

## **Enlivening Dyeing Tradition and ICH : The initiative of ARHI in North East of India**

**Dibya Jyoti Borah, President, ARHI**

### **Abstract**

Non-profit organization ARHI from the North-Eastern part of India has dedicated itself to preserving the undocumented and un-archived ICHs of different small and big communities in this area for many years. These communities are on the verge of losing their identity from the hegemony of either pervading mechanization of urban life or an adjacent bigger community's dominant culture. It is apparent the isolation and the "looked-down-upon" attitude of the majority communities have even created an inner centrifugal force within the communities where the new generations have withdrawn from the existing practices of lore and norms. ARHI has been proactively engaged in different innovative ICH revival and education projects. Of special mention is the ongoing revitalization of ICH associated with the natural dyeing tradition of the Karbi tribe. This project had commenced in early 2019 before the outbreak of COVID-19 and is continuing amidst the pandemic in modified form.

Like other tribes, the Karbi tribe also has a majestic textile tradition rooted in its cultural life. Its traditional costume is indicative of its identity, livelihood patterns, and social and cultural beliefs. They are the aesthetic expressions of rich cultural traditions. The traditional dyeing system is one of indispensable component of the textile tradition. They prepare dye from different natural sources like herbs/plants, or bark, or animal products. In each stage of textile tradition, especially in case of dyeing, there are a set of rituals or songs or performances of ballads which are an indispensable part of the knowledge system. *Phelo Keplang* is one such example. *Phelo Keplang* are the folk ballads sung describing the origin of cotton and usage in their society. '*PheloKeplang*' narrates the origin of cotton and beginning of weaving in Karbi society.

As the traditional dyeing system on the verge of extinction and new generation weavers almost are ignorant of it, ARHI has intervened here in the form of a project named Revitalization of Natural dyeing system and ICHs associated with it. Under the project, a number of activities were undertaken to revitalize traditional dyeing process as well as rituals

and performances associated with it. A series of workshops were being held in villages of West Karbi Anglong district of Assam. The workshops are meant for young generation of Karbi tribe where surviving community elders are providing training and demonstration of different processes of dyeing. The process of training is accompanied by relevant performances of ballads/rituals which are taught by community elders.

The project was going in conventional format from village to village in collaboration with the community before the outbreak of COVID-19. As the COVID-19 crisis grapples up the whole country is put under lockdown and other restrictions, the ongoing revitalization project has to undergo major changes in its form for its functioning after the outbreak. The crisis has brought several challenges as well as opportunities. As movement has been restricted, ICHs training are conducted through video conferences, ICH laden video messages are circulated on mobiles. Since the community is been isolated by lockdown restrictions it another way gives imperative to concentrate on their own resources.