

SPECIAL ARTICLE

**Karbis and the Politics of Peace:
Deconstructing Colonial Warlike and Unwarlike
Stereotypes**

Dharamsing Teron

Director of Centre for Karbi Studies, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam

&

Vulli Dhanaraju

Professor of History, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU)

Shillong, Meghalaya

Abstract: *This paper critically examines the colonial portrayal of the Karbi people of Northeast India as an unwarlike and timid community, challenging entrenched stereotypes imposed by British ethnographers and administrators. Drawing on postcolonial historiography, ethnographic evidence, and Karbi oral traditions, it reveals how colonial narratives obscured the tribe's complex social institutions and peaceful resistance strategies and strategic avoidance of conflict. Traditional Karbi governance and youth institutions emphasized cooperation and peace rather than conflict or war. The paper argues that these colonial constructions served imperial control agendas and continue to shape postcolonial perceptions, marginalizing indigenous identities. By reframing peace and war as flexible collective strategies, this paper enriches understanding of indigenous autonomy, cultural resilience, and the nuanced histories of resistance in colonial and postcolonial contexts. It further highlights how imposed peace conditions in the region contribute to cycles of violence and underscores the enduring significance of Karbi folklore as a repository of nonviolent resistance and aspirations for autonomy. This analysis calls for a reevaluation of indigenous histories beyond simplistic binaries of war and peace, emphasizing the dynamic nature of collective survival strategies within indigenous communities of Northeast India.*

Keywords: Colonial ethnography, Indigenous identity, Karbi people, Northeast India, Peaceful resistance

Introduction

This paper critically examines the colonial construction of the Karbi people in Northeast India as an unwarlike, timid, and non-martial community, challenging deeply entrenched stereotypes perpetuated by British administrators,

ethnographers, and missionaries. Karbi tribe is one of the major ethnic groups in northeast India mainly inhabiting Karbi Anglong District of Assam. The Karbis are mentioned ethnically under Indo-Mongoloid group and Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and are the oldest inhabitants of Assam. They are also found sparsely in other districts of Assam such as Nagaon, Sonitpur, Morigaon, Kamrup, Golaghat, N.C Hills, and Cachar. The Karbis were earlier known as 'Mikirs' by 'others' such as the colonial accounts and the non-Karbis but they call themselves 'Arleng' meaning 'men' in the Karbi language. However, the word Karbi is most popular in academic circles in the northeast India.

The colonial construction of tribes in Northeast India forms a distinct but connected narrative within British rule in India. Unlike the plains-based communities in central and southern India, the hill-dwelling peoples of the Northeast such as the Nagas, Karbis, Mizos, Khasis, and Garos were seen through the lens of geographic isolation and cultural "otherness." This "Northeast Frontier" became a laboratory for colonial policies that both reinforced tribal identities and served strategic and economic interests. British engagement with Northeast India intensified after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826), when the region was annexed as a buffer zone against Burmese incursions. Colonial administrators and ethnographers like John Butler and Edward Tuite Dalton depicted the hill tribes as "savage" and "warlike," distinct from the caste-based societies of the plains.¹ Such characterizations drew on the region's rugged terrain and martial customs, such as the Nagas' headhunting practices, which both fascinated and unsettled British observers. As Baruah (2005) argues, the British portrayed the Northeast as a "frontier" to justify minimal governance and maximum extraction, especially of tea, timber, and later oil, obscuring complex trade networks like those between the Ahoms and hill tribes, thus recasting dynamic societies as static and backward.²

Colonial Construction of the Karbi

The Karbis were consistently portrayed in colonial writings as an "unwarlike" people marked by timidity, cowardice, and a supposed lack of martial spirit. This stereotype was reiterated by several British administrators and ethnographers, including Maj. John Butler (1855), Lieut. R. Stewart (1856), T. E. Dalton (1872), W. W. Hunter (1879), G. H. Damant (1880), H. B. Rowney (1882), Lord Egerton (1896), Stack and Lyall (1908), G. D. Walker (1925), Robert Reid (1940), and Stephen Dewar (1966). With the possible exceptions of William Robinson (1841) and Alexander Mackenzie (1884), these writers collectively reinforced the colonial construction of the Karbis as an "unwarlike and inoffensive race." The American Baptist missionaries among them Rev. James Rae (1836), Cyrus Tollman (1861), and Helen Montgomery (1921) largely echoed these views, depicting the Karbis as simultaneously "timid" and "bloodthirsty," a paradox that underscored the ambivalence of the colonial missionary gaze.

