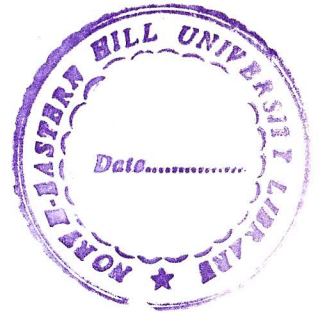


MAJOR FOLK FESTIVALS OF GAROS WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CULTIVATION:
A CRITICAL STUDY



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AN ABSTRACT
SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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2006

Enrolment No.690 of 16.05.01

This research is based on the information gathered from performers of the traditional rituals and from tours conducted in places where the rituals are still prevalent. Written materials are very few in numbers. Hence, the researcher is dealing with recorded facts collected from observation and interviews. There are differences in the manner of performing the rituals in different areas. Though the written records are very few, there were many village elders who could give information through interviews. However, since the words used were very archaic and the narration brisk, the utterances heard were difficult to understand, to be deciphered and expressed in writing. Several tours to villages have been made by the researcher since 1997 to observe the rituals. As time passes on, ceremonies and festivals such as these are gradually disappearing.

It is a well known fact that the people in the villages do not have written records of such materials and the younger generation is losing interest in whatever traditions were followed by their ancestors. Even the oral tradition is fast disappearing with the passage of time. However materials from out-of-the-way and remote villages could not be collected due to scarcity of time, limitations of terrains, and so on. It has been found after the study that even though the *A-chiks* have become Christians; they are still immersed in a tradition which has not yet been completely wiped out of their memory, both in the villages as well as in the towns. Nowadays, most of the people belonging to the younger generation study outside their villages. Modern life styles and the lack of

time to learn the expertise of traditionally handed down professions, like agriculture and related works, are also keeping them from cultivating crops and thus celebrating festivals connected with agriculture. It can also be noted that the villagers are slowly abandoning their beliefs due to these factors. Instead of *jhum* cultivation, most *A-chik* villagers are slowly adopting permanent cultivation and hill terraces.

The *A-chiks* as an ethnic community, are an outcome of the interaction between various socio-economic, political and cultural processes. Divisionary criteria which prevailed at the beginning of this century (such as language, culture and kinship) have given way to other differentiating factors such as level of education, profession, social status and religious denomination. The loose collection of geographical and linguistic sub-divisions (though not much distinction is noted) has developed them into a rather close knit ethnic community.

Justification of the study

The reason why the researcher has selected this topic is because the researcher has found that there are many interesting festivals observed by the Garos in connection with cultivation, but a detailed and systematic survey and recording has not yet been done. Many of the Garos themselves are not fully aware of the different festivals as they are being practised only by the non-Christian indigenous people and as a result they may be lost in the future. Therefore, the researcher felt the need for learning and preserving these dying traditions.

Though a few books and articles have been written on some of the festivals, it may be noted that no detailed and thorough study has been made and recorded in the form of a book or any other form. As a teacher in the university, and seeing the changing trends in society, the need was felt to know and understand these traditions better than what had been written in the few books available.

As the younger generations go out of their homes for further studies to different places they are no longer able to know or give their time for the festivals in their villages, so they are neither able nor interested to learn from their elders. The traditional beliefs and superstitions of the Garos are embedded in the various incantations used in the different festivals, and with the dying of the older generations; many of these incantations will be lost in time unless they are preserved in detail in some forms or the other. The researcher feels that this study would be of great help because the society would gain much information in terms of factual materials as most of the chants and incantations recorded are rarely found now. As stated, the passing down of these information from father to son is hardly taking place, so they are being lost. The alarming fact is that these incantations are receptacles of many beliefs and practices. In order to be able to preserve and regenerate lost traditions unearthing of facts is necessary. Hopefully this informative trait in the thesis would also contribute to the necessary queries regarding socio-cultural aspects of *A·chiks* for the policy makers as well, as much of the materials in the thesis are still areas which are unknown to most people.

