

## **An Empirical Inquiry into the Village Council and Administration of Justice Among the Hill Karbis in a Rural Environment of Assam**

**Arifur Zaman**

Associate Professor  
Department of Anthropology  
Gauhati University

### **ABSTRACT**

*The village council functions as a socio-political organization, serving as a bridge between individuals who relate to each other and forming a cohesive unit. It is a component of a larger social organization, also known as a village organization, which is an institution responsible for upholding the rules and regulations of society. For example, the council represents the people's legal rights, and these obligations are inferred from them. Village organizations often function as territorial, social, and political units. The planning of village organizations, particularly the councils, aims to tackle the social and local issues facing rural residents. A village monitors these issues and maintains various organizations, such as the council of elders, religious, political, and so on, to ensure its smooth and efficient functioning. Traditional village organisations, which exist among tribes today, are the most important bodies in the entire village. The Karbis residing in the hilly areas of Assam also have their traditional village council, known as Sar-van-kap, composed of ten members, the most senior of which is the Rongasar or Gaonburah, which acts as a socio-political unit in their parochial life. In accordance with the State Government's Village Defence Organisation Act, the villagers of the study area have also established the Village Defence Police (VDP) as a police force to safeguard their community. Together with the Village Defence Police (VDP), the Sar-van-kap plays a crucial role in upholding law and order among the village's local inhabitants. This paper aims to assess the role of the village council in maintaining peace and facilitating the smooth functioning of the Karbis' sociocultural life in the rural context of Assam.*

**Keywords:** Karbis, village council, customary law, administration of justice, Sar-van-kap.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Village organisations are social organisations that are an essential component of rural settlements. Dube (2018:1) defines a village as an aggregate of several families sharing the same habitation. Lowie (1950:3) opines that social organisation deals primarily with the significant grouping of individuals. According to Vidyarthi and Rai (2000: 147), the concept of organization is that of people getting things done through planned actions. Dube (1960:202) said that the village settlement as a unit of social organisation represents solidarity different from that of the kin, the caste, and the class and plays a vital role as an agency of socialisation and social control. Firth (1961: 41) mentioned that social organisation has usually been taken as a synonym for social structure. The term "social organization" refers to the methodical processes that a community adopts over time. The social

structure plays a crucial role in shaping the behaviour of society's members, and without it, society's existence would not be possible. The social structure offers a number of courses of action. According to Leach, social structure consists of a set of ideas and the distribution of powers between individuals and groups of individuals (Leach, 1973:4). We should not use the term "organisation" in a generic sense when referring to a group of individuals; instead, it should signify that its members are working towards a specific goal, like addressing societal problems. As a result, many social institutions function as organizations that conceal or blend individual interests with those of the group. In its broadest sense, we can understand a village as a community.

Administration in human civilization is based on a healthy lifestyle and community advancement. Any deviation from justice causes unrest in any given community. India is well-known for its traditional villages, which function as exclusive social and political organisations housing a range of justice subsystems. In India, traditional rules, closely linked to the community's value system, govern tribal villages as administrative divisions. According to Kullu (1994), tribals value their village beyond all else. Their village is where they live their family, economic, religious, and political lives. Tribal villages have an altar, a government centre, and a justice court. In essence, each tribal village resembles a miniature planet. Majumder and Madan (1999) argued that kin groups dispense justice. Village councils, made up of representatives from diverse kin groupings, hear cases involving violations of tribal standards. When there are chiefs, they usually settle cases without consulting family heads or village headmen.

A village's structure reflects the social order that emerges from interpersonal bonds. As a society, we have a voluntary organisation called the village organisation. Since the dawn of civilization, it has existed alongside humans. However, its shape and composition have constantly changed over time. Security, law and order, health, education, religious beliefs, and other tasks are delegated by village organizations. Village organizations form when they select and bring together individuals to fulfill these fundamental requirements. These groups serve people of all ages, genders, and walks of life. These groups work to alter the village's character and infrastructure with the help of its inhabitants. Srinivas mentioned that in many rural areas in India, there is a council of elders, or panchayat. Its purpose is to arbitrate conflicts between locals and discuss issues of importance to the entire community, such as planning a festival or building a temple or road (Srinivas: 1960:22).

