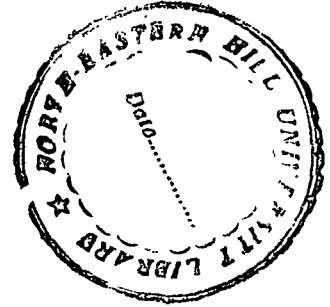


**MAJOR FOLK FESTIVALS OF GAROS WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CULTIVATION:
*A CRITICAL STUDY***



Fameline K. Marak
DEPARTMENT OF GARO

Submitted
In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in Garo of North-Eastern
Hill University, Tura Campus.

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Declaration

The North-Eastern Hill University

November, 2006

I, **Smt. Fameline K. Marak**, 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 for 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.

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(Fameline K. Marak)

November, 2006.

NEHU, Tura Campus.

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CHAPTER -I

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The Garos are one of the three indigenous tribes inhabiting Meghalaya. Classified as one of the most important tribal communities of India and the world, the Garos are a matrilineal tribe of the Tibeto-Burman group and are said to have come to these hills through Tibet from various directions. The Garos inhabit various other districts in the adjacent state of Assam and are also found in parts of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Koch Bihar and parts of Bangladesh as well. Their main home however, is the Garo Hills. The people call themselves *A·chiks* though they are known as Garos by others; and their language as *Mande Ku·sik* ‘the language of man’ or *A·chik Ku·sik* ‘the language of the hill man’. Though the language can be sub-divided into various dialects, such as, the *A·beng*, *A·we*, *Chisak*, *Dual*, *Matchi*, *Matjangchi*, *Ruga*, *Me·gam*, *Gara*, *Ganching* and *Atong*, they are bound together as a single cohesive group by a single cultural thread.

A predominantly agricultural community, they had practiced the shifting method of cultivation of their forefathers, though with the advent of education and consequent modernization, this is rapidly changing and many have started adopting a more settled method of cash crop cultivation of cashew nut, rubber, betel nut and so on.

As worshippers of nature they are a classless and casteless society with strong spiritual traditions handed down by their forefathers, though this is all sadly on the decline with the other influences of modernization, such as the growth of the middle-class and Western influences in lifestyle and religion, particularly Christianity.

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

It is a well known fact that the people in the villages do not have written records of such materials and as the younger generation is losing interest in whatever traditions that were followed by their ancestors. Even the oral tradition is fast disappearing with the passage of time. Therefore, the findings of the research in this book have been collected since 1997. However materials from out-of-the-way and remote villages could not be collected due to paucity of time, limitations of terrains, etc. It has been found after the study that even though the *A·chiks* have become

Christians; they are still immersed in a tradition which has not yet been completely wiped out both in the villages as well as in the towns. Nowadays, most of the people belonging to the young generation study outside their villages. Modern life styles and the lack of time to learn the expertise of traditionally handed down professions, like agriculture and related works, are also keeping them from cultivating crops and thus celebrating festivals connected with agriculture. It can also be noted that the villagers are slowly abandoning their beliefs due to these factors. Instead of *jhum* cultivation, most *A·chik* villagers are slowly adopting permanent cultivation and terrace farming.

The name Garo, *Mande* and *A·chik*:

By taking few examples of definitions the researcher tried to explain the word ‘folk’, which can be concluded as a particular community expressing the traditional way of life through different customs, beliefs, arts, music to make up a distinctive culture. They are considered descended from a common ancestor and preserve its culture from one generation to the next.

Likewise, the Garos have a distinctive culture carrying on its traditions, beliefs and arts after migrating from Tibet. According to some Garo writers, they were called *Garu Mandai* since they migrated from *Garu Pradesh* in Tibet, bordering to China. Since then, they were identified as *Mande* or *Garo Mande*.¹ In present days, they call themselves *A·chiks* or ‘the hill people’ and *mande* or ‘man’. The simple meaning of *A·chik* is ‘a hill’; it is an ambiguous term that can be interpreted in

¹ Moniram R. Marak mentioned that in Tibet, the *Garos* were settled in *Garu Pradesh* bordering to China and the people were known by the name *Garu Mandai*. “*A·chikni Ma·biding*”, 1997, pp.1-2.

different ways. No one can give its original meaning; no history can clear its contextual term till date. Different scholars have tried to explain this word in different ways; unsatisfactorily. According to some, while they were coming up to Garo Hills, they made oaths by biting the earth; traditionally, the Garos often take oath by touching the earth to show his/her genuine intent in certain situations.² There are reasons for migration as mentioned in the history.³ It was terrible famine that compelled them to leave Tibet⁴ and migrate to India. They continued to face hardships and had to constantly fight for their rights with the other indigenous people while they were in Brahmaputra valley;⁵ finally, some of them moved to the hills⁶ and settled there which is now known as Garo Hills. Some even argue that they called themselves *A·chiks* before their migration to Garo Hills. Others say that since they settled in hills they like to call themselves *A·chiks* or *A·chik Mande* which means ‘a hill tribe’.⁷ In the map of Tibet (now China), the word ‘*A·chik*’ can be found in quite a number of places. For example, there is a lake named *A·chik Lake* and a land named *A·chik Land*.⁸ In south-eastern China, there is a river called *A·chik River*. Although it cannot be directly linked to the origin of the *A·chik* people, the same word is found

² *A·chik Lake* and land is shown clearly in the map if open an internet www.lmcpamir.net/firms.com/silk.htm and www.jac.or.jp/english/jan/vol1/QONG.pdf -24-11-2005.

³ Dewnsingh Rongmuthu had collected various primary sources and recorded them in “*Apasong Agana*

(*A·chik Katta Gitcham*)”, 1970, pp.211-245 where details are given about migration and kept moved on from one place to another till they were in Garo Hills.

⁴ Jingnang Marak Raksam, *Nokma* of Rongbinggiri village, East Garo Hills, says that *A·chiks* while in Tibet, they faced famine due infertile land they had to find a better place for cultivation.

⁵ Moniram R. Marak. “*A·chikni Ma·biding*”, 1997, p.2.

⁶ Whenever they moved the place, the *A·chiks* were always preferred the best soil for *jhuming*. First, they test the soil and moved on to better place. While noting the history of Garos migration, D.S.Rongmuthu talks about the surveillance of new place before they were in Garo Hills. It says hardship or dangers of wild animals could not stop the forefathers of Garos for selecting the fertile land to be Garo Hills. “*Apasong Agana*”, 1970, p.213.

⁷ Mihir N. Sangma has mentioned in “*Origin of the Garo*” his book “*Gimaagimin A·chikni A·dokrang*”, 1995, pp. 39-43.

⁸ According to the given website, it is cleared that familiar names of the place and the person have been found.

used in Russia and Uzbekistan where a river and a lake has the word *A·chik*. Lindrid D.Shira has cited an example of fixing the hair of yak's tail into the *A·chik* sword (*mil·am*) which is as an evidence of Garos having originated in Tibet and, that their dialect and customs are similar to the Garos.⁹ Yaks are domesticated in Tibet.

The word '*Garo*' was first used by the British and popularized in India and outside world. They were in contact with the Garos since the eighteen century (1867). But among the British officers some like David Scott, Major Jenkins and Colonel Houghton, sought ways and means to deal with and "civilize" them. The American Baptist Missionaries were invited to start a mission and education centre for the Garos.¹⁰ The field of education and special teachings on the truth of the Bible were added means for the administrators to tackle the mindset of the people in helping change their way of life. In those days the Garos were head-hunters and multifarious people to handle. The plan worked out well and changed their way of life to what they are today. In this regard, Milton S. Sangma noted that the British period is the *golden period* in Garo Hills.¹¹

The people of Garo Hills are generally called by the name Garos; but they like to call themselves *A·chiks*. The '*A·chik*' word is still in a confused state according to many *A·chik* writers giving different views. Lindrid D.Shira has also stated his opinion on this issue. (See appendix II)

⁹ The history of *A·chiks*' migration is almost a myth to the young generation which is also mentioned by Lindrid D.Shira in *A·chik A·songona Nama Kattani Sokbaani*, 1991, p 80

¹⁰ Ibid,p.81.

¹¹ Milton S.Sangma, *A·chikkuni Ma·ambi(History of Garo Language)*,1995,p.45

The word Garo in this thesis has been replaced with the word *A·chik* as a deliberate act by the researcher, as this too has connotations which are believed to have led to the popularization of this particular word. As according to L.D.Shira the *A·chiks* are believed to have preferred the highlands for the plains in all the places that they had migrated through, from the Tibetan mountains. Even in the plains of Assam, many *A·chiks* occupied areas which were interestingly all highlands. They have a close affinity to nature and this was found unpolluted high up on the hills. '*A·bri*' is the *A·chik* word for 'the hills' and 'the mountains' and therefore, the name '*A·chiks*' for its inhabitants. But the fact remains that no scholar has as such been able to prove its real origin. Nevertheless, the modern Garos prefer to call themselves *A·chiks*. Even the Garos who have been included in the Bangladesh region identify with their separated roots in Garo Hills by calling themselves '*A·chik Mande*' or '*Mandi*' as noted anthropologist Robbins Burling has stated.

The *A·chiks* are a tribe closely related to Bodo-Kacharis, Rabhas, Tipra, Lalung, Mech and Koch. The researcher has examined the origin and the merit of the term 'Garo' and '*A·chik Mande*' from various sources, like from the works of Major Playfair, Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu, Lindrid D.Shira, Moniram R. Marak, Mihir N. Sangma, Gilbert K. Marak, Milton S. Sangma and so on. After this, the researcher has described the Land and the People who have been called 'Garos' by the British and '*A·chik*' or '*Mande*' by themselves. Ethnically, linguistically they are the branch of Bodo group.

1.01 Tribe- Ethnicity

The *A·chiks* as an ethnic community have evolved from their interaction between various socio-economic, political and cultural communities. However, divisionary criteria which prevailed at the beginning of this century during the time of the British (such as language, culture and kinship) have given way to other differentiating factors such as level of education, profession, social status and religious denomination in the present day. Interestingly this loose collection of geographical and linguistic sub-divisions has developed into a rather close knit ethnic community called the *A·chiks*.

1.02 Language

Linguistically, the dialect is *A·chikku* or *Garo*. The origin of the *A·chik* language is believed to be from Tibeto-Chinese family. An important branch of Tibeto-Chinese is Tibeto-Burman from where a large number of languages known as the Himalayan group of languages have descended. Many languages of the North-East India like Bodo, Naga group of languages, Kuki-Chin and the languages of North Assam group belong to this Himalayan group. Garo is the branch of Bodo; its cognate languages are Boro- Kachari, Rabha, Koch, Lalung, Mech, Tipra, Dimasha and Deori.

1.03 Justification of the study

The reason why the researcher has selected this topic is because it has been found that there are many interesting festivals observed by the Garos in connection with cultivation, but a detailed and systematic survey and recording has not yet been

done. The detailed features of these festivals are not fully known by most of the modern *A·chiks* as they are mainly practised by the non-Christian indigenous people. As a result they may be lost in the future. Therefore, the interest and need was felt by the researcher for learning and preserving these dying traditions.

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

As the younger generations go out of their homes for further studies to different places they are no longer able to know or give their time for the festivals in their villages, so they are neither able nor interested to learn from their elders. The traditional beliefs and superstitions of the Garos are in the various incantations used in the different festivals, and with the dying of the older generations, many of these incantations will be lost in time unless they are preserved in detail in some forms or the other. If such work can restrain for future generations, it will be a great help the *A·chik* society as well as the *A·chik* Students Community as whole.

Thus, there is a need for conducting studies which look at the major folk festivals, the performance of rituals, manners, beliefs and practices of the Garos. The study is mainly done to preserve the rich dying *A·chik* culture for the future generation. Therefore, the present study is infact one such attempt to find out the

practice and influence of the *A·chik* Folk Festivals. More specifically, the study of the present problem is stated as follows.

1.04 Statement of the Problem

With the above mentioned justification the present research problem is stated as **“MAJOR FOLK FESTIVALS OF GAROS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CULTIVATION: A CRITICAL STUDY”**.

1.05 Operational definitions

In this chapter, the researcher has given the best interpretations of ‘Folk’, ‘Ritual’, ‘Ceremony’, ‘Festival’ and ‘Religion’. These definitions are deduced from various sources. The researcher found it necessary to define these terms as this would facilitate in a better comprehension of the chapters that would follow.

Folk may be interpreted as:

a. “The common people of a society or region considered as the representatives of a traditional way of life and especially as the originators or carriers of the customs, beliefs, and arts that make up a distinctive culture.”¹²

b. People in general; “the common people determine the group character and preserve its customs from one generation to the next.”

¹²Dictionary.com. -11-9-2006 (American Heritage Dictionary).

Thus 'Folk' may be interpreted as, a community that represents traditional way of life as the originators or carriers of customs, beliefs, and arts and preserve its group character from one generation to the next.

Ritual:

“A traditional cultural practice, usually religious, involving precise movements that serves to communicate with deities...”¹³

A ritual is a formalized, predetermined set of symbolic actions, to express certain meaning or truth that unites actions to strengthen their communal bonds. It is a prescribed procedure for conducting religious ceremonies or festivals involving precise movements that serves to communicate with deities.

Ceremony:

“An act or series of acts, often of a symbolical character, prescribed by law, custom, or authority, in the conduct of important matters, as in the performance of religious duties, the transaction of affairs of state, and the celebration of notable events;”¹⁴

A ceremony is a series of acts of a symbolic character prescribed by custom, as in the performance of religious duties, where the celebrations of notable events take place.

¹³ Dictionary.com. -11-9-2006.

¹⁴ Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1 0 1)-11-9-2006.

Festival:

“A festival or fest is an event, usually staged by local community, which centers on some theme, sometimes on some unique aspect of the community.”¹⁵

A ‘festival’ is an organized series of acts, which is performed on important religious events in one place on a set period of time.

Religion:

“Belief concerning the supernatural, sacred, or divine, and the moral codes, practices and institutions associated with such belief”¹⁶

It means “binding”, especially of man with god. It is obligatory to every individual to perform duties to god voluntarily according to his or her faith.

Garos:

Garos are an indigenous tribe living in the western part of Meghalya. As mentioned above, this term has been replaced with the word *A·chik* to denote the changing norms and trends in the society. *A·chik* is the preferred name of the modern Garos.

¹⁵ The Free Dictionary, Thesaurus and Encyclopedia-24-03-2003.

¹⁶en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion- 11-9-2006.

1.06 The *A·chik mites* or gods related to Cultivation:

- *Tatara Rabuga-Stura Pantura* – is the supreme god and creator of both living and non-living beings.
- *Abet-Rengge* or *Rangge* –is the guardian-spirit or god who preserves the land and protects the green vegetation.
- *Misi Saljong* –is the provider of seed-grains of varieties of crops and is the god who first taught men to cultivate land.
- *Mima Kiri Rokkime* or *Rokki*- is the goddess or mother of seed-grains of paddy.
- *Salgra-Susime*- is considered as a benevolent god or the god of wealth or ‘sun god’.
- *Sugra Mateja*- is the field rat who is considered to be the first creature to commit offense by being disobedient to the god, *Misi Saljong*. It is believed that before tasting any seasonal fruit and crops from the field, the first-fruit should be offered to the god *Misi Saljong* who is the provider of all seed-grains, and to *Mima Kiri Rokkime* the mother of paddy who blesses them with a good harvest, being present with them throughout the whole season. According to *A·chik* myth, *Sugra-Mateja* cut and ate the paddy before the harvest, therefore, in the *Nokpante Mese Chaa* ceremony, the first ritual is to kill rats from the barn and punish them for the guilt first committed when they started *jhuming*.
- *Chura*-is the god who is believed to have the ability to protect or to destroy standing crops.
- *Dombe*- is the malevolent god who carries diseases to the crops.
- *Raksi*- is another malevolent god who creates sicknesses to the crops.
- *Bang*- also called ‘*skal*’ which meaning ‘monster or killer’ is another malevolent spirit.

- *Waimong*- is the king or care-taker spirit in the Abode of the spirits, that is, in Balpakram, Napak and Chitmag where which the *A·chiks* believe the spirits of the dead go after death.

1.07 Agricultural Festivals in the Garo Hills

The followers of *A·chik* indigenous religion have to perform a number of rituals, ceremonies and festivals throughout the year during all the seasons as required. It can be considered as the customary duty to one's faith so as to bring blessings to the whole community in the respective season. It is noteworthy to mention the fact that after observing different festivals in different areas in the field, it is found that the very same festivals have different names in different areas. Notably, there are nineteen festivals celebrated in connection with *jhum* cultivation in Garo Hills according to the data collected from the research field. They are listed as follows:

1. *A·a O·pata* or *Jumang Sia*
2. *Gitchipong A·siroka* or *Chiga Roka*
3. *Attepong Su·gala*
4. *Kosi Krita* or *A·song Den·a*
5. *A·siroka* or *Rama Krita* or *A·a Bakchata* or *Den·bilsia* or *Wa·cheng Balrora*
6. *Bang Rika* or *Songa Rakkia*
7. *A·galmaka* or *A·galmakdoa* or *Galmakdoa*
8. *Jamadal Nokdonggaa*
9. *Salrak Tata*
10. *Mi Krita* or *Miamua* or *A·krita* or *Me·jak Sim·a*
11. *Mi So·gala* or *Bang Gala* or *Bang Krita*
12. *Wachi Tata* or *Wachi So·a* or *Salpang Sim·a*

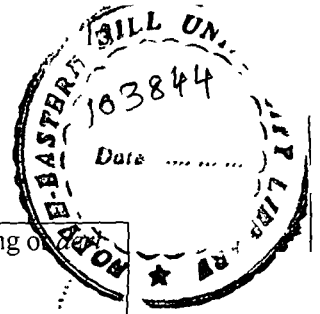
13. *Rongchugala* or *Wanna Stita Guri Janggia*
14. *Jamegapa* or *Jagapa*
15. *Medong Ra·ona, Ahaia* or *Megap Ra·ona* or *Ja·pang Raa*
16. *Wangala* or *Dru Wanbola*
17. *Chugan* or *Mangona* or *Delang So·a*
18. *Wanbasala* or *Mi Jam Tata*
19. *Wankadoa* or *Chare Mikkol Krita*

1.08 Cycle of Cultivation Practice Relating to Festivals

The *jhum* cycle of the *A·chiks* including the months and other activities connected with cultivation is shown below.

List of major Festivals and activities related to *jhuming*

Months	Folk Festivals and exorcism	Activities
January	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jungle clearance for fresh <i>jhum</i> cultivation (<i>a·dal</i>); ● Clearance of <i>jhum</i> field in its second year of cultivation <i>a·breng</i>); ● debris of trees, shrubs, bamboos are left to dry.
February	<i>Kosi, Gitchipong A·siroka, Bang Rika</i> (rituals for purification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● weeding at <i>a·breng</i> ● sowing paddy at <i>a·breng</i> ● cutting of bamboos and wooden posts for field-hut; catching of fish and crabs for the festival of <i>A·galmaka</i>.
March	<i>A·galmaka, Jamadal Nokdonggaa,</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● burning debris for the fresh cultivation. ● sowing seed-grains in <i>a·dal jhum</i> field and paddy in front of field-hut for the gods. ● construction of field-hut and tree-house in <i>a·dal</i>. ● <i>sampok pe·a</i> weeding is done towards the end of the month. ● removal of cotton-seeds from lint by means of <i>kereka</i> (cotton ginning)
April	<i>Salrak Tata</i> , a ritual for drought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● first weeding - <i>a·jakra sea</i> or <i>gama</i> ● weeding of <i>a·breng</i> or <i>a·breng danga</i>.
May	<i>Wachi Tata</i> , a ritual for excessive and continuous rainfall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● working in both the fields, <i>adal</i> and <i>a·breng</i>;
June	<i>Miamua, Bang Rikgala</i> purification ritual.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● second weeding or <i>bamil danga</i> ● harvesting of maize.



July	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cultural operation after weeding of <i>rika</i> ● harvesting of millet- <i>mi si aka</i> ● weeding operation- <i>sampang danga</i> such as removing millet stalks.
August	<i>Rongchugala</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● harvesting of paddy - <i>mi aka</i>
September	<i>Ahaia</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● removing stalks of paddy and weeding for tubers, ginger and so on.
October	<i>Nokpante Mese Cha-a, Wangala, Chugan, Delang So-a</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● weeding called <i>muri rata</i> for cotton; ● <i>nokma</i> allots new <i>jhum</i> plots for the next season of cultivation; ● arrangement of weddings or <i>do-sia</i> for young people in love
November	<i>Jumang Sia or A-a O-pata, Wanbasala or Mijam Tata, Wankadoa or Chare Mikkol Krita</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● jungle clearing for new <i>jhum</i> field after <i>A-a O-pata</i> festival ● crops like ginger, brinjal, yams or culms, cotton are harvested. ● arrangement for weddings or <i>do-sia</i> after the <i>Wanbasala</i> or <i>Wankadoa</i> festivals.
December	<i>Attepong Su-gala, Gitchipong A-siroka, Chiga Roka</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● harvesting or collecting left-over crops like yams/culms, sweet potatoes, etc. ● marriage proposals and ceremonies take place.

1.09 Sub-Tribes observing the Folk Festivals

For this chapter the researcher has collected materials from all the villages of different *A·chik* sub-divisions such as *A·we*, *Chisak*, *Me·gam*, *Atong*, *Am·beng* or *A·beng*, *Matchi-Matabeng*, etc.

The *A·beng*s: The Ranggira and Rongram areas under the Rongram Block among the *A·beng*s¹⁷ have been found to be more suitable and convenient as a research field for the study. The areas of the villages covered in the field study in the Ranggira area in the Rongram Block are - Bolmagre, Mengkaggre, Chibokgre, Kemragre, Rong-dikgre. Villages from Selsella Block are- Milsigre and Dengnakpara, and its nearby villages. Scraps of materials from the Jengjal area under the Rongram Block

¹⁷ The *A·beng* area covers most of Garo Hills, therefore, among themselves, they identify the *A bengs* staying in the hill areas as *Saka-A bengs* and those who live in the plains of Assam border as *Ka·ma- A bengs*

could also be gathered by staying in Ringge-A-pal village. Materials could also be gathered by staying in Ripplenggre village, Te-bronggre and Wa-ram Songma. There, the researcher was privileged to meet a priest who performed the rituals in the ceremonies; many chants and incantations could be collected from him. Another interesting field was the Dadenggre Block. Staying in Dadenggre Baljek A-duma, the researcher could gather some materials from non-Christians living around that area, especially from the Chibonggre villlage. Since the road conditions to Sadolpara are better than other areas this village could be visited every year ¹⁸ and the ceremonies of *Wangala* festival could be thoroughly observed. The studies in A-guragre villages were done by staying in Asananggre and this was conducted in the year 2000. Materials from the Dadenggre Block near the Assam border was collected from Dudanggre, Galwanggre, Ka-ma-Boldakgre villages by staying in Saka-Mronggre village. The researcher was fortunate enough to meet a sixty-eight year old lady from Asananggre where an interview could be conducted to confirm important activities regarding traditional methods of cultivation.

The A-wes: From the northern area in the Kharkutta Block among the *A-we* areas the villages chosen are –Majipara and Mendima. From the Resu Block - Aruakgre and its nearby villages were chosen.

The Me-gams: From the *Me-gam* areas the villages covered are - Do-chi So-ram, Badakka, A-dokgre under the Kharkutta Block.

¹⁸ The village was visited every year from 1998 to 2004 during the *Wangala* festival.

The *Chisaks*: Among the *Chisak* area under the Rongjeng Block, festivals could not be attended but interviews had been taken from experienced village elders of Snal-Bollong, Koknal-Immong and Mejolgre-Wancho Gittim.

The *Matchi-Matabengs*: For the field research for *Matchi-Matabeng* area under the Samanda Block, the researcher resided at Williamnagar and various studies could be held in Sa·satgre, Nengsanggre, Do·rengkigre and the villagers in the foot hill of Mongre Hill had been interviewed. For Rongram Block, the field study could carry on in the villages of Sa·satgre and Selbalgre.

The *Atongs*: In the *Atong* areas, materials had been collected mostly from the Rongara Block, from villages like - Rongsu, Rong·tok, Siju, Siju- Songmong, Kalu and from the Baghmara Block - Karukol village was visited for the collection of materials.

1.10 Research Methodology

(a) Research methods and technique

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 villages of this study. For realizing the need of the study the research scholar collected further information from the field through the method of participatory observation.

(b) Population

A·chiks are found to have settled both in plains and the hills of the North-East. Their settlements have been found in North Bengal, Assam, notably in Dhubri, Goalpara, Kamrup, Karbi-Anglong, Meghalaya, Tripura and Bangladesh. This variegated scattering is believed to be the outcome of the great migration that took place.

The research has been conducted in a block-wise manner, taking meticulous care to accommodate all the areas of field work where there were non-Christians and where the rituals were still being performed. A survey was done of the whole of Garo Hills with special emphasis on the villages where people were still practicing the *A·chik* indigenous religion with great reverence and respect. The provincial survey report of non-Christian villages in Garo Hills (1996-1997) was collected from the *A·chik* Evangelical Association report given in January, 1998 in a block-wise manner. The three new Community and Rural Development Blocks established in 2001 are not included in this survey. These are Gambegre Block in West Garo Hills, Kharkutta Block in East Garo Hills and Gasuapara Block in South Garo Hills.

Table: § 1.1 Lists of Villages**(Pure indigenous villages and Mixed -Christian & indigenous religion villages)¹⁹**

Name of the C&RD Block	Pure-indigenous villages	Mixed- Christian & indigenous villages	Total No. of villages
Dalu	16	59	75
Rongram	28	77	105
Dadenggre	28	84	112
Betasing	26	72	98
Selsela	16	37	53
Tikrikilla	30	42	72
Zizak	5	3	8
Resu	21	47	68
Samanda	2	72	74
Songsak	36	68	104
Rongjeng	10	96	106
Rongara	Nil	25	25
Chokpot	44	78	122
Baghmara	2	19	21
	264	779	1043

According to the survey report of the *A·chik* Evangelical Association of 1996-1997, the number of villages:

- (i) where the whole population still follows indigenous religion in Garo Hills are 264;
- (ii) Besides these, there is a mixed population of Christians and those practicing indigenous religion and they count 1043.

(c) Sample

The sample covered by the researcher for this study is villages from the West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya.

¹⁹ Source : with permission from *A·chik* Evangelical Association (AEA).

West Garo Hills: The West Garo Hills District is divided into eight Blocks out of which researcher found out only five Blocks where the villagers were observing the folk festivals that are related with this study.

(i) Selsela Block (10 villages)- the villages are Milsigre, Kangklapara, Dingnakpara, Monggre, Dabakgre, Boldoka, Rong·chigre, Rong·krakgre, Mangapara, Ganchenggre, Mekalpara.

(ii) Rongram Block (29 villages)- the villages are Te·bronggre, Wa·ram Songma, Wa·ram Dipogre, Wa·ram Asingre, Wa·ram Danjonggre, Chibonggre, Danang Bokdakgre, Rong·bakgre, Riplenggre, Babadam, Bolmagre, Urenggre, Mengkakgre, Mondagre, Chidoagre, Gambaregre, Rong·dikgre, Balupara, A·dugre, Boldamgre, Sa·satgre, Galwanggre, Asananggre, Selbalgre, A·guragre, Jengjalgre, Ringgigre, Chidekgre, Darechikgre.

(iii) Dadenggre Block (9 villages)- the villages are Dadenggre, Chibonggre Saka·Mronggre, Saka·Boldakgre, Kama·Boldakgre, Chisikgre, Galwanggre, Dudanggre, Renchigre, Chiram Songmare, Tesanggre, Boldamgre, Bollonggre, Sadolpara, Rongmasugre.

(iv) Betasing Block (1 villages)- Chisregre village.

(v) Dalu Block (2 villages)- the villages are Dalu, Rimrangpara.

East Garo Hills: Divided into five blocks as the following villages are come under this study;

(i) Samanda Block (5 villages)- the villages are Sa·satgre, Do·rengkigri, Mongre, Mrikwari, Bawegre.

(ii) Songsak Block (2 villages)- the villages are Koknal-Immong, Snal- Bolong.

(iii)Rongjeng Block (3 villages)-the villages are Rongjeng, Mejolgre, Wancho-Mejolgre, Challang.

(iv) Resu Block (7 villages) Aruakgre, A·chotchonggre, Dengnanggre, Jenggitchakgre, Balkolgre, Samkalakgre, A·dumagre.

(v)Kharkuta Block (3 villages)- the villages are A·dokgre, Badaka, Do·chi So·ram.

South Garo Hills: the covered research areas are as;

(i)Baghmara Block (7 villages)-the villages are Jadigittim, Karukol, Nengkong, Siju, Siju-Songmong, Badri, Rongsa A·we.

(ii)Rongara Block (3 villages)- the villages are Kalu, Rong·tok, Rongru A·sim, Rewak, Chitmag-Gonggrot, Balpakram, Alokpang, Rongsu Agal.

(iii)Chokpot Block (3 villages)- the villages are Chokpot, Emangre, Eman-A·sak.

(iv)Gasuapara Block (1 village)- Kapisipara village.

(d) Information Collection

Information was collected in twelve phases. In each phase the researcher collected information about the festivals to be celebrated by the *jhumias* in month wise which has been given below as well as in analysis parts.

In all the three Districts of the Garo Hills, many interior villages are still practicing all the rituals, ceremonies and festivals with great respect for their gods even today. But wherever Christians are a majority, 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. 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 a mammoth task. Yet now, even with the strong influence of Christianity, the awareness for the need to salvage whatever remains is being recognized even by various other organizations in addition to academic discipline.

In this research thesis, the researcher has been concentrating on the festivals connected with agricultural cycles. In these festivals, one can observe the interconnection of the cycle of life of the human beings with that of the agricultural cycles. Moreover, many beliefs and superstitions are also connected with the observance of these festivals. This research thesis is divided into five chapters; the first chapter is Introduction, the second chapter is on Agricultural Festivals, the third chapter is on Funeral Rites, the fourth chapter on Rituals of Exorcism and the fifth chapter is the Conclusion.

The researcher has shown the cartography of the Garo Hills to indicate the three separate maps of East, West and South districts of Garo Hills. This is primarily to provide the spatial and geographical information to the reader.

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

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

a-king nokmas, etc. The personal observation of festivals in the field at different places over the years that forms part of the field work from the 1996-2005 is also included.

The researcher has concentrated on more field research in the three districts of Garo Hills, Block-wise, where the festivals are still observed in a traditional manner with gaiety and religious fervour even today. There are total of seventeen (17) Development Blocks in Garo Hills (East-5 Blocks, West-8 and South-4; earlier there were only 14 Development Blocks and later on 3 more Development Blocks were established in each District; these are Kharkuta Development Block in the East, Gambegre Development Block in the West and Gasuapara Development Block in the South Garo Hills. The entire area of Garo hills including its major villages and towns which have been covered under the research are also indicated in the map.

The researcher has attempted to describe the folk festivals, traditional indigenous *A-chik* religion, construction of houses and *jhum* farming, and the researcher has tried to correlate each other. Lastly, all the sixteen (16) folk festivals of *A-chiks* related to cultivation are mentioned. For this, the researcher has shown the cycle of cultivation, festivals and the whole year of agricultural activities of the *A-chiks* connected with cultivation which has given below.

According to the sources and evidences gleaned there is enough indication of the existence of written language amongst the *A-chiks*. But as time passed, may be due to the migratory processes, etc., the *A-chiks* lost their written tradition. Later on

they emphasized more on an oral culture. Thus, the *A-chiks* had a rich and vibrant folk culture. With the advent of the British and due to conversions to Christianity, these opulent traditions were under the threat of extinction. Though many of the folk beliefs are practiced even now, it is fast disappearing. This is an attempt of the researcher to document those traditions which are fading away to anonymity.

The rituals in the villages are not performed at a given time; dates are fixed all of a sudden and sometimes they are postponed. Therefore, some of the rituals could not be attended due to these uncertain schedules. However, the people, who had been interviewed for the research, are those who had taken part in the rituals and some were even priests. In this way, a single ritual could be thoroughly studied and rechecked many times over. Christians in the villages could be interviewed at any time since they did not have any superstitious belief²⁰ like the non-Christians. But it is to be noted that these interviews were conducted without a formal questionnaire prepared. This is because of the nature of the rituals and the festivals involved. As mentioned the exact number of people involved in the participatory interview cannot be accounted because of the involvement of on the spot interactions.