Thus, there is a need for conducting studies which look at the major folk festivals, the performance of rituals, manners, beliefs and practices of the Garos. The study is mainly done to preserve the rich dying *A·chik* culture for the future generation. Therefore, the present study is in fact one such attempt to find out the practice and influence of the *A·chik* Folk Festivals. More specifically, the study of the present problem is stated as follows.

Chapter -1 Introduction

The introductory part elaborates on the Land and the People of the Garo Hills, definitions of Folk, Ritual, Ceremony, Festival, Religion; the researcher have shown the cartography of the Garo Hills to indicate the three separate maps of East, West and South districts of Garo Hills. This is primarily to provide the spatial and geographical information to the reader.

Then ensues verbal description of the land, population, people, language, religion, agricultural particularities of the religion and the traditional culture of the *A·chiks*.

In this part, the researcher have also included information collected through personal interviews of knowledgeable people like priests, village leaders or elders or

nokmas' etc. Personal observation of festivals in the field at different places over the years that forms part of the field work from the 1997-2005 is also included.

The researcher have concentrated on more field research in the three districts of Garo Hills, Block-wise, where the festivals are still observed in a traditional manner with gaiety and religious fervour even today. There are total of seventeen Development Blocks in Garo Hills (East-5 Blocks, West-8 and South-4; earlier there were only 14 Development Blocks and later on 3 more Development Blocks were established in each District; these are Kharkuta Development Block in the East, Gambegre Development Block in the West and Gasuapara Development Block in the South Garo Hills). The areas, river systems, research covered villages and major towns of Garo Hills are also indicated in the map.

The researcher have attempted to describe the folk festivals, traditional indigenous *A·chik* religion, construction of houses and *jhum* farming, and the researcher have tried to correlate each other. Lastly, all the sixteen folk festivals of *A·chiks* related to cultivation are mentioned. For this, the researcher have shown the sequences of the cycle of cultivation, festivals and the agricultural activities of the *A·chiks*.

Chapter II-Agricultural Festivals which includes

(i) **Jumang Sia:** In this ceremony a ritual is performed to seek permission from god or care-taker of the forest, *Abet-Rengge*, appealing him to evacuate the place for cultivation. This is done in case of the new *jhum* field. After performing rituals, at night the villagers wait for dreams and by interpreting the dreams they will carry on work in the field. If they had bad dreams they regard it as bad omen or as indicative of problems and will do the same ritual by clearing the other plot. It is seeking or submission to divine will in all decisions they take. This is observed for one night but if the dream is not favorable it may go on even for a week or two.

(ii) **Gitchipong A·siroka or Chiga Roka or Sabu Roka or A·si Roka:** This is an important ceremony observed in February or in March for three days, before burning the new *jhum* field. This is the purification ceremony of the village as well as the *jhum* field, especially *a·brenge*. This ritual is performed to be free from any epidemics or any unknown diseases that may afflict the village or the field. According to their belief, the gods related to cultivation may not come and bless if they fail to perform the ritual. Therefore, the villagers conduct rituals to appease eight deities: *A·song* or *Abet-Rangge*, *Mima Kiri Rokkime* or *Rokki*, *Pilne*, *Aminda*, *Susime*, *Rabuga-Tatara*, *Raksi* and *Dombe*. *Abet-Rengge* is the care-taker of the land; *Kiri-Rokkime* is the benevolent god of the crops and lives in the field till the crops are harvested. Whereas *Pilne*, *Raksi*, *Dombe* are the malevolent gods who are capable of afflicting the crops with different

diseases from the time of growth till harvest. They can make the crops unhealthy and yield low. *Rabuga-Tatara* is the supreme god and creator of all living and non-living beings according to the *A-chik* traditional system of belief. *Susime* is also addressed as *Salgra Susime*. According to the belief of the villagers it gives power and strength and sometimes sends curse to mankind. The rituals to cleanse all these maladies are performed by a priest. There are many rituals which have to be performed in the ceremony which lasts for three days ceremonies.

