

# **ABSTRACT**

## **rites of passage in the Garo oral literature**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The main thrust of the thesis: Rites of Passage in the Garo Oral Literature – is an attempt to examine the rites and rituals conducted by the Garos in almost every stage of their lives.

## *Chapterisation*

- Chapter I : Introduction**
- Chapter II : Rites and Rituals at Birth and Adolescence**
- Chapter III : Rites and Rituals during Marriage Negotiations  
And Ceremony**
- Chapter IV : Funeral and Post-Funeral Rites and Rituals**
- Chapter V : Conclusion**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The Evolution of an individual's status in a community almost always constitutes a passage into a new and elevated social realm of existence. Such changes have the sanction of the elders and are often marked by elaborate initiation rites and rituals as a kind of proclamation conferring upon the individual a fair measure of rights, on one hand and social duties and responsibilities on the other. Marking off events like birth, adolescence, marriage, death and afterlife, rites of passage are ritualistic milestones that serve a biographical purpose.

Evolving over prolonged periods of time, most communities must rely on a suitable medium to bequeath their folklore, customs and traditions to successive generations. Among the ethnic Garos, these traditions, rites and rituals were until very recently passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The narrative may take the form of verse set to music, lyrical role-playing or simple 'story-telling' depending on the occasion, but they are all characterized by graphic depiction, liberally embellished to aid the mnemonic process.

In the absence of a written script, the Garo rites of passage have not been documented and much of what is practiced comes from what is best described as 'oral literature.' It is in these narratives, interwoven with mythology and myth that places such as Balpakram – the Garo “hereafter” – or the land of zephyrs has its origin. Regardless of their genre, epic stories that speak of bravery and warfare, chivalry and virtue, chicanery and morality, form a valuable source of the Ethnic documentation.

Since compilations of Garo oral poetry, verses and songs recorded and published from time to time have been coloured by religious and other influences they do not therefore present an accurate and dispassionate picture of the composite culture. The objective of my undertaking this project is to systematically and scientifically document-material on various aspects of oral literature with regard to rites of passage along with empirical data recorded by scholars of yesteryears who did not have the benefit of modern day tools and technology.

The study incisively analyze regional differences wherever there is in the observance of rites of passage and attempt to attribute probable cause for such divergences. While existing works on the subject have provide good starting

leads, additional data from extensive interviews of elders, especially in the rural areas where traditions are still passed down by word of mouth, helped present a truer and more comprehensive canvas.

The first chapter is an attempt to give an account of general introduction of the Garos as a people and a description of all the various aspects of Garo society. An account of the present day geographical distribution of the Garos has been given and a small account of their history has been touched upon with reference to various books. Attempts have been made to divide the Garos according to their geographical location with differences in dialects and some rituals, their clans, and religion. A small part has been dedicated to the predominant occupation of the Garos. Apart from this, the various technical definitions associated with the understanding of this study have been touched upon.

Rites of passage are rituals or ceremonies signifying an event in a person's life, indicative of a transition from one stage to another, as from adolescence to adulthood. The same can also be explained as ceremonies that mark important transitional periods in a person's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, having children and finally death. They usually involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip individuals of their original roles and prepare them for new

roles. Rites of passage are ceremonial events, existing in all historically known societies that mark the passage from one social or religious status to another.

**Rites of Passage of the Garos:** The Garos have inherited literary traditions from their forefathers, which are oral as they are passed on by word of mouth in the absence of a script. They have also inherited rites of passage which mark the passage of an individual from one stage of life to the next, from birth to childhood, adolescence to adulthood, to the state of being married and finally death to afterlife. They perform rites of passage to mark the birth of a child, the arrival of adulthood, the occasion of marriage and death. A ritual performed before the birth of the child is called Darechik Amua, ceremony performed at the back of the house, when the mother is in labour pain, while Do sia is roughly the equivalent of a marriage ceremony.

‘Do·sia is the recognized and official form of marriage among the heathen Garos. It is likewise the most common and honourable form of all the forms of marriage.’<sup>1</sup>

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1. M.S.Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garos* (New Delhi: Books Today,1981),p. 198.  
vide also K.R.Marak, *The Garos and their customary laws and usages* (Tura: The Don-Bosco Printing Press,1964),p.26

Funeral rites are performed at the death of a person, while the post funeral ceremony called Mangona is performed for the final release of the spirit of the dead to travel to Balpakram, 'the land of the spirits'. Mangona can be described as 'a ceremony performed for the benefit of the departed soul.'<sup>2</sup> The performance of these rites is accompanied by chanting of verses, singing, dancing and playing musical instruments.

### **Oral Literature of the Garos:**

In Garo oral literature, transmitted by word of mouth, there are a number of genres like epic, lyric and narrative poetry, folktales, myths and legends, ballads, folksongs, proverbs and riddles, prayers and chants.

Katta agana, Doro, Ajea, Dani, Kabe, Katta Salling constitutes poetry. The epic poetry called Katta Doka or Katta Agana is a long narrative poem about traditional cultural heroes and heroines. A class of poems known as Doro consists of verses regarding gods and goddesses and the sacred items in their religious rituals. It can be both lyrical and narrative. A poem known as Dani is another kind of sacred poetry, which may be recited, and chanted only during certain

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2. H.W.Marak, *Ku-bidik-A Garo-English-Assamese Dictionary Part-II* (Guwahati: Sreegur Press,1975),p.11  
vide also Fr.G.Costa, *The Garo Code of Law* (Guwahati: Labanya Press,1975),p.20.

appropriate occasions and ceremonies. Ajea and Doro sung on ceremonial occasions and social gatherings make up secular poetry. Legends and myths occur both in prose and poetry. Folk-tales are most often told in prose narrative. Kabe is a dirge or song of lamentation sung at the funeral and the post- funeral ceremonies. Folk songs are rich in imagery and reflect the life and activities of the people.

Collections and anthologies of Garo oral poetry, verses and songs have been published from time to time. Several works have been done earlier in connection with the rites of passage of the Garos. Some of these books are A'chik Aganbewalrang (Original Tales of the Garos) by H.W.Marak, Apasong Agana by D.Rongmuthu, Pagitchamni Kuringa Vol I & II by C.A.Sangma, A'chik Golporang (Garo Folklore) Part I,II,III by D.K.Sangma, Pagitchamni Ku bisring by M.N.Sangma, A'chikni Ku'andik by A.C.Momin. A.Playfair, in his monograph, The Garos has included a number of folk-tales and Kabes or funeral wails.

However, all these publications mentioned above do not contain a systematic study of oral literature of the Garo in connection with the rites of passage; therefore, it has been my Endeavour to do a systematic research on

different aspects of oral literature regarding rites of passage as practiced by the Garos.

It is in the oral literature that the thoughts and emotions of the singer and beliefs of the society behind the ceremony are expressed. The mother sings about her son or daughter in Dingdinga or lullaby, which in various ways brings out expectations from a child. The lullabies show differences of attitude of the singers towards boys and towards girls. Similarly, the funeral songs of lamentation for boys and for girls are different, though the basic pattern remains the same. Religious beliefs, linking the living with the dead and the pain of separation are expressed in the lamentations. In the dirge the spirit of the dead is instructed in minute details how to proceed to the land of the spirits. The deeds of the deceased person are recalled, the love that the relatives bear him/her is stressed. The dirges reveal what the society thinks of the origin of life and the role of an individual in the society and life after death.

## CHAPTER II

### **Rites and Rituals at Birth and Adolescence**

The second chapter is an attempt to give an account on all the rites and rituals at birth. Wherever possible, the scholar has tried to give original accounts not yet found in any published or unpublished works. Verses recited at the altar fixed at the threshold of the house for the purpose of performing rituals at the birth of a child and during the naming ceremony has been studied in detail. The thrust of the study has been on the accompanying songs of the father and of the mother. Lullabies sung by the mother, and other members of the family has been studied.

Regarding the rites of passage at adolescence, the materials collected by authors like M.S.Sangma, M.N.Sangma, A.C.Momin and S.R.Sangma has been studied; and effort has been made to get more materials from various sections of the society.

The following topics have been covered in this chapter with possible appropriate explanations and commentary:

**Re·chu Ana:** Re·chu Ana literally means to spread out a plantain leaf. This topic touches on the Garos' belief in the predestined fate of man at the time of his birth. It touches on the folklore of the origin or discovery of this belief and the rituals associated with it. The tradition goes that at the time of birth, the living spirits of all living and non-living things spread out their webs to see to whose lot will fall the fate of the newborn. The Garos' have a ritual at the time of birth that exorcises these spirits.

**Darechik Amia:** This topic touches on the rites performed to safeguard a pregnant woman against miscarriages and pre-term babies. According to the Garos' belief, a deity called Darechik can make a baby be born before term, resulting in miscarriages or pre-term babies. This topic deals with the rituals and rites connected with the appeasement of this deity every time a pregnant woman falls ill during her pregnancy.

**Ma·mri Chinabak:** Ma·mri Chinabak is one of the names of the creator, the supreme being in the Garo pantheon. According to the tradition, it is believed that since he is the creator, he can also be the destroyer. The same was the case of a

foetus. Since he was its creator, he could also be its destroyer. This topic deals with the rites and rituals connected with the appeasement of this deity. This ritual was conducted every time the pregnant woman fell ill during her pregnancy.

**Cutting the Umbilical Cord:** This topic deals with the rituals associated with the cutting of the umbilical cord of the newborn. It is during this time that the newborn will be named, before any of the spirits mentioned in Re·chu Ana could name the baby and claim its fate for themselves.

**Do·magipa Doka:** After the birth of a baby, if the placenta remains inside the mother, it could prove fatal to her. This topic deals with the rites and rituals connected with the appeasement of the deity Me·chibram who is believed to be holding the placenta back.

**A·tila Amua or Dakara Amua:** This topic deals with the birth ritual. The rites and rituals are directed towards the creator Dakara (another name for Tattara Rabuga) appeasing him for the safe birth of the baby. The entire ritual has been elaborated along with the chants starting from inside the house and ending on the courtyard of the house. This ritual contains the following parts: the birthing ritual, conducted at the time of the birth of the baby; the Chi Rugalani, or the water pouring ritual – this is an offering of water for Tattara Rabuga, poured on a

plantain leaf spread out inside the house; the Mi Tinani, or the rice portions ritual – this is an offering of rice placed in portions on the plantain leaf; the Chu Rugalani or the rice beer pouring ritual – this is an offering of rice beer poured over the rice portions placed in the plantain leaf; the A·tila Amua or the courtyard ritual – this is conducted outside on the courtyard of the house.

**A·siroka:** This topic deals with the exorcism ritual after the birth of the baby. After the birth, the priest takes a bath and then brings a broom and a pot of water and exorcises the defilement and pollution or marang, that may have been present at the time of the birth.

**Kni Rata:** This topic deals with the hair cutting ceremony and the naming ceremony. The rituals and rites associated with it are also covered with explanations and commentary. The ritual exorcises the baby for the first time since birth and a ritual is conducted for the deity Tongrengma who is supposed strike the baby and make it mentally retarded.

**Kalkame Den·paka:** This topic deals with a ritual associated with shaving off the baby's hair. It is observed so that the baby can grow up to be strong. The Garos believe that if this ritual is not conducted, the baby would be malnourished and its growth stunted.

**Lullabies:** This topic deals with the lullabies that are sung to babies either to make them sleep or to quiet them down when they cry. There are also songs sung to a child which in various ways brings out expectations from a child.

**Adolescence and the System of Nokpante:** This topic deals with the adolescent life of a Garo, and the life in the Nokpante. It elaborates of the complex educational institution of the Nokpante which was essential in teaching the young men everything that they would need when they set out to make their own lives. The Nokpante was also essential in building a strong society with strong moral and ethical foundations.

Therefore, it has been found that the Garos in their pristine society observed a series of rituals and ceremonies to invoke the blessings of the spirits concerned at birth and puberty of every individual.

## CHAPTER III

### **Rites and Rituals during Marriage Negotiations and Ceremony**

This chapter is an attempt to give an account of the rites and rituals at marriage and negotiations for marriage called Chawari Singa; which is the actually the interview of the prospective son-in-law. The poetry called Doro is sung during the negotiations by both the parties. It is characterized by highly metaphorical language, a feature that is inherited from the past. Study has been made on the chants uttered by the priest solemnizing the union of bride and groom during Dosia or marriage ceremony. The following topics have been covered in this chapter:

**Types of Sons-In-Law in Garo Society:** This topic deals with the two types of sons-in-law in Garo society, the chawari or the normal son-in-law and the nokkrom or the son-in-law married to the heiress. It also touches upon the different practices associated with the powers and functions of these sons-in-law

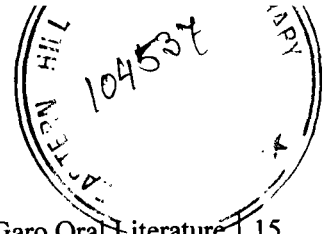
**Marriage Negotiations:** This topic deals with the marriage negotiations that goes with the marriage system of the Garos. It touches upon the various aspects and the practices associated with the marriage negotiations. This topic contains the

doros mentioned earlier, which were a part and parcel of the negotiations for a nokkrom.

***Do·sia:*** This topic deals with the official marriage ceremony of the Garos. The topic contains descriptions and explanations of the various aspects of this type of marriage. This kind of marriage does not have any religious elements and is conducted by a kamal or priest with three chickens. The only element that relies upon the unknown in this type of marriage is the divination on the married life of the couple done with the entrails of the chicken, called do·bik nia. It also contains a case study to further elaborate some of the aspects of marriage.

**Marriage by Capture:** This topic deals with marriage by capture, in which the groom is forcibly captured and married. Though this practice is no longer prevalent, the researcher has attempted to explain the various aspects of this form of marriage from whatever sources that could be garnered. The researcher has given an example from Burling to elaborate this type of marriage

***Cha·senga or Proposal through service in the boy's family:*** This topic deals with cha·senga, one of the aspects of the Garo marriage system. In this type of marriage, the girl comes and stays at the boy's house and cooks and cleans and



does chores in the house helping out her prospective in-laws and at the end of which, if the parents are satisfied with her conduct, she gets to marry the boy.

***Cha-dila or Offering of food:*** This topic deals with cha-dila, a form of marriage proposal given by a girl to a boy she likes. In this type of proposal, the girl cooks some food and sends it off with a friend to the boy she likes while she follows behind. If the boy eats the food sent by her, then it meant that he had accepted her proposal.

***Tunapa or Secretly sleeping with one's beloved:*** This topic deals with tunapa a form of proposal in which the suitor, either a boy or a girl, steals into his/her intended and lies with her. If accepted, they get married.

***Chame Jika or Wooing/courting the Lover with songs:*** This topic deals with chame jika a form of courtship in which the boys and girls of the village sing songs of love to each other at the end of which, if they find each other compatible, the courtship ends in marriage.

***Seka or Elopment:*** This topic deals with seka or elopement. The boy and girl run off with each other against their parents' wishes.

**On-songa or Providing replacement:** This topic deals with the practice of on-songa. In this kind of marriage, when the spouse dies, the relatives of the deceased have an obligation to give a replacement in place of the departed. Often, someone from the immediate matriline is preferred and only when no one is available, a search is widened to include distant clan members.

**Mother-in-law Marriage:** This part deals with the much misunderstood topic of mother-in-law marriage. When the father-in-law dies, if a nokkrom has been chosen, then the mother-in-law is referred to as jik or wife, but it is not a marriage in the true sense of the word.

**Child Marriage:** This part deals with the topic of child marriage. This happens only in the cases of on-songa. When there is a vast difference between the surviving wife and the replacement husband, he is given a choice of marrying his wife's daughter. This practice is called on-chapa.

**Christian Marriage:** This topic deals with the nuances of Christian Marriages among the present day Garos and the traditions that they still adhere to. The Christian marriages are Christian only in the ceremonies while in all else, the age old practices are still adhered to.

***Do·ki Rama:*** This deals with the topic of do·ki rama, a tradition followed the day after the marriage, in which the new son-in-law sits idle.

***Gitcheng Godapa, Greng Gitaka:*** This deals with the topic of gitcheng godapa, greng gitaka, a tradition of the duties of a newly married son-in-law. The traditions of how the new son-in-law has to undertake certain tasks that though may not be to his liking, he is obligated to do.

***Nokde:*** This deals with nokde, the house that the chawari builds when he and his family has to move out of the ancestral house of his wife. It is a custom that a daughter who is not the heiress would have to move out of the house with her husband and family and stay in a separate house as and when they are able to marriage.

The Garos in the pre-Christian society adopted various types of marriage negotiations for the two types of sons-in-law. Likewise, they had various forms of marriages, but whatever form was adopted, it was finally solemnized by do·sia ceremony. The Christians on the other hand still follow some of these marriage negotiations, such as the initiative taken by the girl's family in the negotiations. Similarly, the Christians still practice some of the traditions associated with marriage, with only a change in the ceremony.

## CHAPTER IV

### Funeral and Post-Funeral Rites and Rituals

This chapter is devoted to the study of the rites and rituals performed during the funeral and post funeral ceremonies of the Garos. Death is another transition that is of extreme importance in the Garo existence, but it is not the end because of their belief in rebirth. Thus, there are a lot of elaborate rituals in the funeral and post-funeral ceremonies of the Garos. The focus of the study is on chanting of verses, and singing of dirges called Kabes which is an essential feature of the funeral ceremony. The poem Jaragata means, literally, to recall the spirit to the family of his/her origin. It is recited in a ceremony to call back the spirit of a dead man to his mothers' household. The scholar has studied the different types of Kabe, sung at different stages of funeral and post-funeral ceremonies. The post-funeral ceremonies, lasting from one to three days, take place a few months after the cremation. The traditional belief in the journey of the soul to the land of the spirits and the belief in rebirth have been examined while inquiring into the rituals, Kabe and Jaragata. The following topics have been covered in this chapter:

***Kima Songa:*** This topic deals with kima songa, the practice of putting up memorial posts in memory of the dead.

***Me·mang Gisi, Gro Gisi:*** This deals with the topic of me·mang gisi, gro gisi, the repayment of the debts of the deceased.

***Tokari Pita:*** This topic deals with the custom of tokari pita, a tradition practiced during a funeral. In this tradition, the tokari, a place to keep the mil·am is slashed during the funeral.

***Me·mang Dila:*** This topic deals with the tradition of me·mang dila, or leading the spirit of a dead man back to the place of his birth. This happens about a month after the funeral.

***Jaragata:*** This topic deals with the tradition of jaragata, an elaborate ritual in which the soul of a dead person is led back to its home in so that when the time comes to be born again, it won't lose its way.

***Me·mang Rakkia:*** This topic deals with the tradition of me·mang rakkia, or keeping the soul of the departed. In this tradition, some rice and curry is kept aside for the departed.

**Crossing Over:** This topic deals with the Garo belief in crossing over to the land of the dead with some references to Greek mythology. The Garos belief in the way to the land of the dead and how they can cross Nawang, a demon that blocks the way to the land of the dead.

**Kabe:** This topic deals with the funeral dirges. Attempts have been made to elaborate these as much as possible. Kabes are sung according to the relation of the departed to the singer and are different for different relations.

The researcher has found that the Garos had a number of elaborate rituals related to death and the afterlife. The amount of material collected show that death is an important part of the Garo worldview and death is by no means the end because of the belief in rebirth repeating the cycle and each time being born to the same clan.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, the scholar has made an endeavor to find how different rites of passage are connected to each other. Efforts has been made to find out what the poems, chants, verses and songs express about the traditional world-view of the Garo community, what light they throw on the rituals, and their literary qualities. The findings of the previous chapters has been summed up and recorded. This has been done through the findings of the study of oral literature which accompanies the different rites of passage. Attempts have been made to place the rites of passage in perspective and to analyze the place of the oral tradition keeping in mind the rapidly Christianizing worldview of the modern Garo community.

From the foregoing chapters, it has been found that the Garos in their old society had already adopted elaborate customs and practices for every stage of a man's life with due solemnity and earnestness. Most of these customs and practices are invocations for blessings from the concerned deity while some are social practices without religious tinge.

The first chapter deals with the introduction of the Garos in general and the various aspects needed to understand the topics dealt with in the following chapters.

The second chapter deals with the rites and rituals involving birth and adolescence with a string of ceremonies all interconnected to each other and without one a man's life would be incomplete.

The third chapter contains descriptions of elaborate rituals deals with the marriage negotiations and the marriage ceremony. It also includes the various practices associated with it.

The fourth chapter deals with funeral and post-funeral rites. The chapter deals with how the Garos belief in rebirth fuels the funeral and post-funeral rites.

The fifth and concluding chapter deals with the reasons behind the erosion of Garo culture and the much needed intervention required to halt the process and preserve the remnants of the Garo culture.

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**rites of passage  
in the Garo oral literature**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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2011**



## *Declaration*

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**15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

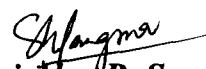
**DECLARATION**


I, **Km. Semeri Alva B. Sangma**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of the work done by me, that the contents of this thesis do not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me to any other research degree in any other University/Institute.


This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Garo.

Place: Tura

Dated Tura The 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011

  
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Place: Tura

Date: 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011

✍ Semeri Alva B. Sangma

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# *Chapter I*

## *Introduction*

# **CHAPTER I**

## **Introduction**

### **The Garos**

#### **1.01 Geographical Distribution:**

The Garos are an indigenous people inhabiting the North Eastern part of the Indian sub-continent. They are mainly distributed over the Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi Anglong Districts of Assam, some parts of Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) and Upper Assam, Garo Hills and parts of Khasi Hills in Meghalaya and are found in greater Mymensingh (Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpore, Netrakona) and Gazipur, Rangpur, Sunamgonj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar districts of Bangladesh.

There are also Garos in the state of Tripura and are found in minority numbers in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Dinajpur of West Bengal and also in Nagaland, but unfortunately, many of the younger generations are unable to speak the Garo mother tongue.

#### **1.02 History:**

As to the origins of the people, the Garos have a strong tradition. They have a legend among themselves that they had migrated from a place called Torua in the land of Tibet under the leadership of the chiefs Jappa-Jalinpa and

Sukpa-Bongipa in two groups. One group came through the Himalayas, through Nathu La<sup>1</sup> pass in the present day Indian state of Sikkim and Tibet Autonomous Region in China and first settled in the plains of modern day Cooch Behar. Thereafter, due to hostilities from the then king of Cooch Behar, they moved eastwards to the plains of Assam to the Manas river. There, they were again persecuted and fought with their persecutors. The king of Cooch Behar, on learning of this battle, came to the aid of the persecutors. Flanked on both sides, the Garos had no option, but to cross the mighty Brahmaputra. They crossed it in rafts made of plantain stems, which they acquired by giving the hand of a Garo maiden in marriage to the prince of the area who was enamored by her beauty. Then they moved eastwards along the banks of the Brahmaputra and came to the place where present day Guahati is located, which they called *Salaram Mitechak* or *A·song Kamekha*, where they were joined by the other group that came along the course of the Brahmaputra under the leadership of Dikgil Nongsting.<sup>2</sup> From there, they retraced their steps westward and in the course of this journey they are supposed to have broken up into different divisions. They visited numerous places until they came to a place near present day Krishnai<sup>3</sup>, where they became prosperous. A Garo kingdom was established in this area with Abrasen as the first reigning prince with his capital at Sambol A·ding in the present *pargana* of Habraghat, to which he is said to have given his name.<sup>4</sup> Though no written records exist to

support this theory of migration, there are instances of Garo villages all along the said migration routes. All the way from Cooch Behar in Northern West Bengal, close to the Bhutan border, towards Assam, a number of Garo villages still exist to this day, though assimilations are taking place into the larger and majority ethnic groups. On the other front, all along the banks of the Brahmaputra, from the borders of Arunachal Pradesh, there also exist Garo villages all the way down to the plains of Assam.<sup>5</sup> There are many different versions of this story and with the passage of time and as it is with all oral literature, some details of the story have been lost while there may have been some additions. There also lies the fact that we cannot ascertain the exact details with the passage of time.

In another narration, collected by Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu and published in his book *Apasong Agana* (first published in 1970), Mowel Sangma Gagra of Chenggni<sup>6</sup> village gives a different account of the migration of the Garos<sup>7</sup>. In his narration, he says that in ancient times, a group of the forefathers of the Garos lived in what is now Myanmar, whose former name Burma was derived from the Garos' name for the place *bormagrim* or land of gigantic trees. They settled and multiplied in what is now Cachar and Sylhet. Then, they migrated to Dakka ron-Bhawal, which are now called Dhaka<sup>8</sup> and Bhowal<sup>9</sup>. They were the first to clear the forests and cultivate in these areas and the land which they left after harvesting their crops were taken over by the

*roris* (Garo name for non-Garos) or plainspeople, who made partitions, dug wells and canals and converted them into paddy fields. The Garos then moved northwards practicing their slash and burn cultivation and came to settle in what is now present day Mymensingh in a place called Shambhuganj.<sup>10</sup> The first chieftain to settle there was called Monsing and Shambhuganj was derived from the clan that ruled the place, the Chambugong clan. While they were settled thus, there came an invasion of giant mosquitoes, the size of sparrows, the narration goes, which would swarm a sleeping man and suck all of his blood if no one were to stand guard to ward off these monster mosquitoes. To escape these pests, the then ruling chief, Sane, sent his best warriors to the green hills towards the north that could be seen from there to find out if it was hospitable. The warriors returned and informed the chief that it was possible, but they would have to clear thick impenetrable forests and beware of wild animals. The narration actually says,

*“Haiwa tangseksek simdimdim a·brirangko chinga gakate re·roroe niba man·jok. Songdongna a·dokde nama, chiringna chigade an·senga; indiba, kilding jakbo gitako tetesa, do·reng noktop gitako goesa, matchamako dingesa, skalmako tatesa uno songdong a·chana man·aigne.”*

Translation:

“We have climbed and wandered along those <sup>hills</sup> green hills. The land is suitable for living, so are the watering places; but, we have to break threads the size of arms, kill eagles the size of huts, fight the giant tigers, exorcise the giant demons before we can settle there.”

In the narration, the “threads the size of arms” were the webs of giant *Nephila* spiders. The chief got word from his warriors that they were willing to take on these difficulties and so, they migrated to what is now the Garo Hills while the descendents of those who decided to stay back still reside in a place called A·bima or Modhupur in Bangladesh<sup>11</sup>.

Web sources place the migratory route even further:

“In their migration from Tibet and southern China, they have wandered all over the face of the earth and their language and culture have traces of Mandarin, Burmese, Bodo-Kachari, Khmer, Hindi or Sanskrit, Persian, etc. Needless to say, the Mandis<sup>12</sup> as a race are very adoptive to new situations, religions, cultures, and environments. According to some theories they are Atharbascan,<sup>13</sup> the same people as can be found in Alaska, Western Canada, and the American Southwest, known as the Dene, Apachi, and Navajo tribes.”<sup>14</sup>

In the book *Apasong Agana*, there is another narration that traces the ancestry of the Garos all the way back to Israel<sup>15</sup>. The narration by Sonaram Sangma Rongrok of Rajasimla, Goalpara District gives in detail of this lineage. Ehera, a descendent of Benjamin, the youngest son of Israel, and his wife Behera, who was a descendent of Judah, an elder son of Israel, along with their servants and their belongings came out of Samaria. They first encamped in a place called Milit<sup>16</sup> and later on in a place called Sirit. Ehera and Behera had two sons, named Japan and A·chik<sup>17</sup>, who became great warriors. According to this narration, Sirit lies somewhere south of modern day Russia. From Sirit, the tribe of Ehera and Behera migrated to a place called Mojib, a grassland, most probably situated in the Eurasian Steppes. Their son Kimpol was born there. They migrated again to Mirit and from there to a place called Jin, where their son Waib was born. Kimpol and Waib became warriors of great renown and the tribe of Ehera and Behera came to be a great warrior tribe.

Jin was a mountainous country and the wind at night sounded like war cries. So, from here they migrated to the mountains of Chemang. In Chemang was born their sons Bangkuala and Eban. From Chemang, guided by the god *Saka Misi Saljong*, Japan took his people and moved towards the East, where they became a great warrior nation. From there, the rest of the tribe migrated southwards to a place called Naori Chiga Timbori, which meant an inland sea

that did not flow anywhere<sup>18</sup>. The events described in this narration bring the migration of the Garos to the Tibetan plateau.

Just like the previously quoted source, we can see that the Garos have probably migrated all over the place of the earth until they came to their modern settlement.

### 1.03 Divisions - Geographical:

The Garos are divided into eleven sub-divisions, according to the geographical location, with variations in dialects and customs. The sub-divisions, in alphabetical order, consist of: *A·beng*, *A·we*, *Atong*<sup>19</sup>, *Chibok*, *Chisak*, *Dual*, *Gara Ganching*, *Matabeng*, *Matchi*, *Me·gam* and *Ruga*<sup>20</sup>.

The *A·bengs* are by far the most numerous and wide-spread division of the Garo tribe. They occupy a large part within the Garo Hills. They are predominant in the whole of the West Garo Hills and as far east as the Bogai river. A small colony also inhabits the South Garo Hills starting from Halwa *A·beng*<sup>21</sup> to the Khasi Hills boundary, and parts of Bangladesh. The *A·wes* inhabit the whole of the Northern parts of the Garo Hills and the plains at their foot, and along the Assam-Meghalaya border from Kamrup district in the east, to a short distance west of the Jinari river. An important division of the tribe, the *Atongs*, occupy the Simsang valley, and the hills in its vicinity from

Nongalbibra extending all the way to Bangladesh along the course of the Simsang river. The *Chisaks* occupy parts of East Garo Hills, from the southern border of the *A-wes* in the north, to within a few kilometres of the Simsang<sup>22</sup> river in the south; and from the western border of West Khasi Hill in the east, they extend about forty eight kilometres westward. The district capital of Williamnagar lies in the *Matchi* area. Immediately east of the *A-bengs*, in the upper valley of the Bogai river, and extending eastward almost to the Nitai river are the *Chiboks*. There exists a small colony of *Duals* immediately south of the *Chisaks*, who have their villages on the banks of the Simsang river and in the hills close to the south bank of the river. A majority of the *Duals* are found in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. To the country south of the main range, i.e., the Durama Range which extends all the way from Tura peak towards Siju, and extending from the Nitai river nearly to the Simsang river, is inhabited by the *Gara-Ganchings*. Higher up the valley of the Simsang river are the *Matabengs*. By their language and geographical distribution, they are found to be a mingling of the *A-beng* and *Matchi*.

The *Matchis* inhabit the central valley of the Simsang, to the west of the *Duals*, and south of the *A-wes*, and southward to the northern slopes of the Durama range. The *Me-gams* are also a sub-division of the tribe with a somewhat confusing lineage. A major part of this sub-division resides in West Khasi Hills, where they are known as Lyngam. According to Playfair, they

represent a hybrid fusion race of the Garo and the Khasi. Their appearance and customs resembling the Garos and their language being classified by Dr. Grierson<sup>23</sup> as Khasi.<sup>24</sup> Some scholars are of the opinion that the *Me·gams* are a sub-division of the Garos because, not only their customs, but also their beliefs are also similar to the Garos. In fact, some of their beliefs are not even found in the Khasi beliefs. As for their language, it can be explained as a form of pidginised Khasi, which the *Me·gams*, being in such close proximity to the Khasis, developed over time to aid in communication and commerce. This kind of thing is not rare in areas where a number of people with different languages have to co-exist. An example would be the language called *Nagamese*, which is the lingua franca in Nagaland, where the different sub-divisions of the tribe speak different dialects. *Nagamese* is a pidginized form of *Assamese*.<sup>25</sup> To the south of the *Chiboks*, in a village called Rugapara on the banks of the Bogai river are found the *Rugas*.

According to Playfair, there are two other sub-divisions of the tribe.

The *Kochu* and the *Atiagra*. He describes the *Kochu* thus:

“In the north-western hills, to the west of the Jinari river, there is a small division of the tribe called Kochu. These must not be confounded with the Kochs or the Atongs, who are also known as Kochu.”<sup>26</sup>

Though the *Kochus* share similar clan divisions, they consider themselves to be separate from the Garos. While the majority of the Garos have adopted the Christian faith and a small minority hold on to the indigenous religion, a majority of the *Kochus* are Hindu.

Of the other sub-division, the *Atiagra*, Playfair has this to say:

“The *Atiagras* form another small and unimportant section of the Garo tribe. They live to the south of the *Kochus* and bear the same relationship to the *Abengs* that the *Kochus* have with the *Awés*.”<sup>27</sup>

As such, in the present day, no mention of the *Atiagras* can be found. They have probably been assimilated into the larger sub-division of the *A·bengs*.

#### **1.04 Divisions – Clans:**

Apart from these geographical divisions, the Garos are further subdivided into various exogamous sects. The main ones *Sangma* and *Marak* are distributed throughout the geographical divisions, irrespective of their differences. Another sect, which is mainly confined to the *A·wes* is *Momin* but now they have also spread over all Garo Hills due to inter marriages and as office workers, business establishments, etc. Two more minor groups that

exist are Shira and Areng. Playfair mentioned another group called the Ebang, who were originally Momins<sup>28</sup> and have probably assimilated back to the mother clan. This could probably be the reason why it is non-existent today.

The last sub-division of the tribe is the *ma·chong* or clan. In the written form, the Garos indicate as an initial before writing the surname Sangma or Marak, etc. Since the exogamous sects are large, these clans further subdivide them into divisions of kinship. While Sangma and Marak have distinct clan names, Momin shares some clan names with both Sangma and Marak, all the clans of Areng are Sangma in some areas and Shira has only one clan, Dalbot, which are also Sangma in certain places giving rise to the theory that both the Areng and Shira sects are probably Sangma in origin and due to whatever circumstances, became the clans they are today.

#### **1.05 Divisions – Religion:**

In the present day, the Garos have acquired yet another division, that of Christian denominations. Christianity began in the Garos with the entry of the American Baptist missionaries and was followed by the Catholic missionaries. Since then, as is the case all over the world, there have been, rivalries and misunderstandings cropped up between the two of them. Though most of the misunderstandings have been cleared, it is only in terms of marriage that the problems exist. It is harder in many cases for a couple from different Christian

denominations to get married than a couple whose clans share a kinship with each other, which would actually be forbidden according to customary laws.

### 1.06 Language

In the introduction to the book *The Garos*, J. Bampfylde Fuller<sup>29</sup> cites:

“The Garos are of the stock known as the Tibeto-Burman, which drifted into Eastern India and Burma across the Plateaux of Tibet. Their language still retains some similarity with Tibetan : and some of their ideas, such as the sentimental value they attach to gongs, are identical with those prevailing in Tibetan villages. It is more curious still that their language in its general construction, and in a few survivals of vocabulary, should show traces of affinity with Turkish, supporting the theory that from some spot in Central Asia a vast migration was impelled, possibly by growing scarcity of rainfall, and that from some of the wandering hordes are descended peoples which now occupy Burma and a great part of Assam.”<sup>30</sup>

The language is called *Mande Ku·sik*, ‘the language of man’ or *A·chik Ku·sik*, ‘the language of the hill man’. The language can be divided into various dialects and named according to their usage by the names of the geographical sub-division, namely, *A·beng*, *A·we*, *Atong*, *Chibok*, *Chisak*, *Dual*, *Gara Ganching*, *Matabengi*, *Matchi*, *Me·gam* and *Ruga*. In her book *Influence of English on Garo Poetry*, Caroline R. Marak<sup>31</sup> cites from G.A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India*<sup>32</sup>:

“Like many Tibeto-Burman languages, Garo is a true agglutinative language that is; simple, monosyllabic words are incorporated to form a compound word to express compound ideas. Prefixes, suffixes and infixes, attached to the root words denote the relationship of a word to others in a sentence and modify the meaning of words. Some of the affixes are capable of being used as words with independent meanings. In some compound words, such as *micron* (eye), the original component parts are becoming unrecognizable as individual words. Changes in pronunciation and inaccuracies in spelling have been responsible for obscuring the component words.

The Garo language shares other characteristics of the Tibeto-Burman tongue. Glottal checks are present in Garo, but there are no clearly accented and unaccented syllables unlike in Indo-European languages. Some other characteristics of the language are abundance of word-pairs, prefixes, suffixes and infixes, verbs and terms for individual objects. The observation that all the Tibeto-Chinese languages once belonged to the class of languages very picturesque and poetical, having an extraordinarily large stock of concrete and characteristic terms for individual things, but they are quite unfit for acting as mediums of high thought, not being able to denote abstract ideas free from all accidental properties, may be applicable to Garo.”<sup>33</sup>

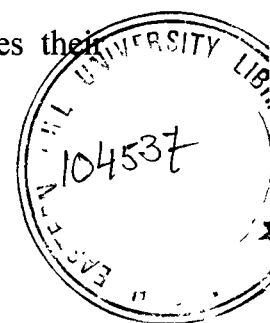
### **1.07 Occupations:**

The Garos are a predominantly agricultural community, and follow the slash and burn practice of shifting cultivation or *jhum* cultivation of their forefathers. With the advent of Christianity and education and the work done by the Government and various other organizations in order to safeguard the environment, they have gradually started adopting other means of cultivation like plantations of cash crops like cashew nuts, betel nut, rubber, etc and other forms of sustainable agricultural practices.

Since the life of the villages revolve around agriculture, a majority of the rites and rituals are also based on agriculture, like *Wangala*, the harvest festival of thanksgiving and one of the major festivals of the Garos. With the wide spread prevalence of Christianity coupled with the disappearance of shifting cultivation, this has also become rare with only a handful of villages still practicing it. The only exception is the 100 Drums *Wangala* Festival which takes place every year in late October or early November, which is becoming bigger event every year. It is a festival which has popularized the *Wangala* dance, not as a ceremonial thanksgiving, but as a centre of attraction of Garo culture.

After the attainment of the state of Meghalaya, the option for professions like Medicine and Engineering also became open to the meritorious Garo students and there have many who have chosen these fields. During the nineties, there was not much scope profession-wise due to lack of information and apart from agriculture in the villages, almost all the Garos were confined to Government jobs, teachers, engineers, doctors, contractors and businessmen. All that has changed during the early nineties with globalization and the information age making its way to the Garos and since then there has been no looking back and the Garos have exploded into the

world choosing a wide variety of professions taking them to places their parents and grandparents would never have dreamt of.



### 1.08 Oral Traditions:

Traditionally, in all old cultures of the world, all the cultural material and traditions were transmitted orally from one generation to another. This oral transmission of cultural material is called oral tradition. Oral tradition, however, should not be confused with oral history. In oral tradition, the messages and testimonies are transmitted from generation to generation in speech or song generally taking the form of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs or chants, while oral history is simply the recording of personal memories and histories of those who experienced historical eras or events and lacks the richness inherent in oral traditions. It is also distinct from orality which is thought and its verbal expression in societies where technologies of literacy, especially writing and print, are unfamiliar to most of the population.

Storytelling and poetry started so long ago in ancient time that no one can precisely even presume when or how they derived. But one thing is for sure that our ancestors did not live to be just a variety of living thing and build up into human being until the power for rhythmic language and narration had progressed in them. In fable the world over, these rational powers are said to

be god-gifted and divine. They are at the very least requisite to any sensible explanation of human race.

For many millennia the only tool of rhythmic words and narrative recognized in any part of the world was the tongue men were born with, not the stylus or the pen, for writing was not invented until too late in human evolution for it to reveal anything about the origin of speech. So for long ages the only way *any* knowledge could survive from one generation to another was through *oral tradition*. Rhythmical speech was the world's first great medium of communication for complex ideas, and there were certainly media men of astonishing skill long before anyone on earth knew how to write.

### **What is Oral Literature?**

One of the most important developments in this century in both the popular and academic understanding of culture has been the wide growth of awareness that only a tiny percentage of man's total creative achievement has depended on literacy. Writing is at most a comparatively recent invention, and while it is useful for keeping records of all sorts, it is a cumbersome and inefficient means of cultural communication, even with the help of printing.

Despite their mechanical clumsiness and incompetence, writing and printing are unquestionably two great gears of progress. But they are not basic

possessions of human nature. The more basic and most characteristic cultural property of men everywhere remains their inherent power of speech. Verbal words are the final source of explicit statement, and any decay or reduction of the arts of speech immediately erodes the value of explicit traditions. We live in an era when, moreover, other potentially enlightening innovations based on electrical recording and electrical broadcasting of speech has only begun to be used and valued.

A great fraction of existing words in any language is short-lived, and is working for simply passing reasons. But a assured section of verbal statement is continuing, whether or not any data is made of it in writing or otherwise. It expresses ideas of such proven, lasting utility that special, *poetic* styles of speech exist in every tongue to guarantee the memory and continuation of those fundamental thoughts in *by oral traditions*. *Oral literature* is the material recorded from oral traditions in every age and in every language.

It has been defined as follows:

“The genres of oral literature cover spoken and sung expression. They may be further divided into the two large groupings of folk narrative and folk song, and other such small genres such as proverbs, riddles and beliefs or superstitions. Folk narrative is an umbrella for a wide range of oral prose traditions.

Oral literature comprises of folk speech, as distinct from formal or standard speech, and various traditional kinds of expressive utterances. Prominent among them are proverb or folk saying,

embodying wisdom in pithy phrases; the riddle, an enigmatic question paired with a deceptive answer; the tongue twister, a nonsense sentence difficult to pronounce because of its string of assonances; the toast, a convivial expression voiced as a drinking salutation; along with other forms involving a special use of language. Beliefs or superstitions are sometimes expressed as wise sayings, although they may also appear in tales and customs.”<sup>34</sup>

Oral literature is, ‘in fact, the traditional knowledge and beliefs that have been transmitted by word of mouth since time immemorial. It is the way of cultures with no written language in preserving their history and traditions. It consists, as does written literature, of both prose and verse narratives, poems and songs, myths, dramas, rituals, proverbs, riddles, and the like.

“The most obvious characteristic of oral literature is that it is oral. In spite of certain borderline cases it normally stands in direct contrast with written literature. The latter exists in manuscripts and books and may be preserved exactly as the author or authors left it, even though this may have happened centuries or millennia ago. Through these manuscripts and books the thoughts and emotions and observations and even the fine nuances of style can be experienced without regard to time or distance. With oral literature it is not possible. It is concerned only with speaking and singing and with listening, thus depending upon the existence of a living culture to carry on a tradition. If any item of folk literature ceases to exist within the memory of man it is completely lost.”<sup>35</sup>

Oral literature is one of the main constituents of folklore. “Oral literature, also called as verbal art or expression literature are ‘spoken, sung

and voiced forms of traditional utterances”.<sup>36</sup> Chants and prayers, poetry, both lyric and narrative, songs, proverbs, ballads and riddles are included in oral literature.

### **1.09 Oral Literature of the Garos**

The Garos, like all ancient tribal people of the world without written language have a rich cultural tradition of oral literature. With the advent of education and the written word, this tradition has been gradually dying out. Over the years, few people have tried to collect and preserve those traditions, the foremost among them being Dewansing Rongmitu Sangma and others like Harendra W. Marak, Mihir N. Sangma, Llwellyn R. Marak, etc, but due to poor connectivity problems and the access to modern recording equipment being non-existent, they were unable to collect much of it and most of the oral literature have died out with the older generations.

One of the main reasons that oral traditions are dying is because a couple of generations lost interest in it and with the advent of education, it only worsened the problem. It is only recently that the interests in oral traditions have resurfaced among the Garos and there is a race against time to collect and preserve them because the sources in the villages are gradually dying out of old age. The younger generations in the villages having little or no interest in them while the new religion portraying the old traditions as

unimportant. Garo oral literature has a number of genres like epic, lyric and narrative poetry, folktales, myths and legends, ballads, folksongs, proverbs and riddles, prayers and chants.