The scheduled time, exact year of observations, timings of the festivals and the exact places of observances have been mentioned in the main chapters. The names of the interviewees from different villages, the village heads, and the participants, both the new converts as well as the indigenous believers have been mentioned in

²⁰ Traditional believers have a superstitious belief that the matters regarding the gods cannot be discussed at any time as they are scared of being punished by their gods.

each chapter in sequence of their relevance to the discussed topics. Details of the surveys conducted and the field centers taken up have also been mentioned in the introductory chapter. Only interview and participatory observation on the spot of these field areas have been taken up, but case studies have not been taken up because of the use of completely raw materials for the research.

The researcher has personally witnessed these festivals and rituals, which in turn has been helpful in relating them to the agricultural practices and the beliefs connected to them. This is the reason why out of the nineteen (19) festivals observed, there have been thirteen (13) festivals studied in chapter II, two (2) festivals in chapter III and the in chapter IV all the rituals relating to exorcism including one (1) purification ritual of the land and the people. Recording in tapes and cameras, documenting written records through interviews, collecting traditional oral literature and getting their translations done has been the groundwork accomplished during field trips. Steel cameras, tape 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 studies as the fields are still virgin.

Villages like Aruakgre, Rong-tok, Kalu, Chitmag, Dudanggre, Galwanggre, Dingnakpara, Rong-dikgre are found to have been the best for field study. However, several impediments had to be encountered while conducting field study. Each block and its sub-divisions had been surveyed by the means of field study. This has been indicated in the table form above. All the festivals took place at different times of the

year. Therefore, the extension of the field study had to be spread across several months. The vastness of the fields was another main reason. In order to collect the required data, the researcher has had to employ the method of participatory observation. Besides this, recordings of the rituals and incantations were also done. But due to technological hindrances, personal interviews were conducted where the incantations were re-recorded. The translations of these incantations have been provided in the thesis in their connection to various rituals and festivals that have been studied.

The sub-topics have been covered in greater detail in the different chapters taken up in the book. In connection to the various research fields, covering the different districts of Meghalaya, the cartography of the areas has been produced.

The interior villages would obviously have been the best places for gathering more information, but due to certain factors they were not safe enough to visit; therefore, for material collection and for more information only a few informants from the villages were interviewed and consulted at Tura in 2004-2005.

The researcher would like to emphasize here that the villagers who have contributed to the research have been, the *nokmas* who themselves have assumed the powers of the priests. Besides them, the village elders have also participated in the interviews that have been conducted. Most of these talks had been done on spot during the festivals themselves. So, most of the interviews were actually random contributions from all the villagers who were in one way or the other involved in the

rituals and the festivals. Several times the researcher has had to make multiple visits to the villages to straighten the recordings of the interviews and for clarification.

The actual proceedings of the festivals have recorded by moving cameras which are kept for the sake of posterity. Alongside these recordings, there are still photographs which have captured the rituals in action. The copies have been incorporated in the various chapters of the thesis. Before finally taking on the field works the researcher had to a great extent, surveyed written literature that had been published before the work was taken up.²¹ *The Garo Jungle Book, The Garos, Maniani Bidik, A·chikni Ku·andik, Apasong Agana, Garo Folklores (A·chik Golporang), Traditional Dances of the Garos* and many other books, the details of which have been given in the bibliography, have given the researcher the basis of information.

The incantations recorded by Dewansingh S. Rongmuthu were a gamut of the folk life and culture of the *A·chiks*. The researcher found out that some of the incantations collected in the book have been actually lost to time. Even the practicing believers were not able to give satisfactory translations to some of the incantations quoted in the text. This is because of the oral transmission of the beliefs and practices which have been slowed down due to the incursion of Christianity. The dances which had been documented have been linked to the celebration of festivals and rituals. This is another important discovery. In the same manner the folktales have been an integral part of the *A·chik* folk life.

²¹ The details of these books are given in the Bibliography.

The researcher would like to add that no translated data has been used for this research. On the other hand, the raw materials collected from the fields, have had to be translated to English, for the sake of readability. Some illustrations have been provided in the thesis. This has been because some of the still photographs have either missed out certain parts of rituals or they have not been visually clear enough. The diagrams of *A·chik house* have been provided by Sembertush A. Sangma and Mingjen Ch. Marak, who were accompanied the researcher on field trips several times. The researcher also wishes to add here that interested students have been involved in the field survey in connection to their academic requirements. The data collected by them have been incorporated after experts have checked the facts.

Since folklore studies are a part of their prescribed syllabus, such field study materials in certain cases have been greatly relevant to the cross checking of facts for the researcher. This has been done due to the complicated nature of the work because of the vastness of the field covered for the study. In this context the differences in the dialects spoken at different blocks and the differences in the timings of observing the festivals has been of utmost importance to the collection of data from the fields researched. The same festivals are known by different names in different villages. This has been another cause for complexity in the working out of the research project.

Nevertheless the study taken up has proved to be an enriching experience. The vast field has been extensively covered and the variations in the observance and celebrations of these festivals have been taken into consideration, without leaving out

any fact which may be of significance to the research. It is noteworthy that the gods are revered in both their malevolent and benevolent forms. Thus the emergence of the various festivals associated with their importance and omnipresent functions. Agriculture has been the peoples' source of livelihood since time immemorial and nature and her incomprehensible ways; the reasons for celebration and implementing strict codes of conduct in *A.chik* society.

CHAPTER-II

CHAPTER II

AGRICULTURAL FESTIVALS IN *A-CHIK* INDIGENOUS RELIGION

2.01 Introduction:

The festivals that have been taken up for study by the scholar are festivals which are directly associated with agriculture and the daily activities that are connected with this occupation. The influences of their beliefs permeate even the occupations of their livelihood. In fact no part of their lives is without the control of their religious beliefs and practices. The indigenous faith itself is replete with strict observances of rituals and *niams* or regulations.

The entire year is full of festivals and the rituals related to them. Strict adherence to the time set by the forefathers is still closely followed though there is a significant difference in the way that the rituals are conducted nowadays. It is to be noted that the *A-chik* forefathers set timings for the celebration of festivals by observing the cycles of the sun and the moon. The seasons also play a major role in determining the particular time for the observance of the festival and the ritual as well. This particular point is still pursued by the faithful followers even today. Thus the different festivals fall within different seasons, depending on the nature and purpose of their observance.

As indicated in the table form all these festivals that have been mentioned take place ritually throughout the year. Different festivals are celebrated in accordance with the process of the agricultural cycle and the necessity of the season. This has

been clearly indicated. Each festival has a particular ritual linked to it. Each ritual in turn, has a specific relevance to the purpose of the festival.

Different sub-divisions of *A·chiks* who believe in the indigenous religion celebrate these festivals. Some of the more important sub-divisions still following these rituals and practices are *Am·beng*, *Matchi*, *Matjangchi*, *A·we*, *Chisak*, *Atong* and *Ruga*. Agriculture is part and parcel of *A·chik* culture but for some remaining faithful followers it is the co-existence with their gods which is more important than just accepting it as a way of life. Many have given up associating themselves with this way of life, the reason being the introduction of Christianity and education, with it the inevitable intrusion of modernity.

The researcher has tried to collect data from all the *A·chik* sub-divisions living in different parts of Garo Hills. The data has been collected at different periods from experienced priests, *a·king nokmas*, and knowledgeable elders from different villages. The informants are strong in the faith of their fore-fathers' beliefs and practices. To select the major festivals, the researcher observed all the festivals in the beginning of the research. Observations and data collection have been done districtwise; the villages and the years of observation are mentioned, for example, in 1997-1998 data was collected from Sasatgre, Selbalgre, Do·renkigre and Mongre, Misilgre, Dengnakpara, in 1999-2000 from Wancho-Mejolgre and Koknal-Immong, Siju Songmong, Rimrangpara; in 2001-2002 from the villages, namely, A·gruragre, Bolmagre, Mengkaggre, Chidaogre, Kemragre, Gambaregre, Rong·dikgre, Sadolpara, Mekalpara, Boldamgre, Rong·tok, in 2002-2003 from Riplenggre, Wa·ram-Songma,

Te-bronggre, Chibonggre, Saka-Mronggre, Dudanggre, Galwanggre, Kama-Boldakgre; in 2004-2005 from Rongsu, Kalu villages.

There are twelve festivals which the researcher has considered as major festivals in the *A-chik* traditional agriculture system, that is, the *jhum* cultivation. The festivals are *Jumang Sia*, *A-galmaka*, *Gitchipong A-siroka*, *Salrak Tata*, *Miamua*, *Wachi Tata*, *Rongchugala*, *Ahaia*, *Nokpante Mese Cha-a*, *Wangala*, *Wankadoa*, *Wanbasala*.

Jumang Sia: This festival is observed in the month of November before clearing the selected spot for new *jhum* field. In this festival, the *nokma* of the *a-king* land perform a ritual of *samsepa* to seek permission from the god *Tatara Rabuga- Stura Pantura* and to inform to the god *Abet-Rengge*, the care-taker of the forest, appealing him to vacate the place for cultivation. After performing the ritual, at night they wait for the answers in the dreams of the villagers. They carry on with their work only after interpreting the dream.

They seek for good and bad omens in the dreams. Bad dreams tell of bad omen and good dreams of good omen. Bad omens instill fear in their hearts and are indicative of problems. They attempt to alter the indications of the omen by observing the ritual of clearing the plot. This signifies the submission to divine will in all decisions they take. The festival is observed for one night but if the dreams are not favorable it may go on for a week or two.

Gitchipong A·siroka: In the month of February and latest by March, the rituals are performed to purify the *a·breng*, which is a *jhum* field in its second or third year of cultivation. Here the farmers plant only paddy but they allow crops from the previous cultivation to grow. They take care of their crops and weeding is done seasonally as the farmers are allowed to consume any seasonal crops from the *a·breng* without any restriction or even without performing any ritual. The benevolent gods for whom the believers sacrifice their first produce offerings are *Rabuga Tatara*, *Mima Kiri Rokkime* or *Rokki*, and the malevolent gods are *A·song* or *Abet-Rengge*, *Pilne*, *Aminda*, *Susime*, *Raksi* or *Rakasi* and *Dombe*. On the last day of the festival the people abstain from daily chores and activities till four (4:00 p.m.) in the evening. Bathing and washing clothes are forbidden.

A·galmaka: This festival is celebrated in March in the new *jhum* field called *a·dal*. It is observed right after the burning of dried debris for cultivation. A ritual of purification of the new farm is performed at a selected plot before fresh cultivation. After this ritual the *nokma* calls up their god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bless the whole village throughout the farming season. Rituals are performed while the ashes are still fresh in the field. The name itself explains the meaning of festival; in some *A·chik* areas the festival is also called *Galmakdoa*. *A·galmaka* literally means ‘the ritual on the ground covered with ashes’. *Galmak* means ‘ashes’, whereas ‘*doa*’ means ‘blow upwards’ or ‘ashes being blown up in the air’ which denotes that ‘the ashes from the plot are blown up’. In the festival, the *nokma* performs a purification ritual of *A·siroka* in the selected new *jhum* field. According to their belief, to call up *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, the villagers have to purify their respective

jhum field first; or else the god may neither stay nor bless their crops in the season. In the morning, the *a-king nokma* performs the rituals for the whole village. After the rituals, they feast together for half the day in the field and at night drinking, feasting, and merry-making in the village take place. The festival continues for a day and a night.

Salrak Tata: In the month of April when there is no sufficient rain in the crop-growing season, the believers observe a festival for the Rain and Sun god *Aning Bokjare -Chining Dimjare* near a huge rock or a pool. The *A-chiks* believe that if the god *Salrak* is displeased, he punishes them by sending severe drought to the area to announce his power to people. They believe that every season is controlled by their gods.

Mi Amua: The festival is also called *A-krita* in some *A-chik* villages. It is observed in the month of May in the *jhum* field when the paddy leaves turn reddish, due to scarcity of water or if they are plagued with disease. On such seasons the farmers offer prayers accompanied by animal sacrifices to the malevolent gods. They ask the gods not to attack the goddess of paddy *Mima Kiri Rokkime* with 'severe headache' before the fruition period.

Wachi Tata: This festival is observed in the month of May when there is excessive rain in the crop-growing period. This happens when someone desecrates the sacred-grove of the Rain god; now the villagers have to ask for god's forgiveness by offering

animal sacrifices next to a big rock. They have to seek their god's blessings in performing all their activities.

Rongchugala: This festival is performed in the month of July when the early varieties of crops ripen. Without this festival they never can proceed with the *Wangala* festival because at this time they offer beaten-rice to their gods and pound the best fresh variety of paddy to prepare rice-beer for the *Wangala* festival. In this festival they offer a thanksgiving offering of all the first seasonal fruits to the gods for the blessings they receive.

Ahaia: This festival is observed in honour of the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* in the month of September. In this festival the villagers offer sacrificial offerings of fresh crops like millet, paddy and seasonal leafy vegetables to their gods asking permission from their gods to begin consumption of the fresh crops. In some areas the same festival is also called *Jamegapa*, *Amarata*, *Medong Ra-ona* or *Ahaia*. The *A-chiks* practising indigenous faith consider the paddy plant itself to be the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. Only after this festival, they prepare rice-beer out of glutinous-rice, millets and maize for the *Wangala* festival.

Nokpante Mese Cha-a: This festival is celebrated at night in the month of October in the village *nokpante*, i.e. the boys' dormitory. The *A-chik* folktales talk about the ancestor of the rats called *Sugra-Mateja* which ate the fresh paddy before it was offered to the god *Misi Saljong*, the provider of seed-grains. The granary is considered as the home of their god *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. In the festival, the villagers

purify their own granaries before storing the fresh paddy as they believe *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* do not reside in an unclean granary. The ritual is performed as a reminder of the mistake committed by *Sugra-Mateja*, a large field rat who in the past ignored the existence of the god *Misi Saljong*.

Wangala: It is the festival of offering thanksgiving to their gods for being with them throughout the whole farming season. This festival is observed in the month of October every year. In the festival the farmers send off the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to their permanent home in the ocean with the ritual of incense burning. The festival is a fulfillment of the past agreement of man with their god *Misi Saljong* while receiving the seed-grains offered by the god in the past.

Wankadoa: This festival is observed once every two years in the month of November after the *Wangala* festival. It is observed alternately with *Wanbasala*, which also takes place once in two years. This festival is observed to offer gratitude for the good harvest and for the wealth bestowed by their gods. In this festival they purify all their ornaments and their goods which *A-chiks* consider as the wealth of the gods, which had been given to them only for safe-keeping. The materials should be purified before being used for the dance with their gods.

Wanbasala: This festival is observed every two years alternately with the festival of *Wankadoa*. In some villages it is called *Mi Jam Tata* or 'purification of the granary'. The purification ritual of the granaries of each family is performed in the village as they are believed to be the dwelling place of the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri*

Rokime. If the granaries are not purified, the gods may not be pleased with them; as a result, the food-grains stored for the entire year may not be sufficient.

Thus it is noted that all these festivals are in one way or the other associated with agriculture and the activities connected with it. No agricultural process is undertaken without the permission and the assistance of the gods. Their gods are an intrinsic part of their lives and therefore the festivals and the rituals themselves bear evidence of their dependence on the divine and the supernatural. Their beliefs talk of co-existence with the gods. Hence they follow strict adherence to rituals and ceremonies.

2.02 THE FESTIVAL OF A·A O·PATA OR JUMANG SIA

The *A·chiks* consider the gods as an intrinsic part of their life and try to follow the will of their gods and goddesses faithfully at all times. It is also believed that every organism, living or non-living has been made by a creator. No one is given the right to destroy any being or thing in any way. Even to clear a forest or to cut trees for cultivation, one who intends to carry out the work has to seek permission from the care-taker god who is also the custodian. For all these reasons, they observe the festival of *Jumang Sia* before clearing a forest for *jhuming*.

Nature of the Festival: *A·a O·pata* means ‘clearing of a bit of land before cutting the forest of a large tract of land’, while *Jumang Sia* means ‘divination of dreams’. *Jumang Sia* festival is a ritualistic clearing of a small part of the ground to seek signs

of approval from the god *Abet-Rengge*,²² the custodian of the forest. The approval of the gods is sought through the interpretation dreams of the villagers.²³ This festival takes place before the chosen forest is cleared for *jhuming*. This is the first festival of the *A·chiks* in the beginning of the new *jhuming* season. It takes place in the last week of October or the first week of November every year.²⁴ The *A·chiks* believe that the work of cultivation cannot be started without this festival.

Purpose of the Festival: The *A·chiks* observe the festival of *Jumang Sia* before clearing the forest, requesting the god *Abet-Rengge* to find shelter in another place. The villagers fear that while clearing the forest they may harm the gods; therefore, they request *Abet-Rengge* and other spirits dwelling in that place to leave before they cut down the forest for cultivation. They also ask the creator of land and water, *Tatara-Rabuga*, to show his consent through the medium of a dream, so the villagers would know what to decide.

Preparation for the Festival: In the morning of the festival, the *nokma* who is also a priest and the heads of the families go to the plot selected for cultivation and perform the rituals. Women, children, boys and girls stay back in the village to prepare food for the feast which will follow the rituals and take place in the village courtyard or in the *nokma's* house. Feasting and drinking together in the village is the concluding part of every ceremony among the *A·chik* festivals.

²² Another name of the god *Abet-Rengge* is *Abetpa-Ranggapa*.

²³ Excluding children's dreams, dreams of any elders of the village are considered.

²⁴ In the past the *A·chik* forefathers counted the months according to the season of *jhum* cultivation; therefore, the end of the harvesting was considered as the end of the year. The month of October is considered as the New Year because it is the end of the harvesting season and the beginning of the season of cultivation.

Preparation in the selected spot: When the villagers reach the selected spot, they clear a small portion of the ground to perform the rituals under the shade of a tree.²⁵ An altar is prepared out of bamboo. The leaves of *bengraru* and a *chokrek* (a small conical bamboo basket) are attached to the altar. The sacrificial items of eggs and jars of rice-beer are placed near the altar.

Preparation in the village: Women, boys and girls of the village prepare food for the feast to be taken after the ceremonial ritual. The whole village participates in the feasting. Some carry water in *kabes*²⁶ from the stream, some collect jars of rice-beer from those families who are entitled to keep a *kram*²⁷. All the necessary arrangements are made by the people who stay back in the village. Plantain leaves for packing cooked rice and curry separately are contributed by each family in the village. All these necessary things are kept ready two to three days ahead of the festival.

Performance of the Rituals: After keeping the necessary sacrificial items such as eggs and rice-beer ready, the men folk go to the selected spot for the new field in order to perform the rituals. On reaching the place, they prepare an altar with leaves of bamboo and *bengraru*. At the altar, the priest performs the rituals of egg-breaking and libation of rice-beer to their gods. While performing the rituals, the priest utters incantations to the god *Abet-Rengge*, asking him to relinquish the place. In the

²⁵ If possible the villagers prepare an altar under a gigantic tree.

²⁶ It is a fresh cylindrical bamboo stump which is used to store water for the whole festival.

²⁷ *Kram* is a traditional drum is played while performing rituals. It is smaller than the other *A·chik* drums. It can be kept only by those families which are blessed by the gods for the purpose, and are able to host the village community during festivals. In most of the villages, they are closely related to the village *a·king nokma*.

prayers, he asks permission to use the land and to make it suitable for cultivation saying:

*A·rong srekkko, simi retchek chaako,
Anga o·e nina, den·e nina;
Den·jamongnajok anga, den·ritchotnajok anga,
Jumang sisi, jumang niknik.*²⁸
In the gravel land where all kinds of thick grass grow,
May I clear the forest, cut the jungle;
May I cut them for a small field,
May I cut them leaving only the uneven bases,
Show me in a vision; reveal it to me in a dream.

Saying these, the priest breaks an egg over the sacrificial items and hangs the egg-shell on the *chokrek* near the altar. After this he pours out some rice-beer on the altar for the gods. He continues to chant incantations in the following manner to the god *Abet-Rengge* and other spirits asking them to shift to another place while they clear the forest for *jhuming* and also during the years they would be cultivating in that particular piece of land:

*Ia chinga, A·nokgipa-Chinokgipa,
Na·simang Abet-Rengge i·no a·chagipa watjawa chingni songkode nokkode,
Pe·na -wangna man·jawa,
Den·e wa·cheng ramna,
So·i galmak donna man·jawa inode;
Matchiagipaba A·nokgipaba do·mesalchatbo,
Chinokgipaba inchritbo gandildilbo;
Walo tusioba jumang nikbo-jumang sibo.
A·wat ine, salwat ine;
Iako o·e cha·na on·gni inode,
Abet-Renggeba, Sareba-Galdeba Derakba-Dugimba,
Na·simang chinalsachi a·paksachi,
Biap jite a·tip rike roskaboni;
Chingade o·gnok!*²⁹

²⁸ These lines were chanted by *Monen Rangsa Marak* from the village of *Wa·ramSongma*, Rongram area while performing the ritual of *samsepa* in 2003.

²⁹ This incantation is made by *Lebensing Areng* (the priest) at the time of the *samsepa* ritual in Rongsu village in 2003 in the *Atong* area of South Garo Hills.

Here we are, owners of the land, owners of the water,
Abet-Rengge, and all other spirits inhabiting the place,
 If you say, we cannot destroy or cultivate the place,
 Cannot cut the trees or cannot dry and burn for *jhuming*,
 The Creator, owner of the land, give them enlightenment and wisdom;
 Owner of the place, defend us and be with us;
 Even when we sleep, give us a vision, tell us in a dream.
 Make them leave the place, shift them to another region,
 If you allow us to clear and cultivate the land,
Abet-Rengge, as well as *Sare*, *Galde*, *Darek* and *Dugim*
 May you all relocate to the other side of the stream, to another place,
 Please move and build your homes in another place;
 As we are about to clear the forest!

The two above incantations are collections from two different areas recited for the same ritual. The second one being more detailed, reflects their beliefs as well. After saying this, the priest makes an incision on a tree trunk, inserting grass and soil between the bark and the trunk; and he awaits a dream at night. This ritual is called *samsepa* or 'inserting grass in the slit made in the trunk'. It is also a sign to others that the area around this spot has been reserved for the new cultivation. Consequently, the village community reveres this space and no one else will dare to claim or touch it. After the *samsepa* ritual, the priest tests the soil by taking a lump of earth from the premises and throws it on the incision on the tree. If some soil sticks to the trunk, it is considered to be good and fertile soil and it is believed that crops will prosper in that soil.

Manner of Observation on Divination: The villagers say that if *Abetpa-Ranggapa* permits them to cultivate the land, they will have dreams of flood and deposition of sand in the river bank, and dreams of cloudy weather or fishing in clear water and so

on.³⁰ Then they know that the plot of land will produce a good harvest. However, if they dream of animals taking away a man's clothes, it is believed to signify prohibition by the gods. It is also believed that the goddess of paddy, *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will move away from her association with the people to the ocean; her home. If someone dreams of a large produce of betel-nut (areca-nut) or of wearing a red dress, it is believed that chilli and aubergines will be good in that season. If they do not heed their dreams, it is believed that death, accidental severing of hands and feet while clearing the forest may occur. In this way, if their god permits appropriation and use of the land, he would reveal it through their dreams. If the god disapproves, they will look for another plot to conduct the same ritual. If they do not seek permission from the gods before using the land it is believed that members of that particular family who violate the norm will be attacked by their gods. This they call *mite-rim-a*, as a result of which all of them may die.

Dreams and their interpretations:

- (i) Cloudy weather in the dream is a sign that the god is willing to permit them to cultivate the chosen plot and would also bless them with a bountiful harvest.
- (ii) Fishing in clear waters indicates that the god is vacating the plot for cultivation and this means a good start and a good harvesting season.

³⁰ These dreams have been narrated by the one of the elders in Te-bronggre village, Rongram area in 2003 and 2004.

(iii) In the village of Selbalgre, people believe that if they dream of heavy deposits of sand, they are going to have a good harvest. A.C.Momin and M.N.Sangma also mention the same in their works.³¹

(iv) Dreaming of heavy bunches of *sokmil* (a wild sour fruit of a kin of cane species, *calamus floribandus*) and white fish signifies a good produce of paddy, chilli and aubergines.

(v) A dream of suffering from any kind of eye problem such as conjunctivitis, signify the growth of chilli.

(vi) A dream of rearing goats signifies good produce of gourd.

(v) Dreams of slaughtering a pig to eat or of animals taking away a man's clothes signify prohibition by the gods to cultivate the chosen land. In such cases it is believed that some people will surely die and so they leave the place to look for another.

Good dreams are supposed to be auspicious. Bad dreams on the other hand are interpreted as indications of misfortune and affliction to the family in the following year. An example of a bad dream would be the main current of a river cutting into the embankments and causing either the widening or the erosion of the bank. Flooding of both the banks is also interpreted as indicative of problems during the time of clearing the plot and this too, is regarded as a bad omen. Thus the villagers say that bad

³¹ A.C.Momin: *A-chikni Ku'andik*, 1985, pp.13-14 and M.N.Sangma: *Maniani Bidik*, 1985, p.2.

dreams indicate difficulties at the time of clearing the jungle or that they are a bad omen for the future.³²

After the ritual of *samsepa* in the selected *jhum* area, villagers go down to the village and celebrate all day and night. Festivities are carried on till they finish many jars of rice-beer brewed for the festival. Sometimes the festival may be prolonged for a week as they wait for their dreams to be interpreted. If the dreams are good, they start clearing the forest and the debris is left to dry for about two months of January and February. The dried debris is usually burnt in the middle of March every year when the tender bamboo shoots start growing.³³

Beliefs and Practices: *A·chiks* strongly believe that if they carry on cultivation in spite of bad dreams, they will have to pay the price for their disobedience and would face misfortunes such as death in the family either of the husband or wife or children. The cultivators also believe that after a bad dream the plot of land is unsuitable for cultivation because there is a possibility of the place being infested with evil spirits. This particular plot of land is then immediately abandoned and clearing it is prohibited for years. This spot is then called *A·kreng Raka* or *A·si Raka* or *Rangadam*. The forest in such places is kept untouched, for it is believed to be the abode of different gods such as the god *Kosi*.

³² This is narrated by the villagers of Gambaregre, Chibokgre and Sasatgre

³³ The priest, the *a·king nokma* of Wa·ram Songma and some of the village elders of that area say that burning of the dried debris in March every year had been practised for years together in the Rongram area. They believe that the budding of bamboos shoots signify the onset of rainy season. Two months after clearing the forest they check if the bamboo shoots have started to grow.

2.03 THE FESTIVAL OF *GITCHIPONG A-SIROKA*

Gitchipong A-siroka is a festival where the *A-chik jhumias*³⁴ perform a purification ritual of the agricultural tools, the *jhum* field and the village before starting the cultivation. The word *Gitchipong* literally means ‘the handle of a hoe’ and *A-siroka* means ‘a purification ritual’ by driving away the malevolent gods from the place before calling up the benevolent gods to be with them throughout the year.

Nature of the Festival: This festival is observed in the village and the rituals are first performed in the village *kimrong*, the sacrificial post, the second ritual at the cross-roads of the village, the third ritual at the *nokma's a-breng* or *jhum* field in its second year of cultivation, and the closing ritual is performed at the *maljuri*, the sacred post in the house of the *nokma*. The ritual is intended for the entire village. All the villagers, except the old and the sick, are involved in the festival. The rituals are performed by the *nokma* or the priest for the benevolent gods; *Abet-Rengge*, *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, *Tatara-Rabuga* and the malevolent gods *Susime*, *Pilne*, *Aminda*, *Raksi* and *Dombe*.

It is observed in the second or third week of March after every two years.³⁵ According to the villagers of Galwanggre and Dudanggre in the Dadenggre Block, the festival of *Gitchipong A-siroka* is observed once every two years. But in the

³⁴ *Jhumias* are those who practise shifting or *jhum* cultivation.

³⁵ In Dadenggre area, the villagers of Dudanggre, Galwanggre, Saka-Monggre, Kama-Boldakgre performed the *Gitchipong A-siroka* festival on 13th/ 14th or 20th / 23rd March in alternate years. In some *A-chik* villages of Garo Hills, a farm is cultivated only for a year; in such villages, it is observed every year in March.

villages on the banks of Ringgi River, it is observed every year in the month of March. In Dadenggre area³⁶ during this festival, some rituals are performed at the cross-roads called *Anti Rama*. Mihir N. Sangma has specified a different name for this festival, as *Rama Cholruramo Krita* which literally means 'the ritual at the cross-roads'.³⁷ In this festival, the entire village participates in all the rituals involved.

Purpose of the Festival: This festival is observed to purify all the agricultural tools of the village and the *jhum* fields prior to the crop growing season.³⁸ Purification ritual of *A-si Roka* is also performed to keep the village and its people protected from diseases and troubles during the year.

Preparation for the Festival: A week or two ahead of the festival, the *nokma* holds a meeting to fix the date and to pick members for the collection of money and rice from each household for the festival. The meeting starts at 7:00 a.m. and goes on till 9:00 a.m. in the village courtyard. After fixing the date for the festival, each family prepares rice-beer and the selected members of the village begin the collections for the festival. The villagers then buy a bull, eggs or other essential items a week ahead of the festival. If the *a-king nokma* is able to bear all the expenses for the festival as it happens in some villages, collection is not required.

³⁶ The villagers of Dudanggre, Galwanggre, Saka-Mronggre, Kama-Boldakgre call this festival *Anti Ramao Krita* or 'the ritual at the road to the market'.

³⁷ Sangma, Mihir N.: *Maniani Bidik*, 1995, p.4.

³⁸ Usually the *A-chiks* plant paddy in the *a-breng jhum* field. Nowadays, due to infertility of the soil, crops do not produce good yield in the farm in its second year of cultivation. Consequently, some *A-chik* villages cultivate the land for a year only.

A day ahead of the festival, the villagers prepare an altar (*kimindam*) with fresh bamboo at the cross-roads (*Anti Rama*) in the village, or on the bank of the river or stream. A small portion of the land is cleared at the sacrificial site to offer sacrifices and also to receive participants for the ceremonial ritual and for the feasting after the ceremony. A bull, nine chickens and ten to sixteen eggs meant for the various rituals are kept ready for the festival. If these things are not available in the village, they are bought from the market.

Manner of Observation: On the day of the festival, everyone in the village keep themselves busy preparing for the rituals right from the morning. While a number of people cut bamboos from the jungle; others prepare an altar, several others make eight small conical *chokreks* woven out of bamboo for the eight gods. Some collect sand from a nearby stream and others carry water in the bamboo cylinders (*kabe*). There are those who carry the sacrificial items to the sacrificial site; several others carry jars of rice-beer and water to sprinkle during the time of the ritual. Some host relatives and people from other villages, *nokmas* from other *a-kings*.³⁹ There are the others who busy themselves cooking for the feast to be taken after the ceremonial rituals.

In Galwanggre and Dudanggre villages, with each *chokrek*, an image of *drongo*⁴⁰ is hung in a bamboo pole. Ahead of the ritual, the villagers clear a small portion of the land for the altar. They prepare it using fresh bamboo with the leaves

³⁹ The land-owners of the neighbouring areas.

⁴⁰ It is made of from fine bamboo strips. *Drongo* or *do-pa* (in *A-chik*) is a racket-tailed *drongo* or kingcrow.

intact and *bengraru* leaves; and on its side, a tender plantain plant is placed for the ritual of *Marang Roka* which may be translated as driving away profanations. A big bamboo basket called *dola sepa* is made to collect the refuse of the festival.⁴¹

After a week of this ritual, the villagers burn the dried debris of the cleared area which will now become the new *jhum* field called *a·dal*. The burning will be followed next morning by the *A·galmaka* festival.

Performance of Rituals:

The First Day

(i) Purification Ritual of Agricultural Tools in the village: The first ritual begins at 7:00 or 8:00 in the morning at the village sacrificial post *kimrong*.⁴² The villagers place their agricultural tools specially hoes and *daos* which are big implements for cutting the forest at the base of the sacrificial post encircling it. The priest performs the purification ritual of egg-breaking using four eggs which he breaks over the tools. In this ritual, if the egg-yolk falls on somebody's tool, the person concerned has to catch a monkey⁴³ for the purification ritual of the village and its inhabitants. This ritual is called *A·si- Roka*.

