

IMPACT OF MODERNIZATION ON MEGALITH CULTURE OF KARBI TRIBES OF ASSAM

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Abstract:

Every tribe has its own unique culture that represents its values and identity. Just like any other Tribes and Community, the Karbis also have vibrant folk culture and identity in Assam. Megalith culture is one of the oldest cultures found in different states of India. Megaliths are basically stone structures that hold the remains of the dead or objects used in burial. In terms of the continuation between the past and present generation, Megalith is one of the crucial characteristics of ethno-archaeological identity. Megalith culture in the state of Assam is mostly found among the Karbi tribe. But with the passes of time this specific culture has been started to diminish among the Karbi tribe of Assam. From different studies it is seen that there are various factors such as spread of education, conversion to other religion, occupational structure etc. are responsible for social change of traditional culture, literature, folklore etc. Therefore, it is obvious that modernization process must have some significant impact on the megalith culture of the Karbi tribe. In the present study an attempt is made to study the impact of modernization on the megalith culture of Karbi tribe of Assam. The present research work is descriptive in nature. The study will be based on both primary and secondary data and the geographical area selected for the study is two districts of Assam Kamrup Metro and Karbi Anglong. The present study will reveal the relationship between modernization and cultural values of the Karbi society. It will also reveal various problems faced by the Karbi community of Assam in continuing their customs and culture which have a significant impact on their lives.

Keywords: Karbi tribe, megalith culture, modernization, cultural change.

Introduction:

The earliest Megalithic culture was evolved in Europe about 8000 to 4000 years ago during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. The Megalithic culture in Indian sub-continent can be traced between 2000 BC to 1500 BC and the oldest specimen of the culture are found in central India, southern India and in the Indus Valley region. The Megalithic culture is based on large stone and characterized various customary purposes and often associated with burial rituals (Meyerhoff, 2013)

Though the culture is primarily evolved in the central and southern parts of India, the north east part of the sub-continent also witnessed the growth of the Megalithic culture in around 5th century CE or earlier. The archaeologists have discovered various Megalithic evidences in areas like Lawnongthroh, Rajbari, Jotsoma, chungliyimti etc. of the period in north eastern

region. Citing the importance of north east India about the Megalithic culture, Mills (1929) reported that Assam destined a worldwide fame in the culture of Megaliths. The archaeologists unable to find out the exact dates of the Megalithic erection in Northeast India but it is evident that the Megalithic erection is found in the vast area of the region including undivided Kamrup, Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Golaghat, Sunitpur and Morigoan districts of Assam.

The Karbis often referred as Mikir and belonged to the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group and are considered one of the major primitive indigenous ethnic tribes in the hill areas of Assam. Just like any other Tribe and Community found in Assam, the Karbi tribe also have a rich and vibrant culture. Their social-lifestyle, folk-belief, folk dance, songs, instruments folk culture, literature, attires, language, rituals, festivals and social customs constitute the culture of the Karbis (Gogoi and Senapati, 2020). They are found in many parts of North east India including Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Assam etc. but they are mainly concentrated in the hills of Assam. Karbis are the main tribe of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Besides Karbi Anglong, the Karbi tribe is inhabited in other districts including Dima Hasao, Kamrup, Marigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Karimganj and Sonitpur districts of Assam. (Terangpi, L, 2020). The Karbis believed in the immortality of soul and rebirth and worshipped their ancestors which reflects the animistic tradition. The social structure of the Karbis is patrilineal and divided into five major clans. These are Lijang, Hanjang, Ejang, Kronjang, and Tungjang. These major clans are further divided into many sub clans. The Karbis of Assam are well versed in Assamese language but primary dialect is Amri.

The Karbis of Assam are one of the few communities who practiced the Megalithic erection in memory of the deaths. Though it is a pre-historical culture of Assam and North East, the Megalithic culture of the Karbis has been continued since ancient past.