They include:

*Katta Agana or Katta Doka or Saling Ring-a, Ajea or A-beng Balsala, Doroa, Cherasola, Daradoka, Rada Ring-a, Gogaedoka, Koredoka or Korebima, Gelo Ring-a, Damik Ring-a, Gose Ring-a, Serejing Ring-a, Arerea or Rere kal-a, Nanggorere Ring-a, Gonda Doka, Ahoma, Mangtata or Grapa, Aemarong Krita, Asong Kosi Tata, Songading Krita, Akrita, etc.*<sup>37</sup>

*Katta agana, Doro, Ajea, Dani Kabe, Katta Saling* constitutes poetry. The epic poetry called *Katta Doka* or *Katta Agana* is a long narrative poem about traditional cultural heroes and heroines. A class of poems known as *Doroa* consists of verses regarding gods and goddesses and the sacred items in their religious rituals and ceremonial performances such as, *Gana, Nokdonggaa, Nokpante Nokdonggaa, Mikchi Sokchi Dina, Jaringa, Dakgina, Amua, Den-bilsia, Miching ra-ona, etc.* It can be both lyrical and narrative. In *Gana* ceremonial performances it is again sub-divided into *Munina Doroa, Danilna Doroa, Mil-amna Doroa, Spina Doroa, Kramna Doroa, Kotipna Doroa, Rangna Doroa, Adilna Doroa, Wa-gena Doroa, Nadena Doroa, Jaksilna Doroa* and *Wantina Doroa.*<sup>38</sup>

A poem known as *Dani* is another kind of sacred poetry, which may be recited, and chanted only during certain appropriate occasions and ceremonies. *Ajea* and *Doroa* are sung on ceremonial occasions and social gatherings and make up secular poetry. Legends and myths occur both in prose and poetry.

Folk-tales are most often told in prose narrative. *Kabe* is a dirge or song of lamentation sung at the funeral and post-funeral ceremonies. Folk songs are rich in imagery and reflect the life and activities of the people. There is another kind of epic called the *Serejing*, which tells the story of two lovers, Serejing and Waljan in the form of a musical drama. In its entirety, the performance of this musical takes twelve to fourteen nights.

### **1.10 Rites of Passage**

Rites of passage are rituals or ceremonies signifying an event in a person's life, indicative of a transition from one stage to another, as from adolescence to adulthood. The same can also be explained as ceremonies that mark the important and transitional periods in a person's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, having children and finally death. They usually involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip individuals of their original roles and prepare them for new roles. Rites of passage are ceremonial events, existing in all historically known societies that mark the passage from one social or religious status to another.

### **1.11 Rites of Passage of the Garos**

The Garos have inherited literary traditions from their forefathers, which are oral as they are passed on by word of mouth in the absence of a script. They have also inherited rites of passage which mark the transition of

an individual from one stage of life to the next, from birth to childhood, adolescence to adulthood, to the stage of being married and finally to death and afterlife. They perform rites of passage to mark the birth of a child, the arrival of adulthood, the occasion of marriage and death. A ritual performed at the birth of a child is called *A·tilla Amua*, literally, ceremony of the courtyard, while *Do·sia*, is roughly the equivalent of a marriage ceremony.

“*Do·sia* is the recognized and official form of marriage among the heathen Garos. It is likewise the most common and honourable form of all the forms of marriage.”<sup>39</sup>

Funeral rites are performed at the death of a person, while the post funeral ceremony called *Mangona* is performed for the final release of the spirit of the dead to travel to Balpakram, ‘the land of the spirits’. *Mangona* can be described as ‘a ceremony performed for the benefit of the departed soul’.<sup>40</sup> The performance of these rites is accompanied by chanting of verses, singing, dancing and playing musical instruments.

Collections and anthologies of Garo oral poetry, verses and songs have been published from time to time. Research has been conducted in connection with the rites of passage of the Garos. Some of these books are *A·chik*

*Aganbewalrang (Original Tales of the Garos)* by H.W. Marak, *Pagitchamni Ku·ringa Vol I & II* by C.A. Sangma, *A·chik Golporang (Garo Folklore)* by M.N. Sangma, *A·chikni Ku·andik* by A.C. Momin. Playfair, in his monograph, *The Garos*, has included a number of folktales and *Kabes* or dirges.

However, all these publications mentioned above do not contain a systematic study of oral literature of the Garo in connection with the rites of passage; therefore, the researcher have done a systematic research on different aspects of oral literature regarding rites of passage as practiced by the Garos.

It is in the oral literature that the thoughts and emotions of the singer and beliefs of the society behind the ceremony are expressed. The mother sings about her son or daughter in *Dingdinga* or lullaby, which in various ways brings out expectations from a child. Similarly, the funeral songs of lamentation for boys and for girls are different, though the basic pattern remains the same. Religious beliefs, linking the living with the dead and the pain of separation are expressed in the lamentations. In the dirge, the spirit of the dead is instructed in minute details how to proceed to the land of the spirits. The deeds of the deceased person are recalled, the love that the relatives bear him/her is stressed. The dirges reveal what the society thinks of the origin of life and the role of an individual in the society and life after death.

### **1.12 The Topic of the Study**

The study has been entitled *Rites of Passage in the Garo Oral Literature*.

### **1.13 Justification of the study**

There are many interesting rites of passage conducted by the Garos in almost every stage of their lives, a detailed and systematic survey and recording of which has not yet been undertaken. The detailed features of these rites of passage are not known nor understood by most of the modern Garos as they are mainly practiced by those still adhering to the indigenous religion of their forefathers. As a result they are in immediate danger of being lost in obscurity, and the interest and need was felt by the researcher for learning and preserving these dying traditions.

A few books and articles have been written on some of the rites and rituals, but no detailed and thorough study has been made and recorded in the form of a book or any other form. Most of the books have mostly dealt with the chants and incantations, but gives no description of the ritual as a whole, thereby leaving the reader with the thirst of knowledge of the complete ritual. The changing trends in society, necessitates in depth research on the fast disappearing traditions.

As the younger generations of Garos go out to the world, they are no longer able to gain knowledge or give their time inundated as they are by the internet, satellite television, media mobile. They are no longer interested in learning from their elders. The traditional beliefs and superstitions of the Garos are seen in the various incantations used in the rites and rituals, and with the dying out of the older generations, many of these incantations are lost. So there is a need for immediate action to preserve the wealth of our oral literature. The preservation of nuances of the ancient traditions for future generations, would be a greatly help for Garo society.

#### **1.14 Methodology**

In the present study, both Historical and descriptive survey methods have been used. Here the researcher has collected necessary data from the research journals, books, magazines, priests, village elders, and knowledgeable people from the selected sections for this study.

In the performance of the rites of passage, songs and chants invariably accompany rituals. Regional differences in the rites of passage as contained in the oral literature were enquired into; for this purpose, the scholar collected additional data from various sections of society. The researcher studied all the

available published verses and poems relating to the rites of passage. The pieces were translated to English.

The data collection included field trips and interactions with people who are well versed in oral lore relating to rites of passage and most of the firsthand data was collected from those who have learned it the traditional way and have performed the rites of passage ceremonies in their lifetime.

The study included three divisions of the Garos: the *A·beng*, *Matchi* and the *Atong* in some aspects only but mainly concentrated on Abengs sub-divisions due to accessibility and by their geographical distance, comparisons were made of the differences if any in the ceremonial practices with regards to the sub-division and geographical location.

### **Information Collection:**

Ten to fifteen years ago, this study would have been much easier, because at that time, in all the three Districts of the Garo Hills, many interior villages were still practicing all the rituals, ceremonies and festivals with great respect for their gods. But today, Christians have become a majority, and the traditional rituals and ceremonies are not strictly followed as in the past. There is an evident change in the society which is moving from tradition to modernity with even the adherents to the indigenous religion adopting

Christian ways and the Christian lore mixing with the traditional lore.<sup>41</sup> Much of what is traditional is being left behind for the more Christian and the more modern way of life. This is one of the reasons why collection of authentic data and documenting them has been an uphill battle. Now, even with the strong influence of Christianity, people have become aware of the importance of an identity and the need to salvage whatever remains.

In these rites of passage, one can observe the rites and rituals that connect human beings to the divine in their transition from one phase of their life into the next. Moreover, many beliefs and superstitions are also connected with these transitions.

The researcher could not personally witness these rites of passage due to the fact that these events do not occur at any time and furthermore, like mentioned earlier, due to the vast reach of Christianity, these rites are seldom conducted and if they are, they are few and far between and most of them have been diluted. The researcher has done the next best thing, i.e., taken first person accounts from people who have been through these rituals or conducted these rituals in their lifetimes. Recording in digital voice recorders and cameras, documenting written records through interviews, collecting traditional oral literature and getting their translations done has been the groundwork accomplished during the field trips. Digital cameras, digital

recorders and written interviews were also used. Considering the importance of chants uttered in the rituals as they have immense collections of superstitions, beliefs and practices; they have been incorporated into the study.

### **1.15 Structure of the Study**

This research thesis is divided into five chapters; the first chapter includes the Introduction, the second chapter deals with Rites and Rituals at Birth and Puberty, the third chapter with Rites and Rituals during Marriage Negotiations and Ceremony, while the fourth chapter focuses upon Rites and Rituals during Funeral and Post-Funeral Ceremonies finally fifth chapter or the Conclusion that places the rites and rituals in perspective.

**Endnotes:**

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<sup>1</sup> Located in Sikkim, India and Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

27.386448° 88.831190°E

<sup>2</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, 1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Reprint), pp. 8; Rongmuthu,

Dewansingh S. *Apasong Agana*, pp.188-193

<sup>3</sup> A place in Goalpara district of Assam

<sup>4</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*. P. 10

<sup>5</sup> The scholar's observation on various journeys by road and from many interactions with people from those areas.

<sup>6</sup> Part of this village is in Bangladesh (25.15°N, 90.8°E) and part of it is in South Garo Hills, Meghalaya, India.

<sup>7</sup> Rongmuthu, Dewansingh S. *Apasong Agana*, pp. 184

<sup>8</sup> The capital of Bangladesh.

<sup>9</sup> A place in Bangladesh. Location: 23° 10' 0 N, 90° 46' 60 E

<sup>10</sup> 24° 46' 0 N, 90° 28' 60 E

<sup>11</sup> Rongmuthu, Dewansingh S. *Apasong Agana*, p. 184-187

<sup>12</sup> As the Garos call themselves in Bangladesh

<sup>13</sup> Athabaskan or Athabascan (also Dene, Athapascan, Athapaskan, or Athapaskes) is a large group of indigenous peoples of North America, located in two main Southern and Northern groups in western North America, and of their language family. The Athabaskan

family is the second largest family in North America in terms of number of languages and the number of speakers, following the Uto-Aztecan family which extends into Mexico.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athabaskan\\_languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athabaskan_languages) (Access date: 21<sup>st</sup> June, 2007)

<sup>14</sup> <http://pirgacha.blogspot.com/p/mandi-tribe-in-modhupur-forest.html>  
 (Access date: 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2007)

<sup>15</sup> Rongmuthu, Dewansingh S. *Apasong Agana*, p. 228

<sup>16</sup> The places mentioned in the narration cannot be ascertained because the names of places change with the passage of time.

<sup>17</sup> The ancestor from whom the Garos derive their name.

<sup>18</sup> An inland lake

<sup>19</sup> Atong comes after A·we because “·” – the raka – is also a part of the Garo alphabet denoting a glottal stop.

<sup>20</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, 1975 (1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Reprint) p. 59-62

<sup>21</sup> The A·beng part of Halwa village is called Halwa A·beng, while the other part is called Halwa Atong, the Atong inhabited area.

<sup>22</sup> This river is called Simsang in Garo Hills and Someswari once it flows into the plains of Bangladesh

<sup>23</sup> Sir George Abraham Grierson, (b. Jan. 7, 1851, Glenageary, County Dublin, Ire.—d. March 9, 1941, Camberley, Surrey, Eng.), Irish

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linguistic language scholar and civil servant who conducted the Linguistic Survey of India (1898–1928), obtaining information on 364 languages and dialects.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/246035/Sir-George-Abraham-Grierson> (Access date: 18<sup>th</sup> June, 2007)

- <sup>24</sup> Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, 1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Reprint), pp. 62
- <sup>25</sup> Personal observations
- <sup>26</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, 1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Reprint), pp. 60
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 61
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 64
- <sup>29</sup> Fuller, Sir Bampfylde. (1854-1937) former Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam
- <sup>30</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, <sup>1975</sup> 1998 (2<sup>nd</sup> Indian Reprint), pp. xxxi
- <sup>31</sup> Marak, Caroline R. *Influence of English on Garo Poetry* Scholar: New Delhi Publishing House, ISBN: 81-7172-382-9
- <sup>32</sup> Grierson, G.A. *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol I, Part I. First published 1927, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967, p. 45
- <sup>33</sup> Marak, Caroline R. *Influence of English on Garo Poetry*, New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd. p.15-16
- <sup>34</sup> *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*. Volume 19. USA: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1998, p.305

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.311

<sup>36</sup> Jadav, K. *Folklore and its Motifs in Modern Literature*. New Delhi: Manas Publications, 1998, p. 8, 9

<sup>37</sup> Rongmuthu, Dewansingh Shangma. *The Epic Lore of the Garos*. Guwahati: Gauhati University Publication Department, February 1967, p.15

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p15

<sup>39</sup> Sangma, M.S. *History and Culture of the Garos*. New Delhi: Books Today, 1981, p. 198 Vide also Marak, K.R. *The Garos and their customary laws and usages*. Tura: The Don-Bosco Printing Press, 1964, p.26

<sup>40</sup> Marak, H.W. *Ku·bidik – A Garo-English-Assamese Dictionary Part II* (Guwahati: Sreeguru Press, 1975), p.11 vide also Costa, Fr.G. *The Garo Code of Law*. Guwahati: Labanya Press, 1975, p.20.

<sup>41</sup> E.g., the Biblical story of the creation of man from Genesis Chapter I.

## *Chapter II*

### *Rites and Rituals at Birth and Adolescence*

## CHAPTER II

### Rites and Rituals at Birth and Adolescence

#### 2.01 Introduction

Earlier, non-Christian Garos were firm believers in their own indigenous religion and strictly observed the rituals associated with it. Before undertaking any work or before any important occasion, they would first make offerings to the Supreme Being or seek his blessings. Likewise, after harvesting of crops, the Garos would first offer the choicest crops, fruits or vegetables to the deity known as *Pattigipa Ra-rongipa* before consuming them. In the same way, the Garos began their life on earth by dedicating the child or seeking the blessings of *Pattigipa Ra-rongipa Tattara Rabuga*<sup>1</sup> right from his birth.

Birth is the beginning of a new existence, as such, as in all tribal cultures of the world it is a special time and the Garos, too, pray to their deity in order that the birth of a child may be as complication free as possible. There are a number of rituals and customs associated with birth and according to the geographical sub-division it changes in form and practice. The very first belief of the Garos is the belief in the preordained destiny of a man as he is born. This belief is called *Re·chu Ana*.

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This belief is called *Re·chu Ana*.

*Re·chuation*

### 2.02 *Re·chu Ana*

The Garos believe that the destiny of every human being has been preordained by *Dinggipa Ba·bra Mugipa Jaring* or the Divine Mother. It is said that during the birth of every child into the land of the living, the spirits of the element world and the spirits of all living beings muster strong under *Dinggipa Ba·bra* for an infinitesimally short time at the place of birth to ascertain by means of spreading out their webs whose lot it is to cut off the life of the new born babe. Each of the spirits present has his own mysteriously woven web, known as *re·chu* or *amrechu*, that is the Web of Destiny. This process of predetermination of the mode of death or end of a human being at the time of its birth by spirits of all sorts of nondescript beings in the world is known as *Re·chu Ana* or Spreading Out of the Web of Destiny.<sup>2</sup> Also, at the time of birth of every human being, a guardian spirit takes charge of the child. This spirit is called *Kalkame Kagra*. It is he who protects the child throughout its life and when the time of death arrives, gives him over to the element or living being whose lot it is to cut off the life of the child.<sup>3</sup>

In the book *The Folk-Tales of the Garos* by Dewansing Rongmuthu, he includes a story about the origin or rather, the discovery of *Re·chu Ana* by the Garos narrated by Kacha Sangma Dawa of Simsangiri (this place is known by the name of Williamnagar<sup>4</sup> in the present day). The story goes that a man called Deng was travelling through a deep forest when he had to stop for the night and so, he took shelter under a gigantic *Awek*<sup>5</sup> tree. About this time, the birth of a child occurred in his village. Towards dawn, he was awakened by the sound of voices overhead. They were the voices of the spirits of all the elements and living beings going to the village to ascertain whose lot it would be to finally end the life of the new born. They called upon the spirit of the *Awek* tree under which Deng was sleeping to ask whether he was coming for the ceremony. He replied that he had a guest and asked the spirit of the *Boldak*<sup>6</sup> tree to take and spread his web for him. The *Boldak* agreed and left with the others. Soon, there was silence in the forest. After a while, the forest became alive with voices again and the *Awek* tree was informed that the child's death fell on the tiger's web and it would happen during his adolescence. When the mother's name, Chelse, was mentioned, Deng, who was listening all the while, recognized it to be his niece's name.

In the morning, Deng hurriedly returned to the village and was informed that Chelse had given birth to a baby boy about the time that he had first heard the voices in the forest. He kept his secret from everyone and determined that he would do all he could for his nephew to protect him from his impending doom.

One day, when the boy was in his teens, Deng and his nephew went to the river to bathe. This was the day that was fixed by *Dinggipa Ba·bra* for the tiger to take the child's life. As they were returning home from the bath, a tiger suddenly leapt up from its place of concealment and rushed at the child to kill him. Deng, who was ever alert, cut off the head of the tiger with a mighty blow from his *mil·am*<sup>7</sup> and began to shout words of victory and danced on the ground and stepped proudly on the tiger's head. Seeing his uncle's exultation, the child too repeated his uncle's words and jumped upon the head of the tiger. As he did thus, the child's leg slipped into the jaws and its sharp teeth deeply prodded it. When the child tried to pull his leg out, it only made the wound deeper. Deng finally managed to get the child's leg out but by then, he had already lost too much blood and as the shades of night were falling, the child died of haemorrhage. His life was cut off by a tiger as was predestined long ago.

This belief is the same in all the Garo areas, but in Rongri gittim of Rongsu village in the Atong area, there was a slight difference in the story. Rongri is about 13 kms walk from Siju, the nearest motorable place, 8 kms uphill to Rongsu and then 5 kms downhill. The story was narrated by Leben Dagal Sangma (75 years) on October 27, 2009. He is also the only surviving person who knows the old ways in and around this area. He is also still a practicing indigene, for want of a better word. The word “animist”, though used to describe these religions is a misrepresented one.

He narrated the story of the discovery of *Re·chu Ana* or *Amra Ana* as it is called in these areas. His story goes thus:

Once upon a time, a man had gone to the weekly market. Those days, the market places were so far that one sometimes had to spend the night on the way back. So this man had to spend the night, and he did so in a *Bolsil* tree. The story goes as before but this time, the infant born was his own son, and his lot fell to the cobra’s web and the time of his death was when he was still a child. In the same way as the other story, the father was ever vigilant towards his son. One day, the father and son had gone to the stream to take a bath and the day happened to be the preordained day of death of the child. Just as they

reached the stream, the father, in his ever present vigil, saw a cobra poised to strike and with a single stroke of his *mil·am* cut off the head of the cobra. In order to show that luck was on his side and not on the cobra's, the father jumped over the head of the cobra, asking his son to do the same. The son, too, jumped over the head of the cobra, but alas, being small, he could not jump very far and accidentally jumped on the head of the cobra, puncturing his foot with its fangs. Try as he might, the father could not save his little boy.

In order that the lot of a child may not fall on any other element or living being, the *Am·bengs* take a plantain leaf and place it where the birth of the child will take place, making sure that as soon as the baby comes out of the mother, it will fall on this plantain leaf. The midwife or anyone present in that room will immediately name the child. This is done so that the lot of the child will not fall in anyone's hands and he will only die of old age. The name of the child in this case would be any name that came to their heads. If the name is not well liked, then the parents have the option to name the child once again when they cut the baby's hair for the first time.

Among the *Atongs*, on the other hand, they have a small ritual. This ritual can be performed by any married man who is able to say the words.

They have been collected from Leben Dagal Sangma (75 years) on October 27, 2009.

The words are given below:

*Aaaija!*<sup>8</sup>

*An·mapaknakenga, jurimenakenga*

*Na·simangara an·mapaknagipao, jurimenagipao*

*Amra anengana jakpa singengana*

*Aaao, na·time ue te·oan ra·sitangbo, bilsitangbo*

*Ia an·mapakna ra·medok, turimena ra·medok*

*Aaa, skal racha kamal tasi*

*Gitok warikak sre tong·gitchak*

*A na·tim chinalsachi, a·paksachi*

*Jalangtokbo, skaldrang, kamaldrang*

*An·mapakkalna, jurimekalna*

*Na·timna kerian, re·eina pa·jarunga*

*Tawona pa·jarunga*

*Atchina man·jairunga*

*Uni gimin na·tim*

*Te·oan jalangtokbo*

*Anga, ye, jako merong gnang*

*Ku·o do·chi ronggnang*

*Anga riksitenga, sanalatenga,*

*Muni ganang chambuni ganang*

*A na·tim jalangtokbo*

*Jakpa senggipa, amra angiparang*

*Skal racha, kamal tasi*  
*Sre tong·gitchak wagam warikak*  
*A na·time*  
*Ichi jakpa sengkunabe, e·chu ankunabe*  
*Ian anga mirongsang*  
*Satprongatenga, dokprongatenga*  
*Prrruuu<sup>9</sup>*  
*A skal racha kamal tasi*  
*Katchaangjok wechaangjok*  
*Amra angipa, jakpa senggipa*  
*Jakpa ra·galangjok, amra salgalangjok*  
*Indikeming de·odo*  
*An·ma pakalebojok*  
*Jurimearibojok*  
*Katangjok takalba skalba*

Translation:

Aaija!

The time of birth has come

In the place where the birth is taking place

You have spread out your webs, your hands

Aaao, you get away from this place immediately, blow away

The time is nigh

Aaa, demons & priests

You, fire

Begone, You!! Beyond the waters, beyond the land  
All you demons and priests of evil

In line 2, the priest is confirming that the time for birth is here. In line 3 and 4, the priest is talking to all the spirits who have come to the birth in order to ascertain in whose lot the fate of the newborn will fall, as mentioned earlier in the story. They are all waiting at the place of labour with their webs spread out, waiting for the baby to fall to one of their webs. In line 5 and 6, the priest is chasing all of them away because the time is near. This ritual is a form of exorcism. In line 7 and 8, the demons and the priests refer to all the spirits that await, and that includes the spirit of fire. In line 9 and 10, the priest is chasing them far away from the place.

Let it be born  
It is scared to come because of you  
It is afraid to come out  
It is afraid to be born  
So you get away from here  
Begone, now!!  
I have rice in my hand  
And an egg in my mouth  
I am chasing you all away  
I have *muni*

In line 11, the priests is asking all the spirits waiting to let the baby be born. In line 12, 13 and 14, he is saying that the baby is scared to come out, afraid to be born. In line 15 and 16, he is chasing them all away. In line 17, 18, 19 and 20, he is chasing them away, exorcising with rice in his hand and a whole egg in his mouth. He tells them that he has the *muni* plant with him.

All of you begone  
All you with your hands outstretched, your webs spread  
Demons & priests  
Fire  
All of you  
Don't stretch your hands here, or spread your webs  
Here, with rice  
I spray, I dust  
Prrruuu  
Demons & priests

In line 27, 28, 29 and 30, the priest chases all the spirits away, he exorcises the place.

Ran away, crawled away  
He who spread the web, stretched the hand  
Removed the hand, pulled away the web

So now,  
Come out  
Be born  
The demons have run away

In line 31, he tells the about to be born child that they have all run away, all the spirits that had spread out their webs for the fate of the child (Line 32), they have all pulled away their webs and their outstretched hands (Line 33). He then calls out to the yet to be born to come out and be born because the spirits that he had been afraid of have all run away from that place.

This is recited when the baby is just about to be born. This is to chase away the spirits that are spreading out their webs of destiny to ascertain on whose lot the child will be fated to end its life. As earlier mentioned, they are supposed to be spreading out their webs to destiny in the very place where the woman is giving birth. That is why they are being chased away and to take their webs with them. The person who performs this will take some rice in his hands and throw it indicating that he is chasing away the spirits. After he has done his duty, he must immediately come out of the room. He should not tarry in that place. If he does, then it is believed that the child will also take as long

in coming out of its mother's womb. So, he has to come out immediately. Anyone else who goes there for any kind of work cannot peep in through the door nor can they stand around.

### 2.03 *Darechik Amua*

*Darechik* is a deity that can cause a baby to be born before term or for the mother to have a miscarriage. Even today, though the general Garo population has converted to Christianity, whenever a miscarriage occurs, it is called as *Darechik Cha-a*, or has been eaten by *Darechik*. So, in order to appease the deity so that it may refrain from such malign activities, from the time of conception, the *Darechik Amua* ritual is observed every time the pregnant woman falls sick. For this purpose, according to the wealth status of the family, a *dikka* or two is kept aside with brew for this ritual, as a contingency plan. This sort of *dikka* is differentiated from the other *dikkas* because the mouths are covered with cloth and not with plantain leaves as is the practice. In this way, any visitor who comes to the house will know that that *dikka* has been kept aside in the event that the woman will fall sick and the *Darechik Amua* ritual will have to be observed. Even the mouth of the *rongdik* that is used to keep the rice is also covered in the same manner. When it is time for the baby to be born, the bamboo strips that are used to keep the

cloth covers in place are loosened as they believe that loosening it will help ease the baby out of the mother's womb. As the time approaches for the woman to deliver her child, the *kamal* or priest asks the woman if the expected day, month or time has come and if so, he will remain in the house and wait till the time of delivery. As the Garos believe, no man is ever born exactly at noon or midnight, but usually before or after. According to their belief, since midnight is partly for the dead and partly for new birth, the birth of a child does not take place exactly at midnight.

Every time the woman falls sick during the pregnancy, before term and as time draws near for delivery, and once the woman goes into labour, the *kamal* or priest conducts this ritual, which goes as narrated by Agat Sangma (75 years) of Selbalgre village on July 15, 2008:

*Oh, Darechikna*<sup>10</sup>

*Amikkani jamana*

*Askini janggina*

*Name po·ometbo*

*Name misinetbo*

*Asindikha girinchiha*

*Nang·ko anga biming mingnua*

*Ma·chong de·nua*

*Nang·ko gialgija*

*Jakwatgija*

*Oh, Darechikna!*

Translation:

Oh, for Darechik

For the soul of so and so

For the life of so and so

Blow the life giving air softly

Remove the pain for her to get well

Slowly let all the pain go away

I will honour your name

I will speak of your clan

Not forgetting you

Not ignoring you

Oh, for Darechik

The 'so and so's in line 2 and 3 are generally replaced by the name of the person who lies ill, i.e. the pregnant woman. The Garos use the terms *amika* and *aski* as substitutes for people's names as they consider it impolite to use a person's name. In the case of rituals, however, unless the actual ritual is being performed, they cannot take names as they consider it taboo. In line 4

and 5, the priest entreats the deity to let the sick person go and let her become well again. Since a chicken is a major part of all *amua* rituals, in this ritual, the priest is informing the deity that in the place of the life of the person, he is offering a chicken, i.e., a life is being replaced with another life, blood with blood.

This is recited during the ceremony performed for *Darechik* at the back of the house at the small room every time the pregnant woman falls sick. This is a safeguard against miscarriages.

There is another variation of this ritual among the *Matabengs*. When the woman is experiencing labour pains. It has a kind of soothing, lilting melody. The words as narrated by Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre village on August 5, 2009 go:

*Bani Darechiksa*

*Bani Jakpapusa*

*Kal·aknaba namja*

*Sningnaba ke·ja*

*Noha no no tangsa*

*Nama namchiktangsa*

*Ia darebrim*

*Nokpante ja·ruwe*  
*Noa nonotangko*  
*Nama namchiktangha*  
*Nang·ni jikjikako*  
*Nang·ni rembuako*  
*Ian bipa gitchak*  
*Ian du·rang gisu*  
*Ian misinonga*  
*Ian poomatonga*  
*Ka·sindik ha chakna*  
*Gerindik dongnawa*

Translation:

Whence *Darechik*  
Whence *Jakpapu*  
It's not right to tease  
It's not good to mimic  
It's my little sister  
It's my niece  
In this precipitous cliff  
With feet hanging from the edge of the *nokpante*  
It's my little sister  
It's my niece

The precipitous cliff in line 7 means that the sick woman is on the edge, i.e., she can either become well and give birth to a healthy baby or she can have a miscarriage or have a pre-term baby.

It's your handiwork  
You have her in your spell  
This is the red male<sup>11</sup>  
This is the crowing rooster  
This is the sacrifice  
That we offer you  
So you will feel welcome  
So you will feel comfortable

They know that it is her handiwork (line 10) and that she has her in her spell (line 8). So, the priest is describing to her the offering that they are giving her and asking her to take is and let the woman get well again.

This ritual is usually performed when there is a prolonged labour. It is believed that when a baby is taking time to be born, it is due to the influence of the deity called *Darechik*. The deity blocks the way of the baby and it needs to be appeased and asked to leave in order that the baby can come out of the mother's womb. The deity is making the woman undergo so much pain. While

reciting this, the *kamal* or priest takes a red rooster, kills it, cuts it open and checks its entrails. This checking of the entrails is called *do·bik nia* and is used for divination. After divination, the *kamal* or priest will hang the rooster in a *kimindam* or sacrificial altar which is constructed behind the house. The delivery of the child usually takes place in the *dun* or sleeping quarters of the *nokachik* or the traditional house because it is covered. Two midwives are usually required. Anybody with experience is taken to be midwives. One has to hold the mother and the other has to take out the baby when it comes out. A belt made of a strip of the bark of the *olmak*<sup>12</sup> tree is hung to one of the beams in the sleeping quarters so that the woman undergoing labour can hold on to it while in the throes of childbirth.

#### **2.04 Ma·mri Chinabak**

*Ma·mri Chinabak* is what the *Matabengs* call *Tattara Rabuga*, the supreme being in the Garo pantheon, the creator. In the *A·beng* areas, he<sup>13</sup> is also called *A·tilla Salnok*, *Dakpipa Rabuga*, *Dakara Rabuga*, *Dakira Raboka*, etc. This ritual is also performed from the time of conception till the time the baby is born. Like the previous ritual, this ritual is also performed every time the pregnant woman falls sick. This ritual is performed because *Tattara Rabuga* is the creator and he is also the destroyer and he can and will destroy

anything that he creates, in this case the baby in the woman's womb. So, in order to appease this deity so that he may keep it safe, this ritual is performed. If the woman in question is too unhealthy and frail, her husband hurries to call the priest and even if the woman is too sick to come out to the courtyard, her clothes are taken and intonement performed to heal the sickness as narrated by Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre village on February 9, 2007 shown below:

*Apa Dakgipa*

*Nama Rabuga*

*O po·ometnua*

*Misinetnua*

*Girinchiha ka·sindikha*

*Srangchina pang·sangchina*

*Apa Dakgipa*

*Nama Rabuga*

*Ma·mri chinabak*

*Srangongkal pang·sangongkal*

*Anga po·ometengjok misinetengjok*

*Kimbalcha Sirapacha*

*Dagalcha Gingapacha*

*Name ba·rikongbo, rodilongbo*

*Apa Dakgipa*

*Nama Rabuga*

*Debra gitchitgija*

*Name ba·rikonge*

*Name rodilonge*

Translation:

Father, the creator

*Rabuga*, the good god

Will blow away gently, the pain

Will slowly soothe the agony

Will slowly cool and gradually remove the pain

To get well, To clear this illness

The priest is calling on the deity *Dakgipa Rabuga* to make the sick woman well again.

Father, the creator

*Rabuga*, the good god

*Ma·mri Chinabak*<sup>14</sup>

Let it get well

To be completely rid of pain

I am blowing it away gently

I will take away the agony

With *Kimbal Sirapa*<sup>15</sup>

With the strong *Dagal Gingapa*<sup>16</sup>

Look after her well

Take care of her.

The same things are repeated here but in line 15 and 16, the priest refers to the *kimbal* plant and the *dagal* plants which are used in the construction of the sacrificial altar. In line 17 and 18, the Garo version refers to taking care of the sick woman like a mother takes care of her child, nurturing her, but in the translation, due to lack of terms, it has been translated as such.

Take proper care

Look after her well

My father the Creator

The good god *Rabuga*

Carry the suffering woman in a sling with untiring shoulders

Take proper care

Look after her well.

Here again, in lines 23, 24 and 25 refers to the mother taking care of her sick child, the same way as in lines 17 and 18.

As the baby comes out, two women priests are present with the priest to receive the baby. Altogether only three people are supposed to be with the woman. The male priest does not enter the place where birth is supposed to

take place, only the women priests are present there. The duty of the male priest is to conduct the rituals and the women priests to administer to the childbirth and call out to inform the male priest about the situation so that he can perform the necessary rituals with their appropriate incantations. Once the baby comes out, the priest names the baby as she cuts the umbilical cord. It is during this ceremony that the priest counsels the mother and father of the child for his proper upbringing right from birth through adulthood so that he can live in right accord with god and man.

### **2.05 Cutting the Umbilical Cord**

This is a kind of prayer said to the supreme god *Tattara Rabuga* on the birth of a healthy baby. This is chanted by the woman priest who administers to the labour. It is chanted as soon as the baby is out and the umbilical cord is going to be cut:

*Oh, Apa Dakgipa*

*Nama Rabuga*

*Mikkang nikani*

*Bimang talani*

*Srangajok Pang·sangajok*

*Angade biming minggnok*

*Ma·chong de·gnok*

*Amikka Marak*

*Amikka Sangma*

*Kamal Ajipa gita*

*Dongal Nangjipa gita*

*Anga biming mingnok*

*Sko tarirakjana*

*Ja·pa silchi kajana*

*Anga nang·ko biming mingonga*

*Ma·chong de·onga*

*Mite aide katangbo*

*Katchi aide rorikbo'*

*Dikgecha mincha*

*Sangsengcha Rudikgecha*

*Anga guarikonga*

*Gua dingonga*

*A·tal tara taro*

*Suna ginda gindeo*

*Kamal Ajipa gita*

*Donga Nangjipa gita*

*Anga su·song asonge*

*Dedeng chakate*

*Jama sikonga*

*Biri patonga*

*Na·a knasonawa*

*Nachil songnawa*

*Meja debarikagita*

*Da·sin bijong songa gita*

*Na·a knatimnawa*

*Beberaa kakket minga*

Translation:

*Oh, Father, the creator*

*Rabuga, the good god*

To see the face

To see the form

It is all clear

I will name it

Declare its clan

So and so Marak

So and so Sangma

Just like the priest, Ajipa

Just like Dongal Dongjipa

Here, the priest declaring that he will be naming the new born is because of the *Re·chu Ana* belief. The woman priest will have to name the baby immediately because if some other spirit, like in the story, should name it before her, then the fate of the newborn would be in the hands of the spirit who was able to name it. So, the priestess declares that she would be naming the baby, just like the priests Ajipa and Dongal Dongjipa.

I will name it  
For the soft crown<sup>17</sup>  
Before the iron is tied on the feet<sup>18</sup>  
I am naming you  
Declaring your clan  
Go away you evil spirits  
Stay, good spirits  
I chase you away with this *dikge*<sup>19</sup>  
With *Sangseng*, with *Rudikge*<sup>20</sup>  
I am throwing it away  
I am flinging it away

The soft crown and the iron tied to the feet refer to the newborn. The crowns of newborns are generally soft because they have not closed yet. Here again, the priestess declares that she would be naming the baby. Then, she exorcises the evil spirits and at the same time tells the good ones to stay. She chases them away with the *dikges Sangseng* and *Rudikge*. Throwing it and flinging it away refers to the discarding of the *marang* or defilement that would be present there.

In this clean courtyard  
I give you a place of honour

Like the priest Ajipa  
Like Dongal Dongjipa  
I sit firm  
I can finally stand  
Giving life  
Shouting from the highest peak  
You will hear it  
Lifting your ear  
Like you were born just yesterday  
Like you just came to life  
You will listen to it  
Belief, it is called truth

The priestess gives the deity a place of honour in the clean courtyard, again, like the priests Ajipa and Dagal Dongjipa.

Once the umbilical cord is cut, the priest gives the offering at the threshold of the house after making necessary intonements and counseling. For this sacrifice, the priest must cut three chickens, including a hen and a rooster. First, he cuts two chickens and later, cuts the third one for good luck. Then, a soup is made from the chicken, which is eaten by the *kamal* or priest, the new mother and the two women handling the newborn. The mother after delivering the child can have any kind of food.

### 2.06 *Do·magipa Doka*

After the baby is out but the placenta does not come out, it is called as *Do·magipa Rim·a*. The same way, it is also because of a deity and a chant is recited to make it let the placenta out, because if the placenta should remain inside the mother, it could prove fatal to her. The ritual is called *Do·magipa Doka*. The words as narrated by Agat Sangma on November 5, 2007 are:

#### *Dom·agipa doka*

*Ian do·magipa me·chibram*

*Nang·suko nang·deko*

*Gon gon gon gon*

*Na·wek jokna na·sal jokna*

*Gimbi pe·na na·nil jokna*

*Nang·suna nang·dena*

*Gon gon gon gon*

*Do·magipa me·chibram*

*Ian bipa gitchakna*

*Du·rang gisucha*

*Dilama jang·kareo*

*Tuchangongnawa*

*Dongpengongnawa*

*Gon gon nang·suko nang·deko*

✓

Translation:

This is the baby<sup>21</sup>  
Your grandchild, your child  
Release it, release it, release it  
Like the *na·wek*  
Like breaking a dam, slippery as an eel  
For your grandchild, for your child  
Release it, release it, release it, release it  
The baby  
This is for the red male  
The crowing rooster  
On the way  
Lying on the way  
Blocking the way  
Release it, release it, your grandchild, your child.

Grandchild, because the placenta comes after the child. The priest is asking the deity *Me·chirbam* to release it. The priest refers to the *na·wek*<sup>22</sup> and the eel, both slippery creatures, so that the placenta can come out with ease.

This will be chanted for as long as the placenta does not come out. This is done such that the deity *Me·chibram* will release the placenta. The ritual is performed with a red rooster by beating it and making it cry “*aiaok aiaok*”<sup>23</sup>.

The rooster just has to cry out. The *kamal* or priest will hold it with his left hand and with his right beat the wall of the *dun*, the *damdil*. This ritual is performed when the placenta remains inside the mother.

### 2.07 *A·tilla Amua* or *Dakara Amua*

If the baby were to be born without any complications, only the courtyard ritual is performed. This ritual is called *A·tilla Amua* or *Dakara Amua*. It is the recitation of the oral lore of the creation of man by *Dakara Rabuga* or *Tattara Rabuga*<sup>24</sup>, who is regarded as the supreme creator in the indigenous Garos belief along with some rituals. This ceremony is done during the time of birth to appease the creator in order that the baby will be born safely. The ritual was narrated by Bhimsing M. Sangma of Sadolpara village on August 6, 2009.

#### *A·tilla Amua*

The first ritual is the birthing ritual. The following is recited when the mother undergoes labour. It goes thus:

*An·tang sti·e mendie*<sup>25</sup>

*An·tang rae pan·chonge*

*Jamako*<sup>26</sup> *dongchangongnawa ine*  
*Janggiko rupengongnawa ine*  
*An·tang doknaronge*  
*An·tang rubibome*  
*Jamako dongchangongnawa ine*  
*Janggiko dongpengongnawa ine*  
*Cholama cholsnion*  
*Dilbri dilsnio*  
*A·ning*<sup>27</sup> *Dakara ine*  
*Chining Rabuga*  
*Jamako pa·ak galbo ine*  
*Janggiko enggalangbo ine*  
*A·ning Dakara,*  
*Chining Rabuga*  
*Jamako dokbibome ne*  
*Janggiko rubibomeba*  
*An·tang na·ara stie mendie*  
*An·tang rae pan·chonge*  
*Jamako dongchangongnawa*  
*Janggiko dongpengongnawa*  
*Dilama dilsnide,*  
*Cholbira cholsnide*  
*Jamako pa·ak galbone ine*  
*Janggiko enggalalbhone*  
*A·ning Dakara,*  
*Chining Rabuga*

*Nang·naba nenggirajaba*  
*Nang·naba jakgitchijaba*  
*Jamana mangsiriade,*  
*Janggina mangbudolade*  
*Do·de gipokchana,*  
*Girang changbokcha*  
*Jamanan mangsririonga*  
*Jangginan mangbudolonga*  
*Amikani<sup>28</sup> jamako ine*  
*Askini janggiko*  
*Jamako ba·rikboda ine*  
*Janggiko rudilboda*  
*An·tang rae pan·chonggiminan*  
*An·tang sti mendigimin*  
*Jamako dongchangnabene*  
*Janggiko dongpengnabeda*  
*Jamako pa·akgalbo*  
*Janggiko enggalalbo*

Translation:

What You have created  
What You have formed  
Would You block that soul?  
Would You stop that life?  
What You have beaten to shape

What You have molten and moulded  
Would You block that soul?  
Would You stop that life?  
In the seven<sup>29</sup> doorways  
In the seven tributaries

Created and formed compares the creation to the sculptor's art. The sculptor shapes the form with his hands. The same way, the creator has shaped the baby that is in the mother's womb. Beaten to shape and molten and moulded refer to the blacksmith's art. The story goes that *Tattara Rabuga* shaped the human form and gave it life the same way a blacksmith makes blades. The seven doorways and tributaries refer to the woman's birth passage.

*Dakara* of the Underground  
*Rabuga* from under the water  
Release the soul  
Untie the life  
*Dakara* of the Underground  
*Rabuga* from under the water  
You created the soul  
You made the life

Here, Underground and under the water refers to the Garo Underworld, the dwelling place of gods. *A·ning* means underground and *chining* means under water, so *A·ning Chining* refers to the Underworld. This “Underworld” does not necessarily refer to something underground, but something beyond the mortal understanding. In referring to wise persons, scientists, etc, the Garos use the phrase *gisik a·ning bitgipa*, meaning “the mind that digs deep underground”. Release the soul and untie the life meaning that it is time to let the baby go so that it can be born, to let his creation spring to life in the world.

What You have created  
What you have formed  
Would You block that soul?  
Would you stop that life?  
In the seven tributaries  
In the seven doorways  
Release the soul  
Untie the life

The same things are repeated here, too.

*Dakara* of the Underground  
*Rabuga* from under the water

We remember you  
We have not forgotten you  
In exchange for the soul  
In exchange for the life  
With a white peacock  
With the white striped  
In exchange for the soul  
In exchange for the life

Remembering that it is the deity who has created the baby and will not forget to give thanks accordingly. Peacock refers to the chicken offering to the deity as thanks and as an exchange for the life that he has given and the same chicken is striped white at the chest.

For the soul of so and so  
For the life of so and so  
Carry the soul on Your back  
Look after the life  
It is what You have created  
It is what You have formed  
Do not block the soul  
Do not stop the life  
Release the soul  
Untie the life

Here, so and so refers to the name of the newborn which would have to have been named as soon as it is born as a safeguard against its fate falling on some spirit's hands. Carrying and looking after refers to the nurturing care that a mother gives her offspring.

***Chi Rugalani – The Water Pouring Ritual:***

The next part of this ceremony is the Water Pouring Ritual or *Chi Rugala*. Here, water is offered to the deity. This ritual is performed outside the room in which the woman is giving birth. For this ritual, water is brought in a *kaksi*<sup>30</sup>. Then, a plantain leaf is spread out on the floor and the water from the *kaksi* is sprinkled. In other villages, instead of a *kaksi* a long *pong* or gourd is used. This signifies the start of a series of offerings to appease the deity in order that the woman can have a complications free birth. During this ritual, the following is recited.