The earliest colonial description of the Karbis came from Rev. James Rae, a

missionary from Serampore, who journeyed through the Mikir Hills in February 1836. In a letter to Capt. Francis Jenkins, Rae commended the Karbis for their apparent law-abiding nature, noting that none had ever been brought before the authorities in Assam for any serious offense. He described them as comparatively "civilized" in relation to other hill tribes and characterized them as "the most inoffensive race of people" residing in the region. According to Rae, warfare held no place in their way of life, as they were, in his words, "very timid."³

James Rae, coming from William Carey's Serampore Mission, arrived in Gauhati in 1829 to establish a mission school and was probably the first missionary to venture into the Karbi highlands near the end of his tenure in Assam.⁴ Francis Jenkins followed with a journey to the Karbi region around 1834, accompanied by his collector, Simons.⁵ Rae's observations revealed a colonial gaze shaped by ambivalence: while praising the Karbis as "extensive cultivators" whose labor was vital to Assam's cotton and rice production and commending their willingness to support their "more lazy and apathetic neighbours" – he simultaneously framed their peaceful, nonviolent nature as "timidity." This characterization reflects a colonial assumption that equated the absence of warfare with weakness or a lack of valor rather than recognizing it as a form of social coherence and stability. By contrast, William Robinson's description from 1841, though still limited by the trope of the "rude state of society," offered a somewhat more respectful portrayal, emphasizing their physical vigor and industriousness. Yet, his remark on the difficulty of tracing their origins due to their lack of written language underscores the colonial impulse to define and categorize indigenous peoples according to Eurocentric standards of civilization and history.⁶

In 1855, Maj. John Butler traveled extensively through the Karbi-inhabited areas of the Mikir tract and devoted several pages to describing the tribe. He observed that, unlike other hill tribes known to him, the Meekirs appeared entirely devoid of any form of martial spirit. Butler characterized them as a quiet, industrious people primarily engaged in cultivation, using only simple weapons such as the spear and the Dao for clearing jungle.⁷ According to a story Butler recorded, the tribe had no inclination toward war because, following an unsuccessful revolt against Ahom rule, they were compelled to renounce the use of arms, a restriction that shaped the present generation's aversion to conflict. Despite their peacefulness, Butler acknowledged that disputes among the Karbis rarely escalated into violence; robberies were uncommon and minor, with petty thefts typically resolved internally within the community. Butler's portrayal resonated with other colonial administrators, who endorsed this view.⁸ Lieutenant R. Stewart reiterated Butler's account, describing the people as industrious and hardworking but lacking ambition, and notably deficient in martial qualities.⁹ Stewart added that though the Meekirs were "cowardly," they were diligent and persistent, regarded as reliable subjects in Northern

Cachar, known for avoiding legal troubles, paying taxes punctually, and excelling in agriculture. They cultivated abundant rice and cotton, selling the latter to neighboring groups and merchants traveling up the Dyung River.¹⁰

Rev. Cyrus F. Tollman, an American Baptist missionary assigned to work among the Karbis in 1861, similarly described them as "wonderfully timid."¹¹ However, one of Tollman's missionary colleagues painted a broader and more negative picture of the hill tribes, labeling groups such as the Garos, Nagas, and Mikirs as "savage and bloodthirsty."¹² Following Tollman, Mr. Edward P. Scott worked among the Mikirs alongside Dr. Nathan Brown, who, during his visits from village to village in 1864, found the people to be of "large stature, muscular and active," and "proverbially peaceable."¹³