Preparations of the altar, offering of sacrificial items, performance of rituals and the name of the festival vary according to the areas. For example in Wa-ram

⁴¹ According to an *A·chik* indigenous belief, the villagers are not supposed to throw away any materials that are used in the festival; instead it is placed on the side of the altar. Placing on the side of the altar symbolizes handing over impurities to their gods.

⁴² This is a sacrificial post in the village courtyard.

⁴³ During the *Gitchipong A·siroka* festival, man is represented by the monkey; therefore the villagers call the monkey '*mande*' which means 'man' in the ritual of monkey catching .

Songma areas, the villagers perform this festival on the bank of a stream or river; therefore it is called *Chiga-Roka* in these areas. The priest sits inside the altar that is encircled with a fresh bamboo fence while performing the ritual. He chants a prayer to *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* inviting them to the village and to their *jhum* fields. After the prayer, he slaughters a bull, smears its blood on the altar and on the eight *chokreks*. The eight *chokreks* represent the eight deities who are *Abet-Rengge* (*A·song/kosi* god),⁴⁴ *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, *Rabuga-Tatara*,⁴⁵ *Susime*,⁴⁶ *Pilne*, *Bang/Aminda*, *Raksi* and *Dombe*.⁴⁷

The *A·si Roka* ritual is believed to purify the impurities in the people and the place. This purification ritual is called *Marang Roka*, or ‘the purification of profanation’ in some *A·chik* villages. Purification ritual is considered necessary as the villagers may, inadvertently injure or kill other living beings while clearing the jungle for the new *jhum* field. It becomes a pre-requisite task to purify tools, the people who use it and the place before calling the gods to live with them throughout the season. It is believed that otherwise the gods do not abide with the people in a defiled place.

⁴⁴ *Abet-Rengge* (*A·song/ kosi* god) is believed to be a malevolent god that has the power to make people lame or crippled, blind, unhealthy and sickly.

⁴⁵ *Rokkime*, *Tatara-Rabuga* (*Atmipa-Tunepa*), these are the benevolent gods that give people good care and blessings in their life; therefore the worshippers have to acknowledge their power and respect the gods with blood sacrifices in all walks of life

⁴⁶ *Asi* and *Malja* were two persons who did not observe the ‘day of *salnima*’ or abstention from work on the preparation day for the *Wangala* festival. As a result both died unnatural deaths which were caused as a lesson by the god *Misi Saljong*. *A chiks* commonly use this phrase, ‘*Asi-Malja*’ to mean that it is forbidden by the gods.

⁴⁷ *Pilne*, *Bang/Aminda*, *Raksi*, *Dombe* are the other malevolent gods. They are believed to be the gods having the power to spoil crops in the field. The villagers forbid the utterance of their names even. They call them ‘*skal*’ or ‘monster’. These deities have the power to make the children sick and scare them by disturbing their sleep.

(ii) Ritual of Monkey Catching: The purification ritual of agricultural tools is over by 9:00 in the morning. After this ritual, the participants especially the men of the village go to the nearby jungle to look for a monkey. The monkey is used for the ritual of *Marang Roka* or ‘cleansing profanations from the village’. Langurs were used before. The langur represented man; that is why in this ritual, the monkey is called *mande* or ‘man’ in the villages of Dudanggre area.

When the villagers catch a monkey, it is taken to the village courtyard and tied at the *kimrong*. While doing so, the villagers shout ‘*man-jok!, man-jok!*’ or ‘(we) have caught it! (we) have caught it!’ In unison they shout ‘*hoia...hoia*’ in the village courtyard. This signifies the belief that they have successfully apprehended the one responsible for the misfortunes in the village. On hearing this shout, the villagers bring to a halt their cooking and pounding of rice-powder and get ready for the commencement of the festival.

(iii) Ritual of taking the Monkey around to each household: Before taking the monkey around to each house in the village, a ritual of egg-breaking, using four eggs is performed by the priest. The priest, his assistants (*matdoks*) and the male members of the village visit each household. In each house, the priest performs the ritual of sprinkling water from an earthen jar. The *matdoks*, each holding an arm of the monkey, follows the priest. They let the monkey claw at the wall of each house. This ritual is called *Sabu Roka* or *Marang Roka* or *A-si Roka* or ‘cleansing the impurities of every family in the village’. Other followers beat the front wall of each house with sticks standing in a line, shouting together “*ho...ai...ho..ai*” with every touch on the

wall. This signifies that the malevolent spirits are driven away from each family in the village. Two members follow the group, carrying a big bamboo basket (*dola*) to gather any old and unused materials/articles like old spoons, bamboo sticks called *me-gol* fashioned for the purpose of stirring rice while cooking, old bags, old bamboo basket (*kok* or *kerang*) from each house.⁴⁸ Every household has to keep these things ready in the front yard; otherwise, the participants can collect anything that is found in a house be it eggs, rice, meat, chicken and so on. So, the villagers put their valuables out of sight before this ritual.

The sticks that are used to beat the walls of the houses are carried in the bamboo basket to the junction in the village path. This is symbolical of the monkey taking away old life, diseases, curses and impurities (*marang*) from the families. The refuse of each household is carried in a big bamboo basket and placed on the side of the altar. This signifies cleansing of impurities from the place and handing over the spirits of profanation to the gods.

(iv) Ritual at the Cross-Roads (*Anti Ramao Krita*): When the ritual of taking the monkey around is over, the villagers move to the intersection in the village path to perform another ritual. Here people get busy in helping to put together the necessary items for the performance of the ritual. A few carry sand from the stream to be kept in the altar; some prepare eight bamboo cones called *chokreks* for eight gods- *Abet-Rengge*, *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, *Rabuga-Tatara*, *Susime*, *Pilne*, *Aminda*, *Raksi* and *Dombe*. Some prepare the altar with *araru* (leaves of a plant belonging to wild palm

⁴⁸ These materials are kept in front of their house before the people visit their houses.

family) and an image of *do-pa* (a racket-tailed *drongo*) made out of fine bamboo strips. They are tied to a bamboo pole near the altar. The old articles collected from each family and the bamboo sticks that are used for thumping the walls of each house are hung on a bamboo pole on the right side of the altar. An altar and eight *chokrek*s are arranged; four at each side of the junction of the *jhum* field and the market place. The altar is prepared on the right side of the road. Near the altar, a *chokrek* with bamboo *wa·smita*⁴⁹ on one side and on the other, another *chokrek* is erected. Here the egg-shells are strung on a bamboo stump after the egg-breaking ritual. For this ritual, four eggs are used. For *Raksi* and *Dombe* sacrificial offerings are made in a *chokrek*. A bull and the monkey are taken to the sacrificial site. The village elders of Dadenggre area say that the god accepts a bull of any colour. It should be stainless; it must not be lame or injured in any way, nor must it suffer from any affliction.

When the villagers reach the sacrificial site, one of the *matdoks* cuts the nape of the monkey's neck and lets it bleed to death. Then the monkey is hanged on the branch of a tree upside down with both the hind and the fore limbs tied to the side of the altar. After the ceremony, beef is cooked for all the participants in the feast. The various offerings collected such as rice is cooked, so also the best part of the beef,⁵⁰ eggs and the assorted red glutinous rice (*menil*), and so on. They are offered separately to each god on plantain leaves at the base of each *chokrek*.⁵¹ Over these items, the priest performs the libation of rice-beer that is prepared out of glutinous

⁴⁹ The hard outer skin of a fresh bamboo stump is artfully cut to produce curly, decorative strips. This is done specially for the rituals.

⁵⁰ This preparation is called *kaji*; it is cooked with ginger and green chilies.

⁵¹ All the cooked items are prepared in bamboo cylinders; this method of cooking and the cooked items are called *brenga*. The *A-chiks* consider *brenga* as a special dish for special occasions.

rice⁵² to the gods. Along with each *chokrek*, a fresh bamboo stump is erected. They place a stone at the base of the *chokrek* and fill the cone with sand in its holder to fasten it to the altar. The stone symbolizes grains of paddy and the sand symbolizes millets. Near the altar, a tiny granary is crafted with a bamboo door and a bamboo cylinder (*kabe*) or an earthen water container, called *warengkong*. The jar is filled with water and placed on the side of the altar.⁵³ The priest performs the ritual of libation in the altar and on each *chokrek*. After this rite, first the priest takes a drink of the rice-beer, next it is given to the *matdoks* and finally all the participants are served. Taking home the left over rice-beer, food and meat is forbidden. This is because they believe that the impurities and profanations would be carried back to the village and their homes.

(v) Ritual in the *nokma's a-breng jhum* field: After the ritual at the junction (*anti rama*), the villagers perform another ritual at the *nokma's a-breng*, the *jhum* field being cultivated for the second year. The ritual is performed in the same way as performed in the new *jhum* field (*a-dal*) during the *A-galmaka* ceremony. The priest invokes the god *Misi Saljong* and the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and calls them up from the subterranean region to come to the *a-breng* field. He calls them from all the four directions, standing and facing west, east, south and north.⁵⁴

⁵² This is called *menil bitchi* or *bitchi*, the best rice-beer that is locally available among the *A-chiks*.

⁵³ This is still in practice in Saka Monggre, Dudanggre, Galwanggre, it was narrated by Willen Mansang Sangma, Greatminson Chambugong Marak and Monen Mrong Marak at Saka Monggre village on the 24th January 2004.

⁵⁴ In this ritual, first the priest calls the gods by chanting an incantation facing west. The same incantation is made while calling the gods as he faces east, south and north.

The villagers carry seed-grains of paddy in dried gourd containers (*lau/ rau*) and jars of rice-beer, to the sacrificial place for the ceremony. On reaching, they prepare the altar at the *nokma's a-breng*. The priest performs a rite of purification of the *jhum* field with the rice-beer and eggs. In this ritual, the priest chants the first incantation to drive away the malevolent spirits from the field and the second incantation is chanted at the same place to welcome *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the *jhum* field. Following the ritual of libation and egg-breaking, the priest shouts, “*jokjok, jokjok!*” or “the place is free from profanation!”⁵⁵ and the *matdoks* drive the profanations from all the four corners of the *jhum* field. When the *matdoks* reach the sacrificial spot, the others thrash the plantain plant placed near the base of the altar. They trample on it and place it in a bamboo basket (*dola*). The priest then offers cooked red glutinous-rice and fresh/ smoked fish on the plantain leaf spread at the base of the altar to their gods. He chants an incantation. When the formal procedure is over, the participants drink and eat and then return to the village. When feasting is ended, for about an hour they plant the seed-grains of paddy in the surrounding area selected to build the *jamadal*. It is from this particular area, that the villagers offer a quantity of paddy crops to the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* at the festival of *Jamegapa /Jagepa / Ama Ra-ona*. Then they prepare rice-beer for the *Wangala* festival. When all these rituals are over, the basket with the plantain plant is ceremoniously carried down to the sacrificial spot at the cross-roads on their way back to the village. This symbolizes that the *jhum* field has been cleansed of profanations for the cultivation.

⁵⁵ The meaning of ‘*jokjok*’ means the profanations are released from the place and it is free from diseases.

(vi) **Final ritual in the village:** The final ritual is performed in the *nokma's* house at the sacred post. The villagers engage in libation ritual to all the gods that dwell in the house and for the god *a-tilla kosi*, in the courtyard. This is done to wipe out envy among the gods who are being given offerings. Eating, drinking and merry-making as usual take place and continue for two to three nights in the village.

Beliefs and Practices:

The Second Day

The day of *Salnima* and obstruction of the entrance to the village: The second day is considered as the day when their gods spend time in the village. On this day, the villagers observe *salnima*. They abstain from daily work in the *jhum* field on this day. This is observed from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On this day, no one is permitted to go to a stream or a river for washing, bathing and carrying water or even to wash one's face in the morning.⁵⁶ In the same morning around 6:00 a.m., the chosen members go to the entrance of the village and barricade the path. A thread is tied across the path on two bamboo poles erected on both the sides of the path, as obstruction. After this, no one in the village is allowed to enter or exit out of the village till 4:00 p.m. If someone enters this road without being aware of the restrictions of *salnima*, he/ she have to pay a fine to the village authorities. At 4:00 in the evening, the thread tied across the path is opened to let the people know that the day of *salnima* is over. The

⁵⁶ On the day of *salnima*, no one in the village can work in the *jhum* field or go to the river/ stream from 7:00 am till 4:00 pm. Therefore, after 4:00 pm. the villagers go to the river/stream together and enjoy the evening on the banks of the river.

participants go to the *nokma's* house for the feasting and drinking. On this day, the villagers cook the head of the bull slaughtered on the first day.

The villagers who follow the indigenous faith observe this festival sincerely and faithfully, honouring and paying great respect to their gods. The villagers believe that if the rituals are not observed, they would encounter misfortune, poverty or death in the family all through the upcoming year.

2.04 FESTIVAL OF A·GALMAKA OR GAL·MAK DOA

The festival of *A·galmaka* or *Gal·mak Doa* is celebrated in the last week of March or in the first week of April every year. According to *A·chik* traditional belief, before planting any crop various rituals of purification are performed in the new *jhum* field. The farmers welcome the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to their *jhum* field, only after purifying the field by getting rid of the impure spirits. Then they ask the gods to bless them in their work the entire season.

Nature of the Festival: In this festival, the rituals are performed for the whole village in the *nokma's jhum* field. At daybreak after the burning ceremony,⁵⁷ the villagers go to the new field to observe the festival. The morning after the burning, the vast stretch of selected plot of land looks scorched and totally lifeless as it is covered with ashes and blackened debris. As the blackened land and floating debris and ashes still remain in the field that morning, it is called '*A·galmaka*' or '*Gal·mak Doa*'.

⁵⁷ Feasting in the evening of burning the cut dried trees and bamboos just before *A·galmaka* festival for the new *jhum* field.

A·galmaka literally means the land is full of ashes. *Gal·mak* connotes ashes. *Doa* stands for the being blown up into the open air. In some areas this festival is called *A·galmaka Doa* which suggest that ‘the ashes from the plot are blown up’, while the same festival is called *Misipua*’or *Aragoa* in Gambaregre and Chibokgre villages. It is called *A·galmak A·siroka* in Sasatgre and Selbalgre. *A·siroka* denotes purification of a place. Even though the names differ, the purpose remains the same in all the *A·chik jhum* areas.

Purpose of the Festival: The festival is observed specifically to purify the new *jhum* field. The purification is done to prepare an undefiled path for the arrival of their gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. They call on these benevolent gods to ask them for assistance during the crop growing season.

Preparation for the Festival: At around 3:00 in the early hours of the morning, the women start cooking rice and curry for the festival. This is collected by 4:00 a.m. from every household by the young men of the village who then eat it together in the village *nokpante*.⁵⁸ The entire village goes to the ceremony in the *jhum* field, with the exception of the old and the disabled. Every family takes along varieties of seed-grains to the field such as maize, millet, green peppers, aubergines and so on.

The best spot in the field is selected where an altar is made to perform the rituals. Each household prepares special food and rice-beer for the occasion. If possible, they carry more than one jar of rice-beer. They also take *bengraru* ‘wild

⁵⁸ The boys’ dormitory, a traditional house where village boys above the age of eight stay.

palm fronds', *me-ga* 'tall grass with white plume', *achuak* 'wild sour fruit', *nopantak* 'a kind of grass', and *reok* 'a plantain tree or canna plant' all of which are used in many of the purification ceremonies. Besides these, a few cocks, and a bamboo pole are also used. All the sacrificial offerings are made in the altar. After the rituals in the *nokma's jhum* field, each family goes to its allotted place and performs the ritual of egg-breaking to purify the impurities of their own land.

Performance of the Rituals: Different rituals are performed in the new *ghum* field to purify it of many profanations. After the purification ritual, the priest calls up the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to be in their midst throughout the season till the arrival of the harvest time.

The offerings are made carefully and sincerely as they are inviting the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. Blood and feathers are smeared on the altar; glutinous-rice, eggs and smoked fish are kept at the base of the sacrificial altar where rice-beer is poured as an offering to *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and to *Misi Saljong*. Out of the sacrificial items eggs and glutinous-rice are cooked together in the traditional way for their gods. The ingredients are cooked in a fresh bamboo cylinder, which gives a better taste. The recipe thus prepared is called *brenqa*.

Rituals in the new *ghum* field: The rituals begin in the new *ghum* field called the *a-dal*. The heads of the families reach the allotted plots around 6:00 a.m. Each family on its own performs the ritual in its respective *ghum* field, without a priest. Widows

too can perform the ritual themselves but the altar is prepared with the help of her son-in-law or any other male relative.⁵⁹

In some villages the eggs are broken with a stroke of the hand and are poured and over the altar's *chokrek* and in some others the eggs are pressed into the *chokrek* which holds the *jaktap*.⁶⁰ The contents are allowed to slide down the altar. The egg shells are hung on the *chokrek*, a cone shaped basket made from tender bamboo strips. While performing the sacrifice, invocations are made to the god *Misi Saljong* and goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*.

The *nokma* performs a ritual in his field on behalf of the whole village. He slaughters a cock on the base of the altar and its blood is offered as a sacrificial offering to the gods. Then a prayer is uttered, requesting the gods to be present throughout the season of cultivation to bless and assist the villagers. The cock's blood is smeared on the altar and its feathers are attached to the same. The *nokma* himself performs the ritual as the priest. He chants an invocation for purification of the land saying thus:

*Oe ...Katchiba, marang starangba,
Nanga dakani, nangja dakani,
Bilsio rokomari dakani chaani;
Ringanio marang nanga,
Ia marangba- starangba katbo;
Angni a-bao, angni ba-kuo,
Nangtinggija gipilgija katbo.
Ian anga a-rikenga se-galenga;*

⁵⁹ Usually it is inauspicious for widows to perform rituals and ceremonies; but in times of urgency they are permitted to perform certain ceremonies, provided they are familiar with the names of gods, the lines of incantations and rituals.

⁶⁰ An essential item woven out of bamboo strips and shaped like a hand; it is attached to the *chokrek*.

*Angni chriko-gronko,
Da-o bimik chachina, mikrep nachina
Anga chit·nakengjok-ge·nakengjok.*

The above lines as translated as:

Yes...*Katchi* , *Marang* too
(Spirits of blemishes and profanations),
Need a ceremony; we need it for various activities,
The whole year through, especially during the season of sprouting.
Impurities in drinks and all these blemishes too disappear;
O impurities go away from my field and
Do not tarry or look back.
Now I am driving you away.
Now let my seed grains
Start sprouting and begin to grow; as I am going to sow.

Saying this, the impurities are driven away from the new *jhum* field. After this purification ritual, the god *Misi-Saljong* is called up to the new *jhum* field; for it is believed that the god does not enter a defiled place. After the invocation to *Misi Saljong*, the priest chants another invocation to *Mima Kiri Rokkime* asking her to come to the new *jhum* field as:

*O Mi...O Mi
O knajokma, knajok!
Angni a·tip rikgipaona, jamdap pingipaona
Jalang kamanjok, nang·na sorok bakman·jok.
Nang·na uno ja·nengtake asongdimi,
Songdu paksani sagal nalsani
Nachil ruan, sko gro, ja·sku gitok de·e,
Changsrae-knatimetpabo,
A·nang sa·greko- diprako ge·songchina ge·botchina,
Bimik chachina, mikrep chaatchina watetpaboni,
Chinga nang·ko mande ra·e, birong chane okamatonga,
Jabilsing·jok, jakari ong·jok.
Nang' patigipako, chinga ge·songtaina ge·bottaina mimako,
Chriko-gronko bimik chaatchina-mikrep naatchina
Na·a patipabojok;
Ian angnaba Mini Arengpana- Saldopana patia gita, ra·rona gita;
Patipachina ra·ronpachina, angaba nang·ko okamenga,
Arengpani okama gita, Saldopani okama gita,
Ring·sala gita angaba*

Saljong ka-stangako, Misi okgnangako,
Ia sachatmako-balmatmako,
Angaba nang-ko okamenga Arengpani okama gita,
Saljongpani ring-sala gita;
Angaba Saljong ka-stangako, Misi okonangako,
Sa-chatmako-balmatmako
Angni noko dongpaebo, sing-toa sing-namako pong jahane,
Bitong ringrotako, tot-ma rema kingma remasa,
Segresa tangitiksa baring a-jrina,
Jalik suurina dongeming Bonepa a-jreoniko,
Sanepani dipildamoniko, ringrotako-tingtota nikeming,
Seng-ki mitapo, gana bimalo sepitako- ra-bitako
Katchi besa, Misi Susime
Me-chik segrena, bisa ma-grena,
Oe na-a me-chik segre bisa ma-gre,
Segreara tanggitikara
Nang' seng-ki mitapo ganna bimal sepitako
Ra-bitako so-dimaha gita,
So-re me-a gita so-dimepabo, so-rimepabo ine
Patiani ra-ronani salo uni so-dimea gita so-dimaha gita
Uko ringopeming ringbameming patia gita, ra-rona gita;
Da-o angnaba patipabo, ra-ronpabo,
Bangbol-banggape nial-kigape,
Katmisipana-Tingkadatpana, kokdok olpana jamdok pakpana.
O Mi...O Mi (Mima Kiri Rokkime)⁶¹

The above lines are translated as:

O can you hear, do listen to me!

Come to the house built for you, to my transitory shelter,

I have built a bridge, for you the path is ready;

Now you can be there,

Come from the other side of the Sea,

Hear me with your ears which are as big as a winnowing fan,

With your long slender neck

Lift up your head and behold.

Look closely; listen to our appeal to sow our seeds,

For the seeds to take root and to sprout, do send us your blessings,

We exalt you, beseech you with respect,

The year has come, the season is in,

Your blessings in the form of seed, Mother Paddy,

Bless our seed-grains to sprout and help them grow.

Like *Arengpa*, *Saldopa* was blessed;

Bless me; I am calling you like *Areng's* father had called you.

Just as *Saldopa* had called and praised you,

⁶¹ These incantations are recorded from a priest named Lebensingh Areng from Rongsu Agal in the *Atong* area in 2003 when it was collected.

To please *Saljong*, as the wish of *Misi*,
 Mother of Incense (*Sasatma- Balmatma*),
 I am calling you like *Arengpa* called you,
 Like *Saljongpa*, I praise you.
 I, too, offer the incense which *Saljong* and *Misi* loved,
 Do live in my place, by inhaling the fragrance,
 Produce fruits heavy enough to droop the stalks,
 The aubergines in the fallow for a poor widow,
 The chilly even from the dew even while staying in *Bonepa's* abandoned *jhum*
 field.
 Seeing the droppings from *Sanepa's* garbage bin,
 Under the waistband (*sengki*) kept our friend *Katchi*,
Misi Susime for the widowed women.
 Yes, you widowed woman, motherless child,
 Like the widow who from her waistband burned the hidden incense,
 Set a fire as mica (*so-re*).
 You blessed taking a sniff from it.
 Bless me, share with me too.
 Under your care help me,
 Like you did for *Katmisipa-Tinkadatpa*,
 And helped him carry six baskets full of paddy, to store in six different
 granaries.

In this way, the priest offers prayers on behalf of the whole village to the
 mother of paddy and millet (*Minima-Misima*) before starting work in the new season.
 Going down to the village after the rituals in the field, another ritual is performed at
 the base of the *maljuri*. Placing the different seed-grains at the base of the *maljuri* he
 invokes the god, the Mother of Paddy and Millet to be with them throughout the
 season. During the invocation he chants in the following manner as:

O Mi, O Mi,
Misimako-Minimako,
Anga uchiniko gronko ge-songna-ge-botna,
Ripeng kajok besa mong-jok.
Ku-manhijok-waldu kajok;

O Paddy, O Paddy,
 The Mother of Millet and Rice
 To plant seed-grains, I have
 Befriended *Misima-Minima*
 Have made an agreement

And enlisted their aid;
To help us plant the seed-grains.

Thus, saying, the head of the family functioning as the priest takes a sip of beer from the bamboo cylinder and spews it out to the gods. Whoever takes a sip abstains from taking a bath that evening as they believe that if one does so, the person may drown while bathing in the river or pond. In such cases, the luck of a drowned person is believed to be washed away by the water.

The ritual of *Saljong Rodila* or taking the god *Misi Saljong* on a visit: The festivities continue for three or four nights and days in the village. Usually the men of the village make a round of visits to every house and continue their drinking spree for days and nights. This round of visits ends with the offering of a drink to the god *Misi Saljong*. The visits start every morning from the *a-king nokma*'s house and ends late at night with the last drink at the *nokma*'s till they are unable to consume any more rice beer for the rest of the day. The next day the visit starts again from his house and will go on to all the *kram*⁶² owners in the village. Each household receives the god *Misi Saljong* with rice-beer, cooked rice and curry where they will spend at least one hour or more and consume one or two jars of rice-beer in each house, together with the family members. In this ritual they believe that the villagers are serving food to the god *Misi Saljong* or the deity *Risi*.⁶³ In this visit according to their belief, they are symbolically taking the god *Misi Saljong* to bless every household they visit in the

⁶² The *kram* is a special drum, believed to belong to their gods and which they always use during rituals and ceremonies. It consists of two drums placed one on top of the other. The one on top is very small, about five/six inches and is the smallest *A-chik* drum is called the *dama na-tik* 'the shrimp drum' or *bitchumani demechik* 'the old lady's daughter'. The other one also, is smaller than the usual one used during the *Wangala* dances.

⁶³ It is a god guarding people's homes.

village. While visiting the families the villagers carry along the drums and gongs and after their visitations are over, they dance merrily every night in the courtyard of the village⁶⁴ as done in the *Wangala* festival. It takes three to four days and nights to complete their visiting of all the houses in the village. After completion, the drums and gongs are returned to the village *nokpante* signifying the end of the festival in the village.

Manner of Observation:

***Migalmak cha-a* or ‘feasting on the day after burning the new *jhum* field’:** After burning the dried debris from the selected plot for the new *jhum* field, the *a-dal*, the villagers enjoy a night of revelry, drinking together in the village. This is called *wal-ni chu* or ‘fire-rice-beer’ because they drink after the new *jhum* field has been burnt with fire. They serve this food with a special kind of rice-beer made from glutinous-rice called *mimitim* or *minil* which had been offered to their gods and the remaining portion is shared in the ceremony with the people as it cannot be taken back to the village. The villagers prepare special food for the occasion which they eat after all the rituals are over. The food for the *A-galmaka* festival consists of special variety of rice and a dish made of smoked or fresh fish.

The day following the *A-galmaka* festival is observed as *salnima* ‘abstention from daily work in the *jhum* field’ by the villagers. After the festival, the villagers plant different varieties of crops such as paddy, maize, tuber roots, chilli, cotton,

⁶⁴ *A-chiks* keep one common courtyard for the entire village which is usually an open space in front of the *a-king nokma*’s or village *nokma*’s house.

ginger, and so on in the field. Then, they demarcate the boundaries in their respective fields and start sowing different seeds which they call *ara goa*⁶⁵. The mixture of different seeds are kept in a small basket called a *gachek* and are scattered deftly by hand. Traditionally *A·chiks* follow and enjoy the mixed cropping system in their farms just as any other hill people who practice *jhum*.

When the villagers complete planting the different crops, they construct the field-hut in their agricultural field, keeping the altar in its front yard. In the surrounding area of the altar they plant the best variety of hill-rice or glutinous-rice meant for the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. They reap the paddy for their gods from this place during the harvest season at the festival of *Amarata*. Finally out of this harvested crop, they prepare rice-beer to offer to *Misi Saljong* during the *Wangala* festival.

Beliefs and Practices: *A·chik* traditional believers have many beliefs and practices. Plantain leaves used to pack cooked rice and side dishes are not thrown away after a meal. During *Migalmak cha·a*, the boys shove them into nooks and corners of the *nokpante* because they believe that the rice is *Mima Kiri Rokkime* herself, the goddess of paddy. It is therefore considered improper to throw away even a grain of rice. Maggots which then grow in the decaying leaves are interpreted as a prediction for a good year. Just as maggots multiply in great numbers, so also it is hoped that they

⁶⁵ '*Ara goa*' is the act of sowing different seeds in the *jhum* field. '*Ara*' is a mixture of different seeds of millet, water melon, melon, cucumber (*te·mit/ susra/ sosra*), a variety of squash (*akkaru kobok*), brinjal (*baring*), chilli, etc.

will have a plentiful harvest in the coming season. Thereafter, they proceed to the newly burnt field for the ceremony of *A·galmaka* festival.

According to *A·chik* belief, the egg-breaking ritual is a symbol of purifying the worshippers, as well as the place of worship. It is considered as an atonement offering for one's wrongs in the presence of god and their fellow human beings. In this ritual, it may be noted that the villagers purify the field through prayers before starting the work. That is why, this ceremony is called '*A·galmako A·siroka*' that is, 'purification during *A·galmaka*'. It is believed that if the villagers do not perform the *A·siroka* ritual during the *A·galmaka* festival, the whole village will be cursed with a possible outbreak of fire when the debris are cleared and burnt in the forthcoming season.

The residue of rice-beer filtered for the festival cannot be thrown away immediately. It is usually thrown only after one week when they begin planting paddy in the *jhum* field. After the ritual in the new field is observed, all the villagers enjoy themselves by sharing the food brought from their respective homes. In the evening, people gather in the *nokma*'s house to eat, drink and make merry.

If anyone forgets to carry home the tools of cultivation from the field on the day of the ceremony, then they are forbidden to collect them till the end of the festival because if they do so, they invite misfortune on themselves, such as being killed by snakebite. Thus, the importance of strictly following the rituals and keeping the regulations of their beliefs is greatly emphasized. The strength of their belief lies in their fear of the unknown world of their supernatural gods.

2.05 FESTIVAL OF SALRAK TATA OR SALGRUA

The festival of *Salrak Tata* is observed in the month of April when the season is dry and there is no sufficient rain for the planted crops, during the crop-growing season. The Sun god is called 'Salrak' and 'prayers offered to the Sun god for the rain' is called 'Tata or Grua'.⁶⁶ This festival is also called *Salgrua* in some villages.

Nature of the Festival: In this festival, the villagers offer blood sacrifice to invoke the god *Salrak*, to send rain for the crops. The rituals are performed for a day on the banks of a river or in a deep whirlpool where the Sun and the Rain god is believed to reside.⁶⁷

Purpose of the Festival: The villagers observe this festival when a severe drought occurs in a village. They ask the gods to bring the heat to an end and send rain during the plant-growing season.

Preparation for the Festival: First and foremost, the elders of the village assemble together in the *a-king nokma*'s house to fix the appropriate date for the festival. After fixing the date, in the evening of the weekly market,⁶⁸ selected members gather

⁶⁶ The god *Salrak* or *A-ning Bokjare-Chining Dimjare* is the provider of sun and the rain say the indigenous believers of Wa-ram Songma and Dadenggre area.

⁶⁷ The performance of *Salrak Tata* festival demands a particular type of place, particularly a suitable place in a stream. If a particular village does not have such place of their own, the place has to be arranged in the neighbouring village for the day of festival to perform the ritual to the Rain god.

⁶⁸ People from the remote villages, (especially the *A-chiks*) could meet relatives to convey the messages of important meetings or festivals only on the market days. Another reason is, if the fields are far off from the villages during farming season they stay and work in their *jhum* fields. They come down to the market to sell out their crops in the weekly market and to buy their basic needs like salt, oil, soap and dried fish from the bazaar.

vegetables, rice, and monetary contributions from each household. In certain villages, these members barricade the main village path to prevent people from passing through it on their way back from the weekly market day.⁶⁹ Anyone who crosses the particular path has to contribute in cash or kind for the day of the festival.⁷⁰ People are informed about the festival well in advance to make them aware of the *niam* (rules and observations) of the festival. A public announcement is made at the marketplace on the market day, so that people from the other villages are also able to take part in the ceremony and observe the day of *salnima* which is the abstention from daily chores like collecting firewood from the forest and working in the *jhum* field. The announcer informs the date, time, place and the strict rules and regulations of the festival.

To perform the ceremony, money is collected from the whole village and a cow, a goat or a pig is bought for the festival. A day ahead of the festival, each family cuts and prepares bamboo cylinders (*kabe*) from the reserved forest of the village, to store water for the day's rituals. On the set date of the festival, the villagers assemble at the selected spot, carrying all the necessary items of the sacrificial animal, eggs, winnowing fan (*ruan*), salt, firewood, *karchi* or *kalchi*⁷¹. It is customary for every family to contribute a quarter kilogram of rice. Male members of each family in the village keep themselves available for the various works involved in the festival. Sacred drums and the long traditional drums are carried down to the ceremonial site.

