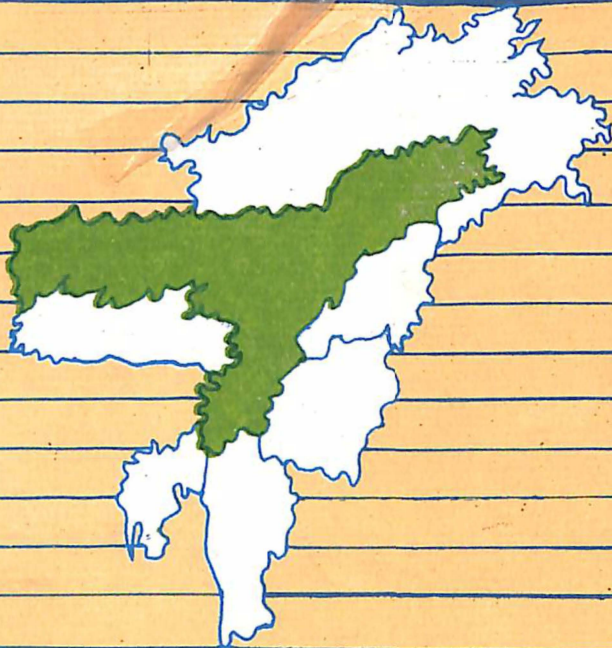


G. K. GHOSH
SHUKLA GHOSH

FABLES AND FOLK TALES
OF
ASSAM



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FABLES AND FOLK-TALES OF ASSAM

G. K. GHOSH
SHUKLA GHOSH



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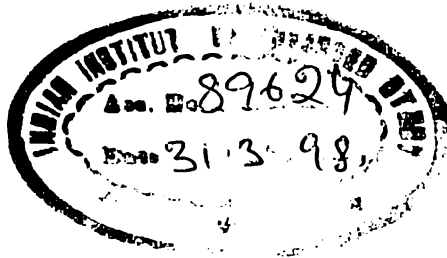
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INTRODUCTION

Assam is a land unique in its characteristics. The term Assam, according to one theory was derived from the term "Assama" or unequal due to its uneven surface. According to some other it was derived from the term Ahom, a race of Thai origin who ruled Assam from 1228 AD till arrival of the British. They were known as Ahoms due to their unequal bravery who not only defeated the royal army of Koch Kingdom but also mighty Moghul army led by no less than Raja Man Singh. Assam still remembers its legendary General Lachhit Bar Phukan.

One must remember Assam is not a land of one race. Apart from caste Hindu Assamese group including Kalitas, Bodos, Dimasas, Lalungs, Karbis, Koches, Ahoms, Shyams, Aitunias, Zeme Nagas and so on with various ethnic origin, linguistic affinities having their own religious beliefs and culture. The resultant culture what we witness today is the result of influence exerted by one race to other as a result it varied considerably from upper Assam to lower Assam.

But diving into the world of their folk tales it gives not only the aroma of the soil but also traces of the original culture. Since these stories were born out of nature and the culture of origin they are obviously ecofriendly in nature.

This book is compiled by the authors who spent over four years in North Eastern India. In this book various folk-tales of various races of Assam are compiled mentioning names of each race in the bracket. Though it is only a drop in the ocean of folk-tales in circulation in Assam, it is an attempt to preserve as many possible. The book, it is hoped, shall be good for pleasure reading for both young and old alike. It may also be useful for research scholars, social scientists, anthropologists who would like to know more about society of various races of Assam during various point of time.

Last but not the least, it should be mentioned that since Assam represents North Eastern India, its folk-tales shall give dimensions of seven sisters with the Mahabharata connection that bridges tribal culture and Vedic culture, these stories may give reflection of India as a whole. Above all since world's all principal races and religions are represented in Assam in some form or other these folk-tales perhaps may give us aroma of the soul of entire human culture of the world.

Kali Puja
2nd November, 1994
Flat No. 2,
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1

LUNGLA MAHADEO (LALUNG)

Lord Shiva or Mahadev created a deity from his body in human form who was known as Lungla Mahadeo (Lung = a stream of juice arising out of Lord Shiva, La = the formation of a living being out of that juice). The union of Lord Lungla and Joyanti Devi (incarnation of Goddess Durga) produced three daughters. From the eldest Karbis were created while Bodos and Lalungs had their origins from the second and the youngest daughter respectively.

2

MAHABALI (LALUNG)

Originally Lalungs were ruled by the Demon King Mahabali who was faithful devotee of Lord Vishnu, a legacy that he inherited from his grandfather Pralhad. The King wanted that all his subjects should adhere to the royal religion. A section of Lalungs refused to accept that religion and as a result the King's fury fell heavily upon them. As a punishment they had to bear a red imprint (Lal) on their forehead and were turned out of the country. Later on those bearers of red mark on their forehead came to be known as Lalungs.

3

SALIVA OF LORD MAHADEO (LALUNG)

Once Lord Mahadeo was heavily intoxicated with rice beer and while he was lying unconscious on a road, a stream of saliva (Lala) came out from the mouth of Lord Mahadeo. Two human beings were created out of this saliva. These two human beings created out of divine saliva were the ancestors of Lalungs and since they were created out of *Lala* were known as Lalungs.

4

**MANUS MAHADEO
(LALUNG)**

Once upon a time Lord Mahadeo and His consort Parvati were enjoying the scenic beauty of the Manassarowar Lake. The soothing beauty of the lake area enchanted the Lord so much that He soon fell asleep on the bank of the Lake. As He woke up He saw five drops of saliva at the place where He was resting. The Lord created five human beings out of divine saliva, they came to be known as Lalungs. These five original Lalungs had the unique privilege of seeing the creator in the form of human being and therefore the Lalungs call Lord Mahadeo as Manus Mahadeo.

5

**THE PIG ANCESTOR
(LALUNG)**

Originally the earth was lying under a vast sheet of water. Then God appeared in the form of a pig and lifted the earth from the expanse of water. The Lalungs believe themselves to be descendants of this divine pig. Thus every Lalung feels proud since they carry divine blood in their vein. They also call themselves as Tiwa (Ti = Water, Wa = Superior), perhaps derived from this folk story.

6

**THE DIVINE KING
(LALUNG)**

Originally Lalungs along with Bodos, Tiperrahs and so on were the subjects of a King belonging to Lunar dynasty (Chandra Banshis) ruling from their capital of Tribeg. Subsequently two brothers of this dynasty Drikpati and Dakshin fought for the throne and had to migrate and founded separate kingdoms. As a result Lalungs were deprived of their King. Depressed Lalungs prayed to Lord Mahadeo for a King. Lord Mahadeo and his consort Parvati flew to earth but the Lord was so much excited to see the natural beauty below that he could not check his sexual desire. He

made a small packet of his semen and threw it down which fell on a *beel* near the Lalung habitations. A Mali fish swallowed those semen and in course of time a human baby was born from the womb of that fish. The Lalungs took care of the baby and in course of time made him their King as he possessed certain kingly features. As the King was born out of a Mali fish, his descendants took the clan Malotal.

7

HARISON RAJA (LALUNG)

According to their legends, Lalungs believe that long long ago they used to live in the hilly region of near Kashi (Varanashi). They were the subjects of one Harison Raja (perhaps the famous King Haris Chandra of Hindu mythology). Since a curse befell on him, Harison Raja had to leave his royal pleasure to live in the house of a *chandal* (an untouchable Hindu caste) near cremation ground – to cremate dead bodies. He used to carry pieces of cloths on dead body to share with his master. The Lalungs still remember Harison Raja as their King and offer cloth to dead bodies of their relatives expecting extra clothing to be taken by Harison Raja.

8

LALUNG, JAYANTIA AND AHOM (LALUNG)

Long long ago Lalungs were living in Jayantia hills under Jayantia King. They moved into plains of Khagarijan (in Nagaon district) because they disliked matriarchal and matrilineal systems and the human sacrifice of the Jayantias. The Lalungs were forced to offer one person every year for the sacrifice before the goddess. Many Lalung families left the Jayantia Kingdom out of fear of losing the only son. When the annual puja approached many Lalung families moved out of Jayantia. Often times a lonely traveller inside a jungle path was encountered by the King's men who enquired whether he was *Bankua* (alone) or *Sikia* (with company). The King's men did not spare a *Bankua*. As regards acceptance of matrimony and Jayantia social system, the Lalungs were divided in their

opinions. The two sections under leadership of Tangara and Hura began to fight with the issue, Hura was defeated and Tangara along with his followers fled away to the Ahom territory through Jagi. The Ahom official Jagial Gohain sent them to Rahial Barua who established them in different areas of Nagaon. In this way five principalities (Paacho Raja) were established under the Raha administrative circle. Later on another seven principalities (Sato Rajya) were established under the Jagi administrative circle. The Chief of these principalities was designated as Powali Raja (= Mini King) who used to pay taxes to Ahom Kings in kind, besides assisting Ahom Kings with soldiers at the time of war.

9

STORY OF MIGRATION (LALUNG)

Lalungs believe that Tibet was their original home during ancient day. Due to some unknown reasons they migrated to a place on the bank of river Jamuna near Allahabad. They were pushed by Aryans and came towards east following the Himalayan passes. After a long sojourn they reached Pragjyotisha where they established a principality and ruled for several years. King Narakasura pushed them further towards east and the Lalungs came to the Kapili valley where they ruled for several generations. They established a principality in the valley known as Tribeg and the Lalungs were then known as Tifras being ruled by their King Pratyardan of Lunar dynasty. Later they were subdivided as Tiperrahs who migrated to Tripura, Bodos spread over North of Bramhaputra and Lalungs who came under subjugation of Jayantias, Ahoms and Kachharis.

10

STORY OF ORIGIN (KARBI)

Long long ago a large divine bird called Wo Palk Pi flew down the earth and laid thousand eggs below an *Amra* tree (*Foudia Mangifera*). From the first egg an unfamiliar human race called Ahom was born. The second egg gave a human race called Chomang (Khasis) and the third egg gave the Nagas. The egg that gave Karbis was the biggest one, for no reason at

all. As the egg was hatched, the Karbis peeped out of the egg and found demons and the demon gods were searching for human beings for the purpose of devouring them while the crows and vultures were flying in the sky. They out of fear went inside the egg and after all other races came out since Karbis came out later, they remained backward.

(The story was noted from Masir Kohir, the holy verse of the Karbi Tribe)

11

THE SPIRIT OF OLD MAN

(KARBI)

Long ago, death occurred to a very pious old man of a particular family. The spirit of old man had started paying regular visits to his living wife in the shape of an apparition. It was offered food and drink by his wife at his each visit. The daughter-in-law of the family was too curious to see the apparition form of her dead father-in-law. When she could no longer resist her curiosity, she had decided to have a look at the apparition by any means, fair or foul, with a view to fulfil her desire she one day sent her mother-in-law to the jhum field and she herself remained at home assuring her mother-in-law that the apparition would be treated as usual with food and drink at the time of its visit to household. The mother-in-law accordingly left for jhum thinking that her daughter-in-law would be capable of entertaining the spirit of her dead husband in the form of an apparition timely with food and drink. At mid-day the spirit of the father-in-law with a ghostly appearance appeared at the court yard of the house and enquired whether any body was in the house. The daughter-in-law came to the door and at the sight of the ghostly appearance of the spirit of her dead father-in-law she was frozen with fright. She had never expected the apparition to be of such an awful, ghostly shape. Any way, the apparition demanded serving of food and drink immediately. Although she kept everything ready, she dare not to offer it (food and drink) out of fright. After waiting sometime for food and drink, he asked for a piece of live fire wood for the purpose of smoking. Instead of complying with its request, the daughter-in-law hid herself behind the bamboo wall. But still she could see the apparition through the little holes in the wall. The spirit of the father-in-law, instead of getting angry with the conduct of her daughter-in-law, rather felt pity at

her plight and asked her to cover head with the cooking pot. Following his instructions she hid her face with the cooking pot and this had saved her from seeing the ghostly apparition of her dead father-in-law any more. The spirit, however, being deprived of the usual share of his food and drink had left the place in disgust never to come back again to pay visit to the living ones. Thenceforth, the living could no longer see the spirits of the dead. It is believed that owing to the fault of the daughter-in-law complete separation has been created between the living and the dead for good.

12

STORY OF TUMUNG CHOMAR HUNTER (KARBI)

In ancient times there was a very expert hunter among the Karbis belonging to Tumung Chomar. It was rather a habit for him to go out for hunting every day with a pack of hunting dogs. One day in course of his hunting he found a female she hang (a kind of big edible lizard found in the forest). With the help of his dogs he caught hold of the she hang and when he tried to kill her, the she hang prayed for her life. In lieu of her life, she promised to take the hunter to the abode of the dead. The hunter granted her prayer and the she hang took him to the kingdom of Yama alive and there he learnt all the rules and regulations that were to be observed in the performance of the death ceremony.

Returning back to the world of the living, he taught the Karbis the rules and regulations and all the religious rites that were to be solemnly observed in the performance of the death ceremony.

13

CONCEPT OF DEATH (KARBI)

The Karbi concept of death depends on three factors, namely, the immortality of the soul, the life thereafter and rebirth. The Karbis believe that the spirits of the dead have a world of their own and it is known as Chom-Arong or Chum-Arong or Yama-Arong which literally means the

city of Yama, the King of death. The Chom-Arong or Chum-Arong or Yama-Arong is supposed to be located on a hill known as Long-serve lying beyond our inaccessible hill called Mukindar Anglong. Unless the spirits of the dead men are sanctified with the elaborate rituals of Chomang Kan, meaning the death ceremony, they do not get admittance to the destined world of the spirit, namely Yama-Arong. Chamang Kan ceremony is therefore performed with a view to enabling the roaming spirits of the dead persons to enter into their proper abode. But Yama-Arong is not a resting place of the souls of the dead persons for ever. It is simply a temporary resting place and the period of rest varies from spirit to spirit. The Karbis believe that the spirit of a dead man is reborn in the same family. When the rebirth in the same family is not a practical proposition, the spirit might take its birth in a family belonging to the same clan. That is why a new born child is very often named after a person of the family whose death took place quite some time ahead of the birth of the child. The reason for repetition of the same name among the members of the same family may be ascribed to this.

It is believed that in the bygone days there had been only a very thin screen between the dead and the living and the spirits of the dead could pay visit to their relatives in the shape of shadows or images called Arjan. It was due to certain incident already described in a separate story, this bond of contact was snapped.

14

STORY OF THONG NOKBE

(KARBI)

Long long ago when Karbis were living in Jayantiapur under the rule of Khasi King, there was a great hero among Karbis called Thong Nokbe. By virtue of his heroic deeds of outstanding merit, Thong Nokbe could become the Commander-in-Chief of the King of Jayantiapur. For his extraordinary valour and courage he was liked by the Jayantia King very much. Later on the title Nokbe, which literally means a hero, was bestowed upon him by the King as a recognition of his heroism. Thong Nokbe under patronage of the Jayantia king had gorgeously performed the death ceremony of his father. To this ceremony besides Karbis, the Khasis and the Jayantias

were also invited. During this ceremonies a sort of dancing competition was performed among the tribes to honour the soul and the Khasis could excell well. Hence thereafter the Karbis followed Khasi pattern of dance during their death ceremony and accordingly death ceremony of the Karbis was named Chomang Kan (Chomang = Khasi, Kan = dance).