Each village operates as its own self-sufficient unit, subject to the authority of a traditional council. An elderly elected person presides over this council, which receives support from a council of senior residents. These experienced residents bear the responsibility of maintaining the village's compliance with established laws and regulations. When a dispute arises among the village's residents, the council arbitrates the disagreements according to the ancient legal system the villagers follow, ensuring the administration of justice. The residents respect and obey the council's decisions. Many view it as an indispensable component of the village's overarching organizational structure.

Dube (2018:7) asserts that the commitments made by members of village local groups bind them together. Customs and norms that have developed over time govern interactions between individuals and groups in many areas of village life. If the village's social norms and traditions are violated, the elders or a council of residents may take corrective action. It is the village council's responsibility to effectively enforce its sanctions, and it has the last say over social ostracism within the community. Srinivas (2004:57) argued that litigants' experiences with and expectations of justice in the village can be very different. The disputing parties either speak for themselves or enlist the advice of a clever third party. In contrast to the intimidating settings of city state courts, there are no expert lawyers disputing in a foreign language here. As rightly observed by Das (1990: 1), the administration of justice among the many tribes and ethnicities in India's north-eastern region varies substantially from that practiced in the rest of the country. The past was not like the present, just as the present is not like the past. Further, there are some significant distinctions between the customs of different tribes.

The Karbis in Kakojan village have their own organisations, some traditional and some modern. The Sar-van-kap (the council of elders), the Church Mondoli, the Dikon Board, and the Village Defence Police (VDP) are among the traditional village organisations for the administration of justice. Specialized individuals assigned specific duties and responsibilities to each of these organizations. The researcher also discovered that members of many such organisations collaborated to facilitate the smooth resolution of problems and conflicts.

The Assamese indigenous groups have their own system of justice administration, which is carried out in accordance with their own customary laws by the relevant village councils or organisations. Each culture places a high value on law and justice, which are also essential to the social, cultural, and political life of the community. An elaborate ethnographic study on a community regarding the traditional organizational bodies, law, and justice were carried out by different scholars like Das (1945; 1953), Srinivas (1960), Thaosen(1962), Pospisil (1963), Aiyappan (1967), Vidyarthi (1967; 1973), Stack and Lyall (1973), Danda (1978), Majumder (1980), Mills (1980), Bordoloi (1984), Bordoloi, Sharma Thakur and Saikia (1987), Das (1990), Roy and Rizvi(1990), Dutta (1991), Nakha(1993), Singh(1993;1995), Kilikder(1998), Playfair (1998), Gurdon (2002), Mitkong (2002), Vitso (2003), Barooah (2007), Endle (2007), Medhi and Barpujari(2007), Barpujari (2011), Zaman and Upadhaya (2015 a;b), et al., and they also focus on the correlation of customary rules and practices regarding justice dispensation with social life. In order to comprehend how the Karbis of Kakojan village function and the function of the various village organisations among them, a detailed analysis among them has been attempted in this paper.

### **The Karbis**

The Karbis, originally called the Mikirs, are one of the important hill tribes in the Assam region of India. They are spread in the Assamese districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sivasagar, East Karbi Anglong, and West Karbi Anglong, as well as the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. However, they are