*Jamana chi rugalongane*

*Janggina chi pakgalonga*

*Di·man me·ako akene*

*Dong·pene de·e*

*Sokman panteko dong·ake*

*Jamana biming mingge dong·aka*



*Janggina ma·chuari dong·pia*

*Amikani jamanana*

*Asikini janggina*

*A·ning Dakara nibone*

*Chining Rabuga nikbone*

*Jamana chi rugalongane*

*Janggina chi pakgalonga*

*Dolama di·ip dipoa*

*Sima chiketchiket*

*Jamani sasisiana ne*

*Janggini oko jomana*

*Kni pangpang siana ina*

*Bimang mangsirengana*

*Jamana chi rugalongade*

*Jangginaan chi pakgalongade*

*Do·pa ge·rang jakchikniko*

*Warigro simdikniko*

*An·cheng soksisiniko*

*Chigil ba·ririniko*

*Jamana chi biahaba*

*Janggina chi koahaba ne*

*Jamana chi rugalongjok*

*Jangginaan chi pakgalongjok*

*A·ning Dakara a nibone*

*Chining Rabuga a nikbone*

*Jamako ba·rikongbone*



*Janggiko rudilongbone*

*A·ning Dakarade ne*

*Chining Rabugade*

Translation:

Pouring water for the soul

Pouring water for the life

Picked while being named for the soul

Picked while being selected for the life

For the soul of so and so

For the life of so and so

See, *Dakara* of the Underground

See, *Rabuga* from under the water

Pouring water for the soul

Pouring water for the life

Water is offered to the deity in this ritual. Here picked refers to the picking of the ears of rice when harvested, in the same way, the baby is also picked from the mother's womb once it has reached its term.

For the fever of the soul

For the life, sick in the womb

For the headache,

For the slender form

Pouring water for the soul  
Pouring water for the life  
From the Drongo's tail  
From the deep water  
From the sand  
From the shallow water  
Water is brought for the soul  
Water is brought for the life

The slender form refers to the *pong* that is used to pour the water. The Drongo's tail refers to the bend in the river that is like the drongo bird's tail, from which the water has been brought. The next three lines also refer to the description of the river.

Pouring the water for the soul  
Pouring the water for the life  
See, *Dakara* of the Underground  
See, *Rabuga* from under the water  
Carry the soul on your back  
Look after the life  
*Dakara* of the Underground  
*Rabuga* from under the water

***Mi tinani* – The Rice Portions Ritual:**

After the Water Pouring Ritual is the Rice Portions Ritual or *Mi Tina*. The offering here is boiled rice. In this ritual, boiled rice is placed in portions in the same plantain leaf used in the previous ritual. The portions will have to be in even numbers, never odd. The portions usually number eight because the number seven is usually associated with divinity. If the portions happened to be in odd numbers, then the *kamal* or priest would be in danger because then he would have to take the place of the offering in order to make it an even number. During this ritual, the following is recited.

*An·tangni noksam ga·mekatang*

*An·tangni wakmesalpakatang*

*Ian mima gorimbo ne*

*Na·ma na·bokba*

*Jamana miraronongade ne*

*Janggina sam sualonga*

*Mi ra·rona kira ren·e ne*

*Sam sua nitoe*

*Amikani jamana ine*

*Asikini janggina*

*Nang·naba nenggirajane*

*Nang·naba jakgitchujane*

*A·ning Dakarana*

*Chining Rabuga*

*Jamanan mi ra·ronongjokne*

*Jangginan sam sualongjok*

*Mi ra·rona kira ren·e*

*Sam suala nitoe*

*Jamako ba·rikongbone*

*Janggiko rudilongbone*

Translation:

From your own toil

From your own sweat

This is the aromatic rice

The white rice

Rice for the soul

Curry for the life

Rice in neat portions

The curry, too, on top

For the soul of so and so

For the life of so and so

We remember you

We have not forgotten you

For *Dakara* of the Underground

*Rabuga* from under the water

Rice for the soul

Curry for the life



Carry the soul on your back  
Look after the life

The toil and the sweat refer to the fruits of one's labour, the harvest. The rice offered is from the owner's own harvest. The white rice refers to the polished rice, the Garo version comparing it to the white belly of a fish. The rice is put neatly on the plantain leaf and the curry on top of it. This is an offering to the deity.

***Chu rugalani* – The Rice Beer Pouring Ritual:**

Then, after the Rice Portions Ritual, comes the Rice Beer Pouring Ritual or *Chu Rugala*. Rice beer is offered to the deity during this ritual. During this ritual, the rice beer will be poured over the portions of rice on the plantain leaf. The following lines are recited:

*Jamana kapingchapanane*

*Janggina rongga sikane*

*Ian mima gorimbitchi ine*

*Na·ma na·tongne*

*Jamako ba·rikalbone*

*Janggiko rudilalbo*

*Jamana an rugalongade ine*

*Jangginaan kanchikongade*  
*Ian kapingchapana ine*  
*Ian rongga sikane*  
*Jamana biming mingahaba ine*  
*Janggina ma·churaba*  
*Nang·na nenggirajawaba ne*  
*Nang·na jakgitchijawa*  
*A·ning Dakara nikbone*  
*Chining Rabuga nibone*

Translation:

Covered for the soul  
Grains, put in for the life  
This is the brew of rice  
The white rice  
Carry the soul on your back  
Look after the life  
Pouring out for the soul  
Pouring for the life  
This is the covered  
This is the grains put in  
It has been named for the soul  
It has been kept for the life  
We remember you  
We will not forget you

See, *Dakara* of the Underground

See, *Rabuga* from under the water

Here, pouring for the life, the Garo version uses the term *ganchika* which means a lot of rice beer has been drunk that the floor is all messy because of having dropped some on the floor.

#### ***A·tila Amua*– The Courtyard Ritual:**

This ritual will be performed twice and then the *kamal* or priest will go out into the courtyard and perform the Courtyard Ritual or *A·tila Amua*.

*Sargoko angsariko ne*

*Wa·geko wa·naruko*

*Sako angsariko songtingringongade ne*

*Wa·geko wa·nakchakongade ne*

*Jamanaha songtingringe niongade ine*

*Jangginaha ge·bakjake niongade*

*Amikani oko jomanaha*

*Asikini sasisianaha*

*Jamako ma·ringringe niode ne*

*Janggiko jajok niongade*

*A·ning Dakara ine*

*Chining Rabuga*

*Jamako ba·rikongkubo ne*

*Janggiko rudilongkubo*  
*Nang·na nenggirajaba ne*  
*Nang·naba jakgitchijaba*  
*Do·ma girang changboko ne*  
*Matma ja·tong gipokko*  
*Jako ra·baa gitan*  
*Sing·o kebaa gita*  
*Jaljang mitapsni cha*  
*Chimik grangsnicha*  
*Sko takorimako<sup>31</sup>*  
*Ja·ping damborimako*  
*Sko takorimako sonacha dokdooade ne*  
*Ja·ping damborimako rupacha modoade ne*  
*Jamana biming mingemingna ne*  
*Janggina ma·churaeming*  
*A·ning Dakara nibone*  
*Chining Rabuga nibone*  
*Jamana mangsiriongade ine*  
*Janggi naan mangbudolongade*  
*Ha jajil mitapo<sup>32</sup>*  
*Pakma kurio*  
*Gitolo<sup>33</sup> bitchi chi·ongade ne*  
*Gisilo bamongade*  
*Sko takorimade ne*  
*Ja·ping damborima*

Translation:

The *Sargo* tree

The *wa·ge* and the *wa·naru*<sup>34</sup>

That are being put up for the ritual

Standing the *wa·ge* with its branches

Putting it up for the soul

Keeping it bushy for the life

Because so and so's belly is aching

So and so is lying ill

If you moan and look at the soul

Looking at life being born

The first four lines refer to the *kimindam* or altar that has been put up in the courtyard. While the previous four rituals take place inside the house, this takes place in the open courtyard.

*Dakara* of the Underground

*Rabuga* from under the water

Look after the soul

Keep pouring the life

You are not forgotten

You are remembered

The white feathered bird

The white legged buffalo

As if brought by the hand  
Or carried on the back

The white feathered bird refers to the chicken that is offered in sacrifice.

To the seventh layer of the Underworld  
To the seven springs  
The speckled head  
The fat thigh  
The speckled head herded with gold  
The fat thigh herded up with silver  
Naming it for the soul  
Selected it for the life  
Look, *Dakara* of the Underground  
See, *Rabuga* from under the water

The speckled head and the fat thigh refers to the chicken offering. It has been selected as an offering and a replacement for the life of the baby to the creator.

In exchange for the soul  
In exchange for the life  
In the Underworld



In the bosom of the Underworld  
Laying eggs in the gongs  
Hatching them in the gongs  
The speckled head  
The fat thigh

The hens were supposed to have been kept in the Underworld and they were kept in a coop made from brass gongs. It also laid eggs on these gongs. It was the eagle, *Ureng Me-a Kokeng Pante*, that swooped down on it and carried it away to the world of men where men saw that it could be used as a replacement for a person's life and could be exchanged to a deity for the person's life when sick or dying.

In all the rituals, the name of *Dakara* is mentioned, because he is the god of all. This is the most important ceremony during the birth of a child. When the child comes out of the mother's womb, it is in pain and is worried. Its fears are allayed in the name of *Dakara Rabuga* and it is to him that the ceremony is directed at. Because He Himself has created it, the *kamal* or priest requests Him not to stay in the way, but instead to help in a normal birth. Men are not allowed into the labour room but are required to stay nearby just in case there is a complication and are needed to send for help or medicines.

After the birth of the child, the household rejoices by drinking rice beer and if the household is well to do, it is even celebrated by cutting a pig.

### 2.08 *A·siroka* or Exorcism

After the delivery, an exorcism is performed by the *kamal* or priest. After the delivery, when the placenta has been taken away and the midwives and the *kamal* or priest has taken a bath, a broom and a pot of water is brought and the *kamal* or priest performs the ceremony, called *A·siroka* or *A·sroka*. It goes like this:

*Mikkang nikani*

*Bimang talani*

*Su marang!*

*Su marang!*

*Marangkode*

*Starangkode*

*Io Nangong Nambi*

*Kiongnangbi*

*Kamal dakani*

*Chital dakani*

*Nangong nimbi*

*Kiong nimbi*

*Marangkode*



*Andimekode*

*Chikamamingsa*

*Rongadatmingsa*

*Chubaketnawa*

*Chudinetnawa*

*Sagil amacha*

*Rekbok bimacha*

*Chubaketongjok*

*Chugaletongjok*

*Su marang!*

Translation:

On beholding the face

On knowing the body

Be off with you, defilement!

Away with you, pollution!

This particular profanation

This particular pollution

Do not stick here

Do not get stuck here

Of presiding over as a priest

Of handling the sacred cup of holy water

Do not stick here

Do not get stuck here

This particular pollution

This particular type of fever  
With the downward flow of the stream  
With the huge boulders  
I will dig with a spade and throw  
I will dig and throw in a heap  
Towards the mother ocean  
Towards the mother of waves and foam  
Now I am digging with a spade and throwing  
Now I am digging and removing  
Away with you, pollution!

This purification ritual consists in driving away pollutions that might be present at the occasion. Exorcism is an essential part of any ceremony. In the *Atong* areas though, there was no elaborate ritual during the child birth itself. Only the ritual mentioned earlier was performed.

After the child is born, the placenta is wrapped up in a cloth, put in a bamboo and hung up in a tree. This can be done anywhere. The umbilical cord is tied. According to the customs, the parents of the child are indebted to the person who cuts the umbilical cord and the person who ties it. Because the child is born does not mean that everything is over and the work is complete, the debt has to be repaid. So, when the baby's hair is cut for the first time, two

helpings of rice and meat curry with some rice beer each are taken to those people. Even the *kamal* or priest who performed the ritual is also given this fare. The parents are indebted to a total of three people. The two women in the labour room and the *kamal* or priest who performed the rituals.

In the *Atong* areas, the placenta is usually buried. It is wrapped up in a piece of cloth and buried, but in the olden days, it was wrapped up in a piece of cloth and placed in a new bamboo grove. It was never touched because they used to chant these words as they placed the placenta.

*Iako kal·akode kiliode*  
*Saljong mikron otboai*  
*Misi ja·dong pe·boai*  
*Ganduriko kal·akode.*

Translation:

If anyone touches this  
Saljong take out the eyes  
Misi break the legs  
If the placenta is touched

This is said so that nothing, not rodents nor reptiles nor insects nor any other animals, can touch it. And when this placenta is buried in a hole, it

cannot be thrown carelessly into the hole. It has to be placed slowly into the ground. It is believed that if the placenta is thrown carelessly into the hole, then the newborn baby will get startled and fall sick. It will get startled and be sick in the heart. This is what the indigenes believe.

As in the *Am·beng* areas, the *Atongs*, too, believe in the indebtedness towards the people who helped in childbirth. The same thing is done in their areas, too. When the hair cutting ceremony is done, a pig is killed and a feast is given by the parents of the child according to their means. When the researcher and her assistants were out on the field, they came upon such an occasion and were asked to join the feast. It was nothing much of an occasion, only their immediate family members were there. There was also not much drinking because since the advent of Christianity, not all households brewed rice beer.

According to the customs in some *Am·beng* areas, when the umbilical cord comes off, it is buried at the threshold. This is generally to ward off the evil eye or as the Garos believe, from the person who can transform himself/herself into a *skal*<sup>35</sup>. If such a person should come into the house then when he/she crosses the threshold he/she would have stepped over the buried

umbilical cord thereby nullifying his/her power against the new born. In the *Atong*, when the umbilical cord falls off from the baby, it is dried and kept. They believe that it has medicinal value. When the baby has a stomach ache, they dip it in water and feed it to the baby. This dried umbilical cord is used for a host of maladies. Though this may be the belief, not everyone keeps the umbilical cords.

### **2.09 *Kni Rata* or Hair Cutting Ceremony**

When the time comes to cut the child's hair for the first time, called the *Kni Rata* ceremony, the child can also be named at the time. There are no rituals as such but some traditions to be followed. It is like a thanksgiving of sorts for the three people that helped in the birthing of the child, namely, the midwife, the woman who cuts the umbilical cord and the *kamal* or priest who performs the *Dakara Amua*. A bottle of rice beer, two helpings of rice wrapped in banana leaves and two portions of meat curry (chicken, pork or beef) each will be taken to their houses. As for the naming of the child, it is named during the birth itself. This is because of the belief that during the birth of a child, the *a-ani bi-sa dimdak*, *chini anggri dimdak*, which literally translates to "all the children of the earth and the nephews of the water", which means all of nature would spread out their own webs for it. Everything

in nature would be bringing their own webs of destiny and spreading it out. That is to say that the destiny of the child would be decided. If it were to fall on the web of a tree, it would be fated to death by a fall from a tree. If it were to fall on the web of a snake, it would be fated to die of snake bite. So, in order to save the child from such calamities, a plantain leaf is spread out in the place where the mother is undergoing labour and when the baby comes out, it is supposed to fall on that leaf and the baby is immediately named with any name that comes to the mind. This is done so that none other would be able to name it and claim it for themselves. If the name that has been given is not liked then the baby can be given a better one at the hair cutting ceremony.

The significance of the hair cutting ceremony is that it exorcises the child for the first time since its birth. The hair can be cut either inside or outside the house. While cutting the hair the *Tongrengma*<sup>36</sup> is recited. *Tongrengma* is a deity that can strike and make a person mentally retarded. This ritual is undertaken so that the baby may be normal. It follows, according to a narration by Nengman Rangsa on April 12, 2008:

***Tongrengma amua:***

*Bani sakuresawa*

*Bani sakambesawa*

*Bani tongrengmasawa*

*Ba sakurekode*

*Ba sakambekode*

*Anga guariknawa*

*Anga gua dingnawa*

*Misa misi dakako*

*Rimi rimak pil·ako*

*Icha munichana*

*Icha dudikgecha*

*Icha glaschichane*

*Icha ringdubichane*

*Ia sakureko*

*Ia sakambeko*

*A·kamana riknawa*

*Salchokona gunawa*

*Dea degrapjanane*

*Achak bao sing·jane*

*Anga guariknawa*

*Anga guadingnawa*

*Ian bipa gitichakcha*

*Ian du·rang gisucha*

*Ian misinatonga*

*Ian poomatonga*

*Ka·sindik gerindik*

*Dongnawa chanawa*

Translation:

Whence is this mad disease

Whence is this malady of the top

Whence *Tongrengma*

This disease

This malady

I will throw it away

I will chase it away

This uselessness

This intoxication

The priest asks where this disease and malady has come from and he exorcises it.

With this *Muni*

With this smelly *dikge*<sup>37</sup>

With this *glas*<sup>38</sup>

With this *ringdubi*<sup>39</sup>

This disease

This malady

Will chase it to the bottom

Throw it down

Child don't cry

The dog won't bark

He chases this malady away with the *muni* plant and the *dikges glas* and *ringdubi*. Throw it down – in the Garo version, the word *salchokon* is used which refers to the high end of the *nokachik*, the back end. According to Sembertush A. Sangma, an expert in matters pertaining to Garo culture, the chant collected is incomplete because the chant refers only to the back part of the house whereas it is conducted on both ends of the house. Child don't cry – meaning such that the child won't cry and go mad.

I will throw it away  
I will chase it away  
With this red male  
With this crowing rooster  
This is the sacrifice  
That I give you  
So that you may feel welcome  
So that you may feel comfortable

The priest is chasing it away with the help of the powerful *dikge* and also offers the chicken as a replacement.

Saying this, the child's hair is cut in the belief the spirits and deities may be playing with the new born child. After the ceremony, as mentioned



earlier, the rice, the curry and the rice beer are taken to the *kamal* or priest's house. Even if the *kamal* or priest does not come to the house on that day, the food and drink is taken to his house. Even if the *kamal* or priest came to the house on that day and partakes of the feast, as a mark of respect, the food and drink are taken to his house so that even the members of his household may be included in the feast.

The other villagers do come to the *Tongrengma amua* but the ritual is performed by the household. This is celebrated in two or three weeks, according to the situation of the household, whether rich or poor. The rice beer will be brewed for a week or two. The hair is cut when the child is able to smile. Either the mother or the father can perform this ceremony. It is usually the mother. At this time, the *kamal* is not needed.

### **2.10 *Kalkame Den·paka***

There is another ceremony called the *Kalkame Den·paka*. This ritual is performed one month after the child is born and is a ritual performed for shaving off the baby's hair. This is one ritual that is observed as a tradition in the lifetime of the Garos at the stage of infancy. According to the traditional Garo belief, if this *Kalkame Den·paka* ritual is not observed; the child is

deprived of food and drink and leads to drying up of breast milk. In this ritual, three chickens are used, out of which two may be of any colour and may either be a rooster or a hen, but the third one, which is regarded as the 'bird of good luck', called *do-rasong*, should be a red rooster. If the family observing this rite is an affluent one, the whole village is invited for the feasting, drinking and merry making.

In the ritual of *Kalkame Den-paka*, a bamboo pole is erected right through the roof in the middle of a thatched house and a youth who is a close relative climbs up to a roof and slits the neck of the *do-rasong* leaving the head of the rooster hanging by a piece of skin and its blood is made to drip down a bamboo pole. Then, the priest pushes up the bamboo pole and the youth cuts the chicken off the bamboo pole and throws it toward the backyard of the house. "*Nambi na-chi* has gone away" chants the priest as the bamboo pole is cut and thrown away. It is only after this that a priestess, who receives the baby during its birth, shaves the baby's hair off its head. According to the Garos' belief, a prayer is offered to the Creator *Rabuga* to take away all the dirt accumulated during the nine months in the mother's womb so as to make the child grow up strong and start his life on earth with hope and courage. Then the child is put on a bamboo plane and the name of the child, given by

the priest during delivery, is reaffirmed. If the name is to be changed, it can be done only by that priest, who had named the child while receiving it at birth. But most often, the name given by the priest is never changed as the Garos believe that the priest has given the name to a child only through the direction of the Creator *Rabuga*. Only if the child is unhealthy or falls sick frequently, the name can be changed, as and when the priest finds it necessary.

The intonation us as follows:

*An·gital sibo*

*Jagital nikbo*

*Kni ja·sramdike*

*Wagam warongsi chae*

*Ba·rikonga rodilonga nang·ko*

*Angan Tattaragita*

*Angan Rabugagita*

*Anga debarikrikonga*

*Jongjong ge·rikonga*

*Name ba·rikongke*

*Name rodilongke*

*Kalkamegita*

*Goeragita*

*Apa Dakgipa gita*

*Nama Rabugagita*

*Anga ra·chakonga*

*Anga sintingonga*

*Name ba·rikonge*

*Name rodilonge*

*An·gital sibo*

*Jagital nikbo*

*Anga jama raktonga*

*Janggi tangatonga*

*Apa Dakgipa*

*Nama Rabuga*

*Sing·jok anga sanjok*

*Nameha bilsokongke ja·dalongke*

*Trusikkana skang skang*

*Bisokongke*

*Ja·dagongke*

Translation:

Get a new body

Witness the next cycle of the moon,

Let the hair grow thick and long

Let the teeth grow well

You are being carried in the arms

You are being looked after,

Just like *Tattara*

Just like *Rabuga*

I am carrying my child

I am rocking my child

The first two lines imply a new person, i.e., a newborn. The priestess compares herself to *Tattara Rabuga* and the way he has looked after the baby.

Carefully looking after the child

Carefully nurturing the child

Just like *Kalkame*<sup>40</sup>

Just like *Goera*<sup>41</sup>

Just like the father, the Creator

Just like the good god *Rabuga*

I am accepting

I cannot ignore the command of god,

I am carrying the child

I am carefully nurturing the child.

The same way, the first two lines also refer to the care that is given to the child. The priestess compares the baby to *Goera Kalkame*, the thunder god, the god of strength and vitality and not to be confused with *Kalkame Kalgra*.

Acquire a new body

Witness the next cycle of the moon,

I am strengthening your soul

I am ensuring your longevity  
My father, the Creator  
The good god *Rabuga*.  
I have asked my god  
I have enquired of him<sup>42</sup>  
May you grow to be a youth  
May you become an adult  
Faster than other children of your age  
Faster than your brothers  
May you arrive at  
May you live to be an adult.

Here, the priestess is blessing the baby so that it may grow strong and live a full life. She says that she has consulted with *Dakara Rabuga*.

Thus, the rituals for the birth of a child are over, but before closing, there are certain practices that have to be mentioned. When the woman is in labour, a mixture of *araru*, *smu*, and another herb is mixed into a paste and cooked inside a bamboo, called *brennga*. It is then applied to the belly, the breasts and the waist or lower back of the woman in labour. This is done by the priestesses. The place of labour is behind the dun, called the *balkim*, which is at the high end of the house and is open on one end and in olden days it was

very high that nothing could be seen from below. The priestesses are called *mande gital sokbagipako nisogiparang* or “the ones who are waiting for the new arrival”. When the baby is born, one of the priestesses will shout *badijok* or “it has passed”. Sometimes, there is prolonged labour and the priest is tired, somebody else can take his place. The term priest is used loosely here because the Garos do not really have a designated priest as such in the village. Anyone who can officiate can do so. In the same way, any woman who can do the work that the priestesses do can do the work, for example, the mother or elder sister of the woman in labour can be the priestess.

We have mentioned everything that has to do with the birth of a child but we have not mentioned the father of a child. The father, too, has some dos and don'ts that he has to follow to ensure that his child is born well. He cannot wrap anything in plantain leaves because it is believed that should he do so during the gestation period of his wife, then when his baby is born, it would be covered. If he puts on a hat or cap or while carrying a *karai*, a cooking vessel, he should not put it on his head. These two things would block the way of the baby. When he carries a bag, he cannot sling it across but has to carry it only on one side. It is believed that slinging it across would make the baby be born in such a way that its umbilical cord would be entangled around it.

Having dealt with birth which qualifies as the initial stage of the rites of passage, the next important state is puberty and adolescence. ✓

### 2.11 Lullabies

Lullabies also form an important part during the formative years of an infant. They are usually sung by the mothers or the women who nurse them in the absence of the mothers. They are usually used to placate the baby or to put it to sleep or in various ways to bring out the expectations from a child. There are two forms of lullabies. The *dingdinga* and the *mumua*. They are both forms of lullabies. The *dingdinga* is longer and the *mumua* is a short verse that is repeated again and again until the required effect, i.e., the baby sleeps. There are no set words or verses for these lullabies because they are often made up according to the situation and sometimes are even nonsense rhymes. Following are an example each of both these forms.

#### ***Dingdinga:***

*Dingding do·ma dingding*

*Dingding dingding*

*Koka rarinado·ma!*

*Dingding dingding*  
*Nadi bipaknademo, matma,*  
*Dingding dingding*  
*Dingding do·ma*  
*Janggal inno me·rori sala*  
*Koka inno bidosi rapa,*  
*Dingding dingding*  
*Nadi bipakgipamo matma;*  
*Dingding dingding*  
*Janggal ino me·roni sala,*  
*Dingding dingding do·ma*  
*Koka ino bidosi sala,*  
*Dingding dingding matma*  
*Dingding do·ma*  
*Dingding matma,*  
*Ki·me inno mijareng*  
*Dingding dingding do·ma;*  
*Dangtiti dangti matma*  
*Amani grong reproka matma,*  
*Dangtiti dangti*  
*Ken·chong wa·pang chitroka do·mako,*  
*Dangtiti dangti*  
*Kattaricha reproka matmako,*  
*Dangtiti dangti*  
*Ken·chong sama pangpilcha wapila matmako,*  
*Dangtiti dangti*

*Dangtiti dangti do·ma*

*Dangtiti dangti matma.*

Translation:

*Dingding<sup>43</sup> do·ma<sup>44</sup> dingding*

*Dingding dingding*

You can wear the *koka*<sup>45</sup>, *do·ma*!

*Dingding dingding*

You can place your earlobe by the pillar<sup>46</sup>, *matma*<sup>47</sup>,

*Dingding dingding*

*Dingding do·ma*

Draw two parallel lines on your back

Tie the *koka* beautifully,

*Dingding dingding*

The words *dingding* do not have any meaning and as such was not translatable. The lines above are rhymes that tell the child that it can dress up and make itself beautiful and sit in the clean places.

Sit yourself by the flat pillar, *matma*;

*Dingding dingding*

Draw two parallel lines on your back,

*Dingding dingding do·ma*

Tie the *koka* beautifully,

*Dingding dingding matma*

*Dingding do·ma*

*Dingding matma,*

The tail<sup>48</sup> is like the ear of rice

*Dingding dingding do·ma;*

The *pakma* or the flat pillar is a part of the *nokachik*. The two parallel lines refer to the lines on the back of the leech, it implies that the child can dress up and make itself beautiful, wearing the *koka*. The words *do·ma* or the migratory duck and *matma* or the buffalo are used for a boy, so from these words, we can ascertain that this rhyme was sung for a boy. The tail of the buffalo is compared to an ear of rice. The buffalo's tail signifies the strength of a boy.

*Dangtiti<sup>49</sup> dangti matma*

Your mother has sharpened your horns, *matma*,<sup>50</sup>

*Dangtiti dangti*

Combed your unkempt hair, *do·ma*,

*Dangtiti dangti*

Sharpened with a knife, *matma*,

*Dangtiti dangti*

Combed your hair, *matma*,

*Dangtiti dangti*

*Dangtiti dangti do·ma*

*Dangtiti dangti matma.*

*Dangtiti* is supposed to be the sound that is made by a bell, like the one that is tied to the buffalo's neck. *Amani ki·me dong·sia* literally means that the mother's tail is untidy, but it is not clear on what context it falls in in this lullaby. Sharpening and combing the hair signify that the mother has taken care of her child and cleaned him and dressed him up.

***Mumua:***

*Owai... owai... ooh!*

*Ma·na jojong grapa oh!*

*Cho·cho cha·na grapa oh!*

*Ama ba·na re·ango*

*Ama nateng tapata oh!*

*Bolrikkongo dandano*

*Atching din chikata oh!*

Translation:

*Owai... owai... ooh!*<sup>51</sup>

Why are you crying, my little boy oh!

Crying to be breastfed oh!

When your mother has come to carry you



When she touches you with her cheek oh!

When you leaned against the tree

An ant bit you oh!

The *mumua* is usually sung when a child cries. Anything that rhymes can be sung, but the tunes usually remain the same.

### 2.12 Adolescence and the system of the *Nokpante*

The *Nokpante*<sup>52</sup> is a dormitory for the adolescent young men and bachelors. It is a unique and distinctive institution and is not found among other neighbouring tribes. It is an institution because it is through this that a boy learns to be a man. It is here that he learns all the life-skills and the knowledge that he would require later in life. When a boy attains adolescence, or from the age of around seven or eight, he would have to go and sleep in the *Nokpante*.

Huberth C. Marak, in his seminar paper on *Nokpante*<sup>53</sup> gives the following description:

“They say that a man is first a bachelor, and then he gets married and start a family and build a house for (his) himself. Therefore *Nokpante* is built in a much elaborate manner than house. If a settlement is big, a number of *Nokpantes* were

constructed according chatchi or *ma'chong*<sup>54</sup>. In Emangre<sup>55</sup>, there were five Nokpantes for five clans: Areng, Nengminja, Re'ma, Gabil and Manda<sup>56</sup>. Two or more chatchis never slept together in the same Nokpante.

In the past, the intertribal feuds and the wild animals were of continuous threat. Therefore Goera Kalkame<sup>57</sup> is summoned to stay in the village in order to protect them from these formidable dangers. Nokpante was built in order to house this god of strength<sup>58</sup>. Some folklore recounts that it was *Gring Me'a Gring Pante* who went to the 'Middle-earth Kingdom'<sup>59</sup> and after seeing their magnificent Bachelors' House wanted to build the same on earth. That was the beginning of Nokpante. But this kind of tale is told differently in different regions."<sup>60</sup>

They will learn everything that they will need in the *Nokpante*. The knowledge will be passed on from the seniors and the elders. They will be taught everything from warfare, how to handle a *mil-am*, *spi*<sup>61</sup> and *dani*<sup>62</sup>, how to handle a spear, how to make wickerwork from cane and bamboo, how to make the general all-purpose *wa-ding* or bamboo strips, how to weave the split and flattened bamboo for making the walls of houses, how to hunt, how to build a house, etc. It is in this institution that the boys with aptitude go on to become *kamals* and story tellers. It is here that a boy finds out what he is truly meant for and go on to excel in it be it hunting or fighting or making wickerwork or building a house, etc. Looking at the modern educational system, we can see that this institution was far more advanced in the overall

development of the individual, a concept which was there in the Garos' social system, which is only now being re-discovered by modern researchers and being implemented experimentally. No female is allowed to step inside the *Nokpante* except during some festivals.

There are no set rules on the age at which a boy can go to the *Nokpante*. According to 75 year old Leben Dagal Sangma of Rongri Gittim, Rongsu, a boy would go to the *Nokpante* as soon as he felt that he was not afraid to sleep away from his parents anymore. The only rule being that he should not be too young. However, on the other hand, a boy could not sleep in his parents' house any longer once he reached adolescence.

As such, there are no rites of passage or rituals to mark this. It just happened that one day the boy would go to the *Nokpante* and not return to sleep in his parents' home again. It was a kind of assertion of independence, something that the non-literate or ancient Garos learnt early on and was mandatory practice. It also created productive individuals and benefitted the society as a whole because, unless the individual was extremely lazy or mentally challenged, there were no useless men in the village. The whole duration of a boy's stay in the *Nokpante* was a transition period from infancy

to adulthood and by the time he would get married, the boy would become capable of taking on his responsibilities.

If such was the case that a bachelor didn't want to get married, then he could stay on in the *Nokpante* and take care of it and teach the juniors.

Mihir N. Sangma, in his book *Some Important Festivals and Ceremonies of the Garos*, gives the structure of the institute of a *Nokpante*. According to him, the *Nokpante* had ten usages:

1. As a sleeping house for the unmarried men and boys of the village.
2. As a training centre or school. Since there were no formal schools, the *Nokpante* was a major centre for knowledge in the village.
3. As a technical or engineering institute. It may sound a bit too modern for a traditional house of knowledge, but this was where they taught construction and fabrication. The dressing of house posts, tie beams and collection of various materials for house construction, designs for walling and flooring using various materials, etc were taught here. Wood carving, cane and bamboo wicker work, mats, winnowing materials, etc and preparation of handles for various agricultural implements and war weapons were also included in the curriculum. There were contests between different *Nokpantes* that resulted in exchange of ideas. They were also taught fixing, fitting, joints

and fastening of materials. So when they went out of the *Nokpante* after marriage, they were well equipped with practical knowledge.

4. As a music school. The various forms of folk songs and other oral traditions with indigenous tunes accompanied by various indigenous instruments were taught here. Not only the tunes but also the construction of the various musical instruments was also taught here.

5. As an agricultural institute. They already knew about jhum cultivation, having helped out their parents in their fields. In the *Nokpante* they were allowed to cultivate independently and thereby learning in the process.

6. As a warfare training centre. They were taught the uses and techniques of the various weapons of war and also to lay traps for defending the village.

7. As a club-house and physical training centre. The young boys used to be involved in various physical sports and took part in competitions for pure fun and physical fitness.

8. As an industrial training centre. Various industrial activities were taught here, like timber dressing, wood curbing, wicker making, etc. In olden days, a Garo village was entirely self sufficient with all the necessary requirements being available or fabricated in the village.

9. As a medical institute. The Garos had three traditional forms of healing. *Krita* or *Amua*, i.e., healing with sacrificial offerings to deities. *Samra*

*sampila*, healing with medicinal herbs and *jaria*, healing with concentration on certain devices. These three forms of healing were taught at the *Nokpante*.

10. As a rest house. If the village had any visitors from far off villages, the *Nokpante* was used as a rest house for the weary travellers (male). The female travellers would sleep in the houses of the villagers with the girls.

Apart from these uses, Dr. Milton Sangma gives one more usage for a *Nokpante*, as a court house and a community centre. The famous decision taken in front of the *Nokpante* of Bonepa, a very influential chief, was to change the system from patriarchal to matriarchal because the former did not suit their new environments<sup>63</sup>. The custom of bringing the girl's father's nephew to marry the heiress was also decided at this place. According to legend, this *Nokpante* was about 183 cubic metres long and was located on top of Misi Kokdok hill.

The end of the *nokpantes* came about with the advent of Christianity when the missionaries, with little understanding of the role this institution played in the social education of the Garos, converted them to school-cum-church institutions<sup>64</sup>. They substituted one institute of learning with another vastly incomplete institute of learning.

There were no such facilities for the young adolescent girls in Garo society. Though this may be the case, the girls were also not deprived of gaining knowledge that would teach them to be good homemakers. They helped out in and around the household and in the course of their chores, they were taught the various skills necessary for a homemaker. They also worked in the jhum fields with the other women, where they also learned about other social mores.

Thus, in Garo society, no one was left out from the pursuit of knowledge and everyone learned the same things equally according to their gender. All knowledge was practical and the process of acquiring it made for a very close knit society.



**Endnotes:**

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- <sup>1</sup> One of the names of the Supreme Deity in the Garo pantheon
  - <sup>2</sup> Rongmuthu, Dewansing. *The Folk-Tales of the Garos*. ISBN 81-86416-65-X. pp. 115 (First published 1960)
  - <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
  - <sup>4</sup> 25.4954600°N 90.6168200°E
  - <sup>5</sup> *Tetrameles nudiflora*
  - <sup>6</sup> *Schima wallichii*
  - <sup>7</sup> A two edged sword used by the Garos
  - <sup>8</sup> An expression. Without any meaning
  - <sup>9</sup> Sound effect of blowing
  - <sup>10</sup> Name of a hardwood tree with edible fruits, said to have soothing powers for a woman in labour
  - <sup>11</sup> Offering of a red rooster
  - <sup>12</sup> A species of tree. Its bark is used as belts to hang the wicker baskets from the head.
  - <sup>13</sup> The Garo language does not have gender specific pronouns, so it is not

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certain whether any of the deities are male or female. In this case, the pronoun “he” is used for ease of use.

- 14 Another name for Tattara Rabuga
- 15 Kimbal is a medium sized tree whose leaves are used in sacrificial ceremonies to deities.
- 16 Dagal is a grass-like plant, also used in sacrificial ceremonies
- 17 As in crown of the head. The soft crown of a new born
- 18 i.e, before the newborn is steady on its feet
- 19 A medicinal root
- 20 Names of dikges
- 21 Do·magipa me·chibram – a phrase used for a baby
- 22 A slippery fish
- 23 The narrator’s own words
- 24 Dakara Rabuga/Tattara Rabuga – Two of the many names of the creator in the Garo pantheon
- 25 Sti mendia, rae pan·chonga – To create
- 26 Janggi-Jama – life and soul
- 27 A·ning Chining – The Underworld

- <sup>28</sup> Amika-Aski – Names that are usually substituted in place of real names.
- <sup>29</sup> Seven is a number associated with the divine
- <sup>30</sup> Kaksi – a container for water used in rituals.
- <sup>31</sup> Sko Takorima Ja·ping Damborima – The first hen that was taken from the Underworld by the Eagle, Ureng Me·a Kokeng Pante. It was seen by Sani Aje, the man, and was reared by him and used for various rituals as sacrifice.
- <sup>32</sup> Jajil Mitapo Pakma Kurio – The Underworld, also known as A·ning Chining
- <sup>33</sup> Gitol Gisil – The ceremonial gongs used by the Garos. The belief is that in the Underworld, before the hen was brought out from there by the eagle, it used to lay its eggs in these gongs and was kept in an enclosure made of these gongs.
- <sup>34</sup> Species of bamboo
- <sup>35</sup> Skal – a human astral vampire in the form of a human head. (Sangma, Dewansing Rongmitu. *Jadoreng*, p. 152). They are generally psychic vampires and feeds of the psychic energies of a person whereby the person wastes away due to incurable vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

- 36 Name of a deity
- 37 A medicinal plant
- 38 A type of dikge
- 39 Another type of dikge
- 40 Kalkame – god of strength and protector of life and the village from the outside aggression and pestilence
- 41 Goera – god of thunder and lightning, of strength and protection
- 42 This probably refers to the act of divination, in which the priest tries to find out the longevity of the baby's life, the rate of child mortality being high.
- 43 Meaningless word, used for its soothing sound
- 44 Do·ma is actually a migratory duck that flies high up in the sky. It is used as a term of endearment for boys.
- 45 Koka – kokasil, a headgear made of silver. The line means to wear nice And proper clothes and sit in a clean place.
- 46 Nadi – earlobe, bipak – a flat pillar, inside a traditional house. The line means sitting in those places.

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- 47 Matma – buffalo, a term of endearment used for boys
- 48 The buffalo’s tail, signifies the strength of a boy
- 49 Meaningless word, used to signify the sound of a bell
- 50 The mother nurtures the boy as he is growing up, as if the horns of a buffalo are sharpened
- 51 Meaningless expressions
- 52 Nok – house, Pante - bachelor
- 53 Unpublished as of date
- 54 Clan
- 55 A village in South Garo Hills
- 56 These are exogamous sects or ma·chong each belonging to one chatchi or the other. According to the findings by Major Playfair, there are 138 sects among the Garos. According to L.M. Holbrook in Ku·rongdik A·chikku into English Dictionary (first published 1998), there are 301 sects.
- 57 Goera- the spirit of strength and the one who causes lightening.  
Kalkame- He is the elder brother of Goera and is the caretaker of all men on earth.

<sup>58</sup> Momin, A C. *A·chik Ku·andik*. P 3

<sup>59</sup> Here the 'Middle-earth Kingdom' (sic) refers to A·ning Chining or the Underworld. Though the term 'Middle-earth Kingdom' sounds good, it is borrowed from Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkein and is in no way similar to the Garos' concept of nor is it applicable in the context of A·ning Chining.

<sup>60</sup> Marak, Huberth C. NEHU Seminar paper entitled *A·chik nok – the art of house construction*.

<sup>61</sup> Rectangular Garo shield, usually cane wicker or carved from wood

<sup>62</sup> Round Garo shield made from wood and covered in buffalo or rhino hide.

<sup>63</sup> Sangma, Milton. *History of Education in Garo Hills*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1985. P 2-3

<sup>64</sup> Marak, Jacqueline R. *Contributions of the Christian Missionaries Towards the Garo Language and Literature*. P 233. — year ?

## *Chapter III*

# *Rites and Rituals during Marriage Negotiations and Ceremony*

## CHAPTER III

### Rites and Rituals during Marriage Negotiations and Ceremony

#### 3.01 Introduction

When ~~the~~<sup>a</sup> Garo crosses from adolescence to adulthood, the time comes for him/her to get married. Marriage is a complex ritual and does not end in just the marriage ceremony itself, but certain other elaborate steps have to be taken only after which the couple can live as a husband and wife. Even before the ceremony, there are a lot of issues that need to be considered. First of all, are the negotiations with the family of the groom for his hand in marriage. In bygone eras, this was usually the case when the prospective groom for *Nokkrom* or a man marrying the heiress.

Most of the marriages were and still are being arranged by the woman's family and the man would have to go and live in his in-laws' house after marriage. Sometimes, it would so happen that both the man and the woman would be forced into the marriage. The ceremonies are more or less the same in all the areas though in modern times, Christian customs have been adopted, while still retaining some of the traditional customs.



Dr. Milton S. Sangma, in his book *History and Culture of the Garos*<sup>1</sup>, has listed a number of forms of marriages. they are:

1. *Do·sia*
2. Marriage by capture
3. *Cha·senga*
4. *Cha·dila*
5. *Tunapa*
6. *Chame Jika*
7. *Seka*
8. *On·songa*
9. Mother-in-law Marriage
10. Child Marriage
11. Christian Marriage

Though these are given as the forms of marriage, *cha·senga*, *cha·dila*, *tunapa* and *chame jika* more proposals than forms of marriage.

### **3.02 Types of Sons-in-Law in Garo Society**

There are two kinds of sons-in-law in Garo society. Since it is a matrilineal society, the line of inheritance goes in the female line and the child will also take the mother's name. Generally, the youngest daughter inherits the house and the property of the parents, though in some cases, the daughter who will take care of the parents in their old age will inherit the property. The two

kinds of sons-in-law are *chawari*, the husband of the daughter who will not inherit the property, and *nokkrom*, the husband of the daughter who will inherit the property, the heiress, and look after the parents in their old age.

When a marriage of a woman is to be fixed, it is usually her male relatives, the maternal uncles and elder brothers and cousins, called the *chra*, who usually go to the prospective groom's house to ask his parents. Even if the parents give their consent, sometimes the prospective grooms are unwilling. If such was the situation in the case of a *chawari*, then the *chra* will try again for about six or seven times that year to convince him. If he still remains adamant, then they will pass him over and go on to the next prospective groom and so on until they get a willing one. If it were the case of a *nokkrom*, the one who will stay in the in-laws' house and take care of them, then they can reserve him for three to five years. Usually for a *nokkrom*, the prospective groom is the nephew of the woman's father. This is usually done to keep the inheritance in the family, and also because since he is a close kin of the father-in-law, in their old age, he will not abandon them. This was a kind of safeguard against the debilitation of old age. Sometimes, the nephew is reserved<sup>2</sup> by the uncle for his daughter even if he is still a child. If the woman's father does not have any nephews or if they have all got married, the next preference is the next closest kin, like second or third cousins and so on.

Even if there are no eligible men in those ranks, the next choice would be any eligible bachelor of the same clan as the woman's father.