T. E. Dalton, writing in 1872, echoed the observations of Butler and Stewart, noting that the Mikir tribe occupied a linguistically isolated position. He reported that the Assam government had either disarmed them or compelled them to renounce the use of arms, which Dalton attributed as the reason for their unwarlike nature. This disposition, he argued, made them compliant subjects but also left them vulnerable to attacks from their more martial neighbors.¹⁴ W. W. Hunter reiterated the views of his predecessors, describing the Mikirs as "undoubtedly the most peaceful and industrious of the hill tribes." He portrayed them as a fine, athletic people but remarked that they were "poor in spirit, and somewhat devoid of personal courage."¹⁵ Hunter further noted that their agricultural tools were limited to a kodali (hoe) and a dao (single-edged knife), with the spear being their only weapon.¹⁶ Similarly, G. H. Damant, a political officer in the Naga Hills, characterized the tribe as "a very unwarlike inoffensive race."¹⁷

Lord Egerton, in his work, singled out the Karbis as the only "unwarlike" tribe among the otherwise warlike hill tribes of Assam and the North-East Frontier. He noted that some neighboring tribes, such as the Garos, Lushais, and Kukis, had recently posed difficulties for English tea-planters due to their resistance to British rule.¹⁸ Egerton also described the Bengalees as a "feeble and unwarlike race."¹⁹ S. C. Dutt, writing under the pseudonym H. B. Rowney, echoed prevailing colonial biases by asserting that the Hill "Meekirs" were not warriors. He described them as "cowardly" but credited them for their industriousness, noting that their sole weapon was the dao, which they used only for cultivation and woodcutting.²⁰

Stack and Lyall (1908) reiterated Major Stewart's assessment, highlighting the fundamentally unwarlike and pacific nature of the Mikirs in contrast to other hill tribes of Assam such as the Khasis, Kacharis, Kukis, and Nagas, who had long been engaged in continuous internecine conflict. They observed that these neighboring tribes maintained their distinct identities through ongoing hostilities with adjacent groups, while the Mikirs, numbering approximately ninety thousand, remained remarkably homogeneous. Unlike other tribes prone to fragmentation and viewing outsiders as enemies, the Mikirs preserved

their tribal institutions, language, and national character consistently across regions such as North Cachar, the Jaintia Hills, Nowgong, and the Mikir Hills. They continued their peaceful agricultural practices, producing enough food for subsistence along with substantial quantities of cotton and lac for export. Surrounded by warring neighbors and still practicing nomadic cultivation at times, the Mikirs occasionally sought the protection of stronger peoples.²¹ Lyall and Stack also described them as “a mild and unwarlike people” and, echoing Butler, noted that the tribe was said to have abandoned arms when they placed themselves under the protection of the Ahom kings.²²

G. D. Walker, the author of the first Karbi dictionary published in 1925, noted minimal linguistic variation among the Karbi people across a broad geographic range from Golaghat to Kamrup and the Khasi Hills beyond Gauhati, and from the Cachar plains near Silchar to the forests north of Bishnath in Darrang. He attributed this linguistic uniformity to the “unwarlike character of the Mikir people.”²³ Robert Neil Reid, uniquely among Assam’s colonial governors, ventured deeply into the remote Karbi interiors and described the Mikirs as “a quiet, inoffensive tribe who have never given any trouble,” lamenting that they were “rather neglected just because they are so harmless and non-vocal.”²⁴ Similarly, Stephen Dewar, who lived with the tribe during the winter of 1921-22, described the Karbis as “the most unwarlike of all tribes either North or South of the Brahmaputra,” noting their longstanding traditional enmity with the Angami Nagas, former headhunters of the Barail Range to the south.²⁵ Austrian Catholic priest and anthropologist Stephen Fuchs, who worked extensively in India and founded the Institute of Indian Culture in Mumbai, also highlighted the Karbis’ non-warlike disposition, remarking that they “took no part in the internecine feuds of the other tribes, but kept aloof and concentrated on their own pursuits.”²⁶