15

STORY OF THIRENG VARENG (KARBI)

Long long ago a great man was born among the Karbis whose name was Thireng Vareng. He was a great social reformer and spiritual leader of the Karbis. He was capable of travelling between the land of the dead and the land of the living freely and in the process he came close to Yama, the King of the land of dead, ultimately marrying the daughter of Yama. He introduced the rules, regulations and manners in which the death ceremony was to be observed. In the land of dead he had seen how the Kans or A-Kans (= dances) were performed by the people there and the same Kans or A-Kans were introduced by him here among the living at the time of celebrations of the death ceremony of the Karbis. Because of the association of the Chom-A-Kans, the death ceremony of the Karbis, might have been called Chom-A-Kan which subsequently changed into Chomang Kan as they migrated over the period of time.

In the Kingdom of Yama, Thireng Vareng saw difficulties faced by the spirits of the dead people and in order to mitigate their sufferings he taught the Karbis the manners in which the death ceremonies of the deceased persons were to be performed so that their souls might rest in peace in the abode of the Yama. Thus he solved the question of the segregation of the dead from the living once for all. It was said, the youth force among Karbis refused to obey Thireng Vareng initially but the ceremony was so elaborate that it was practically impossible to observe entire ritual unless youth participate. Hence in an attempt to provoke the youth to participate in such elaborate ceremony, Thireng Vareng introduced the singing of Kapaer, the songs with obscene language sex and abuses.

Thireng Vareng also described what he saw in Yama Arong. He had described that in the kingdom of dead everything was quite reverse and different. During his frequent visits Thireng Vareng found that a crab be-

came a tiger there. The shehang (A kind of giant lizard) became a King there. A butterfly turned into an elephant. In the Kingdom of Yama he found people going out for fishing but instead of catching fish they caught sticks. Thus what seemed to be bad here would be considered good in the Yama Arong. The singing of Kapa-er, though seemed to be quite obscene here would, therefore, be considered good by the residents of the Kingdom of Yama including the deceased for whose benefit the death ceremony was performed. Similarly, she goats, hens, cocks, pigs etc. were sacrificed here by severing their heads so that the deceased might get them alive in the other world.

(The term Thi-Reng means dead alive while Va-Reng means came alive.)

16

THE KINGDOM OF KARBIS

(KARBI)

Long long ago the Karbis used to live in prosperity on the banks of the rivers the Kalang and the Kapili including Kaziranga area. During the reigns of the Kachhari Kings they were driven to the hills and some of them entered into Jayantiapur, the erstwhile Jayantia Kingdom, and lived under the Jaintia suzerainty.

The Karbis had their own Kingdom also adjacent to the Jayantia Kingdom. Socheng and Niz Rong Khang were their capitals.

(Even today a traditional Karbi King lives in Niz Rong Khang who is respected by all the Karbis).

17

ORIGIN OF HUMAN RACE

(DIMASA)

At the beginning, the world was completely uninhabited and the shapes of the rivers, hills, mountains, trees and plants etc. were not the same that we find today. An earthly silence had enveloped the whole atmosphere. In course of time two godly beings one male and one female appeared.

Their appearance had broken the unearthly and all pervading silence of the world. The male was called Bangla Raja. He was the god of the earthquakes. The female was called Arikhidima, in the shape of a very huge bird. The two fell in love and as a result Arikhidima had a divine conception.

Being a divine being herself and carrying a divine conception, Arikhidima had a great problem to find out a suitable nesting place for laying her eggs. Having flown out all the corners of the earth in search of a suitable nesting place, Arikhidima, at long last, discovered a place called Dilaobra Sanggibra, the confluence of the rivers Dilao and Sanggi. Dilaobra was a very lovely place. The landscape with its shining sands and blooming flowers was beyond description. There was a huge strong banyan tree that even the heaviest storm could do little harm to its twigs, branches and leaves. Arikhidima selected this heavenly place and landed on the banyan tree. There she laid seven divine eggs. When the hatching course was over from the first egg Sibrai was born. Sibrai was followed by the birth of Du Raja, Naikhu Raja, Wa Raja, Ganyung-Braiung and Hamiadao, from the second, third, fourth, fifth and the sixth egg respectively. All the six were gods in the form of human beings, and they started playing gleefully on the golden of Dilaobra Sanggibra. But the seventh egg still remained in the same state although sufficient time had already elapsed. This had caused great anxiety to Arikhidima. When she could realise that the egg would not break naturally, she asked her sons to break it open. But none dared to do this. At last, Hamiadao, the sixth son, who was naughty and daring enough, gave a heavy kick to the egg. Out came the ugly shaped evil spirits from the immaturely broken egg and they tried to devour the world causing widespread chaos. At last they were pacified by Sibrai, the eldest brother who also detailed their habitat and living. Thus the six gods from Sibrai to Hamiadao in the form of Human being were the ancestors of the Dimasas. In other word the Dimasas are the descendant of six gods, namely, Sibrai, Du-Raja, Naikhu Raja, Wa Raja, Ganyung-Braiung and Hamiadao and they are worshipped by the Dimasas as their ancestral gods. The Dimasas believe that the evil spirits that were born out of the seventh egg one responsible for their diseases and other calamities.

The story also in a way says that the Dimasas are the descendants of the divine bird Arikhidima. Perhaps the term Dimasas might have been derived from the term Arikhidimasa means children of Arikhidima since the suffix Sa means children.

(The story has strong similarity with the Karbi story of the divine bird *Wo Palk Pi*, whom the Karbis believe their ancestress and a similar legend of origin believed by the Reangs of Tripura).

18

LEGEND OF PRINCESS HIDIMBA (DIMASA)

Long long ago, India or Bharat was ruled by a Royal family known as *Kuru Bamasa*. At one point of time there was clash between two group of cousins, the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* to occupy the throne of *Hastinapur*, the ancient capital of India. There was a lot of ups and downs and a long story. However, sometime during the era *Pandavas* had to flee leading a life of uncertainties and the five brothers arrived in *Kirata Desha*, today's North Eastern India.

During the period there lived a demon called *Hidimbaka* and his demoness sister *Hidimba*. When these five Indian Princes appeared in the scene, *Hidimbaka* wanted to devour them, but *Bhima*, the second of the five brothers fought gallantly and killed *Hidimbaka*. Subsequently, *Hidimba* fell in love with *Bhima* and became wife of *Bhima*. A brave son *Ghototkocha* was born to them.

With the help of *Pandavas* a Kingdom called *Hidimba Khetra* was established named after *Hidimba* and subsequently *Ghototkocha* became the King of this Kingdom. *Ghototkocha* fought war that subsequently broke between the two groups of cousins and died.

The subjects of this Kingdom were known as sons of *Hidimba* or *Hidimbasa* and perhaps the term *Dimasa* could be the corrupt version of the term *Hidimbasa*. The Kingdom had its capital at *Hidimbapur* which subsequently became *Dimapur*, a commercial town now located in Nagaland.

19

CREATION OF FISH (DIMASA)

At the beginning of this world there was no fish. All rivers, ponds and lakes were free from fishes or water animals and the water was crystal

clear. Once Sibrai, the eldest son of Bangla Raja and Arikhidima, one of the benevolent ancestral gods of Dimasa had arranged a feast inviting all his subjects and gods. He ordered his servants to prepare one of the curries with meat of the creatures that lived in water. But the servants could not find any creature in water as no such creatures were created till then. Sibrai then mediated deeply. At this God became pleased with him and he poured forth all varieties of fish along with rain.

Thus fish came into existence.

Since fish has its own divine background the Dimasas even today consider fishes as a symbol of good omen.

20

LEGEND OF GODDESS RANACHANDI (DIMASA)

Long long ago there was a great Dimasa King called Nirbhay Nirayan. He was known for his valour and bravery while at the same time he was kind to his subjects. Thus subjects loved and respected him, gods blessed him while the enemies were afraid of him.

One night, Goddess Ranachandi appeared to the King in a dream. She told him that on the following day she would appear in a certain spot of a nearby river in the shape of a python and the King had to hold the snake by the neck. Following her instructions, the King went to the particular spot of the river on the following day and waited patiently. When nothing appeared for a long time the King was about to return to his palace at Khaspur. Just at that time a huge python appeared on the surface of the water of the river and swam towards his direction. Although the King tried to grasp the python by the neck at the last moment his courage failed and he could, therefore hold the snake by the tail only. In an instant the huge python turned into a sword in the shape of a snake in motion. The King took the sword to his palace. Following night the goddess again appeared to the King and had taken him to task for not obeying her instructions. She, however, told the King that as long as the sword would be preserved carefully no misfortune would befall to his country and his country would flourish in all respects.

(It was believed that this sword was preserved in the royal armoury till the assassination of the last Kachari King Govinda Chandra, since his

death whereabouts of this sword remained a mystery and the British could occupy this land without much resistance. It was also believed that Ranachandi was considered as presiding deity of this Kingdom and relics of the last Kachari capital near Kumbhirgram Airport of Silchar showed the temple of Ranachandi was prominently placed despite of the fact that they had belief that they were descendants of Pandavas who had Vaisnav connection and later Srimat Sankardeva, the Vaisnav social reformer of Assam did influenced them, the presence of Namghar culture in many Dimasa villages testified.)

21

ORIGIN OF DEHANS

(DIMASA)

Due to various reasons, Dimasa Kings had to shift their capital from Dimapur to Maibong. Maibong was a flourishing capital under the Dimasa rule situated on the bank of Mahur river. By then Brahmaputra valley was ruled by powerful Koch Kings and during the days of King Naranaryan, the Koch Kingdom became too powerful when king Naranaryan's younger brother, Chilarai, a brave fighter, was the Commander-in-Chief of Koch army. It was during that period Koch army led by Chilarai attacked Maibong and defeated Dimasa army. A few Koch soldiers who stayed back at Maibong marrying local girls, created a new race called Dehans.

22

HUMAN EMERGENCE FROM CAVE

(HMAR)

Long long ago when the world was young, men and women used to live inside a large cave, inside of which was obviously very dark. One day one young man, son of a chief while wandering inside the cave found a ray of light coming in through a small hole. He was delighted and came back to call all others. On inspection it was found that there a opening large enough for a man to go but was closed by a boulder. The persons present there pushed the boulder from inside to make way but found a man eater

beast guarding the door way and hence as the first man emerged out, the beast could easily devour him. People then prayed small group of birds moving around for help who inturn swarmed the beast and taking this opportunity two brothers, sons of the chief could kill the beast with their spear. Thus people could come out and settle down happily. As a sense of gratitude the Hmar people even today allow the small birds to eat their ripe crops from their Jhum. It is also said that after the people came out the door of the cave was closed by the God forever.

23

ORIGIN OF KOCH (KOCH)

Long long ago the human settlement was in a place called Rasan Mukpark Tari (meaning the hill where the sun rises). They used to live happily with plenty of sun shine and plenty of food from their Jhum. In one of the villages there lived a man called Harai who married two sisters called Hirai and Jirai. They were great devotee of Lord Shiva. One day when Harai Mondal was away, the two sisters started praying Lord Shiva. Lord was pleased and appeared before them but seeing the beauty of the two sisters, He was excited. So He had sexual union with the two sisters, one after another while both the sisters were also satisfied. In due course they gave birth to two sons and since they were born out of adulterous union they were asked to leave Rasan Mukpark Tari. It is said these two brothers were the ancestors of Koch tribe, who after swelling in number started migrating elsewhere.

24

DAUGHTERS OF SUN (KOCH)

Lord Sun had two daughters called Mukdi and Kundi. They used to travel with their father, when He used to travel on the sky across the horizon. One day while travelling they liked a beautiful place called Rasan Mukpark Tari (meaning the hill where sun rises) and started walking enjoying natural beauty. In the process they came across a handsome man

called Haju and fell in love. Haju married both the divine sisters and it is said their sons and daughters were the ancestors of Koch people.

25

**STORY OF MIGRATION
(KOCH)**

It is said Koch tribe originally belonged to a place called Rasan Mukpark Tari (meaning the hill where sun rises) from where they migrated to Kamrup and reached Hajo. But from Hajo also they migrated for fear of Parasurama. In their migration from Hajo they reached Sonapur and thence they went to a place described as Titili Hancheng, after which they reached a place called Kusumbala which was near the land of Khasis. From the place they entered Garo hills and reached place called Rongjeng. From Rongjeng they continued their journey towards, south-west where they reached the Simsang river and followed its downward course. They crossed the river in a very difficult place, twelve families failed to cross the river and they were left behind. These twelve families intermarried with Garos and started taking beef. However, afterwards when the Koches established their Kingdom in south-west Garo hills, the descendants of these twelve families were invited to come and settle in the new Koch Kingdom, but they refused on the ground that they had taken beef. The Atongs are the descendants of these families. The other branches of Koches followed the course of the Simsang river and ultimately settled in the plain areas in the south western portion of Garo hills where they found a Kingdom, under powerful chief named Suryanaryan.

26

**GODDESS KAMAKHSYA AND KING NARAKASUR
(KOCH)**

Long long ago there was a brave and powerful King called Narakasur who ruled Kamrupa and his domain extended upto Coochbehar. He was so powerful that even the Gods and the deities were afraid of him. In his Kingdom there was Nilachal hill the abode of Goddess Kamakhsya, the incarnation of Goddess Durga. On few specific day in a year the Goddess used to appear in human form in her temple and used to dance fully naked

all over the night. On one such occasion King Narakasur was present and seeing the Goddess dancing he fell in love with her. So at the end of the dance the King asked the Goddess to marry him so that he would make her his principal queen. Since the King was very powerful the Goddess had no guts to refuse him and after a pause she gave him a condition with the intention to avoid this marriage. The Goddess agreed to marry the King if the King could construct stairs from below the Nilachal hill upto the temple within one night. The King agreed and put all his might and as the dawn was nearing it was found that the stair was about to be completed, so the Goddess was afraid and asked the cock to crow. As the cock crowed the Goddess told the King that he had failed to fulfil the condition. The King was angry and wanted to marry the Goddess by force. The Goddess vanished into her image after cursing saying not only King Narakasur but any one belonging to his family if ever visit Kamakhsya temple shall meet unnatural death. Since then no one from the Royal family of Kamrup and Coochbehar ever visit Kamakshya temple. Since the cock helped the Goddess as above, cock was never sacrificed in the said temple since then. Thereafter the Goddess stopped her naked dance too.

27

LEGEND OF KING JANGAL BALAHU (LALUNG)

Assam was ruled by a powerful king called Arimatta. He had two sons out of whom Jangal Balahu was more powerful who established his own Kingdom with Jongalgarh as the capital. His power was so great that the Ahom King, who was ruling in upper Assam was afraid of him and planned to kill him. The Ahom King made a show of friendship to hide his design. He proposed to give one of his daughters to Jangal Balahu who agreed to marry and became the King's son-in-law.