⁶⁹ This is in practice in the villages of the lower Dadenggre areas and Wa-ram Songma area.

⁷⁰ Both the *A-chik* non-believers of the indigenous faith and the non-*A-chiks* have to contribute in cash or kind for the festival and every villager present in the village have to observe *salnima* on the day of celebration for one whole day.

⁷¹ It is the locally prepared sodium-bicarbonate derived in a traditional way.

The chosen site of a river bank or a deep-water-pool, is cleared wide enough to accommodate the villagers. A sacrificial altar is prepared for the festival. *Wa-pepe*, a fresh bamboo pipe is crafted which is used as a flute by the priest following the prayers. A bull, a goat, a pig or a cock and eggs are arranged and positioned near the altar for the ritual of animal sacrifice.

Performance of the Rituals: When the *nokma* and the villagers reach the chosen site at about 9:00 in the morning, they clear the place and prepare an altar. As usual they make the altar and *chokreks*⁷² from fresh bamboo and leaves of *araru*⁷³. The priest *Tuara Nangapa*⁷⁴ performs the ritual on the sacrificial altar where the necessary items are kept organized for the rituals. A bull, a goat, a pig or a cock is slaughtered and its blood is smeared on the altar.⁷⁵ The priest, *Tuara Nangapa* plays the flute (*wa-pepe*) and invokes the Sun god while performing the ritual. During the invocation, the sacred drum is played by one of the assistants of the priest.

The priest invokes the god with the following words:

*Gana gisim ganramchani gaba,
Koka gisim karamchani re-ba;
Stilko mirim goe,
Balwako sa-sat so-e.
Sagal paksachini,
Songdu nalsachani,
Amakoa chirikoa da-ning
Na-makoa Saljongkoa da-ning.
Amako chiriko okamongaming.
Na-mako Raniko chabiongaming,*

⁷² This is a fresh bamboo holder that is attached to the altar.

⁷³ The botanical name is *alpinia* species.

⁷⁴ In this festival, the rituals are performed only by the high priest, *Tuara Nangapa*.

⁷⁵ *A-chik* traditional believers have to perform a number of rituals in a year. In some villages, where there are fewer families, they face difficulty in collecting money to buy necessary items for the festival. Therefore, instead of a bull or a pig, the villagers are allowed to use a goat or a chicken for the rituals.

Mimani sisropana, Na·mani jakgipokana.
Amako Noreko okamongaming,
Na·mako chiriko cha·beongaming da·ning.
A·rongchu kachol cholhachako okamonga.
Saljang matcha, changhachako cha·beongaming.
Mimade sisropongjok, Na·made jakgitchakongjok.
Mini mani sisropana, Na·nimani jakgitchakana.

Come from beneath,
 Come from the dark caves,
 Shower hailstorms of rice.
 Smolder the wind with incense;
 From the other side of the sea,
 From the other side of *Songdu* (River Brahmaputra)
 Oh! Dear Mother Water,
 Oh! Dear Mother of Fishes, *Saljong!*
 Calling on Mother of Water,
 Searching for the Mother and queen of the fishes;
 For rice is withering, the leaves are turning grey.
 Mother, *Nore*; you are being called,
 The Mother of fishes and seed-grain is being assaulted.
 Calling from the bottomless water,
 Calling the *Saljang* tiger,
 Mother Rice is withering; the Mother of Fishes is turning red.
 For Mother, rice that is withering; for the leaves those are turning red.

After saying this, the priest kills the goat or a bull or a pig on the banks of the river. Its blood is drained into the river while an incantation is uttered to the Sun god for the restoration of the life of *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and rain water for the farmlands. Only two eggs are broken into the river, even if plenty of eggs are collected from the village. The remaining eggs are cooked in bamboo cylinder(s). These are served with cooked rice first to the Sun god and then to the people attending the festival. The egg shells are placed on the altar by the priest. When the priest finishes the prayers, the villagers cook food, eat and drink.

Manner of Observation: After meals are over, they carry water in the bamboo cylinders, spray water on each other and enjoy themselves. The participants shower water first on the priest and then on his assistants (*matdoks*) till they are completely drenched. They carry water from the sacrificial spot in the bamboo cylinders and they empty out the water on whoever they meet on the way to the village.

Some people collect water in bamboo cylinders to tip over the people working in the *jhum* field⁷⁶ they even stop people coming from the fields and soak them completely. They blend water with sand and mud, and playfully smear the mixture on the people. According to the custom, no one should be annoyed about this action during the festival. They pour water on the village *Kosi*⁷⁷ when they reach the village. Finally, they sprinkle water on the *a-tilla kosi* inside the village⁷⁸

Beliefs and Practices: The *A-chik* indigenous believers reserve a particular spot like a huge rock, a pool or part of a stream with thick overhanging trees and bamboos for the festival of *Salrak Tata* or *Salgrua* just as a piece of land is preserved and protected for *kosi*. It is forbidden to cut trees and bamboos or carry away bee-hives from this place.⁷⁹ If someone inadvertently encroaches on a part of the land meant for *Salrak Tata* or *Salgrua*, the Sun god is displeased. The villagers believe that in such a case a severe drought may hit the place. Therefore, during such a time, if anyone is

⁷⁶ Even strangers, passing by the road, will not escape from this ritual of pouring out water, of the *Salrak Tata* festival.

⁷⁷ This is the sacred-grove which is believed to be the dwelling place of the *Kosi* god, *Goera-Kalkame*.

⁷⁸ This is a *kosi* in the village courtyard.

⁷⁹ The forest is preserved for the god *Kosi*, *Goera-Kalkame* near the village. These gods are believed to be the god of strength and wisdom. According to the practice of the indigenous believers, no trees and bamboos are cut from this place except two to three days ahead of the festival of *Kosi*.

found to have desecrated the reserve, he or she has to procure all the necessary items of sacrifice, for the ritual. They believe that any form of disaster on their crops due to lack of rain must be compensated by the performance of *Salrak Tata*. The villagers of Kama Boldak, Dudanggre, Saka Monggre villages say that, this festival was initiated since the creation of the earth. In the village Wa·ram Agal⁸⁰ the festival of *Salrak Tata* or *Salgrua* is usually celebrated in two places, such as at Ranggisi Wari Skal (deep water-pool) in the River Diriga and a little lower in the same river, the Nabal Dare (waterfall).⁸¹

The villagers believe that if the god accepts the sacrifices during the ritual; for example at the time of blood sacrifice in the river, the god shows approval with the bubbles of blood which fills the river. Then, two eggs are broken as a purification ritual and the egg-yolk is poured out into the water in the same way as the animal blood sacrifice. People say that froth covers the river if the god accepts the sacrifice. If the god does not accept the sacrifice, the villagers say that the eggs and the blood do not froth even if they drain out blood and eggs into the strong currents.

Another belief is that, after the ceremony each participant must take the river water in a bamboo cylinder and empty out water on the sacrificial spot, on the priest,

⁸⁰ The plot of Wa·ram Agal includes the villages of Wa·ram Songma, Wa·ram Dipo, Wa·ram Danjong, Wa·ram A·sim, Wa·ram Retigre, Wa·ram Te·bronggre which are under the control of one *a·king nokma*.

⁸¹ The villagers of Wa·ram Songma say that the deep water-pool of Ranggisi Wari Skal and the beautiful waterfall of Nabal in the River Diriga are sheltering different varieties of fish. According to the *A·chik* traditional observance (*niam*), fishing from these two places is not allowed; except on the day of *Salrak Tata* or *Wachi Tata* festival after the ceremony. The villagers say even though, there are plenty of fish in Ranggisi Wari Skal and Nabal Dare, it is difficult to catch fish from these two places as the gods of the river guard and protect the fish in that river.

the *matdoks* and then on the other participants. When people feel cold and shiver after the water is poured out, they believe that rain will be very heavy soon after the festival. The villagers of Kama-Boldakgre, Saka-Mrongre, Dudangre and Galwanggre say that sometimes, there is heavy downpour of rain soon after the ceremony. The villagers observing this ceremony believe that the water cannot be poured over a pregnant woman. If someone wants to escape this custom of pouring water, they usually conclude that the person is pregnant and playfully imply the same conclusion even if that person is a man.⁸²

The villagers observe *salnima* which is the day of abstention of the chores like collecting firewood, fishing, washing, working in the *jhum* field the whole day in the village on the day of the festival. On this day, they totally abstain from farming or going to the *jhum* field, washing clothes or taking bath in the stream or river, carrying water and so on. Observation of *salnima* starts at 7:00 in the morning and is completed at 4:00 in the evening. No outsider or villagers are allowed to enter or go out of the village while the ceremony is going on. The clothes, drenched with water during *Salrak Tata* festival, are not supposed to be dried in the sun. It has to be dried in a shady place. Nobody can desecrate the sacrificial altar that is prepared for the *Salrak Tata* festival, nor catch fish and crabs from that river or pond even on ordinary days except on the ceremonial day. If anyone is found guilty, a heavy fine is imposed on that person by the village authority.

⁸² This superstition is still believed in Wa-ram Songma village which is narrated at the time of interview in July, 2003.

2.06 FESTIVAL OF *WACHI TATA* OR *WACHI SO·A*

The festival of *Wachi Tata* or *Wachi So·a* is observed when there is excessive rainfall during the crop-growing season. '*Wachi*' means Rainy season and '*tata*' means invoking benevolent god(s) to liberate the people from diseases or to protect them from the wrath of the malevolent gods and to assist them during the time of adversities. The word '*so·a*' literally means 'burning', or in this context, setting ablaze the dwelling place of the Rain god. Therefore, the *A·chik* indigenous followers of the faith, perform rituals during such seasons by lighting a fire around a big rock or *kosi*, the place which is believed to be the dwelling place of the Rain God. That is why the festival is known as *Wachi Tata* or *So·a*.

Nature of the Festival: The festival of *Wachi Tata* is the observance of goodwill for the Rain God, *Aning Bokjare–Chining Dimjare*, at the end of March or April for three days and nights⁸³ by the *A·chik* indigenous believers. They sacrifice a chicken, some eggs, a goat or a bull to appease the gods in the beginning of the farming season.

Purpose of the Festival: The main purpose of performing the ritual is to appeal to the Rain god to reduce the excessive rainfall and to bless them with moderate rain during the crop growing season. The blood sacrifice of animals' is offered during the ritual and prayers are offered to seek forgiveness from the god(s) by setting a fire at the base of the big-rock which is believed to be the dwelling place of the Rain god.

⁸³ In the Wa·ram Songma village, the festival is observed for a day and a night.

Preparations for the Festival: The *a-king nokma* takes all the responsibilities for conducting the festival. He calls the whole village for a meeting well in advance, to set the date, and deliberate on the rate of collection of money and rice. In this meeting selection of the priest's assistants who are known as *matdoks* are also done and distribution of responsibilities among all the members of the village is also taken care of. The selected members then collect money, eggs and rice from each household; a week or two ahead of the festival.

Performance of the Rituals: In this festival, only the male members of the family are allowed to take part in the ceremonial ritual. To perform the ritual, the villagers go to the place which is specially chosen for the Rain God. They clear a small portion of the land in the sacrificial spot⁸⁴ and prepare an altar with bamboo and leaves of the *bengraru* and *cha-ko*.⁸⁵ Only *Tuara Nangapa*, the high priest, performs the ritual. The sacred drum and long traditional *A-chik* drums are played by the priest's assistants (*matdoks*). A freshly made bamboo pipe called *wa-pepe* is played as a flute while the ritual is being performed by the priest.

In some areas, this festival is observed at the *A-song* or *Kosi* of an abandoned village at the side of a spring where tall and big trees are preserved for the god *Goera-Kalkame*.⁸⁶ The priest slaughters the sacrificial animal by chanting a prayer of

⁸⁴ A place which they believe to be the dwelling place of the Rain god, *Aning Bokjare-Chining Dimjare*.

⁸⁵ *Bengraru* is a kind of reed and *cha-ko* or *rukawak* is a wild chest-nut.

⁸⁶ The *A-chiks* traditionally believe, that the god *Goera-Kalkame* of the *A-song* or *Kosi* is the guardian spirit of the village who saves people from enemies and various diseases.

incantation near the altar that is prepared at the base of a big rock or on the bank of a river, stream, deep pool. The blood is smeared on the *chokreks* that is attached to the altar as an offering to their gods. The rituals of egg-breaking and the libation of rice-beer are performed simultaneously to obtain forgiveness for the whole village and to free the villagers from the wrath of the Rain God. The meat and chicken or eggs are cooked as special dishes in a fresh bamboo cylinder separately (this culinary delight is called *brenga*) for the god and for all those attending the festival. This method of cooking gives the dish a special aroma and delicious taste. Rice-beer being the most essential item in all the *A-chik* traditional rituals, is used following every rite during this festival.

Manner of Observation: On the days of the celebration, the whole village abstains from daily work; the abstention is called *salnima*.⁸⁷ Women, children and the old stay back in the village and observe *salnima*. While the ritual is being performed the priest *Tuara Nangapa* chants an incantation to the Rain god and starts a fire at the base of the big rock, the dwelling place of the Rain god. As mentioned above, this festival is observed for three days; on all these three days of the festival, they observe *salnima*, abstaining from their daily chores. On these days, people are allowed to play cards, make ropes or visit each other in the village. If anyone is found breaking the observation of *salnima*, he/she has to bear all the expenses incurred during the festival. Any participant of the festival can kill any domestic animal belonging to anyone such as a cow, a bull or a pig for the village feast on the following day. In this regard, neither

⁸⁷ The days of the festival are observed as *salnima*, abstaining from daily activities specially in the *jhum* field.

the *nokma* nor the owner gets annoyed or says anything about the killing of the domestic animal. The lawbreaker of the *niam* (the observation) has to pay the cost according to owner's demand. This is done as a punishment or as a warning for the lawbreaker who meddles with the Rain God not to repeat the same offence in the future. When all the rituals are over, the villagers celebrate the festival by drinking, eating and dancing together.

Beliefs and Practices: In some areas, the big rock where the festival of *Wachi Tata/ So-a* is observed is called *kosi*. The villagers say that during this ritual, the fire-wood burns even if the wood be wet due to continuous rain. This is a sign that their gods have acknowledged their prayers and have forgiven their erroneous ways. It is believed that continuous rain occurs only in the locale where someone has desecrated the sacred-grove of the Rain god and has caught fish, cut trees, bamboos, bamboo shoot, or cane from the *kosi*. The villagers say that if such a thing happens, the Rain God punishes man with starvation for defiling the gods abode. Therefore, to restore the relationship between god and man, animals are slaughtered and their blood is smeared on the altar. The meat is cooked for the feast and offered to the gods and the people participating in the festival. It is believed that the gods and men must eat together after the ceremony. Another belief is that whatever they cook on the spot for the festival has to be consumed, as carrying home the leftovers is a taboo and it invites curses to such families and to the whole village as well.

After the ritual at the sacrificial site, everyone carries a stone from the place and keeps it at the fire-place in their respective homes till the rain stops. They believe

that as the stone gets dry, the season also gets drier. The villagers of Wa·ram Songma say that subsequent to the ceremony, the rain stops. Sometimes rain ceases barely after one or two days of heavy rainfall after the festival. If the rain persists, the villagers believe that the rain washes away all impurities of the place and its people with the rain water.

During the wet season, excessive rainfall spoils the crops and usually reduces the yield. Therefore, the *A·chiks* have to seek help in their work and ask for benevolence from their gods. For this reason, they worship the Rain god with immense respect. If a particular village does not encompass a place which is to be kept as the sacred-grove of the Rain god in their area, and it is urgently required; they borrow the sacred-grove from a neighboring village. The *A·chiks* indigenous believers keep the surrounding area of the sacred-grove untouched as it is considered to be the abode of the *Kosi* gods and their powerful god *Goera Kalkame*.

In some villages, there is more than one place where the festival of *Wachi Tata* is observed as in Wa·ram Songma village in the Rongram area. The indigenous believers of that village say that the rain fall varies according to the state of affairs in a place; for instance, if a village encompasses two spots of the sacred-groves; one at *Chilli Ronggrim* and the other at *Nojeng A·duma*. There is thunder and excessive rain if someone meddles with the Rain God at *Chilli Ronggrim*. So, the people go to *Chilli Ronggrim* to perform this ritual by making fire around the big rock in that place. If anyone meddles with the Rain God at *Nojeng A·duma* there is continuous rain but no thunder. In such a case; the villagers go to *Nojeng A·duma* to perform the ritual of

Wachi Tata. This brings us to the conclusion that the traditional believers look for signs even in the manner of the rainfall and act accordingly.

2.07 FESTIVAL OF MIAMUA OR A·KRITA

The *A·chiks* observe the festival of *Miamua* or *A·krita* which is meant for the protection of paddy in the jhum field from any afflictions and it is initiated in the *a·king nokma's* field by the *nokma* himself. He assumes the duties of a priest for the day⁸⁸. It is compulsory for all believers to attend the festival with the exception of the old and the sick, who stay back in the village.

The offerings of blood sacrifices are made for the malevolent gods - *Goera*, *Katchi*, *Susime*, *Marang* or *Bang Skal*, *Mirisi* or *Risi* and *Andime*. Prayers are offered to keep the malevolent gods from attacking the benevolent god *Mima Kiri Rokkime* with diseases. They also pray to call up the god *Misi Saljong* for the second time⁸⁹ from the ocean to accompany *Mima Kiri Rokkime* till the harvest season is over.

Nature of the Festival: *A·chiks* observe the festival of *Miamua* in the month of May or in the first week of June⁹⁰. To yield a good harvest, it is performed in the season just before the paddy reaches the milky stage which is one stage before the paddy

⁸⁸ Nowadays, some *a·king nokmas* cannot perform the required rituals, in which case some other priests are called to take their place.

⁸⁹ Twice in a year, the worshippers of *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* call up from the ocean, during the festival of *A·galmaka* before planting the crops in the field and *Miamua* when the planted crops are not growing well in the season.

⁹⁰ The farmers start cultivation late, if the monsoon comes late in the season, as they depend fully on rain water.

attains the fruition stage. For the observation of the ceremony, the villagers collectively go to the *jhum* field at around 6:00 a.m. in the morning of the festival.

This festival is observed in the season when the villagers find it difficult to search out vegetables or fruits from the jungle as well as from their farms; that is why the festival is also known as *Akal Wana*. That is, in many *A·chik* villages some people go hungry in this season, as their farm is yet to produce the seasoned crops. Substitute for their staple food is not available most of the time.

Prayers are also offered to appease the malevolent gods so that they may not attack the healthy paddy during its growing period. The priest also makes special prayers to the god *Misi Saljong* to seek his permission to consume the fresh seasonal vegetables such as bamboo shoot, *me·jak* (*rythymeokchina*) and sour leafy vegetables such as *galda* (sorrel) etc., from the new *jhum* field. After the ceremony, meat is also cooked and eaten together as a community in the field itself.

Preparations for the Festival: The villagers prepare rice-beer well in advance and prepare for burnt offerings. Some incense, four cocks and a pig for the blood sacrifice and some rice is collected from each household. Each household makes as much rice-beer as they can afford for the festival.

In the morning of the festival, the young male members carry the jars of rice-beer, the sacrificial cocks and animal to the *nokma's jhum* field. There they prepare

six to seven sacrificial altars ⁹¹ for the malevolent gods; namely, *Goera*, *Katchi*, *Susime*, *Marang* or *Bang Skal*, *Mirisi* or *Risi* and *Andime*. ⁹² A separate altar is prepared for the god *Misi Saljong* near the other altars. The altars are made in the ground with the leaves of *bengraru* or wild palm fronds and a small plantain plant is kept ready for the ritual of driving away the benevolent spirits.

Performance of the Rituals: The rituals are performed by the villagers in two places at this period. One is performed in the respective *jhum* field by each family and then in the *a-king nokma's jhum* field collectively.

Ritual of driving away the malevolent spirits from *jhum* field: Before the ritual in the *nokma's jhum* field, they go to their own fields to drive away the spirits of impurities and profanations. Shouting at the malevolent spirits, they pick up a lump of earth or sand and a small plantain plant from their *jhum* field and put them all into a basket saying, "We have caught the impurities and profanations in the basket", ⁹³ and the members of the family stomp the bamboo basket several times. After driving away the malevolent spirits from the entire field, they pull out some paddy by its roots in their respective fields. The paddy plants are then placed near the altar. After the rituals in the *jhum* field, the same plants are carried to the pathway leading to the field and are buried across the path. This place, where the paddy plant is buried across the path is called *Mirama* or the path of *Rokkime*. This is done for two reasons:

⁹¹ In some villages, only six altars are prepared as the offerings to the gods *Mirisi* and *Andime* are made in one altar.

⁹² The deities which have the power to spoil the crops.

⁹³ They shout saying "*marang starang napjok, napjok!*"

- (a) to prevent the impurities from returning to the field; and
 (b) to direct *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, who is called up from the ocean for the second time, to the *jhum* field.

In the ritual of driving away the malevolent spirits, the priest utters incantations to drive away the profanations. The offerings are also made to the spirits of different diseases to free the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* from them. The spirits which carry diseases, as mentioned by the believers are *Aminda*, *Rakasi*, *Bang*, *Mirisi*, *Susime*, *Goera* and *Salbamon*. Therefore, this festival is also called *Bang Krita*, *A-krita* or *Me·jak Sim·a*,⁹⁴ or in other words, the ritual of chasing the malevolent spirits away.

Rituals at the *nokma*'s *jhum* field: When the villagers gather at the *nokma*'s field after driving the spirits from their respective *jhum* fields, the priest calls up *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the new (*a·dal*) *jhum* field for the second time saying:

Ama Minima knajokmamo ...
Nama Na·nima nasangjokma?
Ang' kiramko knajokmamo?
Ang' ku·sikko nasangjokma...nasangjokma...!
Ang' kiramna chakatbakan ine anga i·na guguonga...
Ama Minimako, ang' gisikna u·na singsangkan ine,
Anga ma·siatonga, Namako Na·nimako...
Ang' kiramna chakat Na·ma Minima...
Ang' gisikna sengcha,
A...Nama Na·nima...
Ang' kiramko knasingsange,
O...Sagalni chakatbakan ine ...
Ang' kiramko nikjagringe ...

⁹⁴ In this festival, a ritual is also performed to ask permission from the gods to consume green fresh leafy vegetables such as *me·jak* from the new (*a·dal*) *jhum* field.

*Rekbokni sengchabakan ine...sengchabakan ine.*⁹⁵

Mother of paddy do you hear me?
 Benevolent Mother of fish, have you heard me?
 Can you hear the sound of my *kiram* (*kram*)?⁹⁶
 Can you hear my voice, my voice?
 I am begging you to rise up to the sound of my *kiram* and come.
 O Mother of paddy, I am yearning for you, hear my thoughts and feel for me.
 I want you to understand, good Mother of fish...
 Rise up to the sound of my drum (*kram*),
 Mother of fish, Mother of paddy.
 Contemplate on my feelings.
 O... good mother of fish...
 Listen to the sound of my *kiram*
 O...rise up from the sea,
 Hearing my *kiram*
 Will you rise up from the sea?
 Seeing my *kiram* in a vision
 Will you come up from the ocean?

Thus, the priest calls upon the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* from the *Sagal Ama-Rekbok Chiga*, its heavenly home in the sea, to come to their *jhum* fields. They request the Creator of the Universe to set *Mima Kiri Rokkime* free from sicknesses and diseases saying:

Nang' mikrep chaatgipa,
Nang' bimik naatgipa,
Ja pang siangenga,
*Rike bon angenga.*⁹⁷

The rich paddy you sprouted,
 The seed grains you germinated;
 The roots are dying,
 The leaves are fading.

After a little while he chants again,

⁹⁵ This invocation is chanted by the priest, Monen Rangsa Marak from the Wa-ram Songma village on 05-09- 2004.

⁹⁶ *Kiram* or *kram* is the special drum used in rituals.

⁹⁷ This incantation was chanted while the ritual was being performed by the priest Lebensing Areng from Rongsu Agal village, in 2000.

Angko knajokma? angko knajokma?
Ang' gisikko nasangjokma nasangjokma?
Minima knaongma? Na-nima nasangongama?
A...Sagal Amachani, Rekbok Bimachani.
Ang' kiramko knae, ang' mikkangko nasange,
Angni jamap mikkango, angni karbong(kalbong) ki-sango,
Jamap aurip auripha namalbone,
Karbong prip pripha selaribo ine,
Rekbok Bimachani, Sagal Amachani,
A-ni ki-me moramchani, chipakkore satramchani,
Angni jamap mikkangna, angni karbong ki-sangna,
Jamap aurip auripha, karbong prip pripha nambabo.⁹⁸

Have you heard me? Have you heard me?
 Can you read my thoughts? Read my thoughts?
 Can you hear me Mother of paddy?
 Can you hear me Mother of fish!
 From the depths of the sea, the depth of the ocean,
 Hearing the sound of my drum, seeing my face
 In front of my hut in the field, behind my rubbish dump
 Grow beautifully around my field hut,
 Overflowing even on my rubbish-dump,
 From the depths of the sea, the depth of the ocean,
 From the depths of the earth,
 The ends of the sea washed by its waves,
 In front of my hut in the field, behind my rubbish-dump;
 Surround this hut with your beautiful growth,
 Covering even my rubbish-dump, grow beautifully.

As he chants the invocation, he ties the *sue* plant (a wild creeper) on the logs of trees, the pillars of the field house and the burnt stumps and bamboos as well. While fastening the creepers, he chants the following words:

Oe Jaru-Jabalba, Rengra-Balsaba
Sonijao mindinio gitilpanabe-dipilpanabe,
Chinalsachi-a-paksachi, a-rongsichi- a-bangalchi,
Me gamachi-Dikgilmachi
Balpongangbo-jipongangaibo.
Nangtingnabe-kogilnabe,
Ian cha changjawa-ringchangjawa
Patipabo-ra-ronpabo.

⁹⁸ This incantation was chanted by the priest, Rimbak Bolwari Marak from Chibonggre village under Rongram Block on 06-09-2004.

*Me·jak cha·na am·engjok,
Galda cha·na am·engjok,
Chinga cha·na skang
Nang·na i·a cha·chatko·balmangko on·chenga.*⁹⁹

Yes, Jaru-Jabal,¹⁰⁰ Rengra-Balsa,¹⁰¹
Do not stumble or get lost in the eaves of the roof,
Blow over to the other side of the water or land,
To the rocky landside, to other strange places,
To the land of *Me·gamma*, to the land of *Dikgilma*,¹⁰²
Blow away, move away
Do not collide with or dismantle the roof.
We make this offering; we will not forget even when we eat,
We will not forget even when we drink;
Do bless us, do provide for us.
We are about to eat the *me·jak* leaf,
We are about to eat the sorrel leaf.
Before we consume, we first offer you this incense.

Saying this, the priest burns the incense to the Rain god and the Wind god pleading them not to damage the crops. In this invocation, he asks the gods to give them permission to eat the bamboo shoot, *me·jak*, sorrel and other green leafy fresh vegetables from the *jhum* field by performing a libation of rice-beer to *Misi Saljong* over the offering of fresh vegetables of the season. As the *nokma* pours out rice-beer for the god *Misi Saljong*, he chants another invocation on behalf of the whole village saying:

*O Mi.... O Mi...
Oi... .. (i·na an·tangan)*

O mother of Rice, O mother of Paddy!
Yes!.... (The priest himself replies on behalf of the gods!)

A little later, he begins to chant again saying:

⁹⁹ This incantation is chanted by Lebensing Areng from the Rongsu Agal village in 2000.

¹⁰⁰ It is the deity of the Rain.

¹⁰¹ It is the deity of the Wind.

¹⁰² It means the other neighbouring places.

*O... na·ara bano jamangenga-singsangenga,
 Anga nang·ko okamenga-ringsalenga;
 Jabilsil ong·jok, jakari ong·jok!
 Mija ku·manchigipa-wal·du kagipa,
 Mija nang' ge·songgipa-ge·botgipade,
 Bimik chagipa mikrep chaatgipade,
 Apa Misi-Apa Saljong Songdu ja·rimni,
 Mikka simdimni-dram rikingni,
 Bolsil ja·pango, ja·nengtakgipa-asongdimgipa,
 Anga nang·ko okamenga-ringsalenga.
 Anga nang·na a·tip rikjok,
 Jamap pinjok,
 Rama bakjok,
 Jalang kajok.
 I·gita re·bae,
 Ia ang' chisimilo tokkerao,
 Ang' sambasigipao re·baeming
 Ja·nengtake asongdime neng·takebo,
 Nigame nikgame patiebo-ra·ronebo.
 Angni chriko-gronko
 Me·ga bipang, do·chi chongchang,
 Jaraatbo-chongkaatbo;
 Ta·ma mikkang, e·ching galwang,
 A·sulna bate, a·ripengna bate,
 Ari badie boltong agree,
 Do·sik janggila, na·gil sintila namatbo angna,
 Angaba Mini Arengpani Saldopani man·e cha·a gita,
 Gisil bon·gija, gran chon·gija;
 Pakmisipana-Tin·kadatpana
 Bangbol banggape, nial ki·gape,
 Indake patipachina anga okamenga,
 Na·a da·o patipabone.¹⁰³*

O ... where are you, have you forgotten or are you lost?
 I am calling you, singing to you.
 The year and the season have arrived!
 The previous understanding we had, the agreement we made,
 The ones you had planted and sown,
 The seed grains you germinated, which you had sprouted.
 Father *Misi*, father *Saljong* from the depth of the *Songdu* ¹⁰⁴
 From the dark clouds, from the banks of the river.
 At the base of the *Bolsil*,¹⁰⁵ the one who rests his feet and relaxes.
 I am calling you, singing unto you,

¹⁰³ This incantation was chanted by the priest Lebensingh Areng from Rongsu Agal village in 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Songdu is the A.chik name for the Brahmaputra.

¹⁰⁵ It is a large and hard deciduous tree.

I have built for you a shelter,
 Made a roof over it,
 Prepared the roads
 And built a bridge,
 Come this way,
 To my home and shelter,
 My sacrificial altar,
 While I am performing my rituals-
 Come and relax, sit and rest your feet;
 Watch over my actions, do bless and provide
 My seed grains; make them grow.
 The *me·ga* plant, the eggs we offered,
 Do make them multiply and bear abundant fruit,
 Let the branches of the *ta·ma* tuber, and the ginger spread and grow abundantly,
 More than the neighbouring field, beyond the boundary of the *jhum* field;
 Make it so good that the birds will not shun, and the fish will not reject;
 Let me grow rich too, like *Arengpa* and *Saldopa*
 With unending wealth, no shortage of supplies
 For *Pakmisipa-Tin·kadatpa*¹⁰⁶,
 He had so much to eat that others envied his plenty
 Bless me so; I am calling you,
 May you bless me now!

Thus saying, the priest requests the god *Misi Saljong* to bless *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and the villagers richly during the season.

Manner of Observation: The worshippers make separate altars for each malevolent spirit and offer rice, blood and feathers of the cocks as well as the cooked meat, placing them at the base of the altar before the food is served to the participants. After making offerings to the gods, the worshippers share food among themselves. They invoke the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and make a bamboo basket to catch the spirits of impurities and drive them away from their *jhum* fields. When the rituals are over in the *nokma's jhum* field, the villagers go back to their respective *jhum* fields and tie up

¹⁰⁶ Legend has it that once a man harvested so much millet that he could not consume it within a year and the leftover millet got damaged.

some leaves of paddy in a knot as a sign that the same ritual has been performed for them as well.

After the rituals, as they come down from the *jhum* field carrying the basket with the plantain plant, the villagers continue to shout and move towards the edge of the *jhum* field where they believe some other spirits are hiding. In the belief that all the spirits have been driven out or confined in the basket they shout, "We have caught the impurities, we have caught the impurities!" They join together in stomping on the baskets once more. The basket that had been tied up and the paddy plants that were uprooted from each family farm are placed near the altar made for the ritual of *Mirama*. The items carried from the field are placed at the base of the altar of the *Mirama*, literally the path of *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. The altars and the *chokreks* from the *nokma's jhum* field are also pulled out and placed together on the side of the *Mirama*. They also carry the ears of the pig and feathers of the cocks that were used for sacrifice to the gods and hang them together on the side of the altar on a bamboo pole. Finally, the priest prayerfully promises to the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* that they will be returned safely to their home in the ocean, *Sagal Ama-Rekbok Chiga*.