primarily found in the Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. According to Das (1990: 553), the Karbis, Assamese hill tribes, are the main inhabitants of the Karbi Anglong district in Assam. According to the guidelines outlined in the Indian Constitution's Sixth Schedule, it has an independent district council. "The Assamese gave the race the name Mikir, the origin of which is unknown; they call themselves Arleng, which means man in general," according to Stack and Lyall (1908:4). By race, they are Mongoloid, and by language, they are Tibeto-Burman. The Karbi tribe has historically lived in the hills, but for a variety of causes, they have also spread into plains. There are five clans (kurs) in Karbi society: Tungjang, Ejang, Lijang, Hanjang, and Kronjang. Every clan is divided into multiple sub-clans by the Karbis. The Karbis' cultures are well-known for their reliance on jhumming, the importance of bamboo in material culture, the importance of rice beer (hor) in both socioeconomic and religious life, and their extensive folklore. The Karbi men are skilled basket makers who use cane and bamboo. Their staple food is jhum, though some have adapted to long-term cultivation. The Karbis are animismatics, but they also worship gods and goddesses in a way that borrows from Hinduism. Among the animistic gods worshipped by the Karbis are Arnam Sansar Recho, Hempu, Peng, and Arnam Kethe, each with their own rites. Bordoloi (1982:2) stated that "the Karbi concept of death depends primarily on three factors, namely, the immortality of the soul, life hereafter, and rebirth... the Karbis believe that the spirits of the dead have a world of their own and that it is known as Chom-Arong, which literally means the city of the king of death." To ensure that the departed spirit has a place in the hereafter, the Karbis perform a complex ritual known as Chomangkan in honour of the deceased. As of right now, a sizable portion of them have accepted Christianity, and the most of those involved in this study are Christians.

### **Micro field**

Kakojan village is located in Assam's Karbi Anglong district. The village is about 9 kilometres from the nearest town, Bokakhat in Golaghat district, and it is under the jurisdiction of the Dolamara police station of the Duarbagori Panchayat. The majority of the village's residents are homogeneous Karbis. In Kakojan village, there are 87 Karbi households and a total Karbi population of 505. There are 276 males and 229 females among them. The village has green hills with gentle slopes, and bamboo is one of the village's main natural resources. The majority of the houses are kaccha and are arranged in a somewhat circular pattern. The village, on the other hand, has a market and a few shops to meet the needs of the residents. There are also two schools, one LP and one ME, both of which provide education up to the eighth grade. Almost all of the houses in the village have electricity. The village is not well connected in terms of transportation and communication. The main road in the village is a pucca, but the lanes or inroads are kaccha.

## Objectives

The current research aims to examine the structure and composition of the traditional village council in the village being studied, including the personnel involved. It also seeks to understand how the village council administers justice and its role in the social, cultural, and political aspects of the community. Additionally, the research will explore the functions of the village council, its role in resolving disputes and crimes, and any changes that have taken place in the traditional council of the village under investigation.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study focuses on the administration of justice in the Karbis, employing standard anthropological field methods for data collection. Initially, the investigator gathered background knowledge about the community, tribal customary law, and justice administration through extensive library work. The study is mainly based on primary empirical data, which are collected during the empirical fieldwork carried out in the study village. The researcher gathered the primary data for this study using standard anthropological field methods such as non-participant observation, structured and unstructured interviews, concrete case study methods, and questionnaire methods, among others. The investigator conducted an intensive study on the *Sar-van-kap*, the council of the elders, often regarded as the most important organisation in the community, by interviewing the *rongasar* or *gaonburah* and ten other elderly members that constitute the council. By engaging in detailed interactions with the current members of the village administration and justice dispensation, we recorded their roles and responsibilities. We also interacted with the village's local residents, who expressed their genuine confidence in the councils' ability to maintain law and order and ensure the smooth functioning of daily life. The investigator also talked to members of the Rong Kerai Police (*Gaon Arrokhni Bahini*), also known as the Village Defence Police (VDP), who are there for the community's safety and employed by the state government, about their roles and responsibilities in overseeing the village's administration. The researcher also engaged with the members of the local church committee, who play a crucial role in maintaining the village's peace and harmony. As and when the situation demands, another method cross-checks the data gathered by one method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A village is an independent unit, largely self-sufficient, having its own village assembly, watch and ward, officials and servants (Srinivas; 1960:35). Perhaps the most interesting feature of the village is its political and judicial organization (Rosser; 1960: 80). Kakojan, the village under investigation, has a homogeneous Karbi population and traditional village organisation. Males and females hold various positions based on their capacities and abilities. However, in some organisations, such as the youth and women's organisation (*Seher*), only members of a certain age or gender are present. The most

important organisation in the village is the village council of elders, known as *Sar-van-kap*. Some of the important organisations in the village include the Church Mondoli, the Dikon Board of the Kakojan Baptist Church, the Village Defense Police (VDP), and others. The village organisations found in the current study area are discussed further below:

#### **The Village Council or the Council of Elders (*Sar-van-kap*)**

The *Sar-van-kap* is often regarded as the most important organisation in the community. There are a total of ten members present, the most senior of which is the village headman, also known as *Rongasar* or *Gaonburah*. He is in charge of the organisation. In the native Karbi language, the word *kap* refers to a group of ten persons, and the words *sar-van* denote the role of village headman. The *Rongasar* is the most senior member of the village's administrative team. Since the Karbi tribe follows the patrilineal system of inheritance, all of the members of the *Sar-van-kap* are adult males. Additionally, in order to be qualified to occupy a post at this office, an individual is required to have completed at least some degree of primary or secondary school. The following is a list of the 10 members of the *Sar-van-kap* and the roles that they hold:

**(a) *Rongasathe or Rongasar*** - The phrase "headman" derives from the compound word "Rongasathe," which is made up of the terms "Rong," which means "village," and "asathe," which means "head." In Karbi terminology, "Rongasathe" literally translates to "head village." He presides over the meetings of the *Sar-van-kap*, including the annual meeting, and is responsible for the planning of a variety of activities that are intended to take place over the entire year. Additionally, he possesses the power of veto, which enables him to overrule the decisions that were made by the other members of the *Sar-van-kap*.

**(b) *Chingthongasar*** - The *Chingthongasar* is the village's assistant headman. In Karbi, the word *chingthong* means assistant, and the word *asar* means head. When the *Rongasar* is unavailable or absent, he takes care of the village council.

**(c) *Kemayakleng*** - This member is the secretary of the council and is responsible for keeping the minutes of the village council meetings. He is responsible for the organisation of meetings, the upkeep of the treasury of the *Sar-van-kap*, and the disbursement of essential cash during various crisis periods, such as the provision of aid in the event of natural disasters, during marriages and festivals, and so on. In addition to this, it is under his purview to ensure that all essential and official paperwork of the different works connected to the village and the village council is kept up to date.

**(d) *Kemayakleng akhibi*** - In the Karbi language, this position is referred to as an *akhibi*, which literally translates to "assistant." He is the assistant secretary of the village council, which means that he assists the secretary in the official activities of the council and takes over the duty of the Secretary when the Secretary is not present.

**(e) *Klengdon Klengsarpoh*** - This member of the village is also known as the *Chowkidar* (caretaker) of the village. For a period of five years, an unmarried male, essentially someone from the youth, is

recruited through a general meeting. He has to be present in all the various activities of the village, like marriages, festivals, or any event, and he actively governs the participation of the youth in all these events.

**(f) Pheranke** – This member of the village council is responsible for collecting. During weddings and other such events, he collects a sum determined by the *Sar-van-kap* in cash or in kind, which he gives to the *Kemayakleng*. He coordinates with the *Klengdon Klengsarpoh* and tells the locals of the significant events scheduled throughout the year.

**(g) Mekerkethe** – This *Sar-van-kap* member serves as the Convener. He is responsible for arranging meetings and gathering the villagers to discuss any topic or situation that requires immediate attention or poses a threat or danger to the inhabitants.

**(h) Himasar** – The Himasar is the group member who mostly handles village and land border conflicts. The terms *hima* and *asar*, which signify boundary and head, respectively, are combined to form the word *himasar*. He keeps track of the villager's land records and documents any alterations to the land boundary or transfers of land. He resolves every land dispute between villages as well as inside villages.