The first two days of rituals are held in the village and the third towards morning in the *anti-rama* or on the intersecting path to village, the market place and the field. For various rituals they need sixteen eggs, a cow or bull, nine chickens. On the third day they abstain from daily activities till four in the evening. Taking bath and washing of cloths are not allowed during daytime. Here, villagers cannot go out of the village, even strangers are not permitted to enter the village. As a sign of observation they will erect two bamboos on either side of the road on the main junction. Fine is imposed, as the rule keepers demand a penalty if anybody is found breaking rules in whatever forms.

(iii) *A·galmaka or Galmakdoa or A·galmakdoa*: This festival is observed right after the burning of dried debris of the new *jhum* field. After burning, the villagers enjoy drinking and feasting whole night and continue the next day and night. Sometimes drinking at night continues almost the whole week. The ceremony is performed while

the ashes are still fresh in the field. Therefore, the name itself explains the meaning of ceremony. It is also called *Galmakdoa* or *A·galmakdoa* or *Galmak* is literally, ‘ashes’ and ‘*doa*’ means ‘blow up’ or ‘the blowing up of ashes’. Here the first ritual is *A·siroka* or the purification ceremony. This ceremony is celebrated in the next morning of burning the new *jhum* field. This is performed in the fresh field (*a·dal*). According to their belief, before invoking *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, the mother god of paddy, it is imperative to purify the field; otherwise *Mima Kiri Rokkime* may not come to stay and bless in the season. If it is not done so, whatever crops they plant may not give good yield.

This festival is observed for a day and night. There are different rituals towards the morning and the head of the family can perform the rituals in their own *jhum* field. After the rituals, they spend half a day feasting in the field and they spend the night drinking, feasting, and merry-making in the village. In this ritual they invoke the name of *Misi Saljong* from the sea, the place believed to be his abode. *Misi Saljong* is the provider of paddy and other seed grains to mankind. It is believed that without *A·siroka* ritual, *Misi Saljong* and *Kiri Rokkime* may not stay in an unpurified field or village. If the village and its fields are cleansed, the gods guard and bless them throughout the whole season.

(iv) ***Salraka Tata or Salpang Sima***: This festival is performed in the month of April, in the crop growing season. The believers observe this festival for the sun and the rain

god. The rituals are performed near a pool or a water source to the god called *A.ning Bokjare-Chining Dimjare*. It is believed that if the sun god is displeased, he sends excessive heat and drought to the area. Every season is controlled by their gods, according to their belief. As the Rain-god is appealed to in the *Wachi Tata* festival, so also in the *Salrak Tata* festival, the sun-god is greatly requested.

(v) ***Miamua or A·krita or Me·jak Sim·a***: This ceremony is performed in June when the first weeding is done in the field. It is observed for a day and a night where feasting, drinking and merry-making are continued throughout the night. There is a belief that sometimes crops may get infected with diseases. They may also wilt and brown in the advanced stage of growth. The villagers believed that it is the disease caused by different malevolent gods. Therefore, to free the crops from such sicknesses, they perform rituals for six different gods like *Susime, Rakasi or Raksi, Bangskal, Goera, Areta* and *Salbamon*. For each god an altar is made separately in front of the field-hut (*a·ba jamadal*) near the field-altar (*a·ba kimindam*). In some villages, for *Areta* and *Salbamon*, only one altar is made and all the sacrifices are offered together.

To mollify these gods, they perform *Miamua* or 'Akal wanna' to the paddy in the growing period to get good harvest. The whole village observes the ceremony together in *nokma*'s farm and as a sign of observation they tie the leaves of the paddy together in their own farms. A pig, a chicken or a duck, *araru* leaf which are a kind of palm leaves, bamboo strips, leaves and a wicker cage basket, etc. are required for the

nokma or priest who performs the ritual. Sacrificial offerings are made of a pig, a chicken or duck. Here, blood is smeared and the feathers are fixed unto the altar.