When the princess visited her father after marriage, he told her to steal the sword of Jangal Balahu and to send it to him concealed in the stomach of a big fish. When the daughter returned to her husband, the King sent a request to Jangal Balahu for a big fish. Jangal Balahu told his wife about her father's desire and asked her to fulfil it. She got a big fish, hid the sword of Jangal balahu in its belly and sent it to her father. Immediately the King received the fish, he declared war against his son-in-law.

On hearing this, Jangal Balahu told his wife to prepare and serve food quickly, as he could fight best when he was not hungry. His sword had magical power and he was confident of victory. The wife feigned to cook rice while she put stone chips in her pot. Jangal Balahu became impatient as his wife was late in serving food. He went to see and found her cooking stones. He was so infuriated at this that he killed her with a kick and went to get his sword, but it was missing from his sheath. The soldiers of the Ahom King was fast approaching, so he set off to fight them with the scabbard of his sword only. After a heroic battle, Jangal Balahu was exhausted and went to drink water from the Kolong river, but he was pursued and killed at a place called Kajolimukh. It is said the Lalungs are the descendants of the soldiers of the army of Jangal Balahu.

28

ORIGIN OF MITHI CLAN (LALUNG)

A man of the Kush clan fell in love with his cousin of the same clan and married her. But as it was a great offence against the law of their society the couples were driven out from the village. They went to live in a jungle. One day as they were roaming in the wood the wife who was carrying was over taken by labour pain. She asked her husband to fetch drinking water. The man set off but arrived at a place where only women lived. They got hold of him and did not allow him to go back. In the meantime, his wife who was lying alone in the jungle gave birth to a male child. She waited for her husband for some time, but as he did not come, she left the child behind and went to look for him. At that time as tigress happened to come there in search of food, for its cubs, seeing the infant alone, the animal thought that its mother had also gone out to bring food for her child, and went near it. The child cried aloud at the sight of the tigress but she thought it was hungry and put her teats into its mouth. The boy stopped crying and sucked. From that day, the tigress nurtured the boy, till he was able to walk. Then one day he came out of the jungle and settled in the Lalung country. He married in due course and his descendant formed a separate clan which came to be known as Mithi. The Lalung word for tigress is Misa. It is likely that the name Mithi was derived from it.

29

**LEGEND OF PADMAVATI
(LALUNG)**

Long long ago when Lalungs were living under domain of Jaintiapur Kingdom there was a beautiful Khasi woman called Padmavati living in a village Khairam belonging to Chiefdom family. On day the lady, still unwed, conceived super naturally from the moon (= sondra in Lalung dialect). She was thus driven out and was given shelter by the Lalungs of Amsodoi. After some time a tiger was born to her and it was allowed to go to the jungle. Then she gave birth to a boy who was taken by the Lalungs of Khaplangkuch a hamlet of Amsodoi. This boy was said to be the first ancestor of the Huka clan. That is the reason why the Hukas do not kill tiger, as it would be an act of parricide. In case a tiger is killed in the vicinity, they observe pollution period considering as if one of their clan member has died. This is so because they consider tiger as their cousin being off spring of their mythical mother.

30

**ORIGIN OF LALUNG CLANS
(LALUNG)**

The Lalungs believe that all their clans have descended from twelve sisters who were born in a family which lived on a red hill. They grew up but did not get young men to marry. As the time went by they became dejected and lost interest in life. One day while spinning, they thought that it was no good to live longer as they were passing their youth, and they went to a river to drown themselves. But the god of water took pity on them. He sent twelve young men who met the sisters as they came to the river and they married. The Lalung clans are the progeny of those twelve sisters.

31

**SONS OF MONKEY
(LALUNG)**

Long long ago there lived a monkey near a Lalung hamlet Baropujia. The monkey was blessed with certain divine power and hence he could

speak both human dialect as well as monkey dialect. In the process he could mix up with human population freely which led to conceiving of his child by a young girl. The child that was born was the ancestor of Amchi clan among the Lalungs. Till date it is said that the Amchis refrain from killing the monkey.

32

THE PLIGHT OF LALUNGS (LALUNG)

Once, long long ago Man people (Burmese) attacked Assam. They were powerful and tyrant and burnt villages after the village looting wealth and raping women. The Lalungs during the period therefore had to run for their life, running towards eastern direction from their habitat in the plains towards the Kolong river in the Nowgong district. In their attempt to cross it, they were drowned in the river. The Karbis who were also there helped them to come out and cross the river. After that incident, the Karbis started calling them Lang-Lung (Lang = water, Lung = sinking) and these two words subsequently compounded into lalung which ultimately became the name of the tribe, though Lalungs call themselves as Tiwa.

33

NARAKASURA (ASSAMESE)

A boy was conceived by Basundhara the mother earth from Lord Vishnu. The boy was named Narakasura and Basundhara placed the new born child at the fields of King Janaka of Mithila, and the King found the child in the same way he found Sita. The mother appeared in person and requested King Janaka to rear the boy till a particular age.

When the boy came of age he was taken to Kamrupa by Lord Vishnu and given to win the Kingdom, from the Kiratas. The Lord also saw to it that Narakasura got all the required objects needed by the mighty King including Shakti as powerful as the fire itself. Narakasura was also ordered to worship the source of all Shakti, the Goddess Kamakhsya. King Narakasura was believed to be the ~~founder of Assam~~ ^{founder of Assam}. The Koch royal

family of Coochbehar claims that they are the descendants of mighty Narakasura.

34

BHANUMATI (ASSAMESE)

Long long ago there was a powerful King called Bhagdutta was ruling Pragjyotishpur. He had a beautiful daughter named Bhanumati. Bhanumati was not only extremely beautiful but also known for her magical power and she had all knowledge from scriptures to warfare. It was no doubt difficult to find a proper match for her. After a long search a match was found for her marriage he was Duryadhana, the eldest son of King Dhritarastra, the King of Hastinapur. It was said that Duryadhana had very strong personality he was powerful and brave. It was said believed that wherever he walked lotus used to blossom. Hence Duryadhana and Bhanumati were made for each other. As the both parents agreed the marriage was solemnised. However, before Duryadhana could become King he was killed by his cousin Bhima after the war of Kurukhetra in an unfair means.

(People of Assam still consider this story as true and it is said Dighli Pokhri, a large lake found situated opposite central library and Cotton College in Guwahati was dug during the marriage ceremony of Duryadhana and Bhanumati to provide water for Royal guests).

35

ORIGIN OF KALITAS (ASSAMESE)

Long long ago there was a Brahmin sage called Viswamitra who was known not only for spiritual knowledge but also for his knowledge in warfare. There was a Khatriya King called Sahasrabahu Arjuna who was one of the most powerful Kings during the period. Once due to some reason the King had exchange of words with Parasurama's father who was also a sage. As the King ultimately lost his temper he killed the sage. This enraged the sage Parasurama who took vow to kill all the Khatriyas to

make the world free from the tyrant Khatriyas. He went for expedition first killing Sahasrabahu Arjuna and then wandered round the world twenty one times killing all the Khatriyas. A section of Khatriyas went towards jungles of Assam renounced their sacred thread, adopted different names, being afraid of the powerful Parasurama. Since they concealed their caste, they started calling themselves as Kula-lupta or devoid of castes.

Subsequently the term Kula-lupta was pronounced as Kalita and these people and their descendants came to be known as Kalitas. Today these Kalitas are the dominating caste in Assam having Aryan physical features settled amongst mongoloid population.

36

ARRIVAL OF BRAHMAPUTRA (ASSAMESE)

The great ancient sage Parasurama during his wandering around the world to kill all the Khatriyas arrived ultimately in Assam and washed his axe full of Khatriya blood in a pond. The pond situated in the border of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is still called Parasurama Kunda. But his axe was not totally free from blood as there was need for flowing water with higher flow rate. He sat down praying Lord Brahma who in the trance appeared and asked Parasurama to go further east at the eastern most corner of the Himalayas and make an opening so that Lord Brahma will arrange sacred water from Manas Sarowar to come through. Parasurama did exactly as advised and thus mighty river Bhamaputra appeared. Since the river appeared because of boon of Lord Brahma it is like a son of Brahma hence was called Brahmaputra (putra = son). Since it carried blood of Khatriyas after washing the axe of Parasurama it was named Budha Lohit. (Lohit = blood).

37

THE GOAT AND THE CAVE MEN (ZEME)

There was a large cave in North Cachar hills of Assam inside which a large number of human beings used to live. They could never see outside

world since the outlet of the cave was closed by a large boulder. One day a he goat came for grazing near the boulder and as it got itching sensation at the base of its horn, it started rubbing the place with the boulder. In the process the boulder shifted and rolled down along the hill slope. Thus the outlet of the cave opened up. The human beings living inside the cave became curious seeing the light coming in through the outlet and ultimately they started coming out. Subsequently they started settling down outside the cave. The total emerging population subsequently divided into three groups forming three tribes whose descendants are known as Zemes, Liangmais and Rongmeis together called Zeliangrong people.

38

THE LEGEND OF JAYAMALA (ASSAMESE)

The northern part of the Goalpara district of Assam lies at the foothills of the Bhutan hills. Running through the dense forests of the Bhutan hills and coming to the foot of the hills is a small stream. On its bank there lived a Brahmin named Jayanath with his comely wife Jayamala.

Jayanath was a priest. He used to perform Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, Kali Puja, Upanayan (sacred thread ceremony), marriage rituals etc., to earn his livelihood. His wife Jayamala used to spin poita (the sacred thread worn by the Brahmin) on her spinning wheel. The Brahmins in the adjoining villages used to buy all the sacred thread she used to spin. What they thus earned was just enough for their needs. Whenever they managed to save some food Jayamala fed the deer and the pigs the goats the cows and birds like woodpeckers and snipes. Occasionally even some wild elephants would come and share the food. These wild creatures were friendly with this couple and in return they brought them oranges, bananas, jackfruits, mangoes, pineapples, arum (Kachu), dhenki sak, and bamboo shoots. Jayamala's affection for wild animals and her devotion to her husband could not be surpassed.

The smooth tenor of their life was soon disturbed. Jayanath's services were called for conducting last rites of a well-to-do Brahmin. This Brahmin had only one daughter who was very ugly, lazy, spoilt and extremely selfish. Because of all this, she was not married. The Brahmin's widow felt helpless with such a daughter and implored Jayanath to marry her.

Jayanath, fond as he was of his wife, first spurned the proposal but realising that the girl would inherit all her father's property and more so because of his greed for money yield to the widow's request.

Then Jayanath brought riha khonia and makhala woven of Muga and Silk, a pair of bangles, earrings and a necklace for his bride and a large pot of curd, some molasses and a large mahaseer fish. In the evening he and his fiance was bathed solemnly. Next morning, the wedding was to be celebrated and the girl was awakened from her sleep at day break. Some curd was put on her forehead and she put on the dress brought by Jayanath and was ready to welcome him. Jayanath was then seated on a wooden stool before the entrance of the Brahmin's house and was smeared with sandal wood and flowers placed on his head. He was led into the house. A portion of courtyard was fenced with slit bamboos. There the sacred fire was lighted with mango wood and rice, flowers and ghee were offered to the fire by Jayanath himself as he was a Brahmin. The priest then tied the thumbs of Jayanath and the Brahmin's daughter with Kusha grass chanting hymns. They were then declared husband and wife. He returned to his hut with his rich, proud and selfish wife. Jayamala was shocked and hurt to see her husband married to another girl. She looked at them tearfully and went back to her hut.

In a few days Jayanath's second wife had a three storeyed mansion built for herself and Jayanath beside the humble hut. The mansion was full of life as there were many servants was maids and sentries. Jayamala with broken heart watched the prosperity of her husband his growing love for his second wife. The second wife would never allow Jayanath to see Jayamala. Jayamala was assigned the job of bringing water from the river, and that was what she still lived for. For while she would fill the gold Jhari of her now rich husband, they would look at each other. That was the only chance she had to see her husband. In return for her service, the maids used to bring her a handful of rice in a brass plate at the end of the day. But Jayamala hated to touch this food. She lived on the fruits and roots brought to her by the animals from the day her husband married again, with the plate of rice in one hand, the gold jhari in the other, and a copper pitcher on her head she would go walking through the forest to the river giving the rice away to the birds and animals she came across and when she reached the river bank she would sit there and think about her sad life. Tears would roll down her cheeks and mingle with the river water.

The elephant King often used to come to drink water from this water upstream. He used to come with his herd of elephants to drink water from the river and play in the water. One evening he found the water salty and tasteless as he waded through and reached downstream. He asked one of his companions, "The water upstream is so tasty, how is it that it is salty and tasteless downstream?" The companion replied, "Your Majesty, a beautiful girl sits at the ghat every evening. She weeps and her tears mingle with the river water. The salty tears make the water downstream tasteless." The elephant King was moved when he heard of this and swam upto the girl. Jayamala had just taken up the copper pitcher on her head, the gold jhari in her hand and was about to go back to her hut. The elephant King barred her way. He heard her story and asked her to leave the cruel world of man and join him in the Kingdom of elephants and stay there as his queen. Jayamala did not readily agree. But she could not get much of a chance to think because a sudden surge of the river roaring like thunder swept away her small hut and her co-wife's mansion all at once. Jayamala stood dumb founded when the elephant King lifted her up on his back with ease.

Then the elephant King passed through the deep forest of pine, sals and simuls, thick bamboo thickets and groves of betelnut and reed interspersed with jackfruit and orange trees. The whole place was filled with the sweet scent of the wild roses and Kapauphool. Thus the elephant King went on for seven days and seven nights till he reached his Kingdom at the foot of the Bhutan hills.

The palace of elephant King was standing there milk white carved out of ivory and inside it was a throne of ivory. The elephant King went in and seated Jayamala on the throne. The beautiful Jayamala looked like a golden doll on the ivory throne. Thousands of elephants trumpeted to the new queen and bowed before her. The elephant King took his new queen on his head again and arrived at a miraculous waterfall with his herd of elephants. They went through a pass. The waterfall rolled in seven streams of seven colours. The elephant King put the water of the seven streams in seven jars and poured it on the new queen's head and Lo! She changed into a beautiful young female elephant. The copper pitcher on her head turned into the elevation on the forehead and the gold jhari changed into her trunk. The elephant King announced in a jubilant voice, "Hereafter we shall serve you and your word shall be the law." The queen led the herd of elephants back to the elephant land.

Till this day in the Goalpara district of Assam we may find many herds of elephants but it will always be noticed that the herds are always led by a she-elephant, the legacy created by Jayamala.

39

**QUEEN KAMALA KUORI
(ASSAMESE)**

Once there was a king who lived in a certain part of Assam. He loved his subjects and did all that was possible to protect them. His subjects were also very loyal. The King led a happy life with his devoted queen Kamala Kuori.