In the period of reservation, if the man happens to have an affair with another woman, or if the woman has an affair with another man and they get caught, then the guilty one has to pay a fine. This is called *ba-ra sakki kotip sakki* or "the cloth and turban as evidence". When a man has been reserved for a woman, the woman will keep a piece of his clothing with her. This is called *ba-ra sakki kotip sakki*. Until the man has been released from reservation, the woman will keep the piece of cloth with her and in that period, if the woman should have an affair with another man and gets caught, then she would have to pay for that *ba-ra sakki kotip sakki*. If on the other hand, the man has an affair with another woman during that period and gets caught, the other woman will have to pay the woman who has the *ba-ra sakki kotip sakki*.

There is a fine. If the man cannot be convinced to marry the woman and his cloth is returned by the woman, then he has been released and after that, whatever indiscretions he may have, will not have any consequences, except for societal ones. This is why the woman keeps his cloth, as evidence that he has already been reserved for her in the event of any indiscretions. After the fine has been paid, it is not that the guilty party can walk away, but it depends on the clans of both. Even if the clan does not allow, if they both like

each other, then they could elope and the clan would not be able to do anything. So, after the fine has been paid, they can walk away. If they should listen to their clans, then the man can say that he will break off with his lover and go with the one who has already been betrothed to him. The guilty party has to pay a fine for the *kotip sakki ba-ra sakki*, which is called *a-kim* or the invisible bond that binds the two clans of the married couple. Before monetary system, the fines were paid in kind, such as gong, *mil-am*, etc. With the advent of the monetary system, fines were paid in currency.

### 3.03 Marriage Negotiations

Since the marriage of an heiress was a notable event, the prospective son-in-law had to be someone the girl's parents could trust to take care of them in their old age. As such, there were elaborate customs that had to be followed before he could be taken in as the *nokkrom*. Before everything, the girl's parents and other male relatives will go to the boy's house to seek for his hand for the girl. This is called *chawari sing-a*. Usually, a *nokkrom* had to be one of the girl's father's nephews, either close or distant. The following is a song called *Demechikna Se Sandiani* or Searching for a Husband for the Daughter. It is sung by the father of the girl who goes to his *ma-nok*<sup>3</sup> to ask for his nephew as his son-in-law. It goes:

*Ajinganga anga in*

*Ajing anga ai!*

*Atcha nanggo, nanggo*

*Atcha nanggo, nanggo*

*Angade do·ma gita bilbajok*

*Do·ma gita bilbajok*

*Matma gita jokbajok, sokbajok*

*Grong dagongobamo*

*Amana gitingnasa bilbaa*

*Ja de jatengoba*

*Ja de jaranoba*

*Damilna ra·ninasa jokbaa*

*Angade a·ni bolmandalni*

*A·ni bolmandalkosa su·songnaa man·paja*

*Chini bolgipokkosa dilgatna changpaja*

*Gitingkodemo, angni gitingdrangko*

*Angni ra·nidrangko*

*Kambekode noknade gatjajok*

*Ja·pang janenade changjajok, changjajok*

*Angademo ja·pang karameongjokbamo*

*Angade kambe do·tekmeongjokbamo oe*

*Chameana donongjok*

*Dimbraana gatongjok da·ning,*

*Angni gitingdrangnamo*

*Angni ra·nidrangnamo*

*Angade dongatangming rikilming gujiajokona*

*Kawatangming kawiming a·bachengamo a·bachenga,*

*Gitingna ja·riarisamo*

*Ra·nina jajokarisa angade*

*Songgabatarongjokone*

*E·toriarongjokne,*

*Dipana ja·reangeming*  
*Snana jajokangeming.*

Translation:

*Ajinganga anga in*

*Ajinganga ai!*

*Atcha nanggo, nanggo*

*Atcha nanggo, nanggo<sup>4</sup>*

I have come flying like the *do·ma*

Flying like the *do·ma*

I have reached, escaped like the buffalo

With huge horns

Came flying for my mother, the banyan tree

Here, the father of the girl likens himself to the *do·ma*, the migratory duck (line 5). He says that just like the migratory bird returns to the place where it was hatched, every year, he has returned to the place of his birth. The words *do·ma* and *matma* or buffalo are used as terms of endearment for boys. Here, the man compares his mother to the banyan tree, a tree that gives shelter and food for its denizens. The line implies that he has returned to his roots.

When the moon is bright

When it is winter

I have escaped for the *damil*, the *ra·ni*

I am of the earth, of the *jathropa* tree

I have not been able to plant the earth's *jathropa*

I cannot bring the water's white wood  
 The banyan tree, my banyan trees  
 My beloved *ma·nok*  
 The top has not been taken to the house

This custom of looking for a prospective groom for the heiress usually takes place during October and November, before *a·galmaka* (line 10). The *damil* and the *ra·ni* signify his *ma·nok*, or the relatives of his matrilineal lineage. Since he is the son, he will be settled anywhere, and from there, he has returned to the place of his birth to look for a groom for his daughter (line 13). Line 14 implies that he doesn't have a *nokkrom* yet. White wood means the *gambari* tree. The line means that he has not found a good man for her. Meaning his return to his roots (line 16). If he had a son-in-law, his household would prosper just like the tree tops grew higher (line 19).

I can no longer strengthen the trunk  
 My trunk is diseased  
 I am not going any higher  
 I have come because there is someone eligible  
 I have come because you have so many,  
 My banyan trees  
 My beloveds  
 I have come for an agreement  
 To start with my beloveds  
 I have come from far for my banyan tree

Returned to my beloveds  
 I have crossed different lands  
 I have returned  
 I have come home  
 Where I was stung by the ant

He is unable to lead the household anymore (Line 20). Like the vegetables die out because they have acquired a disease (line 21). Meaning the eligible bachelors (line 24). Meaning that he had returned to the place where he grew up, to his mother's house (line 34).

The next is his sister's, i.e., the prospective groom's mother, reply. It is called *Depanteko Chawarina On-sona Man-gijani* or the Inability to Give the Son's Hand. It is called thus so that the man might not have any expectations of his nephew, his son-in-law. It goes like this:

*Do·mani Dira dobao magna*  
*Matmani a·ging gabao nengramo*  
*Achria rongnangja*  
*Nang·ni ama waridrango*  
*Gripchia daknangja*  
*Nang·ni giting a·jadrango*  
*Pan ja·gi dilgata*  
*Bako dilgatnok do·mana?*  
*Nokgil sawe su·songna*  
*Bako su·songnokmo matmana?*

*Gualirinokai do·ma*  
*Walpilarinokai matma,*  
*Chong jakrimiloba*  
*'Bao chong cham·gnok?' ine*  
*Do·made gualgnok, do·made,*  
*Bokja kramchioba,*  
*'Bao bokja enggnok?' ine*  
*Matmade walpilgnok, matmade.*

Translation:

Your fatiguing climb is for naught  
The buffalo's climb is tiring  
Through difficult terrain  
To your mother, the deep pool  
The impenetrable forest  
To the land of your banyan tree  
Training the betel leaf vine  
Which can we train for you?  
Planting the *sawe*<sup>5</sup> behind the house  
Which one can we plant?

The Garos usually used to stay in hilly areas, so here, it signifies that he had climbed uphill (line 1). Comparing his mother to a deep pool. Meaning that he has returned where he is surrounded by his own kith and kin, it is as if he had waded into a deep pool (line 4). He is surrounded by his relatives (line 5) His mother's village (line 6). To take to his home, like training a vine or

creeper to climb a tree (line 7). Who can we give you? (line 8). Who can we give? (line 10)

We will forget, *do·ma*  
 You will have to return, *matma*,  
 Even if the harpoon is inconvenient to use  
 Saying, ‘Which harpoon will be worn out?’  
 You will forget, *do·ma*,  
 With a bundle of clothes,  
 Saying, ‘Which bundle will be opened?’  
 You will have to return, buffalo.

He’ll have to return empty handed (lines 11 and 12). But if you want we will have to send someone, even if he is of no use for you (line 15).

Then, at last, the sister will give her son to her brother as a son-in-law. The next song is called *Depanteko Chawarina Watatani* or Sending Off the Son to his In-laws. It goes like this:

*Songchigita drina*  
*Do·ga gita balbangna nipile do·mana*  
*Mamatangni bimanggita ong·jaoba*  
*Pan ja·gi dilgate donrikonga*  
*Nokgil sawe su·songe rorikonga,*  
*Songchi gita dria*  
*Do·ga gita balbanga,*  
*Mamatang gita ha·aijawa*  
*O·gito gita ma·manjawa,*

*Mamatang gitade sokjawa*

*O·gito gitade man·jawa.*

Translation:

Like pillars in a row

Hinged like a door, for *do·ma*

Even if his form is not like his uncle's

We are training the betel leaf

Planting the *sawe* behind the house

In rows like pillars

Hinged like a door,

He won't be as wise as his uncle

He won't be as wise as his father-in-law,

He will not reach his uncle's status

He will not be able like his father-in-law.

Even if he is not upto your expectations, we are giving him to you (line 4). In the last four lines, the boy's mother is asking her brother, the girl's father not to get his expectations up.

The previous portion was in verse form. The following is a part of the same thing in prose form.

The girl's father will ask:

*Angade kal·e cha·na rimi cha·na amjaongjok. Angnade gri angjongko on·na nangchongmota. Angni jomani salo, saani salo, sa nirokgen, sa amugen, sa samra sampilgen?*

Translation:

I am growing old and unable to till the land nor look after myself. My nephew<sup>6</sup> has to be given to me. Or else who will look after me or treat me when I fall sick or grow weak?

The father or the mother of the boy will reply:

*Kam gong·jaoba, a·sel sapjaoba na·songtangtang mamasa gisie nerie cha·naode rimangbo.*

Translation:

Even if he is lazy and does not know any work, it's up to you. If you want to quarrel and stay then take him.

After all the negotiations are complete, only then can the marriage be solemnised. Usually Chawari Singa or marriage negotiations take place at night and goes on till cock crows.

### **3.04 Do·sia**

*Do·sia* is the official marriage ceremony of the Garos. Of this Playfair has to say this:

“There is very little of a religious nature in Garo marriages. No sacrifices are offered up, nor are any of the usual emblems of religion erected as in ceremonies connected with births and death. The nearest approach to anything of a religious nature is the consulting of omens by the village priest, to ascertain whether the wedded couple will be happy and prosperous or the reverse.”<sup>7</sup>

The ceremony itself is not too complicated. Three chickens are required for the ceremony. A hen for the man and a cock for the woman and a red rooster called a *do·rasong* or rooster of destiny. The ceremony is performed by the *kamal*.

The *kamal* first takes the cock meant for the woman and slaps her on the back with it and intones the following:

*Dera dedera*

*Songde amira,*

*Mini chawariagita*

*Mini jakgitokagita,*

*Badagonggita,*

*Chagongbone*

*Bibakbone*

*Amikanaming*

*Askinaming*

*Do·siongane*

*Do·dokongane*

*Iahai!*

Translation:

Like my own child  
 From my mother's land,  
 Just like the hand was asked for before  
 Just like the hand was tied before,  
 Like the *badagong*,  
 Stand tall  
 Be strong  
 For so and so,  
 For so and so  
 This rooster is being killed  
 This rooster is being sacrificed  
 Here it is!

Line 1 and line 2, the priest mentions just like his child from his mother's land. This is because usually, *do·sia* was performed when the son-in-law was supposed to be the *nokkrom* and the custom for the *nokkrom* is that the *nokkrom* had to be the nephew, the girl's father's sister's son. So, the nephew would indeed be like his own son and that, too, from his mother's land, i.e., of the same matrilineal lineage as himself. This is the reason that in most villages, there have been only two clans in a household for generations, the wives of one matrilineal lineage and the men also of one matrilineal lineage. Line 3 and 4 refer to the time when the girl's parents went to the boy's parents to ask for his hand in marriage with their daughter. *Badagong* is a vine, the married life of the to be married is being compared to the vine that

entwines itself to trees and plants that it is nigh impossible to separate and just as the vine is, let them in their married life be inseparable. The “so and so”-s in line 9 and 10 will be substituted with the names of the persons getting married.

After saying these words, the *kamal* will rip off the head of the cock with his bare hands and throw it to the middle of the house. After the cock has stopped its flapping about, the *kamal* will take the hen meant for the man and slap him on the back with it and intone the following:

*Amikanaming,*

*Askinaming*

*Dira dedera gita,*

*Songde amira gita,*

*Mini tikkniagita,*

*Mini jakgitokagita,*

*Badagonggita*

*Ka·pakongane*

*Iahai!*

Translation:

For so and so,

For so and so,

Like my own child,

From my mother’s land,

Just like it was fixed before,

Just like the hand was tied before,

Like the *badagong*

The yearning

Here it is!

Then the *kamal* will rip off the head of the hen and let it go. After the hen has stopped flapping, what happens and where it lands is observed. Does the cock killed for the woman face the man? And in the same way, does the hen killed for the man face the woman? These things are also taken into account. If the hen killed for the man faces the woman, then it is believed that the man likes the woman. In the same way, if the cock killed for the woman faces the man then it is believed that the woman, too, likes the man. After this has been observed, the entrails will be checked for divination. The intestines will be picked up and divined. It is believed that if the intestines are full, then the couple will have good fortune and if the intestines were empty it would be the other way around. After the entrails have been looked at, the *do-rasong* will be killed. While anyone who knows how to perform the ceremony can be the *kamal*, only experts can kill the *do-rasong*. This is because the *do-rasong* has to be cut in such a way that blood does not spray all over. The blood has to be allowed to spill only on a single piece of *wa·si*<sup>8</sup>. The *kamal*, or whoever it is that will cut the *do-rasong*, will hold the *atte*<sup>9</sup> on the ground with one foot on top of the *wa·si* flooring and cut off its head. Then he will allow the blood to flow and collect in a single piece of *wa·si*. It should be such that the blood

does not spray here and there. If the blood should flow and collect in a single piece of *wa-si* then it is believed that the married life of the couple will be peaceful. If the blood should spray all over the place, then it is believed that they will have a tumultuous married life. After the ceremony, the chicken will be cooked, the *do-rasong* separately. The man should not eat the chicken whose entrails were used for divination. It is something that should not be done. The woman's side will offer it to the man anyway, but he should not eat it. Instead, he can eat the *do-rasong*.

After the divination, the intestines used in the divination for the man will be burned in the fire and it is believed that if the intestine bursts then the man is sharp witted. If it just burns, then the father-in-law is smarter.

That evening, since both the man and the woman would be unwilling, the man would try to run away. Even if they like each other, the groom will run away. This running away is a sort of precaution against future quarrels. Even if the groom likes the bride, he must run away at least once or twice, because if he does not run away, but stays on the day of the marriage, should there be any quarrel between the husband and wife in future, the husband would be able to say anything as the wife can then say that she did not really like him in the first place, but he had come subserviently. So, it is a must that the groom should run away once or twice. Every time the groom runs away, he

will be brought back by the male relatives of the bride. ~~Since the ceremony~~ has already been performed, it will not be repeated again. Instead, they will eat and drink rice beer. When the groom runs away, the bride is also supposed to run after him with a *kerang*<sup>10</sup> on her back. Then, the groom will bring her back. Sometimes he escorts her back to her house.

**Case Study:** According to the source, Bhimsing M. Sangma of Sadolpara village in West Garo Hills, he, too, ran away from his wife. He ran away, his wife followed. He escorted her back to her house, drank some rice beer, ate food cooked by his wife and then came away again. He says that even though the groom may not like the bride, he should at least keep her dignity and escort her back to her house as a gentleman would do. The dislike should be kept within himself.

On the night of the ceremony, there is something called *tudila*, which is done by the male relatives of the bride to safeguard against the groom running away. What will happen is that the bride and the groom will have to lie together side by side and the male relatives of the bride will surround them in such that the groom cannot run away. The doors will be locked and the heavy wooden mortars used for pounding rice will be pushed against them. They will hang bells on the door such that if he tries to run away, the bells will alert them. The new groom would have to be very clever to run away undetected, it

was a kind of testing of wits. In days past, the men used to keep long hair, sometimes the groom would tie the hair of two or three persons together such that even if he was detected, he could run away easily while they tried to untangle their hair. These become anecdotal incidents that can be related later in some family gatherings among the male members.

After the groom runs away, the bride will follow him with a *kerang* on her back. The groom will welcome her into his parents' house, eat together because since she is new at the place, she might not be comfortable. This is done whether he goes back to stay with her or not. This is done so that she can tell others that even though he did not come, he treated her well.

In some areas, on the other hand, the groom will take his portions of food and take it up to the tree top. When the groom is eating, the bride will try to make the food fall by hitting it with a stick and when it falls she would eat it. Then the groom would come down and because he is starving has the food with her. If this happens then it meant that they were destined for each other.



### **3.05 Marriage by Capture**

When a girl has attained a marriageable age, if she wants to marry a particular boy, she tells her parents or any of her relatives of her intentions. As soon as her male relatives come to know of her desires, they would watch the

movements of the boy and once the opportunity arose would abduct him and bring him to the house of the girl and confine him alone with the girl for more than one night. In the course of his capture, if he should struggle and make quite a ruckus, then it was considered a good sign as he would make a good husband. Robbins Burling, in his book *Rengsanggri*<sup>11</sup>, describes one such event of bridegroom capture that he witnessed during his stay in Rengsanggri village. He recounts:

“I was sitting in Rengsanggri one afternoon when three shy-looking youths from another village wandered in and inquired where they might find Unon. Everybody chuckled, and somebody replied that he might be out in the fields, and suggested that the boys go there and look for him. The boys walked out in the direction of the fields, until they came over the crest of a hill from which Unon could be seen cultivating in the company of half a dozen other people. Here the boys split up, so as to close in on him from all sides. Unon did not realize his peril until one boy was almost next to him. He started to flee but was caught, and after a brief struggle he recognized the uneven odds, surrendered, and let himself be led calmly to Waramgri, where a girl was waiting, hoping to become his bride.”<sup>12</sup>

A single foray did not usually lead to a marriage because the boy would invariably run away. He is then pursued by the male relatives of the girl and brought back. If he runs away a third time, then the girl's relatives will let him go on the account that he really doesn't like the girl. Even if he likes the girl, it was a mandatory custom for him to run away at least once. The capture of the

bridegroom can take place anywhere including the marketplace and other public areas, not only in secluded spots and the abduction will not be interfered with by anyone from the boy's village.

### **3.06 *Cha·senga* – or proposal through service in the boy's family**

It is said that where ever a woman goes she carries a mortar and pestle with her. This is to say that where ever she goes, she helps out with the household chores. Men do not do this, but a woman had to do it. If she would not do it then this happened. If she went to her in-laws' house, and she did not do an ounce of work, it would mean that she did not like her husband. That is why, even if she did not want to, she had to do it. In the case of the marriage, after the bride followed her groom to his parents' house, she would do the household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing utensils, etc. This showed to her in-laws' that she was hardworking and would keep their son happy. This is called as *cha·senga*. This for usually took place when the groom in question was the son of the girl's maternal uncle. When they are alone, then they will talk and during the course of their talk, they find that they like each other, then the bride will stay on for a month at her in-laws' house. Even if they find that they do not like each other, she will stay for at least a week and help out with the chores. If she has stayed on for a month, then the husband will return with her back to her house, because he has seen that she will make a good wife, and settle down in his in-laws' house. It is not that the man follows the woman, but

he goes with her. If he's not exactly ready for married life, or if he wants to take some time, say about a year, he can tell the woman that he cannot come that year and if she waits, then he will come next year, but definitely not that year. It could be that he has some unfinished work or has something that he wants to do for his parents and if his plans have not been fulfilled yet, then he can make the woman wait. If he tells the woman that he will come the next year and cannot come this year, then the woman will wait for him. That is if she likes him. Though the man himself has said that he will come, he won't just come on his own. He has to be dragged away from his parents' house. The woman or her male relatives will have to come and get him. Even if he likes the woman very much, he won't go by himself. This time, there won't be any ceremonies. Just drinking rice beer and eating.

The rice beer is fermented in a pot called *dikka* for about a week or more. It is taken out of the *dikka* by means of a gourd, called the *pong*. The first liquor that is taken from the pot is called *bitchi*, after which it is diluted and after a time it is taken out to drink. This diluting and drinking can go on as long as it is good to drink. If the brew is strong, then one pot can be used for a night. Now, when the man has gone to the in-laws', and if rice beer was drunk at the time of bringing him there, then he will be ordered to take the *dikka*, throw away the residue and wash it. If the man happens to feel like relieving himself, then the father-in-law will sneak off to check if the faeces is dry or

wet<sup>13</sup>. If the faeces is dry, then it is believed that his management of the household would be good, but if he happens to have loose motions, then he would amount to nothing. These things were also taken into account in the old days.

### **3.07 *Cha-dila* – or offering of food**

According to Dr. Milton S. Sangma, this kind of proposal is mostly practised among the *Matchis*<sup>14</sup>. In this form of proposal, the girl cooks some rice and sends it to the man of her choice, from among the boys at the *nokpante* or bachelor's dormitory, through her sister or any of her female relatives. She herself will follow at a safe distance so as to be out of the danger of being embarrassed should he refuse. Should he start eating, the girl will come out of hiding and eat with him, the news of which will be conveyed by her to her parents. They would then initiate the negotiations with the boy's parents and the marriage would be arranged.

### **3.08 *Tunapa* – secretly sleeping with one's beloved**

In this form of proposal, the boy or the girl may be a suitor. The suitor<sup>15</sup> would approach the sleeping party as he/she lies sleeping and lie with him/her when everyone else in the house will be asleep. If the suitor is accepted, then they sleep together a while and go to the girl's house before the break of dawn. After the negotiations, marriage is arranged.

### **3.09 *Chame Jika* - Wooing/courting the Lover with songs**

During certain festivals, such as *Wangala*, *Mangona*, etc., pairs of boys and girls would exchange rice beer, betel nuts and tobacco and chant rhythmic songs with words of wooing until in the end they decide to either marry or part. This process sometimes used to go on for more than one night. This process is called *Chame Jika*.

### **3.10 *Seka* or Elopment**

*Seka* or Elopement takes place usually when they are not allowed to marry, for one reason or another. The boy and the girl will run away together and go from place to place. After that they return and stay in the girl's house and they live as husband and wife.

### **3.11 *On-songa* – or providing replacement**

When a husband dies, his younger brother or nephew is made to marry the widow, and in the absence of these two kin, his nearest relatives are made to marry her. This arrangement is called *On-songa*. It is to provide a continuation of relations between the two clans. Since the widow was almost always too old for the younger man, he was compensated for with the offer of the daughter along with the mother in marriage. This custom was called

*On·chapa*. If it was the wife who died, then it was the younger sister, the niece or the nearest relatives of the deceased who would have to take her place.

**Case Study:** In our travels to conduct research, we came across 87 year old Singjan Ch. Momin of Nabokgre village in East Garo Hills. Why his case is worth noting is because he has had three wives from the same clan, but of different generations. When his first wife died, a substitute was given to him by his wife's clan. The new wife happened to be his first wife's niece, i.e., his wife's sister/female cousin's daughter. He had children from the second wife and when she died, he was again provided with another wife, who also happened to be the second wife's niece. So, we see that he had three wives of the same clan but three different generations. The third wife is younger than the second wife's daughter. To the second wife's daughter she's both stepmother and younger cousin and for the second wife's grandchildren, she's both step-grandmother and aunt. This is sometimes the case and in this way, kinships in Garo villages can be very complicated and could be the topic for another research.

### 3.12 Mother-in-law Marriage

This happens usually in the case of a *nokkrom*. When the father-in-law dies, his widow lives on with her daughter as long as she lives. After this time she will also be referred to as the *jik*, the Garo term for wife. This is mainly

because she is the true owner of the property and the heiress can only inherit when she dies. According to the close observations by Burling<sup>16</sup>, it is this terminology that has given the misconception in anthropological circles that they actually married their widowed mothers-in-law. Even the Garos also maintain that this is their custom, but Burling, upon closer study, found out that these widows rarely, if ever, had sexual relations with their sons-in-law. It was only an arrangement so that her heiress would take care of her as long as she lives. The son-in-law slept exclusively with the daughter, his original wife.

### 3.13 Child Marriage

There was no law that regulated the age for marriage, though there were instances of girls and boys marrying at the age of 11 or 12. Usually they married only after puberty. Dr. Milton Sangma cites that this was mostly prevalent in the *on·chapa* form of marriage<sup>17</sup>, though there has been instances of child marriage outside of the *on·chapa* form of marriage.

### 3.14 Christian Marriage

Christian marriages were conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Christian Marriage Act, 1872 (Act No. XV of 1872) after the Garo Hills District (Christian Marriage) Act was passed in 1954.<sup>18</sup> Though Christian marriages are the vogue these days, many of the traditions are still being used.

Even if the ceremony of the marriage has changed, many of the old traditions are still being followed. When it is seen that a boy and a girl are in a relationship, if the parents and the elder male relatives of a girl like the boy, then it generally happens that they will first ask the girl if she really likes the boy and wants to marry him. If she replies on the affirmative, then the boy will be called to the girl's house on some pretext or the other, like inviting him for dinner, etc. When he has thus come to the girl's house, he is taken unawares and the maternal uncles and other male relatives of the girl will ask the boy of his intentions, whether he intends to marry her or if it is just something he is just in it for passing his time. This is called *sing·sruka*. After this is over and the boy has also returned a positive answer, the girl's relatives will then go to the boy's house and inform them and fix a date in which they can come for the *chawari sing·a*. On the fixed day, the girl and her relatives will come to the house of the boy bearing food and gifts. The *chawari sing·a* itself is just a formality to get the two families acquainted with each other and to fix the date of the marriage.

A Garo marriage is a big affair nowadays. From the girl's side there will be preparations because the marriage has to be borne by the girl's family. The expenses will not be borne by the family alone, but help will be extended from all the relatives and friends either monetary help or in kind. Some will give pigs, chickens, vegetables, etc. while others may give rice. The work will

start from as far as a month before the wedding. This was because previously, there were no halls that could be hired out and the reception had to take place at the girl's home and since there were also no caterers, the relatives and the friends would pitch in to help out with the work.

On the day of the ceremony, the girl's family will send some vehicles to pick up the boy and his family and relatives. This is called *chawari rima*, or going to bring the son-in-law. Some of the girl's relatives will go along with the vehicles to pick them up. The boy's family will receive these relatives, give tea and snacks and after a prayer will board the vehicles.

The ceremony either takes place in church or in the girl's house with the priest officiating, wherever it is more convenient for both parties. The wedding cake is usually cut where the reception will take place. After the ceremony, there will be a feast where the boy's family and relatives will be served food first. After everyone from the boy's side has partaken of the feast, after staying a while, the boy's family and relatives will depart, leaving the boy with a prayer and some advice.

After the marriage, on the evening of the same day, the boy's younger brothers and cousins will bring his luggage and he is obligated to give them

any gift that they ask of. This is usually monetary or material. This practice is called *do·simpak cha·a*.

The obligations of the newly married do not end at the ceremony, but it just starts there. They are indebted to all the help that they got during the marriage from their friends and family. Even the gifts that they got have also to be repaid. These debt repayments do not have to be done immediately, but it has to be repaid only when a marriage occurs in the family of the person to whom the newlyweds are indebted to.

### **3.15 *Do·ki Rama***

As we have seen earlier, that after marriage it was mandatory for the man to run away from his wife's house at least twice. When the man has come to his wife's house of his own accord, it is called as *do·ki rama* or "putting out the chicken excreta to dry". The next day after the man has come to his wife's house, he will not do a single piece of work, the man will remain idle, this is called *do·ki rama*. Both the husband and wife will not do any work but will spend it with each other, while the in-laws will be busy in their own daily activities. The wife will take him on a tour in and around the village. She will show him the family's jhum fields, show him places of interest, places which are sacred, places which are considered to be bad and other such things. She

will show him where the village gets the water, etc. In this way, the family starts.

### 3.16 *Gitcheng Godapa, Greng Gitaka*

When the man has started to live in the in-laws' house, then he has to do the honours of mixing the brew in the *dikka* and pouring it out. For example, if some relatives of the wife visits, then the newlywed would have to do it. Even if it takes the whole night, he would be relegated the task of mixing and pouring out the brew to any visitor that his father-in-law chose to bring. Usually, in the old days, when relatives visited from far, the revelry would go on for several days, imagine the predicament of the newlywed husband, who would like to sleep in the arms of his new wife, but is instead duty bound to his task of mixing and pouring out the brew. He would have to do it even if it takes the whole night, or even if he's tired, because, as the elders in the society amusedly say, it is for such tasks that a man brings home a son-in-law, to help his father-in-law. This is called *gitcheng godapa*<sup>19</sup>, *greng gitaka*<sup>20</sup>. When a man leaves for his in-laws', his relatives advise him to help out his in-laws' and tell him to always try to do what his in-laws like. So, even if the new husband is unwilling, feeling sleepy, tired, etc., even before it has hardly been two days since he has come, somebody will be asked to visit and he has to do his duty of mixing and pouring out the brew. This is why he has been brought to his in-laws', to help out. This is the custom of the Garo. If a man should

refuse to do so, then it is said that he is not sociable with his in-laws, that he does not adhere to the custom of *grent gitaka gitcheng godapa*<sup>21</sup>.

The origin of *grent gitaka gitcheng godapa* is this – the Garo society in villages are very close knit and every household in the village will be present for funerals, helping out the bereaved family, this is called *gro nanga* or to be indebted. On those occasions, because a neighbour or a relative or anyone has helped out the family in either cash or kind, the Garos have a custom where they are indebted to the family of that person and they try to repay that debt when any such occasion occurs in the family of the person who has helped. This custom is still prevalent even among the Garos living in the towns regardless of their literacy or social status. In the villages, whenever a person dies, cattle are slaughtered for a feast for those who have come for the funeral from near and far. It is an obligation of the family of the deceased. The task of cutting the meat falls on the men folk, this is the origin of why the term *grent gitaka* is synonymous to helping out.

When a new son-in-law comes, since he is from another village, he would not be accustomed to the lands that belong to the village. So, when the time comes for claiming the land for jhumming, it is usually done by the father-in-law. According to the customary laws, the *A-king Nokma* or the village clan chief is the caretaker of the lands that belong to the village. There

are no forms of ownership of land as such but can only be claimed for agricultural purposes or for homesteads. If the father-in-law claims a plot of land for jhumming this year, then the next year, he will claim a bigger plot to accommodate for the new son-in-law and as long as he stays with the in-laws, the plots for jhumming will be claimed by his father-in-law. Only when he starts to stay separately will he have to claim it for himself. If he happens to be the son-in-law of the *A-king Nokma*, then his father-in-law will do it for him as long as he (the father-in-law) is living. If he is the *nokkrom* then, too, the father-in-law will do it for him though he (the son-in-law) will have to do the work of cultivating and the father-in-law may stay at home and give the orders. The size of a plot of jhum cultivated land depends on the number of people in the family and accordingly, they cultivate.

### 3.17 *Nokde*

A *nokkrom* will always stay in his wife's ancestral home. The ordinary *chawari* and his family, however, can stay with his in-laws for a maximum of two years after which it is not according to the customs to stay on. For example, a man goes to his in-laws house this year and this year he has worked in the jhum fields along with his wife. They may have separate jhum fields, too, but they will be staying with the wife's family. The next year, this son-in-law has to build a house for himself and stay separately. This is the custom, and if he's unable to do so, he and his family can stay on for a

maximum of two years after which it is against the society's norms and is not good for the man's dignity because it shows his uselessness in supporting his own family. So, the men, generally try to come out of the in-laws house in one year to show that they are not useless and can support their own families on their own. This custom is called *nokde rika* or building a separate house. There are also certain rules associated with this custom.

A house is usually built of wood and bamboo with thatch roofing and is changed every few years. When a house is built, mature trees are usually used for the pillars and the beams. In the case of *nokde rika*, however, mature trees cannot be used, only young trees. Thus, the first house after taking a wife is built with young trees. It is called *asi namja* or taboo. → ?

In the village, when a house is being built, the other members of the village help out and so, the house owner will have to bear the cost of food and drink, especially when the thatch roofing is being put up. When a *nokde* is being built the first time, all the expenses will be borne by the father-in-law, whether it be rice or cattle<sup>22</sup>, everything including any amount of rice beer. Since all the expenses are to be borne by the father-in-law, mature trees are not used for the pillars and beams and only young trees. Only when the house has to be rebuilt will the expense be borne by the son-in-law and only then can mature trees be used to build the house. If a man lives in the house that his

father-in-law built all his life and does not try to rebuild his house and stays in it even if it is dilapidated, then again it shows that he is not able to support his family.

Although there are traditional ways of saying during marriage negotiations, there is not much of religious colour in the wedding ceremonies. However, it is found that all forms of Garo marriages are finally solemnised by *Do-sia* marriage ceremony which is the only traditional and official form of marriage.

*Christian marriage - )*

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Sangma, Dr. Milton S. *History and Culture of the Garos*, New Delhi: 1981, p.197-202
- <sup>2</sup> The term “reserved” is used because though it may seem like a betrothal it is not exactly a betrothal because the man has not promised to marry the woman.
- <sup>3</sup> The ancestral home of the father of the girl, i.e., his mother’s home.
- <sup>4</sup> Expressions, usually meaningless
- <sup>5</sup> The sago palm
- <sup>6</sup> Father’s sister’s son
- <sup>7</sup> Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, p. 101 - year ?
- <sup>8</sup> *Wa·si* is the split bamboo belts used for making the walls of the traditional houses. This *wa·si* are woven together to make sturdy walls and partitions. They are also used for flooring.
- <sup>9</sup> *Atte* or *atte-mande* is a curved, multipurpose chopper with a bamboo handle used by the Garos. It can be used as a machete, a farming implement, a kitchen knife, etc.
- <sup>10</sup> A wicker basket made of bamboo used to carry things. It is carried on the back with a belt made of bark slung across the forehead.
- <sup>11</sup> Burling, Robbins . *Rengsanggri*, Tura: 1997
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 83

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- <sup>13</sup> In the old days, there were no water closets and people generally used to do it in the nearby forest.
- <sup>14</sup> Sangma, Dr. Milton S. *History and Culture of the Garos*, p. 200
- <sup>15</sup> The word suitor is used for both the male and the female for want of a better word
- <sup>16</sup> Burling, Robbins. *Rengsanggri*, Tura: p142
- <sup>17</sup> Sangma, Dr. Milton S. *History and Culture of the Garos*, p 202. Vide also Costa, Fr. G.: *The Garo Code of Law*, pv1052
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p 202, vide also *The Garo Hills Autonomous Acts, Rules, Regulations*, 1968, p. 104-105
- <sup>19</sup> *Gitcheng godapa* – it is the act of mixing the brew in the *dikka* with water. The unmixed brew is very strong as it has a high alcohol content. It is usually first extracted out of the *dikka* with a gourd, called a *pong*. After it has been extracted, water is poured into the *dikka* to make more brew, a dilution of the first extract and then extracted after a while and so on. This act is called *gitcheng godapa*. The following extracts can be drunk after a few minutes with each extract containing less alcohol than the previous content. If the original brew is very strong, then extracts from the same *dikka* can be drunk for a number of hours.
- <sup>20</sup> *Greng gitaka* – it is the act of chopping the bones while cutting meat.

<sup>21</sup> The order of the words are interchangeable

<sup>22</sup> Beef is usually the choice meat

## *Chapter IV*

# *Funeral and Post Funeral Rites and Rituals*

## CHAPTER IV

### Funeral and Post-Funeral Rites and Rituals

#### 4.01 Introduction

Death is another transition that is of extreme importance in the Garo existence, but it is not the end because of their belief in rebirth. Thus, there are a lot of elaborate rituals in the funeral and post-funeral ceremonies of the Garos. They say that life is usually welcomed by the men while it is given a send off by the woman, into whom they will be reborn, that is why most of the death rituals are conducted by the Garo women. Before delving into the intricacies of the rituals, we have to first look at the Garos' belief in death. Like all ancient cultures, the Garos also believed that men were immortal until the first death, which also brought about malady. The following is a narration by Gongsin Sangma Dawa of Marakgre, West Garo Hills which was published in Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu's *Apasong Agana*<sup>1</sup>.

In ancient times, there was no death because there was nothing that caused death. The first among man to die was a man called Me·gam Gairipa<sup>2</sup> Mande Singeripa<sup>3</sup> Me·gam Dimrang Chada Gongman Mande Dimrim Me·gam Dimsim and his wife was called Grimchi Bachari. His mother was called Alime Dingsime. In the beginning, Me·gam Gairipa dwelt in the land of Mangsang but later on dwelt beside the river Simsang, taking his drinking

Mangsang but later on dwelt beside the river Simsang, taking his drinking water from Dengrengkitik Wari Chora<sup>4</sup>. He was very strong and a man of status.

One day, he took his daughter Gairi Singeri to the market called Anti Racha A·kang Gitel Dimdimpatal Chalang Agal. From there, after passing through Rongtitdru Chamegaru, they came to the Gijangbra Dilsing Gitel river. At that time, Sangma Sangreng A·ning Ranja Do·pa<sup>5</sup> Chiring had put out a wicker basket to trap fish. On seeing the travellers, he requests them saying, “Please do not cross in front of my fish-trap.”

But Me·gam Gairipa thought of himself as having the highest status and thus crossed in front of the trap scaring away the fish. Sangma Sangreng got angry and cursed Me·gam Garirpa.

All of a sudden, Me·gam Gairipa felt his head grow heavy and felt feverish. They crossed Sokchuan Bri Meruan A·ding and reached Anang Adilkang Tematchi Pongro. There, the son of Karupa<sup>6</sup>, Misi Saljong's<sup>7</sup> slave Rimerinok Kalme Do·ol Misi Chengmatpa Saljong Chengchipa<sup>8</sup> was dreaming. He was telling his relations about his dream the previous night

about how Me·gam Gairipa captured him and took him. Before he could finish, Me·gam Gairipa and Gairi reached the place and he tried to capture Rimerinok. Rimerinok told him that he belonged to Misi Saljong and he had left him there and requested that he be left alone. But Me·gam Gairipa did not listen and captured him and took him away from Asra Malenggoka saying that he would eat him.

Pulling the recently captured Rimerinok along, the father and daughter crossed Kapera Ginggarap and stayed the night at Daram Dasing Raka Ganda, A·song Gagitik Chiga Changsiram. Angry at Me·gam Gairipa's insolence, Misi Saljong hit him and Me·gam Gairipa had a sudden bout of illness at midnight and died. This was the first death.

Me·gam Gairipa then went on to dwell in Me·mang A·song, or the land of the dead, but did not feel at home there because he was without any friends. So, his spirit went back to his home, he brought with him some beef and beaded necklaces. Upon seeing the father, one of his sons saw him and called out to his mother. The mother, who was out catching shrimps in the stream, did not believe her son and hence did not come. Gairipa was embarrassed at this and so he decided to return to *Me·mang A·song*. His son, who was

overjoyed at seeing the father, jumped in joy on the *jal-eng*<sup>9</sup>. As he was jumping, the boy fell over the edge, onto ground and died. Thus, the father and son became the first inhabitants of *Me-mang A-song*.<sup>10</sup>

Me-gam Gairipa's wife returned home and found the beef and the beaded necklaces that her husband had brought with him and thus believed that he had indeed come. She traced his footsteps all the way to Balpakram<sup>11</sup>. When she reached there, she called out to her husband on the other side of Chianggal Chidimak<sup>12</sup> from the foothills of Mangru Mangram<sup>13</sup>, asking him to come home with her. He replied that he would not return in his old form, but would be there in the *delang*, in the *kima*, in the *chugan*, in the *mangona* and he would be born again in the wombs of one of his close clanswomen, because he had already been embarrassed when he returned earlier and had vowed never to return. He asked her to return home and marry someone from his *gri sokchi*, or same matrilineal bloodline. She returned home and did as she was instructed which was liked by everyone.

The reason for the narration of this story is because all the funeral and post funeral rites and rituals are based on the beliefs associated with this story. Almost all the customs associated with the Garos have an origin in this story.

#### 4.02 *Kima Songa*

*Kima* is a memorial post that is put up in memory of the dead. There are two types of *kima*. The first one is carved in the form of a human figure and is used as a memorial of the dead person. It is put up in front of the house and is put up every time a person from that household dies. So it can be ascertained from the number of *kimas* in front of a house, the number of people that have died in the household. Apart from this type of *kima*, there is another one without any carvings except for a cut around the wood. When a person in a household dies, a cow is killed for that person and such a *kima* is also put up. In the case of a new house, or *nokde*, mature trees cannot be used for the first time a person dies from the household. Only young *mandal* trees can be used according to the customs. There is a very stern law for this almost bordering on taboo. The person who would directly put up a mature tree would be ridiculed by society on the grounds that since he didn't know the rules he would never be successful. The second time around, mature trees were allowed to be put up.

#### 4.03 *Me-mang Gisi Gro Gisi*

It is usually the custom in funerals that all the people who come for the funeral will give some money to the family of the bereaved. This is called

*mepal bree cha·a*, or buying a meal, i.e., usually when a person dies, people from all over, relatives from distant places will come, so the family of the bereaved are obligated to provide food for them and usually many numbers of cattle are cut in order to provide a meal for all. Then there is a thing called *me·mang gisi gro gisi*. For example, a man has gone to live in his in-laws house and as long as his father-in-law is alive, supposing someone in the family dies and the relatives and friends come for the funeral. Some will give money, some will bring cows, etc, and the father-in-law will be indebted to those people. In his lifetime, if any such eventuality occurs in any of the friends'/relatives' houses, the father-in-law will try to clear off his debt. If, however, the father-in-law is unable to pay off that debt, then the son-in-law, the new head of the family will have to repay the remaining debts because he is married to the heiress of the property. His is, as the Garos call, *chongchu babot*. This repayment of the debts of the deceased is called *me·mang gisi, gro gisi*.

#### **4.04 Tokari<sup>14</sup> Pita**

After the wake of the deceased, just before the body is taken out of the house for cremation, the Garos have a tradition called the *tokari pita*. In the room where the dead body is placed during the wake, a *tokari* is placed at the

head of the deceased on the wall. A *mil-am* and a *kimindam*<sup>15</sup> is placed on the *tokari*. Just as the body is about to be taken out, the person entrusted to the task will take out the *mil-am*, make a war cry, stamp on the ground and slash the *tokari* with the *mil-am*. The war cry will go thus:

*Raka o'e, challang o'e*  
*Apa sio, angde bon-o*  
*Chu·sana donga, damsana donga*  
*Sidil tokkuja, jaksano tokkuja*  
*Chu·sanade dongkuenga,*  
*Damsanade dongkuenga*  
*Apa gimaa'o angde bon·chone*

Translation:

Yes, I'm tough, yes, I'm a warrior  
At my father's death, at my son's end  
There's place for one more, there's place for one more  
We have not all died,  
There's place for one more  
There's place for one more  
When my father is lost, when my son has met his end.

When the deceased is about to be taken out the same person will pick up the body first and he will also slash the *tokari*. Not just anybody can do this ritual because the person who does this has many tasks afterwards and he

becomes the most important person in this ceremony. The person who undertakes this task also cannot go home on that day. He will also get one *mil-am* and one *spi*, the same *mil-am* which was used to slash the *tokari*. He would also have to start the negotiations. Before describing the negotiations, it would be best to touch upon another tradition. In the story narrated in the beginning of this chapter, we have seen that Me·gam Gairipa had instructed his wife to marry from his same matrilineal bloodline, called the *gri sokchi*. This is because it is duty of the husband's clan to provide a replacement of the deceased for the wife and hence they would have to provide her one after her husband's death from the same matrilineal bloodline, be it his younger brother, younger cousin or any male nephews that he might have, this custom is called *on-songa*. Garo society, being matrilineal, though apparently male members conduct meetings and initiate decisions, a woman's consent is essential before it is finally adopted.

