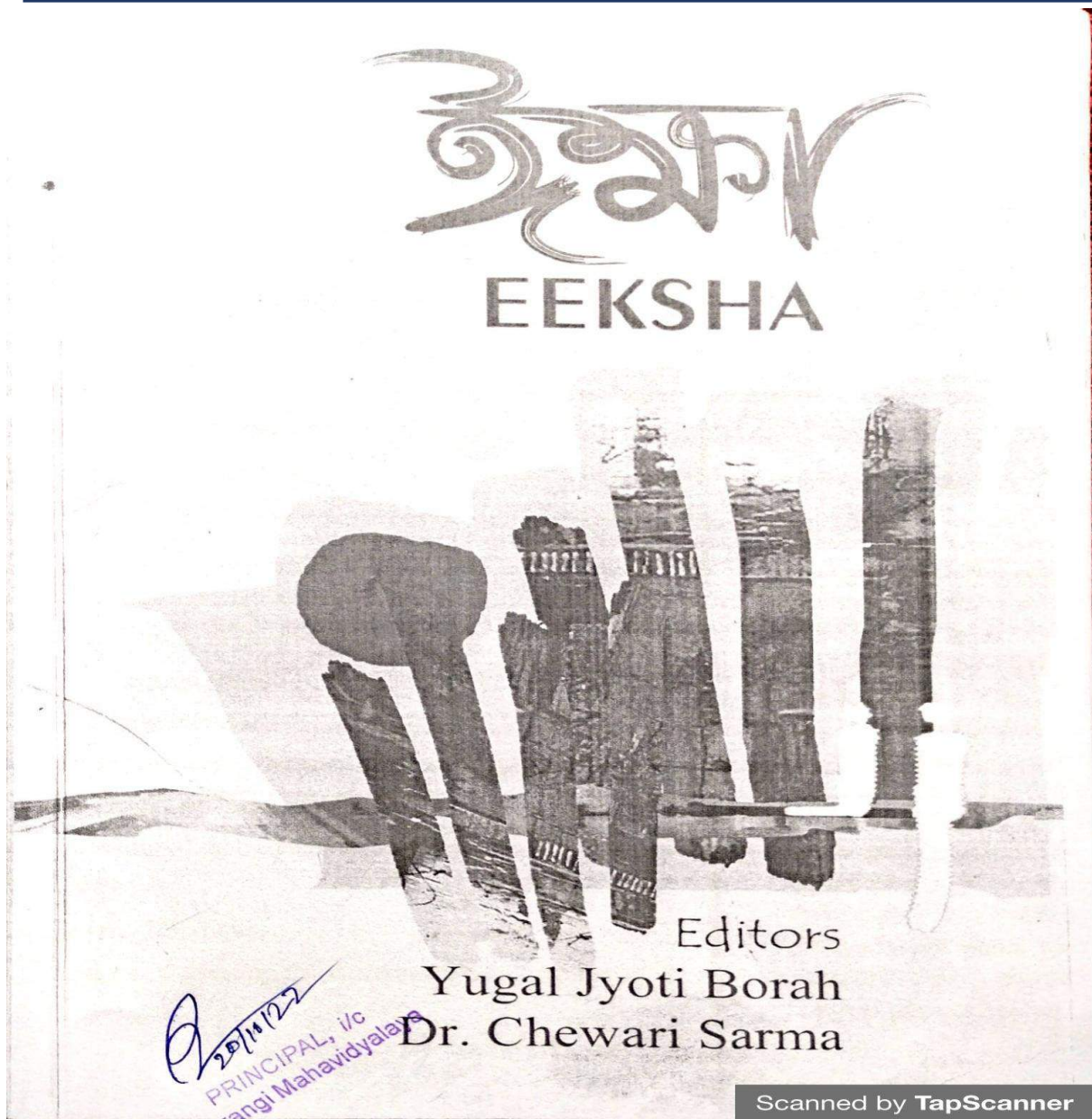


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1. Pallabi Saikia

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## RELIGIOUS FAITH AMONG KARBIS: CONTINUITY AND CHANGES

✍ Pallabi Saikia

Assam is a state with natural beauty and a part of North East India, where numerous racial and tribal groups are living together with different Socio-cultural attribution. Each of the tribal groups has an own and unique traditional history, language, culture, society, religious beliefs and strong ethnic identifies. The tribal people generally live in hilly forest area, river side and isolated areas. These tribal people are not similar on the basis of their characteristics, though these are some similar characteristics of all of them.

According to Dr. D.N. Mazumdar, "A tribe is a collection of families or groups of a family bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed a well assessed system reciprocity and mutuality of obligation."

The tribes of Assam can be divided in two categories as the hill tribes and the plain tribes. Hill tribes are living in hilly areas and plain tribes are living in the valley areas.

These two categories have different geographical situations of the habitat and have different cultural characteristics.

Among various tribal communities the Karbis are one of the important tribes of Assam. They are found in the hilly areas of Assam, mainly their domain is Karbi Anglong

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**District.** Some population are also found in North Cachar Hills, Nagaon, Morigaon, Golaghat, Kamrup, Jorhat, Sivaspur and Lakhimpur District of Assam and its bordering states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

The origin of the word 'Karbi' can be found in the 'Mosera Kehir' which is a retelling of the origin of Karbi history. Karbis call themselves 'Arleng' which literally means 'Man' in Karbi language. Karbis were previously known as Mikir community and the oldest aboriginal tribes of North East India. Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha has, therefore called the Karbis as 'the Columbus of Assam.'

Accordingly to Stack and Lyall, in the book the book the Mikir, said that the original abode of the Karbis was the eastern portion the Khasi and Jaintia Hills bordering the Kopili river. According to Jygoram Gogoi the earlier settlement of the Mikir was in the hills called Nongpilar in the North Eastern region and came down to the plains and settled in the Lumbajong lying between Dimapur and Diphu.

On the basis of physical characteristics, Karbi tribes are belonging to Negrito group. They belong to greater Mongoloid racial stock. Karbi has very rich and sweet culture and heritage of its own. Among them generally found patriarchal family. The father is the head of the family, where Nuclear family is considered as Ideal type. However to a very limited extent joint families are still found in Karbi society. The Karbi strictly follows clean exogamy. They have five cleans called kur. There are Ingti, Enghee, Teron, Terang and Timung. Each of the five cleans has major sub-cleans. Those are completely exogamous. The marriage between a boy and girl belonging to the same clean is not

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