But alas! Happiness does not last forever. It is like a dew drop on a leaf. There happened to be a severe drought in his country. The fields were parched. There was not a jot of verdure any where. People and cattle were dying of hunger and thirst. The King was very anxious to save his people. He engaged some people to dig a big deep tank. The tank was deep but it remained dry. The digging was done deeper and deeper but not a drop of water came out. The King was submerged in thought. His subjects lost all hopes.

While King was in trance, he had a dream. Some one told him in his dream that he will be able to save his people and water will automatically come in the big tank provided he can sacrifice his beloved queen.

The King woke up from his trance. He was in troubled mind. One side there was his beloved queen, and on the other side there were his loyal subjects, to protect, them was his sacred duty. He was in a dilemma. Finally he revealed his dream to queen Kamala Kuori. She listened to it, remained silent for a while and then with tears in her eyes, said "My lord. I must sacrifice myself for all these people who are like my children. I know you will never be happy in my absence but let me go."

The King stood on the bank of the tank. The people waited with grief and suspense. The queen bade good-bye to the King and stepped into the hollow of the tank and Lo! water-cool, clear, clean-came gushing out.

The King cried out to this queen

"O lady of my heart, Kamala

How much is the water ?"

"O lord of my heart,

To my ankle is the water," came the reply

The water rose up higher. The king asked again,

"O lady of my heart Kamala

How much is the water ?"

"O lord of my heart

To my knee is the water," came the reply

The water rose up still higher. The King asked again,

"O lady of my heart Kamala

How much is the water ?"

"O lord of my heart,

To my waist is the water" came the reply

The queen went forward and the water rose up still higher.

The King asked in a tear choked voice,

"O lady of my heart Kamala

How much is the water ?"

"O lord of my heart,

To my neck is the water," came the reply.

The queen sank further and now the water came in a surge.

The King asked with tears rolling down the cheeks

"O lady of my heart, Kamala,

How much is the water ?"

"O lord of my heart,

To my head is the water"

The faint voice of the queen came and the beautiful queen Kamala Kuori was lost in deep water forever. The King and his subjects wailed her loss loudly. She is still remembered for the sacrifice she made for the well-being of her subjects.

40

**THE STORY OF THE FOUR THIEVES
(ASSAMESE)**

In some place, interior of Assam, there once lived an old couple. They were rich but they had no children. They had two houses. They used to sleep in one of them. Four thieves used to loiter about the old couple's houses. The old man constantly pondered on how to baffle the thieves.

One day he filled a piece of bamboo joint with cowdung, dirty water and husk of rice. This he left hanging on the rafter of the dhenki shed (dhenki = a wooden contraption for pounding paddy etc.) Bamboo joints are commonly used in Assam for storing stuff.

After nightfall the four thieves came. They first wanted to know if the old couple were asleep and they listened quietly for some sound. The old man asked his wife, "old woman ! old woman ! where have you put the molasses and milk with chira (chira = flattened rice) ?" The old woman burst out, "Woe is me ! I have left them hanging on the rafter of the dhenki shed and the thieves will easily get it." The thieves were very glad to hear this. Their mouth watered. Very stealthily they went to the dhenki shed and took away the bamboo joint. They gathered some banana leaves to use as plates, divided the spoil in equal shares and sat down to eat. One of them wrinkled his nose and said, "Smells rather strong, doesn't it ?" Another touched the mess with his hand and realised what had happened. They all burst out laughing. Hearing the chorus of laughter the old man rushed to them with a stick and the thieves ran away.

Another night the old man heard the sound of the thieves and he asked his wife. "Old woman ! Old woman ! where have you hung the bag of salt ?" The old woman replied, " I have hung it upon the south wall of our sleeping room, a wretched mistake on my part. The thieves will get it without trouble." (In Assam salt is a rare commodity hence has great demand. It was not surprising if salt bags are stolen). One of the thieves hearing the dialogues of old couple pushed his hand in through opening of the thatch and tried to find the bag. As soon as he pushed his hand, the old man cut his hand with a knife. The thief did not tell this to his companions. He only said that he did not find the bag and then fled away. As the other three thieves did not know what had happened they also felt about for the bag and in the process got their finger, ear and nose respectively, chopped.

The thieves were in great pain as their wound continued to bleed. They tried to find something for themselves. And what also they could find in a pot but the ashes of a trunk of a banana tree ! (Known as Khar). The pungent salt ashes were soaked in the cuts of the first thief and the pain became more acute. He did not speak about this to his companions and they also dipped their wounds in this pot. Then all of them hopped about in terrible pain. At that moment the old man came out with his big stick and drove them away.

One day the old man went to cut reeds for a fence around his house. And then he saw the four thieves fast asleep under an Ou tree (Ou tree is called Chalita or Chalta. It bears hard sour fruits which are usually pickled. Botanical name of this trees is *Dilensis indica*). This bears fruits which are very heavy and hard. An idea of playing a trick on the thieves crossed the mind of old man. He cut some of these fruits keeping the stalks long, and very deftly ties one fruit each to the hair of these thieves. Then he shouted "Thief ! Thief ! The thieves were roused suddenly from their sound sleep and began to run. As they were running, the heavy big fruits were bumping on their heads, and they were thinking that the old man was continuing to hit them. They, thus became more panicky and ran on breathlessly. When they were tired with the running they had done, they discovered the trick the old man had played on them.

The old man did not stop here. He wished to harass the thieves again as he was very angry with them. So he hid himself in a mat receptacle for storage of paddy and asked his wife "where have you kept the brass cups and plates ?" He imitated the voice of the old woman and answered his own question, "I have kept them in the paddy receptacle under the dhenki shed." The thieves greedily rushed towards the dhenki shed and lifted up the paddy recaptacle to carry it away. But it was very heavy one of them said " My goodness ! isn't it too heavy ?" Another replied " Well, there would be many cups and plates inside." And they gladly went away with their booty.

After a while they came across a small river. As they were wading through the old man said, " Look here, I am getting wet ! lift it up." The thieves heard this but could not make anything out of it and proceeded as before.

Soon they came into deeper water and the old man burst out an anger. "Stupid brutes sons of slaves. Can't you see your way ? I am getting soaked through and through." The thieves were beside themselves with

fear now and dropping their burden in the water they disappeared hastily. The old man, thus, had to pay for being too cunning.

41

**THE STORY OF A SLY SERVANT
(ASSAMESE / KACHARI)**

A Kachari Brahmin was going to his mother-in-law's house with his servant. The Brahmin, as is the custom, bought some bananas and other eatables to take as presents for his mother-in-law. He gave the baskets of presents to the servant to carry. He told him, "Look here, don't eat any of these bananas. I can see every thing behind me just as well as I can see in front of me." Warning the servant thus the Brahmin marched ahead.

After a while the servant felt hungry and tore one of his bananas from the bunch and held it behind his master's back and ate it. Like that he went on eating till all the bananas were finished.

When the Brahmin saw that the bunch of bananas was not there he got very angry and asked the servant what he had done with it. "Why", the servant retorted innocently, "You told me you could see at your back, so I showed you every banana and ate it. You did not say anything. How could I know that you would be angry ?" The Brahmin could say nothing.

At noon they halted at a place to cook their lunch. They had a few Khawai fishes with them. These were cooked by the Brahmin as he was not supposed to eat food cooked by the servant. The Brahmin served one fish to the servant and kept the rest for himself. While they were eating, the servant asked innocently, "can you tell me, sir, whether the Khawai fishes swim about alone or in a shoal ?" "Why ! of course in a shoal." The Brahmin replied. Immediately the servant placed the fish given to him on the Brahmin's plate and said, "In that case this fish should also be in a shoal."

The Brahmin immediately left his food as he would not eat food touched by the servant. The servant had a good meal of all the fishes. The Brahmin remained hungry for the whole day.

On their way they found some Simul trees. The servant asked him "What are these trees ?" The Brahmin was educated, so he replied, "These are called Sirmolu," "No, no, these are Himolu" the servant protested and

took a bet of five blows if it was not so. They met some cowherd boys. The servant asked them the name of the trees. They were illiterate, so they said that the name was Himolu. As soon as they uttered Himolu, the servant gave the Brahmin five blows. Next day, some goatherds were passing that way. The servant asked, "Sir, what are these animals?" "These are Chag." "No, no these are Changali," The servant protested "and here are five blows for you." He again gave five blows to his master.

The following day they came across a flock of herons. The servant asked the Brahmin, "Sir, what are these birds?" The Brahmin said, "These are Bog." "No, no you know nothing, these are Boguli and here are five blows for you," said the servant and showered another five blows on his master.

While the Brahmin was feeling miserable, they came near his mother-in-laws house at night. The Brahmin was very hungry, so he sent his servant ahead to tell them to have his supper ready. The servant reached the house before his master and told the people there to cook a duck for him. While it was being cooked he secretly put a lot of ashes of banana tree into the meat.

The Brahmin was very hungry. Though his mouth was burning with acrid taste of the ashes he ate his food silently. He could guess that the servant has caused some mischief. He was being teased by the servant in all possible way hence he decided to take his revenge.

He wrote a long letter to his brother and asked the servant to deliver it. The servant was illiterate. He felt suspicious about the content of the letter. He stopped on the way and requested a passerby to read it for him. The man read from the letter that the Brahmin had asked his brother to kill the servant. He heard this and immediately tore the letter into pieces. He persuaded the stranger to write another letter instructing his brother to get his niece's marriage to the servant, as early as possible and he was not in position to attend the ceremony.

The servant gave this letter to Brahmin's brother. He was very annoyed by such a whimsical order from his eldest brother but he dare not disobey him. So the servant married Brahmin's niece by trickery.

The Brahmin came to his brother's house after some months. He thought that the servant must have been killed. But to his surprise he saw him as his nephew-in-law. He decided to kill this man at night. But somehow his niece came to know about his idea, and told her husband to sleep at

a different place. She advised him to put his calf with its legs and mouth tied up in the bed.

The Brahmin came at night to his niece's room to kill the man. He mistook the calf for servant and killed it. In the morning he could detect his mistake. He was a Brahmin. For a Brahmin it is a sin to kill a cow. To absolve himself from the sin, he invited all the people to a feast without telling them the occasion.

In the meanwhile, he told the servant who was now his brother's son-in-law, to bury the calf in the garden. The man buried the cow with his tail sticking out of the ground.

As the guests came and sat for the feast the servant ran into the garden and pulled the buried carcass of the calf by the tail and took it to the guests. He shouted, "No, no, the Brahmin hasn't killed a cow and he is not giving the feast for that reason!"

The guests were angry and refused to take food. They shouted, "Fie, fie, a Brahmin has killed a cow !," and went away. Thus the sly servant could out-witted his master in every case.

42

THE SEVEN FOOLS AND THE BRAHMIN (ASSAMESE / KACHARI)

There were seven fools somewhere in Darrong district. Because they were fools they could not find any job. Thus they were very poor. So they went out in search of fortune. On their way they came across a ploughed field, full of white clods. They took this to be a sheet of water and started swimming. After crossing the field they counted themselves. Each time their number came to six as none of them counted himself.

They wailed aloud for their lost friend while a Brahmin passed that way. He asked them "Why are you all weeping ?" "Alas, we were seven and one of our friends has been drowned while crossing this stream" they said pointing at the ploughed field. The Brahmin realised that they were fools. He told them, "Well, I shall find out your missing friend if you promise me to serve me." They eagerly agreed. The Brahmin gave one of them seven pieces of betelnut and told him to count them. The fool counted these. The Brahmin told him to distribute one piece to each of his friend

keeping one for himself. He did this and they discovered that none of them were lost. They were now glad to follow the Brahmin to work for him.

While the fools were serving the Brahmin one day he ordered them to plough the entire land high upto the simul tree. The fools thought that they were to plough the land from above the simul tree. They took the cattle and the ploughs for tilling the land. They fastened the cattle to the ploughs and climbed the simul tree holding the ropes. The ropes gave away. The cattles were hurt and some of them died. The ploughs were broken. The old man was disgusted but he did not dismiss them. He bought some new ploughs and some new cattle for tilling his land.

One day the Brahmin sent his son with the fools to work on the field. He told them, "Look here, this boy is lazy. If he sits idle push him along. After working for some time, the boy was sitting idle for a while. The seven fools pushed their seven knives into his body and the poor boy fell dead on the spot. After dusk the fools returned home. The Brahmin did not find his son and asked them about him. They replied "You told us to push him along if he idled away his time. So we pushed our knives one by one into his body and he died." The Brahmin was stunned. He buried his son tearfully. But he did not dismiss his fools. He thought that he would be more exact in future while telling them to do anything.

One day the fools went to reap the paddy. They came home with the burden of the harvest. They asked the Brahmin where they should keep their burden. The Brahmin told them "Ask my wife and she will tell you." When they approached the old woman she was very busy with her work and she was annoyed with them and said "put them on my head". The seven fools literally carried out what she told them and heaped all the harvest on the poor. Old lady's head. The old lady succumbed to death under the heavy weight of the paddy. When the Brahmin asked them if they had stored the paddy they told him what had happened. The Brahmin was shocked. He ordered the fools to take the old woman's dead body for burial. They took the dead body fastened to a bamboo and on the way it bumped against something and fell off.

When the fools reached the burial ground they found that there was no dead body which had been fastened on to the bamboo. They suddenly saw another old lady walking by. They shouted "Look here, the old woman wants to escape and she is pretending to be somebody else. Catch hold of her." They caught her and forcibly buried her.

When they came back they described to the Brahmin what had happened. The Brahmin could no longer tolerate them and decided to finish them off. He asked them to count down a huge simul tree from the trunk and not to move out till the whole tree fell. The fools did exactly as told, and the big tree crashed on them and killed them.

43

THE STORY OF TENTON (ASSAMESE)

Father had gone to plough the field. Mother to transplant the seedling of paddy, and sister to catch fish. There was nobody in the house except Tenton. He had been asked to remain at home because his sister's husband was expected. His parents repeatedly told him to receive his brother-in-law with great respect.

When the brother-in-law arrived at the gate of their house, "Hullo, is your father in?" Tenton thought, "Look at him, he does not know how to address his superior. He says 'Your father' Why, he should have called my father 'Deota' He replied "Father has gone to pierce the patal and make the earth upside down." The brother-in-law asked, "Where's your mother?" Tenton thought, "The audacity he has! he does not say ai when he refers to mother" and he answered, "She has taken seven days old painta (watered rice) and has gone to revive the dead." (Revive the dead = when the seedlings are collected for transplanting these look dead and dry and after transplantation these get back their freshness). And no longer waiting for another question Tenton said further, "and sister has gone to filter the sea for precious gems." The brother-in-law felt insulted and went away immediately.

At dusk the parents returned home and when they heard that the son-in-law had gone back, the father in a fury beat Tenton severely and turned him out of the house.

Tenton was not worried. He roamed about here and there. After some days he made friends with two thieves. One day he broke into a house with his friends. The thieves collected the booty and slipped away. Tenton stumbled against a drum and when it produced a loud sound he began to play on it. The inmates of the house woke up and caught him. They decided to take him to the King's court.