Literature Review:

The practice of erection of Megalith as a social norm. There can be seen differences regarding the erection of megaliths among different tribes and also in conceptual term regarding the megalith culture among them (Bora and Bezbaruah, 2018). It is seen that process of erection of Megaliths is the funeral rituals of Karbi tribe of Dimoria block of Assam. Though there are some impacts of social and economic factors on the megalith culture but the practice is continued by the Karbis (Choudhury, 2004).

There is also the amalgamation of past and present in respect of Megalithic erection. It reflects that though there is huge diversity in erection of megaliths among different tribes but the primary objective of celebrating of megaliths are the same (Marak, 2019). Meyerhoff (2013) focuses on the history of the megaliths where large stone erection occurred between about 4000-8000 years ago in Europe during the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

A survey conducted by the Directorate of Archaeology, Assam in 2016 in Dima Hasao district which focused on the Megalithic sites at Khobak village of the district. It is found that the shape, size and construction pattern of the Megaliths are of dolmen type which is quite uncommon and unique. Mills and Hutton, (2004) also found that Menhir and Dolmen are the types of megaliths that are found in North Cachar areas of Assam. A systematic exploration of megalith was conducted from 1966 in Garo Hills of Meghalaya where stones belonging to Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods were found scattered in different parts of the area (Subba and et al ,2004).

There can be seen transition of culture and customs as a result of various socio-economic factors. Kumar (2021) discusses about the patterns of modernity on the outlook and behaviours of the tribes. Here the main focus is given on the impact of British policy on the tribals. After converted to Christianity a major change in the cultural life of the tribes can be seen. British industrialization and urbanization process shifted the tribal people from their primitive habits and culture. The author points the dynamic nature of the static tribal society in post independent era.

According to Bhuyan (2020) modernization can be viewed as a tool for socio-economic transitions. The author clearly defined the nature of the economic and social factors of modernization that can shift the patterns of primitive occupations, individuals value, literacy and culture. Reed and Julia (2011) discussed on the dynamic states of culture and its paths towards modernization. There are some parameters or models that are marked as pillars that compelled the culture to move towards modernity. Andreeva and et at (2017) discussed a model that helped to understand the economic and social impact of modernization on cultural values in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The significance of the study is that the fundamental values of a society should not be transited because of society's readiness or the desires of social groups but should be based on the realistic views and aims.

Karla and et at (2009) focused on the cultural change in an Amazonian society in Bolivia because of the unexpected arrival of outsiders in 1950. But it is important to note that no significant change can be seen among those who reached adulthood at the advent of the outsiders because of their orientation to the aspects of local culture. Chonzik and Killingpi (2014) pointed out the comparative educational attainment as a parameter for the transition of hill Karbi society in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Besides this, another important factors like the spread of missionary activities, modernization waves, occupation, marriage, migration etc. have brought about a sense of reforms across the Karbi society.

Sarma (2021) represents the gradual changes of the society of the plain Karbis of Borbari area of Guwahati and it is found that the Dehal and Ronker festivals observed by different communities of the Karbis now amalgamated. There has been observed a change in the pattern of the Karbis in relation to their dress, food habits, village structure and identity of the area. There can also be seen a remarkable social change in the aspects of religion, folklore and literature due to the impacts of the Gospel. The social and religious festivals representing their rich heritage were influenced by the process of westernization in every aspect of their traditional life (Terangpi,

2020). If we see the practice of Megalithic erection of Assam-Meghalaya border region, there are some the impact of urbanization and industrialization in the traditional old age practices.

Objective :

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

- 1.To study the present status megalith culture of Karbi tribe of Assam.
- 2.To outline the problems faced by the Karbi tribe in continuing the megalith culture in Assam
- 3.To study the impact of modernization on megalith culture among the Karbi tribe of Assam.