The Garos were a warrior race and it were always waging war against each other or their neighbours from the plains and it so happened sometimes that a woman would lose her husband at a young age. So, in order that the woman and her young children may not be without any support, a substitute for her husband was taken from his same matrilineal bloodline. It was also for

cases such as this that a man would bring his nephew home to be his *nokkrom* or the one who would inherit the property and if such was the case that the *nokkrom* was of another clan than the to be father-in-law's then his nephews had a right, under the Garo inheritance laws, to claim their birthright, called the *a·kim*. Thus, in some cases when the marriage negotiations were going on, if the would be *nokkrom* was of a clan other than the to be father-in-law's then the boy's male relatives would clarify that ground that the father-in-law's nephews would not, in later times, claim their birthright. *On·songa* also applies to the wife's family, too, and when the wife dies, then they would have to provide the husband with a new wife.

Coming back to our topic of *tokari pita*, we see that it was the duty of the person undertaking the task to look for a substitute for the deceased person. He would be the first one to slash the four pillars used for the funeral pyre and only after him would the others follow suit. He would also be the first one to start the negotiations, and the other male relatives present would support him in his decision. In order to understand this tradition better, we include a case study.

**Case Study<sup>16</sup>:** When *nokma* Janggam Mrong died, his nephew and son-in-law, also his *nokkrom* Kaljon Mrong had to take his widow as his wife. Bhimsing M Sangma, one of our sources from Sadolpara village narrated this event to us. It so happened that at the time of Janggam's death, he was asked to be the person to undertake the task of *tokari pita*. Bhimsing is among the last few remaining in that area who is well versed in the old customs. Though he has been baptized, he is not a Christian as he did it only because his wife nagged him to do it, not out of some change of faith. He had to start all the negotiations in the search for the substitute of the deceased. He did it even before the body of the deceased had been fully burnt down. So, he took Kaljon Mrong, who was standing outside, because he had to fulfil the task. Who else would be better than Kaljon, as in any case he was married to the *nokmechik*, or the daughter who was supposed to inherit the property. This is mainly to provide a companion for the old woman, who, as long as she lives, still retains the ownership of all property and Kaljon's wife would inherit the property only after her death and not for any conjugal reasons. The reason is that if the old woman feels unwanted in and around the house then she would try to destroy whatever wealth that she has before her death, as had so happened in the past. So, in order to pacify her, she was provided with a substitute for her deceased husband.

He tells the chosen man,

*“nang·ni nio, nang·ni sari, nang·ni mama, nang·ni atchu, nang·nan donangjok, nang·nan di·angjok. Chawariko demechikko, nang·ni tariani, su·galani, anguko angdeko. Nang·ni tari rim·roka kagima jotapani nang·nin ong·jok. Nang·koa chingan donjok, noan ma·an, nang·na bate sawa bachako man·taikugen. Chinga kimindam pongdok songjawa, chingade pongसान songgen, nang·on ian nang·on.”*

This would roughly translate as since he would be the one who would also inherit everything; it was his duty to also look after the original owner. So, to fulfil the customs, Kaljon was talked to by Bhimsing who got him to agree into taking his own mother-in-law to be his wife. Since it was the tradition and Kaljon knew it, he was resigned to whatever decision was taken by the male relatives. According to Bhimsing, Kaljon took him up to the house later that night and they drank together.

Kaljon said to him, *“Aiao boning apa, nang·na agrede angko indake agangipa dongjajok. Na·a angko indake aganjok, angni gisikoba su·dikani ong·jok”* meaning, *“Aiao<sup>17</sup> boning apa<sup>18</sup>*, there is no one but you who has said this to me. You have said this to me and it has touched me”.

According to the rules, the custom of *on-songa* has to be fulfilled while the body of the deceased is being cremated. Even before the body is brought out for cremation, the clan of the deceased is looking for a substitute, called the *gro jea*. They will look around among the clan members for the next eligible choice. They will decide amongst themselves and after the decision has been made, will come to the grieving widow and inform her of their choice. Even if the proposed person is not present at the time of the funeral, his fate is sealed. After the decision has been made, he can come and stay in the house anytime he wishes. If he so wishes, he can stay on in the house after the funeral. If the proposed person refuses, then the clan of the deceased still has a debt to the widow and hence, another one will be proposed in his place.

#### **4.05 *Me-mang Dila***

When a man dies, the Garos have a custom called the *me-mang dila*. *Me-mang dila* literally means to guide the spirit of the dead back to his mother's home. It is believed by the Garos that if it was not done, then the spirit of the dead would be lost and have to wander. So if a man dies, his spirit would have to be guided back to his mother's home. If his mother had already died, then the person who inherited the ancestral home would be there. Even if

the form of the deceased was not there, his memory would have to be taken to the home of his birth, e.g., a chicken, a bottle of rice beer, a basketful of rice would be taken to the mother's house. It was only when this was done that the necessary requirements from the wife's clan was complete.

The husband's clan would only complete their mandatory requirements only when they could provide a substitute for the deceased or if they would be released from this debt by the widow. Until then, they would have to find a willing substitute. This is how the relationship between the two clans was kept from generation to generation. This is called *nokchame angboning jakrimra rimagong* and in the case of female relations *ama jakritinga sari kongkantia*. That is to say that they are like the links to a chain that keeps on growing longer by joining link after link. That is why if someone from a clan dies, someone is sent as his substitute. That is why even in this day and age, it is practised in some places though it is getting tougher to fulfil the custom. Even if the custom could not be fulfilled, the custom is there. Some religious organisations in Garo dominated areas tried to abolish *me-mang dila* without any understanding of its significance. It would have been tantamount to taking the identity of the Garo people. They were under the misconception that this was a custom of worshipping the dead whereas it was just a custom of

returning the dead to his mother, telling her here is your son, let him be born again in your clan. Before the cremation, the mother or her successor will tie a *debra*<sup>19</sup> and move around the courtyard. This is just as a remembrance of the dead person saying, “he has been brought up by me”. “He has been brought up by me and so I will take him back”. So according to the custom she re-enacts the actions of carrying a child in the *debra* in order to show that she is taking him back. This is the reason why a *debra* is tied during a funeral. That he would not be given or be taken anywhere else but would be born again in the same clan. Only the person who has tied the *debra* can give the dead body a bath. It is not exactly a bath in the true sense of the word but wiping off the face and hands and feet with rice beer. Some rice beer will be poured into a *rang*<sup>20</sup> and the person will wipe the face, the hands and the feet of the deceased.

Only the mother can bathe the body, or in some cases, if the mother is no longer living, her successor will do the necessary work. The *rang* which is used to bathe the body is given to the person who does this work. This is called *ma-gual*. This person also gives rice beer to the dead person one last time. The rice beer will be poured down the dead person’s mouth. In some places instead of rice beer, the water from dipping the rice is substituted. The

male owner of the house where the death takes place is called the *me·mang nokgipa*, or the owner of the spirit. After the body has been cremated, without this person drinking a drop of the rice beer, no one will drink. They will all say, “Give to the *me·mang nokgipa* first”. Only after he has drunk can the others drink.

When a woman dies, the *rongdik* or rice pot<sup>21</sup> is broken and when a man dies, the *dikka* is broken. This is because the woman is considered the owner of the utensils and the rice pot, etc. meaning that since she is the person to make the home, her death signified that the homemaker is dead. So, in her memory, the rice pot will be broken. It will be done whether the pot is full or not. The same way, the man of the house is the owner of the *dikka* and upon his death, on the arrival of his family members, the *dikka* which is put up over the *ongari*<sup>22</sup>, no matter how big will be broken. It can even be done with the help of a *mil·am*. If a *nagra*<sup>23</sup> is present in the house, the *nagra* will also be broken. A *kram*<sup>24</sup> on the other hand, will not be broken.

Also, when a person dies, the house can be slashed with a *mil·am*, but only those parts which are permissible because a house also contains a female domain and a male domain. When a woman dies, the whole house can be slashed. Only the parts which are considered the male domain of the house

will be slashed when a man dies. Everything can be slashed except for the *dun* doorway when a man dies. The slashing cannot go beyond the permitted areas. Even the sacrificial altars can be slashed when a man dies. This is because though the man may build the house, the home is built by the woman. Thus when a woman dies everything can be slashed and when a man dies everything except for the *dun*'s doorway can be slashed.

It has been observed in some cases that when a man died, even if someone is standing by the doorway, the doorway will be slashed without any warning. This is because the male relatives of the deceased will be coming with grief in their hearts and the people standing around the doorways and the sacrificial altars should know what will transpire in those areas. They will be forewarned that the relatives of the man, called the *ma·nok*, are coming and they will be asked to move from there. This is a tradition that is done so that the relatives of the deceased can show their anger and grief at the death of their beloved son. There will be war cries and stamping of feet from afar. Usually in war cries, the surnames of Sangma or Marak is mentioned, but in this case, it will not be mentioned. If the deceased has planted trees like bananas or mangoes or litchis along the way, even those are sometimes not spared. Only those planted by the deceased will be slashed along the way and

no one else, because if someone else's trees were to be cut down, then the one doing the slashing and cutting would have to pay a fine to the owner. But this slashing and cutting of the trees planted by the deceased would be taking this tradition to an extreme because it would prove to be counterproductive to the family of the deceased.

In the Garo traditions, there are a lot of rules involved with the death of a person. Rules like *ma·gual on·a*, *ukam on·a*, etc. For example, if a man dies, then his relatives would get the *ma·gual*, i.e., to forget. And the relatives from his wife's side would give the *ukam*, not to forget. In *ma·gual*, if the man's relatives were to give `500, then they would get back `1000 and so on. The *ukam* can be any amount. Thus, when a person died, depending on the person who died, money would either be given or taken. Before the advent of the monetary system, in kind either *Mil·am* or *Rang*, etc.

In the traditions, the men are involved in welcoming life and the women in giving the final farewells. It would not be a final farewell because of the Garos belief in rebirth. In the story of *Me·gam Gairipa*, the first man to die, he told his wife that he would be born again from the womb of his clanswomen. Thus every ritual that has to be performed after the funeral of a

man is to make sure that he is born again in his own clan and is done by either his mother or her successor. All the rituals during the funeral and post funeral ceremonies are done by the women. Duties such as crying, *me-mang rama agana*, etc. are all done by the womenfolk. Men are never given these tasks. Men are more often entrusted with tasks like sacrifices and rituals during sickness, etc. In the event of the death of a person, however, it would be the women's turn to do things. A man can only bring the life of a person back from the brink of death from the *kimindam* to the house<sup>25</sup>. The woman, on the other hand will bring the soul, or rather lead it from the funeral pyre to the house<sup>26</sup>. In all rituals, the men do not use the everyday language, they use an archaic form of language which is hard to understand and translate. The women, on the other hand usually use the everyday language that makes it easier to understand and translate. We can see an example in the following ritual called *Jaragata* in both its forms.

#### **4.06 *Jaragata***

*Jaragata* literally means to “lead the way of the soul” and according to the Garos, it is performed on two occasions:

1. After the funeral of a person
2. When a person is seriously ill.

1. After the funeral of a person: The Garos believe in being born again after death. After death, the soul of a person wants to be born again in his mother's household and in his own clan. After death, even if the soul wants to be born again in his mother's home, it usually loses its way. Thus after death, the soul is shown the way to his mother's house.

When a man dies; before or after his funeral pyre is lit, the relatives of the deceased walk around it. One of his relatives carries the tail feathers of a rooster and walk with the rest of the group. Then, they will beat the *rangs*, the drums, and carrying the feathers; guide the soul to his mother's house beckoning all the while. If the *kima* has already been put up, the feathers will be put on the *kima*. If the *kima* has not been done, then the feathers would be put on the side of the house. This is to mark the mother's house for the soul when it returns to be born again. It is said that if no sign was given or no one showed the way, then the soul would get lost.

In some places, this is done on the day after the cremation. The remains in the ashes of the funeral pyre will then be picked and buried. This is called *greng eta*. A stone is placed on top of the place where the remains are buried

and this is called *krom*. That day, the soul will be taken in to the house by beating the *rang*, the drums and carrying the feather and beckoning.

*Jaragata* is also called *debra on:pilani*. This is when the son has gone as the *chawari* to somewhere else and died there, when his soul is guided back to his mother's place, the *debra* used to carry him when he was a child is returned. There are several verses that is chanted by the woman during this rituals. *Jaragata* is different for men and women, and for married and unmarried men. The women, upon marriage, usually do not leave their ancestral home and even if they are not the heiresses, they don't usually move out of their ancestral village. So, *Jaragata*, in their case usually took place from the funeral pyre to the house. The same was the case for unmarried youth and children. Men, on the other hand, had to leave their ancestral home and sometimes even their ancestral village. So, during *Jaragata* for them, it had to be from their wives' home/village to their ancestral home, the place of his birth. The research has included the *Jaragata* recited for when a woman died and when a married man died. The following *Jaragata* was recited by Jiji Mangsang Sangma of Sadolpara village during the funeral of her elder sister Sisi.

***Ganchioniko nokona jaragatani***

*Aiha! Gitok wa·ringkatming*  
*Rokim ong·aronga ine,*  
*Aiha! A·ning a·jri cha·nawa ine,*  
*Aiha! Silga ringkambe kanawa, kanawa*  
*Aiha! A·ning rong·kuchaknawahai*  
*A·ning rong·kuchaknawa*  
*Aiha! Samakki ko·ka karamhade iade, iade*  
*Aiha! Makkre de gipakramha iade*  
*Amakdrangha*  
*Aiha! Huro rikrorangha ki·amade ki·amade*  
*Aiha! Hai, hai re·ba!*  
*Nang·ni oktangana ama*  
*Aiha! Hai, hai gaba nang·chade so·doetonga*  
*Wal·adam wal·jakode ia*  
*Nang·ni sisodrangko*  
*Aiha! Kilbolma kilte rodilakonde ia,*  
*Aiha! Salbaramdilanade ia*  
*Nang·ni sisodrangko ama*  
*Aiha! Bana kena siknawa*  
*Bana kena siknawa*  
*Aiha! Bana kilon·nawa*  
*Mite Ring-Changdingba dongja,*  
*Hai, hai re·ba!*  
*Aiha! Katchi Do·pa gisimba dongjade, dongjade*  
*Aiha! Bano aganonga ama*  
*Aiha! Sireng balgitchakming aganongane*

*Da·asala ama?*

*Aiha! Gitok wa·rikatming rokim ong·onga ine*

*Daja, daja!*

*Aiha! Gitok sotnawahai ama*

*Hai, hai re·ba!*

*Ino aganede!*

*Aiha! Chelchik den·nawaha na·de*

*Aiha! Kni reding chotnawaha*

*Uming roe aganode ama,*

*Aiha! Jaksi reding chotnawaha*

*Uming roe aganode*

*Uming roe aganode*

*Aiha! Sa·sammani dedeming rokim ong·aronga ine*

*Ama iaa?*

*Aiha! Baba ma·ni cheksiming bao roe aganongaming?*

*Hai! Re·ba do·me bichu gongnoke rimonga,*

*Aiha! Hai, hai, gaba, gaba!*

*Jaksi bima goteke rimongnade*

*Bana rogualnawa ama, ama?*

*Aiha! Ja·pareko ja·wee gaba ama, ama*

*Aiha! Kottineko chaloe re·ba, re·ba*

*Aiha! Nang·ni a·kildangana*

*Hai, hai re·ba, re·ba!*

*Aiha! Nang·ni samsi pikana re·ba*

*Hai, hai re·ba!*

*Aiha! A·tilla sonarongrongna re·ba*

*Nang·ni a·tillana,*

*Aiha! Kasari ja-takkimkimna re·ba ama,  
Bao rogualongahai?  
Aiha! Bao rojakwatnawa  
Bao rojakwatnawa amaa?  
Aiha! Kilbolma kilchae dongeroata  
Nang·ni ama, nang·ni sisodrangkoa,  
Aiha! Wal·adam wal·chae so·e roata  
Nang·ni dededrangkoa,  
Aiha! Amade na·ade rogualrikongjane i·o  
Makkreni degipakarongo;  
Aiha! Ma·dede na·de rojakwatrikarongane  
Rojak watrikarongane?  
Aiha! Bana kena siknawa?  
Hai, hai re·ba, re·ba!  
Aiha! Bana an·dil monawa?  
Hai, hai gaba, gaba!  
Aiha! Jongcha somikchatchiming  
Roe aganna am·ongane?  
Aiha! Salbaramdilnade ia  
Nang·ni sisodrangko,  
Aiha! Giting bitol pil·ainade ia  
Giting bitol pil·ainade ia  
Aiha! Wal·adam wal·cha so·e dongdilnade ia ama  
Aiha! Kilbolma kilchae  
Janeng rodilpilkande ia,  
Aiha! Hai, hai re·ba!  
Hai, hai re·ba ama, ama!*

*Aiha! Hai, hai gabane!*

*Bara, bara!*

*Aiha! Ama bao rogualna am·onga*

*Korekkime chakatna am·ongade anga*

*Amakoa anga da·asala*

*Aiha! Mikkang done re·chaalna am·ongade anga*

*Aiha! Korekkime chakatna anga ma·deko da·asalde,*

*Aiha! Mikkang done re·chana, re·chana*

*Aiha! Mite-Ringchangdingba dongja*

*Bana kena siknawa?*

*Aiha! Katchi do·pagisimba dongjamo,*

*Aiha! Miteko chingan sikarongade*

*Nang·ni ja·sinan*

*Nang·ni angde nangain*

*Aiha! Katchiko chingan dinaronga*

*Chinga dinaronga.*

*Aiha! Miteko wagam pe·aronga mo ma·de?*

*Aiha! Katchiko biri okaronga, okaronga*

*Hai, hai re·ba, re·ba!*

*Aiha! Nang·ni a·kildangana re·ba*

*Nang·ni a·kildanga ong·ja iade!*

*Aiha! Huroni jakweweramha ia, ia,*

*Aiha! Makkreni degipakramaha*

*Makkreni degipakramaha.*

*Aiha! Samakki koka karamhade iade, iade*

*Aiha! Makkreni degipakramaha*

*Makkreni degipakramaha.*

Translation:

Jaragata: From the Funeral Pyre to the House

*Aiha!*<sup>27</sup> With the fire,

Why are you loitering,

*Aiha!* Are you going to settle here,

*Aiha!* We will tie you to the edge of the sky and pull you up

*Aiha!* The earth will confess

The earth will confess

*Aiha!* This is the place for creepers

*Aiha!* The place where the monkey hugs its young

The monkeys

*Aiha!* The place where the hoolocks relieve themselves

Line 1, 2 and 3, here, the reference is to the lit funeral pyre and the Jiji is asking the soul of her sister why she loiters thus on the fire, she asks her if she's planning on settling there. Line 4, meaning that the deceased will not be allowed to fade into oblivion but she will be reborn within her own clan. Line 5, meaning that the earth itself will not let you remain in oblivion, it will confess to where it is that she dwells. Line 7 implies that the ground is not a place for a person but the place for plants and creepers. Line 8, a place for monkeys. Line 10, meaning in short that it is not an ideal place for a human being.

*Aiha!* Come on, come on!  
To your own womb, mother  
*Aiha!* Come on, up, the fire is burning towards you  
They are burning the big fire  
Your children  
*Aiha!* So you can be born again  
*Aiha!* Be a baby once more  
Your children, mother  
*Aiha!* Who are you afraid of  
What are you afraid of

Line 11, Jiji is entreating her sister to come away from that place to be reborn again. Line 12, to return to the womb where she was born from, i.e., to the womb of someone from her own lineage. Here, mother is the term *ama* which is used as a term of endearment for women. Line 13, referring to the fire burning in the pyre. As the pyre is being burnt, Jiji is by the pyre with the gong which was used to bathe the deceased.

*Aiha!* Who are you afraid of  
Even the deity *Ring-Changding* is not here,  
Come on, come on!  
*Aiha!* No powerful deities are present here  
*Aiha!* Who are you talking to, mother  
*Aiha!* Talking to *Sireng balgitchak*

Today, mother?

*Aiha!* Why are you loitering with the fire?

Today, today!

*Aiha!* You will be beheaded, mother

Line 22, 24, meaning that no one is here that she should be afraid of.

Line 26, the line is unclear. Line 30, meaning that she will be burnt.

Come on, come on!

Talk to me!

*Aiha!* Your ribs will be cut

*Aiha!* Your hair will be singed

If you stay here and chat, mother,

*Aiha!* Even your fingers will be singed

If you stay here and chat

If you stay here and chat

*Aiha!* If you stay here with the undried branches

Mother, here?

Line 32, Jiji entreats her sister to talk to her, meaning to listen to her words. Line 33, the comparison is to cutting meat, to the cutting of the ribs of a cow. Line 35, meaning that if she stays in the fire. Line 39, the pyre is built with young, undried branches.

*Aiha!* Why are you talking from the branches?  
Come on! I'm beckoning you here with these feathers,  
*Aiha!* Come on, come on, climb up, climb up!  
I'm snapping my fingers to get your attention  
Where are you lost mother, mother?  
*Aiha!* Climb up with the soles of your feet mother, mother  
*Aiha!* Holding your walking stick, come, come  
*Aiha!* To your own dwelling  
Come on, come on!  
*Aiha!* To your own courtyard

Line 41, meaning from the pyre. Line 42, the person doing the *Jaragata* has to have a bunch of feathers with her with which she beckons the soul of the deceased. Line 43, climb up meaning from the pyre.

Come on, come on!  
*Aiha!* To the golden courtyard  
To your courtyard,  
*Aiha!* To the strong built resting place,  
Where have you lost yourself?  
*Aiha!* Snap out of it  
Snap out of it, mother?  
*Aiha!* Why are you taking so long  
Your mother, your children,  
*Aiha!* You are being burnt

Line 52, she is enticing the soul of her sister. Golden courtyard meaning clean courtyard, her own. Line 54, there are usually resting places called *bandasals* or *kasaris* built in the courtyard of some people in the village. It is used as a resting place for travellers and as a place for meetings. Line 58; meaning why she is taking so long in coming out of the pyre.

Your children,  
*Aiha!* Mother, why are you loitering here  
In the place where the monkey hugs its young;  
*Aiha!* Aunt, you are still here  
You are still here?  
*Aiha!* Who are you afraid of?  
Come on, come on!  
*Aiha!* Who are you terrified of?  
Come on, come on, climb up, climb up!

Line 64, aunt because she is also an aunt to some of them present.

*Aiha!* It's smoking  
Are you going to stay here?  
*Aiha!* You can be a baby again  
Your children,  
*Aiha!* You can return to your banyan tree  
You can return to your banyan tree  
*Aiha!* Like you were when you were small

*Aiha!* Helping out in the fields

You can rest again,

*Aiha!* Come on, come on!

Line 75, meaning she can be born again in her lineage.

Come on, come on, mother, mother!

*Aiha!* Come on, climb up!

Cousins, cousins!

*Aiha!* Where are you lost, mother

I want to stand up with you

I will today

*Aiha!* I will keep you in front of me

*Aiha!* We will walk together,

*Aiha!* Walk in front of me, walk

*Aiha!* *Mite-Ringchangding* is also not here

Line 84, here cousins imply maternal first cousins.

Who are you afraid of?

*Aiha!* Even the powerful deities are not here,

*Aiha!* We are holding the deity

Your sibling

Your child

*Aiha!* We have led the deity away

We have led it away

*Aiha!* We have broken the deity's teeth, right, aunt?

*Aiha!* We have removed the deity's sting

Come on, come!

Line 98, meaning that the deity has been rendered powerless.

*Aiha!* Return to your dwelling place

This is not your dwelling!

*Aiha!* This is where the hoolock hangs by its hands,

*Aiha!* This is where the monkey hugs its young

Where the monkey hugs its young.

*Aiha!* Where the creepers grow,

*Aiha!* This is where the monkey hugs its young

Where the monkey hugs its young.

Line 102, meaning the pyre.

The next *Jaragata* is when a married man dies. The following was recited by Mireni Gabil of Sasatgre village during the funeral of her maternal uncle (*mama*). Her uncle resided in Tura and she had to take his soul back to her village.

Kabe: Jaragata

***SORA – 1 (Dun pakmasam)***

*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo*

*Hai do·ma re·chabo, re·chabo;*

*Bao chuja sikonga, mamane mamane*

*Bao matgol dem·onga, do·mane do·mane*

*Ba·ra reding kongtokcha mamako*

*Aiwa niatchengpa anga do·mako*

*Oksambengo gatgnok anga*

*Pakkreo dongnok anga*

*Tinga bidang tingako*

*Dongatangna gogale chakatbo!*

*Chenga jengkok chengako*

*Kawatangna gogale re·babo do·ma*

*Hai mama chakat*

*Dongatangna re·chabo!*

*Hai do·ma re·cha*

*Gitingtangna re·chabo re·chabo!*

*Kabik sona mendingcha*

*Anga goongkatgnok mamako,*

*Bet soni janggicha*

*Anga dokongkatgnok mamako,*

*Dun natengtanggita gahat gahat*

*Ian dun natengne!*

*Pakma natengtanggita re·cha re·cha*

*Ian pakma natengne!*

*Kapachel sonadingchicha*

*Anga dokongkatgnok mamako*

*Kabik sona mendingcha*  
*Anga moongkatgnok do·mako;*  
*Hai do·ma chakat, chakat*  
*Amaming hajalsaming chakat, chakat!*  
*Gitingming warisaming re·cha, re·cha*  
*Amana hajalsana rikongchakatsrong chakat mama!*  
*Gitingna warisana*  
*Biding chasronge re·chabo do·mara,*  
*Degipana re·ange ija*  
*Pakma sosariange ija, ija;*  
*Pakma sosariako gogaleha chakatbo*  
*Giting tabariako nipileha re·chabo!*  
*Do·sisini miekram ija*  
*Namatangna gogalbo do·sisini miekram itoba mama,*  
*Arampani gijoram ija*  
*Arampani gijoram mitoba kawatangna nidingbo!*  
*Amatangna chakatbo, chakatbo*  
*Gitingtangna re·chao, re·chao*  
*Nang' turamsniko gogalbo, gogalbo*  
*Nang' jojong Bangmina gogalbo!*  
*Nang' cha·ram cha·riko nitimbo nitimbo!*  
*Nang·ni gri·menduna kricheng, kricheng*  
*Gitingna hajalsana gogaleha chakatbo mama.*  
*Amatangna chakato, chakato*  
*Saljongna tasisana sidrieha re·chabo, re·chabo*  
*Pakma tobariako gogal, gogal!*  
*Misi hajalsako nang' jojong bangmia*

*Donmanjane rikongkat*  
*Reding chosariao*  
*Nang' gri-mendia dokma rike roongkan!*  
*Hai mama chakatbo*  
*Mil·am tokarikoba sikgnok anga*  
*Kancha edilakoba chotgnok anga*  
*Mil·am tokkarinaba wa·gichongsa songbajok,*  
*Amana hajalsana ino*  
*Kancha edilanabamo rebangchelko kabajok,*  
*Giting warisaa in*  
*Ama warisao songa nokpantepile ronade*  
*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo!*  
*Giting hajalsaona mipal cha·pile ronade*  
*Hai mama re·chabo, re·chabo!*  
*Neng·de neng·kisimkuja anga mamako*  
*Ba·de ba·chekchimkuja anga do·mako,*  
*Debra dokchengchrae ba·gnok mamakoanga*  
*Pakkre de·chingchrae wengnok do·mako anga,*  
*Me·gacha dingjakjakcha kasolsepe olgnok mamako*  
*Kamchacha sojakjakchamo*  
*Chelku me·gajakgnok anga do·mako*  
*Tonualko da' gual, amatangna chakato, chakato*  
*Tochangwelko da' jakwat amatangna re·chao,*  
*Bilha bilsreteming chakat, chakat*  
*Changsa goretrepeming re·cha, re·cha!*  
*Amatangna re·chao, re·chao*  
*Indakeha chakatbo*

*Tonualko srepe chakat,  
Il·epeha re·chabo  
Tochangwelko il·epe re·cha!*

Translation:

Verse I: (By the wall of the *Dun*<sup>28</sup>)

Come on, uncle, get up, get up.

Come on, *do·ma*, get moving, get moving;

Where are you hiding, uncle, uncle

Where are you lying down, *do·ma*, *do·ma*

With the spotted cloth, uncle

Look here, *do·ma*

I will carry you on my back

I will keep it on my shoulder

Leave this place

Stand up to return to your home!

In the first line, she is asking her uncle to get up. The term *do·ma* in the second line is a term of endearment that is used for the males of a clan. Most of such ritual verses have some sort of comparisons to everyday life. In line three, she's looking for her uncle who is hiding, this is a comparison to when cattle is herded, some of them lie down without heeding the cowherd. It is the same comparison in line four, meaning that the uncle is not heeding his niece. Line five mentions the *ba·ra marang*, a cloth that is used to cover a dead

person. It is because the niece is the person who will be tying the *debra* around her, signifying that she will be taking him back to his own home. This is done by the niece in the absence of the mother, or the sister of the deceased, meaning that they are also deceased or are unable to carry out the ritual. In line six, she is persuading her uncle, i.e., his spirit, to listen to her and return with her to the place of his birth. Line seven refers to the way Garo women carry their babies on their backs with the help of the *debra*. Here she means that she will carry his soul on her back. Line eight, meaning that she will tie the *debra*. In line 9, she is asking him to leave his place and return home. Home for him would be the place where he was born, with his own clanspeople.

The *jengkok*<sup>29</sup> that you have made  
Leave behind all that you love, *do·ma*  
Get up, uncle  
Start out for the land of your birth!  
Get moving, *do·ma*  
Start out for your banyan trees!  
Let me tie it with the *mending*<sup>30</sup>  
I am herding out my uncle,  
With a cane stick  
I am herding out my uncle,

In line 11, she is asking her uncle to leave the *jengkok* that he had made, meaning that he had to leave the household that he had built. In line 16, banyan tree signifies his mother and sisters, his roots. The Garo word *giting* or banyan tree is used as a term of endearment for the female relatives. It is used because just like the banyan tree gives food and shelter to its denizens, a mother gives food and shelter to her children. He is being asked to return to his roots. Line 17 means that she is herding the soul of her uncle with the feathers that she holds in her hands while going through the actions of dusting. In lines 18 and 19, the action is again compared to the herding of a cow.

Get up through the side of the *dun*  
 This is the side of the *dun*!  
 Get out through the side of the pillar<sup>31</sup>  
 This is the pillar!  
 With the *kapachel sonadingchi*  
 I will herd out my uncle  
 Let me tie it with the *mending*  
 I will herd out the *do·ma*;  
 Come on, *do·ma*, get up, get up  
 With your mother and the thousand, get up, get up!

In line 21, she is asking the soul of her uncle to come out through the side of the *dun*. In line 22, she asks him to come out through the side of the

pillar. In line 25 and 26, *kapachel sonadingchi* means feathers, the one she carries in her hand and with this she's herding out her uncle's soul. In line 30, does not necessarily mean his mother but also his clanspeople. Thousand indicates that a number of his clanspeople have come to his funeral and are now ready to return.

With the banyan tree and the deep water, get moving, get moving  
 For your mother and the thousand, get up, uncle!  
 For the banyan tree and the deep water  
 Do not divert your path, *do·ma*,  
 Go to your child, there  
 The wall is wet, there, there;  
 Leave them all and get up  
 Remember the banyan tree and get moving!  
 There, to where the *do·sisi* nests  
 Return home, leaving the *do·sisi* behind, uncle,

Line 31 refers to the women of his clan, to one of whom he will be born again. Line 34, meaning that he should not look to go here and there but must come along with them. Line 36 means his friends who are drinking. In line 37, he is asked to leave them all and come away, including his child in line 35. In line 38, he is asked to remember the home of his childhood and get moving to go there. Line 39 refers to the *pangsoni*, the outside corner of the roof where

the roofing thatch is not trimmed. Sometimes, birds called *do·sisi*<sup>32</sup> nest in this place.

There is *Arampa*'s domain  
 Even if *Arampa* is flying, think of your beloved  
 Get up, for your mother, get up  
 Get moving, for your banyan tree, get moving  
 Leave your sleeping place  
 For your little brother, *Bangmi*, leave here!  
 Look after the place where you dine!  
 Come to the place where your nephews dwell  
 Leave everything for your banyan tree and the thousand, uncle.  
 When you get up for your mother

In line 41, *Arampa* means the swallow and his domain refers to the sky. It is mentioned because now they are coming out of the house towards the *pangsoni*. Line 45 refers to his wife's home, he is being asked to leave this place and return to his birthplace. In line 46, *Bangmi*, refers to the roll of plantain leaves in which the Garos wrap the cooked rice. This line shows that they have reached the place where they eat, inside the house. In line 48, the dwelling place of his nephews refers to his birthplace, because the term *gri* used for nephew generally is used for a man's sister's son.

Leave everyone behind

Leave the wet wall behind!  
 The thousand millets and your little brother *Bangmi*  
 Leave them all behind.  
 The clothesline that you have tied  
 Let your nephew use it!  
 Come on, uncle, get up  
 I will take the *mil·am tokari*  
 I will cut the *kancha edila*  
 I have planted one clump of *wa·gi* for the *mil·am tokari*,

In line 51, even though there are a lot of people at his funeral, he is asked to leave them all behind. Line 52 again refers to his friends and the others who sit drinking. In line 53, the thousand millets refers to many people, the line refers to the many people who would be eating the rice that is wrapped in the plantain leaves. A Garo funeral is like a feast and it is the duty of the family of the deceased to make sure that everyone is fed. In line 55, it means that he should leave everything that he had made during his lifetime behind. In line 56, the nephew is referred to signifying that he had already got a *nokkrom*, which was usually the sister's son. So, here, since he's dead, his nephew, his *nokkrom*, would become the man of the house and hence would be using the things that he made in his lifetime, i.e., running the household that he built. Line 58 meaning that she will take the *tokari* used to keep the *mil·am*. In line 59, *kancha edila* refers to the clothesline tied inside the house to keep clothes.

Line 60 means that she had planted a clump of *wa·gi*, a species of bamboo, so that on his return to his birthplace, he can make another *tokari*.

For your mother and the thousand  
For the *kancha edila* I have tied the *rebangchel*,  
For the banyan tree and the deep water  
In the deep water mother, you can be a bachelor again  
Come on, uncle, get up, get up!  
To the thousand banyan trees, you can eat there  
Come on, uncle, get moving, get moving!  
I am not fatigued, uncle  
I have not carried you, *do·ma*,  
I will carry you with this *debra*, uncle

Line 62 implies that back in his birth home, she has tied a *rebangchel*, a kind of cane, for the *kancha edila*. Line 64 implies that when he is born again, he can be a bachelor once again. Line 66 implies that he can be born again in the home of his mother. Line 68 implies that he is not yet born again. Line 69 implies the same as the previous line. Line 70, meaning, “thus, will I carry you”.

I will carry you across the shoulder,  
I will carry you, *mama*

With the *kamcha*

I will carry you on my bosom, *do·ma*

Do not forget the *tonual*, when you get up for your mother

Do not drop the *tochangwel* when you start for your mother's,

Jump up at once and get up, get up

Jump up once and start, start!

When you start for your mother's

Get up like this

Get up holding the *tonual*,

Flasing it around

Start, flashing the *tochangwel*!

In line 71, it implies tying the *debra* which is tied across one shoulder. Line 72 implies that she will be taking his soul back. In line 73, *kamcha* is a piece of cloth. In line 74, she is comparing her actions to the action of carrying a baby with the help of a *debra*. In line 75, *tonual* is a kind of sword, like a *mil·am*, but with differences. The line implies that he should not forget the manlike qualities once he is reborn. In line 76, *tochangwel* is also another kind of sword. The meaning of this line is the same as the previous line.

### ***SORA- II (ONGGAL/BILBANG)***

*Amatangna chakato, chakato*

*Gitingtangna re·chao, re·chao*

*Ai biga chikdree dongpuet*

*Dikkani – Jaripani mo,  
Giting ija kangsari  
Kaksini nodipani niono,  
Inaba kena siknabe mamara  
Inaba an·dil monabe do·mara!  
Srong chakatsrongbo mama, mama  
Biding re·chasrongbo do·ma, do·ma  
Watcheng kritongchange wata, wata  
Amana Damdikmana wat mo!  
De·sengkri baljange chenga, chenga  
Ambina Okdambitmana chenga, chenga  
Ama Dambikmana gogale chakatbo  
Ama Dambitmacha songdongrikkan  
Ambi Okdambitmacha nang·macha  
Onggarina deltinga mama kena sikonga amana,  
Dangknokna-Rokrina  
Do·ma an·dil moongnawa do·ma  
Bipa moongkatnawa anga, anga  
Slang dokongkatnawa anga, anga.*

Translation:

Verse II: (The Fireplace)

When you get up for your mother, when you get up

When you start for the banyan tree, when you start

Leave the *dikka* behind

The *dikka-jaripa*,

The banyan tree is there

Where the spout of the *kaksi* looks down,  
Do not get scared like this, uncle  
Do not let your body shake so, *do·ma!*  
Straight, stand up straight, uncle  
Start along your path, *do·ma*

Line 3 cannot be translated so its meaning has been put in place. *Dikka* is the pot used for brewing rice beer. In line six *kaksi* is a kind of kettle with a spout which is used in rituals. In line 7, she is asking her uncle not to be scared because he is in a new state of being.

Weaving it alternately  
Weave it for mother *Dambitma!*  
Weaving it alternately  
Weave it for grandmother *Okdambitma*  
Leave it for mother *Dambitma*  
Let mother *Dambitma* dwell here  
To grandmother *Okdambitma*, to your mother  
For the fireplace, uncle, are you afraid of mother  
For the *Dangknok-Rokri*  
*Do·ma*, your body must be shaking  
I will herd out the male, I will  
I will herd you out, I will.

Line 11 implies the woven parts of a *dikka*. In line 12, *Dambitma* is another name for *dikka*. In line 16, it means the top of the fireplace, the

*ongari*, where the *dikkas* are usually stored. Line 18 implies that he is scared of this place and what it stores. In line 19, the four pillars that hold up the *ongari* are called the *dangknok*. *Rokri* is just a rhyming couplet word called a *ku:jikse*. The Garo language is rich in such words. Lines 21 and 22 mean that she will be herding out his soul even if he doesn't want to leave, even if he is scared of his new existence.

***SORA- III (Chuchekra)***

*Krong songmriana, mama kena sikongnawa*

*Amatangna chakato*

*E·tong bikap den·ana*

*Do·ma totorakongnawamo*

*Gitingtangna re·chao, re·chao*

*Katchiari aichichok mama kena siknawa*

*Katchiari aichija mo,*

*Do·ma totoraknawa, do·ma.*

Translation:

Verse III: (At the *Chuchekra*)

For the pillar, uncle, you must be scared

When you get up for your mother

Lay the plantain leaf

You must be terrified, *do·ma*

When you start for your banyan tree

This is the dwelling place of *mites*, uncle, you must be afraid  
This is the dwelling place of *katchis*,  
You must be terrified, *do·ma*.

*Chuchekra* is the place next to the *onggal* where the *rugala* ceremony,  
i.e. the rice beer pouring ritual, is performed on a plaintain leaf. In line 6 and  
7, *mite* and *katchi* mean deities. They are also a *ku·jikse*, *mite-katchi*.

**SORA- IV (MANJRI)**

*Kiting Alep-Chijengni ija*  
*Manjrini Pongjengni ija*  
*Misinako –Chijengko*  
*Gogaleha chakatbo mama*  
*Manjriko pongrengko*  
*Nidingeha re·chabo do·ma*  
*Huro mikgitchakrangni songdongram ija*  
*Rakdo-Bibo-Injangni a·charam ija*  
*Pongsi-Chiratdrangba songdongram*  
*Bato-Bibo-Injangba a·charam.*

Translation:

Verse IV: (At the Manjri)

Here is the *Ki·ting Alep-Chijeng*

At *Manjri- Pongjeng*

At the *Misina –Chijeng*

Leave it all and get up, uncle

The *Manjri-Pongjeng*

Think of your mother's home and start

This is the dwelling place of the red faced hoolock

This is the dwelling place of *Rakdo-Bibo-Injang*

It is also the dwelling place of *Pongsi-Chiratdrang*

It is also the dwelling place of *Bato-Bibo-Injang*

The *Manjri* is the first pillar from front wall of the main chamber of the *nokachik*, where usually is placed the skulls of animals and birds. It is also used during some rituals. Line 1 means, the place where the hornbill's skull is placed. Line 2 is a *ku:jikse*. Line 3 means, the place where sacrifices are made, where lives are exchanged and where men speak with the gods. Lives are exchanged meaning that if someone is sick, sacrifices are made of living animals signifying that one life is being traded for another. Line 5 is another *ku:jikse*. The word *pong* is in both the *ku:jikses* because the *manjri* is also the place where the *pongs*, the gourds used for taking out the rice beer from the *dikkas*, is kept. In line 7, she is telling him that this is the dwelling place of hoolocks, so he should leave that place. In line 8, *Rakdo-Bibo-Injang* means monkey. She is telling him that this place, i.e., the wife's home is not a fitting place for a human being, he should leave it. There is no disrespect meant to

the wife of the deceased. In line 9, *Pongsi-Chiratdrang* is a bow-like diviner.

In line 10, is a *Bato-Bibo-Injang* parrot.

***SORA – V (CHA·RAMA)***

*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo*

*Hai do·ma re·chabo, re·chabo*

*Mima ga·susetramni ija*

*Na·ma kentri kramni ija, ija*

*Re·numako ma·gale*

*Na·ma gogalramkoba galbo*

*Amatangna gogale chakatbo*

*Balmimako pakchite*

*Mima meduramkoba ketinbo*

*Kawatangna ketinge chakatbo*

*Amatangna chakatbo, chakatbo!*

*Gitingtangna re·chabo, re·chabo*

*Rongji-Bimadrangni songdongram ija*

*Songji-Me·chikdrangni a·charamni ija*

*Brak-Norang-Korangna mama kena sikongnawa*

*Amatangna chakatbo,*

*Me·gon-Chimatongrangna do·ma totorakongnawa*

*Gitingtangna re·chao, re·chao.*

Translation:

Verse V: (At the *Cha·rama*)

Come on, uncle, get up, get up

Come on, *do·ma*, get moving, get moving

To the place where the rice is cooked

There, where the dry fish is washed

Where the *re·ru* is

Where the dry fish is prepared

Leave it all for your mother and get up

Tearing the plantain leaf

Leaving the place where you wrap the rice and eat

Face towards your loved ones and get up

Get up, for your mother, get up!

Start, for your banyan tree, start

This is the dwelling place of *Rongji-Bima*

This is the dwelling place of *Songji-Me·chik*

Uncle must be afraid of *Brak-Norang-Korang*

Get up for your mother,

*Do·ma* must be terrified of *Me·gon-Chimatongrang*

When you start for your banyan tree.

*Cha·rama* is the place between the front wall and the *manjri* in a *nokachik*. It is the place where the cooking usually takes place. Line 13: *Rongji-Bima* is the name for a *me·gol*, a ladle used to stir rice as it boils in the pot. Line 14: *Songji-Me·chik* means the same as *Rongji-Bima*. Line 15: *Brak-*

*Norang-Korang* is the name for spoon. Line 17: *Me·gon-Chimatongrang* is the same as line 13 and 14.