On their way they came across a man who was very annoyed with his two unruly bullocks. He shouted, "I wish somebody would finish them with one blow." Tenton instantly took him for his words and killed the bullocks with just one blow. This was beyond imagination of the owner and in great anger and grief he tied Tenton with a rope and joined the first party to charge him before the King's court.

As they were going on they found an old woman she was selling bananas with the cry.

"Give me a pice to have a bunch

Then give me a kick and go on your way."

This she said only to attract people by a piece of quaint humour but Tenton as was his nature took a bunch of bananas from her, gave her the price and a kick also. She got angry and said she must have justice and started for the King's court.

Though Tenton was dragged to the King's court by three parties he was not perturbed at all. He was ready with his answers for the charges brought against him. To the first charge brought against him he replied, "Is there a thief so foolish enough to beat upon a drum in a house where he comes to steal? I searched for some chira (flattened rice) which I needed very badly." Tamuli Phukon, Minister to the King, was fully satisfied with his explanation and remarked, "His words are worth a hundred rupees."

Then came the second charge. To this he said, "I did not do any wrong. The man invited some one's help to finish his unruly bullocks and I did only what he wanted someone to do." Tamuli Phukon agreed and observed, "His words are worth a thousand rupees."

To the third charge against him Tenton defended himself boldly. He said, "I did exactly as the woman wanted me to do. How should I know that she did not mean what she said?" Tamuli Phukon was very impressed with Tenton's intelligence and observed, "His words are worth a lakh of rupees."

The King acquitted the boy of all the charges. Tenton went out of the King's court with a glint of mischief in his eyes.

A few days passed. Tenton went to the King's court of his own. "A word is a word," he reminded the Minister. Yes, the Minister owed him a hundred, a thousand and a lakh of rupees. He must pay the price which he

declared for the intelligent words of Tenton. The King could not ignore the claim of the boy. He gave Tenton a large sum of money.

Tenton filled two baskets with the money. But he was not a boy to go away silently. He stood at the door of the Minister in a defiant posture and shouted, "If one gives me a good and satisfying meal one get all this wealth." You must be wondering why he shouted like this. Subsequent events shall give interesting at turn.

Tamuli Phukon had a young and beautiful daughter called Champa. Champa had a maid servant on whom she counted much. She wished that her mistress should get all this money and so she persuaded Champa to invite Tenton for a meal. Champa granted the wish of her favourite maid. She cooked delicious dishes and invited Tenton to a meal. She placed a seat for him, bathed him and fed her with her own hands and after the meal she gave him pan and supari (Betle leaf and areca nut).

Now Tenton had no excuse to break his promise. So he gave all the money to her and went back to the King. He said to the King, "Oh king, will you kindly allow me to put you some questions ?" The King smilingly assented. Then Tenton asked, "My lord, who is it that places a seat for some one and asks someone to take it ? Who is it that bathes and feeds someone with her own hands ? Who is it that keeps someone's money ?

The King answered, "Why ! it must be the wife ! But what does it mean ?"

Tenton said with a grin, "My lord please ask the daughter of Tamuli Phukon," The King understood everything.

Tamuli Phukon was beside himself with rage. His foolish and greedy daughter had been trapped by this mischievous boy. The King told him that he should give his daughter in marriage to this boy and calmed him, saying "Tamuli Phukon, this is a clever boy and will make a nice husband for your Champa."

Tenton, thus became the son-in-law of Tamuli Phukon. The King made him a Tamuli next in rank to his father-in-law and he lived happily ever after.

44

**THE STORY OF TEJIMOLA
(ASSAMESE)**

Long long ago there lived a merchant in Assam. He had two wives. The elder one had a daughter named Tejimola. The younger one had no issue. Tejimola's mother died when she was a small child. Her step-mother brought her up. She did not like Tejimola, but as she was the only child in the family, her father was very fond of her. The step-mother looked after Tejimola only to please her husband.

When Tejimola grew upto a girl of ten or eleven her father took her to a rich man's daughter of the same age. They became good friends.

Since Tejimola's father was a merchant, he had to go to many places to sell his goods. At that time there were no good roads and travelling took a long time. The merchants used to go out to the markets with a number of man, bullock carts and guards. The voyages by river were also a hazard as there were pirates besides unpredictable behaviour of the principal river Budha Lohit. Once he had to be away for six or seven months. He was sad as he had to leave his only daughter behind. But he could not do otherwise. He called his wife and said, "I am going out on business leaving Tejimola under your care. Look after her and love her. She is my beloved little child." Tejimola's step mother agreed without a murmur to do so.

She was happy that she could now torture Tejimola as much as she liked. But why should she stop only to the extent of torturing her ? She could even kill her if she liked. Yes, she should kill her, the step-mother felt. If Tejimola were to be married, at the time of her marriage her father would give her a large sum of dowry. But if she dies, all these money would be her.

Poor Tejimola ! as soon as her father left the village, her step-mother tried to find fault with her. She used to beat her hard for a slightest offence or even no offence.

She was suffering too much, when fortunately, one of Tejimola's friends marriage was settled. It was to take place during following week. Tejimola wished to attend the wedding party and to stay with her friend for a couple of days during the wedding. Her friend also was very eager to have Tejimola near her at the time of her marriage.

The step-mother did not forbid her to go. She even discussed eagerly about the dress Tejimola would like to wear at the wedding. Tejimola was surprised to see such a change in her. The step-mother asked a number of people as to which riha would go well with which mekhala. She had a lovely riha a splendid mekhala and a gold embroidered Khonia. (Riha is worn below the waist made of rhea thread mekhala is worn above waist upto head made of either silk or muga while Khonia is the embroidered scarf made of muga worn on mekhala). She told Tejimola, ‘‘aitee (my girl), put on these when you are in your friend's house. I shall now pack them and give the packet to you. If wear them now they would be dirty for the wedding party.’’ She made a packet and gave it to Tejimola. Had poor Tejimola known what was in the packet she would not have accepted it. Her step-mother had placed a mouse in between in the riha and mekhala and some cinders in the Khonia.

While she was about to arrive in her friend's house Tejimola very eagerly opened the packet. She imagined herself as one of the best dressed girls at the wedding party. But alas ! all her hopes were lost. The riha and mekhala was torn to pieces and the Khonia was dirty and burnt at places and smeared with ashes. She was scared to death. What would she say to her step-mother ? She sobbed loudly. The servant who escorted Tejimola to her friend's house was also puzzled. She took another riha and mekhala from her friend and attended the marriage ceremony.

When Tejimola returned home, her mother asked her about the dress. She was trembling with fear and could say nothing. She dropped the packet and stood sobbing. Her step-mother scolded her and beat her very cruelly. But she did not stop there. She took Tejimola to the dhenki (rice pounding tool). She was asked to put rice into the hole and her step-mother to pound it. While pounding with all her might, she crushed Tejimola's right hand. Tajimola wept bitterly but was ordered to put paddy with her left hand. While doing so, the step-mother pounded with all her might and crushed her left hand also. Tejimola cried hard but asked to use her legs one and then head to push the rice. Hence after crushing legs her head was also crushed consequently she died.

Her step-mother buried her under the eaves of the rice pounding room. Some days passed. The neighbours asked about Tejimola, since they did not see her for a long time. Tejimola's step-mother told everyone that she had gone to her friend's house.

One day an old woman asked for a pumpkin from Tejimola's step-mother. She replied that she had no pumpkin creeper in her garden. The old woman took her to the garden. She saw a pumpkin plant just where she saw Tejimola. She was pale with fear. She did not touch the plant herself. She told the woman, "Well, pluck as many pumpkin as you like." As soon as the old woman was about to pluck a pumpkin the pumpkin plant sang, "Do not pluck my fruit, oh, old mother. I am Tejimola. My father is away, my mother killed me and buried me here." The old woman was shocked and told Tejimola's step-mother what she heard. The step-mother uprooted the plant and threw it away in a distant corner of the garden.

After some days a party of cowboys came to Tejimola's step-mother and asked her for some shaddocks. She told them that she never had such a tree in her garden. The cowboys took her to the garden and showed her the tree. She saw the tree standing on the spot where she had thrown the pumpkin plant. She permitted the cowboys to pluck as many shaddocks as they liked. As soon as the cowboys touched the tree, the tree sang, "Brother cowboys, do not pluck my fruit. I am Tejimola. My father is away. My mother crushed me to death and threw me here." The cowboys repeated what they had heard, to the step-mother. After the cowboys went away she cut the tree and threw its branches into the river.

Tejimola's father was coming home after finishing his business. His barge was moving towards his home. He saw a very nice lily plant floating on the river. He thought he would give it to Tejimola.

As soon as he touched the lily plant it sang very sadly, "Father, father, don't pluck me. I am Tejimola. Mother has crushed me to death."

Tejimola's father understood everything. Still he wanted to verify the truth. He took on the palm of his left hand a little bit of betel he was chewing. On the palm of his right hand he put a laroo (sweet meat) and he said, "If you are my Tejimola be a salika bird and eat the betel from my hand. If you are not my Tejimola take the laroo."

Soon a salika bird came and perched on his left hand and ate the betel. He put the bird in a silver cage and brought it home. When he reached home he asked his wife about Tejimola. She told him that Tejimola had gone to her friend's house. The merchant then took a gamcha (a sort of traditional towel) and told the Salika, "If you are my Tejimola get into human form and put this gamcha." As soon as he uttered this Tejimola came out of her cage in human form, a lovely little girl and put on the

gamcha. Her father clasped her to his bosom. The step-mother was driven away while father and the daughter lived happily thereafter.

45

BRAVE KING BANASUR (ASSAMESE)

Long long ago there was a brave king called Banasur who ruled north bank of great river Budha Lohit (Brahmaputra). He had his capital at foot-hills leading to the hills inhabited by Kirats. He had a invincible fort and a beautiful garden around it. He had a beautiful daughter called Usha who was famed for her beauty. Usha was known not only for her beauty but also for her knowledge in various scriptures. It was indeed a difficult task to get appropriate match for her. Banasur also was a great scholar and a brave general having knowledge in various departments of warfare. He was a great devotee of Lord Shiva and with the boon given by the Lord he became practically invincible.

There was a handsome prince called Aniruddha who was grandson of Sri Krishna the King of Dwaraka. He belonged to Jadu bamsha a family reputed all over India for various reasons. Aniruddha was not only handsome but also had knowledge in various subjects like warfare, literature, philosophy and so on. During the days of wandering he once came to the capital of Banasur and happened to meet Usha. It was a love at first sight as they were made for each other in all respect. Aniruddha approached Banasur for the hands of Usha and after knowing his back ground Banasur readily agreed. But the match was not acceptable to Aniruddha's grandfather Sri Krishna. Since Aniruddha was determined to marry Usha and Banasur supported him, Sri Krishna with his Yadav army attacked Kingdom of Banasur. The war continued for several days and ultimately Sri Krishna admired the bravery of Banasur and agreed for the match. The love of Usha and Aniruddha ultimately came out as winner. Due to bravery of Banasur his capital was renamed as Tejpur while due to large blood shed of the said war his kingdom was renamed as Sonitpur.

46

SALUK KUNWAR
(ASSAMESE)

Long long ago when the world was young in Assam there was a king who had a beautiful daughter. The King was so fond of her that she was weighed with flowers everyday. The gardener's wife used to supply the flowers.

There was a pond near the palace where people usually came for fishing. One day the gardener and his wife came to the same pond not for fishing but for plucking Saluk flowers. Saluks are a species of lotus without smell. It is of white, pink and yellow varieties. They brought many flowers, one of which was very big. These flowers are cooked and eaten as vegetables. The gardener took a *dao* and was about to cut the big Saluk in pieces when flower burst out.

"Aare Aare Katbe be bura
Hama Heki Saluk Kunwar genru raja."

(Cut me at the side, oh old man, so that I can come out. I am Saluk Kunwar).

The old man out of fear called his wife and gave her the flower. She fearlessly cut the flower at the side and out came a beautiful boy of tender age. This couple was childless and so they adopted him as their own child and called him Saluk Kunwar.

In course of time Saluk Kunwar grew into a fine young man while his mother continued to take flowers to the princess who had also grown into a young girl of exquisite beauty. One day when the old woman was ready to go to the palace with flowers Saluk Kunwar made a garland of Khadikajal (Arabian jasmine) without string and placed it with the flowers. His mother found it out and she angrily refused it to carry to the princess but Saluk Kunwar persuaded her to do so.

The princess was as usual weighed with flowers and while she was looking through them she found a lot of marijidara, rajani gandha, jai (jasmine), ketaki (screw pine), roses, azalias, parrot flowers, Kapauphool, Champas, Saluks, and lotuses of various aroma. However she was intoxicated with smell and colour when suddenly she came across the garland of Khadikajal and she asked the gardener's wife about it. The gardener's wife did not deceive her and told her that it came from Saluk Kunwar. The

Princess was pleased and she felt a strong desire to meet him. They met and fell in love. The young couple decided to marry. Saluk Kunwar put some vermilion on the head of the princess and the marriage was kept secret.

Saluk Kunwar used to ride a peacock to meet the princess at night when everyone in the palace would be asleep. He used to advise the peacock so that the gardener's wife would not see.

"Uru uru bese Manjusa
Maye dekha pabe ga."

(Fly, fly immediately, oh peacock, so that mother may not see).

The palace used to be guarded by sentries with spears so the princess would sing :

"Phira phira sonya more
Balame bhansabe ga."

(Oh my love, come quickly otherwise spears will strike you)

But one night he was really struck with a spear while he was coming to the palace. The princess tried her best to revive him but it was all in vain. Saluk Kunwar died. The princess, in total grief did not come out of her room in the morning. When everyone in the palace failed to make her door open, the King himself came near the door and asked her to open it. She said,

"Suna suna Baba mora
Saluk Kunwar sonya mora
Balame bhasaila ga."

(Oh Father ! Saluk Kunwar my husband, has been killed with a spear).

She wept and opened her door and people were speechless to see the dead body of Saluk Kunwar. Amidst of the heart-breaking cries of the princess as his body was being taken for cremation, a parrot flew to the spot with amrita bari (nectar water) and sprinkled it on Saluk Kunwar. He came to life and sat up. As soon as he gained consciousness he asked angrily, "who has brought me here ?" The king decided to give his daughter in proper marriage to Saluk Kunwar. The gardener and his wife was informed. They came to the palace with fish, sweet-meats, curd and betelnuts. After they came all the Brahmins of the village were called and

an auspicious day was selected. Now pankhilli was celebrated, betelnuts and betel-leaves with two pieces of gold and two pieces of silver were offered to the idol of Goddess Luxmi in the palace.

The marriage was to take place on the third day. Saluk Kunwar and the princess whose solemnly bathed and the palace was throbbing with merry making. The drummers were beating the drums, children were dressed in their best and friends and relatives all assembled. A play was staged at night. This was to take place in Saluk Kunwar's house but as he a poor gardener's son it was held in the palace. Both of them were bathed ceremonially on this night.