(vi) ***Wachi Tata*** : This festival is celebrated for one day and one night at the end of March or April each year. It is performed where the water source is perennial and which is believed to be the dwelling place of the Rain god, usually in the spring or river or pond or waterfalls. If these are not available in their village or *a·dok*, they have to borrow these spots from other village or *a·dok* for performing the ritual.

Due to excessive rain falls, the crops get spoiled and yield less. It is believed that for any mistake or disobedience committed by the villagers who violate the rules or certain beliefs or superstition, the rain god punishes them to suffer without good harvest. Therefore, to seek forgiveness from god, they sacrifice a goat or chicken and eggs. Here, blood is offered to god and the meat cooked for the feast. This cannot be carried home; all the cooked items should be consumed or offered in the place where the ceremony is performed for the Rain and Sun god. Prayers are also offered to stop the continuous and heavy rainfall that sets in after the rainy season.

The highest priest, *Tuara Nangapa* does the ritual. In this ritual, they set fire encircling a big stone where they believed the Rain god resides. This is done mostly at *Kosi* of a selected abandoned village that is situated near the spring. The forest and land is preserved for *Goera Kalkame* or *A·song* god, as they believed these to be the abode

of guardian spirits for the whole village who protects them from enemies and various diseases.

After the ritual, they return home, each carrying along a stone to dry in the fireplace. The stone is kept there till the rain stops. As the stone dries, it is believed that the season would also dry. As in *Wachi Tata*, this festival is observed for three days and on the last day they abstain from daily activities, here no one is allowed to play cards, make ropes, do their daily chores or go to the field. Penalty is imposed upon anyone breaking the rules. The guilty is made to bear all the expenses incurred for the festival. When the rain stops after the ceremony, people can kill any domestic animal such as cow, pig etc., and the payment is demanded from the person breaking the rules to clear all the dues.

(vii) Rongchugala: Here, '*rongchu*' means 'flattened rice' and '*gala*' means 'throw or offer'. In this ceremony, a ritual is performed in the farm altar (*a-ba kimindam*) in front of field hut (*a-ba jamadal*) before harvesting paddy. At this time the cultivators get an early variety paddy from the field and the flattened rice made with this is thrown early in the morning into river or spring as a sacrificial ritual offering to *Misi Saljong*. They observe this with a strong belief and no one is allowed to eat any crop like sorrel, corn, millet, pumpkin, melon, chilies, etc. before this ceremony.

Any head of the family member can perform the ritual; a husband or even the widow can do it as in *A·galmaka* ceremony. It is observed in September when they start harvesting crops from their farm. One very interesting feature observed here is the consideration made for families who cannot afford to hold feasts at home. Such families can take part in the ceremony with the *nokma* or other families or close relatives and observe the ceremony along with them.

This is considered as if they have performed the ceremony and therefore after this can consume fresh fruits or vegetables from the field. It is the first ritual offering of the first fruits to god *Misi Saljong* and also a thanks-giving offering for good harvest. Most of the farmers grow an early variety only for this festival. In this ritual, offerings for god are made at home with some flattened rice and a sliced wild lemon (*te·matchi*) placed in *balim*¹ for *Nawang-Guangpa*, a fearful malevolent spirit; one in *andipe*² for *Muri-Mude Mangru-Mangram* or *Me·mang*, another fearful spirit. Offerings are also made at the *nokdechol*³ for *Cholsi Choljong-Misi Saljong*, at *nokgil* for *Bijasik-Chelengmana*.⁴

(viii) Jamegapa or Amarata or Medong Ra·ona or Ahaia: When harvest is over in the field, the farmers bring home the paddy sheaves together. *A·chiks* consider rice or

¹ It is a verandah in the entrance of an *A·chik* traditional house.

² It is a partition of a house just near the threshold.