**(i) Wofongasar** – This member's main responsibility is to guarantee that all traditional Karbi rules and practises are upheld at any event or festival, notwithstanding the influence of Christianity, and to avoid any degradation of the same.

**(j) Dengriasar** – This member of the Karbi traditional village council works closely with the Pastor to preserve the village's birth and death records. Additionally, he is in charge of maintaining records for the traditional clans and their subclans.

When it comes to the position of *Rongasar*, the succession of office goes from the father to the eldest son in the family. The remaining members of this organisation are chosen based on the merits of their individual applications. Although in the conventional Karbi system, members are elected according to their clan, in the Kakojan village, members of the *Sar-van-kap* are elected independently of their clan. This is in contrast to the traditional Karbi system, which follows the election of members according to their clan. It's possible that the presence of Christians in the village played a role in bringing about this result.

### **The role of the *Sar-van-kap***

The members of the *Sar-van-kap* are responsible for maintaining the order and cohesion of the villagers. As such, the following conflict resolutions are discussed:

**(a) Marriage** – Marriage between members of the same clan (*kur*) is forbidden in Karbi society, and clan exogamy is practised. Marriage within one's own clan is frowned upon, and those who do so are expelled from the village and never welcomed back. In cases of elopement, whether from their own tribe or another tribe, from their own village or from outside the village, the groom's parents and *Rongasar* go to the bride's house and beg forgiveness. The village headman is also accompanied by

the *Pheranke*. They also take some flat rice, jaggery, five betel leaves, and five nuts to represent the five clans' agreement. These items are to be delivered to the bride's home as a token of apology. Following these procedures, the eloped couple marries again in the village according to Karbi traditions, which is required to validate the couple's marriage and their acceptance in the village. However, it should be noted that the groom is punished in the form of fines, which serves as a lesson to the others and ensures that no other villagers commit the same misdeed.

**(b) Adultery** – Adultery is a serious offence in the village. When a case of adultery is brought to the attention of the *Sar-van-kap* officials, both individuals involved in the crime are expelled from the village.

**(c) Robbery** – When a theft or robbery occurs in the village, a meeting is called at which the village headman (*Rongasar*), the victim, and the accused must all be present. If the accused is found guilty, the *Rongasar* fines him. The *Rongasar* also orders the guilty to turn over any stolen or robbed property to the victim. In addition, the guilty party is warned not to commit similar acts in the future. However, if similar acts are committed again, the *Rongasar* refers the case to the Village Defence Police (VDP). Members of the VDP decide whether to solve the case within their jurisdiction or refer it to the police.

**(d) Property** – The most valuable asset in the village is land. Because the Karbis are a patrilineal society, property is held solely by males and is passed down from father to son or sons after his death. However, if there is any discrepancy in the transfer of landed property, whether within or outside the family, a due date is set at which the conflicting parties must be present, and the *Rongasar*, in collaboration with the *Himasar*, provides a solution.

**(e) Intra and Inter Village Disputes** – Members of the *Sar-van-kap*, the Church Mondoli, or the VDP settle intra-village disputes. In all intra-village disputes, a meeting is called at a fixed location, most likely the *Rongasar's* house, where the officials and both conflicting parties are summoned and a solution is delivered. In cases involving inter-village disputes, the *gaonburahs* of both villages meet to discuss the issue and try to reach an agreement. If the offender is from the village, he must now pay a fine. Furthermore, he must take an oath to refrain from committing such acts in the future.

**(f) Divorce** – Divorce is frowned upon in Karbi society, as well as in the village. If a couple decides that they do not want to continue their married life together, the *Rongasar* is notified. He calls for an official meeting in which the husband and wife, as well as their parents, meet and discuss their proposal, and if they agree to separate, the *Kemayakleng* and the Pastor document it. However, if both the divorced wife and husband want to remarry after divorce, the village council and church do not approve, even though divorce and remarriage are legal in their society. The children of a divorced couple are given the option of staying with either their mother or their father.