Methodology:

The present research work is descriptive in nature. The study will be based on both primary and secondary data. The source of secondary data includes written documents in the form of books, journals, magazines, official websites and other published and unpublished works. For primary data, observation and interview methods will be applied for collection of data. Furthermore, questionnaire and pre-structured schedule method will be selected to collect data from the field. To collect the relevant data, elderly persons, village headman, priests and persons who have engaged in stone erection process will be selected for interview. Thus, the present research study will be primarily based on megalithic survey, case studies, interview method, participant and non-participant observation methods.

Geographical area selected for the study is two districts of Assam where people of Karbi community can be found. These two districts are Kamrup Metro and Karbi Anglong. Since the megaliths has the archaeological potentialities and socio-cultural significance, therefore megaliths are a living tradition of the Karbi tribe and therefore the study will be undertaken in a systematic way.

Modernization significantly impacts megalithic culture, often leading to its decline or transformation. While some communities continue to maintain traditional practices, such as erecting megaliths as memorials, others face challenges due to urbanization, changing social structures, and the introduction of new technologies. Traditional social hierarchies and belief systems associated with megalithic practices may erode as societies become more interconnected and modernized. This can lead to a decline in the observance of rituals and ceremonies linked to megaliths. In some cases, a lack of awareness among local communities about the significance of megaliths can lead to their neglect or even destruction. Insufficient documentation of these sites can also hinder efforts to preserve them.

The Karbi community in Assam, Northeast India, maintains a unique megalithic tradition deeply intertwined with their spiritual beliefs and oral narratives. They view stone as an enduring element and erect megaliths, particularly during ceremonies like Chomangkan, to honor the deceased and ensure the presence of their spirits. While the Karbi community still maintains some

aspects of their megalithic culture, particularly the practice of erecting stone monuments after death, there's a noticeable decline in its prevalence and practice due to factors like urbanization, religious conversion, and economic changes.

The Karbis, especially those in the plains areas of Assam, still practice erecting stones (menhirs and table stones) after cremation as a way to honor the deceased and maintain a connection with their ancestors. These stone structures, often called Long-e and Long-dang, are believed to be a resting place for the departed soul and a way for the living to feel the presence of their loved ones. Megalithic beliefs and practices are passed down through generations via oral narratives, particularly during ceremonies like Chomangkan.

As Karbi communities interact more with urban centers and embrace modern lifestyles, traditional practices like building megaliths may be seen as less relevant or practical. Some Karbis have converted to Christianity or other religions, leading to a decline in traditional rituals and beliefs, including megalithic practices. In the Kamrup metropolitan district of Assam a group of Karbi community people identified themselves as 'Amri Karbi' after embracing into Christianity. Shifting livelihoods and economic pressures may make it difficult for some families to afford the resources and time needed to perform these elaborate rituals. The increasing percentage of educated people and opportunity diminished the importance of the culture among the youths. The Karbis living in the plains have been influenced by Assamese Hindu culture, which has led to a blending of traditions and a possible decline in some aspects of their unique megalithic culture. With fewer elders actively practicing and teaching these traditions, there's a risk of losing the knowledge and significance of megalithic practices. Overall, while the Karbi community still holds onto aspects of their megalithic culture, the forces of modernization, religious conversion, and economic changes are contributing to its decline, particularly in urban areas and among younger generations.

Findings:

- i) The Karbi community of Assam still maintain their age old custom i.e. erection of megalith with some modification in structural part.
- ii) It has been noticed that the modern education system and global opportunities deviated the minds of the young Karbi population.
- iii) Shifting livelihood and economic pressure also affected the culture to some extent.
- iv) The preach of gospel and conversion by the Karbis into Christianity is the major challenge towards the existence of the megalithic culture.

Conclusion: An age old custom and rituals reflected the cultural identity of a particular community. The megalithic culture Indian sub-continent can be traced between 2000BC-1500BC. The Karbi community of Assam practiced the megalithic erection culture since ages. But the

modernization factor diminished greatly the importance of the rich culture. The collective measures of various stakeholders and the sense of importance of such culture required for its preservation.

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