The Colonial Culture of Insecurity

Barua explains that in the early years of British rule in India, there was no effort to classify the diverse cultures and peoples into racial hierarchies or to isolate specific groups as martial races. However, Barua argues that during the late nineteenth century, the expansion of Britain’s empire in Asia and Africa popularized race as a topic in Victorian England. This shift was influenced by the British interpretation of the Indian Mutiny and accelerated by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* in 1859, which moved the focus from common human traits to racial differentiation.²⁷

Nonetheless, the colonial classification of tribes in Northeast India into “warlike” and “unwarlike” groups predates the 1857 Mutiny. Within this framework, the Karbis were consistently represented as the “most unwarlike.” However, they were not unique in this regard; Mac Munn identified them as part of a “vast mass of unwarlike people” across India.²⁸

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly challenged the colonial “martial

race" stereotype, emphasizing that these categories were constructed deliberately by imperial elites to serve political objectives, often with regional variations.²⁹ The colonial state's primary focus was on controlling the "warlike" tribes in Northeast India, while the "unwarlike" or peaceful tribes attracted little concern. Van der Dennen and Johan succinctly explained that peaceable preindustrial societies posed a conceptual problem for dominant theories of warfare, which typically ignored, negated, or explicated away the existence of such communities.³⁰

During the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, the "Mikirs" proved "very useful as coolies" to the British forces, contributing to the war of conquest against the Lushai. Their reputation for cowardice was notably challenged, as their conduct during the expedition "cleared" their character in this regard.³¹ Despite their colonial portrayal as 'unwarlike' and 'timid,' the British colonial state enlisted the "Mikirs" into its Labour Corps, and they were later drafted into the Royal Indian Navy. Robert Neil Reid explicitly recorded that an Assam Regiment, raised wholly from Assam inhabitants in 1941, included Mikirs alongside Garos, Lushais, Abors, Nagas, and Khasis in the Labour Corps, while Sylhetis joined the Royal Indian Navy.³²

Surrounded by headhunting tribes, the pre-colonial Karbis frequently adopted a strategy of avoidance rather than confrontation to evade violent raids. Historical accounts by Damant, Mackenzie, Stewart, and Lyall document the regularity of Angami raids on "Mikir" and Kachari villages. Damant observed that the Karbis suffered greatly due to the aggressive incursions of their Angami neighbors.³³ Stewart reported that relentless attacks forced the abandonment of Karbi and Dimasa villages along the Angami frontier, with frequent relocations motivated by fear of raids or disputes with neighboring communities.³⁴ He described the "fearful ravages" inflicted by the Angami Nagas in North Cachar, where widespread slaughter occurred among Mikir and Naga peoples in Kachari villages.³⁵ Mackenzie (1866) recorded a specific raid by the Nagas of Razepehah, who devastated a "Mikir" village in Sergamcha, North Cachar.³⁶ Lyall further noted that recurrent Angami raids, alongside oppression by Kachari kings, compelled the Karbis to migrate westward into the territory under the protection of the Jaintia Raja.³⁷

Colonial authors consistently noted the absence of recorded aggression or violence among the Karbis. In the medieval history of Northeast India, few other communities are documented as consistently avoiding or fleeing from warfare and violence as the Karbis, making them likely unique as a model of peaceful and non-warlike behavior. Citing Stephen Fuchs, J. M. G. Dennen included the Mikirs in his classification of "primitive peoples claimed as highly unwarlike" whose warfare was reported as either absent or mainly defensive.³⁸ E. P. Scott, who lived among the Karbis in 1864, described their society as characterized by a complete lack of internal conflict, noting that despite multiple families often sharing a single house, he never witnessed any angry or

unpleasant exchanges. Scott remarked, "They are strangers to family and neighborhood quarrels."³⁹

While this portrayal suggests an absence of violence within or by the Karbis, folklore reveals that violence did occur as a form of self-defense rather than organized aggression or warfare. To understand the nature of such internal conflicts, one must consider their social structure. Historically, incest was considered a grave violation punishable by execution, a practice abolished during the time of colonial encroachment through consensus led by the legendary Karbi Chief Rengbonghom, known as "Socheng Chongmeipi." Excommunication and banishment replaced execution, but the incest taboo remains a vital social norm. Similarly, extramarital affairs were severely punished, culminating in the communal killing of the accused couple during a public fishing event called *Me Kehung*.⁴⁰