**(g) Loan settlement** – In the village, people can get loans in the form of cash and goods. If someone in the village borrows money from someone else in the village, he has to pay back the loan with the



agreed-upon interest. If the loan is not paid back, the *Kemayakleng* of the village council will fine the person. But if the person dies before paying back the loan, none of his family members are responsible for paying it back, and they can't be forced to do so. It's up to the family of the person to decide if they want to pay back the loan or not. If the lender goes to the *Rongasar* about a loan that hasn't been paid back, he can set up a meeting so that both sides can come to an agreement. During the meeting, the lender is always at the mercy of the borrower's family if they decide to pay back the loan if the borrower has died. The idea behind this is that since the father took out the loan, the son doesn't have to pay it back, but he can if he wants to. All of these loan deals are verbal, which means they are taken at face value. Because of this, there are no written records of these deals.

**(h) Adoption of children** – When a married couple does not have any children of their own, they can adopt children from both within and outside the village. Any such adoption of children, however, must be documented in front of the village headman, and the child must be baptised by the Pastor.

**(i) Transfer of land** – There are no provisions for transferring land to a foreigner or outsider. However, there are no restrictions on the transfer of land between villages. The land of the village or the market is public property and is owned collectively by the village.

**(j) Disputes regarding Accidents** – The village headman, in collaboration with the VDP, is in charge of resolving minor accidents in the village. Following an investigation and determination of the cause of the incident, the person responsible for the accident is held accountable and fined. In the case of major accidents, however, the cases are transferred directly to the police station.

**(k) Dispute regarding breach of duty** – If a person is found to be violating their official duties and failing to honour the position that they hold, they are fined and given a stern order not to do so again in the future. If the person does the same thing again, he is replaced by another competent individual. All of these actions require the *Rongasar's* as well as the other members of the *Sar-van-kap's* consent and agreement. It should be noted that in all of the preceding disputes, the fine incurred by the aggrieved is always collected in cash and not in kind. If the *Rongasar* and *Sar-van-justice kap's* dispensation and verdict are unsatisfactory to the disputing parties, they can appeal to the village council again. However, if they are dissatisfied with the verdict and believe they have not received justice, they can appeal the case to a higher level of authority. In this case, the case is referred directly to the Village Defence Police (VDP).

The transfer of the case from the *Sar-van-kap* to the VDP, on the other hand, requires proper documentation from both the *Rongasar* and the president of the VDP. Srinivas (2004: 99) mentioned that “customary law as observed in the villages is not regarded as law even though it governs the lives of millions. Convenient myths exist to the effect that the introduction of British law destroyed the law and customs followed by the village panchayat. Indian villages are really ‘bilegal’ using both their traditional system as well as British–introduced law administered by the official courts situated in towns”. In the event of serious offences like as homicide, rape, or significant accidents, neither the

Rongasar nor the VDP nor the Church will have any hearings on the subject. All of these incidents, in the majority of cases, are promptly reported by the VDP to the Dolamara Police Station, which is the closest police station and is located approximately 15 kilometres away from the village. Members of the *Sar-van-kap*, the Church, or the VDP have no say in this matter and are only permitted to alert the police about it.

The Kakojan village is located in the Rongmongwe block of the Duarbagori constituency and is also known as the Near Duarbagori Area (NDA). The village does not have a Gaon Panchayat but is governed by the Karbi Autonomous Council (KAC). This is due to the Karbi Anglong district being designated as an Autonomous Council in 1952. The KAC elects a member at the block level for the village. The block-level member is a government agent who informs the villagers about the various government schemes and how to apply for them. He also receives government funding for all of these development projects and schemes.