Next morning the priest sprinkled water with mango leaf on Saluk Kunwar and the princess and placed adibash (the black ointment) on their forehead. Saluk Kunwar was anointed with Sandal wood paste, a crown of pith and flowers was placed on his head and he was presented with a ring, a pair of clothers and some card, by a young girl of the palace.

He was seated on a stool within a space enclosed with split bamboo and plantain trees and the princess walked around him seven times and threw flowers and vermilion on Saluk Kunwar each time. Sampradan was done by the King and the girl was given away.

Then the fire with mango wood was lighted and rice, ghee and flowers were offered to the fire by Saluk Kunwar, hymns were chanted by the priest and he was married to the princess.

But many of the people in the palace were jealous of Saluk Kunwar and wanted to harm him. One day all the relatives of the King went hunting with Saluk Kunwar. They thought that Saluk Kunwar, as he was brought up by the poor gardener, would not be able to hunt. But it happened otherwise. They could not hunt anything and felt ashamed. Saluk Kunwar killed some deers. He with drew from the party and sat nearby in the guise of a yogi. As the relatives of the king approached him, he gave a deer to each one of them and put a mark of chillim on the back of each (Chillim = round flat pieces of charcoal used for getting smoke of tobacco). Then he came home with one deer for himself.

These people would not let him stay in peace. They went for Shikar another day. In the course of the day. the king and ali of his party felt hungry and thirsty. They brought bhok laroo (the sweetmeat that satisfies hunger) with them but forgot to bring piyas laroo (the sweet meat that quenches thirst) and they sent Saluk Kunwar for water. He brought water

from a pond which belonged to a demoness. The king as he did not like Saluk Kunwar, sold him to the demoness for the water and proceeded towards the palace.

The princess, as she did not see her husband, asked her father :

"Suna suna Baba mora
Saluk Kunwar genru raja
Aarai Kata durga."

(Oh father, how far is my Saluk Kunwar)

The King replied,

"Suna suna beti more
Saluk Kunwar genru raja
Juya Khele pasa Khele
Aarai bahut dur Ga."

(Oh my daughter, he is gambling with dice, far far away)

Every one said the same to her. None told her the truth. But she had two dogs called Chaonra and Bhaonra who reported the truth to her. Then she went in search of her husband with Chaonra and Bhaonra with her. There was a washerman at the place where Saluk Kunwar was sold. The washerman helped her. He hid her with Chaonra and Bhaonra. The demoness sniffed at the air and got human smell and asked washerman about it. He lied to her. He was all the while thinking of saving Saluk Kunwar and the Princess. He thought out a plan. He advised Saluk Kunwar to play a jubliant tune on the flute and go away into the depth of the forest. As he did so the demoness with her kin followed him and went into the deep wood. But when he stopped playing, she could not find out the way back and was lost in the thick of the jungle with all her kin.

Saluk Kunwar returned home with the princess and the two loyal dogs Chaonra and Bhaonra. He met the king and described his skill in hunting. The mark of Chillim on the back of the King's relatives proved Saluk Kunwar's statement to be true. The King felt ashamed and yielded at once.

The King gave his kingdom to Saluk Kunwar who lived with his loving wife happily thereafter.

47

**THE STORY OF THE SIX BROTHERS AND THEIR
NEPHEW
(KARBI)**

Once upon a time, somewhere in the Karbi Anglong, there lived a widow. She had a son. She was anxious to bring up her son well and asked her brothers to help her. She had six brothers. But far from helping her to rear up the small boy, they were very jealous of him. The boy was clever and more handsome than his uncles.

The boy had only one thing to call his own that was a calf. The calf had a glistening body and one can not imagine how plump it was. The boy was very fond of it. He used to feed the calf and tend it with loving care. The six brothers did not like this. One day they killed the calf.

The boy was very clever. He took off the hide of the calf and cut off one of its legs. He went to another village with that leg. There he came to a Brahmin's house. While nobody saw him he buried the leg in a corner of the house. Then he went to the Brahmin and asked him.

"Respected sir how is it that there's a smell of beef in your house ?"

The Brahmin angrily retorted, "You fool ! How dare you talk such sacrilege? Let a tiger eat you. Don't you know this is a Brahmin's house ? Wicked fellow I challenge you to find it. If you can't find out any beef in my house, let my curse turn you to ashes." The boy meekly replied, "Well, let me search", and he pretended to search.

After a short while he presented the leg of the calf before the Brahmin, smiled with a flash of mischief and said, "Sir, you challenged me now see whether this is anything but a cow's leg." The Brahmin felt very angry. But if his neighbours would come and see it, he would be an out caste. After a little thought he decided to take this Karbi boy into confidence and whispered to him, "My boy, don't let anyone know about this. I will give you a Mon-thing (bag) full of money." He gave him the money the boy went away.

The boy felt very happy. He had never seen so much money in his life. He ran to his mother and said, "Mother go and bring rice measuring pot from my uncles." She went and brought the pot. As soon as the widow was gone her brothers talked among themselves, "It is really a mystery. They are so poor. What'll they do with the rice measuring pot ? Let one of

us go and secretly find out what they are doing." And they sent their younger brother. He hid himself behind the fence and saw that the mother and son were measuring a large sum of money. He came back and reported.

"The boy has brought a large heap of silver coins and they are measuring it with our rice measuring pot. Really it is hard to believe my own eyes."

When the widow went to return the pot, her brothers told her, "Go home and send our nephew we have some urgent work with him."

When the boy went to his uncles they asked him, "Where from have you brought so much money? You borrowed the pot to measure money: is it not? It's no use hiding it from us, you will be in trouble." He promptly answered, "There's nothing to hide. It's the price of the beef. When you killed my calf I cut it into pieces and went to the next village. The people there swarmed around me as they got smell of beef and so all the beef was sold in a few minutes. They told me that I had gone there with too little a quantity of beef and they needed much more. Their appetite for meat seemed so keen that perhaps they would have eaten me if I would not promised to bring sufficient beef for them, immediately. What shall I do uncles?"

The six brothers thought this was a chance for earning some money and asked him, "Well, if we take some beef for them, will they buy from us?" "Surely," the nephew replied, "and you have many cows, you can kill all of them and sell the beef. Perhaps you will get so much of money that it'll be difficult for you to carry it."

They did not lose any time at all. They killed all their cows and took big bags of beef on their back and were ready to go for selling it. Their nephew gave the direction to that village where he had been and advised them, thus, "The head of this village is a Brahmin. Just as you step into the village shout in this manner." "Who is there to buy beef," and there'll be a throng of people around you."

The six brothers went to the next village and started hawking beef loudly in the village of the Brahmins. A number of people were chatting in that very Brahmin's parlour who was cheated by their nephew. All of them called the brothers in a chorus, "Yes, well buy beef, come here," and as they entered the out house of the Brahmin, these people caught the six brothers and flogged them at random. The brothers fell at the feet of those people and asked for forgiveness. The Brahmins left them go after warn-

ing," You are too bold, You have come to sell beef in a village of Brahmins. This is a good lesson for you to remember for the rest of your life. We hope you'll never come here again".

The six brothers came out of the village with their limbs aching. The eldest of them said on their way home,"This boy has cheated us in a very nasty manner. Let us take revenge on him. We'll set fire to his house."

This was an act congenial to their nature and all the brothers agreed as soon as they reached their village, they secretly set fire to their nephew's house. The hut was turned into a heap of ashes in no time. The poor widow and her son became homeless. The boy, with much trouble, wove huge basket of cane and filled these with ashes. Then he set out towards a far off village. He found that the people of this village had been suffering from acute eye-sores and could not see any thing clearly. When the boy entered the village the villagers asked him,"Stranger what for you have come here ?" The boy answered,"Brothers, I heard that all of you are suffering from acute eye-sore. I could not sit idle when I heard this, so I have brought some miraculous medicine. They felt grateful to him, and brought a lot of money and took the ashes. The boy told them,"But there's a rule for the use of this medicine. Unless you go by this rule it 'll not be of any use. Don't apply it on your eyes, soon as you get it. When I start for my village, I shall go a little away and shout, apply, and then all of you apply it at once on your eyes."

In this way, the boy used his wit and earned two bagful of money for sale of the ashes. When he went out of sight the patients shouted,"Shall we apply the medicine now?" He replied from a distance,"Wait a little, don't be hasty, then all will be futile." He shouted these words, till he crossed the boundary of the village. When he reached a safe distance he shouted "Now rub it deep into your eyes." The patients rubbed the ashes deep into their eyes. Their eyes started bleeding and they were mad with pain as expected. They talked among themselves, "This is how the Karbi boy has cheated us. Well, if he dares show his face again we will tie his body tightly and thrash him well."

The boy reached home and again sent his mother for the rice measuring pot. The uncles were surprised. "Perhaps he has got some hidden treasure," they observed. They could not resist themselves. They came to their nephew and asked, "Where from have you brought so much of money, dear ?" The orphan replied, "It is the price of the ashes of my house to

which you set fire. The people of the village where I went to sell the ashes were telling me repeatedly, "We want more ashes, we want more ashes !" But my hut was too small and I couldn't get much ash from it. If you burn your huts you'll get a large amount of money and then perhaps you'll be able to build a thousand huts like the ones you have. And you'll need some porters to carry the money."

The brothers consulted each other. They decided that such a chance should not be missed. They set fire to all their huts immediately. The flames of the fire spread and consumed all the big huts. They were all turned into ashes. Their neighbours thought that they were mad, however, ignoring everybody, each of the brother took a huge bag of ashes on his back and started his journey on the midway track. They bent under the weight of the ashes but they did not mind it as they thought about the money they would get from selling it. Suddenly their nephew approached them running and said "Go to the village where the people have eye-sore and hawk your ashes there." When they were hawking ashes there, the villagers invited them inside the village. As they came in, the six brothers were tied head to foot with ropes by the villagers who then rubbed the ashes deep into their eyes. They were almost blind. Besides this there came a shower of slaps and punches and kicks on them. Thrashing the brothers to their hearts content, the villagers released them. On their way home, the brothers discussed among themselves. "This devilish boy has given us so much trouble. He has made us burn our houses and we have been flogged for selling ashes. We must take revenge on him. Let us reach home. We'll put him in an ingchin aru (ironcage) and throw him into the river.

They caught the boy when they came home and put him into an Ingchin aru and took him to the jungle on the bank of river. They rested there and thought, "This boy will go down the stream presently. He'll not be able to slip away from us now. Let us go and take some rice."

When they were away, a prince from another kingdom who was out hunting, came near the cage and saw the lad in it. He was taken aback and asked him, "What is the matter ? How is it that you have been left in this dense forest in an Ingchin aru with your hands and feet tied ?" The boy replied, "I have a maternal uncle's daughter. You can't imagine how beautiful she is. But as my ill luck would have it, my maternal uncles are pressing hard to marry her. I have selected my own bride and my answer to them

always is, I will never marry her. You are my Ong (uncle). I shall never allow you to be Ong Hi (father-in-law). But they would not listen to me. At first, they coaxed me, then they flogged me soundly and when they could not persuade me by any means they thrust me into this cage and brought me here: I don't know what they'll next do to me."

The prince asked, "If I marry her, then will the problem be solved?" The boy answered, "Then you'll have to enter this cage and wait till my uncles come back." He remained silent for a while and said, "When they return they'll ask you, 'What else have you got to say?' Tell them, 'Throw me into the river, that'll be better.' Then if they tell something more, say, 'Yes I am ready.'"

The prince felt glad and said, "I shall remember you for long." The boy said "But it can't so easy. If you go into Ingchin aru in that princely dress with your ornaments they'll find out who are you. Take me out. I shall give you my clothes. Wear them and enter the cage."

The prince opened the door and the boy came out and exchanged his garments with those of the prince. The prince entered the cage in the shabby clothes of the Karbi boy. The boy advanced towards the village.

The brothers finished their meal and came back. One of them came closer to the cage and asked, "What else will you say?" The prince as taught by the boy answered, "It would be better if you throw me into the river." "Then it'll be no fault of ours," said the brothers and hurled the caged prince into the river. "What is the matter?" he thought. "Am I to marry the princess who belongs to the kingdom of death?"

The six brothers ran home with perfect peace of mind. They thought that by this time their nephew must be dead.

As they reached home they saw a godly looking prince walking in the courtyard of their sister. How beautiful was his dress! And his ornaments dazzled their eyes. They came near their sister's house and saw that this was nobody else but their nephew. They were wild with envy. They thought that the Arnam Atooms (evil spirits) were pleased with boy. A boy thrown into the river and still alive! Had anyone ever come across such an incident? Perhaps he had gathered much wealth from the Patalpuri (the under world Kingdom of god of death). They grew curious about the land of the dead. They went to the boy and asked him, "Child, we threw you into the river because you told us to do so. You must have been around the Patalpuri.

But how could you come back so soon? We are very eager to know how you went there."

The boy opened the story with an air of seriousness, "You threw me into the river and I went down slowly. When only Arnem Kethe knew. Suddenly a palki (a wooden sedan) stopped near my cage and out came a number of armed guards. They showed me much respect and opened the cage. They told me, "Sir, your grand parents had sent this palki for you to the Kingdom of Death God. Kindly take your seat on it. I was scared but I thought that since I was already dead, why should I worry? Then the bearers of the palki swam and reached the Kingdom of the Death-God. I got down from the palki and saw a big palace before me. Out came granny and grandpa. They caressed me and at the time of return they gave me this dress and ornaments and said "Child, we are very eager to meet your uncles, tell them to come soon, for once. They also gave me a knife wrought with gold and said, "Perhaps your uncles will remember us when they see this knife." The boy showed the knife of the prince to his uncles and went on with his story. "Then the bearers of the Palki left me at the bank of the river. You should go there very soon otherwise grandpa will be very sorry."

The six brothers said, "Well, we understand it all, but how to reach that place?" The boy replied, "It's not very difficult. Bring an Ingchin aru for each of you and come with me to the bank of the river. Then each of you go into your and I shall throw you into the river, one by one. Then three pairs of palki will come and take you straight to patalpuri.

The six brothers quickly went home and brought six Ingchin aru. They went with their nephew to the bank of the river and each one of them went into an Ingchin aru. The boy tied them tightly inside the Ingchin aru.

He threw his eldest uncle first of all into the river. As soon as the cage was cast into the river there was a host of bubbles on the water. The nephew shouted, "Look, look, granny has given so much harpo (rice beer) to the uncle that he has become tipsy and is vomiting like anything." His uncles when they heard this felt, still more eager to reach their brother in the patalpuri. Each of them shouted his cage. "Throw me first, throw me first," then the nephew cast all of them into the river and went home with relief.

His aunts saw him alone and asked him when his uncles would return home. The boy replied. "Why do you worry? They'll meet grandpa and granny after such a long time and they won't leave the uncles so soon.

They have just now started drinking then they'll eat good dishes and they'll dance and sing : so they'll be there long."