³ It is a back door which is significant since it is considered to be visited by the malevolent spirits.

⁴ This is a post of the back door which is considered as another important physical structure of *A·chik* houses.

paddy as god *Rokkime* itself. When they reach home, they offer paddy to god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* both in the *maljuri* and *chusimra*, which are two sacred posts, as the first harvest offering before tasting new rice or millet. After this ceremony, they prepare rice-beer from glutinous-rice, millets and maize for the *Wangala* festival. After completing all the rituals, as usual, they dance and drink the whole night. This festival starts at night and lasts the whole of the next day.

(ix) *Nokpante Mese Cha-a*: This festival starts at night just before one or two weeks before *Wangala* festival. This festival takes place in the village *Nokpante*. It is the purification ritual of barn before storing the new seeds for the year. They believe *Misi* and *Rokkime* do not stay in an unpurified barn. Barn is considered the residence or home of these gods. Here, another ritual is to remind the mistake committed by *Sugra Mateja*, a large field rat who in the beginning ignores the existence of god *Misi Saljong*.

(x) *Wangala or Dru-Wanbola*: *Wangala* festival used to be celebrated for one week and at present the duration has been shortened for two days. It is the most popular and well-known festival of all. First day is the performance of the ritual of *rugala*, on the second day *sasatni sal* ceremonies are performed. After the ritual, feasting and drinking will continue till the villagers consume all the rice-beer prepared for the *Wangala* festival. A bull and a chicken are used for animal sacrifice; it is a thanks-giving ceremony to *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and finally through a ritual *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* is send /back home to the sea.

(xi) **Wanbasala:** *Wanbasala* and *Wankadoa* festivals are performed in alternate years on rotation. *Wanbasala* is the purification ceremony of the granaries of each household in the village that is believed to be the home of *Misi-Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokime*. It is believed that if the granary is not purified, the god is not pleased with them and there will be shortage of food-grains in the year. The ritual is therefore performed for *Misi-Saljong* to bless and appeal for help to save the food-grains throughout the year so that they will not suffer hunger. The ceremony is performed separately in front of their respective granaries and altars are made in-front of the granaries. Usually a white chicken and four eggs are used during performance. Sacrificial posts for *Misi-Saljong*, *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, *Susime* and *Bang* are made. In this ceremony, the head of the family or the head of the *mahari* leads the ritual similar to *A·galmaka* ceremony. Feasting, drinking and dancing follow as usual.

(xii) **Wankadoa:** This is usually observed for three days in the month of November after *Wangala* festival alternately with *Wanbasala*. The priest or the *nokma* performs this ritual. All the rites are done in village altar (*kimindam/ kimildam*) and an altar is made at the cross-roads to the farm and the market place. This ceremony is observed to acknowledge *Misi Saljong*, the provider of seed-grains (*chare-rongjanggi /chare mikkol*) or paddy for giving them a blessed harvest and wealth. It is a thanks-giving offering and invocations are made to seek blessings again in the next season. Prayers are also offered requesting god *Misi Saljong* and god *Susime-Salgra*, *Mima Kiri*

Rokkime, Bang not to cause any harm or diseases. Offerings are given separately for each god in the altar. In the village altar (*kimindam*), precious items like necklace or ornaments are hung and while doing this a *matdok* takes a list of the collected items systematically. When everything is placed, in the *matdok* will hang these items from the bamboo pole and the priest will perform a ritual by pouring out rice-beer over the ornaments. After the ritual, they dress themselves with these ornaments and dance by singing *ohoma*, an *A-chik* folk song, to the *nokma*'s house and spend the day and night drinking, dancing, singing and feasting as in *Wangala* festival.

