats and powder of dried rice are essential. Along with Johang Hemphu, Numpa, Char and some other deities are also propitiated.

The meaning of the word Jahang is 'Ja' means to meditate and 'hang' means to get. Thus Jahang is a deity attained through meditation.

3. Baliya Baba/Thalgi/ Jalgiri

Baliya Baba or Thalgi or Jalgiri is also a popular deity of the plain Karbis. He is worshipped in the month of
Phaun. Flowers, betel leaves and areca-nuts, soaked grams and unboiled rice, a gill of hemp and a cup of opium are offered. Four containers (Karhi) of country liquor are also offered. Then fowls and goats are sacrificed. In some places the god is worshipped in the field. A red or white foul is sacrificed over a kalani. The flesh of the sacrificed animal is prepared with Pachala and offered with country liquor.

The deity is worshipped for the welfare of the villagers and for avoiding madness.

Baliya baba is not but the Siva of the Hindus, offerings of hemp and opium indicate Sivas existence.

4. Chumeng Åthe

Chumeng Åthe is a rain god. To worship him, at first an altar of earth about six inches high is made. A small banana tree, a plant of Nena tenna, a branch of arum bush and some reeds are planted around the altar. The above mentioned trees and plants must grow on the stone. A pig is to be sacrificed. Ingredients of country liquor (buju jwali), liquor (rak jwali) are to be offered. The flesh of the sacrificed animal is baked in a piece of bamboo.

The Karbis worship the deity when there is constant drought. It is their belief that rain is sure to pour if the
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deity is contended.

5. Hemphu

Hemphu is a household deity of the Karbis. Every Karbi householder owns this deity. He may be worshipped at any time. Rice cakes in the Haoh Bihu, flattened rice (Chira) in the Beher Bihu, different varieties of fruits in the Ambubasi, soaked gram and rice in the Shraddha ceremony are offered to the deity. When a child is born, he is propitiated by sacrificing a red cock. Country liquor is also offered.

The deity is worshipped for avoid sickness. Different offerings in different times indicate that the deity is connected with the agriculture offering of fruits on the concluding day of Ambubasi Vrata may be inferred to be the influence of the Hindus who take fruits on the day abundantly. On the other hand, it would not be wrong to infer that the deity is connected with productivity.

6. Kālikā

Kalika is a household male deity. He is represented by a long sword (Dakhar). The sword is kept inside a piece of bamboo and is placed in the bed room. Generally, the deity
is worshipped in the month of Jeth (May-June). In time of worship the sword is taken out from the bamboo and placed on an altar at the courtyard. A goat and a foul are sacrificed. Three naibedyas containing areca-nuts and betel leaves, vermillion and unripe banana are offered. Three containers (Pana) full of country liquor are also offered.

Purpose of the worship of the deity is to protect the particular family from any disease.

7. Kuvir

Kuvir is a malignant spirit. There are three kinds of Kuvir, namely, Chaman, Akas and Langra Kuvir. When anybody is overpowered by chaman Kuvir the following symptoms are occurred that he or she runs away from home, wants to bite a person and runs so fast that it is impossible to catch him. In that moment the head of the family vows to offer puja to the spirit. Nipul flowers and unboiled rice are to be kept beside the patient. When the patient becomes ease, a striped she-goat and a cock are to be sacrificed. The flesh of the killed animal and bird is prepared with Pachala (Young banana tree) and offered in the name of the spirit.

Akas Kuvir is propitiated when some one suffers from fever and fitness. A cock and three hens are sacrificed.
Incense is burnt and vermillion and unripe banana are offered.

Lengra Kuwis is propitiated by sacrificing a pig and a cock. When a person goes out of home with his belongings and he becomes so strong that three or four persons cannot debar him from going, the Karbis believe that the person is possessed by lenggra Kuwis.

B. Deities of the Garos (Sanskark)

The Sansark Garos have only a few deities who are worshipped in different occasion. Major playfair had described some of the deities which are common to all the Sansark Garos. Those who are living in the plain and surrounded by Hindu or Rabha villages, they have inclination to the Hindu or Rabha deities. Now we shall try to give a description and method of worship of the following deities which we have found in our field study.