On the day of the festival, they cannot to eat dry fish; it is said that if they do so, the millet and paddy will get spoilt before the harvest season. When the rituals are over, the left over jars of rice-beer are carried to the *nokma's* house in the village, where feasting and drinking continue till late into the night.

Beliefs and Practices: The indigenous *A·chik* believers say that if they have visitors during festivals like *Me·jak Sim·a* or *Miamua* or *A·krita*, *Rongchugala*, and *Wangala*, the family will never suffer from shortage of paddy. Therefore, they warmly welcome visitors and gladly share whatever they have.

While driving the spirits away from the *jhum* field, the villagers use a tender plantain plant in which they believe the malevolent spirits take shelter. They also believe that it can hold the evil spirits that are causing headache to *Mima Kiri Rokkime*.

The villagers fasten creepers to the posts of the field hut *jamadal*, the logs and bamboo stumps, as a sign of honour to the gods of Rain, Storm and Wind and plead with them to spare their crops. It is also a way of asking the gods to bless them with rain but not excessively, as the crops would then be destroyed. It is observed that the *A·chik* farmers try to follow the footsteps of their forefathers in maintaining a good relationship with their gods and goddesses so that their hard work does not go in vain.

2.08 THE FESTIVAL OF RONGCHUGALA

The festival of *Rongchugala* is performed by the *A·chik* farmers in July for two days when the early variety of paddy is harvested from the field.¹⁰⁷ This is a thanksgiving festival where the believers venerate their provider, the god *Misi Saljong*.

¹⁰⁷ Traditionally, *A·chiks* used the land for two years for cultivation; in the second year of using the land, the farmers plant only paddy and cotton. These days, due to infertility of the soil, using the same field for two years is not favoured; the field is used only for a year in many areas.

Nature of the Festival: The first crops of *misi sarang* (the early variety millet), *mi sarang* (the early variety rice), melon, maize and the seasonal citrus fruits such as *te-matchi*, *chinara* and *slongga* are offered to their gods. The festival is observed for two days. On the first day, the *nokma* performs the rituals alone. The next day, the first ritual is performed by the heads of the families in their respective homes. The second ritual is performed by the *nokma* on behalf of the entire village. It is performed at the base of the *maljuri* in his house.

The Purpose of the Festival: An *A-chik* folktale says that in the past, when *Misi Saljong* offered seed-grains to *Ae Segri Doti Pagri*,¹⁰⁸ the god said to her, “Every year, when the *slongga* (a type of citrus fruit) ripens, I will come back; so burn an incense for me and prepare drinks for me out of your fresh crops”.¹⁰⁹ Therefore to fulfill the god’s will and desire, the *A-chiks* till today sincerely burn incense, performing the rite of libation of rice-beer; and offer the first fruits to the god *Misi Saljong*. The worshippers are allowed to eat the seasonal fruits as well as the fresh vegetables from the new *jhum* field only after this thanksgiving offering is performed ritually.

Preparation for the Festival: One day before of the celebration, they all go to the *nokma*’s house to pound rice and make flattened-rice for the festival. Rice-beer is prepared well in advance out of the early variety of rice, millet and maize. During this time, the villagers use more beer made from millet and maize. On the morning of the first day as per the custom, every household contributes a jar of rice-beer and some

¹⁰⁸ The first woman who received seed-grains from the god *Misi Saljong*.

¹⁰⁹ Rongmuthu, D. S. *Apasong Agana*: pp.110-111.

rice or vegetables to the *nokma*'s family to receive guests and friends from neighbouring villages.¹¹⁰ The relatives usually stay with the relatives in the village and wait for the festival.

¹¹⁰ On occasions like this, visitors are usually received by the *a-king nokma*.

Performance of the Rituals:

The First Day

(a) Ritual of Thanksgiving offering: Early at dawn on the first day, at around 4:00 a.m. the first sacrificial offering is made only by the *a-king nokma* in his house on the side of the rice-jar of his household. The sacrificial items like the fresh leafy vegetables, citrus fruits like a *te-matchi* which is cut in half are placed on plantain leaves. Rice-flour or flattened-rice is sprinkled over these items which are placed as offerings. The ritual of libation is made with rice-beer prepared from millet, maize and fresh rice to the gods, *Misi Saljong, Mima Kiri Rokkime, Goera-Kalkame*.¹¹¹

(b) Ritual of Sprinkling flattened-rice: On the same day, at around 4:30 a.m. the *nokma* performs a ritual in a nearby stream or a river, sprinkling the flattened-rice or rice-flour and rice-beer into the water. There is a belief related with this ritual, which strongly recommends the *nokma* to go to a river or stream alone early in the morning, and perform the sprinkling ritual to their gods without being seen by anyone.

The Second Day

(a) Ritual of First Fruits Offering: On the second day, each household should perform a ritual of first fruits offering on the side of their rice-jar at around 6:00am. Every household offers the freshly harvested crops to their gods from the *a-dal jhum*. The heads of the families offer prayers to their gods; after which the ritual of libation is made over the sacrificial items.

¹¹¹ The god who is believed to protect the believers from dangers of enemies, diseases etc.

(b) **Ritual at *Maljuri* in the *A·king Nokma*'s house:** The villagers gather in the *nokma*'s house at around 8:00am to perform this ritual. Prayers and invocations are made to their gods by the *nokma* as he leads the ceremony as a priest. The *nokma* performs the purification over the agricultural tools which have been placed by each household of the village on the altar that is affixed to the *maljuri* with a *chokrek* fastened on it. The priest leads the prayers and as he continues chanting, rice-beer is poured out on the tools and the other items like melon, maize, wild tubers (*ta·ro*), green leafy vegetables and citrus fruits, etc. which are placed alongside the tools. After that the priest sprinkles the rice-flour or flattened-rice over all these items. A chicken is also slaughtered and its blood is smeared on the offerings and on the *chokrek*. In the prayers, the priest asks god's permission to consume the fresh crops and the seasonal fruits saying:

Apa Misi, Apa Saljong
Patigipa Ra·rongipako,
Gital cha·nakengjok
Rongchu cha·nakengjok,
Chinga cha·changjawa, ringchangjawa;
Nang·kode Patigipa-ra·rongipakode
Nang·nan ia on·chenga.
Attenaba, gitchinaba,
Nokapnaba biapnaba,
Kintenaba Bonenaba
Dakchakgipa chaatgipanaba
Singdo-Mea-Chaldo-Pantenaba
Ringgo doke, manggo chime
Chorang mite Jorang-Pantenaba,
Nang·ko cha·changjawa,
Na·song jipaesa·chobaesa
Angade chri·gron nikenga;
Uni gimin anga cha·changjawa, ringchangjawa;
*Na·simang skang cha·chengchina.*¹¹²

¹¹² These words of the incantation are recorded from a priest at Rongsu in 2003.

These lines are translated as:

Father *Misi*, father *Saljong*
 The one who provides and blesses,
 We are going to eat the fresh-rice,
 We are going to eat the flattened-rice,
 We will not forget you while eating,
 You, who have blessed and provided,
 Our first offering is for you.
 For the *dao* and the hoe
 For the place and for the shelter,
 For *Kinte* and for *Bonepa*¹¹³,
 For the one who helps things to sprout and grow.
 For *Sing-do- Me-a*, the young man *Chaldo*¹¹⁴,
 We shall beat the brass gong.
 The god *Chorang*, the young *Jorang*,
 We will not forget you too,
 With your help and care in the growth,
 We are now seeing the seed-grains,
 We shall therefore not leave you out
 Or forget you while eating and drinking,
 You therefore, may be the first to eat!

Thus saying, the priest performs the purification ritual over the tools. While pouring out the rice-beer to the gods, the priest does not forget *Kinte-Bonepa*¹¹⁵ and he is also offered rice beer as well. *Kinte-Bonepa* is believed to be the person who started the practice of *jhum* cultivation among the *A-chiks* in the past, at the *Misi Kokdok* Hill. Some families bring two packets of cooked rice to offer to him and to the god. This is placed on the plantain leaves at the *maljuri*. They also keep a chicken, rice-beer and its residue (*chu ste*) or powdered rice (*pura*) filled in a bamboo cylinder for the ritual. The first offering is made to the god, *Misi Saljong* and then offerings to other gods follow suit. During the libation ritual, the priest utters the following words:

¹¹³ The first man to initiate *jhum cultivation* among the *A-chiks*.

¹¹⁴ The god who helps plants to grow tall and big.

¹¹⁵ *Bonepa* is believed to be of short stature but who was stronger than a normal person. That is why he is also called *kinte*, (a lump of earth) which is small, but hard and round. Being the first person to start *jhum cultivation*, he is also known for the plenteous blessings of paddy the gods bestowed on him. He is also considered a demi-god.

A....skal acha
Ta-mal-tasi, Patigipa-Ra-rongipa,
Apa Misi, Apa Saljong.
Ringoppabo, ringbampabo;
Gitok ma-si, ka-bak sosi ianjok menil bitchijok,
Mini Arengpani, Saldopani kana gita, on-a gita;
Angaba kanpaenga-on-paenga,
Ringopeming ringbameming;
Patiebo-ra-ronebo,
Misi nang' ge-songgipa-ge-botgipa,
Cha-uode-choluode,
Mesankoba-matchokkoba
Gimikkoan na-a mikrongretatbo, so-otbo,
Nang' chri on-gipako cha-uode inenga,
Misi waldi mattengti
Cha-unaba gnang, me-kinaba gnang
Pakkuakgni-dongdang pe-gni,
Buringniba re-bae cha-gni;
Uarangkoba na-a mikron otbo, ja-tong pi-bo.
Nang-na on-na man-gija, kanna man-gija dake cha-ode.¹¹⁶

The lines are translated as:

O, monster-like spirits
 The one who provides and blesses
 With varieties of tubers,
 Father *Misi*, father *Saljong*.
 Kindly drink it fully to the last
 To wet your throat to your heart's content,
 Here's the best rice-beer made out of sticky-rice.
 Just as *Arengpa*, *Saldopa* once fed and gave you to drink.
 I am also offering you to eat and drink,
 Please take a gulp, please drink;
 Do bless us and do share,
Misi, it is the one you have sown and planted,
 What if it is stolen and taken away?
 All the deer and other destructive animals,
 Ruin them, kill them all.
 If the seed-grains you gave are stolen, I say
*Misi waldi*¹¹⁷ or *mattengti*¹¹⁸ may steal them.
 The paddy may be damaged, plucked and thrown away,
 Animals from the jungle may come and eat,
 Remove their eyes, cripple their legs,
 If they destroy and eat without leaving some for you.

¹¹⁶ This incantation is recorded at Rongsu in 2003 from Lebensingh Areng a priest; at the time of recording he was about 65 years.

¹¹⁷ It is believed to be a field rat.

¹¹⁸ It is an A.chik name for the dwarfs.

Thus, the priest offers prayers to the gods on behalf of the whole village. In the prayer he says that those who steal the crops before offering it first to the gods should be cursed; invoking it in an incantation as 'Let the gods take their lives as a punishment'. After sometime, the priest utters another chant:

*Indake nokapba, biapba, Kinteba Boneba,
Nang o ma chakchengaha.
Chinga buring o a, samring o a,
Der a a gama a sua.
Indakesa chinga janggi tanga-jama raka;
Nang na cha changjawa.
Krong wa chong gimiknan,
Nokkap biap gimiknan on eng a.
Na simangni dakchakesa,
Na simangni ka saesa,
Na simangni an chakesa,
Na simangni nokchakesa,
Chinga janggi jama tangpaenga.*

The incantation may be translated as:

In this manner *Kinte Bone* also,
Made their first dwelling with you.
We cleared the jungle and the forest,
Cut, burnt and cultivated.
In this way, we cultivate and live.
We will not forget you while eating
For the pillar and the bamboo,
The house and place, we are making our offerings.
Because of your help,
Because of your love,
Because of your agreement for our sake
Because of your hospitality,
We live and our life is spared.

In this way, the villagers offer the first fruits to their gods faithfully before consuming the fresh crops. Seasonal wild fruits are also first offered to god and permission is obtained before they can be eaten.

Manner of Observation: Before the ritual of thanksgiving offerings to the gods is observed, the *A-chiks* are forbidden to eat any fresh fruits and crops of the season. To offer fresh paddy to gods, a number of young men and women together pound and flatten some amount of fresh paddy in the *nokma's* house a day before the celebration. Other offerings like melon, maize, seasonal leafy vegetables are offered to the gods by performing a ritual of libation with rice-beer. Flattened-rice is scattered into a stream or a river to their gods; in some villages, broken grains of rice called *rongkit* or *pura* (rice-powder)¹¹⁹ is offered instead of flattened rice. Citrus fruits are sliced in two and salt is applied over the slices before offering them to the gods.

On the first day of the festival, only the *nokma* performs the ritual in the morning around 4:00 a.m. by scattering flattened-rice on the river as a sacrificial offering to the god *Misi-Saljong*.¹²⁰ The next day, each household performs a ritual at around 6:00am near the rice-jar, later they gather at the *nokma's* house at around 8:00am for another ritual. Here the *a-king nokma* performs the ritual of thanksgiving offering of items like the flattened-rice or broken-rice at the base of his sacred post the *maljuri* for the whole village.

Feasting and drinking will continue as in other festival for days and nights in the two- day festival in the village. This ceremony is still in practice in the villages of *Gambaregre*, *Chibokgre*, *Selbalgre* and *Sasatgre* in *Ranggira* area.

¹¹⁹ The villagers of *Wa-ram Songma* usually use rice-powder or broken rice for the ritual.

¹²⁰ The *A chiks* believe that the home of their gods is in the subterranean region and in the ocean.

Beliefs and Practices: One of the favourite recipes of the *A·chiks* is preparation of curry with rice powder. Rice powder is prepared by soaking rice in water for some time to soften it, then pounding it into a fine powder and sprinkling it in hot boiling curry. However, according to their faith, they cannot soak rice in water till this festival and the fresh rice is not eaten till the *Wangala* Festival. However, in the case of poor families, an exception is made; they are permitted to use the fresh rice on condition that the paddy should not be dried in the sun as usual; rather dried in a large heavy iron wok before pounding for consumption.

The ritual of sprinkling of rice-flour or flattened-rice into a river or a stream symbolized the offerings the freshly harvested rice to their gods. It is thrown to the water, as they believe their gods are dwelling in the subterranean region. The purification ritual of the agricultural tools (*daos* and hoes etc.) is that; they believe this as while farming inadvertently they may kill any living-beings. Therefore, the agricultural tools are prohibited to keep inside the house without its purification rituals. If they do so, the villagers say, their gods that dwelling in their houses may leave them, else may not bless them. Hence, the tools are purified ritually after the work by the priest before keeping them inside the house. Further, the villagers say that if the people take fresh-rice without observing this festival, one may kill either by a snake, or a centipede, or a millipede, a spider or a scorpion. Therefore, every believer fearfully pays respect and prayers are dealt in faith to their gods.

2.09 THE FESTIVAL OF *AHAIA*

The festival of *Ahaia* is known by different names in different areas. In Ranggira and Rongram areas, it is called *Amarata* or *Medong Ra-ona*; in Dadenggre area and in the surrounding villages of Wa-ram Songma, is called *Jamegapa* or *Jagepa*. Sasatgre and Selbalgre villages know this festival as *Ahaia*, but at the same time it is also known by two other names, *Jamegapa* or *Midong Ra-ona*.

The *A-chik* farmers usually plant paddy for the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* in the front yard of the field house *jamadal*. During the harvest season, harvesting of paddy from this particular spot is done by observing a festival. This festival is called *Ahaia* or *Amarata*. 'Ama' stands for mother', 'rata' means to cut, therefore the name itself implies the belief connected with the festival as a ritual which symbolizes cutting the mother of paddy. The *A-chik* believers of the traditional indigenous religion believe that paddy itself is the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* who sustains the life of the people.

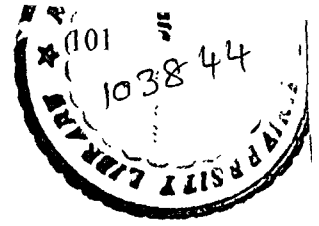
The festival of *Amarata* or *Ahaia* is conducted when every family in the village completes the harvesting of paddy from their *jhum* field. This is done so that the entire village can attend the festival of *Amarata* together on the same day. The *A-chiks* greatly revere paddy as the physical form of their goddess. In most of the villages, the festival of *Ahaia* is given a lot of importance. It is a worship of the deity in her most natural form of incarnation.

Nature of the Festival: This festival is observed in the month of September every year for one whole day and a night in the village.¹²¹ Some perform the rituals in the village and some in the *jhum* field. The month of September is full of rituals for the believers. There are numerous rituals performed for the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, and the god *Misi Saljong*.

In the beginning of the *jhum* cycle after the *A-galmaka* festival, a special variety of paddy and millets are planted in the best place in the *jhum* field in order pay respect for the god *Misi Saljong* and the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. The paddy specifically demarcated and planted for the gods is kept untouched even during the reaping season. The reaping of this crop is done last of all after the paddy in the rest of the *jhum* field has been harvested. The reaping is done during the festival which is observed in the month of September. The farmers go together to the *jhum* field in the morning to perform the various rituals to their gods.

Purpose of the Festival: The festival is celebrated to take back the mother goddess of paddy, *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and the provider of seed-grains, *Misi Saljong* from the *jhum* field which had been the temporary dwelling place for the gods, to the village where they would be honoured for their invaluable assistance during the crop growing season. The ritual behind the reaping of the sacred paddy planted in the plot dedicated to the gods, is based on a belief. It said that cutting or taking the life of the paddy actually prepares a place for the dead gods which is far better than the sacred plot in

¹²¹ Most often, this festival is observed on the 8th of September or in unavoidable circumstances on a convenient date in the first or latest by the second week of September every year.



the farm. In their life after death they proceed to better place in their supernatural world.

The worshippers observe this festival while reaping the paddy specifically planted for the gods. They prepare rice-beer for the *Wangala* festival out of the fresh paddy harvested from the *jhum* field. They say that observing the festival of *Ahaia* in honour of the gods is mandatory otherwise their offerings of thanksgiving may not be accepted by the gods.

Harvesting the paddy planted for the gods in front of the *jamadal* symbolizes the death of their gods. They keep the spirits of the deceased *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Misi Saljong* in the village at the sacred posts in their respective houses. They take good care of the sacred paddy before sending the spirit of their gods to their permanent home in the ocean.

Every family has its own sacred plot where the paddy is planted symbolizing the presence of the gods in their *jhum* fields. This is the reason why this sacred paddy is harvested only when every family completes its own reaping activities by the morning of the day specially fixed for the festival.

To observe the *Ahaia* festival on that morning, the villagers go to their respective *jhum* field, where the rituals are performed by the heads of the families. If anyone fails to complete harvesting at the same time with the other families, they wait for a week more. Harvesting of paddy begins in the month of August and it takes

almost a whole month to complete the harvest. It is usually over in the first or second week of September. The ritual of *Ahaia* is the last of the rituals observed in the *jhum* field. After two years of cultivation, the field is abandoned for about five to ten years.

Myth of the Festival: It is believed that in the past, there was a bird *do-reko-kokagipok*, 'a white headed-babbler' also named '*Do-nima Sanima*'. This bird is said to have been the first one who taught the people to observe the *Ahaia* festival by offering the first fruits from their labour in the field. Some village elders of Waram Songma narrated this version in 2003, saying that it was this bird who started shouting and singing the *Ahaia* incantations for the gods while cutting the paddy-stalks from the *jhum* field. The villagers of Waram Songma say that they were inspired to follow the example set by this bird, which they still do.

Preparation for the Festival: The villagers wait a week for all the families in the village to complete harvesting the rest of the paddy from their fields. When all the families complete the harvesting, early in the morning, they all go to the *jhum* field on the set date. They take along with them jars of rice-beer, *chambils* (kind of citrus fruit), or two *atols* (another type of citrus fruit), lemon called *te matchi* or *jambura* (pomelo). Any of these commonly available fruits is used in the Sadolpara village. They carry cooked glutinous rice in bamboo cylinders¹²² and jars of rice-beer prepared out of fresh sticky rice.

¹²² This method of cooking is called *brenga*.

Performance of the Rituals: Before going to the field, the *nokma* consults the will of the gods. In order to find the answers to his questions concerning the rituals of the day, the *nokma* strangulates a red cock in his home to observe its entrails on behalf of the whole village.¹²³ The first ritual is the ritual of libation called *rusrota*.

This same ritual is performed in the morning at around 8:00 a.m. by all the families in their respective homes in the village. Before taking the life of the mother of paddy *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, they seek permission from the gods to cut the sacred paddy, an act which is symbolically termed as cutting off the neck of the mother of paddy. The believers say that it is the same as causing death to the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. They say *Mima Kiri Rokkime* dies when the sacred paddy is reaped; therefore they take good care of the spirit of their gods who had helped them during the time they needed them; the gods served them by assisting the precious crops, especially rice and millet to grow. So the faithful and grateful followers observe this festival before sending them home safely. The agreement made to the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, during one of the rituals in the *A galmaka* festival, promising to send them home safely with honour, is fulfilled during this festival. Even during the Wangala festival in a particular ritual, word is given to the gods that they would be sent back to their home in the ocean after their services have been received. This festival is one more way of fulfilling this agreement with the gods.

¹²³ By observing the entrails one can predict whether their gods will come with them to the village after the rituals.

Ritual of Jamegapa or Jagepa: Just a week before the *Ahaia* festival, the village *nokma* performs another ceremony called *Jagepa* or *Jamegapa*. This ritual is performed in the village to seek permission from their gods to eat fish and crab and to store smoked fish. Obedience by all the believers while observing this ritual is important because there are prohibitions regarding the eating of eating meat and prawns for a week before and during the festival. Fish, crab and dry fish curry are usually cooked during the *Ahaia* festival. However, there is no restriction for eating animals reared at home. In some villages people are allowed to eat chicken during the festival.

The Ritual of Ama Rata: At around 9:00 a.m. before the sacred paddy cultivated for the gods in front of the *jamadal* is reaped, the ritual of *Ama Rata* is performed in the *jhum* field. This is called *amarata* or literally cutting off the mother. The reaping of the paddy stalks symbolizes beheading the mother of paddy herself. The villagers reap the paddy uttering the words, “*Rokkimekon gitok ratmanjok, Kirikon sko sotmanjok*”, which may be translated as, ‘the neck of *Rokkime* has been slit and the head of *Mima Kiri Rokkime* has been cut off’. This implies that they are ready to carry the gods back from the *jhum* field to the village; both in their spirit form as well as their represented image in the form of the paddy stalks. Before cutting the paddy stalks, the head of the family pours out a little rice-beer over a sickle and chants the following words as a prayer for permission to cut the paddy. Reaping these particular clumps of paddy is considered as physically hurting *Mima Kiri Rokkime* the Mother of Paddy.

Jama jakgitokgnok tarime chakatnajok na-ching

*Apa Misidrangmo, nama Saljong drangming;
Na ching akgni e chanajok dunsam maljrenamo,
Kambe dongdang akgnok angaba,
Nang' dongatangna chakatbo,
Nang' kawatangna e chabo.*¹²⁴

Translated version of the lines is as follows:

Awake, your life is at stake
Arise to join the company of *Misi Saljong*.
We (*Misi* and *Rokkime*) will be walking into the *dunsam*¹²⁵ *maljuri*¹²⁶,
I too will pluck the paddy by its stalk.
Rise up to go to the place you dwell in,
Move to go on with your mate.”

Uttering these words, he pours out rice-beer over the first-fruits offerings of their crops which are placed in the altar at the *jhum* field to their deities. In this festival the farmers make rice-beer especially out of freshly harvested glutinous-rice¹²⁷ which is cut after the ritual of *Jamegapa* or *Jagepa*.

The Ritual of *Midong Ra·ona*: This ritual is performed in the *jhum* field itself when all the families get ready to go home with the *mimanggots*.¹²⁸ The ritual is called *midong ra·ona* or ‘bringing down the paddy with its stalk’. In this ritual, farmers cut the paddy stalk with the sickle which has been kept specially cleansed for *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. While cutting the paddy, they all shout in the *jhum* field saying, “*Ahu....hu...Rokkimeko*” “*Ahu..... Mimako*”. This particular clump of paddy is cut from the stem. The bundled paddy stalk is then placed on the sacrificial altar in front of the field hut. The altar is fenced around with paddy straw carefully to represent the

¹²⁴ The chanting is collected from Wa·ram Songma from a priest in 2004.

¹²⁵ The special part of a wall in the house where they believe their gods dwell.

¹²⁶ Sacred post where the offerings to the gods are made.

¹²⁷ This is called *mimitim* or *menil* in *A·chik*.

¹²⁸ A tiny bundle of seed-grains is tied in a bamboo stump; this stump is called *mimanggot*.

safe keeping of their gods. Out of the entire collection of the sacred paddy, a small portion of it is tied with a straw.

The heads of the families then offer a thanksgiving ritual to the god *Misi Saljong* in their respective fields in honour of the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* for assisting them throughout the farming season. When the ritual is over the heads of the families cut the paddy stems and throw a bundle of them towards the new jhum field *a-dal*. The other tiny bundle of paddy on its stalk is fixed to both ends of the *mimanggot*. Meanwhile the priest chants an invocation saying, “*Adi ja·mano nang·ko rimongne, de·ongne!*” which means “After sometime you will be carried down to your home in the village.”¹²⁹

Ritual of *Saljong Rimona* or ‘carrying down the god (*Misi*) *Saljong*’: The harvested paddy is kept only for a week in the field. The villagers say that the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will start weeping desperately if the paddy is kept for a long period in the open field. They believe that *Mima Kiri Rokkime* wails for protection as it is in danger of being destroyed by wild animals or birds. They say that she weeps in the field saying:

*Nio mikgil champiljok anga,
Donga jachimitpiljok anga
Demdemana grangna anga kena sikonga,
Angkode baoha dunsam maljurina,
Rimena amongjokai,
Ampokna gasimpenaba,
Baoha gatena amongjokai*¹³⁰

¹²⁹ These words were chanted by a priest in Wa-ram Songma during the festival in 2004.

¹³⁰ This incantation is collected from a priest from Waram Songma in 2005.

The translated version of the above lines is:

With weary eyelids I watched and waited,
 Feet tingling at having to stand and wait so long,
 I fear the sound of fluttering feathers (of destructive animals and birds),
 When will I be taken to the *dunsam maljuri*?
 When are they going to come and take me
 To rest my tired self on a stool?
 Where will you give me a place to rest?

Not wanting to grieve *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, the villagers do not keep the harvested paddy in the field longer than a week. They care for their gods and try to maintain a good relationship with them and make amends for their mistakes. They invoke their gods through prayers and animal sacrifices in all seasons.

After the ritual in the *jhum* field, the *mimanggot* is carried down to the village which is called *Saljong Rimona* or carrying down (*Misi*) *Saljong*. The *mimanggot* looks like a bunch of feathers called *do-me*, which men and women fix at the back of their heads during the *Wangala* festival. This ritual is done in the evening.

A couple leads the god *Mima Kiri Rokkime* before other the members of the family. In some villages three or four families join and go down together to the village. As they come down, they dance in a line carrying *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* thumping the *mimanggot* on the ground singing *Ahaia* as:

Dunsam maljurichana chakatbo apa Misidrang
Charam chusimratangna e-chabojok Saljongdrangni
Tarimean chakatgen nama jakgitokgnok nang-koba
*Apsan e-chagen Misi Saljongming na-chingba.*¹³¹

¹³¹ Collected from a priest in Wa-ram Songma village in 2003.

The lines are translated as:

Rise up father *Misi* to the *dunsam maljuri*,
 To the dining place the *chusimra*, make a move *Saljong*
 Arise and be ready, I will take you by your wrist,
 And we will move together with *Misi Saljong*.

Saying this they bring down their gods to the village and stop the incantation when they reach the *maljuri*. After this chant, the priest cuts the climbers such as the vine of the white gourd growing on the roof of the field house. If the climbers cover the roof, they believe that their god *Misi Saljong* is guarding the field along with them. The priest cuts the climber saying; 'Let the god and goddess come with us'¹³². Then saying, '*Mima Kiri Rokkime* is not getting up', they take the *mimanggot* to let *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* climb down from the roof through the *mimanggot*, as creepers do on a bamboo pole.

The Ritual of *Ama Dila*: This ritual is performed at around 3:00 p.m. after all the other rituals are over in the *jhum* field. They carry the last of the harvested paddy to the village, calling it *amadila* or leading the mother paddy which signifies carrying home their gods in a *mimanggot*.¹³³ Then they carry down the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the village singing '*Ahaia*' and shouting '*Oh..ho..ho..ho..*' to the gods. They say singing *Ahaia* signifies a call or an appeal to the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to come home with them and stay with them till the time of *Wangala* festival. According to their belief, they have to keep their gods in their homes at the sacred post till the ritual of incense burning in the *Wangala* festival.

¹³² In Achik: *Oe...mo ...o...chrigipa rongipa haimo...o...*

¹³³ It is a tiny bundle of paddy with stalk fixed in a bamboo stump. It symbolizes the farmers carrying back their gods to the village from the *jhum* field after the harvest.

Ritual of *Medong Pota* at the *Maljuri*: On reaching home, the heads of the families tie the *mimanggot* to the sacred post *maljuri*¹³⁴ or *chusimra* in their homes¹³⁵. The fixing of the tiny bundle of paddy stalk and millet on the *mimanggot* is known as '*medong pota*'. It signifies keeping their gods safe within the boundary of their homes.

Then a ritual of offering the first-fruits to the gods is made in gratitude for good harvest. Invocations are chanted to the gods for being with them throughout the farming season. Through prayers the farmers seek permission to consume the fresh products of various kinds of seasonal crops like millet, early seasonal variety of paddy, seasonal citrus fruits like *chambil*, pomelo, *chinara* (locally available citrus fruits), fresh leafy vegetables like *mejak* and sorrel (*galda*). As for the common people, the ritual is performed at the base of their *chusimra*.¹³⁶

Ritual of *Rugala* or libation: The ritual of *Rugala* or libation is performed by the *nokma* at his sacred post for the whole village. He cuts a pomelo or any seasonal citrus fruit in half with a sickle and sprinkles it with salt; roasted chilly is placed over

¹³⁴ The *maljuri* is a pillar in the *nokma*'s house in which their gods are believed to dwell to guard and bless the villagers. The pillar is considered as a sacred post. It may be noted that only the *nokmas* of the village can construct a house with a separate post of *maljuri*; others construct theirs only with the post of *chusimra* where they perform rituals

¹³⁵ In some villages, as in Sasatgre area (in the *nokma*'s house), there are separate posts of *maljuri* and *chusimra*. As mentioned earlier, most of the offerings and rituals are performed at the *maljuri*, at the *chusimra* rice-beer is kept for serving the people during festivals. In *Ama Rata* ceremony, the prepared *mimanggot* is always kept attached to the *chusimra*

¹³⁶ *Maljuri* is a sacred post in the house of the *nokmas*.

it as an offering to the gods in the altar at the field. After this, libation of rice-beer is offered to the god *Misi Saljong* saying:

*Apana Misinamo, namana Saljongnamo,
 Apa Misidemo jachokba jachimiteba dongnokmo,
 Kisang rongchipeliba nikongnawane,
 Apa Misinamo nama Saljongna,
 Apako Misiko da-aldemo,
 Nama Saljongkoa anga jakgitokgnok,
 Apa Misiming nama Saljongming,
 Anga chakatalnajokmo*¹³⁷

When translated it goes:

For father *Misi*, for good *Saljong*,
 Father *Misi* may have waited with tingling feet,
 Whose buttocks may have become numb with sitting!
 For father *Misi*, for good *Saljong*.
 For father *Misi* today,
 Good *Saljong* I will hold by the hand,
 With father *Misi*, with good *Saljong*,
 I will get up and move on.

Saying this, the farmers keep their gods on the sacred post till the *Wangala* festival.

Manner of Observation: A week before the *Ahaia* festival, the villagers are forbidden to eat meat, prawn, citrus fruits like *chambil*, *atol*, *narang* and sour leafy vegetables from the new field such as sorrel (*galda*), *me·kring* or *me·krido·nok* (a locally available leafy sour vegetables). They do not eat fermented bamboo shoot which is regarded as a delicacy by the *A·chiks*. Dried sorrel (*galda*) and even chilly cannot be roasted and eaten even though the *A·chiks* love eating roasted chilly with their meals and with sour fruits. However they are permitted to consume the fresh vegetables that are available in the field in its second year of cultivation before the

¹³⁷ Collected from Waram Songma village in 2003 from a priest.