Chapter III-Funeral Rites (of Festivals) include:

(i) *Chugan or Chougin:* *Chugan* or *Chougin* is a post-funeral festival of the *Atongs*, a sub-division of *A-chiks*; inhabiting in the South-Eastern part of Garo Hills and Khasi Hills of Meghalaya and Bangladesh. It is celebrated in the October or December or January (depending on the harvest) for three days and on the fourth day clearance of dues or debts incurred in the festival is made before the New Year by the *maharis* and *chras* of the family. *Chougin* is coined from two words '*chou*' and '*gin*' which means 'cloth with rice-beer or reverence with rice-beer to gods and the spirit or spirits of the deceased'. The celebration is for honouring with heartfelt respect the spirits of the dead. Rituals are made in reverence to god *Misi Saljong, Rokkime, Waimong, Nawang, Salgra-Susime* and the deceased spirit. In *Atong*, it is the time of grief and joy as it is also considered thanks-giving for good harvest. In other words, it is the final respect to

the departing spirit of the deceased to Balpakram with prior permission of the gods. Singing, dancing, feasting, drinking and lamentations, mingle together in this festival.

The festival serves three functions as:

- a thanksgiving to god *Misi Saljong* for a good harvest.
- a rite to send off the spirit of the deceased to the land of the spirits, Balpakram.
- an entreaty to god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bequeath some seed-grains for the next season.

(ii) Mangona or Delang So'a : This is an important post-funeral festival. It is observed by almost all the divisions of the *A·chiks* but *Atongs* celebrate this as 'Chougin' with noted variations in some rituals. It is a farewell ceremony for the departed spirit to Balpakram; for it is believed, the spirit of the dead never departs from home without these rituals. It is also considered a formal reception for the other spirits who have died before. In the case of a poor family, they perform *watpaka* ceremony to commemorate the dead. This is good enough, because it comes without entertainment or feasting.

This ceremony is performed in October after *Wangala* festival for three days. According to the *A·chik* belief, they had to send seed-grains and the entire essential materials for daily use in Balpakram which is the abode of the dead. The *A·chik* mythology says the first person that met death in life on earth is *Susimema*; therefore,

whatever they performed the rituals at the time of her death, the believers had to follow the same. The steps of rituals in the festivals are-

- *Wadaka* is the day of preparation for rituals in the festival which includes *kamal rimnapa* or the selection of priest to perform the rituals in ceremony
- *Mitingni sal* or the mid of the festival- this is the second day of the festival where *kima sola* or carving of effigy to represent the spirit of dead is done; *delang rika* or the construction of *delang* or residence of the spirit till they send off the spirit to *me·mang a·song* on the third day of the festival, is also done; *mang pujua* or providing a special bed or resting place for the spirit; *grendik rimnapa* or the ritual of bringing back the spirit of deceased home from *delang*; *grendik rodila* or the ritual of paying last visit the close relatives' and friends' homes; *matme·mang mi dina* or serving food for the spirit. *Matme·mang* is a bull that is believed to be the embodiment of the spirit of the deceased to the bull through a ritual of *jaragata*. After this, the family members treat the bull as a person, serve food lovingly then till the time of ritually sending off the spirit to Balpakram; *nokdonggaa*- it is a purification ritual of a house or house-warming ceremony for the spirit on the last day; *metongbol pe·a* or pulling down the seed-grain bamboo post to burn down the seed-grains the spirit is observed.
- *Delang so·a* or the ritual of burning off the tiny-hut is considered to be the grand sending off of the spirit to *me·mang a·song* to carry out the life-style in life-after death; in this ceremony various rituals are performed such as: *chare* or *michri ragata*- it is the ritual where the priest offers a prayer to god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to spare some seed-grains of paddy for surviving members of the family, as they burn

paddy at the time of *delang so'a. Rokkime Okama* – in this ritual priest, performs a ritual on behalf of the family to call upon the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to be with them; *A·chiks* considered death to be a curse from god; so, purification of the house is must for the family to call the gods, therefore they perform all these rituals sincerely to appease their gods and to receive blessings everyday. In all *A·chik* festivals, feasting and drinking is compulsory and continues days and nights in the village till they complete jars of rice-beer prepared for the festival.