The wives of six brothers kept awake for four nights but the husbands did not return. They apprehended some danger and asked the nephew, "What's the matter, child ? How is it that your uncles haven't returned yet ?" The boy said, "They'll come soon." The six women spent some more sleepless nights and asked the boy again, "Why haven't your uncles returned ? We are terribly afraid that some evil has befallen them. Go and see what has happened." The boy now replied carelessly, "Don't talk nonsense. Do what you should : place a plate of rice for each on the Non-Sek." (Non-Sek is a place in the Kitchen amongst Karbis where they put food for the dead).

His aunts then realised what ill luck had come to them. They beat their breasts hard and wailed loudly. The villages echoed the cries of the six widows.

The uncles who ill-treated the son of their widowed sister were given early death by Arnam Kethe and their widow's were left on this earth to lament over their death.

(Arnam Kethe is the supreme god of the Karbis)

48

A TALE OF HARATA KUNWAR (KARBI)

Long ago there was a old man living somewhere in Karbi Anglong who had six sons. The youngest one was Harata Kunwar who did not like to work. The jungle always beckoned him with its mystery and adventure. He hunted wild boar and deer while his brothers tilled their land. His brothers were fed up of him and complained to their father about him.

While the father listened to their complaint he decided to find out how much each son loved him. He asked his eldest son, "My eldest one how will you feed your old father ?" The son replied, "Father, I shall be the head man of the village and shall arrange for meetings. There the villagers will bring many pots of rice and many bamboo joints full of tasty wine as present to me. I shall send you as much rice and wine as you need out of these gifts." The father was pleased.

Then the father asked same question to his other sons one after another. The second son replied, "Father, I shall be blacksmith and shall prepare knives and peos and sell them. With the money I earn by selling these, I shall buy you betelnuts, betel leaves and milk white rice." The father was pleased. The third son said, "I shall work on my land all day long. And I shall reap a rich paddy harvest and get a large sum of money by selling it. And then I hope father, you will not be in want." The father was pleased. The fourth son replied, "Father, I shall hang on to a rich man and flatter him. He will give me good food and shelter and I shall share everything with you." The fifth son humbly said, "Father, I shall work as a servant to some one and with the little money I shall get I shall feed you." Father remained silent in these two cases.

When the father asked Harata Kunwar, he raised his head high and said proudly, "Father, I do not think the same way my brothers do; I have much higher ambition. I shall marry the daughter of the sun-god and get half of his kingdom and I shall put you on the throne of my Kingdom. I shall order my attendants to bring water in pitchers made of gold. They will wash your hands and feet with this water. They'll bring plates full of rice and pitchers full of wine for you."

The father was dumbfounded. The brothers were filled with anger and jealousy. And there ended the talk between father and sons.

Next day, at dawn, Harata Kunwar slipped away into the forest to hunt animals as usual. The old-father went towards his field with his five sons. As they worked, the sons poisoned the mind of their father against their youngest brother. They said to him, "Father, look at the way Harata speaks ! He'll marry the daughter of the sun-god ! Big talk only. He is totally useless. He does not work at all on the soil. Why shouldn't we get rid of him ?" "Yes : That's what we should do," the Father said very grimly.

After supper, Harata's father and brothers started drinking. They were pouring wine down their throats from a broad based earthen-jar. Wine brought devilish thoughts to the old man. He conspired with his sons and it was decided that a hemthap (a platform upon which wild boars are hunted) should be erected and Harata be sent there to hunt. They would go there and hide in darkness. As Harata would be dozing, one of them would kill him with a javelin. After such a conspiracy, Harata's father and brothers went to bed.

But they did not know that Harata's eldest brother's wife eavesdropped and over heard the talk. She was fond of Harata. She loved him as her own brother. She was anxious to save Harata and could not sleep.

Next day, when every one was away in the field Harata Kunwar came to his sister-in-law with some wild fowls he had killed. The sister-in-law served him rice with affection. This was usually the time when they talked about things which interested both of them. But today she was glum for a while. Then tears rolled down her checks. Harata was surprised to see her tears. "What is the matter with you, sister-in-law?" he asked. She then told him what she had heard. Harata consoled her, "Don't worry about me. No one will be able to kill me. When they go out I shall throw six clods of earth on the roof. If you don't hear this sound just at mid-day, be sure that I am dead."

In the evening his father called Harata, patted him on the back and said, as if with great affection, "Harata, my son, it is almost impossible to save the harvest from the wild pigs. They are eating up the paddy. To night you go and scare them away. I have got a hemthap created in the forest."

Harata finished his meal, took his bows and arrows and went to the field. He took some seeds of purui plant and squeezed its blood red juice. Then he uprooted a banana tree and prepared a human effigy with it. He put this effigy flat on the hemthap made it holiow and filled it with blood red juice of the purui seed. Then he covered the whole of it with white piece of cloth. This effigy was looking like someone asleep covering himself with a white sheet from head to foot.

At dead of night Harata's father and brothers started for the jungle each one with a spear. When they reached the hemthap his father told his eldest brother, "Now strike Harata with all your might." He advanced towards the banana tree but he stopped. How his brother was sleeping innocently and soundly! He burst out, "Father, I can't do it! He is my brother, my youngest brother, forgive me." All his brother were ordered one by one by their father to kill Harata but all of them refused. The old man muttered with rage, "You are all cowards. You haven't the courage to kill a man." Then he threw his spear with all his might to pierce only the banana tree. The blood red juice of the purui seed spurted out. He looked proudly at the red stream and remarked, "He was a real full blooded man how forcefully is his blood coming out. This is like my son. He has been served right for his tall talks. Now he will go and marry the daughter of the sun-god, pooh!

pooh !" "Oh, whom are you talking to father ?" Harata Kunwar's voice broke in. They were startled. This must be Harata Kunwar's ghost. Overcome by fear the father and his sons ran on breathlessly till they reached their own farm house. There they stayed for the night.

When it was dawn, they started for their home. As usual they finished their lunch and went to work on their soil. Harata threw six clods of earth on the roof and sister-in-law came out and took him in. She served him rice. Finishing his meal Harata said to her. "My dear sister-in-law, I shall no longer stay here with my enemies, I shall go away to some other place. Prepare some sweets for me."

His sister-in-law agreed that he should go away. She felt very sad for the boy, and prepared some sweets for him. On the eve of parting Harata said to his sister-in-law, "If I do not die, I shall return and throw six clods of earth on the rood. Whenever you hear the sound, clean the pinris (small wooden seats or stool) which are mine." They both wept. Then Harata left with his bows and arrows.

Harata travelled a long way. Soon he stopped in front of a hut thatched with hempan and shouted, "Hello granny, are you in ?"

"I have nobody to call my own," Came the reply, "Who are you, calling yourself my grandson ?"

Harata Kunwar said, "Just come out and see who it is ?"

The old lady rushed out of her cottage. She dressed quite fancifully. She wore a scarf with red and blue stripes, and she had wild flowers on her grey hair and on her ears. Harata liked her with all his heart. She spoke to him with a frown, "I am old and poor and live on alms and nobody comes to me. Why have you come here ? What's your intention boy ?" Harata replied, "I shall stay with you, dear granny," She could not believe him, "You are worthy to be a King. Why should you stay in such a forest with an old beggar woman, my boy ?" Harata retorted with a smile, "Till I be a King, I shall stay with you." The old woman felt happy to have a nice looking boy like Harata with her as her grandson. She was tired of her lonely life.

One morning she told him, "Harata I am going to the King for alms. Sun the paddy. Then bathe in the river. But don't go up stream." Harata dried the paddy, stored it and went to bathe in the river. He was all the while thinking why granny should forbid him to go upstream. There must

be some mystery behind her order. He could not stop himself going upstream. After going a little further up he came across a bathing place with a staircase coming down into the water. There he found bits of broken pitchers made of gold and silver.

He came home and asked her about the bathing place. She rebuked him for disobeying her. Then Harata implored her to tell him the background of the place. She, with initial hesitation told him everything. She said, "This is Bariti Richar ghat (bathing place for the king of Biratpuri). The six daughters of the king come here everyday to bathe. But I warn you not to go again." But Harata became more and more curious, to visit the place. He was determined to see the princesses.

Next day as soon as the old woman went out he started for that spot. He hid himself behind a bush nearby. The sun was at the highest altitude. Harata was looking at the sky. And Lo ! What a beautiful sight was it ! Six beautiful fairies were flapping their wings and coming down from heaven. They were sisters. Their silver wings were sparkling with the ray of the sun. They alighted on the bank of the river, put away their shiny clothes with care and dived into the river naked. They played in the water for a long time.

Noon rolled into twilight. Then the eldest sister remembered that much work remained to be done and their parents would be angry. They would have to cook, they would have to put the fowls and pigs in the cage and sty. So they put on their dresses and flew away. The youngest of the sisters was the most beautiful. Harata looked at them till they appeared to be mere dolls from a distance. He wished to marry one of them. He asked his granny how he could marry one of these fairies. The old lady was furious. She replied, "These are not fairies. They are the daughters of the sun-god. You are not a god. You are only a man. How can you marry any of them ?"

But Harata would not listen. He knew that the old woman was fond of him. So he coaxed her all the while to tell him how he would be able to marry a daughter of the sun-god. The woman had to yield. She said, "If you want to marry one of these girls, you'll have to do some difficult jobs. But you are very lazy. How will you do these things, I wonder !"

Harata was ready to do anything however difficult. She told him, "You are to cut off the weeds and clear the jungle on the bank of the river, that's your first task."

As soon as it was dawn Harata ran to the jungle on the bank of the Kapili river and cleared it in a day. He put together the felled trees and set them on fire. When all were burnt he sowed the seeds of maize and millet on the ashes. He also planted sugarcane and banana tree along with several flowering plants.

(This type of cultivations known as slash and burn agriculture or jhum cultivation is practised by various hill tribes).

He was the favourite of the gods so it took very little time for the seeds and saplings to flourish. There was a golden harvest of maize and millet each of its grain full with milk. There was lilies and marigold in full bloom.

The princesses came that day at their usual hour. After a bath when they got out of the water they looked into the orchard of Harata Kunwar and asked, "Whose orchard is this? We have never seen such a beautiful orchard before" they flew towards heaven after a short while. Harata went home and asked the old lady, "What shall I do next?" "Go and build a hut in the jungle," She ordered him. He returned after sometime and said, "I have built the house, now bring me the house wife for that." The old lady shook her head and said, "No the time is not yet ripe. You have to do many more things. Take a bamboo and carve out a flute." Harata prepared a flute out of a bamboo.

The time came when the grains ripened. Granny told him to play on his flute while watching his orchard. When Harata Kunwar came to his farm house he was in a world of splashing colours. As if some magic wand had touched the plants and flowers that were in bloom. He was basking in the beauty of the scene when he heard the flapping of wings. The princesses arrived. They dived into the river. They were playing in the water. After sometime the eldest of them said, "Let us return now." At that moment Harata began to play his flute. The princesses were charmed by the music. The eldest sister said, "It must be that person who owns this beautiful orchard. Let us go and bring some flowers from him." They all came to his orchard and asked, "Who are you?" "I am Harata Kunwar," he replied. Then they asked for some flowers. Harata felt very happy. They took as many flowers as they liked and went away.

Harata came home. Granny asked him, "My dear boy have you talked with the daughters of the sun-god?" He reported to her what had happened. The old lady bent her head and thought for a while. She found out

a way to capture the youngest of the sun-god's daughters. Then she advised Harata. "Tomorrow is an auspicious day. Hide yourself by the bathing ghat before the sisters come. Watch where they land. Five of these sisters are married the youngest is still free. But Paban Raja, the wind-god is imploring the sun-god to wed his daughter to his son. He had sent bamboo joints full of wine and skins of gourd as presents to the sun-god at the time of proposing marriage. However, I can tell you what to do. When the princesses put their clothes on the river bank, take note of the petticoat and scarf that belong to the youngest of the sisters. And when they plunge themselves into the water take away that petticoat and scarf and come to me. I shall weave things like them quickly and put them just at the spot where she kept her own. And she will not be able to fly unless she puts on her own clothes. The eldest sister will implore you at that time to return her petticoat and scarf. Tell her that you'll return them only if one of them marries you."

Next morning he dug a trench on the sandy bank of the Kapili and hid himself.

As soon as it was noon, the princesses dropped from the heavens. They put their clothes on the bank of the river and plunged into the river. When they were busy playing in the water Harata took away the a striped scarf and petticoat of the youngest girl and ran to his granny. He took the scarf and petticoat woven by the old lady and placed them there. Then he started playing upon his flute. The six sisters rushed to Harata's hut as they listened to the music. They were lost in the music. After a long time the eldest sister remembered that they were late for returning home. She dragged them to the ghat and all of them changed their dresses.

Then they came back to Harata for some flowers. After they took flowers they started to fly. But alas ! the youngest tried so hard but could not fly. Her wings were numbed. She rose a little bit above the ground but fell with a thud, and she started crying. The other sisters saw this. They came down. The eldest sister could guess that this could be the mischief of Harata and therefore she approached him for the dress of her youngest sister. Harata promptly replied, "Yes, I shall return her dress but one of you should marry me." The princesses felt trouble and they said to Harata, "How can any of us marry you ? We are all married." Harata smiled a little mischievously and replied, "Well, you remain with your husband, the dress will remain with me."

The five sisters told the youngest that she must marry Harata. She began to weep. Don't you know that Paban Raja has arranged my marriage with his son ? That he has sent father the bamboo joints full of wine and other delicacies of food as presents ?"

"But you are not yet the daughter-in-law of the Paban Raja. The trouble ends if you marry Harata Kunwar. Look at the sky. It is darkening. We'll have to reach home. The fowls and pigs will be waiting for us to put them in their places. Besides, our parents must be very anxious seeing us late. We pray to Arnam Kethe that you be happy as the wife of Harata. We shall never forget you, we will see you everyday as we come to bathe." The youngest sister replied, "Well, when all of you insist on so much I shall marry him," and she burst into helpless tears. She was left alone by her sisters with an unknown man in an unknown place. The sisters were also in tears as they consoled her. The eldest sister said to Harata, "Harata, because you are so eager to marry one of us we are leaving our youngest sister with you. But she is the dearest to us all. Never ill treat her. Never tell her to cook. Never touch her hands and feet." Saying this she flew into the sky along with her sisters. Harata then told his new found wife, "Night has fallen; let us go home."

Harata felt very happy now. He started hunting with fresh energy. He used to rush into the forest with his bow and arrows to hunt deer, wild boar and so on. Always one can see pieces of meat hanging on the bamboo frame in front of his hut. Harata was very fond of dry meat.

One day Harata told the old woman, "Granny, I am home sick."

She replied "Yes, my boy, you should be. You have your own land and house. But my dear, your wife is not feeling at home with you till now. You should stay here for some time more to make her happy." Harata said, "Granny isn't it that we have been married for a year." "But she is not happy my dear," said the old woman. So Harata continued to stay with the old woman. He worked very hard in his field. His harvest was very rich. So much was the quantity of paddy, maize and millet that there was hardly any space to store the grains. The Karbis believe that one who tills the soil with the swets of one's brow pleases the supreme God Arnam Kethe. Hence, Arnam Kethe blessed Harata with a son. Harata was in depth of bliss. His rich harvest, his beautiful wife, his lovely son, everything was joyful to him. But still he could not check his desire to go home and show his worth to his father and brothers.

