

Revitalizing the Legacy



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Aiyushman Dutta 27 February 2009 9192 views

For four consecutive days, the hills of Karbi Anglong reverberated with the melodious sound of beating drums and a cheering crowd, creating an atmosphere of sheer jubilation and ecstasy, as both the young and old alike joined hands to celebrate the annual Karbi Youth Festival. The 800 bigha-wide expanse of the cultural ground of Taralangso of Diphu town was packed to a record crowd of more than one lakh people, who were adorned in the best of their finery — a mixture of traditional sophistication and modern glamour — and who could be seen jostling around the hilly expanse with the tantalizing smell of various traditional dishes teasing one's nostrils all along the way.

The first Karbi Youth Festival was held in 1974 at the behest of the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), which, since its formation, has taken on the responsibility of revitalizing the fast disappearing legacy of the Karbi tribe. Like previous years, Taralangso witnessed a variety of traditional as well as modern dance competitions, like Ritnong Chingdi (Harvest dance), Hacha Kekan, Nimso Kerung, Kan Pangrum and songs like Ove alun (Love ballad), Lun chethak (Duet), Lun cheto (Group song), Lun kimi (Modern song), amongst others. Besides songs and dances, some of the traditional Karbi games, like 'Bathili ke-ap' (indigenous catapult), 'Kengdongdang' (stilt walking) and 'Hambi kepathu' were also played in the festival with the participants vying for each other amid loud cheers and claps. Official records depict the presence of around 1,118 competitors from different corners of the district in the pot-pourri of competitions which were held in the four-day event.

A matter of consternation, however, was the total absence of demonstrations on folk music and instruments, which is otherwise an inseparable part of the festival. While most of us would still like to believe that our traditional folklores and instruments are on the verge of extinction, the fact remains that they have already become extinct — the Karbi folk instruments and folk music practitioners being a pointer in this regard. In many ways, these types of unpleasant truths mar the entire joy and ecstasy, which festivals of solidarity, like the Karbi Youth Festival, bring along its wake.

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BY AIYUSHMAN DUTTA

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