Chapter IV-Rituals of Exorcism:

(i) *A·siroka*: The term *A·siroka* is the combination of two words; '*a·si*' and '*roka*' or 'the clearing away the spirits which manifest evil' and rituals are done to drive way the spirits or to exorcise the spirits. These rituals are performed in different times and purposes for different spirits. It also meant the expurgation of impurities or curses or diseases, etc. from an entire village. According to their belief, these spirits or *mites* are omnipresent in the sky above, on earth, in the depths of the waters, in the dark caverns, recesses of mysterious mountains, in the trees, and the groves. Rivers and lakes, mountains and hills, trees and shrubs, sticks and stones, are the dwelling places of some spirits.

Similarly, the stars, sun and the moon are associated with some spirits considered immortal by the *A·chiks*. The *A·chik* traditional beliefs are deeply embedded with ritualistic meanings. Apart from the thanksgiving rituals, *A·siroka* contains as

aspect of asking forgiveness for the past wrongs, and through the performance of the rituals the villagers also plead for blessing in the future from god(s). Of all the festivals relating to cultivation, '*a·siroka*' is the first ceremony which is performed starting from *Jumang Sia* till *A·song* or *Kosi Tata*. *A·chiks* strongly believe in purification and cleansing which are necessary for the healthy habitation of god and man in the society, be it traditional or modern.

(ii) ***A·song Den·a* or *Kosi Tata***: In this ceremony a goat and a chicken are used as sacrificial animals. It is performed only by the *Tuara Nangapa*, the high priest. Here, similar to other rituals a small portion of land is cleared for an altar called *sambasia* near *Kosi*, a sacred grove where trees are never cut and people forbidden to enter and where a powerful god called *Goera Kalkame* (the god of Power, Thunder and Strength) resides. Therefore, only *Tuara Nangapa*, the high priest performs the rite. In this ritual, whole village take part, even the children will have to be there. Preparations are done well ahead of time, at least two or three weeks before the ceremony. It is observed for one week. The decision for the festival is fixed before three to four months and information is sent to all the surrounding villages and relatives well in advance. It is a unique ritual in a sense that, once the festival starts, no outsider is allowed into the village and also, the villagers are not allowed to go outside of the village, not even on emergency.

Unknowingly, if someone enters the village during the festive days, he or she has to stay in till the end of the festival. Even strangers are not spared; else they have to pay fine whatever the amount. For this ritual divination is important (*sima nia*). When the festival starts, they block the main road of the village with thread at by tying it from the two ends of the boundary of the village and all the foot-paths are tied with white thread. In some village they use a bamboo pole or the cut branch of a tree as a sign of closing the road. If someone crosses the blocked road, a heavy fine is imposed which must be paid to the village.

On these festive days no one in the village is allowed to do any daily chores. The items like white thread, a goat, a chicken, rice-powder, *wa·chol*, a sharp pointed bamboo stake or musical gong and musical horn and the sacred drum are required for in the ritual. For all these arrangements, *chras* (the eldest maternal uncles) and the *nokma* have to take the responsibilities and even select three *matdoks* to assist at the time of rituals. On the first day people abstain from daily activities, on second day rituals and animals sacrifices are performed, on third day feasting and merry-making, traditional games like *wapong siksusaa*, etc. are conducted where young men test their strength sportingly.

Replacement Approach: Today *jhum* cultivation is considered as an unsustainable means of cultivation. This system is associated with the problems of soil erosion, increased run off, loss of vegetation and habitat for wild animals, with low productivity

and is labor intensive. There has been an attempt to make technological intervention into the system. The State Soil Conservation Department originated as the *Jhum* Control Wing under the Forest Department in the erstwhile composite State of Assam. Schemes like *Jhum* Control Scheme and Watershed Management Programmes were initiated to address the practice of shifting cultivation with the aim of providing alternative means of livelihood. However, the follow-up programme has not been encouraging as the practice still prevails extensively in the region.