The Karbi Idea of Peace and War

There is a wealth of folklore surrounding the significant role played by Karbi legends in resisting external domination. The legend of Rongpharpi Rongbe, a symbol of resistance against the oppressive demands of a Kachari king, continues to resonate within the collective memory of the Karbi people and fuels nationalist sentiments amid their ongoing push for autonomy. Rongpharpi, a young mother, is celebrated in folklore for fiercely opposing the degrading practice of collecting breast milk, bravely confronting and defeating soldiers sent to enforce this demand. B.C. Allen recounts a curious tradition indicating that the Karbis, originally settled near Dimapur, migrated to the Jaintia Hills to escape the Kachari king's daily demand for six seers of human milk, a peculiar staple in his diet.⁴¹ Similarly, the folklore of Thong Nokbe, regarded as a folk hero, celebrates his solitary stand against the Jaintia rule. His defiance and fearlessness in the face of injustice have cemented his legacy as an enduring symbol of resistance.⁴²

The factors that contributed to the Karbis being perceived as 'unwarlike' can be partially understood through their social institutions. The four well-defined Karbi territories: Rongkhang, Chinthong, Amri (in the highland of West Karbi Anglong district), and Dumra (Deemorooo) (in the Assam plains of Kamrup district) were governed by their traditional chiefs, who were respectfully called Recho, meaning kings.⁴³ These kingdoms functioned on community contributions from their respective clans. The Recho and other chiefs held roles that were primarily cultural, social, judicial, and religious, explicitly excluding military responsibilities. Chiefs were elected through a consensus process and could be removed or replaced by similar collective decision-making.⁴⁴

Another key social institution shedding light on the Karbis' 'unwarlike' nature is the youth dormitory, known as the 'Jirkedam.' This was a cooperative farming institution composed of young people, focused solely on peaceful agricultural activities without any military function. The Jirkedam played a

central role in transitioning adolescents to adulthood. Before puberty, children were cared for predominantly by the extended family rather than their biological parents. Discipline did not involve physical abuse or torture, yet children were not overly pampered to avoid fostering entitlement, obstinance, or disrespect toward elders. This cultural ethos is captured in the saying, "Oso alom patheri, methan dim keme pek'ri" (Do not pamper the child, do not leave a good place for a dog). Contrary to claims by Tanmay Bhattacharjee, who asserted without sufficient evidence that the Karbis are "staunchly patriarchal" and "more male dominated than any other society," there is little gender bias against female children among the Karbis.⁴⁵

The Jirkedam, in its more ancient and original form known as Jirlong, included both male and female members. While girls participated in the cooperative activities, they did not reside in the dormitories, which were exclusively for males. Stack described the institution as a "club of the dekas (Assamese)," referred to as 'maro' or 'terang'.⁴⁶ The 'maro' or 'terang' was situated centrally in the village, next to the house of the village chief, called the Sarthe (Gaonbura/Kangbura). Under the guidance of an elder known as the Sar Barim, members of the Jirkedam were trained in a range of skills including farming, construction, basket-making, fishing, and hunting. These activities typically lasted three to four years or as determined by the Sarthe and the village council. The environment of the terang was entirely non-military, focused solely on agricultural and communal responsibilities. The institution employed a hierarchical structure, with office bearers entrusted with specific duties. The Klengsarpo (Chief) and Klengdun (Deputy Chief) were assisted by other officers, numbering from eleven to thirty depending on the village's size and population. Conflicts or physical confrontations among members were resolved with verbal warnings and formal ritual apologies. At the conclusion of the Jirsong (passing out ceremony), a ritual worship of the guardian spirit of the youth, 'riso-arnam,' was performed, accompanied by prayers intended to cleanse any negative energies or actions. The ceremony included communal sharing of food and other resources accumulated by the institution. Overall, the Jirkedam played a vital role in preparing members to become responsible and dutiful adults.