### **Village Defense Police (VDP)**

*Rong Kerai* Police in the Karbi language and *Gaon Arrokhri Bahini* in the local tongue both refer to the same organisation, the Village Defense Police (VDP). The villagers have formed a police force called the Village Defense Police to protect their community in accordance with the Assam Government's Village Defense Organization Act. The Kakojan village VDP reports to the Dolamara Thana area's Circle Organizer (CO), who in turn reports to the Dolamara Police Station's Officer-in-Charge (OC). The Thana Village Defense Officer is the Officer in Charge of the Dolamara Police Station. In the Dolamara Thana region, the VDP is organised and supervised by the CO. Kakojan's VDP is made up of people from the seven villages served by the Dolamara Police Station who were chosen by the CO and the village headman based on their qualifications. Some people choose to become members of the group on their own own. They are the police force's frontline personnel. There is a president, a secretary, and eighteen other members in this group; the membership is open to both men and women, albeit men make up the majority.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of the VDP**

The VDP's primary duty is to uphold the peace and safety of the community by enforcing a uniform set of laws, rules, and regulations across the board. To this end, law enforcement agencies collect intelligence, conduct surveillance, and take other preventative measures. To top it all off, the VDP also acts as the village's trial court when the *Sar-van-kap*'s traditional method of trial is no longer viable. To put it more simply, if the *Sar-van-kap* or the *Rongasar* are unable to resolve a given issue or conflict, the matter is referred to the VDP President along with supporting documentation from the *Rongasar*. The VDP is tasked with finding the truth and bringing the victim justice.

It is the job of the VDP Secretary to collect the fine from the guilty parties. The fine is not predetermined and goes straight into the VDP's general fund based on the gravity of the infraction.

Members of the VDP use the funds they amass in this way to conduct investigations and make trips to the police station and other government offices. It's important to note that the legitimacy of the organisation and its members can be gauged by their willingness to issue membership cards.

### **Religious Organization**

The Karbi people who live in Kakojan village predominantly practice Christianity. The vast majority of the villages adhere to the Baptist faith, although a handful of them follow the Catholic faith. As a result, there is a Baptist church in the village that is located next to the residence of the local headman. The Kakojan Baptist Church is the name of this church, and the general church committee serves as the overarching authority for maintaining the village's social solidarity.

### **General Church Committee and its members**

This institution in the village is also known by its other name, the *Church Mondoli*. The name "mondoli" refers to both the people who live in the entire village and the people who serve on the committee, but the committee members are only responsible for administrative tasks. The committee comprises a total of thirteen individuals. The following is a list of members of the religious group known as Church Mondoli, as well as their respective roles in the organization:

(a) ***Kepangriabang*** – *Kepangriabang* is the Karbi term for pastor. As a result, he serves as the leader of the Christian Church. His primary responsibilities include leading worship services during holidays and special events, reading scripture, and presiding over oaths and trials. In addition, he is responsible for coordinating everything that takes place before, during, and after a birth, marriage, or death, as well as a baptism. In addition, he assists with settling the smaller disputes that arise in the community, such as those involving theft, marriage, fights, etc.

(b) ***Abdunneiphu*** – *Abdunneiphu* (in Karbi) is the Assistant Pastor. He is the next in command after the Pastor in the *Church Mondoli* and works and assists him with various activities. He also steps in for the Pastor when he is unavailable.

(c) ***Konchungbang*** – This member, known locally as *Konchungbang*, serves as the Secretary of the Church Mondoli. He keeps a record of births and deaths in the village, as well as organising Committee meetings and overseeing the management of various festivals and events.

(d) ***Dhumchungbang*** – This individual is a part of the Church. The Church has appointed him to the position of Assistant Secretary. He works as an assistant for the Church's General Secretary. During the General Secretary's absence, he takes charge of the job that needs to be done.

(e) ***Dhinrinbang*** – *Dhinrinbang* is the Karbi word for the position of treasurer or cashier in the local community. He is responsible for the upkeep of the village treasury and distributes the necessary sums of cash at various times and events, such as Christmas, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Karbi New Year, or during various crisis periods, such as marriage, death, or when the villagers are affected by

natural disasters as well. In addition, the Treasurer is responsible for taking care of any donations made during the Church's weekly Sunday services or at any other time during the week.