***SORA – VI (NOKKRA)***

*Dun wakpatdrangni songdongram, songdongram*  
*Segin nokmadrangni a·charam,*  
*Ama-Dikki-Noringko gatramne*  
*Ambi-Chingri-Gitelko donramsa,*  
*Ama-Kingri-Gitelko gate*  
*Mimako ma·jie rorikna*  
*Namatangna gogalbo!*  
*Mimako ma·jie dongrikan*  
*Kawatangna pe·pilbo!*

Translation:

Verse VI: (The Treshold)

This is the dwelling place of the *dun wakpat*  
The dwelling place of the big *segins*,  
The dwelling place of *Ama-Dikki-Noring*  
The place where *Ambi-Chingri-Gitel* is kept,  
Placing *Ama-Kingri-Gitel*  
To sort out the rice husk  
Leave it all for your loved one!  
Let them stay, sorting out the rice  
Return to your loved ones!

Line 1: *dun wakpat* are various household items made from woven bamboo strips, wicker work, like the *ruan*, the *kerang*. Line 2 implies the wall. Line 3 *Ama-Dikki-Noring* is the name for mat. Line 4: *Ambi-Chingri-Gitel* is the *gin·chera*. Line 5: *Ama-Kingri-Gitel* is the *ruan*. Line 7: here loved one means the deceased mother.

***SORA – VII (AGRANG)***

*Hai mama chakat, chakat*  
*Hai do·ma re·cha, re·cha!*  
*Masu grong napina*  
*Wendikgonggiane ija,*  
*Do·ku ra·ching dambena*  
*Katgoldemongnawane ija, ija,*  
*Hai mama chakatbo gogaleha*  
*Hai do·ma re·chabo gongtingeha!*  
*Anga nolma wa·tre rugnok, rugnok*  
*Hai bada idari enggnok, enggnok!*  
*Bipa moongkatgnok anga*  
*Challang dokongkatgnok anga mo*  
*Bipa paidanghane agrango ba·gale*  
*Slang dogitalhane*  
*Jeng chon·o cha·jane*  
*Bipa paidalkoba donja, donja*  
*Slang dogitalkoba donja, donja*  
*Sari aidi dongbone, sari aidi dongbone*

*Mani aidi jitbone, mani aidi jitbone,  
Bipa moongkatgnok mo anga  
Challang dokongkatgnokmo anga  
A·pal daarinawa  
Jeng chon·o cha·gija  
Donitengko ninawa  
Agrango gagija,  
Challang bipagrakne  
Budu ga·rikketeming  
A·pal daarinawa,  
Bipa nateng gitchakne  
Mima ga·suseteming  
Bon·e daarinawa  
Sari rama watbone sari  
Mani aidi jitbone, manine.*

Translation:

Verse VII: (At the *Agrang*)

Come on, uncle, get up, get up

Come on, *do·ma*, get moving, get moving!

Holding the horns of the bull

That is held there,

For the young bull

Scared away there, there,

Come on, uncle, leave it be and get up

Come on, *do·ma*, get moving firmly!

I will pull it down, pull it down

Come on, let's untie it!

In line 3, the bull implies the bull that is kept by him. Before *Wangala*, the Garos have a custom called *matchu agrang gata*. In this custom, a bull is brought inside the *nokachik*, and kept in the *agrang*. It is cut and eaten at the time of *Wangala*. The *jengkok* previously mentioned also pertains to this custom. Line 4 implies the pen built for the bull in the *agrang*. Line 9 implies that she will pull down the *agrang*. Line 10 implies that all the ties that bind him there will be untied.

I will herd out the male  
I will beat out the warrior  
This is a good male  
Only just climbed the hill  
Doesn't eat when it is fed  
The male of good stock is also not kept  
Even if he has just climbed the hill.  
Sister-in-law, please stay,  
Mother-in-law, please move out of the way,  
I will herd out the male

Line 11 implies the deceased, likening him to a bull. Line 12 means the same thing as line 11. Line 13: meaning that the bull is of good stock, also likening the deceased to a bull. Line 14: signifying that it is young. Line 18:

here sister-in-law is the wife of the deceased. Line 19: the mother-in-law of the deceased. Line 20: meaning “we are taking our son home”.

I will beat out the warrior  
He will not heed my words  
He won't eat when fed  
Will look when you serve  
Will not climb the *agrang*,  
A strong warrior  
He will break the ropes  
He will run off in the open,  
The red cheeked male  
To the eating place  
He will go everywhere  
Sister-in-law, please don't block the way  
Mother-in-law, please move away

Line 22: meaning that the soul of the deceased will try to go wherever he pleases. Line 29: meaning that he doesn't listen to her words.

SORA – VIII (PANGSONI)

*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo*  
*Hai do·ma re·chabo, re·chabo!*  
*Amatangna skangaha mo*  
*Do·rangdingma-Rangdingma dake*  
*Bilondime rosobo mama, mama,*  
*Gitingtangna jaja mo*

*Do·pa gisim pil·e dake*  
*Goonchoke jansobo,*  
*Dongkiakna -Sing:jina mo*  
*Ja·gitote ja' matgen nichengbo name*  
*Amatangna chakato*  
*Bolchinnina-Kottinina-Chongrina mo*  
*'Nigitote miknapgen!' Ine an·dil monabe*  
*Gitingtangna re·chao*  
*Nang' gitingdranga*  
*Mikmakmana mesae roosa*  
*Namatangna gogale chakatbo.*

Translation:

Verse VIII: (Pangsoni)

Come on, uncle, get up, get up  
Come on, *do·ma*, get moving, get moving!  
Before your mother  
Like the *Do·rangingma-Rangingma*  
Fly down and wait together,  
Many for the banyan tree  
Like the black drongo  
Go before us,  
Look for a place and ask  
You will trip and cut your foot, look first

Line 3 implies that he should walk first and lead. Line 4: *do-rangdingma-rangdingma* is the name for the swallow bird. Line 5: you can be friends, you do not need to fear these birds. Line 6 implies many of them playing together.

When you get up for your mother  
For the crossbar  
Do not fear saying, 'I will look up and get something in my eye!'  
When you start for your banyan tree  
Your banyan tree  
Dance like you're drunk  
For your kinsmen, walk with purpose

Line 13: implies that he will look up to the *pangsoni* and get something in his eye. Line 16, meaning to go in joy.

### ***SORA – IX (BALIM)***

*Namana ja·dil su·kanna*  
*Gogaleha chakatbo mama,*  
*Rangchin-Mikkang ba·rango*  
*Achakma·na birone rosokan,*  
*Nang·ni kawa ganapang mo*  
*Namatangna chakatbo,*  
*Gitingtangna re·chabo, re·chabo*  
*Gitingna hajalsana*

*Amana warisana*

*Amana warisana*

*Hai mama chakat, chakat*

*Gitol rangchinchintangko gogat, gogat!*

*Rangchin-Mikkang ba·rangko de·so, chridim*

*Achakmana mi on·na skirimkan.*

Translation:

Verse IX: ( At the *Balim*)

Take root in the good

Leave everything and get up, uncle,

At the *Rangchin-Mikkang ba·rang*

Give to the dog,

Your beloveds might climb

Get up for your own good,

Get moving for your banyan tree

For the banyan tree, for the thousand

For mother, the deep water

For mother, the deep water

Come on, uncle, get up, get up

Take the gong!

Carry the *Rangchin-Mikkang ba·rang*, you lot

Learn to give food to the dog

*Balim* is the place covered by the *pangsoni*. Line 1, so that he will be born again in his clan. Line 3: *rangchin* means the sky, the clouds. The line

implies coming out into the open. Line 4: giving the dog's portion. Line 5: meaning the younger cousins and nieces. Line 12: the gong is taken in place of the deceased. It signifies that they are taking his soul back so that he can be born again in his own clan. The fact that he should be born again in his clan is because, for the Garos, the clan relationship is very sacred and it is taboo to marry someone from the same clan. So, if he were born again in some other clan, then in future he could inadvertently marry someone from the clan he belonged to in his previous birth. This shows that the lineage of a person follows him even beyond death. Line 13: meaning to agree upon something. Line 14: dog is mentioned in this verse because it is under the *balim* that a dog is usually given its food.

***SORA –X (KIMINDAM)***

*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo*

*Pattal meriraphane ija*

*Pattal merirapeming rosonawa*

*Amaan warikaa mamako*

*Sa nichaksonawa mamako?*

*Gitingin hajalsaain mo*

*Araruni jakdingni ija mo*

*Kimildamko de:jiko gogalbo*

*Araru- jakriko de:kribo*

*Katchi bolgop dokana*

*Do·ma totoraknabe*  
*Amatangna chakato*  
*Do·de a·dimdimna mama jagoknam*  
*Gitingtangna re·chao*  
*Bodila kal·aksonawa*  
*Inaba jagipunam mama*  
*Kamponba mangkalsonawa*  
*Inaba totorakongnawa do·ma, do·ma.*

Translation:

Verse X: (At the Sacrificial Altar)

Come on, uncle, get up, get up  
To the open place there  
Be at the open place  
Mother has inundated uncle  
Who will wait for uncle?  
The thousand banyan trees will  
The branches of the *araru* there

Line 2: the open place meaning the open courtyard. Line 9: *araru* is a kind of palm whose leaves are used at the sacrificial altar.

Leave the altar behind  
Clean the *araru* leaf  
Don't be afraid of the *katchi*  
Don't be terrified, *do·ma*

When you get up for mother  
Do not be startled at the peacock dust  
When you start for your banyan tree  
*Bodila* will tease you  
But do not be afraid  
*Kampon* will also try to frighten you  
But do not be terrified, *do·ma, do·ma*.

Line 11: meaning that he has to leave the altar where he has made his sacrifices and conducted other rituals during his married lifetime behind. Line 16: meaning not to be afraid of the hills and valleys. Line 18: *bodila* means elephant. Line 20: *kampon* is a large ant, called *kompru*.

SORA – XI

*Hai chakat , chakat mama*  
*Hai re·cha, re·cha do·ma!*  
*A·ni-Drongdrangba dongsonawa*  
*'Ga·bato ga·sokjawakon?' ine kena siknawa mama*  
*'Sing·o sosinawakon?' ine an·dil monawa do·ma;*  
*Amatangna chakato*  
*Kena sikna nangjane*  
*Gitingtangna re·chao*  
*An·dil mona nangjane mama!*  
*Hai mama chakatbo, chakatbo*  
*Hai do·ma re·chabo, re·chabo!*  
*Rama dimchang pang·sange batbajok mama*

*Chima al·ang ko·kange gabajok do·ma*  
*'Amain jaktuwatnawa?' ine kena siknawa*  
*'Palang malskoknawa' ine an·dil monawa mama*  
*Hai do·ma chakat, chakat*  
*Hai mama re·cha, re·cha!*  
*Chigao-Ringman-Tingmano*  
*Gitingin hajalsa,*  
*Napi gansoong sikongane amako*  
*A·songo-Sasatbolbolo*  
*Chiga-Ringman-Tingmano*  
*Icha rosoongane*  
*Napi gansoongane*  
*Amaba warisaba mo*  
*Gitingba hajalsaba mo,*  
*Amatangni a·songna chakatbo*  
*A·song-Ringman-Tingmanna chakatbo*  
*Gitingtangni chigana re·chabo*  
*Chigana-Sasatbolbolna mamara, mamara.*

Translation:

Verse XI:

Come on, get up, get up, uncle

Come on, get moving, get moving, *do·ma!*

*A·ni-Drong* will also be there

Do not be afraid, uncle, saying, 'Will I be able to cross?'

Do not be terrified, *do·ma*, saying, 'Will the water reach my waist?'

When you get up for your mother

You should not be afraid  
When you start for your banyan tree  
You should not be terrified, uncle!

The last two verses will be recited along the way from the house of the deceased to the house of his birth. Line 3: *a-ni drong* means the earthworm. Line 5: they have reached a river or a stream.

Come on, uncle, get up, get up  
Come on, *do·ma*, get moving, get moving!  
We have crossed to the open path, uncle  
We have crossed the uneven terrain  
Do not be afraid thinking, 'Mother will drop me?'  
Do not be terrified, uncle, thinking, 'Will I be able to cross the bed?'  
Come on, *do·ma*, get up, get up  
Come on, uncle, get moving, get moving!  
After completing everything at the *Chiga*  
The thousand banyan trees,

Lines 13 and 14: she is describing the difficult terrain that they have crossed. Line 16: meaning he might slip. Line 19: *chiga* is the place from which people collect water. The line is all inclusive, including everything that can be found in the *chiga* from stones to fish to crabs, etc.

We are entering our land  
At *A·song-Sasatbolbolo*

After completing everything at the *chiga*  
We are waiting there  
We are entering  
Even mother, the deep water  
Even the thousand banyan trees,  
Get up for your mother's country  
Get up to complete everything in the land  
Get moving to your banyan tree's watering place  
For the *chiga-sasatbolbol*, uncle

In line 21, they have reached the boundaries of the land belonging to their village. Line 22, including everything in the land from trees to animals and so on.

### ***SORA – XII***

*Hai chakat, chakat*  
*Hai re·cha, re·cha*  
*A·song Roe-A·songna*  
*Ma·gipani a·songna chakatbo*  
*Chiga Rochi-Pang·sangna*  
*Chiambini chigana re·chabo!*  
*Du·dap soribrina chakat, chakat*  
*A·song srekdarina re·cha, re·cha!*  
*Amatangna chakato, chakato*  
*Mikdongma jakdrimana re·chao*

*Gitingtangna re·chao, re·chao*  
*Dodorakapanaba mo*  
*Ama kena siknabe mo*  
*Kena-Mesengbalnaba mo*  
*Toma-Totorakongna mo*  
*Raka-Soljadrangba dongsonawa*  
*Inaba kena sikongnam mama*  
*Bika- Miratrangba rosonawa*  
*Inaba totorakongnam do·ma.*

Translation:

Verse XII:

Come on, get up, get up  
Come on, get moving, get moving  
For the pleasant place  
For mother's country  
The pleasant watering place  
Of our ancestors!  
To the hearth, get up, get up  
Start for the place where you like to dwell!  
When you get up for your mother

Line 7, the place where he permanently resides, i.e., where he has grown up eating the food cooked there.

Get moving for the ears of rice

When you start for your banyan tree  
Do not be terrified  
Mother, don't be afraid  
Even for fearsome things  
Even the cowards are waiting  
Even the brave are waiting  
Do not be afraid, uncle  
The hard hearted will also be waiting  
But do not be terrified, *do·ma*.

This ends when they reach the ancestral home of the deceased and the person on whom this task falls will have to recite all along the way. To the Garos, death is not the end but the start of another cycle.

### ***Jaragata – Den·jaringa***

This is the other form of *Jaragata* performed when a person is ill. It is also called as *Chisalbat Amua*. This form of *Jaragata* is performed only when a child wastes away without any apparent reason. This is done so that the soul of the child lying ill does not go somewhere else and gets born there. The Garos believe that when a child wastes away for no apparent reason, it is because the soul of that child is lost somewhere else and there is a danger that it might be born again there. It is in a state of limbo, neither here nor there because here, it does not feel that it is with its mother and there it is not yet

born. So, the soul is stuck between two bodies, one already born but wasting away and the other still in the womb. If it were to be born again, then the person lying ill would die. This ritual is performed to call back the soul to its rightful place.

First, a stream will be dammed and an altar put on one side. A ladder will also be put up and a string will be tied to it across the stream and one end of it will be strung all the way to the house. At the altar will be tied a chicken drumstick and crab clippers. The water is dammed so that the one who is performing this ritual will do so beating on the water and the string is strung across so that the priest can see when the soul is coming back. It is believed that when the soul returns, the string will move and as long as the string does not move, the priest will keep chanting and beating the water with a stick. The string will be strung all the way to the house and will end inside, in the middle of the house. Here, there will be brass gong and some cotton and a branch of the *dagal* plant will be hung over it from the same string. Now, the soul that has been roaming will hear the call and it will be so unbearable that it has to return. As the soul returns, it is believed that the thread strung from the stream will start moving. As the soul reaches the body of the child, the *dagal* branch will drop down and at the exact moment the thread will be snipped off. The

thread will then be put on the child and the mother will carry it on her back and start dancing and merrymaking. This ritual is performed when the child is around one and a half years old and cries unconsolably. Though the practice is usually for children, it is also performed for grown ups too, when they waste away without any apparent reason.

When this ritual is performed, no one is informed of this, only the immediate family members. This ritual is performed in secret. No one is informed because if such was the case, and somebody heard of it then they could think that the soul is being born again in their child, so they will take the precaution of putting a charm on the child or beat them to the ritual. So, the preparations for this ritual has to be done in secret. When the rice beer brewed for this purpose is ready, then a priest will be called and the ritual will be performed quickly and in secret.

***Den·jaringa/chitata***

*Hai hai chakat.. chakat*

*Amikkani jamaa...bao bao am·onga sokkua...*

*Amikkani janggiaa..bagipako sing·onga amaa...chakat*

*Nang·ni ama dongonga inoonmo...io...*

*Na·ongni sokku ruonga ian...*

*Bako sokku am·onga...na·aa nanggo...o..ibae...*

*Bako ama sim·onga...bako ama sing·onga...e...*

*Japing gambarebokan...ruarongai...ia nang·ni ama....*

*Sokme rai chi·chokdim dongaronga e....nang·ni sokku...*

*Ma·na ama am·onga e....na·a...*

*Bana sokku sing·onga...na·a...*

*Hai hai gaba...a....gabaa....*

*Nabak nateng chotnawa ...iba..e...iba*

*Aliko sokku am·ama.....a...*

*Alik bikma bunaoa.....a...gaba....gaba...*

*Na·tengko sokku am·ama a...*

*Na·batko sokku am·ama...a...*

*Na·ba nateng chotnawa gaba...gaba*

*Iamo..ma·ko sokko kangipa...a...*

*Ruaronga...e...ruaronga*

*Nang·ko ja·ping rimgipa dongarongae dongaronga gabaao*

*Hai hai re·ba...re·ba...re·ba...*

*Sagalchako am·ama...maina ia...*

*Rekbokchako sing·nama...*

Translation:

Come on, come on, get up.. get up

So an so's soul...where is it searching for its siblings...

So and so's life..what more do you want...get up

Your mother is still here...here...

Your siblings are all here...

Which siblings are you looking for...you...o..come...

Which mother are you looking for...which mother are you looking for...e...

The white wooded thigh...is still here...this, your mother....

The beautiful gourd tip is here e....your siblings...  
 Why, then, are you looking for a mother e....na·a...

Line 1, the priest is asking the sick child to get up. Line 2, the priest asks where the soul of the child has gone to look for its siblings. Line 3, means that the child has everything it wants right there, but it is still searching for something better. So, the priest asks the child what more it wants. Line 4, means that the child's mother is still here, it does not have to look elsewhere. In line 5, the child is told that even his siblings are all here. Line 6 and 7, the child is believed to be sick because its soul is wandering. The priest asks that when his mother and all his relatives are all here, who he is searching for that his soul has to go wandering. Line 8 and 9, the white wooded thigh is a metaphor for the mother of the child, the beautiful gourd tip is a comparison meaning the mother's breast, again a metaphor for the mother.

Who do you want to call your siblings...you...  
 Come on, come on, get up...a....get up....  
 The rings, the handles will break ...iba..e...iba  
 Are you calling the shrimps your siblings.....a...  
 The shrimps are bad.....a...get up....get up...  
 Are you calling the fishes your siblings a...  
 Are you calling the zebra fish your sibling...a...  
 Your ring will break, get up...get up

Here she is..the mother who fed you...a...

Still here...e...still here

The priest asks the child if on his wanderings, he calls the shrimps and the fishes his siblings. To entice the child to return, he tells him that the shrimps are a bad lot and not good for him. In line 19, he tells him that the child's mother, the one that fed him, is still here.

The one who took you on her lap is still here, still here... get up

Come on, come on, come...come...come

Are you searching from the sea...why is it...

Are you searching from the sea...

Line 23 and 24, *sagal-rekbok* is the sea. The lines mean that the soul of the child is lost wandering in the sea.

#### **4.07 *Me·mang Rakkia***

*Me·mangko rakkia*, or putting out food for the dead is another post funeral tradition. Usually it is not practised for more than a month. For example, if a person died during the new moon. After he has been cremated, a *delang* will be constructed where the family members will put out food for the newly dead. This practice will be carried on until another new moon has risen. Then the *delang* will be destroyed. This is the last of the post funeral rituals.

After this, if the deceased had worked hard in his fields the whole year, and was not able to eat of his harvest, then *midong kaa* is practised. Three or four or six bamboo poles are put up and an ear of rice each is tied up on the top of the poles. This is the last ritual that is done for the deceased.

#### 4.08 Crossing Over

In Greek mythology, Charon is the ferryman of Hades<sup>33</sup> who carried the souls of the newly deceased across the rivers Styx<sup>34</sup> and Acheron<sup>35</sup> that divided the world of the living from the world of the dead. A coin to pay for Charon for passage, usually an obolus<sup>36</sup> or danake<sup>37</sup>, was sometimes placed in the mouth of a dead person. Some authors say that those who could not pay the fee, or those whose bodies were left unburied, had to wander the shores for one hundred years.<sup>38</sup>

In the Garo tradition, a *natapsi* or any other shiny object is placed in the hand of the deceased. It is said that before the deceased is reborn again he goes to *me·mang a·song* and on the way to *me·mang a·song* there awaits a demon called *Nawang* who waits for souls passing through his domain. The newly dead would have to throw the *natapsi* in his hand and *Nawang* would momentarily get distracted by the shiny object and rush to pick it up. It was

during this opportune moment that the soul of the dead could cross safely into *me·mang a·song*. If it so happened that the deceased did not have anything with him, then *Nawang* would lead him astray and the soul would be cursed to wander for eternity.

#### 4.09 *Kabes*

Apart from the rites and rituals, there are a number of funeral dirges called *Kabes* that are sung on the different occasions during and after the funeral. The following is a dirge that is sung when a son-in-law has died and it is sung when his relatives have finally arrived. It was sung by Rok Cheran Sangma of Gambarigre.

##### ***Kabe: Ma·nok sokbamitingo ring·ani***

*Aiha! Noskani nappgiminna oe, nang·chawaride*

*Du·du rim·e nappgimin bu·alane*

*Angna ku' agannaba ine.*

*Aiha! Nang·mani sokme galwang chagipani re·baengo*

*Nang·chawaride ku' aganbone.*

*Aiha! Nokoni ba·rachik gangipani re·baengo*

*Denokpanteko chakatkan ine*

*Aiha! Nang·ni ba·rima iano donga*

*Ku' aganboda nang·mana.*

*Nang·mana ku·biba kribo*

*Aiha! Agan' do·ga chipgiminde bu·aria chawaride,*

*Aiha! Janggi cholijajokode*  
*Re·bajajokwa denokpantede.*  
*Aiha! Nang·ni amadangna*  
*Noko dongrikgipan sokbaengode,*  
*Nang·chawariko rime salsoboda.*  
*Aiha! Ganna bipake neng·gipani re·baengode*  
*Denokpante ku' aganboda.*  
*Aiha! Nang·madrangna*  
*Janggironggi-Me·chikko ruranan man·jama;*  
*Nang·mani sokbao sokbao nang·chawaria?*  
*Aiha! Agan-Cholsi-Me·chikko*  
*Jitatna man·jama denokpantea?*  
*Aiha! Nang·mani dul dokna sokbaengo*  
*Nang·chawaride ku·aning aganboda*  
*Barani mikkasimni re·baengo*  
*Denokpantede janggi sisoahakonde*  
*Aiha! Ganna bipake ma·gipaa*  
*Nang·ma amadrang sokbaengoa,*  
*Aiha! Jakra-Dongru-Me·chikan re·baengoda*  
*Nang·ni sokku,*  
*Aiha! Denokpantede tua janggimingna*  
*Nang·mana ra, ku' aganboda,*  
*Nang·ni nokbialnaa.*  
*Aiha! Nang·ma Indurian sokbaengode*  
*Chawaria ku·mesokboda.*  
*Aiha! Nang·ma mikka sokkuni re·baengo*  
*Denokpanteko agansoboda*

*Aiha! Nang·mani Badurini sokbaengoa*  
*Barani mikkasimni re·baengoa*  
*Aiha! Jaksi jilgipa sokbaengode, nang·madrang*  
*Aiha! Knimerimramgipa re·baengode*  
*Nang·ni sokkudrang*  
*Aiha! Chasuari aganboda nang·mana*  
*Ganna chu·onggipani sokbaengo*  
*Sokme chijimgipani re·baengo*  
*Aiha! Nang·na mibolbitchil jo·atgipa sokbaengai*  
*Challang bika kapgipa re·baengaha,*  
*Chawaride ma·manjane*  
*Nang·madrangko,*  
*Den·okpante uko jajikjajokne*  
*Nang·ni sokkudrangko*  
*Aiha! Nang·mani Gangga-Me·chikni sokbaengoa*  
*Ama Nang·da-Bimani sokbaengoa*  
*Nang·mana ku·mesoksura chawaria,*  
*Baradrangna ku·aganwatku denokpante*  
*Amana ku' agannaba na' de,*  
*Gisik a·ning naggimin bu·alane*  
*Sokkuna ku·mesoknaba*  
*Janggi jagima giminde bolama?*  
*Agan do·ga chipari agannane*  
*Kore-Binde napariha ku·sokane*  
*Nang·ni sokkutangna,*  
*Nang·mana ku·siksualboda chawaria*  
*Sokkuna kuaganalboda denokpantea.*

*Aiha! Bimangtangko jilana agansuala ine nang·mana*  
*An·matangko donbigrange gimaatsoana*  
*Nang·ni sikkudrangna*  
*Aiha! Nang·ni sikkudrangna*  
*Ku·arike bu·alsoboda*  
*Angni okballingara*  
*Aiha! Nang·ma Nang·do-Bimani sokbaengoa*  
*Chawaride ku·ma rengsi skakon,*  
*Aiha! Nang·madrangni Gangga-Me·chikni re·baengo*  
*Denokpantede ku·sikan neng·soakonde.*

Translation:

Kabe: Sung when the relatives of the deceased son-in-law arrive.

*Aiha!* Your son-in-law

Came in with the chicken, it's all like a lie

You will say, "You gave me your word".

*Aiha!* When the mother who nursed you is arriving

Please talk to them.

*Aiha!* When the people wearing the *ba·rachik* from the house arrives

To tell the son to get up

*Aiha!* Your siblings are here

Talk to your mother.

Line 2: referring to the *do·sia* ceremony, when he became a son-in-law, he was supposed to outlive his parents-in-law, but now it is as if he has not

kept his word. Line 6: when the relatives of the deceased are arriving.

Referring to the deceased (line 7).

Show your mother your breath

*Aiha!* The doors of speech are closed,

*Aiha!* When life is useless

The son will not return.

*Aiha!* For your mothers

Those who remained home are arriving,

Pull up your son-in-law.

*Aiha!* When they are coming with clothes on their shoulders

Speak, son.

*Aiha!* For your mothers

Line 11: the singer of this dirge is asking the deceased to talk to his mother. The person is already dead, hence he cannot speak anymore (line 12).

Lines 13, 14: the life has already gone out of the body, so the deceased will not return. Mothers meaning the kin from his mother's side (line 15). Implying that those who remained at his ancestral home are coming, i.e., since he had to leave the place of his birth when he got married.

Can't you call *Janggironggi-Me·chik*;

When your mother arrives, son-in-law?

*Aiha! Agan-Cholsi-Me·chik*

Can't you move her, son?

*Aiha!* When your mother is coming to call everyone,

Son-in-law, please speak

When the dark clouds are coming

I think his life is already gone

*Aiha!* Your mother with the cloth over her shoulder

Your mother and the others are coming,

*Janggironggi-Me·chik* meaning the woman that gave life, i.e., his mother (line 21). *Agan-Cholsi-Me·chik* meaning the mouth, the goddess who gives the power of speech (line 23). Line 27 refers to the people who are coming for the funeral, comparing them to dark clouds gathering before the rain. Line 30 is referring to the relatives of the deceased.

*Aiha!* When *Jakra-Dongru-Me·chik* is coming

The one who nursed you

*Aiha!* Son, you have slept off

For your mother, go ahead, speak

For your real home.

*Aiha!* When your real mother is arriving

Son-in-law, show that you can speak.

*Aiha!* When your mother is arriving

Son, speak.

*Aiha!* When your mother who is like the storm clouds is coming

Line 31, *Jakra-Dongru-Me-chik*, the woman who gave birth to you.  
Line 35 means the ancestral home of the deceased. Line 40, meaning the mother who could give plenty of food, almost like the rain.

When the dark clouds are coming  
*Aiha!* When the ones who took care of you are arriving  
*Aiha!* When the white haired are coming  
Your relatives  
*Aiha!* Get up and talk to your mother  
When the one with enough clothes arrives  
Who can also give enough food  
*Aiha!* The one who prepared food for you is arriving  
Your nephews and uncles,  
You don't feel anymore, son-in-law

In line 41 and previously in line 27, the relatives of the deceased are compared to rainclouds because just like the rain clouds, they come bearing water, i.e., tears. In line 43, the white haired means all the elder relatives of the deceased that have come for the funeral. In line 46, the one with enough clothes means the person who has looked after the deceased all his life without him feeling the need of anything.

Your relatives,

You don't know anything anymore  
Your relatives  
*Aiha!* When your mother, *Gangga-Me·chik* is arriving  
When mother *Nang·da-Bima* is arriving  
Show your mother that you can speak, son-in-law,  
Speak to your people  
Even to speak to your mother,  
You don't know anymore, so it's like a lie  
Even to speak to your relatives

Line 54, *Gangga-Me·chik* meaning the person who has given birth to you. *Nang·da-Bima* also refers to his mother.

*Kabes* or dirges such as these are sung at appropriate times at funerals. All these dirges are sung by the female relatives of the deceased and according to the relation of the deceased to the singer, the dirges also differ. The reason that women play a major role in most of the funeral and post funeral rites is because of the Garos' belief in rebirth, and since the deceased will be born again of a woman, preferably of his own clan, the major rituals like *Jaragata* are performed by them.

From the amount of material that has been collected, we can see that death is a very important transition in the Garo worldview. The elaborate rites and rituals have been passed on through countless generations go toward making sure that a soul will be born again to the world repeating the life cycle again until the next death.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Ringmuthu, Dewansingh S. *Apasong Agana*, Delhi: Romil Publishers (P) Ltd. 1970. p. 43
- <sup>2</sup> Gairipa literally means “the father of Gairi” the suffix *-pa* is usually put to denote that he is the father of the person whose name is suffixed. The Garos address married men with children by the name of their first born and adding the suffix.
- <sup>3</sup> The father of Singeri
- <sup>4</sup> Name of a portion of the river Simsang where the water is deep. All and any deep part of a river is called *wari* in Garo.
- <sup>5</sup> In this case, *Do·pa* is a word and is not suffixed.
- <sup>6</sup> The father of Karu
- <sup>7</sup> A deity in the Garo pantheon
- <sup>8</sup> Here, this character is a monitor lizard
- <sup>9</sup> A roofless platform attached to the traditional houses which is also used for storing vegetables like yam, etc. It was usually as high as the house.
- <sup>10</sup> Translated from the original Garo.
- <sup>11</sup> The home of the spirits of the dead. Believed to be in what is now Balpakram National Park in South Garo Hills.

- 12 A place in Balpakram.
- 13 Also a place in Balpakram
- 14 Tokari is a container made by cutting a bamboo whole with one side open and the other side closed by keeping the notch intact. It is put in the walls by making a pointed end from the closed notch. It is used for keeping stuff like spoons and *mil·ams*, etc.
- 15 Sacrificial altar made of bamboo and leaves.
- 16 This pertains to the Mother-in-Law Marriage that has been covered in the previous chapter
- 17 An expression
- 18 *Boning apa* – a form of address to a kin
- 19 A length of cloth that is used to carry babies
- 20 Ceremonial gong
- 21 Earthen pot used for storing rice
- 22 Space above the cooking area in the kitchen used to store things so that the smoke will preserve it.
- 23 A kind of drum

- 
- <sup>24</sup> A small wooden log drum that is considered to be the residing place of a deity
- <sup>25</sup> The ritual in question refers to *Jaragata*
- <sup>26</sup> This also refers to *Jaragata*.
- <sup>27</sup> An expression
- <sup>28</sup> The bedchamber in a traditional Garo house
- <sup>29</sup> A wicker basket used for getting fodder for cattle
- <sup>30</sup> A bunch of strings used by Garo men and women to tie their hair
- <sup>31</sup> *Pakma* = wall, in this case it means a flat pillar that is usually part of a traditional Garo house
- <sup>32</sup> According to legend, these were the birds that taught the Garos how to dance during the *Wangala* festival
- <sup>33</sup> Hades refers to both to the ancient Greek underworld, the abode of Hades, and to the god of the underworld. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades> (Access date: 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2010)
- <sup>34</sup> The Styx was a river in Greek mythology that formed the boundary Between Earth and the Underworld (also called Hades). It circles the Underworld nine times. The rivers Styx, Phlegethon, Acheron and Cocytus all converge at the centre of the Underworld on a great marsh,

which is also sometimes called the Styx. The other important rivers of the Underworld are Lethe and Eridanos, and Alpheus.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Styx> (Access date: 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2010)

- <sup>35</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, Acheron was known as the river of pain, and was one of the five rivers of the Greek Underworld. In the Homeric poems the Acheron was described as a river of Hades, into which Cocytus and Phlegethon both flowed. The roman poet Virgil called it the principal river of Tartarus, from which the Styx and Cocytus both sprang. The newly-dead would be ferried across the Acheron by Charon in order to enter the Underworld.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acheron> (Access date: 21st September, 2010)

- <sup>36</sup> A Greek silver coin worth a sixth of a drachma.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obolus> (Access date: 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2010)

- <sup>37</sup> The danake or danace was a small silver coin of the Persian Empire, equivalent to the Greek obol and circulated among the eastern Greeks.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danake> (Access date: 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2010)

- <sup>38</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charon\\_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charon_(mythology)) (Access date: 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2010)

# *Chapter V*

*Conclusion*

## **CHAPTER - V**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.01 Conclusion**

In this concluding chapter, an endeavour has been made to find out how different rites of passage are connected to one another. Efforts have been made to find out what the poems, chants, verses and songs express about the traditional world-view of the Garo community, what light they throw on the rituals, and their literary qualities. The findings of the previous chapters have been summed up and recorded. This has been done through the findings of the study of oral literature which accompanied the different rites of passage. Attempts have been made to place the rites of passage in perspective and to analyze the place of the oral tradition keeping in mind the rapidly Christianizing worldview of the modern Garo community.

In the first chapter, an introduction of the Garos has been made. The researcher has included everything that is required into the understanding of the following chapters. In the introduction of the Garos, the geographical distribution of the Garos has been included so as to place the location of the Garos in the world map and to put them in an international perspective. International, because the geographical distribution of the Garos span two

International, because the geographical distribution of the Garos span two nations, India and Bangladesh and if further study were to be done into the migratory routes of their oral history, could cover many more. By looking at the geographical distribution of the Garos alone, it can be ascertained that they are by far the largest ethnic group in the Eastern parts of the Indian sub-continent, and if geographical boundaries had depended on ethnicity, would have formed a formidable geographical entity. Since such is not the case, the researcher has seen that the Garos, though large in number, have been divided by geographical boundaries and face marginalization wherever they are located because in that geographical domain, they are a minority, be it in states like Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland or even in the state of Meghalaya, which they were instrumental in creating, or in Bangladesh.

The next part of the introduction deals with the history of the Garos. Being a tribe without a written language, most of the history has been passed down orally and as such can neither be categorized as fact nor as fiction. From whatever oral lore that has been collected, we can see that the Garos have lore that can trace their ancestry all the way to Israel, to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah and also genetic links with the Japanese. After they parted ways with the tribe of Japan, it is not certain how long they wandered until they came to

settle in the Tibetan plateau. After their migration from the Tibetan plateau into the Brahmaputra valley, they spread out over the plains and the hills south of the Brahmaputra. Now, it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of these accounts of their history. The part about the Jewish ancestry cannot be ascertained with certainty because they are from accounts collected by Dewansing Rongmitu Sangma from Sonaram Rongrokgre Sangma almost a century ago and till date, these two men have been the only sources for this theory. Both of them were educated men and it is not certain whether Sonaram, who was a Christian, and a well travelled man, could have made these grandiose claims from stories he heard from the bible or in his many travels. Though it may be easier to disregard these accounts as mere “tall tales” made by an educated traveler to awe his audiences, there are some arguments that support this theory. A closer look at the indigenous Garo religion and the ancient Jewish religion, would reveal striking similarities. For example, the belief in the Supreme Being. The Jews believe in a deity, that is the creator and the destroyer of all on earth and accordingly blesses and smites. The same way, the Garos believe in a similar deity, *Pattigipa Ra-rongipa Tattara Rabuga* who is also described as the same. The Jews never worshipped idols, neither did the Garos. Another striking similarity is the Jews belief in giving the first harvests of their crops to this deity which the Garos

believe, too, and will not touch a harvest until sacrificial offerings have been made of the first fruits. These are just a few similarities and many more can be discovered upon further study. As for their migration from Tibet, though there are no historical records, evidences of Garo villages can be seen all along the said migratory route and upon further study of their history, some new evidences might see the light of day. As for the Garos living in present day Bangladesh, according to one account, they are supposed to have migrated from present day Myanmar, though where they came from to get there in the first place is not known. Were they part of the group that came along the course of the Brahmaputra under the leadership of Dikgil Nongsting or were they another group altogether. Nevertheless, these accounts remain accounts only because there has not been any study made on the origin of the Garos. The Garos themselves are only now waking up to the importance of ethnic identity and are new to the field of anthropological research with most of the researches in anthropology and linguistics done by foreigners while the Garo researchers have resigned themselves to collecting and preserving the cultural heritage.

In the next part of the introduction, we come to the divisions that can be made of the Garos. The first of these divisions is the geographical division and

according to these divisions, there are changes in the dialects and of course, slight cultural variations. These variations can be divided into *A·beng*, *A·we*, *Atong*, *Chibok*, *Chisak*, *Dual*, *Gara Ganching*, *Matabeng*, *Matchi*, *Me·gam* and *Ruga*. With the advent of Christianity, the missionaries sought to create a lingua franca among the Garos and adopted the *A·we* dialect because it was the dialect used by the first division that they came across in their endeavour to spread the good word. Thus, they started using this dialect in the books and in conversation and soon it spread all over the Garo areas. In a way it unified the Garo areas but slowly killed off the other dialects. Though there are still some traces of these other dialects left in some remote pockets, the *Ruga* dialect has died out with the last living speakers of this dialect. The only surviving words have only been recent collections.

The *A·beng* dialect has survived the onslaught of this linguistic imperialism only because of sheer numbers while the *Atong* dialect because of the inaccessibility of their areas. In the present scenario, we cannot give the geographical division with precision because of the migration that has taken place on account of trade and commerce and we find that most areas are of mixed citizenry. The divisions that have been included are taken from a century old book by Major Playfair, which has also been the basis of all the

introductions on the Garos in all the books that have ever been published regarding the Garos.

The next division is of the Clans or *ma·chongs*. These divisions still stand strong in modern Garo society because it is this form of kinship that binds society together. This is one of the aspects of the Garo customs that has never gone out of style and looking at modern trends seems like it never will.

The last division that we have is that of religion. This is a fairly recent phenomenon and is rife with the pettiness that infects any organized religion. Christianity has divided Garos into different divisions, such as Baptist, Catholics, Seventh Day Adventist, etc. and these denominations created some misunderstanding between them but in course of time, they buried these Petty differences and went even to the extent of jointly translating the Bible by both the Baptist and the Catholics. This form of division raises its ugly head only when two people from different denominations of the same religion want to get married. It is easier for two people of different religions to get married than for those that are of different denominations within the same religion. Though this is still the case, it is also eventually fading away due to changes in the mindset of the people regarding this issue.

A part of the analysis includes, a small introduction been made on the language of the Garos. Citations from Fuller and Grierson have been taken and the language, with its various dialects, has been established into a group.

The next part deals with the occupations of the Garo people in general. Though they are a predominantly agricultural community, with the changing times they are also adapting. There was a rush for technical lines like engineering and medicine during the nineties but with the advent of globalization and the internet, the Garos have been venturing into other fields as well and recent trends have seen women, who were predominantly homemakers or teachers, also venture out into other careers.

The Garos, like any other tribe without a written language, have a rich oral tradition. As for their written language, there is a legend that before they settled into their present locations, they migrated from place to place. In order to preserve their written language, they had written it on the hides of animals and carried them rolled up. During one of their mass migrations, they fell upon hard times. Food was a scarcity and people were dying of starvation. In order to preserve the tribe, they had to take these hides and boil it and use it for food and thus, their written language was lost to the sands of time. There is no way of ascertaining the origin of this legend, whether it existed before the Garos’

contact with the outside more “civilized” world, like the Bengalis and the British, or it came into being after the contact. Some modern scholars are of the opinion that all tribes with only oral language have some sort of legend amongst themselves about the loss of their written language. If the Garos’, or any tribe for that matter, have the legend of the loss of their written language before contact with any of the outsiders, then the fact that they have a concept of language in the written form has to be given some amount of thought. If it came later, then the legend could be attributed to the introduction of the written language of the outsiders.

In Chapter II, the researcher has dealt with the elaborate rites of passage that are performed at the time of the birth of a child. Before the rites, the researcher takes a look at the beliefs that the Garos have on the universal scheme of things. According to the belief that was observed, the Garos believe that the fate of every man is predestined at the time of birth. They believe that at the time of birth, the living spirits of all the living and non-living gather at the place of birth holding their plantain leaves to see on whose lot will fall the fate of the new born. According to this belief, the fate of the newborn is sealed, i.e., his end. The time of death, the age of death and the way he will die is all determined at this time. This belief has a basis on a story about the

discovery of this; the story is given in the second chapter. In order that the new born may not have a gruesome death or an untimely death in his fate, the Garos have some practices. The first of these practices is the exorcism of the spirits that are supposed to be holding out their plantain leaves hoping that the lot of the child will fall on him. Another practice is that of laying out a plantain leaf on the spot where the baby will fall once it comes out of the mother's womb. This is done so that the baby will not fall on anyone else's leaf and live a long life. And yet another practice is that of naming the baby as soon as it comes out from the mother's womb. If the name was not already decided, then the midwife attending would give it any name that came to her mind. This is also done so that no one else could name the baby and claim it for themselves.

Some of the rituals performed by the Garos at birth are performed from the time of conception till the time the baby is born, though not continuously but whenever the pregnant woman is ill. One such ritual is the *Darechik Amia*. It is believed to be the deity that causes miscarriages and untimely births. So appeasement rituals are performed for the deity every time the pregnant woman falls ill. There is always a *dikka* or a pot of rice beer kept for such occasions. In the same way, the Garos have the ritual called *Ma·mri Chinabak*.

*Ma·mri Chinabak* is one of the names of the supreme deity, *Tattara Rabuga*. It is believed that he forges a human in the Underworld. As the belief goes, since he is the creator, it is believed that he could also be the destroyer. So in the same way as the previous ritual, this ritual is also performed whenever the pregnant woman falls ill as an appeasement to this deity so that it may keep the unborn safe. The pronoun “it” is used for this deity because it is not certain of the gender of this deity. The gender of some of the deities of the Garo pantheon cannot be determined because the language does not have gender specific pronouns like “he” or “she” as a noun replacement. It may be the generally accepted notion that the supreme creator is a “he” but according to the researcher, since this deity is the creator, then it could either have both male and female attributes or be asexual.

In the next part of the second chapter, the cutting of the umbilical cord is mentioned. Here, too, is a ritual with sacrificial offering to *Tattara Rabuga* as a thanksgiving for the birth of a healthy baby. It is a given fact that the Garos give a thanksgiving offering to a deity at every event in their lives, be it a new born baby, a new harvest, etc. After a new harvest, the first fruits of their crops are always offered first to a deity. It is during this time that the baby will also be named. During this time, the priestess will exorcise the

malevolent spirits that may be present at the time of birth and asks only the benevolent ones to stay.