This skewed or one-sided portrayal of the Karbi people reflects an extreme colonial mindset that labeled their war-avoidant and violence-abhorring nature as 'timid.' Such a narrow perspective limits understanding and diminishes the importance of studying societies that value peace or have internalized peaceful traditions within their social structures.

However, as Dennen and Falger argue, "it makes little sense to make the distinction belligerent/peaceful, warlike/unwarlike," since this binary is neither neat nor historically fixed.⁴⁷ They contend that peace and war are "collective survival strategies," and that historically, the Karbis chose "collective retreat and cultural insulation" as a means to avoid war and sustain themselves. Their

folklore and history illustrate that this strategy entailed significant costs, as they paid a heavy price for refusing retaliation and instead opting for strategic retreat to survive.⁴⁸

The colonial characterization of the Karbis as 'unwarlike' and lacking any "martial spirit" served the colonial agenda by allowing them to be largely ignored, as they did not challenge colonial authority. Unfortunately, this narrative persists in postcolonial discourse, albeit with a significant complication. In the context of Northeast India, where marginalized communities exist, peace is often imposed rather than freely chosen. This has resulted in what is described as a "state of permanent peacelessness" neither a condition of constant war nor lasting peace.⁴⁹ Peaceful expressions within this imposed order frequently go unrecognized or are suppressed, leading to frustration that can escalate into cycles of violence and counterviolence. In the Karbi Anglong region, this dynamic has given rise to the concept of a "third force," a notion often invoked alongside official calls for peace and anti-terrorism measures. As Huxley famously noted, such circumstances cultivate a "habit of violence," making it "exceedingly difficult for the perpetrators of violence to revert to their policy."⁵⁰

Karbi folklore rarely glorifies war or violence. A few traditional verses celebrate folk heroes such as Thong Nokbe and Waisong, who resisted the injustices imposed by Jaintia chiefs. Stack and Lyall noted instances of warfare between Khasi (or Synteng) chiefs that caused harassment to the Karbis, prompting their migration toward the Ahom frontier.⁵¹ There are also narratives of Kareng Rongpharpi's resistance against the dehumanizing demand for breast milk collection by Kachari kings.⁵² W. W. Hunter similarly documented the oppression by a Cachari prince that led to the Karbis' displacement from their original territory.⁵³

The migration stories in the Mosera tradition recount many hardships endured by Karbi ancestors throughout their long history.⁵⁴ Their refusal to engage in warfare and preference for avoidance meant they have fewer words to describe structures of violence. During the colonial period, this peaceful and war-abhorring disposition was condemned as timidity and linked to racial inferiority—a stigma that continues to marginalize the Karbis in postcolonial narratives, which overlook societies that reject war and violence.

While much of history traditionally focuses on war and military events as an established genre,⁵⁵ scholars have argued that war is not as universal or homogeneous as often assumed. Meyer critiques the naturalistic fallacy that treats war as an inevitable aspect of human nature, emphasizing variation in human conflict behaviors.⁵⁶ Recent archaeological interpretations of the mysterious Harappan civilization suggest it may have thrived for some 2,000 years without engaging in warfare or establishing leadership cults.⁵⁷ Moreover, Yuval Noah Harari, with his interdisciplinary analyses, highlights how our current era is comparatively peaceful, noting that more people today die from sugar-related diseases than from gunpowder violence.⁵⁸

The non-violent world of the Karbis can be glimpsed through an enduring myth about a 'hidden village' called Rongbin, said to exist in a parallel realm of peace and abundance. As the name suggests, Rongbin and its inhabitants are invisible. According to legend, the door of Rongbin was once open to those in distress, but it closed when greed and selfishness overcame humanity. The material aid that was once freely given ceased, and all connections with humans were severed. Nevertheless, ritual propitiation of the spirits of Rongbin continues to this day among modern Karbis, who seek protection from enemies and calamities (propitiation is sometimes incorporated within the community Rongker ritual, where protective territorial spirits are worshipped). This utopian vision of their ancestors—a peaceful world without violence may seem fanciful, but it reveals the Karbi people's enduring aspiration for nonviolence. Generations have lived with the hope of reclaiming the lost Rongbin, embracing the idea that "each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it."⁵⁹