Ahaia festival. It is believed that feasting and dancing during the festival helps the spirit of the gods to travel to the next world. After the rituals in their homes, the villagers gather in the *nokma*'s house to drink and celebrate the festival for a night and a day.

The following day after the festival, the villagers observe a complete day of rest which is a day of abstention; the practice is known as *salnima*. They say that they spend this day only with their gods. This is still in practice in the villages of Gambaregre and Chibokgre in Ranggira area.

Beliefs and Practices: There are some superstitions and beliefs associated with all A.chik festivals which are strictly adhered to. Restrictions are observed by all the villagers whether they are believers or non-believers. Even the non-*A·chiks* of the same village have to observe all these beliefs.

In the ritual of *Ama Rata*, the priest takes out the bundle of the stalks of paddy from the sacrificial altar erected at the *jhum* field, and throws it in front of the path as the celebrants proceed home just before the ritual of *Saljong Rimona*. They observe the position and manner in which the bundle has fallen. If the tip of the stalk of paddy faces the village, they believe that the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will follow them to the village. If the tip faces the paddy field, they believe that the gods will remain in the *jhum* field. While carrying down the gods to the village with the ritual of *Saljong Rimona*, one should not look back or stop or talk to the people on the way. If they turn back, they say *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will stay back in

the paddy field. They believe that if this happens, paddy will not grow well in the next season.

The gods are carried down to the village in a *mimanggot*, the bamboo that holds the paddy-seeds. The villagers of Dudanggre in Dadenggre area say that the *mimanggot* holds the spirits of the gods like an urn; the sacred post is considered as the temporary protected shelter of the spirits of the dead just as a *delang* is constructed as a temporary shelter for the spirits of the deceased human beings. As the spirit of the deceased is kept safely in the *delang* till the day of the post-funeral ceremony, so also the spirits of the gods are kept at the sacred post till the day of the *Wangala* festival.

The villagers respect the spirit of their gods and devotedly take good care of them. During the ritual of *A·galmaka* in the beginning of the agricultural cycle every year the gods Misi Saljong and Mima Kiri Rokkime are invited into the farm.

The *A·chiks* entertain the spirits of their gods with music and dance and offer sacrifices of the best rice-beer. Before the paddy is offered to the gods, even wild birds and animals are invoked through prayers, not to eat or destroy the crops from the *jhum* field. They observe endless feasting throughout the year in honour of their gods. The offered items to their gods which are kept at the sacred post are not to be touched, by either man or animal. According to the villagers if somebody touches or even makes an attempt to do so, the person bears the curse of being killed by a tiger.

The *A·chiks* never sing or shout without any sufficient reason in the field while the paddy is growing and they are strictly forbidden to shout as long as the paddy is still standing in the *jhum* field. The villagers consider shouting as a sacriligious act which chases the gods away from the field. They shout and sing only during and after the *Ahaia* festival. During the festival, the families shout and sing *Ahaia* following the leaders, the *nokma* and the heads of the families, while coming down to the village. This they say signifies calling their gods to come along with them to the village. If the leader sings *Ahaia*, another person cannot sing along with him. They believe that any one who disobeys these observances will be killed by a tiger. In the village of Sadolpara, people say that any one who does not respect the restrictions will be bitten by a king cobra or killed by a wild boar. During the period of the festival of *Ahaia*, no villager is allowed to go to the forest or *jhum* field, in fear that they may face such dangers. One who climbs a tree or cuts bamboo is cursed to be torn to bits by a tiger. Anyone who goes to the river during the period of abstention is cursed to be trampled by an elephant or be killed by an alligator, poisonous snakes or centipedes.

On the following day of the festival, the villagers pound the newly harvested paddy in the *nokma*'s house to prepare rice-beer. This is especially prepared for the god *Misi Saljong* as an item of offering to be given during the *Wangala* festival.

2.10 THE FESTIVAL OF NOKPANTE MESE CHA·A

The festival of *Nokpante Mese Cha·a* is celebrated in the first week of October before the farmers consume the seasonal fresh crops from their field. The ritual is hosted by the village boys in their *nokpante*, the boys' dormitory. The whole village

as well as others from the nearby villages attends the festival. Girls and women are allowed to enter the *nokpante* and dance only during this festival.¹³⁸ The rest of the year the girls and women are forbidden from entering the dormitory by customary law.

Nature of the Festival: In most of the villages, the festival of *Nokpante Mese Cha-a* is performed for two days just a week before the *Wangala* festival.¹³⁹ The time and dates of the celebration are fixed by the *a-king nokma* in a village community meeting. The important rituals are performed at the first night at the *chusimra* of the village *nokpante* by its head or else by the *a-king nokma*.

Purpose of the Festival: This festival is observed to acknowledge the god *Misi Saljong* for the blessings with good harvest. Thanksgiving offerings are made through the ritual of libation; preparing rice-beer out of the fresh and best variety of sticky-rice. Only after these offerings, the villagers can prepare rice-powder, the *wanchi* for the *Wangala* festival. Another purpose is to purify the village granaries which are considered to be the abode of god, *Misi Saljong* and the goddess, *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. For this, purification ritual of egg-breaking is performed by the heads of the families before storing the fresh paddy in their granaries.

¹³⁸ According to the *A-chik* customary law, no women and children are allowed to enter the *nokpante*. The dormitory being the abode of the god of protection Goera Kalkame, it is considered as sacred.

¹³⁹ The festival of *Nokpante Mese Cha-a* is performed a week before the *Wangala* festival in the Saldolpara area and is called the festival of *Nokpante Mese Ang-ke Cha.a*. In Wa-ram Songma and Dadengre area, it is observed one day ahead of the *Wangala* festival.

Purpose of catching rats in the Festival: According to a folktale it was the wish of *Misi Saljong* that the first-fruits should be offered to him before they are consumed. It is said that the rats are the descendants of *Sugra Matija*; the latter, violating the commandment of the god, ate the paddy from the farm before it was offered to the provider.¹⁴⁰ The god took a strong exception to the sacriligious act of *Sugra Matija*.

The god *Misi Saljong* felt insulted and dishonoured. After that, the whole family of rats was condemned for generations. The condemnation remains even today. To remind rats and human beings not to repeat the same blunder and to acknowledge the power of the creator, a symbolic punishment of killing rats and eating their meat is done by the believers as a kind of oath, saying that they will never commit the same mistake again.

Another purpose is to offer fresh paddy by performing the ritual of libation of rice-beer to the god, *Misi Saljong*. Only after this ritual, the villagers can prepare rice-powder for the *Wangala* festival, which is used for ritualistic smearing on the house of the nokma and on the celebrants as well.

¹⁴⁰ An *A·chik* myth says that *A·ni-Agilpa-Chini-Galapa*, who was the first person to receive the seed-grains believed in the god's word and sowed them in the right season. The god, *Misi-Agilpa-Saljong-Galapa* (*Misi-Saljong*) chained the servants of *A·ni-Agilpa-Chini-Galapa* and left them to die without food for days together. *A·ni-Agilpa-Chini-Galapa* looked for the root cause of the punishment and finally found out that the culprit was *Sugra-Matija* (the ancestor of the rat family which had violated the commandment. This has been mentioned by H. W. Marak: in *A·chik Aganbewalrang-Original Tales of the Garos*, 1983, pp.2-5). Since then, the entire species of rats have been cursed by the god. Rats are killed as a part of the festival till today. This is also said by the elderly people from Gambaregre village, West Garo Hills.

Preparation for the Festival: The village *nokpante*, its surroundings and the village paths are cleaned two to three days before the festival. Contributions are also taken in cash or in kind from each household to buy a bull. The bull is reared for the festival by the boys from the *nokpante*. In some villages, rearing of the sacrificial bull is done for a month. Its blood is sacrificed to the gods and the meat is enjoyed by the participants in the festival.

Rice-beer is prepared at the *nokpante* by the boys out of millet and rice. They make as many jars of rice-beer as they can well in advance. The drums, gongs and flutes are carried from the *nokma's* house to the *nokpante* for the festival. Each household has to contribute a jar of rice-beer and broken-rice (*rongkit*) for the festival. The boys keep the seasonal crops such as brinjal, yam, ginger plant with roots and citrus fruits like *chambil* and *slongga* (kinds of lemon) ready, to offer as thanksgiving to the gods.

Preparation for the Ritual of *Rugala*: Before starting the rituals in the morning, the village youths gather in the village *nokpante* to search for rats from the traditional garbage bins called *kalbongs* of each field-hut in the *jhum* field, and later from the village granaries.¹⁴¹ This practice has been incorporated as part of the traditional game of entertainment among the youngsters at the time of the festival.¹⁴² The first one to

¹⁴¹ In most of the *A-chik* villages, granaries are constructed together for all households in a particular area convenient for all in the village.

¹⁴² In the *Rongram* area, this game is played for two days and nights before the *Wangala* festival with fire-torches lit on short bamboo poles. The rats are then skinned and its meat is smoked for the festival.

catch a rat is considered as the strongest and the wisest man of the village; and he carries this title for the rest of the year.

The rats that are caught are then brought to the *nokpante* for the ritual. The rituals are performed by one of the elders of the *nokpante*, preferably the son of the *a-king nokma*. He divides the captured rats into eight portions on the bamboo floor before the ritual. In some villages, the ritual is performed by the *nokma* himself if he does not have a son.

Performance of the Rituals:

The Ritual of Smearing *Wanchi*: This ritual starts around 12:30 pm in the *nokpante*. The boys of the village smear the powder made out of white China clay on the walls of *nokpante*, the drums, gongs, flute, the sacrificial post and village altar instead of rice-powder.

The Ritual of Sacrificing a Bull: In the afternoon at around 1:00 pm., a bull is sacrificed at the sacrificial post (*tilta*) at the village courtyard and its blood is smeared on the village altar as well as on the walls of the *nokpante* which is believed to be one of the dwelling places of the gods. After this, the meat is cooked for the feast at night.

The Ritual of *Rugala* (libation of rice-beer): This ritual starts at around 6:00 pm. in the village *nokpante*. The priest performs the ritual of *Rugala*¹⁴³ with an invocation of thanksgiving to *Misi Saljong*, and rice beer is poured over the offered items which

¹⁴³ If the *a-king nokma* has no son, he performs the ritual himself.

consist of fresh crops of ginger, yam, and some amount of broken rice. The rats are also placed on the plantain leaves spread on the bamboo floor of the *nokpante* along with the other offered items.

The Ritual of Offering *Miruan* to the gods: The rice collected from each household is cooked and beef is prepared for the feast after the ritual. Cooked rice and curry is kept ready in the winnowing fan as many as they can collect and as much as the winnowing fan can hold, to serve the people. Before food is served to the participants, it is offered to the gods by the priest who scatters it ritually on the bamboo floor.

The Ritual of Incense Burning: This ritual is performed at night after the ritual of *Rugala*. It is done for *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* at the *chusimra*¹⁴⁴ of the village *nokpante*. As the priest continues to chant a prayer, the participants beat the bamboo floor with sticks rhythmically in place of the traditional drums. After the ritual, the head of the *nokpante* performs the traditional *grika* dance; others follow him. The leader then loudly flaunts his worth and strength of character making a public proclamation as:

*Chalang oe, raka oe,
Ma-ko gealirigipa;
Apaba raka, angaba raka!
Mama ja-mano, atchi ja-mano,
Gual jakwalkujaowa oe!
Kudu mongnal gualkuja, jakwatkuja oe!
Apaba raka, angaba raka,
Amaba raka, atchiba raka,
Chalang oe, Raka oe!
Raka betchri kimka ajri,*

¹⁴⁴ The main post of the house where during the important ceremonies, jars of rice-beer are placed and served to the people.

*Chalang oe, Raka oe!*¹⁴⁵
*Chalang !*¹⁴⁶

The Strong one; I am the one!
 One who does not forget his mother;
 Father is strong, I am also strong!
 As my uncle, as my grandfather,
 I will not forget and leave you unprotected either, I give my word!
 Their good works will still be carried on, yes!
 Father is strong, I am also strong,
 Mother is strong, grandfather is also strong,
Chalang yes! The Strong one yes!
 I am strong and firm as the bitter seed of the *kimka*
 plant¹⁴⁷ in the fallow field (*ajri*)¹⁴⁸
Chalang yes! The strong one, yes I am!

Here, the young man makes a solemn public promise and declares that his strength and wisdom would be used to serve his people as his forefathers had done in the past.

The Ritual of Egg-Breaking in the Granary: A number of families construct their granaries at a particular place which is felt to be safe in case any fire breaks out. In many villages it is noted that granaries are built at a little distance from their residential houses.¹⁴⁹

The ritual of egg-breaking is performed by the heads of families on the second morning at around 8:00am. Each family makes a *chokrek* and a *jaktap*¹⁵⁰ out of fresh bamboo, erecting them together in front of their respective granaries. In this ritual, the

¹⁴⁵ Recorded from Pedison A. Sangma, a sixty-five year old man from a village called Rongbakgre on 07-08-05 during the festival.

¹⁴⁶ A person who is considered to be a man of great strength and wisdom. He is also the most powerful and respectable person in a village.

¹⁴⁷ Its botanical name is the *solamum indicum*.

¹⁴⁸ It means the fallow land.

¹⁴⁹ The villagers say that the houses are built at the distance from their granaries to keep watch and be safe from dangers of fire and other calamities.

¹⁵⁰ The meanings are in the glossary.

heads of the families break an egg over the *chokrek* and the *jaktap*. The egg-shell is kept on the edge of the *chokrek*. A priest presides over the whole function and breaks the egg; he offers a prayer on behalf the family members and asks for forgiveness and blessings from their gods in the coming year.

Manner of Observations: According to the belief associated with the festival, the villagers are not allowed to prepare rice-powder, the *wanchi*¹⁵¹ or *wanti* before the *Wangala* festival. Instead of *wanti* the villagers powder white China clay and make a paste to smear it on the walls of the *nokpante*, the *kimrong* or *tilta*¹⁵², the sacred drum and on the other long traditional drums before they start the rituals.

When all the rituals are over, the boys of the *nokpante* happily share the food with all the participants in the ceremony. This is done keeping in mind the belief that their gods happily drink the rice-beer prepared for the festival and spend the day with them. The celebrants dance in the *nokpante* the whole night, yet again believing that the gods dance along with them.

Beliefs and Practices: The villagers believe that if this festival is not observed, the crops in the field may be ruined or misfortune may occur in the village within a year of committing this grievous mistake. They also believe that the first-fruits should be

¹⁵¹ According to the traditional belief, the villagers cannot dry paddy in the sun nor soak it in water but rice beer.

¹⁵² This is a 'Y' shaped post on which the bull is tied to be slaughtered. This is usually erected right in the middle of the *Achik* villages.

duly offered to their gods. So, the first seasonal crops in this festival are always offered with thanksgiving.

The villagers catch rats and kill them for destroying crops both in the field and in the village granaries. The meat is cooked and served as a special item in the ceremony. This practice of eating field rats is a part of the practice which has been followed since the days of *Ani-Agilpa-Chini-Galapa* to help remind the believers not to repeat the sacriligious act of *Sugra Matija*, the ancestor of the rat species.

Therefore, it is a must for all the *A·chiks*, to purify the granaries ritually before storing the freshly harvested paddy. They say that the gods never reside in impure and defiled places. If a family stores fresh food-grains without observing the purification ritual, the family will have to inescapably face scarcity of food and possible starvation the whole year.

2.11 THE *WANGALA* FESTIVAL

The *Wangala* festival commences in the last week of September and goes on till the first week of October¹⁵³ after the harvesting of paddy is done. It is one of the most popular festivals of the *A·chiks*. This festival is also called *Dru Wangbola* in some areas.

In fact this festival now holds a significant place in the *A·chik* society. This is because the *Wangala* is popular both traditionally and even amongst the modernised *A·chik* society as well. Today the dance of the *Wangala* festival has been taken as a part of *A·chik* cultural activity in the form of the Hundred Drums festival held annually at Asanang since the early 1970's.

Nature of the Festival: It is interesting to note that the *Wangala* festival is fixed on different dates in different areas and villages. As far as possible each village and each area fix and set the date differently so that the people of each one can attend the *Wangala* ceremony held in the others without missing out on the celebration in their own villages.¹⁵⁴

Purpose of the Festival: The *Wangala* festival is observed in order to honour and propitiate the gods for a good harvest after all the labour that the villagers had put in and the hardships they have had to face during the growing and harvesting season.

¹⁵³ It is an *A·chik* custom that all the relatives should be called for important meetings and festivals such as the *Wangala* festival. Therefore, different dates are fixed in all villages in the same area, so that relatives can attend the festival in other villages at different times.

¹⁵⁴ The *Wangala* festival is observed for a week but these days it is celebrated for two to three days in the villages on account of economic conditions and hardship due to low productivity of the farms.

Myth related to purpose of the Festival: There is an *A·chik* myth which explains how mankind obtained seed-grains of paddy. This myth is important to them because their staple food is rice; hence, they value grains and any explanations associated with either their procurement or their existence which is significant to the life of the people. The myth has been recorded from a number of sources by D. S. Rongmuthu in '*Apasong Agana*' (*As Told by Our Forefathers*). The book records that the seeds of the crops were endowed graciously by the god *Misi Saljong* to a mortal called *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa*.¹⁵⁵ After the seeds were gifted, the man was instructed by the god to gather the first-fruits of his farm as offering to him. As commanded, *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* offered the first harvest of all kinds of crops to the god, *Misi Saljong*. This act of offering was passed on as a tradition which is prevalent to this day.

A·chiks who abide by their indigenous faith, pay tribute to the provider of seed grains with the first harvest of any crop they cultivate in their fields. The *Wangala* festival is celebrated with this intention. Along with the crops, special rice-beer made with the best variety of rice such as glutinous rice is offered. Incense is burnt at the *nokma*'s house at his sacred post to please the god *Misi Saljong*. If the god is appeased with the sacrificial offerings, the followers receive abundant blessings from the god. It is to experience this favour that the tradition is reverently followed till date.

¹⁵⁵ As told by D.S. Rongmuthu in *Apasong Agana*, pp. 63-64, 1970 (1st edition), he is the representative of mankind.

The act of *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa's* offering to *Misi Saljong* as a mark of gratitude is still practised. This is clearly seen in the words of the god himself who according to D.S. Rongmuthu, said:

“When I return from the weekly market, I will bestow on you the seed-grains. Once the paddy ripens, every year, in the right month, do not forget to give me offerings, do not forget to drink and toast for me, do keep aside something in remembrance of me to commemorate my gift and to honour me.”¹⁵⁶

Apasong Agana records the narrative of Totim Sangma Nengminza which describes the ceremony of thanksgiving. The ritual of offering is performed by burning incense as desired by the god. He says that *Misi Saljong* himself asked *Ai Segri Dotdi Pagri*, a widow, to burn incense and when she did so the god was satisfied and said to her,

“Truly, this is aromatic; it is touching and it is also a beautiful sight. It satisfies me.”¹⁵⁷

These words indicate that *Misi Saljong* was pleased that mankind heeded his words and therefore he blessed them, not only with abundance of crops but also with immense wealth.

Apart from these rituals *Misi Saljong* advised the man, *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* saying:

“Every year, during the season when the *slongga* matures, and the mangoes ripen, I will come back, I will reappear. You may eat like *Misi* eats, drink like *Saljong* drinks. Burn incense for me, prepare a drink for me.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Rongmuthu, D. S.: *Apasong Agana*, pp.63-64, see Appendix §1.1 for Garo version.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.110, for Garo version see Appendix §1.2.

¹⁵⁸ Rongmuthu, D. S.: *Apasong Agana*, pp.110-111. See Appendix § 1.3 for Garo version.

The *A·chik* myth about the gift of seed-grains to mankind recorded in '*Miko Man·a*' narrated by *Kimchang Sangma A·gitok* in *Apasong Agana* states that *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* promised to acknowledge the provider *Misi Saljong* in the harvesting season as the god desired. The god permitted the farmers to eat millet and rice, but only on his approval, that is, after the offerings have been given to him in acknowledgement of his benevolence. He forbade them from consuming those grains before the ripening season, which implies that no one is to claim the crops before offerings of first-fruits to him in a ceremony.¹⁵⁹ *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* to express his gratitude to *Misi Saljong* displays his pledge as follows:

“When the paddy turns yellow, when the time arrives, when the due month is at hand, *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* at the sacred post, at the *chusimra* will pour beer, burn incense and show reverence and honour. I will call on your (*Misi Saljong*) name, and say I will not forget to offer a drink to you.”¹⁶⁰

The above lines show that *A·ni A·gilpa Chini Galapa* is truly glad and invokes the god *Misi Saljong* with his heart and soul. He humbles himself before the god *Misi Saljong*. He assures the God he would keep his word even in the time to come, so that he would always be blessed. This prayer is seen in the following verse;

“I, for the sake of your friendship, I, for the sake of your patronage; I offer these first fruits of the life-sustaining seeds. Do not be angry with me, do not be hard on me, and do not weep. You are my friend, you are my partner, the one who gave me seeds, the one who sent me grains, the one who planted, the one who cultivated, the one who increases, the one who takes care, the-giver of life. I will not forget you while eating; I will not forget you while drinking. Do bless, do give, do care for us, and look after us.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid; pp.61-66,1970(1st edition)

¹⁶⁰ Rongmuthu, D. S. : *Apasong Agana* p.64. See Appendix § 1.4 for Garo version.

Till today the *A·chik* traditional believers observe this with the same sincerity. At this juncture it is important to take a look at the rituals of *Wangala* festival.

The purpose of using crab as a Sacrificial Offering: In the past, *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, the goddess of paddy was said to have died when the paddy was cut from the frontyard of field-hut at the time of the *Ama Rata* or *Ahaia* festival. This was described as the death of the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. It was also said that in the past, the believers used crabs as sacrificial offerings in the funeral ceremony to the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. That is why crabs are still used as sacrificial items during the *Wangala* festival. They are caught from a stream for the ritual.

Preparations for the Festival: A bull is reared in the *nokma*'s house for sacrifice in the festival, at least a month before the fixed time. The *a·king nokma* calls a meeting in the village to fix the date and to collect contributions to buy essential items for the festival. Sacred drums and other drums, gongs, horns and flutes are aired out and kept ready for the ceremony one day ahead of the festival. The surroundings of the village are cleaned a week ahead, as the festival is considered as a special occasion for them. They believe that in such occasions, the gods attend the ceremony; therefore they keep their surroundings clean.

Three to two days before the festival, women collect firewood, plantain leaves, clean rice and carry water from the stream in long bamboo cylinders. Men construct or repair the village altar. They also collect jars of rice-beer from the families of owners of the sacred drums, relatives of the *a·king nokma* and whoever

would be willing to contribute to the festival. They repair drums by tightening the animal hide which covers both ends of the hollow wood. Women busy themselves at home as well as at the *a-king nokma's* house preparing for the festival. They put on their best clothes and stay ready to meet the gods and friends from other villages.

Performance of the Rituals: On the first day of the festival in the evening, when preparations are over, plantain leaves are spread at the base of their sacred post to place offerings of the first harvest of crops like tubers, yam, ginger, onion and white gourd. The first offering of libation is made at their respective homes over the offered items by the heads of the families. After this ritual, the villagers gather in the *nokma's* house to drink together which continues the whole night.

Series of the Rituals in the Festival observed within the five days:

- (i) *Rugala*, the ritual of libation performed on the first day of the festival.
- (ii) Rituals on the second day:
 - (a) *Wanna Stita Guri Janggia*, the ritual of agreement with their gods;
 - (b) *Mipanchi-Meruan Goa*, the ritual of feasting together with gods;
 - (c) *Sa-sat so-a*, the ritual of burning incense to their gods;
 - (d) *Jol Ana or Jol Wata*, the ritual of libation in the second *nokma's* house.
- (iii) *Saljong Rodila*, the ritual of spending time with *Misi Saljong* on the third day.
- (iv) *Bisri Bisra*, which is feasting with relatives and organizing *mahari* gatherings on the fourth day.

(v) *Kram gata*, the ritual of sending off their gods to their abode and keeping the sacred drums back in their original place. The sacred drums that are borrowed from others are returned to the owners on the fifth day.

The First Day:

(i) ***Rugala*, the ritual of libation:** The first day of the festival is called *Rugalani sal* or 'the day of libation'. In the afternoon at around 12:30 p.m., the calf that is reared in the stall at the house of the *nokma* is slaughtered at the sacrificial post village at the village courtyard.¹⁶¹ Its blood is then smeared first on the sacrificial post and on the village altar and on the walls of the middle room called *dunsam pakma*¹⁶² of the *a-king nokma*'s house. The meat is equally divided and given to every household in the village. It is the first ritual performed in the evening in the *nokma*'s house for the entire village.

The farmers offer the best and the most fragrant rice-beer made from glutinous-rice to the god *Misi Saljong* at about 4:00 p.m. in their respective homes. The heads of the families conduct the ritual of libation over the offered items. The items are tubers (*ta-ma*), a white gourd (*akkaru gipok*), ginger, turmeric, leek or onion (*rasin chisik*). They spread plantain leaves and place the offerings at the sacred post to their gods. After the ritual, they spend the night together in the *nokma*'s house drinking as many jars of rice-beer as they can consume.

¹⁶¹ If the village is big enough, they divide the families into two or three clusters according to their convenience. In occasions like this, each cluster collects money to buy a bull and to rear one. Its meat is then divided equally to all the families.

¹⁶² A portion of the wall in the *A-chik* traditional house that is believed to be one of the dwelling places of the gods.

The Second Day: The second day is called *Sa-satni Sal* or the day of Burning Incense. Four rituals are performed on that day in the village. As per the *A·chik* custom, every household brings a jar of rice-beer, cooked rice and curry, which are separately packed in plantain leaves to the *nokma*'s house early in the morning. They eat together during the ritual of *mipanchi-meruan cha-a* or feasting on freshly harvested rice symbolically with the gods.

At about 9:00 a.m. all the villagers gather in the *nokma*'s house for the ritual of libation. The *nokma* places all the offered items on the plantain leaves such as the plants of ginger, yam, onion and white gourd, glutinous-rice and the best variety of rice called *mima* filled in two tiny bamboo baskets called *gachek*. Two or four crabs in a fishing basket are also offered. While the priest starts performing the libation of rice-beer over the offerings, simultaneously he invokes prayers to the gods. The number of crabs used varies from village to village. In Gambaregre and Dadenggre areas, two crabs are used in the ritual; whereas in Sadolpara, four crabs are used. Out of these crabs, the *a·king nokma* kills one or two, and the others are set free to crawl away along the bamboo floor.

Ritual of *Wanna Stita Guri Janggia*: At around 11:00 a.m. the *nokma* performs the ritual of *Wanna Stita Guri Janggia* or the ritual of agreement with the gods. The

nokma ties one of the bamboo cross beams above the sacred post with an *olmak*¹⁶³ as a symbol of promise to continue their good relationship with the gods.

Ritual of Mipanchi-Miruan Goa: At around 11:30 a. m. the ritual of *Mipanchi-Meruan Goa*, or feasting on fresh rice and curry together with the gods is made. After the ritual of *mipanchi-miruan*, cooked rice mixed with curry and *kaji*, the special beef curry is served to all the participants and visitors. Feasting is part of the ritual in this ceremony. The *nokma* scatters the *mipanchi-miruan* in the *dongram cha-rama* or the middle room of the *A-chik* traditional house for the gods. This is called *mipanchi-miruan goa*.¹⁶⁴

Ritual of Incense Burning: At dawn on the second day of the festival, the *a-king nokma*, who is also the priest, goes to the river to catch crabs for the ritual. It is used as one of the sacrificial offerings while the others in the village observe *salnima*, or abstention from the day's works, especially from working in the *jhum* field. In some villages, *a-king nokmas* catch four crabs and some others catch two for use in the ritual of sending off *Mima Kiri Rokkime*.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ A traditional rope made of the bark of a tree with the botanical name *sterculia villosa*

¹⁶⁴ Rice that is specially brought to the *nokma*'s house and kept to be given to the gods on the second and last day of the *Wangala* Festival.

¹⁶⁵ It is said that the gods in the ancient days on the occasion of the funeral ceremony for *Mima Kiri Rokkime* sacrificed a crab. In the same manner crabs are caught and killed by the head of the family for the goddess in the evening. This ritual is performed at every household. It is an essential part of the *Wangala*.

At around 1:00 pm. the ritual of Incense Burning is performed by the *nokma* at the sacred post ¹⁶⁶ on behalf of the entire village. Before starting the ritual of incense burning, all the doors of the *nokma*'s house are closed till the end of the ceremony.¹⁶⁷ For this ritual, the *a-king nokma* comes clad in traditional clothes from their room which is called the *dun* to the sacred post to perform the ritual. The wife of the *nokma*, (the *nokma me-chik* who is also the *a-king nokma* herself) follows him, clad in the traditional costumes and jewellery. The *a-king nokma*'s son-in-law comes immediately after her, bringing coal in a *chokela*.¹⁶⁸ In some villages they use a metal gong called *an-chi ja-pa* for burning the coal for the ritual. While the priest drops the pieces of incense into the burning coal as offering to the god *Misi Saljong*, the drummers and other musicians play continuously and their music reaches the crescendo.

On the day of the incense burning ceremony, the point of the sickle is stuck on one or two crabs on the chest and the others are set free after rice-beer has been poured on them.¹⁶⁹ They believe that they are setting them free for *Mima Kiri Rokkime*.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ This is the main post of the house which is believed to be the abode of different gods. Considering it as a sacred place they pour the blood of animal sacrifices on it during ceremonies.

¹⁶⁷ An achik traditional house usually has only three doors, the main door at the entrance called the *nokkra*, the door at the back called *nokdechol* or *nokgil*, and the side door called *balpongra* or *srek*,

¹⁶⁸ A brass or earthen bowl with a holder, which is used for burning incense during rituals.

¹⁶⁹ This signifies that the harvesting of crop is in actual cutting the head of Rokkime or it means the death of mim Kiri Rokkime

¹⁷⁰ Two or one of the crabs are killed while performing the ritual and the other one or two are set free after pouring rice-beer over them. Setting the crabs free sends a message to the other stinging and poisonous creatures like insects and snakes, about the power of man and god over them. The villagers even say that during the dry season such animals and insects are afraid to come out in the open on account of fear. In some villages they use only two crabs, one for the ritual and the other to be set free after piercing it in the chest.

The *nokma* chants an incantation while the sacrificial offering of crabs is being done, saying:

*Chusimrana pongdingna, maljurina tadingna,
Minimani siana, Rokkimeni bon·ana;
Ian kasi saongjok, ian wenbandaongjok;
Kangkaredangko, nanggong cholsidrangko,
Minimani wil·ana, Na·nimani siana,
Ian ja·rim akongjok, ian chelpina pe·ongjok.*

For the *chusimra* post, for the *maljuri* pillar,
For the death of Mother Rice, for the end of Rokkime;
Wearing the feathers (*do·me*)¹⁷¹ on our turban; here we have started the dance;
Our first fruits and vegetables of all shapes and sizes,
For cutting the Mother of Paddy, for the death of Mother of Fish,
Here the first crop is being harvested; here we are breaking the legs of the crabs and piercing their chest to kill.

They offer it as a sacrificial item for the death of *Mima Kiri Rokkime* as had been done in the past. The others crabs are set free after piercing them in the chest at the time of the ritual.¹⁷²

The drummers beat drums continuously while the ritual is being performed by the priest saying:

*Da·alsalde Sani ki·manchionga, Aji wal·du kaonga;
Sanini ki·manchi ki·sokjok, Ajini wal·du kaa wal·sokjok;
Bilsina ki·manchijok, jakarina wal·du kajok;
Akaru ronggonggenaba ki·manchia;
Migaru okstinaba wal·du kaa;
Ta·ma mikkangna ki·manchia;
E·ching galwangna wal·du kaa.
A·randodoona, jenggi balbingona,
Ki·manchipiletnawa, wal·du kapiletnawa;*

¹⁷¹ The *A·chik* traditional head-gear made of cock's tail feathers.