1. Riei Mitte

Riei is a malignant deity. When some one suffers from any wound and when the wound is increase due to some germs it is believed that the patient is over powered by Riei.

To propitiate the deity, a bamboo cot about four to five feet in height is constructed. A long bamboo is erected
and on the top of it a ball of cotton tied with split bamboo is kept hanging. In time of cutting the bamboo the name of Risi is to be uttered.

Then the Khāmil (Priest) utters some mantras and a goat, and a pig are sacrificed. The blood of the sacrificed animal is to be kept in a pot called ōri and sprinkled on the bamboo cut. Eighteen naivedyas of rice and curry are offered. Nine or ten girls taking ōri (Country liquor container) on their back dance seven times around the cut. Drums and adri (flute made of buffaloes horn) are played. The patient must take the country liquor first. He is given rice and boiled egg of hen to eat. The rice and curry offered to the deity are distributed among the villagers or sprinkled on them.

Risi is a benevolent deity of the Rabhas. He is responsible for creation of the universe. He is not worshipped individually by the Rabhas. No legend is connected with Risi of the Garees as a creative power. The Garees may adopt the deity from the Rabhas and to them he may be a malignant spirit.

2. Dārichik

Dārichik is a malignant spirit responsible for female diseases particularly miscarriage. The spirit is worshipped
on the village path. To represent the spirit a statue of human being is constructed by bamboo.

A dog or a goat or a duck is sacrificed. The blood of the sacrificed animal is offered to the spirit. A little quantity of rice put in a waterful bamboo tube and it is sprinkled on the statue by mouth wind.

Offering of blood of the sacrificed animal may indicate the bleeding of the patient which occure due to abortion. There is reason to think that the contagious magic is applied to cure the disease.

3. Chuchumi

The deity is propitiated when somebody suffers from rheumatic pain. He is also given of riches and causer and curer of blindness and lameness.

A rectangular is made of bamboo and seven leaves of *Juniperus* tree is kept inside it. Cotton balls are tied with thread and put on the bamboo. Powdered rice is sprinkled over the leaves. A pig is sacrificed and eighteen *naivasvayam* containing rice and curry are offered. Afterwards small symbols are tied with sticks and all paraphernalia of worship brought home. The male and female votaries then dance and sing. Rice is throwing on the votaries. Offered rice and curry are
throwing on the dancers and singers. Country liquor is indispensable.

4. Kanche

The deity is propitiated after seedlings. A piece of stone is erected under a tree to represent the deity. Four flowers of Kana and four branches of Khumka tree are put in four corners of the stone. A pig, a white fowl are sacrificed. The flesh of the sacrificed animals are roasted with leaves of chokia plants. Powdered rice is also mixed. Kanche is also worshipped when a person or a cow is lost or a person becomes mad. Then he is worshipped by offering a white fowl and Jakai and Khaled are exhibited.

Kanche is a Rabha deity. The Garos have adopted the deity from their neighbouring Rabhas. The purpose and methods of worship are the same.

5. Chalak Mitte

Chalak Mitte is a rain god. He is invoked in case of continued drought. Major playfair has described the function as follows:

"All the male members of the village repair to a big rock in the neighbourhood, each person holding a gourd of water in his
hand. The priest recites a prayer to implore the god to have mercy on them sacrifices a goat and smears its blood upon the rock. The assembled persons then pour the contents of their gourds over the unfortunate priest to the accompaniment of beating of drums and blowing of wind instruments". 1

The function is performed generally in the month of March-April.

6. Rakohi

Rakohi is connected with crops. The deity is worshipped when a portion of a corn field is dried. A fowl is sacrificed. Rice is also offered. A bamboo basket is kept hanging on a long bamboo and bows and arrows are kept in the basket.