Conclusion

The colonial portrayal of the Karbi people as an unwarlike and timid community has profoundly shaped both historical and contemporary understandings of their identity. This narrative, rooted in British colonial ethnographic practices, framed the Karbis within a simplistic binary of warlike versus unwarlike tribes, often dismissing their unique social institutions and cultural strategies for peace and survival. In reality, the Karbis employed deliberate and effective forms of peaceful resistance, such as avoidance of violent confrontation and strategic migration, which enabled their survival amid headhunting neighbors and political upheavals. Their traditions, including community governance without military functions and culturally embedded youth institutions emphasizing peaceful cooperation, further underscore a deeply ingrained ethos of nonviolence.

Postcolonial discourse, however, continues to grapple with these colonial legacies, often overlooking or misunderstanding the costs and choices involved in the Karbis' peaceful strategies. The imposition of peace as a survival necessity rather than an autonomous choice has contributed to cycles of tension in the region. Moreover, colonial and missionary influences disrupted traditional Karbi structures and introduced new challenges, complicating their cultural continuity. This analysis invites a reevaluation of indigenous histories that transcend reductive frameworks of violence and passivity. It highlights peace and war as dynamic collective strategies shaped by context rather than fixed traits. Recognizing the Karbis' peaceful resistance as a legitimate and powerful form of agency enriches scholarship on Northeast India and underscores the need for nuanced approaches to understanding indigenous polities, autonomy struggles, and cultural resilience in the face of colonial and postcolonial challenges.

Notes and References (Endnotes)

1. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872).
2. Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).
3. "Calcutta Christian Observer," *Calcutta Christian Observer* 5 (1836): 157-74.
4. Milton S. Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India, 1836-1950* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), 1.
5. A. S. Rao and D. M. Verma, eds., *Cyperaceae of North East India* (Howrah, India: Botanical Survey of India, Government of India, 1982), iv.
6. William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Asam* (Delhi: Sanskaran Prakashak, 1841), 308.
7. John Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1855), 138-39.
8. Butler, *Travels and Adventures*, 138-39.
9. Lieut. R. Stewart, "Notes on Northern Cachar," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 24 (1856): 605.
10. Stewart, "Notes on Northern Cachar," 605-6.
11. "The Missionary Magazine," *The Missionary Magazine*, published by the American Baptist Missionary Union, 41, no. 3 (March 1861): 75.
12. "The Missionary Magazine," *The Missionary Magazine*, published by the American Baptist Missionary Union, 44, no. 6 (1864): 168.
13. "The Missionary Magazine," 168.
14. T. E. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta: [n.p.], 1872), 54.
15. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol. 2 (London: Trübner & Co., 1879), 188.
16. Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, 190.
17. G. H. Damant, "Notes on the Locality and Population of the Tribes Dwelling between the Brahmaputra and Ningthi Rivers," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, new ser., 12, no. 2 (April 1880): 228-58.
18. W. Egerton, *A Description of Indian and Oriental Armour*, new ed. (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1896), 84.
19. Egerton, *A Description of Indian*, 107.
20. Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney, *The Wild Tribes of India* (London: Thos. De La Rue & Co., 1882), 178.
21. Edward Stack and Charles Lyall, *The Mikirs* (London: David Nutt, 1908), 152-53.
22. Stack and Lyall, *The Mikirs*, 5.
23. G. D. Walker, *A Dictionary of the Mikir Language*, reprint (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1925), preface.
24. Robert Neil Reid, *Years of Change in Bengal and Assam* (London: Ernest Benn, 1966), 138; Robert Neil Reid, "The Excluded Areas of Assam," *Geographical Journal*