¹⁷² Setting the crabs free is meant to inform the other crabs about the sacrifice made in the festival and that that their fellow crabs were being sent companions to the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* on her journey home in the ocean

*Sonia mesekiona, sani do-grangjaona
Gitok wal-e ratona, delnao chingkam pitona;
Ki-manchipilna wal-du kapilna.*

The above lines tell about the thanksgiving prayers offered by the priest while performing the ritual to their god, the provider of seed-grains. As mentioned in the *A-chik* folktales, *Sani* and *Aji* were believed to be the first persons to receive the seed-grains of paddy. In this chant, the priest mentions the previous prayers that they had made at the beginning of the season for the god's blessings to their crops. As they had prayed, the provider has answered their requests and blessed them with the abundance of a good harvest. Therefore, with grateful hearts they offer thanksgiving to the provider at the end of the harvest season.

It is believed that when the smoke reaches the middle of the house, the *dongrama* and *cha-rama*, which are used as the living room, the first *nokma* performs the *grika* dance wielding a sword and a shield and the dancing troupe follows him singing the '*Ahaia*'¹⁷³ or '*Oh...hoi...a*'¹⁷⁴ folk song. After this, they dance around to the racks constructed over the fireplace of the middle room. After chanting incantations for sometime at the base of the sacred post, the priest takes the burning incense through the room. The participants dance inside the house for sometime, then the *nokma* carries the incense to the altar *located* in the courtyard. The rest follow him

¹⁷³ This folk song is sung in the Sasatgre village; one person leads in singing the song and others follow singing '*ahaia ahaia*'... after every line.

¹⁷⁴ This folk song is sung in the Gambaregre and Sadolpara villages.

dancing in a row to entertain their gods. At that moment, one of the celebrants¹⁷⁵ fires a blank shot with a traditional gun called *sang slai* which looks like a musket.¹⁷⁶

There the priest offers another prayer to their gods and dances encircling the altar in the courtyard. The incantations are chanted to entertain *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* before sending them off to the *Sagal Ama Rekbok Chiga*, the ocean. While incense is being sprinkled on the burning coals, the *nokma* says:

Poi..Apa Misimo, Nama Saljongne
Da-a bilsinaba jakarinaba, ki-manchipiletnawa
Wal-du kapiletnawa... Saljong

Poi¹⁷⁷father *Misi*, good *Saljong*
 For this year, for this season,
 We will make an agreement,
 We will fix a date...*Saljong*.....

They stop dancing for sometime and sing popular folk songs like the *dani*, *aje*, *serejing* and *gonda doka*. Suitable words befitting the occasion are composed for the songs.

(d) *Jol Ana* or *Jol Wata* Ceremony: The ritual of *Jol Ana* or *Jol Wata* is performed on the same day after the incense burning ceremony. This ritual is performed in the second *nokma*'s house. The ritual is intended to recognise the power of the second *nokma* which he exercises in the absence of the first *nokma*.

¹⁷⁵ One of the close relatives of the *nokma*

¹⁷⁶ A traditional *A-chik* gun, which looks like a musket.

¹⁷⁷ The villagers are wishing good luck to *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* while sending them off to their permanent home.

To start the ritual of *Jol Wata*, the villagers are invited by beating the *dimdima* or *nagra* drum to house of the second *nokma*. When the men arrive at the second *nokma*'s house, before the ceremony they eat *kaji*¹⁷⁸ and drink rice-beer together. The music of sacred drums, long drums, gongs, horns and flutes are played for sometime. Soon after, they reach the house of the *nokma*'s son-in-law or the second *nokma*¹⁷⁹ playing the drums and he plucks a *do·me*, the head-dress made of a bunch of feathers from the wall of *dunsam*.

It is permissible to perform the *grika* dance¹⁸⁰ in the second *nokma*'s house because it is looked upon as snatching away the gods' blessings from the first *nokma*.¹⁸¹ Therefore, as soon as they enter, the second *nokma* plucks the head-dress feathers from the first *Nokmas*' *dunsam* wall because the head dress which is quite elaborately done, signifies greater power in the first *nokma*. It also signifies the respect the second *nokma* has for the first *nokma* eventhough he would be trying to snatch away the blessings from the first *Nokma*. This act seems to indicate that the powers of the first *Nokma* are definite. The priest performs the ritual of libation to the god, *Misi Saljong*. When the ritual is over, they go back to the first *nokma*'s house and continue dancing and singing the whole night. It is believed that while proceeding from the first *nokma*'s house to that of the second, they are taking *Misi Saljong* for a visit. The visit also includes drinking rice-beer and making music. As they drink,

¹⁷⁸ A special item of meat and liver prepared in the *Wangala* festival.

¹⁷⁹ One of the sons-in-law of the *nokma* who is capable of shouldering the role of *nokma* is selected to be the second *nokma* of the village.

¹⁸⁰ A traditional dance solely performed by one man brandishing a sword and shield and praising the strength and courage of their fore-fathers and expressing confidence in himself.

¹⁸¹ It is customary that the *grika*¹⁸¹ dance is first performed by the *a-king nokma* in his house; then with his permission, others can also perform the *grika* dance.

every devotee first pours out a portion of the rice-beer that is served as offering to
 * *Misi Saljong*.

The Third Day

(a)The Ritual of *Saljong Rodila*: In this ritual, *Misi Saljong* is entertained by taking him on a visit to all the houses in the village. Therefore, the ritual is called *Misi Saljong Rodila* or taking *Misi Saljong* for a visit. No ritual is performed on that day as in the day of *salnima*. The villagers are forbidden to carry on the daily activities and chores such as going to the forests or the *jhum* fields. It is believed that if one does so it offends the god *Misi Saljong*. Misfortunes may occur in such families. After the visit they dance and sing folk songs of *dani*, *aje*, praising the land and their gods or the creation of the earth and so on.

The Fourth Day

***Bisri Bisra* or ‘breaking the group into smaller groups ’:** On the fourth day of the festival, people continue to drink rice-beer and feast among their own clan members¹⁸². The people divide themselves into groups in accordance to their respective clans. This custom is known as *Bisri Bisra* or in some areas it is also called *Gria Busru*. Feasting and merry-making with the relatives takes the whole day. No ritual is performed even on the fourth day.

The Fifth Day

¹⁸² This day of feasting in the village is observed separately by each clan or *mahari* in the house of one of the clan members which is fixed by rotation each year.

Kram Gogata or ‘returning back the *kram* to its place’: On the last day of the *Wangala* festival, at around 11:00 a.m., people go to the *nokma*’s house beating the drums and carrying the last jars of rice-beer from their homes. Women carry cooked rice and curry pack as on the second day of the festival for the *mipanchi-meruan cha-a* to serve as the last meal to the gods and the participants.

The packed rice and curry from each household are received by the relatives of the *nokma* and are kept at one place in the house of the *nokma* before the ceremony. They mix the rice and curry together in the winnowing fans as many as they receive. They keep them at the cross-beam till the time of the ritual.

The *nokma* performs the final ritual of the *Wangala* festival on the fifth day at the sacred post, chanting incantations to send off *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Misi Saljong* to their permanent abode. Incense burning and the ritual of libation are offered even on the last day to their gods. After the ritual, the villagers drink rice-beer; the *mipanchi-meruans* are served to all the people in the ceremony. After a while they deposit the sacred drums in their place in the *nokma*’s house and they disperse.¹⁸³ That is why this ritual is known as *Kram Gogata*.

Manner of Observation: During this occasion the villagers are very hospitable and they happily receive people from different neighbouring villages; even strangers are warmly welcomed at this time. During this festival, the Mother of Rice, *Mima Kiri*

¹⁸³ Others take back their own drums without any ceremony.

Rokkime is lovingly welcomed to the festival and ritually given a warm send off to their home; the ocean, on the last day of the festival.

In the afternoon of the first day, before *Rugala* ceremony, the bull is slaughtered at a sacrificial post¹⁸⁴. The sacrifice of animal blood is done in honour of the god *Misi Saljong* as well as other gods like *Risi*, *Goera-Kalkame*, and *Susime-Salgira*. The blood of the sacrificial bull is first smeared on *tilta*, and then on the *kosi*¹⁸⁵ placed in the village courtyard, on the front and side walls of the *a-king nokma*'s house and in the house walls of *kram* owners¹⁸⁶. The meat is shared by each household as is done in other festivals. Soon after, they paste rice-powder which is mixed with water in the brass gongs (*rang*) smeared on the walls of houses, on the *krams*, the long traditional drums, on the people attending the ceremony and on the village altar. This act of smearing is known as *nokma wanti / wanchi toka*. This symbolizes the full participation in the ceremony. After every ritual they enjoy drinking together. Young men and women drink and dance the whole night in the village courtyard and in the *nokma*'s house. After celebrating this festival, the farmers are permitted to consume all the seasonal crops from their fields.

Beliefs and Practices: The *Wangala* festival is a fulfillment of the past agreement of man with the god *Misi Saljong*. It is a day of thanksgiving for their gods' blessings

¹⁸⁴ A sturdy post erected at the village courtyard for the purpose of tying the sacrificial bull and slaughtering it.

¹⁸⁵ A special stone erected at the centre of the village for *Goera Kalkame* the gods of strength, to be assured of his presence. *Goera* and *Kalkame* are credited with the defense of the village against all outside aggression and diseases.

¹⁸⁶ There are three to four families of *kram* owners in one village. Most of them are related to the *a-king nokma*.

celebrated every year. This thought of gratitude is found among the *A-chik* traditional believers even today. Traditional believers faithfully give their farm products to their gods. Therefore, they always invoke the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* in the sacred post with incense burning, libation ritual at the end of every year. Prayers are offered by the priest seeking their blessing in the forthcoming season.

The burning of incense is done to welcome the god *Misi Saljong* as he desired. Another purpose is to keep good relations with their gods. They believe that if they do not observe this seriously, the god *Misi Saljong* will severely punish them in the way that had been done to *Asi* and *Malja*¹⁸⁷

On the days of the festival, everyone in the village keep themselves busy cooking and receiving people. Whoever comes to the festival is welcomed with rice-beer. In the distant past, it was said that they did not drink water during such festivals; instead they served rice-beer to all the visitors. Even today, rice-beer is a must in every *A-chik* traditional festival.

A-chiks believe that if there are more guests in the village during the festivals, they will receive more blessings from their gods. Another belief is that the original abode of the gods and goddesses' is the ocean. Therefore, the worshippers warmly call up *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* from the ocean in the beginning of the

¹⁸⁷ *Asi* and *Malja* were two persons who did not observe the 'day of *salnima*' or abstaining from works on the preparation day for the *Wangala* festival. As a result both died unnatural deaths which were caused as a lesson by the god *Misi Saljong*. *A-chiks* commonly use this phrase, '*Asi-Malja*' to mean that it is forbidden by the gods.

farming season; and send them off after the harvest season to their abode. If it is not done, they will not be blessed with good harvest the following year.

While the priest is performing the ritual of incense burning, devotees are not allowed to go out of the house through the main door. They say other gods and goddesses also come to attend the ceremony with *Misi Saljong* and they mingle with the people. For an emergency, the back door or the side door is used. Any guest from another village cannot leave before the incense burning ceremony. Another belief is that while burning the incense, the smoke should fill the room and go up along the ridge of the roof and out through the back. If it does, they predict that the forthcoming year will be a prosperous one. If the smoke of the burnt incense moves along the post, they say that the crops for the year will be good, but if the smoke scatters, the year will not be a good one. In case there is a blazing fire while incense is being sprinkled, it is believed that misfortune may occur in the village.

2.12 THE FESTIVAL OF WANBASALA

This festival is observed by the *A-chik* farmers who follow the indigenous faith. It is celebrated in the village to beseech the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bless the food-grains in their granaries. Prayers are offered to seek protection of the villagers from all the possible dangers of stealing or destruction of the food-grains.

Nature of the Festival: This festival is celebrated in November or sometimes in December after every two years alternately with the *Wankadoa* festival. It is observed in the village for two to three days. Animal blood sacrifices are made to appease the

benevolent and malevolent gods. The sacrificial offerings are made to the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*,¹⁸⁸ *Salgra-Susime*, *Bang-Skal*¹⁸⁹ to ask for blessings from the gods and forestall any harm to the villagers throughout the year. The rituals are performed by the heads of the families in front of their respective granaries.

Purpose of the Festival: The *A-chik* farmers devotedly observe this festival to honour the god *Misi Saljong* and the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. Prayers are offered to invite blessings upon the stored paddy in their granary so that it will be sufficient for the entire year. The villagers also implore the gods not to lead the family members into starvation or sickness in the coming year. A purification ritual of egg-breaking is performed to purify the people and the village.

Preparation for the festival: As is done in other festivals, the *a-king nokma* calls the villagers for a meeting well ahead of the festival. In the meeting, a date is set and necessary arrangements are made. After this meeting, the *a-king nokma* gives consent to the villagers to prepare rice-beer and other essential items for the celebration. Each family keeps four eggs and a chicken with white feathers ready for the ritual. If the items for the ritual are not available in the village, they buy the items from the bazaar a week ahead of the festival. A day ahead of the festival, in the evening, each family prepares an altar and four *chokreks* or conical bamboo holders, in front of their

¹⁸⁸ The *A-chik farmers* cannot utter the real name of gods and goddesses at the time of the ceremony and while working in the *jhum* field. Therefore, the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* are called by another name as *Merongtek*, said the village elders of Saka-Mronggre, Galwangre, Kama Boldakgre and Boldakgre in Dadenggre area.

¹⁸⁹ The village elders of Dadenggre, Saka-Mronggre, Galwangre said that the malevolent gods *Raksi/Rakkasi* and *Dombe* represent the god *Bang-Skal*. Interview was conducted on 4th July, 2003 at Saka-Mronggre village under Dadenggre Block.

respective granaries for offerings of sacrifices to the gods. The gods worshipped in this ceremony are (i) *Misi Saljong*, (ii) *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, (iii) *Salgra-Susime* and (iv) *Bang-Skal*.

In the altar, leaves of *araru* which are a species of *alpinia* are wrapped and bound to the altar. The villagers prepare a separate *chokrek* to the god *Salgra-Susime* with the leaves of *araru* and a door is made out of split bamboo. Another *chokrek* is made separately to the malevolent god *Bang-Skal*.

Performance of the Rituals: In *A-chik* villages, the close relatives live close to each other and construct their houses and granaries separately, keeping a common courtyard in the middle. The heads of the families in each hamlet usually perform the ceremonial rituals. Each family performs the ritual separately in front of their respective granaries in the morning at about 8:00am. Before the ritual, each family has to place the sacrificial items like eggs, chicken and rice-beer at the base of the altar. The blood sacrifice of the chicken and the egg-breaking purification ritual are performed to get rid of the impurities of the village and the people themselves. For this reason, only chicken with white feathers are used in this festival.¹⁹⁰ Any elderly man of the family specifically the maternal uncle of the family is entitled to perform the rituals. A priest first kills the chicken, later smears its blood and fixes the fine feathers on each *chokrek*. The four eggs are sacrificed by breaking them one after another on the bamboo post which is attached to the *chokreks*. Then the priest chants a prayer of purification by performing an egg-breaking ritual on each *chokrek*. Later, he

¹⁹⁰ An elderly village leader named Monen Mrong Marak from Ka-ma-Boldakgre (Dadenggre Block) answered to my queries in January, 2004.

invokes a prayer to the god *Misi Saljong* to bless the family with abundant rice in the growing season and to protect each household from every hazard of poverty and sickness throughout the year. After the rituals, the liver of the chicken and egg-yolk are cooked together in a bamboo cylinder. The cooked items are divided equally on the plantain leaves to be offered to the benevolent and malevolent gods. The offerings are made at the base of the altar and the *chokreks*. Egg-shells are strung on a bamboo strip and festooned on one of the *chokreks*. When the rituals are all over, each family cooks their own food separately at the sacrificial place itself. After cooking, they place the rice and curry at one place and eat lunch together. Strangers may misinterpret this sight as the day of family feasting. On this day, well-to-do families cook the special variety of rice like *sarengma* (the fragrant variety of rice) but economically disadvantaged families generally cook the most commonly found variety used daily called *megra* or ordinary rice.

In the evening, all the villagers come to the *nokma*'s house to drink and dance together.

Manner of the Observation: After the ritual, the villagers collect all the used and unused materials, such as plantain leaves, firewood, leaves of bamboo or strings and gather them together in a big bamboo basket. This big bamboo basket is supported at both ends by a strong bamboo stump. The basket is called *dola* in Dudanggre village and the ritual of carrying away the refuse is called *Bang Roka*.¹⁹¹ *Bang* is believed to

¹⁹¹ It is a ritual of purification that is performed to free the people from any kind of trouble, sickness, harm and problems.

be a malevolent spirit whereas the word *Roka* literally means getting rid of the malevolent spirits from the place. This signifies purifying all kinds of impurities from the village and its people. In the evening after the ceremony, the villagers gather in the *nokma*'s house for feasting and dancing which continues for two to three days till they consume the jars of rice-beer that was prepared for the festival.

Beliefs and Practices: During the festival, the whole village strictly observes a day of abstention¹⁹² in the village. No villager can go out to the jungle, to the *jhum* field or to the river till the rituals are over. According to their belief, staying in the village is equivalent to spending time with the gods.

In every *A·chik* ritual, purification ceremony of the place is often performed to encourage mutual coexistence with their gods. They believe that the gods do not live in defiled regions nor do they bless the people who do not appease them with offerings and prayers. Therefore, special purification of the entire surroundings of the village and its pathways is done before the ceremonies are begun, as a symbol of welcoming the gods, so as to be able to receive their blessings.

2.13 THE FESTIVAL OF WANKADOA

The festival of *Wankadoa* is observed among the *Am·bengs* or *A·bengs*¹⁹³. There are *Saka A·bengs* and *Kama A·bengs*. The *A·bengs* living in the Ranggira area are called *Saka A·bengs* meaning those who live in the higher altitudes and the *A·bengs* residing

¹⁹² On the day of *Salnima* the whole village abstains from their work specially in the *jhum* field.

¹⁹³ This festival is still in practice in Dadengre area.

in the Assam borders are called the *Ka-ma A-bengs*, meaning those who live in the lowlands. In this festival, rituals are performed to acknowledge the god *Misi Saljong* as the giver of the seed-grains of paddy and wealth to the people.

Nature of the Festival: The *Wankadoa* festival is celebrated in November every two years, alternately with the festival of *Wanbasala*. The festival is observed for three days in the village after the *Wangala* festival.¹⁹⁴ Blood sacrifice is made to the Creator *Tatara Rabuga*, *Misi Saljong* and the malevolent gods.

Purpose of the Festival: The festival is observed to offer thanksgiving to the god *Misi Saljong* for helping the worshippers obtain a good harvest and receive wealth. Invocations are made by the *nokma* or the priest of the village to acquire the same blessings even in the next season of cultivation.

Preparation for the Festival: A week ahead, the *a-king nokma* summons the entire village for a meeting and a date is fixed for the festival. The leading members are chosen from each family and they make collections of money and rice at a fixed rate. Every family prepares rice-beer for the festival and each contributes a jar of rice-beer and at least a kilogram of rice to the *nokma*'s house for the festival. The village *nokma* takes all the responsibilities of hosting the visitors and relatives from other villages during the festival.

¹⁹⁴ According to the *A-chik* traditional belief, it is an important festival and they are to observe it sincerely to please their gods; but to hold the festival the villagers have to incur lots of expenses. In some villages even the *a-king nokmas* are not capable of holding such festivals. This is one of the reasons of gradually giving up the practice of observing the festivals these days.

In the morning of the festival, the villagers prepare an altar in the courtyard which is in the centre of the village. Near the altar, a bamboo pole is placed to keep the ornaments of each family for the purification ritual.

Performance of the Rituals:

The First Day

(i) Ritual in the village altar-

(a) Purification ritual of ornaments: To begin with, the villagers are called to the village courtyard to perform the ritual of purification at 6:00a.m with the beating of the drum called *dimdima*¹⁹⁵. When they hear the sound of the drum, the villagers come up to the sacrificial altar to attend the ritual with their family ornaments and place them on the bamboo pole. The *a-king nokma* performs all the rituals on behalf of the entire village. It is a custom of the worshippers to purify the ornaments in order to be able to wear them and dance in the festival.¹⁹⁶ The *nokma* or the priest chants an incantation while performing the purification ritual of the ornaments of each family. After incantations are chanted, he performs the ritual of libation of rice-beer at the village altar. The ornaments have to be purified with rice-beer; or else, they believe that the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will not be happy and the villagers may not be blessed by their gods in the following year.

This ritual is over by 10:00 a.m. in the morning.

¹⁹⁵ This drum is commonly known as *nagra*, but in some villages it is also called *dama dalsang*

¹⁹⁶ The villagers believe that they cannot use unclean materials or ornaments in this festival.

(b) Ritual of expressing affection to *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Misi Saljong*: This ritual is performed on the same day and starts at around 11:00 a.m. at the village altar after drinking rice-beer together in the *nokma*'s house. After the ritual of purification, the ornaments are considered clean enough to be used in the festival by the villagers while dancing round the altar with the gods. They all come together to the village altar dressing up beautifully to dance with the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. In this ritual the villagers dance round the village altar as in the *Wangala* festival. While dancing with the gods, the elderly women from each family carry the grains of paddy in a gourd,¹⁹⁷ just as they carry seed-grains in a *gachek*¹⁹⁸ while working in the *jhum* fields during the sowing season. This ritual is symbolic of their love and affection to the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and the god *Misi Saljong*. The *A-chik* forefathers say that the paddy itself is the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. During the dance, the women lead the dancers, carrying the grains of paddy like they would carry babies, with them. After the women dancers, the priest follows and dances with the group. Then a *dani* singer sings throughout this ritual of dancing along with the gods. Finally, the drummers follow with the long traditional drums, dancing in a circle around the altar.

In this dance, the villagers use all the traditional drums in the village along with other musical instruments like horn, gongs and flutes. On the day of the ceremony, the priest puts on the traditional dress called *ba-ra marang* and the other

¹⁹⁷ *Raw/lau* are dried and used as a container to store seeds for the season.

¹⁹⁸ This is a tiny bamboo/ cane basket that is used while sowing seeds in the *jhum* field.

dancers also wear their best traditional dresses. They adorn themselves with traditional ornaments like necklaces, and head ornaments such as *mending* which is a kind of colourful band and *pilne* which is a hair pin made of pure silver. *Pilne* is decorated with colourful beads and cock's feathers. *Kadesil* is worn by men and *kamaka* by women; they are worn on the forehead. While dancing they sing *ahoma* (a folk song) together till they reach the *nokma's* house. The male dancers sing-

Hoi.....

Ahoe.....*hoe*.....

And the female dancers follow

Ho.....*aia*.....*ho*....

after the male dancers in unison. They all dance together around the sacred post in the *nokma's* house. After sometime they come out of the house to the altar. It is then that the *nokma* leads the dancers with the *grika* dance to the altar. In this ceremony, they dance joyfully as in the *Wangala* festival.

The Second Day

Ritual of *A·sima Nia* at the newly selected spot for the *a·dal* (new) *jhum* field: On the second day of the festival, the villagers gather again in the *nokma's* house at about 8:00a.m in the morning. The *nokma* receives the gods and the people to the day's ritual with rice-beer in his house. This sharing of drinks takes about an hour to complete. When all the villagers, visitors and relatives from other villages reach the *nokma's* house, they dance together round the sacred post for about an hour, which the worshippers believe, constitutes a dance with their gods. In the afternoon, at around 1: 00 p.m. all the male members of the village who attend the ceremony go to the place selected as the new *jhum* field to perform the ritual of *A·sima Nia*. When

they reach the spot, they first clear a small portion of the land at the base of a big tree to perform the ritual. In the cleared spot, the priest performs a ritual called *A·sima nia* or 'divination for the new place for cultivation' and an invocation is made to the god *Abet-Rengge* seeking permission to use the land for cultivation. After the invocation to the god, the priest slits the bark of the tree and inserts cotton ball in it to symbolize that the place is claimed by his village. This ritual is performed in November every two years before cutting trees and bamboos for the new *jhum* field.

Manner of Observation: All the villagers observe *salnima* throughout the festival. During the performance of the rituals the *matdoks* play the sacred drum and the other villagers play the long traditional drums, gongs, horns in this festival. The drummers call the villagers for the ritual with the beating of the drums. As they come, the elderly women from each family in the village bring their family ornaments for the purification ritual. When they reach the altar, they hand over the ornaments to the *matdoks* which are of various kinds like *rikgitok*, *rikgitchak*, *dokatchi konal*, *siliting*, ear-rings like *namel*, *naderong* and other ornaments that are used on the head, and waist etc. All these items are placed on the bamboo pole that is placed near the village altar. Then, the priest performs a ritual of purification. After this ritual, the participants drink rice-beer in the *nokma's* house. It is followed by the ritual of dancing along with the gods which is performed around the sacred post and the altar in the village courtyard. For this reason, purification of ornaments is done so that the gods accept the performances of the festival. After every ritual, the villagers serve rice-beer to the gods and to all the participants in the ceremony. Though the ritual is

performed for a day; celebration feasting and dancing continue for three days and nights in the village.

Beliefs and Practices: It is mandatory for all the villagers following indigenous faith to attend the festival. This festival is held to share blessings with others. They believe that the gods bless generous hearts. If they are selfish, the gods may take back even the little that they receive. They observe *salnima* during the days of the festival. This obligation is not only for the believers but for all the people who are in the village. Contributions of rice or cash and kind from any person are accepted.

Conclusion:

All the festivals mentioned in this research have been recorded by the researcher from the recollections of indigenous believers who have been interviewed in the villages. This participatory narrative though helpful to some extent, also has its limitations. The researcher has found that as the believers narrated their experiences they also had their own problems in recollecting as they talked. One reason is that except for some major and popular festival, many are not observed anymore. Various factors have been traced to the cause of the loss of these festivals, such as, economic, social, and religious causes. There are also cultural hindrances which check the popularity of these traditional beliefs and practices.

To a great extent the invasion of modernity may be responsible for the loss of the customs and traditions. Most of the faithful followers, who have refused to take on the new religion, live in very poor economic conditions; therefore, since the

festivals require excessive spending in terms of cash as well as in kind, the people are unable to rigorously follow the rules of their religion. In majority of the villages they are no longer observed in great detail. Some of the rituals have been overlooked due to the lack of manpower and qualified priests and are almost lost to history now, as they have not been documented.

Lack of time is also a major factor in not observing these festivals. With the rise of modernity and a fast paced lifestyle, they are not able to keep up with the demands and strict rules of their indigenous customs. Manpower, as already mentioned above, is another important factor in not being able to keep up these festivals. In fact none of these festivals can be held and their rituals conducted, without the co-operation of a large number of people. With the advent of the modern lifestyle, it is not always possible to have manpower ready for the asking at all times. Keeping these various factors in mind, the researcher has been able to identify the reasons mentioned for the decline of the traditional festivals.

However, those who adhere to their indigenous beliefs, still devotedly follow the customs of their forefathers' in spite of the unavoidable incursion of modernity and the new religion. In spite of their own poverty, they still faithfully give offerings to their gods. It has also been found, that besides changing the way of life, Christianity has also stopped the passing down of knowledge from the fathers to the sons. Not only generation gaps but also big gaps of belief have thus been created. It is because of this that tradition is being lost with the passage of time. In some cases the *nokmas* themselves have converted to Christianity and become modernized. So with the

acceptance of a new belief the old ways of life are also lost. They are not able to pass on their ways to their children and the knowledge of A.chik ancestral past is fading away with them. Incantations which were very important in passing on information about the glory of our fathers and forefathers have also been lost to the modern generation.

Besides not being able to pass on the traditional customs and traditions, as mentioned earlier, they have also not been documented. On account of many other connected factors much of *A·chik* culture has been oral in nature. The absence of a script has been a major factor in the oral nature of *A·chik* traditions and culture. This is another factor in the loss of undocumented traditions, beliefs and practices. On the whole, with the advent of Christianity and with it the arrival of education and modernity, not much importance was given to the observance of these festivals. Even so, whatever remains today has been considered an important part of *A·chik* culture which is in need of documentation and preservation.

CHAPTER-III

CHAPTER III

FUNERAL RITES OF THE *A·CHIKS*

3.01 Funeral rites of the *A·chiks*

The *A·chiks* have various cultural practices, rituals and ceremonies that are observed by all sections of society. Most of these performances correspond with the seasons, agricultural cycles, and so on. In this chapter, the researcher will be dealing with the funeral rituals and ceremonies related by the *Atongs*. It is alarming to note however, that the manner of performance of traditional practices is getting modernized year after year. It is noted with poignancy and fear that these traditional rites and rituals are fading away and that in the near future they may even disappear completely. In the recent times, a section of young men and women who began to realize the richness of their fore-father's traditions became interested in preserving these disappearing rituals. They are now working hard to retrieve their rich cultural heritage to preserve it for posterity, so that they can retain the distinctness of their identities. Interestingly, this enthusiasm has paved the way for the safeguarding and documentation of different rituals and ceremonies of all the sub-divisions of the *A·chik* society. In line with the spirit of these young enthusiasts the researcher would like to discuss one of the important funeral rites of the *Atongs*, namely, the *Chugan* and the other which is called *Delang So·a* or *Rua* by the *Am·bengs* and by the *A·wes* as *Mangona*. This is a post-funeral festival which has been observed and witnessed by the researcher during repeated visits for field studies in the different districts of Garo Hills.

The researcher has been able to give the tentative timing of each ritual as observed during the field study. Earlier *A·chiks* used to calculate time by looking at the position of the sun and the moon during various seasons. The cock crow was also another cue for fixing their work schedule.

3.02 CHUGAN or CHOUGIN

Meaning of the Term *Chugan*:

Chugan is a post-funeral festival of the *Atongs*, a section of the *A·chiks*. The word *Chugan* in the *Atong* dialect is *Chougin* which is a compound word formed out of two words *chou* and *gin*. *Chou* in *Atong* means *chu* or 'rice-beer' and *gin* means *ganata* 'clothed with' or *mande ra·ata* in *A·chik* language meaning 'revering or honouring with heartfelt respect'.¹⁹⁹ Thus, *Chugan* or *Chougin* means the commemoration of the departed ones as well as an observance in honour of the god *Misi Saljong* through offerings of rice-beer and prayers. It is an interesting fact to note that the *Atongs* highly respect the spirits of the dead and perform rituals with reverence to their gods.²⁰⁰

According to the *A·chik* belief, a dead person's spirit does not leave the world of the living without a ritualistic adieu by family members and the *mahari* (relatives). The *Atongs* believe that it is the will of the gods and goddesses that *Chugan* is

¹⁹⁹ Mihir N. Sangma has also mentioned the same in his book: *Maniani Bidik*, 1985.p.39.

²⁰⁰ It is not only the *Atongs* but almost every other section of *A·chiks* respects the departed souls with a series of rituals in their traditional religion. For example the *A·wes*, *Chisaks*, *Rugas* and *A·bengs* have the ceremony of *Delang So·a* or *Mangona*.

observed. Therefore, a ceremony to bid farewell to the spirit of the dead has to be held. This ceremony consists of religious rituals and social festivities. They consider it to be the duty of *chra-angde*, the eldest maternal uncle or the eldest son of the departed soul, to take the initiative of arranging for all the requirements connected with the *Chugan* festival. The *Atongs* believe that if the spirit of the deceased is not sent off ritually without observation of *Chugan*, the king of spirits called *Waimong* in *Atong* dialect, will not provide him or her a place to live in the after-life and that he or she may be looked upon as an unsociable person who might not have been loved even by the relatives. It is interesting to find that *Chugan* is in fact, a festival loaded with socially significant meanings and gestures which have smoothened the cycle of life of the *Atong* society as a whole.

The *Atongs* inhabit the south-eastern part of the Garo Hills and some parts of the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. A large number of *Atongs* are also found settled in the Indo-Bangladesh border on the banks of the river Simsang. *Chugan* is a very important occasion for the *Atongs* in the sense that the villagers show respect to the spirits of their dead. This occasion also has a direct bearing on their faith and belief. They observe it with a great religious fervour. However, modernization has brought in some changes in the cultural practices without their realizing it. Migration to other towns for educational and other reasons, the routine of school education and also conversion to Christianity are some of the aspects of modernity which have affected tradition directly or indirectly. It is worthwhile to note that basic tradition has merged with modernity in certain ritualistic practices.

The field study of *Chugan* has been a laborious and at the same time, an enriching experience. Thorough research had been conducted for over a period of four years. In the years, 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2001, the researcher had concentrated on the festivities at the Siju *Atong* area of the South Garo Hills and in the Rongtok (2003) and Kalu *Atong* (2004) area of West Khasi Hills. Despite the many changes that have come along the way, it is heartening to find that the traditional beliefs and ceremony still continue to be practised with passionate fervour and dedication among the *Atongs* in these areas.