It has been seen that the Garos attribute every event or occurrence in nature to some deity or the other. Thus, either good or bad, any event has a cause in some deity. The next part of the second chapter is called *Do·magipa Doka*. This ritual is performed immediately after the birth of the baby to appease the deity *Me·chibram* so that it will let the placenta come out without any complications. From this ritual, we can see that even things like the placenta ejecting out of the woman's body is also attributed to a deity who demands appeasement. Though it is a ritual of appeasement, there are no sacrifices made. Only a rooster is made to cry out by beating it.

The next part of this chapter is the main birthing ritual, the *A·tilla Amua*. This ritual is performed at the time of birth and consists of five parts. The first four is performed inside the house and the last one outside. This ritual is as an appeasement to *Tattara Rabga*, the supreme creator, so that the baby may be allowed to be born safely. This ritual is performed by the priest when the woman undergoes labour and is performed in the main compartment of the house. It is performed to make the delivery as smooth and as

complication free as possible. The first part is performed with the necessary incantations, and goes on to the next part. In the next part, the *chi rugala* ceremony, a plantain leaf is spread out on the floor and water is poured as an offering to the deity. Then the ritual moves on to the next part, the *mi tinani*. In this ritual, an offering of rice is put in small, evenly numbered, portions on the plantain leaf. After this comes the *chu rugala*, in which rice beer is poured from a gourd over the rice portions on the plantain leaf as an offering. Then, the ritual moves out of the house into the courtyard in which a sacrificial altar or *kimindam* has been erected. We can see the systematic and elaborate way in which the offerings are made to the supreme deity in order to facilitate a safe birth.

The next part touches upon the topic of exorcism. Though a minor exorcism is already performed at the time of the cutting of the umbilical cord, there is yet another ritual for exorcism. After the priests and the midwives have washed themselves, the priest exorcises the place of any kind of malevolent entities that may have been drawn there. It is done by sprinkling water. The placenta was wrapped up in cloth and either buried or placed in a bamboo or a tree.

In recent years, we have seen the surge in interest in stem cell research and among them the umbilical cord as one of the best sources for it. Not only that, sources state that it has the potential to cure various diseases and the blood from the umbilical cord can also be used for transfusion, etc<sup>1</sup>. This could be a case of science catching up with ancient wisdom because since time immemorial, Garos have understood the importance of the umbilical cord and have always preserved it for future use in the cure of some diseases.

Like other cultures, too, the Garos have a haircutting ceremony. The significance of the haircutting ceremony is to remove all pollution and defilement that came along with its birth. The ceremony is accompanied by a chant called *Tongrengma*, which is a deity that is responsible for the mental retardation of a child. It is recited in order that the mental malaise may not strike the child and that it may grow up normally. There is also a ritual called *Kalkame Den·paka* which is performed during the haircutting ceremony. This is performed so that the child may grow up with strength and courage. This is also a ritual performed to the supreme creator. It is during this ceremony that the name of the child given at the time of birth will be affirmed or if the parents want to change it, they can do so.

Before the birth, not only the woman had to do certain things but the husband also had to do some other things. Some of these are also touched upon as an understanding of the intricate workings of the Garo psyche. During infancy, there are no rites of passage. Only lullabies called *dingdinga* and *mumua* are sung to the child to bring out the expectations in a child.

The next stage in a person's life was puberty. There were no rites of passage as such, but a significant change in a boy's life was that he would no longer be sleeping in his parents' house but would be sleeping in the *nokpante* with the other adolescent boys of the clan. Here, they would learn everything they had to learn about life. Here, they were taught every skill necessary in order that they may live useful lives. The boys would live on in the *nokpante* until they got married. This was a system that was in place long before the advent of classroom education in the Garo Hills. It may not have had book education, but it certainly imparted wholesome and practical education. It was crushed in the way of the juggernaut that is Christianity when *nokpantes* were converted to classrooms and institutions of the Church.

Long before the developed world understood the importance of independence in a man's life, the Garos had put it in practice in their

*nokpantes*. Every able bodied boy had to enter the *nokpante*, stay there and learn and once they come out of this institution, they were ready for life and were already mature and able to make decisions for themselves. In that way, it was far advantageous than conventional education, the only difference being literacy, which, had these institutions not been done away with, would also have found its place in the curriculum. The *nokpante* also had its various uses, which has been touched upon in the chapter. There have been plans of reviving this system albeit with a difference, not as a sleeping dormitory for boys but as an institution of learning in tandem with the school curriculum but it is yet to see the light of day.

Though boys had this opportunity of learning, the girls were also not left behind. They, too, learnt everything that they had to learn about the various duties of a woman from their mothers and elder female relatives during the course of their household duties and while working in the fields. The rites and rituals of birth that have been touched in this thesis are by no means complete. There are many aspects that need to be investigated further to gain insight into the intricate details that interweave these rituals together.

Chapter III deals with the rituals involving marriage ceremonies. The traditional and the modern aspects of marriage has been touched upon and the many forms of proposals, too. Though the Garos are also moving with the times in all aspects of life, they still retain some forms of traditional practices. One such example can be seen in the marriage ceremonies. The researcher has already touched upon the topic of marriage and all its aspects. In the modern world too, some of this practices are still relevant.

There are two types of sons-in law in the Garo marriage system, the *nokkrom* and the *chawari*. There is a lot of difference between these two types and the researcher has attempted to explain this as clearly as possible. The *chawari* is a son-in-law without privileges and without any stake in the property of his wife's parents. A *nokkrom*, on the other hand, is the husband of the heiress and every responsibility of running the household eventually falls on him after his father-in-law. The researcher has elaborated on all the responsibilities and duties of both these categories of sons-in-law in the Garo marriage system.

The next part deals with the marriage negotiations. This practice was usually only for the *nokkrom*, i.e., only practiced when the son-in-law to be

would be the heiress' husband, though nowadays it is practiced for both categories. It used to be such that these marriage negotiations would go on till dawn and the negotiations would be in the form of songs called *dani*. The researcher has given a couple of *danis* as examples to understand the kind of negotiations that took place for a marriage.

The next part is the *Do·sia* form of marriage, the traditional form of marriage which is solemnized by killing two chickens and then divining with the intestines of a third. This form of marriage is still relevant in some pockets where the indigenous religion is still practiced. The researcher has elaborated not only on the ceremony but the various practices associated with it. Also included is a case study so as to bring it to a more practical level and not just theoretical.

The next topic is the marriage by capture, which is a form of marriage in which a son-in-law is kidnapped and then married. This practice is no longer prevalent and have been so for quite sometime, but there are people who have been witness to it. The researcher has included a passage from Robbins Burling's book *Rengsanggre*, about the time when he was fortunate enough to witness such a kidnapping. In this form of marriage, the process

would start when a girl would tell her maternal uncles and elder brothers about a boy that she had taken a liking to and would like to get married to. Then, these male relatives of hers would kidnap the boy, with the knowledge of his family, and get them married off.

A part of the analysis includes the *Cha-senga*, a form of proposal made by the girl by engaging in service in the boy's family. This was practiced so that the girl may endear herself to the boy's family and get the boy's hand in marriage. This followed by The next topic in this chapter is *Cha-dila*. In this form of proposal, the girl cooks and sends some food with a friend to the boy, who, at this time, would be in the *nokpante*. She herself would hide and watch from somewhere close by. If the boy should accept and eat the food, the girl would come out of hiding and eat with him, ending in marriage. This followed by *Tunapa*. In this form, the suitor, either a boy or a girl, would sleep with his/her beloved and then they would get married after the necessary negotiations. During some festivals like *Wangala*, the boys and girls would be allowed some amount of freedom and they would stay up very late and sing songs of courtship to each other, ending in the marriage of one or more couples.

The next topic dealt with is that of *seka* or elopement. It is as the name suggests, the boy and the girl run off with each other. When a husband or a wife dies, it is the customary duty of their clan to provide a replacement for the deceased from among the same clan members. This is called *on-songa*. The researcher has elaborated on the subject and included a case study to demonstrate the complexity of this practice.

Mother-in-law marriage is an often misunderstood topic because of the fact that when the head of the household dies, the surviving wife is also referred to as the *jik*, the Garo term for wife, of her *nokkrom*, the husband of her heir. Though no conjugal relations exist between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law, this topic has been the cause of many misunderstandings just because of the term *jik*.

The topic further deals with the instances in which child marriages arises. The last topic regarding the forms of marriage is the Christian marriage, which is also the contemporary form of marriage. The researcher has elaborated upon the various practices associated with this form of marriage and also the various social impacts of marriages in Garo society.

There is the concept of *do·ki rama*, which refers to the day of idleness spent by the boy on the first day at his in-laws house after the marriage which is analysed at length.

The next topic included *greng gitaka gitcheng godapa*, which is basically the duties of a son-in-law, especially the *nokkrom*, towards his new family and towards society as a member of this family.

If a son-in-law is not the *nokkrom*, then after a certain amount of years that he stays with the in-laws, he has to build a house for himself and stay separately. This house is called the *nokde*. The researcher has elaborated upon the various practices associated with this, thus ending the chapter on marriage.

Chapter IV dealt with the next big event in the Garos life cycle, death and with it the preparation for rebirth. The Garos believe in a larger scheme of things, in life and death and rebirth. To them, death is not the end of everything but the soul of the dead returns and is born again. Almost all the customs and rituals that are carried out by the Garos have an origin in the story of Me·gam Gairipa, the first man to die. The researcher has seen that by far, death has the most elaborate rituals and the Garos are rich in funeral and post

funeral rites, from sending off the deceased to the funeral dirges to leading the soul to its ancestral home so that it can be born again in the same matrilineal lineage, etc. Like all ancient cultures, to the Garos, too, death is only a transition into rebirth. A line from an internet source goes:

“To die is to sleep, the myth seems to be saying, to be entombed among flickering dreams until we wake again.”<sup>2</sup>

The chapter deals with the ceremonies surrounding death. The first part deals with the custom of *kima songa*, i.e., erecting of carved wooden posts in the memory of the deceased. A human form would be carved in the wood and it would be put up in front of the house. If the house was an ancestral home, then a lot of *kimas* could be seen. These days such traditions are dying out as society moves on with the rest of the world.

The next part deals with *me-mang gisi*, *gro gisi*, or the debts that the deceased could not repay. This is a custom in which if the father-in-law could not pay off his debts, it would be transferred to his *nokkrom*. According to custom, the *nokkrom* was always the father-in-law's nephew, his sister's son, or a close cousin's son, but having the same clan as him. That is why for

generations, the *nokkrom* was always the same clan as the father-in-law, this was done as an insurance against the property falling into the hands of another clan. Thus, if a *nokkrom* was from another clan, the nephews of the father-in-law had a right to claim it as their birth right. It so happened that if the *nokkrom* was of another clan, during the marriage negotiations, the girl's father would have to clarify that there would be no claimants from among the father's nephews. Again, if the *nokkrom* was already from another clan, then the sister of the father-in-law would adopt him in a custom called *deragata*. Thus, the *nokkrom* would have the adopted clan of his father-in-law.

The next part deals with *tokari pita* or the slashing of the *tokari*, a holder for *mil·ams* made of bamboo. The person performing this task not only has to slash the *tokari* but he also slashes the walls and the doorways of the house. This was usually done when the head of the household dies, and the slashing of the walls and doorways of the house signified that since the head of the household had died, the household would fall into ruin. This is because even though the society was matrilineal, the main bread earners were usually men. In the story of Me·gam Gairipa, he had told his wife to take a new husband from among his matrilineal lineage. This in order that they would be provided for, they would not feel the need of a man in the house. Accordingly,

in the case study given in Chapter IV, someone had to be given as a replacement for the deceased. In this case, the wife of the deceased was aged so his son-in-law was given as a replacement, which falls under the category of the mother-in-law marriage touched upon in Chapter III. This has been the tradition by which the clan members of the deceased give a replacement and in this way, the relationships between the clans are kept for generations.

Next in the chapter is the tradition of *me·mang dila*, a custom of leading the soul of the deceased back to his ancestral home. Since the Garos believe in rebirth, they are of the opinion that it is best to be born again in his own matrilineal clan. Thus, it is believed that a soul, if left to itself, would never find the way back to his matrilineal lineage and would be in danger of being born as an animal or an insect and worse yet, in another clan. Why worse, because if he were born in another clan, he could end up in marriage with someone from his original clan. This was taboo (i.e., marriage/sexual relations between people having the same *ma·chong* or clan) and was tantamount to incest. These traditions, though outdated, are some of the traditions that still colour the life of the Garos, keeping them linked with their ancestors. *Me·mang dila*, on the outside looks like a simple traditional belief, but the main reason for this is actually for keeping the relationship of the two clans.

The intricacies of relationship between the Garo clans are also a very interesting topic for research.

The next topic is the ritual of *jaragata*, which is the ritual of leading the soul of the deceased back to its home so that it will not lose its way when the time comes to be reborn again. This tradition is fading away with practices only in certain pockets. There are two forms of *jaragata*, which literally means “to adopt the soul”. The first form is the one in which the soul of the dead is led back to his/her ancestral home. This ritual is different according to the gender, the marital status and the relationship of the deceased with the woman performing the ritual. The other form of *jaragata* is performed when a person wastes away without any apparent signs of sickness. The ritual included in this work is of the ritual performed for a child though it can also be performed for a grown up, too, as was the case with one of the sources Mr. Sembertush A. Sangma. Though he is a Christian, he has an avid interest in the culture of the Garos. According to him, in the summer of 2001 he was afflicted with a mysterious ailment without any symptoms of any disease, but he was just wasting away. So in September of that year, the *chisalbat amua* ritual was performed for him in Gambarigre village in West Garo Hills district by a priest Onsing Mrong Marak and he was cured. So, we see that it is not only the

non-Christian Garos that believed in the power of these rituals. Sembertush's case may be rare in the towns, but in the villages, it was still prevalent at that time though now these practices have slowly been fading.

The next part of this chapter deals with the crossing over of the souls from the land of the living. Comparisons have been made with Greek mythology into the similarities of paying the ferryman and crossing Nawang. Though the tales of crossing over to the land of the dead exist, there exists no account of how and when these souls will be born again. This is another point that has to be looked into.

Then, we move on to the funeral dirges. During the funeral, several dirges are sung according to the situation. The example given is sung at the funeral of a married man when his mother's household and close relatives arrive.

The amount of research that has been conducted has been exhaustive and is by no means complete because in a living people culture is for ever changing and adapting with the times. Though a thorough study has been attempted, there may still be some aspects that have been overlooked because

of the fact that some of these aspects may well have been forgotten in the deep recesses of the mind due to the lack of practice.

From various field trips and studies, it has been found that the oral traditions differ from area to area depending on their geographical distance. Though they share the same foundations, they have slight differences. Take a look at the folklore for example, the Garos have a tradition of their migration from Tibet. All the lore will be similar to a certain point from which it will differ, this is the point at which the two groups part ways and as the years pass, the lore of migration keeps piling up according to the individual village. Thus, it may be possible to find different accounts of the same story in different geographical locations. This was possible when there was less communication between villages but with increased connectivity, everything has become a mishmash of ingredients.

The object of this study was to documenting the various rites of passage in the oral tradition of the Garos. The Garos are rich in rites and rituals pertaining to all aspects of their everyday life and are very reverential to their deities, giving them sacrificial offerings as appeasement at every turn of their lives be it in times of celebration, in times of strife, etc. They have rites of

passage at various stages of their lives but the most important ones are birth and death with death having more importance than birth. The Garos are firm believers in the cycle of death and rebirth and have elaborate rituals. During the birth of a child, they have mostly sacrificial offerings towards the various deities for a safe birth, exorcisms and other rituals to ensure a bright future for the newborn. During death, the deities have no place in the rituals. The most important person in death is the deceased. The womenfolk of his clan have elaborate rituals to coax him back to return and be born again in his own clan. They have rituals that lead the deceased back to his/her own relatives and it is always preferred that the deceased be reborn in his own matrilineal lineage. Though the rituals are slowly fading away with the rapid spread of Christianity, the researcher has taken utmost care to collect the data from first person accounts of witnesses or former practitioners of the indigenous religion.

The major problems faced by the researcher were the deplorable conditions of the roads and the dearth of people to take authentic accounts from. Most of the elder generations are gradually dying out and from those that still live, with old age most of them have lost their hearing. When the word “authentic” is used, it means a bonafide practitioner of the indigenous

religion, or someone who has witnessed it first hand and not someone who heard of it from somebody else because, as is the case with anything passed on from word of mouth, there tends to be a lot of embellishments whether knowingly or unknowingly.

This research has been an entirely new foray into virgin territory and as such has not been without any difficulty. The first difficulty faced by the researcher is the lack of published literature dealing with this subject. Though there has been many books written on the culture of the Garos none has been on any kind of exhaustive research, only compilations of narrations collected from various sources.

Another problem faced is the dearth of people who practice the old religion or of former practitioners. Though many were found, some of them were not too well versed and were not able to explain most of the rituals. There were some that still practiced but they were unwilling to share the chants of the rituals citing reasons that they were sacred and could not just be recited, especially those dealing with funerals, without bringing some form of curse on the family. As culture and traditions of indigenous communities disappear due to the onslaught of foreign influence and so called modernity,

matrilineal Meghalaya has withstood the test of time although the cracks are there to acknowledge that “change”, for the worst, is in the air.

Meghalaya – the abode of clouds – is also the abode of a rich cultural heritage where its indigenous people have inherited from their ancestors. The cultural heritage is still unrivalled and vibrant in spite of the blitzkrieg from foreign sway, modern schooling and a systemic modification in the way of life.

The major tribes – Khasis, Jaintias and Garos - of the matrilineal state have a distinctive culture which they have been identified with. But the indigenous people, safeguarded by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, have a challenging task ahead of them – to preserve and promote their culture which is unquestionably synonymous with the preservation of their “tribal identity”. The culture is their identity. Once the culture is renounced, the identity is also at stake.

It is, however, sad to witness how this significant cultural tradition is slowly being forgotten about as a result of modernisation and lack of effort to disseminate the knowledge about the Garo culture to the younger population.

It is time the traditional dances, chants, et be incorporated in schools and colleges as a part of school curriculum. How many of them from the younger generation and who claim to belong to the Garo community know how to perform Wangala dance? I must admit that there are many aspects of their “culture” that one is ignorant about and probably would never know it as they are slowly but steadily disappearing.

With the conversion of many indigenous Garos to Christianity by the missionaries, various rituals have been given up since it is considered ‘evil’. A classic example is the preparation of ‘rice beer’. The Wangala festival is considered meaningless without the ritual of rice beer preparation, offering and presentation to *Misi-Saljong*, the god and the giver.

And with the apparent frailty of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, which is the custodian of Garo traditions under the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule to the Constitution, the Wangala festival is imperilled. The Garo community has hailed the coming of the District Council, which has been there for the last 35 years. But very little has been done by the Council to protect, preserve and promote the indigenous culture and tradition.

Despite the relevance of the Wangala festival in Garo society, the arena of performance is fast disappearing in most parts of Garo Hills because of the influence of modernisation, education, and cross-cultural integration. For the Garos, the Wangala dance festival combines the complex spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional element that characterises our society, and, when it is lost, the Garos will lose their unique heritage and an irreplaceable way of being. It is a part of their cultural blueprint and all effort must be made to preserve it.

Having seen the importance of reviving, preserving, promoting and protecting their traditional cultural identity, a group of Garo intellectuals have put their heads together and decided to organise the "Wangala Festival" on modern lines by grouping together 30 dancers with ten drums to form a contingent, and 300 dancers to comprise the "Hundred Drums Wangala Festival". There is, of course, a challenge to preserve their culture by practicing and making them part of their lives. But they must make an effort to sustain their tradition and culture. The younger generation today needs to know their rich culture so that they are preserved for the upcoming generations.

As Theodore Bikel puts it,

“You don't really need modernity in order to exist totally and fully.  
You need a mixture of modernity and tradition”<sup>3</sup>

During the course of the research work, the scholar has found that there are many aspects of Garo culture that has hardly been touched. Even this thesis is but a tip of the iceberg and could well be improved upon. Not only are there rites of passage but there are many more rites and rituals in the Garo tradition that are lacking research. Research can also be done on the folklore and folktales of the Garos, the myths and legends. Even the migration from Tibet and the history beyond that is still shrouded in mystery. While working on this thesis, the scholar has found many diversions into the various interesting aspects of the Garo culture that has been overlooked by the many researchers over the years.

### **5.02 Suggestions**

During the course of the research work, the scholar has found that there are many aspects of Garo culture that has hardly been touched. Even this thesis is but a tip of the iceberg and could well be improved upon. Not only are there rites of passage but there are many more rites and rituals in the Garo

tradition that are lacking research. Research can also be done on the folklore and folktales of the Garos, the myths and legends. Even the migration from Tibet and the history beyond that is still shrouded in mystery. While working on this thesis, the scholar has found many diversions into the various interesting aspects of the Garo culture that has been overlooked by the many researchers over the years.

The Indian Constitution, has, within the statutes of its Sixth Schedule created the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). Though it is meant for the self-administration of the Garos, one of its many functions should have been the preservation of the Garo culture. The only form of preservation of culture that is being done is only on the succession and appointment of the *nokmas*. In an interview with Executive members of the District Council the researcher was made to understand the fact that till date there were no separate provisions for the preservation of Culture with the GHADC. However the Council would soon be taking the initiative to start some sort of programme and would raise during the next session of the GHADC. Only time will tell whether this words will materialize into something or will remain the words of a politicians.

In view of the lack of interest taken by the Constitutional bodies such as the State Government and the District Councils, NGOs and social organizations should devise ways and means to preserve and protect our rich cultural heritage before it is completely blown away by the weight of globalization. Without the active participation of the NGOs, the days are not far off when our old culture and tradition disappear from the face of the earth.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>[http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/04/0406\\_060406\\_cord\\_blood.html](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/04/0406_060406_cord_blood.html) Access date: 25/05/2011

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.endicott-studio.com/rdrm/rrTombWomb.html> Access date:  
09/07/2011

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.1-famous-quotes.com/quote/1388649> Access date: 12/05/2011

## *Glossary*

## GLOSSARY

### GARO TERMS USED IN THE THESIS

*A·ning Chining*: The Underworld

*Amua* : Sacrifice

*A·siroka* : or *a·sroka*, exorcism

*A·tilla* : Courtyard

*atte* : *Atte* or *atte-mande* is a curved, multipurpose chopper with a bamboo handle used by the Garos. It can be used as a machete, a farming implement, a kitchen knife, etc.

*Ba·ra sakki* : Literally, the cloth and the turban as evidence. The cloth

*kotip sakki* That is kept by the woman as a promise from the man that he will surely become her husband.

*Bormagrim* : Literally, the place of big trees.

*Bitchi* : Rice beer. The undiluted extract from the *dikka*.

*Chawari* : Son in law, both the ones married to the heiress and the ones not married to the heiress.

*Chra* : Usually used as *chra depante*, the male relatives of a clan, without whose knowledge no decision in the clan can be taken.

*Danil* : A round shield used by the Garos during warfare.

- Debra* : A long piece of cloth used to carry the baby on the back.
- Dikge* : A medicinal plant the roots of which are used to make Medicines either by itself or in a concoction with various other ingredients. Magical properties are sometimes attributed to some plants of this family.
- Dikka* : An earthen pot with bamboo weavings used to brew rice beer.
- Dingdinga* : A lullaby
- do·bik nia* : Divination by way of checking the intestines of a chicken. Usually done during the *do·sia* ceremony in order to divine the future of the married couple.
- do·rasong* : The chicken of luck. The chicken whose intestines are used for the *do·bik nia* during the *do·sia* ceremony.
- Do·sia* : The Garo equivalent of a marriage ceremony.
- Dun* : The bed chamber (is) a *nokachik*.
- gri sokchi* : The male members of the same matrilineal lineage.
- Jal·eng* : Balcony like platform in a *nokachik*.
- Jaragata* : A part of the funeral/post funeral ceremony in which the spirit of the dead person is entreated to return to his/her clan by being born again in the household of a close kinswoman.
- Jik* : Wife
- Kaksi* : A kettle like vessel used during various ceremonies, especially for *chirugala* or water pouring ritual.

<i>Kamal</i>	: A priest
<i>Kerang</i>	: A wicker basket wide and open at the top used for carrying things.
<i>Kimindam</i>	: The sacrificial altar.
<i>Kram</i>	: A small drum
<i>Krita</i>	: Sacrifice. Synonymous with <i>amua</i>
<i>ma·chong</i>	: Clan.
<i>Ma·nok</i>	: The immediate clan members of a man, especially of a married man.
<i>Mandi</i>	: The Garos name for themselves, especially in Bangladesh.
<i>mil·am</i>	: A double edged sword used by the Garos for both warfare and in certain ceremonies like <i>tokari pita</i> .
<i>Mumua</i>	: A lullaby.
<i>Nagra</i>	: A large earthen pot covered with skin and used as a drum.
<i>nokachik</i>	: The traditional house of wood and bamboo constructed by the Garos.
<i>Nokkrom</i>	: The son-in-law married to the heiress.
<i>Nokma</i>	: The village headman.
<i>Nokpante</i>	: The bachelor's dormitory.

- Ongari* : The shelf above the fireplace where the *dikkas* are usually stored.
- or *onggal*
- Pong* : The gourd which is used for extracting rice beer from the *dikka*.
- Rang* : A brass gong.
- Roris* : Plainspeople, non-Garos
- Salaram Mitechak* or : Place where present day Kamakhya Temple is located.
- A·song Kamekha*
- Skal* : The usage in this thesis is a human astral vampire in the form of a human head. (Sangma, Dewansing Rongmitu: Jadoreng, p. 152).  
 They are generally psychic vampires and feeds of the Psychic energies of a person whereby the person wastes away due to incurable vomiting and/or diarrhoea.
- Spi* : Rectangular shield made of cane wicker or carved from wood,
- Wangala* : The Garo harvest festival.
- wa·si/wa·se* : *Wa·si* is the split bamboo belts used for making the walls of the traditional houses. This *wa·si* are woven together to make sturdy walls and partitions. They are also used for flooring.

## OTHER TERMS USED IN THE THESIS

**Ceremony** : A public or religious occasion that includes a series of formal Or traditional actions  
It is a formal act or set of acts performed as prescribed by ritual or custom.

**Oral Literature** : Oral literature comprises of folk speech, as distinct from formal Or standard speech, and various traditional kinds of expressive utterances. Prominent among them are proverb or folk saying, embodying wisdom in pithy phrases; the riddle, an enigmatic question paired with a deceptive answer; the tongue twister, a nonsense sentence difficult to pronounce because of its string of assonances; the toast, a convivial expression voiced as a drinking salutation; along with other forms involving a special use of language. Beliefs or superstitions are sometimes expressed as wise sayings, although they may also appear in tales and customs.<sup>1</sup>

Oral literature is the knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation in the form of songs, poetry, stories, proverbs, etc, through the spoken word and they

are used to record the history, beliefs and traditions of a group of people. This form of literature is used in cultures where there is no written word.

*Pargana* : A former administrative unit of the Indian Sub-continent, used primarily, but not exclusively by the Muslim kingdoms.<sup>2</sup>

**Rites of Passage** : A ceremony or an event that marks an important stage in sb's life.<sup>3</sup>

Rites of passage are rituals or ceremonies signifying an event in a person's life, indicative of a transition from one stage to another and usually involve ritual activities and teachings designed to strip individuals of their original roles in preparation for new roles.

**Ritual** :A series of actions that are always performed in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony.<sup>4</sup>

A ritual is any formal and customarily repeated act or series of acts. A ritual can be the established form for a ceremony, a system of rites, a ceremonial act or action.

**Tradition** : A belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people.<sup>5</sup>

**Religion** : The belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the Activities that are connected with the worship of them.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Volume 19 (USA: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 1998), p.305

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pargana> (Access date January 18 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 1324.

<sup>4</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: (Oxford University Press, 2010, Eighth Edition) pp. 1324. ISBN: 978-0-19-4799102

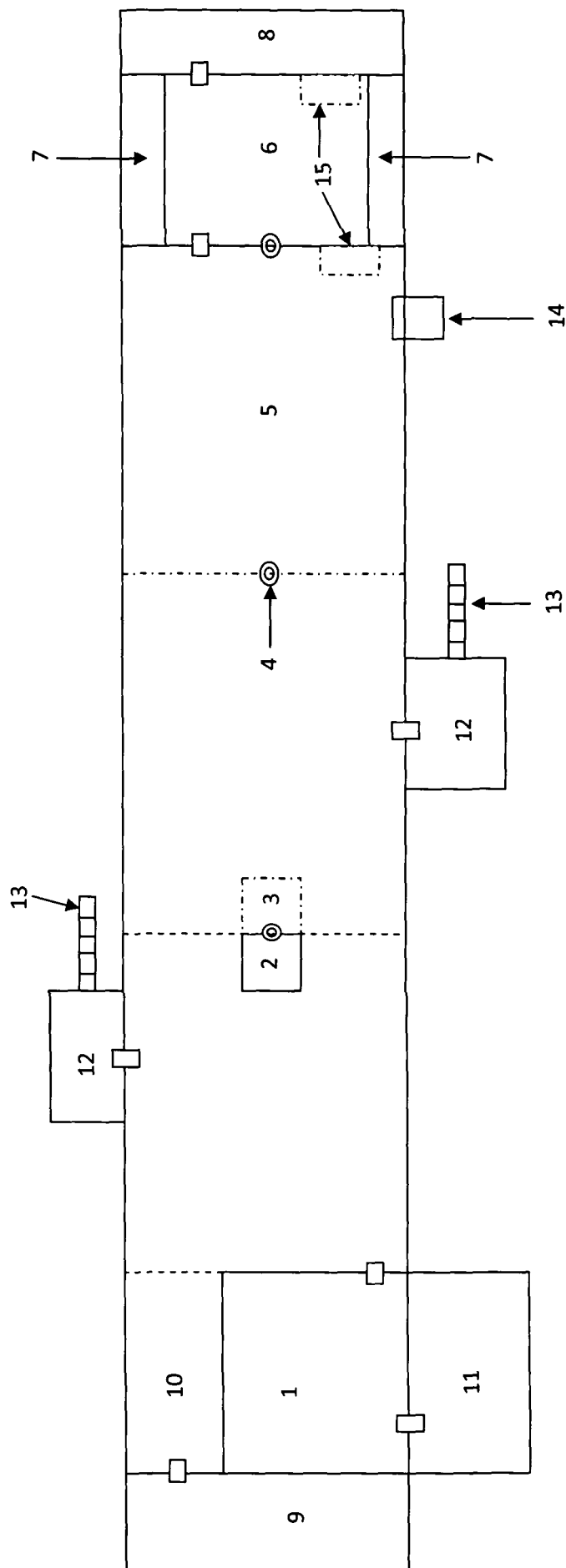
<sup>5</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: (Oxford University Press, 2010, Eighth Edition) pp. 1642.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 1287.

# *Appendix I*

## *Floor Plan of a Nokachik*

APPENDIX I  
FLOOR PLAN OF A NOKACHIK  
Fig-1



## Fig-1 Parts of *Nokachik*

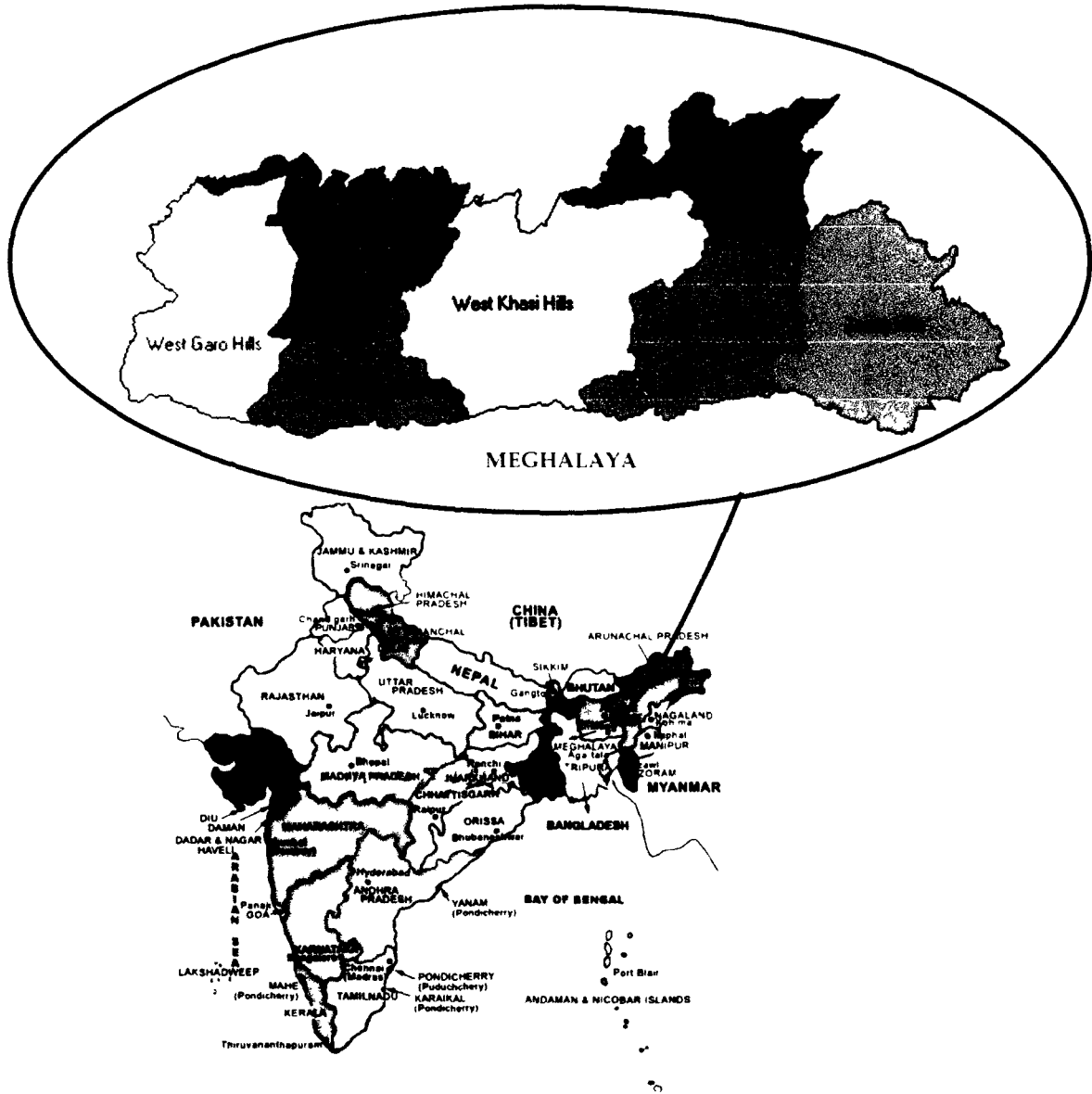
1. Dun (Sleeping chamber)
2. Onggal/Bilbang
3. Chuchekra
4. Manjri
5. Cha·rama
6. Nokkra
7. Agrang
8. Balim
9. Kaldik/Chidik
10. Corridor
11. Nokgilsrek (Dunni Jal·eng)
12. Jal·eng
13. Jang·ke (Bamboo ladder)
14. Chigrang/Chisrek

## *Appendix II*

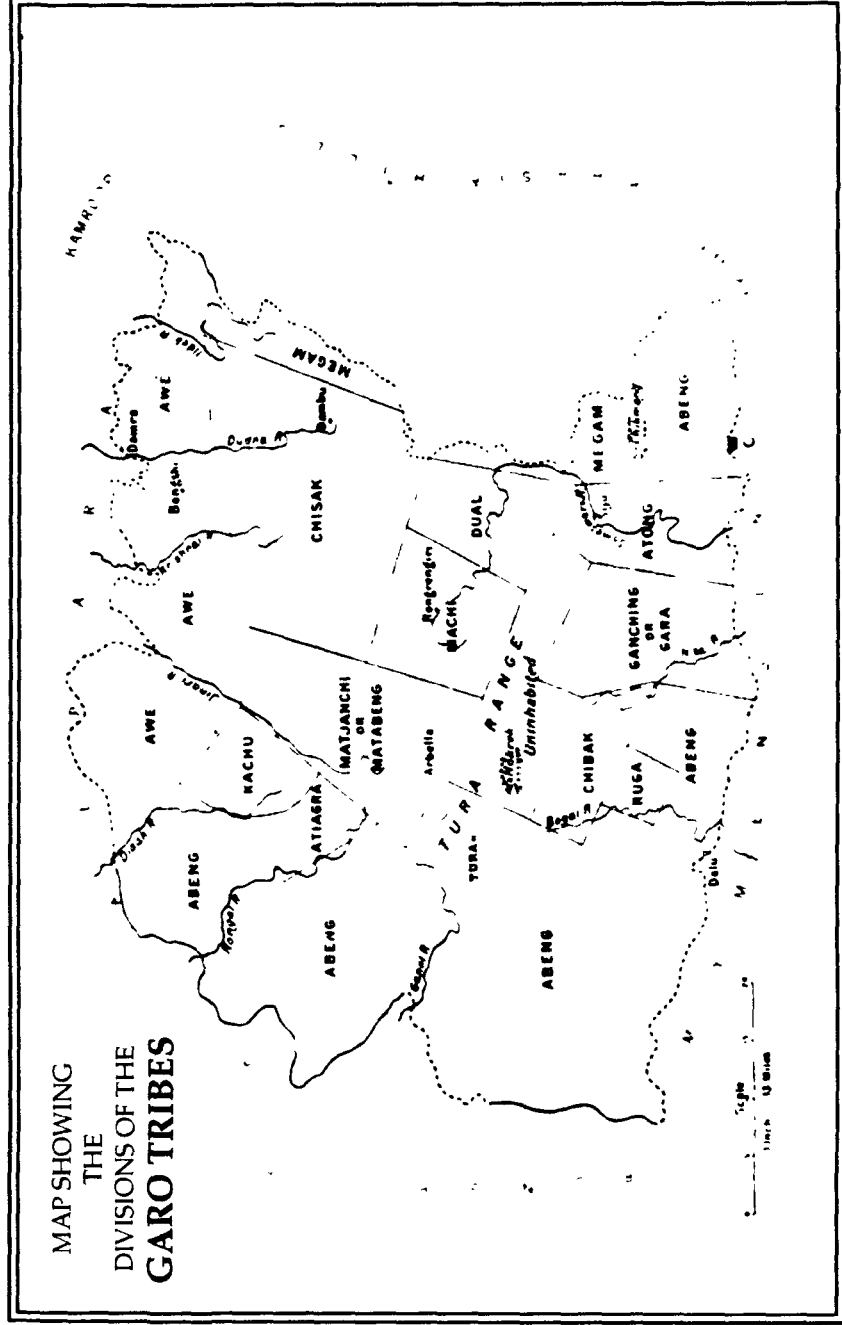
*Maps*

## APPENDIX II

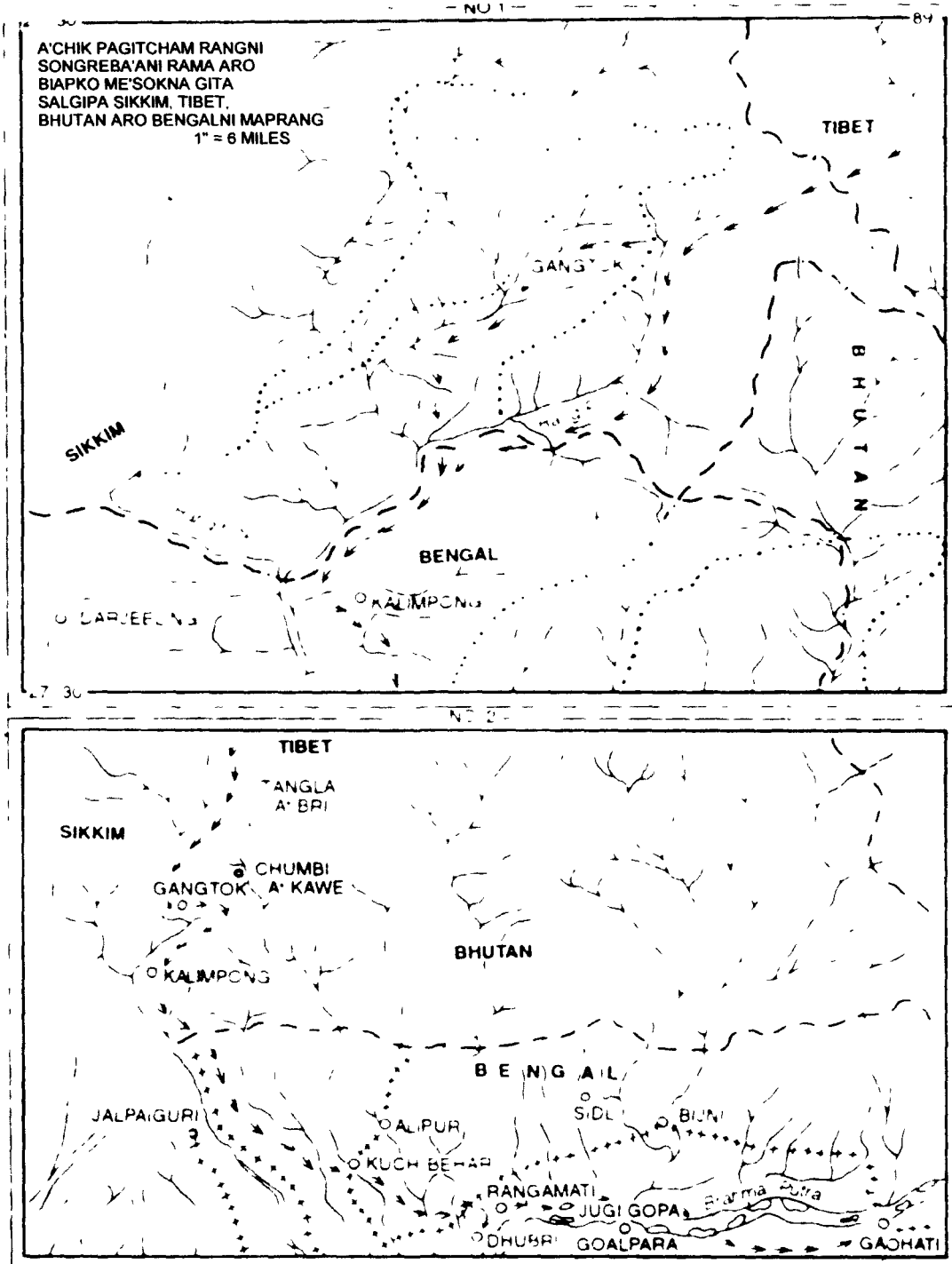
### MAPS



The location of Meghalaya in India showing the seven districts.