- 103, no. 1/2 (1944): 18–29.
25. Stephen Dewar, "The Ceremony of Erecting a Monolith among the Angami Nagas," *Folklore* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1966): 264–69.
 26. Stephen Fuchs, *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 202.
 27. Pradeep Barua, "Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races," *The Historian* 58, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 107–16.
 28. Sir George MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, reprint (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1976), v.
 29. Kaushik Roy, *Sepoys against the Rising Sun: The Indian Army in Far East and South-East Asia, 1941–45* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 21; David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 12.
 30. J. M. G. van der Dennen, "The Politics of Peace in Primitive Societies: The Adaptive Rationale behind Corroboree and Calumet," in *Indoctrinability, Ideology, and Warfare: Evolutionary Perspectives*, ed. Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Frank K. Salter (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998), 151.
 31. Hunter, *A Statistical Account*, 384.
 32. Robert Neil Reid, "Assam," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 92, no. 4663 (April 14, 1944): 241–47.
 33. Damant, "Notes on the Locality," 228–58.
 34. Stewart, "Notes on Northern Cachar," 607.
 35. Stewart, "Notes on Northern Cachar," 602.
 36. Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta: Home Department Press, 1884), 121.
 37. Stack and Lyall, *The Mikirs*, 123.
 38. J. M. G. van der Dennen, *The Origin of War: The Evolution of a Male-Coalitional Reproductive Strategy* (Groningen: University of Groningen, 1995), 595.
 39. "The Missionary Magazine," 168.
 40. Dharamsing Teron, "Migration Memories in Karbi Oral Tradition," in *Karbi Studies: Memories, Myths, Metaphors*, vol. 1, ed. Dharamsing Teron, 2nd ed. (Guwahati: Assam Book Hive, 2012), 117–25.
 41. B. C. Allen, *Census of India, 1901*, vol. 4, Assam, pt. 1 (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1902), 136.
 42. Dharamsing Teron and Maggie Katharpi, "Singing the Past: Historical Episodes in Karbi Traditional Verses," in *Karbi History: Past and Present*, ed. Vulli Dhanaraju and Dharamsing Teron (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2020), 96.
 43. Butler, *Travels and Adventures*, 127.
 44. Butler, *Travels and Adventures*, 127.
 45. Tanmay Bhattacharjee, *Sociology of the Karbis* (1982), chap. 2, 41, <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8080/jspui/handle/10603/69330>.
 46. Stack and Lyall, *The Mikirs*, 12.

47. Johan M. G. van der Dennen and Vincent S. E. Falger, eds., *Sociobiology and Conflict: Evolutionary Perspectives on Competition, Cooperation, Violence, and Warfare* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1990), 257.
48. van der Dennen and Falger, *Sociobiology and Conflict*, 257.
49. van der Dennen and Falger, *Sociobiology and Conflict*, 257.
50. M. M. Jacob, quoted in Prasenjit Biswas and C. Joshua Thomas, eds., *Peace in India's North-East: Meaning, Metaphor, and Method—Essays of Concern and Commitment* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2006), 1.
51. Stack and Lyall, *The Mikirs*, 5.
52. B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, vol. 6, Nowgong (Calcutta: City Press, 1905), 82–83.
53. W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, vol. 2 (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1879; repr., Delhi, 1998), 188.
54. Teron, ed., *Karbi Studies*, 189.
55. Peter van den Dungen and Lawrence S. Wittner, "Peace History: An Introduction," *Journal of Peace Research* 40, no. 4 (July 2003; special issue on Peace History): 363–75.
56. P. Meyer, "Human Nature and the Function of War in Social Evolution: A Critical Review of a Recent Form of the Naturalistic Fallacy," in *Sociobiology and Conflict: Evolutionary Perspectives on Competition, Cooperation, Violence, and Warfare*, ed. J. van der Dennen and V. Falger (London: Chapman and Hall, 1990), 238.
57. "No Interest in War: Harappan Civilization," *Real Archaeology*, September 22, 2017, <https://pages.vassar.edu/realarchaeology/2017/09/22/no-interest-in-war-the-harappan-civilization/> (accessed March 19, 2021); Annalee Newitz, "Did This Ancient Civilization Avoid War for 2,000 Years?," *Gizmodo*, June 24, 2014, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/a-civilization-without-war-1595540812>.
58. Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Vintage, 2011), 410.
59. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 206.