**(f) *Scihemlangbang*** – This team member's other name is *Chowkidar*. He is in charge of communicating numerous messages and pieces of information to the villages. The Church Mondoli *Chowkidar's* work restricts exclusively to disseminating information pertaining to the Church.

**(g) *Dikon Board*** – The Church Mondoli organises the seven remaining members into a board known as *Dikones*. Men make up five of the seven members, with two reserved for women. The *Dikon Board* members assist and advise the Committee's other members on its proper functioning and behaviour, as well as its related tasks. Members of the *Dikon Board* are also responsible for presenting the accused before the pastor and after his confession in church; they also provide counselling. They also assumed responsibility for overseeing church activities during the early stages of the village's conversion to Christianity.

Each member of the entire committee serves a five-year term. After their terms end, five village members form a Nomination Board. Based on their merits, these knowledgeable members recommend deserving candidates for the various Church Mondoli positions. Regardless of the position, there is no possibility of familial succession. The Nomination Board also hears appeals regarding term extensions based on service. However, it is up to the *Dikon Board* to choose the assistant pastor from among them. For example, the *Dikon Board* assigns a person to the position of pastor only if they have completed matriculation. He must also be fluent in a number of languages, primarily the village's secondary languages.

### **Role of the Church Committee in dispute resolution**

The church's committee and its members are responsible for a variety of tasks. They handle all major events and festivals in the first place. In addition to that, they also deal with minor cases in the village. The Church Mondoli serves as a court of law as well. In cases of theft, quarrels, property ownership, etc., the victim will appeal to the Church Committee members for justice, and the Committee will convene a meeting between the disputing parties to resolve the matter, akin to the *Sar-van-kap* system. The pastor and witnesses bring people who have committed crimes such as adultery, theft, fighting, excessive drinking, and robbery to the church for confession. The accused then face a suspension anywhere from one month to six months, depending on the gravity of their crime. The *Dikon Board* members also offer counseling services. During this period, however, neither the Church nor the *Sar-van-kap* would provide any financial assistance. The *Rongasar* receives notification and assumes control of the situation in the event of a repeat offence. The *Rongasar* banishes the offender and their partner from the community when they learn of a case of adultery involving a repeat offender. However, in situations such as theft, drunkenness, disputes, etc., the *Rongasar* will penalize and suspend a repeat offender once more, albeit for a more extended period, such as a year.

## Conclusion

The traditional village council of the Karbis of Kakojan village is still active, and they have great faith in their customary laws. Society greatly respects the village council's judgement. Therefore, the people have good faith in their traditional justice delivery system. Customary laws, established and followed since time immemorial, serve as the foundation for justice. Therefore, the Karbi people do not approach the modern court of law. Unlike the modern court of law, which is expensive and time-consuming, the Karbis do not burden their justice delivery system with cumbersome formalities. There is a common saying that justice delayed is justice denied, but this is not applicable to Kakojan village council's justice delivery system. It is because justice is quick, cheap, and perceptible. Furthermore, because of its flexibility, it offers an economic advantage by reducing the fine to a level that is deemed appropriate for the offender. The villagers find it confusing to approach the Modern Court of Law because of its formalities, lengthy proceedings, and the high costs associated with pursuing a case. However, the modern statutory law court refers and decides cases involving serious crimes such as murder, homicide, and rape. In this case, they approached the nearby police station, located in Bokakhat town. The villagers believe that they have benefited from other village organisations, such as the VDP and government block-level members. Crime has decreased as a result of the VDP's presence, and the block-level members assist them in taking advantage of the various government schemes. The Kakojan Baptist Church in the village helps to unite and build solidarity among the residents. There is an interpreter, preferably from their own community or a person who belongs to the Karbi tribe, who has adequate knowledge regarding the customary rules of the land as well as their dialect, who intervenes between the government authority and the aggrieved party. Therefore, the community settles disputes in accordance with its customary rules.

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**Corresponding Author:** Arifur Zaman (E mail: arifurzaman@gmail.com)