Jha (1997) pointed out that transfer of any technology should consider the psycho-socio-cultural characteristics of the farmers. He emphasized the need to conduct an in-depth study into the social organization, social behaviour and social cognitions profile associated with *jhum* cultivation so as to smoothen the progress of permanent settlement patterns relating to Agriculture, Forestry and Animal husbandry. The strengthening of traditional institution rather than the creation of new institutions in rural areas may provide a better scope to address the problem.

Farmers do understand the unsustainability of *jhum* cultivation, says Charseng Ch. Marak (*A·chik* Welfare Society), who is working closely with a number of villages in the West Garo Hills through the International Federation for Agricultural Production (IFAD) Project. This private Project is presently a fast growing project in West Garo Hills and the village self-help-groups are experiencing extensive encouragement in various ways. According to the survey in the IFAD Project in West Garo Hills, the

current land use (in hectares) in *jhum* is the highest. He even says that any approach to address this system should operate in harmony with the cultural system of *jhum* cultivation that has been deeply rooted in the lives of the people.

Today, as found in survey and research, even in remote villages, government agencies such as Soil and Water Conservation department, Agriculture department and Forest department are encouraging people to take up permanent cultivation through methods like terrace and valley cultivation, horticultural plantations, cash crop plantations and planting economically viable forest trees like *Tectona grandis* (*Teak*), *Hollock*, *Michelia champaca* (*Titachap*), *Dalbergia sissoo* (*Sisu*), *Gmelina arborea* (*Gamare*), in order to make them realize the sustainability of a permanent type of cultivation other than shifting cultivation.

The advent of education and contact with the outside world, has helped the *A-chik* farmers to accept new ideas and methods of cultivation. They have started planting more remunerative crops like rubber, tea, coffee, cashew, areca nut, betel leaf, black pepper, pineapple, orange, banana and various types of medicinal plants as alternative means to earn their livelihood. Beside these, maintaining cattle, fishery, keeping chicken and goat are giving them extra income and help.

Hindrances to tradition in Modern life and education: Modernity always brings conflict with precepts and values as cherished and held dear by the older generation. Education enlightens and helps in shedding some of these beliefs in rules and values that may not have meaning in relation to modern ideas and thoughts for living. Modern life and the education of the younger *A-chik* generation have helped in shedding much of these traditions and values held dear by their ancestors; such as preserving folk art, craft, folk ideas or other valued culture. Today, even in villages, school going children do not show interest to learn traditional values, justifying that more time is needed to be spent in schools or colleges rather than learning age-old skills from their parents or elders. It may be noted, that neglecting such traditions pave the way to easy going attitudes and laziness or it may be interpreted as the way to a hard life in the future.

However there are some people now showing an interest in learning the old ideas and trying to bring out a good outcome; thus helping to preserve and keep intact whatever traditional cultures or practices we have now. In other words, it helps to show their rich culture to others. To look down on one's own tradition may lead to a great loss to the community. The only hope is that if they value traditions and modern education, conversion may not have to be blamed or considered a hindrance to traditional faith and culture; rather it will enhance ways to preserve our tradition in a better manner as in other cultures.

This will be the main component of the entire thesis. All the facts that have been produced are authentic data collected from the field alongside the secondary materials that have been produced. The researcher would like to specify that the festivals taken for study are in one way or the other, associated with cultivation.

These festivals which have been taken for granted for a long time are now gradually assuming importance in society due to the concern of several groups in the society to preserve and promote the popularity of the celebration and observance of the festivals. This thesis belongs to this group of interested group and hopes to make significant contributions to the field of *A·chik* sociological studies.

During the period of this research the researcher has found that all the contributors have been enthusiastic to contribute all the information known to them in connection to their fast disappearing tradition. It was an evidence sure enough of an awareness for preservation and conservation which was sweeping over the society as a whole. Every contributor to the field study and the final format of the thesis have been mentioned and acknowledged either in the chapters or the acknowledgement section.

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