7. Saljong

"Saljong is the god of fertility. He is represented by the Sun, and is worshipped because all crops are in his care, and without his favour no harvests would be reaped. The great festival of the year, the Mungala, is celebrated in his honour, but the actual sacrifice to him is offered in the fields before the village festival begins. A cook is

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killed, its blood is sprinkled on the sacrificial altar,
a little liquor is poured out on the ground in front of it,
and the worshipper then returns to the village for the
Wangala rejoicings. The spirit is also known by the names
Tangugipa-Tengtotgipa, Salgira, Salgra and Ramgra-Balesa.\textsuperscript{2}

The above description is given by Major Playfair Dr.
D. Mazumder differs from M. playfair as regards to sacrifice.
Dr. Mazumder has described that no sacrifice is done in
worshipping Saljang.\textsuperscript{3} Dr. Mazumder may have referred to the
Christian Garos who also perform wangala.

C. Deities of the Hajangs

It has already been discussed that the Hajangs are the
more acculturated tribe of the Bodo group. Majority of them
has accepted Hinduism and practised Hindu custom and manners.
Yet, some of the original deities are worshipped in their
traditional method. As for example Bastu is the Chief deity
of the Hajangs. They may have adopted the deity from their
Hindu counterpart. But the method of worship is quite different.
Now we shall try to give a description of different deities of
the Hajangs which we have acquired in course of our field study.

\textsuperscript{2} 2. Maj Playfair, \textit{ibid}, p. 81.
1. Bastu

Bastu is worshipped twice a year i.e. in the month of Bahau (March-April) and in Aahon (Nov. - Dec.). The Puja is performed in a wide place of the village. All the villagers participate in the Puja.

An altar of mud is prepared first. Then statues of a horse and an elephant made of clay are installed on the altar. A qhat (earthen pot) is also placed beside the idols. Earthen lamps are lit. Milk, unboiled rice, vermillion, flowers are offered as naivedya. In some places a tortoise or a dura (a species of tortoise) is sacrificed. Peacocks, goats, fowls etc. are also sacrificed. Along with Bastu Siva, Kali, Kangkhya, Lakshmi, Chandra, Gopal and Sitala are also propitiated.

The purpose of worship is the welfare of the villagers.

2. Pate deo or Mayla deo

Pate deo or Mayala deo is a malignant spirit. When a child suffers from epilepsy, it is believed that the reason of the disease is attack of the spirit. To propitiate the spirit two statues of horse made of paddy straw are placed on the village path. The puja is held in the morning. Rice powder is offered. Cocks and she-goat are sacrificed. The sacrificer then prepares rice and flesh curry at the place of worship. After offering the prepared dish to the deity, the villagers
take it there.

3. Haila deo or Kändura deo

Haila deo is propitiated when a child cries constantly. The spirit is worshipped under a Sangre tree. Fried rice powder and two athia bananas are required. The bananas and rice powder are placed on a piece banana leaf. Here the vetary is the mother of the child. The mother brings two athia bananas to the place of worship and she offers the bananas taken in her hand and takes back the bananas offered first. She then utters some words to the spirit in this way "O Kändura deo! you take my child and give your child to me". The other people also bring the rice powder and banana in the place of worship.

4. Bandeo

Bandeo is responsible when a person loses appetite after protracted illness. A statue of tiger with beak and tail is made of straw. Then the spirit is worshipped by sacrificing fowl and pigeons. Bandeo may be inferred to be a tiger deity.

5. Gang deo

Gang deo is a malignant spirit who causes fever and
vomiting. The deity is worshipped beside a river. The articles required for the propitiation are a garland of Karabi flower and eggs.

The word gang may have come from the word Ganges and as such Gang deo is a spirit who dwells in water or a river.

6. Brahma-Hari

Brahma-Hari is a benevolent deity. He may be a combined deity of Brahma and Hari. The method of worship is also vasnavite. To propitiate the deity a new thatched house is to be constructed. Sixty four donas made of banana stem are placed inside the house. The donas contain unboiled rice, banana, cakes, gaja white flowers etc. The priest taking fire in his hand enters the house and chants some mantras in his own language. The Puja may be performed individually or publicly. The purpose of the Puja is the welfare of family or the villagers as a whole.

In some places the deity is known as Pitha deo.