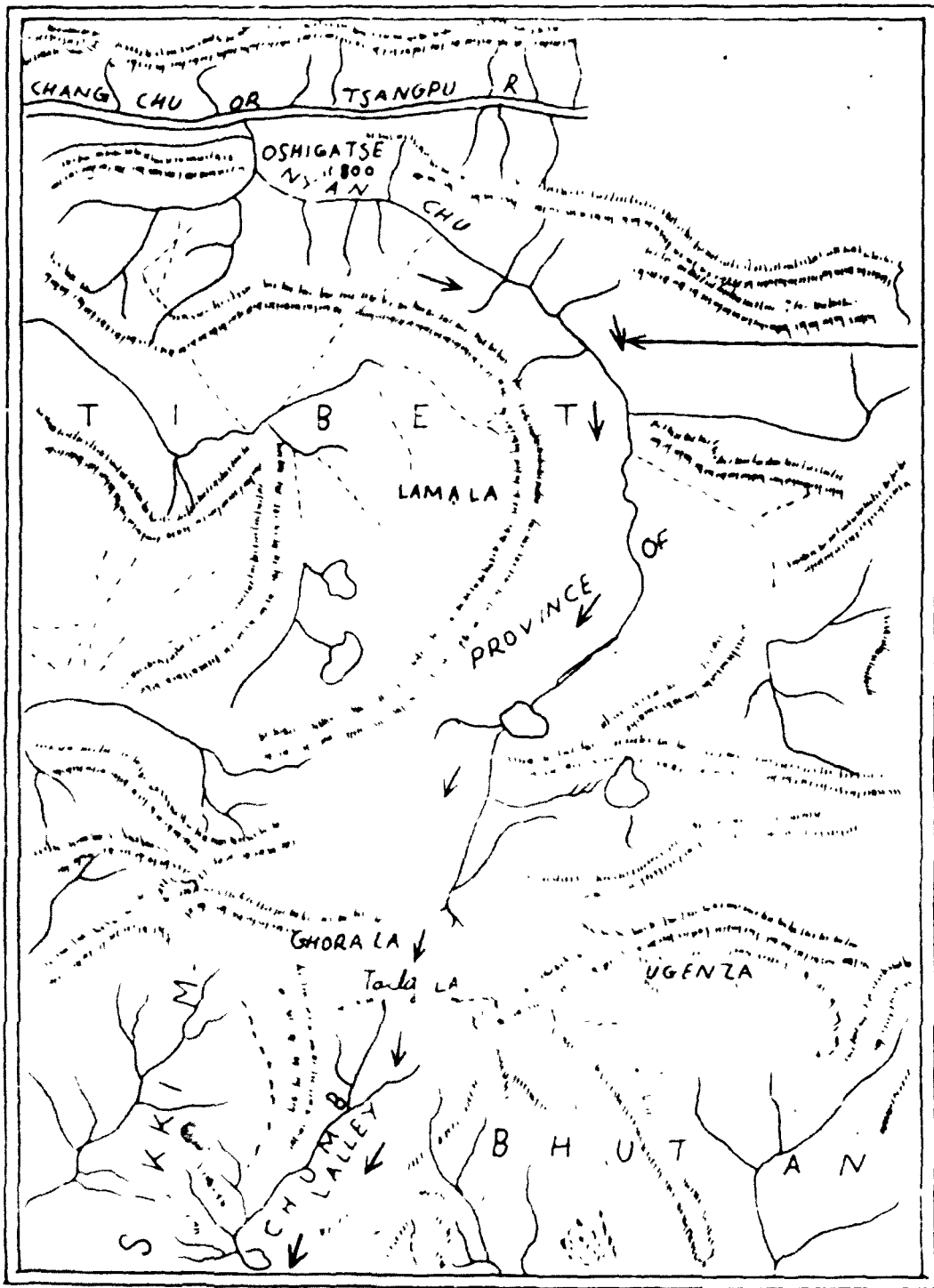
Map showing the various divisions of the Garos.  
 Source: Playfair, A.: *The Garos*. Delhi: D.K. Fine Art Press (P) Ltd., 1998



The migration routes of the Garo forefathers shown in the maps of Sikkim, Bhutan, Tibet and Bengal

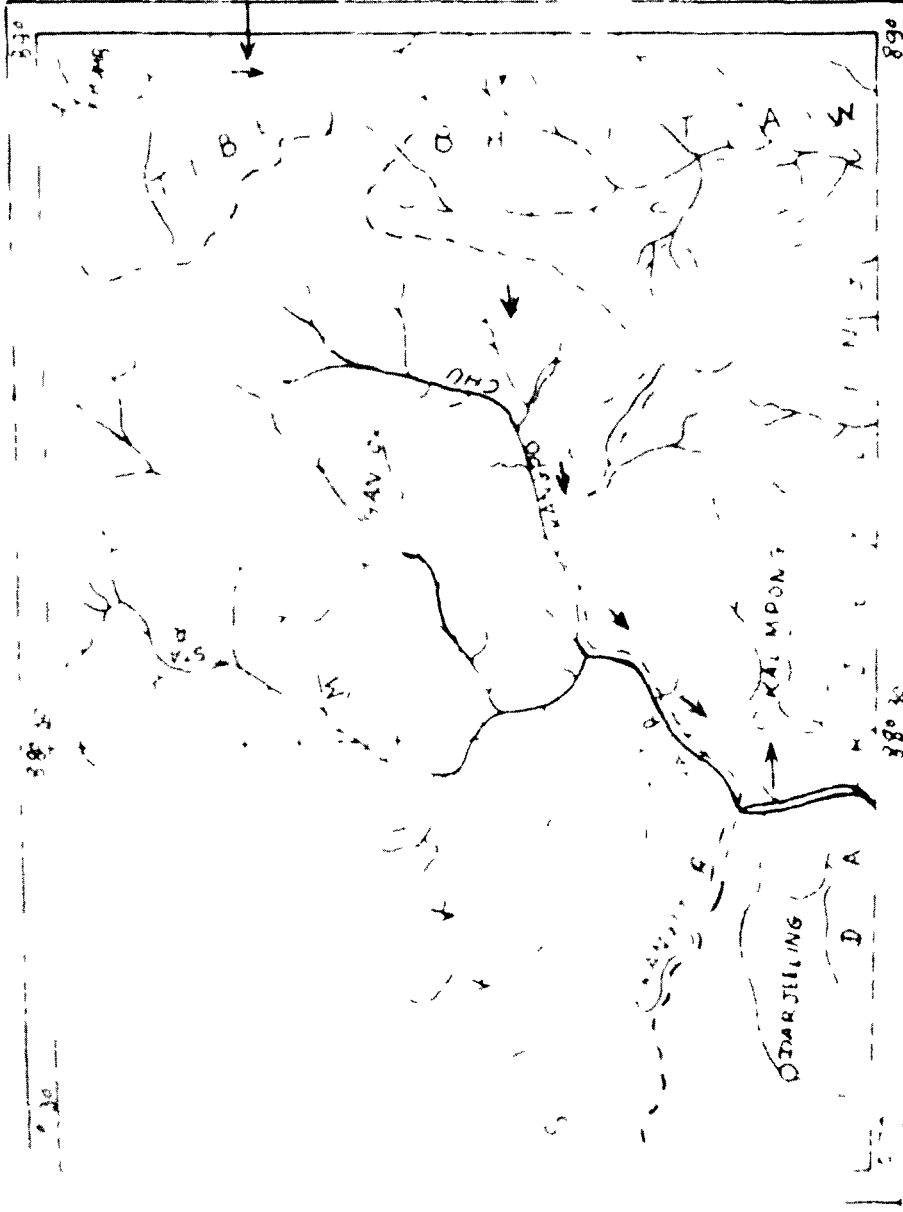
Source: Sangma, Mihir N. *Gimagimin A-chikrangni A-dokrang*. New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995

SKETCH MAP OF TIBET TO ILLUSTRATE THE MIGRATION OF THE GAROS INDICATING THE MIGRATION PATH

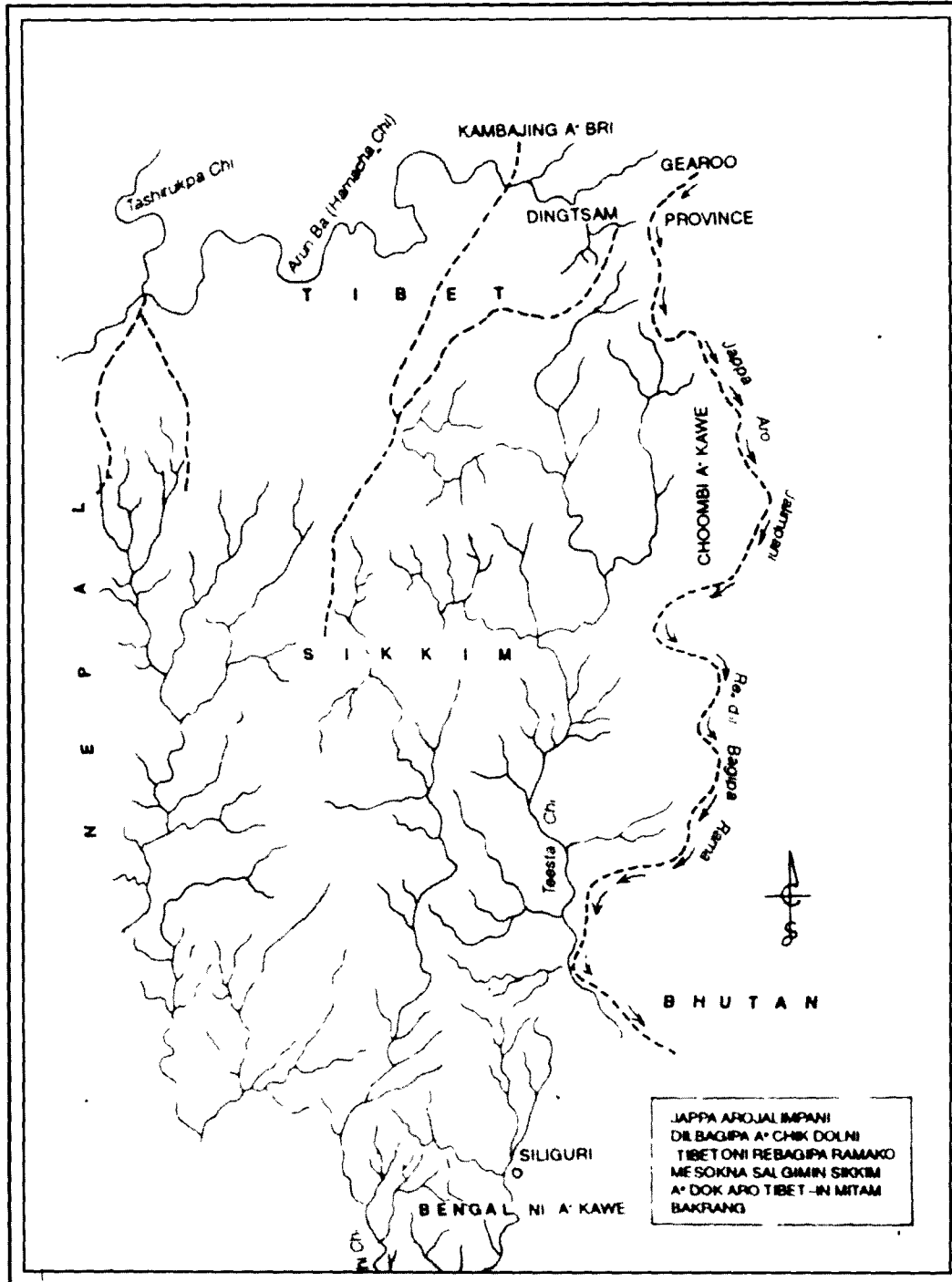


Source: Sangma, Mihir N. *Gimagimin A-chikrangni A-dokrang*.  
New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995

Sketch Map of Sikkim, Tibet, Bhutan and Bengal to illustrate the migration of the Garos indicating the migration path

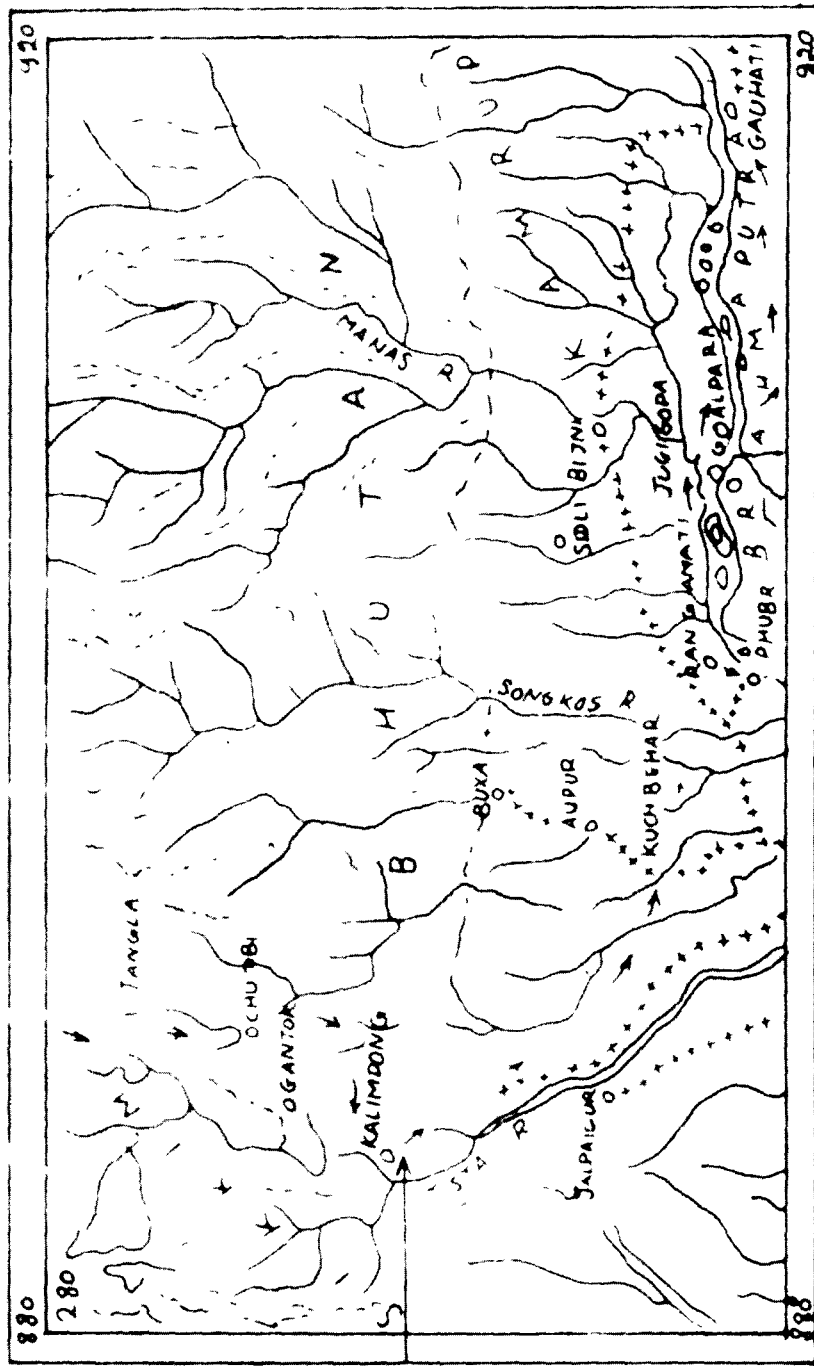


Source: Sangma, Mihir N.: *Gimagimin A·chikrangni A·dokrang*.



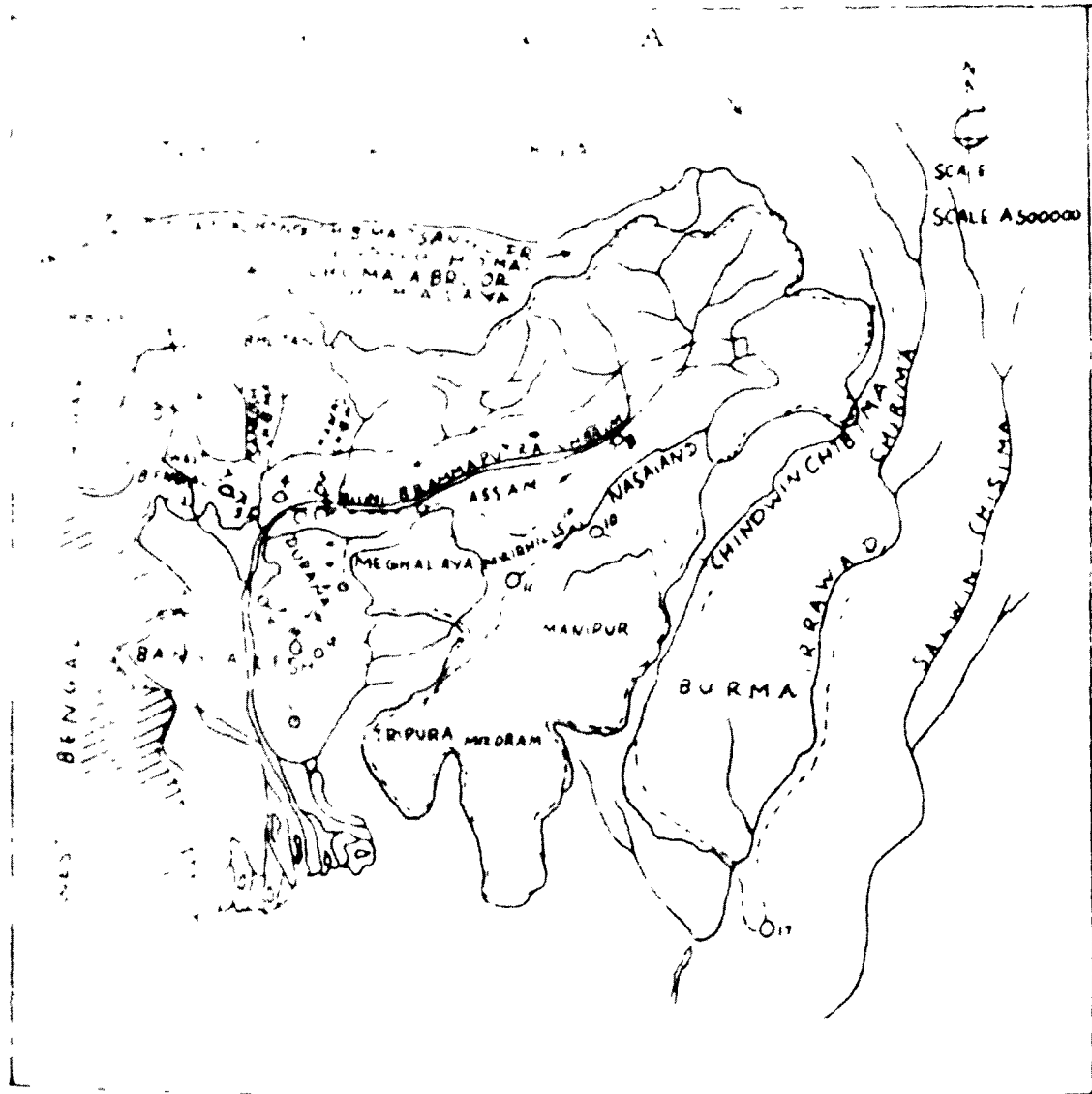
The route taken by the group led by Jappa and Jalimpa showing parts of Tibet and Sikkim.  
Source: Sangma, Mihir N.: *Gimagimin A'chikrangni A'dokrang*. New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995

Sketch Map of Sikkim, Bhutan and Assam to illustrate the migration of the Garos indicating the migration path

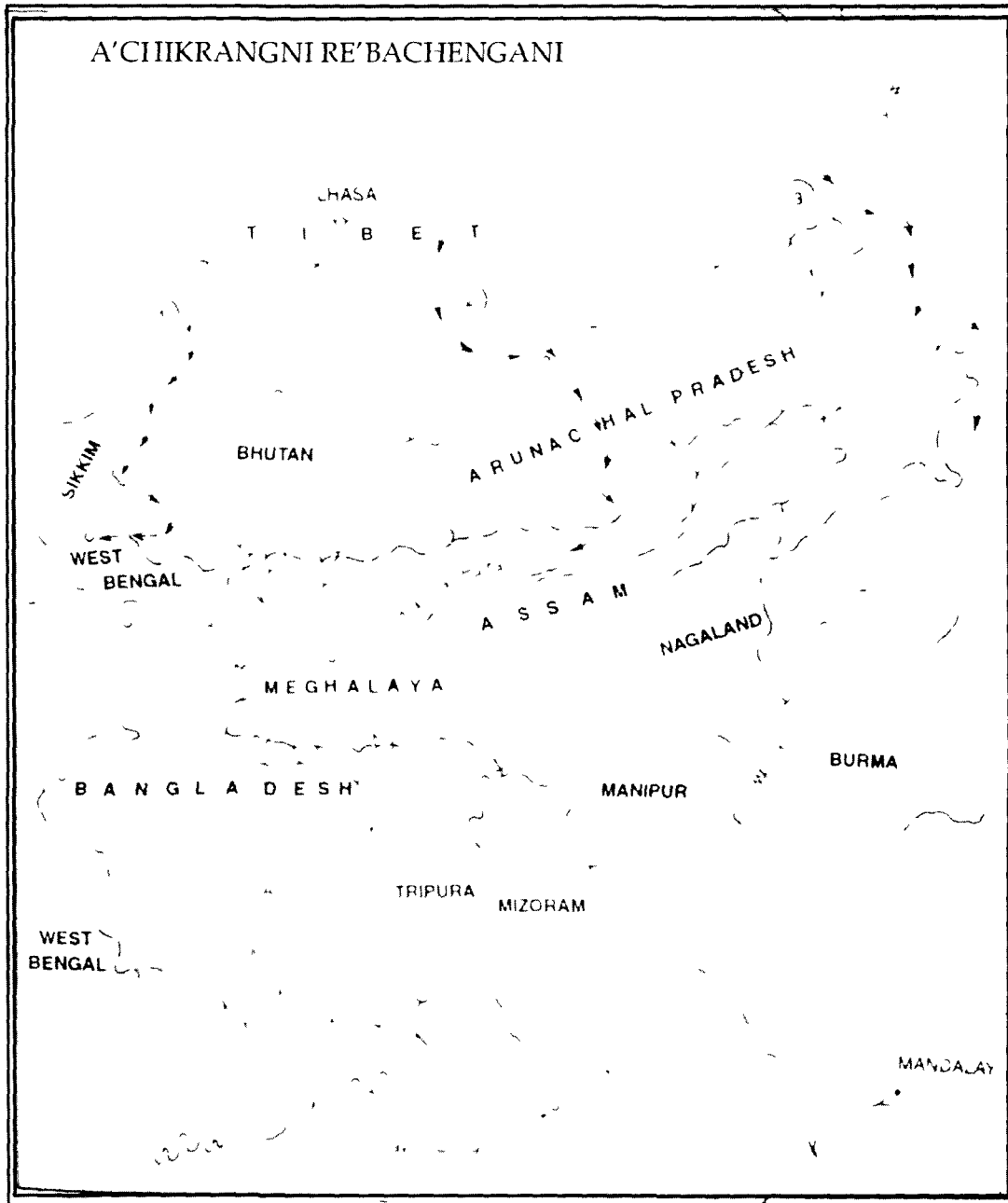


Source: Sangma, Mihir N.: *Gimagimin A·chikrangni A·dokrang*.  
New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995

Map of Tibet, Bhutan, Assam, Bengal and Burma for illustration on migration indicating different migration routes of the Garos



Source: Sangma, Mihir N. *Gimagimin A·chikrangni A·dokrang*.  
New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995



The migration of the Garos.

Source: Sangma, Mihir N.: *Gimagimin A'chikrangni A'dokrang*.  
New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1995

# *Appendix III*

## *Photographs*

**Darechik Amua**



**Fig.1 The *kamal* Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre preparing to perform the *Darechik Amua* ritual.**



**Fig.2 He takes the rice beer in the bamboo into his mouth.**



**Fig.3 He spits out the rice beer while he holds the red rooster meant for the sacrifice in his other hand.**



**Fig.4 He recites the intonations after spitting out the rice beer.**



**Fig.5** He prepares to kill the rooster with an *atte*.



**Fig.6** He cuts the rooster's throat with the *atte*.



**Fig.7 He drips the rooster's blood over the sacrificial altar.**



**Fig.8 He smears some blood on the altar.**



**Fig. 9 Smearing blood on the altar.**



**Fig. 10 The remaining blood is allowed to drip on the altar.**



**Fig. 11 He prepares to extract the intestine to be used for divination.**



**Fig. 12 The intestine being pulled out from the chicken.**



**Fig. 13** The intestine is pulled out from the chicken.



**Fig. 14** He divines with the intestine.



**Fig. 15** The *Kamal* after the performance of the ritual.

**Please Note:** The above ritual is a re-enactment and may differ slightly from the main text due to the fact that each ritual has differs slightly with the geographical location. Moreover, in re-enactments, the whole ritual is not usually performed because it is believed that it misleads the deity and could make it angry. So, in order that the deity may know that it is a re-enactment, the *kamal* usually makes small changes in the performance of the ritual. This is also the case with the following two rituals.

*A·tilla Amua*



**Fig.16** The *kamal*, Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre village getting ready to perform the *A·tilla Amua*.



**Fig.17** He prepares the necessary articles.



**Fig.18 He starts the intonations.**



**Fig.19 He burns the incense.**



**Fig.20 Performing the ritual.**



**Fig.21 He gets ready for the *chi rugala* ceremony.**



**Fig.22** He takes the *pong* or gourd filled with water and intonates before he pours the water on the plantain leaf spread out on the ground.



**Fig.23** He pours the water on the plantain leaf.



**Fig.24 He pours to water on the plantain leaf.**



**Fig.25 Then he drinks the water.**



**Fig.26 He kills the sacrificial chicken with an *atte*.**



**Fig. 27 He smears the blood of the chicken on the *kimindam* or sacrificial altar.**



**Fig.28 He sticks the down (soft feathers) to the blood.**



**Fig.29 He extracts the intestines for divining.**



**Fig.30** He divines with the intestines.



**Fig.31** He hangs the intestines on the *kimindam*.



**Fig.32 Then, he performs the *mi tinani* ritual and places the rice in even portions on the plantain leaf.**



**Fig. 33 Placing the rice portions on the plantain leaf.**



**Fig.34** He gets ready for the *chu rugala* ritual.



**Fig.35** He pours the rice beer from the *pong* onto the plantain leaf.



**Fig.36 Pouring rice beer on the plantain leaf.**



**Fig.37 At the end of the ritual, he splits a small piece of bamboo.**



**Fig.38** He tidies up the area after the ritual.



**Fig.39** He tidies up the area after the ritual.



**Fig.40** The researcher standing by the *kimindam* with the *kamal*.

*A·siroka*



**Fig.41** The *kamal* standing with the midwives Galjak R. Marak (66 yrs) and Retnak M. Sangma (56 yrs) to perform the *a·siroka* ceremony after the birth of the child.



**Fig.42** He begins the ceremony with an intonation to exorcise the malignant spirits.



**Fig.43 He then breaks the egg on the bamboo pole erected for this purpose.**



**Fig.44 He puts the broken egg on top of the pole.**



**Fig.45** The *a-siroka* ceremony is complete.



**Fig.47** The pole used for the *a-siroka* ceremony.



**Fig. 47** The *kamal* holding the bamboo pole used in the *a·siroka* ceremony.



**Fig. 49** Front view of a *nokachik*. The part under the roof is called the *ballim* and the roof covering it is called the *pangsoni*. The bamboo with the egg is erected to the right if the child is male and to the left if the child is female.



**Fig.50** The villagers of Rengmagre village.



**Fig.51** A village woman, Sempila Ch. Marak (29 yrs) husking rice on a wooden mortar, called a *cha-am*, with a wooden pestle, called a *rimol*.



**Fig.52 Tachang Ch. Marak (24yrs) carrying a pot, called a *dikka*, of fermented rice beer, on his back on a woven basket, called a *kokreng*.**



**Fig.53 The *am-bol nok*, or the firewood shed and the *do-nol*, the chicken roost, perched on a tree trunk.**



**Fig.54** A typical *nokachik*. House of Motchang Ch.Marak, Nokma of Sadolpara



**Fig. 55** The front carved beam of a *nokachik* called a *bilbang*. (other crossbeams are also called *bilbang*)



**Fig.56** The front of the *nokma*'s house in Sadolpara village.



**Fig. 57** The *bilbang*, with a woven wicker basket called a *kera* perched on top.



**Fig.58** A typical *nokachik*.



**Fig. 59** The *kima* of Najeng Ch. Momin (70 yrs), who died about 5 yrs back, with a *midong rapa*, in this case, the *midong rapa*, instead of ears of rice, are ears of maize.



**Fig. 60** The *kima* of Chimam M. Sangma (67 yrs) of Sadolpara village who died in Oct. 2010



**Fig.61** The *kima* with a *nokachik* on the background.



**Fig. 62** A *bandasal* or a resting place for villagers and travellers alike.



**Fig.63** A *koksep*, a small wicker basket used to carry fish while fishing. It is also used to keep dried chillies over the fireplace.



**Fig.64** A *kokreng* with an assortment of *pong*.



**Fig. 65** A *dikka*.



**Fig. 66** A woman carrying water from the *chiga* or the watering place. Normally, the *chiga* is at a distance from the village because the Garos usually never build their houses by the waterside thereby ensuring that the streams and waters remain unpolluted.



**Fig. 67** Wanen A. Sangma (40 yrs) & Chejin R. Marak (42 yrs) partaking of a *dikka* of rice beer.



**Fig. 68** A villager weaving a *kera*.



**Fig.69** A fresh *kima* erected in memory of a deceased female member of the household in Chidaogre village.



**Fig. 70** A group of old *kimas* in Chidaogre village. The number of *kimas* in front of a house signifies the number of deceased from the household.



**Fig.71** A *nokpante* in Chidaogre village.



Fig. 72 The *bilbang* of the *nokpante*.



Fig.73 The entrance of the *nokpante*.



**Fig. 74** Inside the *nokpante*.



**Fig.75** A side profile of the *nokpante*.



**Fig.76** Another view of the *nokpante*.



**Fig.77** The carved steps of the *nokpante*.



**Fig.78** A *bandasal* in Chidaogre village. A *bandasal* is also called a *kachari* or court because a village court or any meeting would be held in front of the *bandasal*. Otherwise it was just a resting place for the villagers and travellers passing through the village.



**Fig.79** A row of maize hung on the side of the house for seeds.



**Fig.80** A *tokari* on the *dun pakma* or the wall of the bedchamber.



**Fig.81** *Mil-am* on a *tokari*.



**Fig.82** *Mil-am* hilt on *tokari*.



**Fig.83** *Mil-am*.



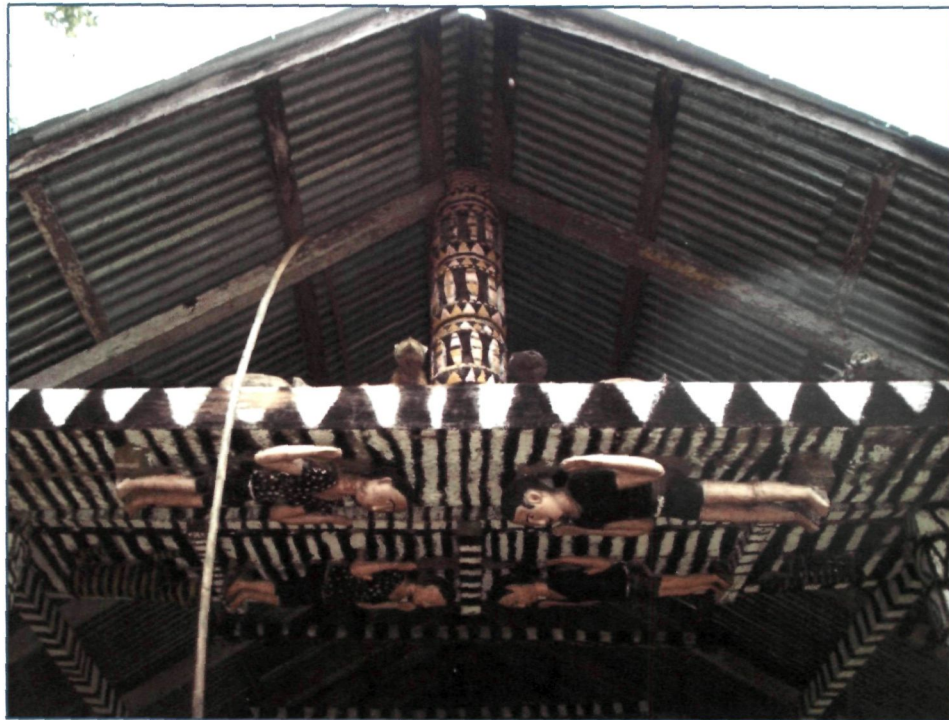
**Fig.84** A *kimindam*.



**Fig.85** A *kimindam*.



**Fig.86** A *nokpante* in Asakgre village.



**Fig.87** Carvings on the *nokpante*.



**Fig.88** Carvings on the pillar of the *nokpante*.



**Fig.89** A *do-kaku*.



**Fig.90 A village.**



**Fig.91 *A·song kosi*, a stone erected to signify a sacred forest, one that would never be cleared for jhumming. This practice is no longer relevant in some areas.**



**Fig.92 A *kima*.**



**Fig.93 A *midong*.**



**Fig.94** A *Wangala* festival at Gambegre village



**Fig.95** The men carrying the log drums, preparing for the *Wangala* dance.



**Fig.96** A woman of Gambegre village.



**Fig.97** Some of the things stored hanging inside a *nokachik*. Seen here are gourds, maize for seeds for the next year's planting season, a bamboo mat, etc.



**Fig.98** *Dikkas* or rice beer in Gambegre village .



**Fig.99** The researcher getting a first hand experience in Gambegre village in the year 2007.



**Fig.100 Village children in Gambegre Village.**



**Fig.101 Ears of maize being sundried.**



**Fig.102 A village scene.**



**Fig.103 A Wangala dance. The person leading the dance carries a *mil-am* and a *spi* and shouts war cries during the course of the dance.**



**Fig.104** A member of the dance troupe playing the Dama or drum on the ground.



**Fig.105** A villager smoking a *mola*.



Fig.106 A *nokachik*.



Fig.107 Ususally things are put above the fireplace to preserve it so that the soot will blacken it and the heat keep it dry. Seen here above the fireplace, in the *onggari* are *dikkas* and *ruans* or a wicker instrument used for winnowing rice. Below the *onggari* can be seen feet of cattle smoked for cooking at anytime in the future.



**Fig.108** An assortments of *pongs* in a basket at the *chuchekra* pillar.



**Fig.109** An assortment of *moras* or bamboo stools on the *onggari*.



**Fig.110 A *kimbrong* or *tilta*. This is used during village feasts for beheading cattle.**



**Fig.111 Delang of Late Rason A.Sangma, 80years, Nokma of Rengmagre village died on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011**



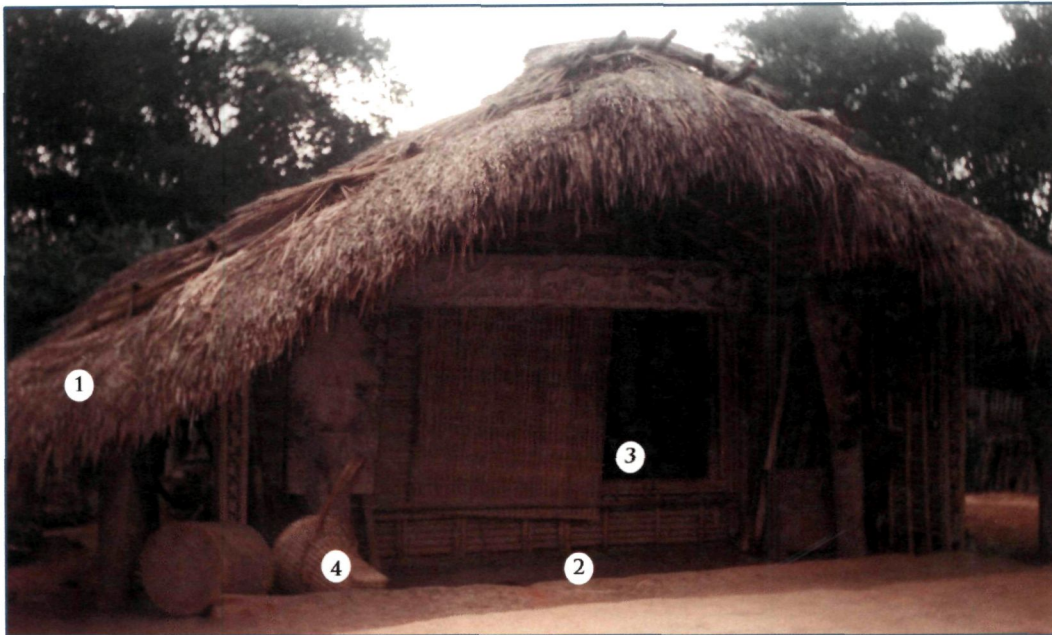
**Fig.112 Delang of Late Rason A.Sangma, 80years, Nokma of Rengmagre village died on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2011.**



**Fig.113 A *nokachik* in Daribok village.**

**Parts of the *nokachik*.**

- 1. Ballim**
- 2. Pangsoni**
- 3. Pangsoni**
- 4. Jal'eng**



**Fig.114 Front of a *nokachik*.**  
**Parts of the *nokachik* front. 1. Pangsoni 2. Ballim 3. Nokkra 4. Kerang**



**Fig. 115 Parts of the *onggal/bilbang* area**  
**1. Chuchekra 2. Hearth 3. Dangknok 4. Ongari**  
**2.**



**Fig.116** The *pakma* post (1).

## Resource Persons



**Fig.117 Leben Dagal Sangma of Rongsu Rongrigittim village.**



**Fig.118 Mireni Gabil Momin of Sasatgre village.**



**Fig. 119 Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre village.**



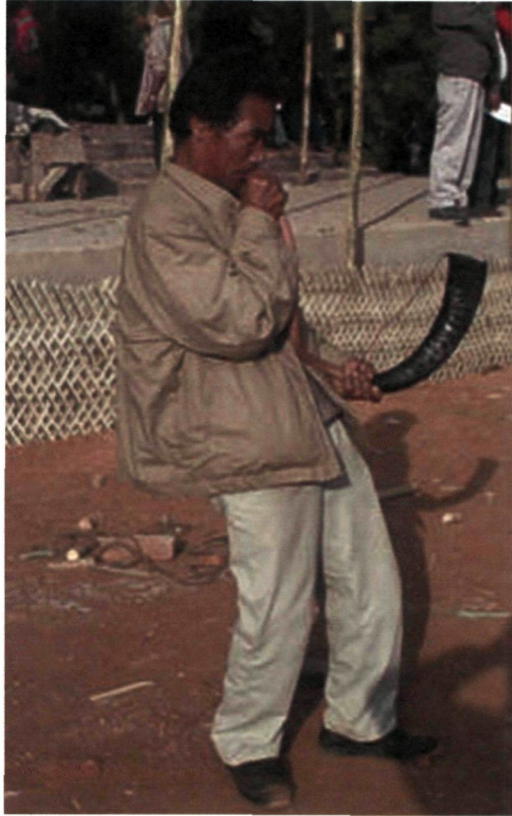
**Fig.120 Rinjeng Tegite Sangma of Selbalgre village.**



**Fig.121 Bhimsing Mangsang Sangma of Sadolpara village**



**Fig.122 Ronjak Ch. Marak, 74, of Rengmagre**



**Fig.123 Lt.Agat Sangma, Selbalgre**

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Marak, Caroline R. (2003) A seminar paper on “*The Culture of the Garos: An Overview.*”: Tura, Department of Garo, NEHU, Tura Campus.

Marak, Caroline R. (2005) A seminar paper on “*A·chik Oral Literature: A Survey.*”: Tura, Department of Garo, NEHU, Tura Campus.

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# *Curriculum Vitae*

## Curriculum Vitae

**Name** : Semeri Alva B. Sangma

**Gender** : Female

**Date of Birth** : 26<sup>th</sup> October 1976

**Permanent Address** : Bonepa Atilla, Tura,  
West Garo Hills,  
Meghalaya-794002, India

**Address for correspondence** : 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Greendash bldg,  
Ringrey, Tura, West Garo Hills,  
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**Email:** : alvabsangma@gmail.com  
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**Education Qualification** : M.A. Sociology

**Other Qualification** : Diploma in Information Technology with  
Software Application, LCC Shillong. 1996

### **Present Status:**

- Editor, Publisher & Proprietor of *A·chik Songbad*, a Garo newspaper published from Garo Hills, Meghalaya since May 2006.
- A freelancer for *The Eastern Panorama* magazine, *North East Sun*, *Eastern Chronicles*, *Meghalaya Times*
- A stringer for *NDTV 24x7* (Garo Hills districts in Meghalaya)
- Member of : Shillong Press Club, Shillong,  
Meghalaya Editors & Publishers Association, Shillong  
Journalist Union of Meghalaya, Shillong  
Save our Planet, Tura
- Publicity Secretary of Motor Sports Association of Garo Hills (MAGH), Tura

- Convener, Publicity Committee, 100 Drums Wangala Organisation, Asanang
- **Proprietor** : A·chik Songbad, Tura  
Narayan Offset Printers, Tura.  
Narayan House of Designing (A DTP Unit), Tura.  
Kuriting Communication (Distributor of Tata Indicom Teleservices), Tura  
Computer Education Centre, Tura.  
Fragrance (a complete house of designer perfume), Tura  
Al's Octane Petrol pump, Tura  
ABS Consulting, Tura

### Research Experiences

- Worked as a translator and a guide for Prof. Anne Hvenekilde, University of Oslo, Norway, for her research work in Garo Hills.
- Worked as a Investigator/Researcher on *Functioning of Anganwadi centres in Assam and Meghalaya* for Ministry of Human Resource Development (Department of Women and Child Welfare, New Delhi & Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Guwahati and New Delhi [DOC] Final Report on [wcd.nic.in/research/ICDS-Assam-Meghalaya.doc](http://wcd.nic.in/research/ICDS-Assam-Meghalaya.doc)

### Publications:

Research Paper: entitled: *Wangala: Culture as identity*. Protocol. Journal of Translation, Creative and Critical Writings. Vol.V No.1, 2011 ISSN No0973 9807

Article: entitled: *Garo Hills: The Land of myths and legends*. Traveller Outlook India. <http://traveller.outlookindia.com/fulltravelogue.aspx?id=225>

### Participated in International Workshop:

*'Bridging North-South Differences in reporting climate change: Journalists' role in reaching an agreement at COP 15 in Copenhagen'*, India Habitat Centre. New Delhi October 27<sup>th</sup> 2009

[http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=341](http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=341)

4:alva-sangma-at-international-environment-workshop-&catid=44:front-page&Itemid=28

**Publisher of:**

- *Some important festivals and ceremony of the Garos* by Mihir Sangma
- *Ampati* by S. Jaganathan

**Participated in International Conference:**

- *Baptist World Alliance Conference 2010*, Hawaii, USA
- *Young Women's Leadership Conference 2011*, Bali, Indonesia

**Website & Blog:**

Achik Songbad : <http://www.achiksongbad.com/default.asp>

Hundred Drums Wangala Festival:

<http://hundreddrumswangalafestival.blogspot.com/2010/10/wangala-drummers-participated-in-rythms.html>

**Awards and Fellowships received:**


1. *National Award 2010 for Outstanding Efforts in Entrepreneurship* by Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India. New Delhi <http://www.dcmsme.gov.in/entrepreneurshipawardees.pdf>
2. *Meghalaya Youth Icon Young Achiever's Award, 2007* by Rilbong Cultural & Sports Organisation. Shillong
3. *Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship* in 2006  
Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship for ST Candidates - UGC  
[www.ugc.ac.in/notices/selectedcandidates\\_st.xls](http://www.ugc.ac.in/notices/selectedcandidates_st.xls)

4. **Best President of Leo Club** (Leadership Experience Organisation : youth wing of Lion's Club International) of Shillong during the Leoistic year 1997-1998
5. **Only lady driver in India to have featured in Apollo Flight of the Hawks:** Extreme Adventure Reality Series on National Geographic Channel, 2010 [http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=7266:states-own-selected-for-apollo-flight-of-the-hawkz&catid=45:notebook](http://meghalayatimes.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7266:states-own-selected-for-apollo-flight-of-the-hawkz&catid=45:notebook)

**Declaration:**

I do hereby declare that the above information furnished by me is true and correct to the best of knowledge and belief.

Date Tura the 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2011

  
Semeri Alva B Sangma  
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