He asked his granny once again, "Shall I go home now?" Granny told him, "My boy, the daughter of the sun-god is thinking of flying away to her father's kingdom." Harata then asked his wife, "Will you not visit my home?" She meekly agreed.

Next morning they started. They went a short distance when they had to go through a hilly track with many ups and downs. Harata's wife was tired to travel with the child. Harata saw this and took off his turban, tied his wife and child on his back tightly with it and stepped up the hill. When he reached the top he came across a very big hill bird. The bird spread its wing barring his way. Its breast was jet black. It was picking earth with its beak. Harata coaxed it much to let him pass. But it would not more. So he could not help but pierce it with an arrow. The bird flapped its wings in pain and died. He was hurrying on his way cross such a big wall? He went near it. Oh no, it was not a wall. It was a very huge wild boar. It was digging earth with its sharp tooth. It had created a big hole. The hill was trembling with the jerk as it dug earth. Harata killed this boar. He was now dragging his prey on his way home to make grand feast of pork with it.

Harata reached home in the evening. He threw clods of earth on the roof. His sister-in-law heard his signal. She washed all the wooden pinris and rushed out of the house shouting, "Harata has come, Harata has come." Harata put the dead boar by the fence and came in with his wife and child. The sister-in-law was very glad to see them and she gave them sweet rice and wine to eat and drink. Soon all his brothers were assembled. Harata's wife sat in the middle of the room. Her complexion was so bright that the room seemed to be lit with it. No one was able to look at her long. There was a kind of heat coming out of her body. Harata's brothers were amazed. A human being never looks like this. Had he really married the sun-god's daughter? Harata offered them the wild boar he had killed. But his brothers, five of them, could not bring the huge animal in. Harata remarked, "Now I see what kind of strong youngmen you are." Saying this he easily lifted it on his shoulders with only one hand and brought it to the court yard. The boar was then roasted. Harata cut the meat in small pieces. The six brothers sat with a big pitcher of wine. Harata's sister-in-law served them with wine and meat. There never was such a feast in their house. They revelled in music and dance.

Next morning, the whole village woke up with the news that Harata had returned with a wife and child. So many people came to see her.

When everyone was busy with the new comers, Harata brought a big bamboo joint and put her dress which he had stolen from Bariti Richar Ghat with ornaments inside it and then tied it tightly on the thatch of his house

As morning passed into noon the number of relatives and neighbour increased. They were all taking among themselves, "A human being cannot be so beautiful. She must be daughter of some god." Harata's wife told them softly, "I am not looking half as beautiful as I would in the clothes given by my father." The old women who were there said, "Then let her wear those clothes and let us see her in full bloom of her beauty." Harata's father was angry with him because Harata did not allow her to wear these clothes. She told her father-in-law where these clothes were kept. Harata's father jumped on the roof and gave her the bamboo joint. She now wore the dress which Harata had taken away from the river bank. She looked like a flame.

And Lo ! she was rising up and up towards the sky. Harata Kunwar was coming home after his visit friends. He saw his wife flying and alas ! he felt so sad, but she consoled him, "Don't be sad I shall come back." He wept for a long time for her. Then one day he left home to meet the granny who might help him now. He tied his son to his back with a piece of cloth for his long journey.

When he reached the old woman's door he sat his son free from his back and wept a lot. The old woman understood everything. She said, "My boy, she belongs to the sky and how can she set her mind on this earth ? How can you get her ? You can not fly up into the sky like her."

She gave some burnt meat to him to eat but he did not even touch it. The old lady took pity on Harata. Then she thought out a plan which would help him. She said to Harata, "The son of Paban Raja will go with his attendants to Birat Puri to marry your wife. Before he reached there, the elephant of the sun-god will come to bathe in this river. Lie in ambush with your son. When the elephant will be going back after his baths quickly tie your son on your back with your turban and then catch hold of the elephant's tail tightly. If the elephant resents and roars at you tell him that your wife is in the kingdom of Bariti Richa. He will be silent on hearing this and will take you to heaven. The kingdom of the sun-god is a wonderful place. There you'll see trees of gold with clusters of silver flowers, the river flowing with milk and the ghats wrought with glittering gems. In the afternoon your wife's attendant will come for water. Ask one of them to

give some water for your son. One of them will surely come to you with a pitcher of water. Drop your ring inside the pitcher without anybody's knowledge." Now she smiled mischievously and said, "And then tell me what happened? Well, let's wait and see." She went to kitchen.

Next morning Harata hid himself in the sand on the bank of the river Kapil. All of a sudden he saw a stormy mass of cloud coming down on the earth with sound and fury. It was the huge elephant of the Sun-god.

Harata took off his turban and tied his son with it and caught hold of elephant's tail. The elephant did not get angry.

As soon as the elephant reached the kingdom of Sun-god, Harata left its tail and hid himself nearby.

It was festive day for Biratpuri. Harata's wife was to be wedded to the son of Paban Raja, who had come to the Kingdom of the Sun-god with a retinue of forty eight. His attendants were all peevish. So the people of the Biratpuri feared their displeasure. The Sun-god sat on a *ing* (dias) in front of his room. The bridegroom's party gave him a pitcher full of wine. The sun-god asked the Paban Raja, "Oh King may I know why you have kindly come to visit my kingdom," Paban Raja replied, "My wife is getting old, so I have come to your daughter as my daughter-in-law to help my wife in household work." The sun-god said politely, "My lord, my daughter is not good at all in household work. She does not weave and she does not do other work." (To weave cloth is a must for all girls not only in Assam but also in entire North Eastern India except perhaps Khasis and Bengalis). The Paban Raja said, "That does not matter, we shall teach her everything." Then the sun-god asked his queen whether his daughter had given her consent to the marriage. The marriage would not take place without the consent of the bride and till she consented the sun-god. But the bride was glum and silent with her head down. The queen asked her again and again whether she would marry. She burst into tears. The queen was puzzled.

There is a custom in the Birat Puri. The bride has to take bath with the water of the river on the night of the marriage. The attendant went to the river to fetch water where Harata was waiting. He followed the advice of his granny exactly. As the attendants poured water on her head from one of the pitchers out came the ring of Harata. The ring fell at the feet of the princess. The princess picked it up. It was her husband's ring. She wondered how it had come so far? Thoughts of Harata Kunwar came into her mind. What a hero he was! How bold he was. How he wept for her

when she was coming away. The princess longed for her husband and child. She asked her servants as to who had brought the water with the ring. An old woman had filled the pitcher with the water. She told the princess everything. The princess ordered her to bring the person who drank the water of her pitcher.

Harata was brought before the princess. He had his son with him. As soon as Harata put down his son from his back he ran to his mother. The princess embraced her son and wept.

The sun-god saw this. He was saying to himself, "Now I understand why she did not agree to marry. She has a son and I was marrying her to the son of Paban Raja. Fie on me !" He told the Paban Raja, "My lord, now you see what has happened. So kindly go back to your own kingdom with your people." The Paban Raja was beside himself with anger. He was unable to bear such an insult. But the Sun-god is much more powerful than the Paban Raja. So he raised a fierce storm and felled some trees and went away. Then all was quiet.

The son-in-law had come for the first time. So there was grand feast. At night Harata's wife slept in the Kam (Woman's dormitory). Harata stayed in the men's dormitory. He sent his dress to his wife. That was the custom. His wife put the dress on the bed. She clasped her son and fell asleep.

Harata stayed in the Sun-god's Kingdom, Birata Puri, long after marriage feast. He worked very hard. He reaped a big harvest. Three years passed. Twelve farm houses and twelve granaries were full with grains. Now he wished to go home. One day he said to his wife, "My darling, even the birds live in their own nests. But we are in another's house. Let us now return to the earth and make a sweet home for ourselves. Our son will grow bigger and he will have some brothers and sisters to play with. I shall work very hard and feed them. Tell Omhai (father-in-law) this very day, dear." Harata's wife shyly told her mother, "Mother, your son-in-law wants to return to the earth. He wishes me to go with him. He'll go one of these days. What shall I tell him ?" The queen embraced her daughter to her breast and said, "As I give away my harvests to subjects so I have given you away to Harata. I cannot force you to stay." She heaved in sigh. She then asked her daughter, "What shall I give you ? Gold or silver or some servants or what ?"

Harata was there. He said, "I never had a gift from anyone. All that I have I've earned. I shall take nothing else but my wife with me"

An elephant came. It had gold seats on its back. It was led on the spot by servants of the king. Harata rode on it. His son was tied on his back. His wife sat by him. After two days Harata reached home with his wife and son. He became the king in time. This was the kingdom of happiness and prosperity. As child he dreamt to become King. His dream was fulfilled due to his hard labour and goodness.

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THE SNAKE PRINCE (ASSAMESE)

Long long ago there was a great king who ruled Assam. He was known for his bravery as well as kindness hence his subjects used to live with joy and happiness, most of their problem being solved by the crown.

The King used to live with his beautiful queen and beautiful and cute daughter. The princess had all virtues besides her physical beauty since she could master all the subjects on the earth. Therefore it was very difficult to find appropriate husband for her who should match her calibre. Thus one can imagine the worry of the King despite being so happy otherwise.

The King thus one day discussed the matter with his Prime Minister. They decided to send messengers to various countries to collect biodata of various Princes and nobles so that suitable match could be found. But alas! On scrutinising the various biodata, it was noticed that no prince or noble and calibre to match the princess hence were not suitable to be her husband.

The King, the queen and the Prime Minister then discussed the matter in great length. Finally they decided to invite all eminent astrologers and magicians to calculate who would be the husband of the princess. The astrologers gave various contradictory views, some opined that her future husband stays in Assam itself some said he stays in east while the other west and so on, no conclusion could be drawn. Various magicians also gave contradictory views.

At last one young magician appeared who said he could help the King provided, the King, the queen and the princess follow a ritual prescribed by him. He said the ritual should start from next full moon day after three of them get up early morning taking bath in a nearby stream. Accordingly, three of them followed what the magician said and one evening a very handsome prince appeared before them who said he was the prince of

underground world and had mastered all the subjects. The princess tested his knowledge and was satisfied. Thus everyone around were happy and it was decided to solemnise the marriage on next auspicious day. But the prince said he would come only in the evening and should leave before dawn hence marriage ritual as well as future life should be planned accordingly. Everyone else around assumed him as a spirit, or a ghost or a demon but as the princess insisted, the marriage was solemnised.

The prince used to come every evening and vanished before dawn, and inspite of all attempt made he could not be traced anywhere around. The princess also tried his best to solve the mystery but she also failed. Year rolled by. The princess gave birth to a beautiful son but mystery of her husband remained as before. One morning when her husband was leaving at dawn she followed him with her son secretly. As her husband quickly moved on a narrow path into the forest his son quickly yet silently moved following foot steps of his father. He found his father moved into the skin of a large python and moved slowly into the forest. He came back and reported it to his mother. Next evening the mother and the son went into the forest waiting for the prince to appear slowly and turned into the prince leaving the skin behind as he walked few steps towards the palace, his wife and son appeared and burnt the skin despite of his request not to do so, since he said it would be difficult for him to go back to his nearer ones. But it was all over by then. The snake prince remained back into the palace and ruled Assam as King with his beautiful wife and handsome son. The subjects were also happy under his administration.

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THE ROYAL ASTROLOGER (BODO)

Long long ago there was a time when entire Assam was ruled by the Bodos. They had a very kind yet a brave king. The subjects were happy as their granaries were full of paddy. Women were happy as they used to get enough of cotton, endi and muga cocoons to spin yarn and weave cloth. They used to weave wonderful cloth for all known for design and texture.

During those days in one of the villages on the north bank of the mighty river Budha Lohit there lived a boy who had super natural power to understand the languages of animals, birds and reptiles. He, however, never let anyone know this secret.

One day, when he was going out with his father he heard a frog speaking to another predicting that there would be rain. Hearing this he asked his father to carry rain coat since rain was anticipated. As it was a sunny day, his father ignored his words but on the way they got badly drenched as it really rained. His father was surprised but ignored the incident as a mere coincidence.

On another occasion as it was cloudy his father carried rain coats but since, the same way hearing from a frog that the day would be sunny and hot, he advised his father to leave the rain coat behind and carry enough of drinking water. This time too his father ignored him and as expected his father came back tired and thirsty. This time too his father ignored the incident as a mere coincidence.

One day the boy was walking close to the village forest and heard a snake talking to another planning to kill the son of Gaon burrah (Village chief) who stoned him a day before. After hearing this the boy rushed to Gaon burrah advising him to send his son to far off place for a few days or otherwise he would be killed due to snake bite. Like his father, the Gaon burrah also ignored the advice of the boy. But same evening the son of Gaon burrah died of snake bite. This made the boy famous as astrologer and no one thus could ignore the boy any longer.

The boy continued to predict many incidences in advance hearing birds, animals and reptiles. Many people came to him for his counsel and in the process the boy became very rich.

At last the king came to know about this boy. One day the costly diamond necklace of the queen was found missing. The king and his men tried in vain to locate by searching but failed. Finally the boy was summoned. The King asked the boy if he succeeded he would be suitably rewarded but if he failed he will be put to death as a fraud. The boy was sad and was walking slowly since he knew that he was not an astrologer. For a while he was resting beneath a tree and heard two birds conversing about the necklace. The male bird was telling its female counter part mentioning the name of a maid servant who had picked up the necklace when the queen was sleeping hiding it below a neem (margosa) tree. The boy went back to palace telling the king where the necklace and as the maid servant admitted on interrogation the king was very happy. He not only gave the boy a lot of wealth but made him royal astrologer. The boy lived in pomp thereafter.

CONCLUSION

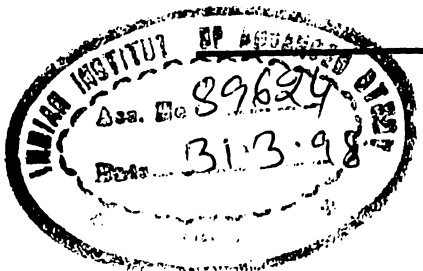
The folk-tales of Assam as described in various writings give us many good teaching. The tales are born out of experience through generations of various groups of people like the Karbis, the Lalungs, the Dimasas, the Bodos and besides the caste Hindu Assamese population. It consists of folk tales, tales of mythology and a few unrecorded historical facts. Many of these tales connect Assam with main stream of Indian epics like the Mahabharata.

These tales give us teaching like moral teachings, environmental thoughts and ethics and perhaps in many sense given guidance for our day to day life.

Thus the book, hopefully shall be useful for young and old besides for research scholars. Total 50 stories are recorded here which are perhaps a fraction of total story in circulation which are carried forward orally and need to be collected.

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