Various Sub-Groups of the *Atongs*:

Though the *Atongs* are a sub-division of the *A·chiks*, according to the field survey, they can be further classified into six groups. These sub-divisions are made on the basis of the different intonations in different areas. They are:

(1) *Atong Kitchu*²⁰¹

(2) *Atong Badri*²⁰²

(3) *Atong Siju*

(4) *Halwa Atong*²⁰³

(5) *Dabuk Atong*²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ *Atong Kitchus* are found mainly in thirteen villages, namely- Goreng, Nengchigin, Kanchusruk Gittim, Rangram Jangkre, Rongtok, Kallu (in Khasi Hills), Kallu (in Garo Hills), Bokchung, Rengdim, Nengwal Do·bakol, Agreng, Rongding A·we and Medu A·we.

²⁰² *Atong Badris* occupy three villages, namely- Rongsa A·we, Badri Jaisru Gittim and Rongdong.

²⁰³ *Halwa Atongs* occupy Rongru A·sim area; among them, only two or three villages are still observing the *Chugan* festival.

²⁰⁴ *Dabuk Atongs* are found in Alokpang, Gokagre, Masighat and Baghmara; in this area many have converted to Christianity.

(6) *Atong Dual*²⁰⁵

The *Atong Kitchus* inhabit the central part of the Garo Hills, while the other groups are found in the south-eastern part, according to the survey; Siju, Kalu and Rong tok continue to follow the festival of *Chugan*.

The researcher however, had sufficient opportunities to make an in-depth study of the *Chugan* festival in the Siju, Kalu and Rong tok area. It would also be worthwhile to mention the sources of the researcher in writing this work. The sources of information for this research are based on:

- the participatory narratives heard and witnessed by the researcher.
- The details of the data collected from various villages are discussed later in this chapter.
- the narratives of the participants themselves in the ceremony.
 - the narratives of the villagers recalled from memory.
 - the field work done in the festival is part of the coursework²⁰⁶ of

M.A. in Garo, in the NEHU, Tura Campus.

²⁰⁵ There were difficulties in tracing the *Atong Duals* in this research due to technical reasons, like the lack of proper connecting roads, the distance involved, etc., therefore, the researcher was unable to find the exact number of *Atong Dual* villages. According to the information obtained from available sources, there are about fifteen villages in India and some more in Bangladesh.

²⁰⁶ The researcher had been teaching the two courses on traditional poetry and folklore, in the Department of Garo, NEHU, Tura Campus from 1996-2004. Besides classroom teaching, the researcher has also been collecting and documenting data related to *A·chik* culture with the help of students who are familiar with traditional rituals.

- the existing documented works on the *Chugan*.²⁰⁷

The process requires repeated witnessing of the festival as it is essential to comprehend its numerous variations effectively. This is because of the fact that the *Atong* dialect, as well as, the rituals in it, was too complex to be understood at one sitting.

The researcher had the fortune to witness the *Chugan* festival observed in honour of deceased persons in three villages: Siju, located about forty kilometers to the north of Baghmara, the district headquarters of South Garo Hills, and Rong-tok and Kalu, both situated in West Khasi Hills. In the field study, the first village was Siju Songmong. The name of the deceased person was Ewing Ampang Sangma, a married man, for whom the *Chugan* festival was observed from 22nd to 24th October, 1997. In the same village, from 20th to 22nd October 1999, the researcher witnessed the *Chugan* festival conducted for Pone Richil Marak, a married woman. In another instance, the researcher witnessed *Chugan* conducted for Mrinel Chambugong Marak in the village of Sonai Agal, Siju from 18th to 20th October 2000. In the month of October 2001, from 10th to the 12th, the researcher visited Asakbanda Gittim, Siju, where the *Chugan* rituals were performed for a married woman, Anche Rong-rok Sangma.

At Rong-tok, West Khasi Hills the *Chugan* festival was observed from 7th to 9th December, 2003 for Rokman Ga-re Marak, a married man, who had died in 18th

²⁰⁷ Sangma, M.N. *Maniani Bidik*, 1985. pp.38-53 and two issues of *Chimik* (Vol. II No.3, February, 2004, pp.28-30 and Vol.II No. 5 March, 2004,p.8)

May, 2003. Another festival witnessed by the researcher was that of Meldin Mongri Sangma, a married woman from Kalu, West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, who died in June, 2003. *Chugan* was observed in her honour from 12th to 14th, January, 2004.²⁰⁸

A further source of information was Mr. Devdular Gabil Momin of Rong-tok, West Khasi Hills during an interview with him in April, 2005, who narrated the form of *Chugan* prevalent in his village. He was also generous in sharing his experiences of *Chugan* festival. Another source was a sixty year old priest²⁰⁹ from Kalu in West Khasi Hills, who was interviewed in September, 2004. In the Siju area, *Chugan* is often celebrated in the month of October; in certain other areas as in Kalu and Rong-tok, it is observed in the months of November and December and sometimes in January, in accordance with the harvesting done in the area. It is celebrated for three days and then the fourth day is set aside for the clearance of dues or debts incurred during the festival. Apparently this is also the most opportune moment for romance among some young men and women. On the fourth day, the members of the *maharis* meet the parents or relatives of the man and the woman involved in an affair and seek permission to perform *do·sia*, the *A·chik* traditional system of marriage, practised under the customary law. If the concerned relatives agree, arrangements are made for marriage. Finally, for *A·chiks*, the grand finale of the agricultural cycle is the harvest season which is regarded a time to enjoy and unwind, as farmers are free at this time of the year from much of the tedious works in the fields.

²⁰⁸ In the Rong-tok and Kalu areas, the harvesting of paddy is done in the month of November or December since the people living there cultivate a late variety of paddy called *cha·ging*. Therefore, The *Chugan* festival is observed in the month of December or January after the harvest, according to the convenience of the family members or the *mahari*, who are to host the festival.

²⁰⁹ The priest, who had performed different rituals during the festival, is now no more.

Traditionally, the festivities of the *Chugan* are observed for three days and nights. On all these three days, different rituals are performed and animal sacrifices are offered to the gods and to the deceased. After the ceremonies, feasting, drinking and dancing take place everyday. The studies on *Chugan* festivals observed in the Siju area, as well as in the Rong-tok and Kalu villages are noted below:

A Chronological Representation of the Ceremonies and Rituals of *Chugan*.

First Day	Second Day	Third Day	Fourth Day
Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<i>Jaudanga</i> or <i>Tunapan Sal</i> or the eve of the festival	<i>Butungni</i> or <i>Mitingni</i> or <i>Ong-miting Sal</i> or in the midst of celebration	<i>Atinia</i> or <i>Watchotani</i> or the final day of the festival	<i>Echam Gala</i> or the day of clearance of due or debts, etc.

One of the distinguishing features of the festival is that it involves the expression of both joy and grief. It is observed as a joyous occasion as the members of the deceased family can shower their respects on the spirit of the departed one for the last time, for they cannot do so at the time of his or her death, being overcome with grief at the loss. It includes a sumptuous feast, with drinking and dancing, arranged in honour of the deceased. It is also a sad occasion because the dead man's spirit is finally leaving the world of the living to the distant land of spirits. It is interesting to observe on these days, the combination of dancing, drinking and shedding of tears performed in honour of the gods and the spirit of the deceased. The festival is an

implicit realization of the realities of life; that sorrows and joys are inevitable in life and that they are interconnected. It is observed that the *Chugan* festival also serves many functions.

The various functions of *Chugan* are:

- a thanksgiving to the god *Misi Saljong* for a good harvest;
- a rite to send the spirit of the deceased from the land of the living, to the land of the spirits which the *A-chiks* believe to be Balpakram, this village is located in South Garo Hills;
- an entreaty to the god *Misi Saljong* to bequeath some seed-grains for the next season;
- an occasion for the youngsters to meet and choose their life-partners;
- an occasion for all the villagers to come together to remember the departed, join the festivities and help the family members to overcome their loss. It also helps to enhance the after-life of the deceased in the land of the spirits.

Preparation for the Festival:

(i) *Delang*:

This is a bamboo structure, shaped like a house, constructed as a temporary and safe resting place for the spirit of the deceased till the spirit is ritually sent to its permanent abode. It is built right after the cremation of the dead, in the front-yard of the deceased.

The days of the *Chugan* festival are very important for the *Atongs*. The members of the *maharis* of the deceased and the neighbours do all the preparatory work and collect the necessary materials, well ahead of time. This collection of materials can often take a month. Sometimes it takes just a week or two to collect firewood, banana leaves, to pound and clean rice and so on. The construction or repair of the *delang* is also done by the members of the *mahari* or well-wishers from the village. Inside the *delang*, there is a tiny house structure called *me mang nok* meant for the spirit of the dead to reside in, till it is burnt, which is a symbol of sending off the spirit to its permanent abode. The *delang* is burnt on the third day of the festival. If the members of the family and the *maharis* want to observe *Chugan* for the deceased, at the time of cremation, a ritual is performed to retain the spirit of the deceased till the day of *Chugan*. As a follow up action, a *tilta wa-resu* which is a bamboo pole with leaves intact is also set up on the side of the house of the bereaved family. As a customary announcement that someone in the family has died, a piece of red or white cloth called *ba-ra marang* is also tied to the edge or outer branch of the *tilta wa-resu*.

The rituals of *Chugan* in the *Atong* area differ from those performed for the dead among the *A-beng A-chiks*²¹⁰. The same festival is called *Delang So-a* by the *A-beng* and *Mangona* by the *A-we*.²¹¹ The main difference between the *Atong* and *A-beng*, of keeping the spirit of the deceased before sending it to the land of the dead,

²¹⁰ A sub-division, they are living in the western parts of Garo Hills.

²¹¹ One of the *A-chiks* sub-divisions, living in the northern part of Garo Hills

is that the *A·bengs* erect memorial posts or totem poles called *kima*²¹² to represent the deceased; whereas the *Atongs* preserve the ashes or bones of the deceased in an urn called *grengdik*, 'greng' meaning bone'and 'dik', an urn. The word 'dik' comes from the word *me·dik* which means cooking pot. The urn is carved out of wood, usually out of *bolgipok* or *gambare*²¹³ or they may use an earthen pot to keep the ashes or bones. That is why it is called *grengdik*.

(ii) *Medong rapa* or *Metongbol rapa*:

Another interesting preparatory step for the festival is the hanging of the seed-grains on a bamboo stump by cutting off the ears of paddy, maize and millet for the *Chugan* festival. The ears of paddy are tied together and beautifully suspended from a bamboo stump, almost five feet high. The bamboo stump is prepared with varieties of food-grains and is called *Medong Rapa* or *Metongbol Rapa*. Maize and millet ears are fixed on a long bamboo stump that is attached to the cross-beam (*bilbang*) in *sansia samsuria* where the varieties of items such as seed-grains, materials of daily use, are hung on a bamboo pole for the deceased at the cross-beam of the house. This is especially done to send the seed-grains to Balpakram to appease the spirits or *me·mangs*.

Frequently, the *Delang* and the *Metongbol* which is the bamboo stump prepared with paddy are repaired by the members of the *mahari* and the villagers, a week before the *Chugan* festival. The pictures which have been included in the appendix are of the *medong rapa* near the *delang* and the second one is of the one prepared inside the house at the sacred post. This construction with ears of paddy on a

²¹² It is also called *kima teka* or *krom bota* in some areas.

²¹³ The scientific name is *gmelina arborea*.

bamboo pole inside the house is called *sansea samsuria*. The picture in the appendix §1, shows the *metongbol* with the *me-mang nok* a tiny house constructed for the spirit, on the side of the *delang*.

Performance of the Festival:

First Day:

The sequence of activities relating to *Jaudanga* or *Tunapan Sal* or eve of the festival on the First Day.

<i>Jaudanga or Tunapan Sal or the eve of the festival.</i>	
(i) <i>Sansea Samsuria</i> or the ritual of sharing seed-grains, and other materials of daily use with the spirit. It starts at around 10:00 a.m.	(ii) <i>Kem Tata</i> or the purification ritual of drums, which starts around 11:00 a.m.

The researcher has given above the tentative timing of each ritual as observed during the field study. Earlier *A-chiks* used to calculate time by looking at the position of the sun and the moon, during various seasons. The cock crow was also another cue for time.

Among the *Atongs*, the first day of the *Chugan* festival is known as *Jaudanga* or *Jaudong Gasam* or *Tunapan sal* which means the eve of the festival. *Chugan* always begins on a Wednesday, since that day is believed to be the most auspicious day to appease the gods. There are three main rituals during the day connected with the eve of the festival:

(i) *Sansea Samsuria* :

This is the preparation of a variety of crop seeds and other materials of daily use including food items, which are arranged inside the house on one side of the *maljuri*, the main post of the house, considered sacred to the gods. It supports the *bilbang* or the cross-beam of the house. This preparation has two implications for the *Atongs*:

- it is a thanks-giving offering of food grains to the god *Misi Saljong* for the good harvest;
- a sharing of seed-grains and other materials of daily use, which are sent along with the spirit of the deceased to sustain it in its day to day life in Balpakram along with the community of spirits.

The urn is concealed under the *sansea samsuria* and food is served during every meal time to the spirit of the deceased by the family members till the day of the festival. The villagers carry out different rituals during the festival. The rites are usually performed by priest. At ten o'clock in the morning, on the first day of the festival, the female members serve food to the spirit of the deceased. The ceremony starts with the placing of a variety of items including grains at the sacred post by the family members and friends.

The paddy and other grains and seeds chosen for the occasion are prepared and kept in the sacred post two or three weeks ahead of the festival soon after the crops are harvested. They are arranged beautifully and are suspended in one or two rows on

a long bamboo stump. This preparation is called *sanssea samsuria* (see appendix). Inside the *sanssea samsuria* they conceal the urn called *grengdik*, because it is customary not to expose the urn before the *Chugan*. Traditionally only the mother or the daughter of the deceased can touch it before the festival.

The materials of *sanssea samsuria* are prepared and kept ready to be sent along with the spirit for its use in *Memangdam Balpakram*, the place believed to be the abode of the spirits.²¹⁴ In addition to food-grains such as paddy, many other materials including knick-knacks essential for daily use, such as the *koksi* the fishing basket, *chekke* the fishing net made out of fine bamboo strips, and so on. It is believed that in their world, the spirits engage themselves in farming and all other agricultural activities as in normal day-to-day life in the land of the living. These items are offered on their departure to *Balpakram* to facilitate their after-life. If these items are not offered, the deceased will apparently be deprived of a good life and live a life of poverty in the home of the spirits. Other items like food, clothing and money are believed to be essential for the spirit to live a decent life in *Balpakram*. If these offerings are not made, the more prosperous spirits will not pay attention to them. Therefore, the relatives of the deceased do not want their dear ones to be treated with contempt in *Balpakram*. Like the *Rugas*, the *Atongs* also believe that the spirits of the departed ones (their dear and near ones) would visit them and participate in the eating and drinking of rice-beer, as well as, dancing, during the festival. Therefore separate

²¹⁴ This is believed among those who follow the indigenous religion.

packets of food, flattened rice, bananas, betel nuts, betel leaves (*pan*) and rice-beer are served to the spirits of the ancestors and relatives of the same family.

It was observed that in the ritual, the priest calls the spirits by their names to participate in the feast. In the past, a separate area was allotted to the spirits²¹⁵ in the *dongrama*, the middle portion of a traditional *A·chik* house.

(ii) *Kem Krita*:

This is the purification ritual of drums to be used in the festival. This is the second ritual in the series. The purification ritual of the two *Atong* traditional drums²¹⁶ is performed around eleven a.m. by the priest before the *Chugan* festival begins. The drums are taken out to the platform outside called *nokdai* or *nokeng*²¹⁷ where the priest breaks the two eggs at one go as part of a purifying ritual. While performing the ritual, he utters a chant for the purification of drums seeking permission from the drum god and the other gods before using them in the festival. In the two pictures below, the priest is performing an egg-breaking ritual to purify the drums in the *nokdai*.

²¹⁵ These were narrated by one of the participants at the *Chugan* festival that was observed for Pone Richil Marak. The narrator, was about fifty-four years of age in 1999. He had a rich knowledge about various functions of different rituals of the festival and also helped me clear my confusion in connection with their faith.

²¹⁶ The elderly participants said that in the past, the *Atongs* used more than six drums in the ceremony of the *Chugan* festival observed in the memory of Mrinel Chambugong Marak. The traditional drums of the *Atongs* are different from that of the *A·bengs* traditional drums.

²¹⁷ It is like an open-side-verandah, made of split bamboo usually constructed in every *A·chik* house. This is called '*srek*' in the *A·beng* area. It is a space where the family spends some time together after a hard day's work.

THE SECOND DAY

The sequence of activities relating to *Butungni* or *Mitingni* or *Ong-miting Sal* on the Second Day.

<i>Butungni/ Mitingni Ong-miting Sal</i> or mid of the festival
● <i>Kal Wata</i> -the ritual of summoning the spirits to the ceremony which starts around 2:30 a.m.
● <i>Grengdik Pua</i> – a ceremony of piercing the urn around 6:30a.m
● <i>Grengdik Auata and Ba-ra Pata</i> a ceremony of bathing the urn and clothing it around 8:00 a.m.
● <i>Grengdik andNokjapang Matme</i> - <i>Mangko Noksul Rodila</i> a final visiting ceremony of the spirit to his/her relatives' and friends' homes around 10:00 a.m.
● <i>Chiga Rodila (Greng dik and Nok japang Matme-mang Rodila)</i> -a ritual of taking round the spirit to bathing place around 1:00 p.m.
● <i>Nokja-pang Matme-mangna mi-chi dina)</i> - a ritual of serving food to the spirit by the family members around 3:00p.m.
● <i>Metong bolo kamal Krita</i> -a ritual at the <i>Metongbol</i> at around 3:20 p.m.
● <i>Delang So-a, Samsuri and Metong bol So-a</i> - a ritual of finally sending off of the spirit to <i>Balpakram</i> around 4:00p.m.
● <i>Gando Makal Pala</i> - traditional game of <i>Gando makkal</i> which starts around 4:30p.m

The second day of the *Chugan* festival falls on the following Thursday. This is called *Butungni Sal* or *Mitingni Sal* or *Ong-miting*, which means 'in the midst of celebration'. The activities and rituals performed in the ceremony are:

(i) *Kal Wata* or *Me-mang Okama*:

This means the summoning of the spirits of family members and relatives who died earlier from 'the land of the spirits' to 'the land of the living' by blowing a horn called *kal* in the *Atong* dialect and *adil* in *A-chik* standard language. The ceremony takes place at around 2:30 a.m. in the *dongrama-cha-rama*, the room used for conducting rituals.²¹⁸ The *kal* (the buffalo horn) is blown in order to summon the spirits from *Balpakram*. After blowing the horn, some singers sing the *kabe* (a

²¹⁸This portion of the room is considered to be the dwelling place of the gods and also the room where the *A-chiks* usually offer seat to the visitors.

requiem), and the men folk slaughter two young bulls called *matmemang* as gifts to the spirit, at around twelve thirty.²¹⁹ It is believed that the young bulls will help the spirit in carrying the load of festival offerings to Balpakram. The *Kabe* is sung to the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments like *jakmora* (brass bell), *chengchop* (small cymbal) and drum. In their song, the singers instruct the spirit about the path of the spirits of the deceased to Balpakram. This gesture also indicates that the members of the *mahari* and family members are willing to release the spirit of the deceased from the world of the living. However, the *Atongs* believe that the spirits tarry for a while and, only on the third day at around 2:30 p.m., will finally depart for Balpakram.

It is also said that on hearing the sound of the horn, other spirits acquainted with the villagers, visit the home where *Chugan* is being observed. The blowing of a horn is a gesture of welcome to the spirit of the deceased and the accompanying spirits. Hence, it is known as the ceremony of summoning the spirits by blowing a horn. It is believed that a spirit should not go alone or empty-handed to the land of the spirits; if it does so, the other spirits do not welcome him or her into their abode. As mentioned earlier, the god *Waimong* would consider that the spirit of the deceased had not been a good human being. Had he or she been a good member of the family or a worthy member of *mahari* (clan), the god feels that they would not have released him or her without gifts or *sansesa samsuria* in the *Chugan*. Here, one finds that *Chugan* serves as a time of reunion between the spirits and the living. Therefore, to celebrate

²¹⁹ Twelve o'clock is supposed to be an ominous time for the *Atongs* as well as for all the *A-chiks* according to their traditional belief.

the occasion of togetherness and to make the spirits happy, they eat, drink and dance together continuously day and night.

(ii) *Grengdik Pua*:

This is a ceremony of piercing the rim of the urn, a symbolic prerequisite of sending the spirit to *Balpakram*. The ceremony starts around 6:30 a.m. before sunrise, in the *nokdai* or *nokeng*. The ritual is performed by the priest in the morning as they consider it a taboo if they happen to step on somebody's shadow while performing the ritual. Therefore, this should be done in the morning before sunrise.

To perform the ceremony, a mat is first spread out on the floor in the *nokdai* or *nokeng*. The mat should be the same mat that was used by the person who carved the urn at the time of carving it. So, when a person buys an urn, he or she has to buy it along with a mat. The same mat is used at the time of embellishing the urn. In performing the ritual, the priest stands facing the east and chants a few verses in the name of the deceased before and after making holes on the rim of the urn. In his chant, he informs *Katchi Rangsi* (the god who is believed to be the life-giver) the purpose of hurting the urn by piercing its rim while making holes on both the sides. The villagers equate this with the piercing of human ears. According to the *Atongs*, ear-piercing of the urn helps in identification of the spirit when he or she arrives at *Balpakram* so that they will be recognized. It is also a sign that he or she is of the same family and that the members of the family will not allow him or her to mix with some other family. They believe that if the rim is not pierced, the spirit will become

deaf in the spirit world. While rituals are going on, the drummers beat the drums continuously, accompanied by flutes and gongs. It is commonly feared that if they hear *aia* 'an expression of pain' from the spirit, it is a bad omen. They say that someone in the family who hears that sound may die very soon. So with great fear and extreme caution they perform this ceremony.

(iii) Bathing and clothing the urn:

This is a ceremony of bathing and clothing the urn before sending off the spirit to Balpakram.

Around 8 a.m. in the morning, the immediate members of the family and close relatives gather in a room after the ceremony of piercing the urn. The urn is then oiled with scented oil and egg yolk. After giving the urn a bath with oil, it is decorated with clothes which the relatives lovingly make with beads and other ornamental items like *naderongs* (ear-rings), *rikgitoks* (necklaces), *rikmatchus* (necklaces made up of semi-precious stones) etc. However, these *naderongs*, *rikgitoks* and *rikmatchus* are meant for the *nawang*, a gluttonous monster ²²⁰ living on the cross-roads of Balpakram, to distract him from chasing the spirit while passing through its place. In the meantime, the drums, flutes and a gong are played slowly and continuously in different cadences.

²²⁰ The *nawang* is a dreadful and gluttonous monster which is believed to be living on the cross-roads of Balpakram. The *A·chiks* believe that it haunts the spirits of the dead while passing through the transit path on their way to the Land of the Spirits, Balpakram.

(iv) The ritual of summoning the spirit:

This ritual summons the spirit of the deceased from the *delang* as well as the other spirits from Balpakram to come and join in the festival. The ritual is done before the urn is taken out from the *sansae samsuri* for the ritual of a final visit of the spirit of the deceased to the homes of his or her relatives' and friends'. The priest initiates the spirit summoning through a ritual by which the spirit of the deceased and other spirits are summoned into the room in the *dongrama*. The drummer remains silent for a few moments while the priest performs the prescribed ritual. As a sign of a warm welcome for the spirits to the festival, the others move outside to offer a place for the spirits from *Balpakram*. This goes on for about ten minutes. After every ritual, dancing invariably takes place. While dancing, three women dancers throw a handful of rice for the spirit called *rongjanggih* (rice given to the spirit); one female member of the family plays a brass-bell called *jakmora*, another woman carries the urn in a *ba-sek* (cloth which is used to carry a baby), the third woman carries rice (*rongjanggih*) in a *gachek* (a tiny basket) or a *koma* (another tiny bamboo basket or a small tin used for measuring specific amounts of rice). On the top of *rongjanggih* (a basketful of rice) they set up *do-me* 'chicken feathers'. Then they dance in a much stylized fashion, according to the rhythm of the music in the background. As they go on dancing, the woman with the *gachek* ritually throws small amounts of rice from it towards the left and the right, and at the same time, she sings a *kabe* (requiem). After these three women other dancers follow, dancing to the rhythm of the music. During this festival the priest performs many ceremonies in a completely inebriated condition and many

bulls are slaughtered. However, it is said that even in their intoxicated condition, no accident befalls them while slaughtering animals even at night.

(v) Taking round the urn and the bull (*masu nokja·pang*) to the close relatives' or friends' homes:

This is a ceremony of visiting the homes of relatives' or friends' of the deceased. It takes place around ten o'clock in the morning after the ritual of summoning the spirit or spirits.

This is a symbol of the spirit paying visits to the houses of close relatives and neighbours. The procession covers a few houses (three to four houses) in the village. It involves certain rituals like throwing of rice-grains as a sign of offering to the spirit. The bull, *masu nokja·pang* (also called *masu motai* in the *Atong* dialect)²²¹ is taken along while relatives and other participants move with the urn, dancing and singing.

While dancing rhythmically to the music, women cuddle and rock the urn as if it were a baby. Another woman plays a small cymbal called *chengchop* or *chotcheng*, while the men beat two drums. It is also fascinating to see some men roll up freshly plucked leaves deftly and use them as a mouth organ. The dancers move rhythmically and harmoniously in tune with the music. Food is offered with great respect to the bull (*masu nokja·pang*) in each house while it makes its rounds in the neighbouring houses. The village people dance along in procession, meaning that the journey of the spirit is not a lonesome one as it has the company of other spirits. *Grengdik Rodila*

²²¹ The *matme·mang* bull is reared by the family members of the deceased considering it as the deceased person. The priest performs a ritual called *jaragata* at the time of bringing the bull home to enable the spirit of the deceased to enter the spirit of the bull. The bull is called *masu motai* or *masu nokja·pang* in *Atong* dialect. After this ritual, the family members serve food at every meal to the spirit as is done to a man till the day of *Chugan*.

(taking round the urn to the relatives' homes) signifies the paying of due respect and honour to the departed soul.

(vi) Taking the spirit to the stream or river:

This ceremony takes place around 1:00 p.m. after the ceremony of taking round the spirit to the relatives' or friends' homes in the village. This ceremony is called *Chiga Rodila*.

This ceremony begins when they reach the *Simsang* River, or stream which they call a *chiga*. *Chiga* means the place where people normally go to fetch water for domestic use or use as a bathing-place. It can either be spring water or a small stream or a river. In some places, the water from a higher level is diverted through a bamboo faucet into a convenient spot below. *Rodila* means taking round the spirit of the deceased to different places.

Chugan is not complete without going through the practice of *Chiga Rodila* ceremony. In this ceremony the urn and the *masu nokjapang*, also called *masu motai* are brought to the *chiga*. In the procession the urn is taken under the shade of a piece of cloth called *ba-ra marang*.²²² When they reach the *chiga*, the woman with the urn draws water and gives the spirit (*me-mang*) a bath by sprinkling water on it, then she washes her face. At the same time the priest and others who play an important role in the ceremony, all wash their face. In Siju, the villagers normally use the *Simsang*

²²² This is supposed to shade the urn during the ceremony. This cloth is used by women during special festivals like *Chugan*

River for drinking and bathing while the upland dwellers use spring water. In such ceremonies instead of going down to the river the villagers perform this ritual in the stream or river available to them. The ritual of giving a bath to the spirit on the bank of the River Simsang is shown in the picture above.

After this, the priest chants to the god *Misi Saljong*:

*Nang, Misi jadok pe·gipa,
Saljong mikron otgipa*

These two lines of incantation, talk about the reasons why the deceased person have to face death in life. The priest addresses the prayer to the god, asking him whether it is the result of god's anger or curse. Is it because of god's curse the person has to face death when he or she was not ready to die? This ceremony is also called *gittim batanga* or 'crossing a village' by the *Atongs*. If close relatives live in a distant place they will take the urn to the relatives' home for the last visit. In some *Atong* villages it is also called *Mela*.

While going down to the *chiga*, the procession follows in a single file. The procession is made in the following order: (i) the drummers, (ii) the eldest maternal uncle who does the *grika* the traditional *A·chik* warrior dance, (iii) two men holding a *ba·ra marang* or *ba·ra kadi* or *ba·ra a·sim* (traditional clothes), holding both the ends of a cloth to offer shade to the urn (iv) the woman who carries the urn (v) another woman who plays a *jakmora*, the brass-bell, (vi) a woman with *gachek* and rice, who all dance under the shade of the *kadi marang* or *ba·ra marang*, (vii) other dancers, men and women follow suit in the following order (viii) the man who plays the flute (ix) the man who plays the gong, followed by two other men who play the tune of

beautiful folk songs like *gonda doka* or the tune of any folk songs made by rolling up fresh leaves in their lips called '*bol bijak sika*'. Their buoyant mood, their dancing and singing, which reaches its zenith at night, is really infectious.

(vii) Serving food to the *Masu motai* or *Nokja-pang* :

In all the three days and nights of the *Chugan* festival, the ceremonies continue one after another. Serving food to the *Masu Nokjapang* is another ceremony where cooked rice is served to the bull, in the same manner as serving a person. *Masu Nokjapang* is considered to be the embodiment of the spirit of the deceased by performing a ritual of *jaragata* ²²³ at the time of bringing home a bull by the family members of the deceased for *Chugan* festival.

At 3:00 p.m. when the procession reaches back home from the *chiga*, the family members and close relatives serve food (rice) to the bull (*masu nokjapang*) and the other bull (*matmemang*) that were provided by the close relatives of the deceased. These two bulls are killed simultaneously on the third day of the festival. Whoever serves food to the bull has to serve food to all the people who are present in the ceremony. After serving food to the bulls, the *delang* and the *metongbol* are burnt off ritually. The two bulls- *masu nokjapang* and *matmemang*, are slaughtered at the same time, on the side of the burning *delang* and *metongbol*. The killing of bulls in this ceremony means, sending them along with the spirit of the deceased to *Balpakram*.

²²³ According to the *A-chik* traditional custom, a ritual of *Jaragata* is performed to embody the spirit of the deceased in the bull-*masu nokja-pang* itself. *Jaragata* means a ritual through which is believed to be the spirit of the deceased enters the bull-*masu nokja-pang*.

(viii) Slaughtering *Masu motai* or *Nokjapang* :

This ritual of slaughtering the *Masu nokjapang* is done while the *delang* and the *metongbol* are burning.

As is customary, relatives from far and near always bring young bulls to the *Chugan* and these are slaughtered to please the deceased spirit. According to the *Atong* custom, the *Nokjapang matmemang* is slaughtered by the *chra* who does the *grika* and leads the dance ²²⁴ on all the three days of the *Chugan* festival. The *matmemang* is usually brought to the *delang* by the *chra* who slaughters it at one stroke. It is considered inauspicious by the *Atongs* to bargain over the bull for the *matmemang*, while buying it from the market. The buyer usually has to pay according to the rate of the sellers.

(ix) Burning of the *Delang*, *Sansea Samsuri*, *Metongbol* and *Tilta Wa-resu*:

This is the burning ceremony of the *delang*, *sansea samsuri*, *metongbol* and *tilta wa-resu* which are set on fire in the front yard of the house.

This ceremony starts around 2:30 in the afternoon, with the killing of the *masu nokjapang* and all the other *matmemangs* together. If they are not using a pig for the ritual, one *matmemang* is kept aside for the ritual in the *krom bota* ceremony. Many bulls are slaughtered when *Chugan* is observed. For rich or important deceased persons, about twenty to thirty bulls are slaughtered. After this ritual, the *chra-angdes*

²²⁴ This is the traditional *Achik* danced which is performed only by the leaders or *nokmas* or by a person who is considered to be a strong man by the community. He will lead the dancers in dancing, on the occasions like *Chugan* or *Wangala*. In *Chugan* festival, the eldest/oldest maternal uncle of the family or clan called the *chra* will lead the dancing.

(male relatives from the wife's side) set fire to the *delang*, *samsuria*, *metongbol* and *tilta* along with the slaughtered heads of the bulls. It is believed that if they do not burn the *delang* and other offerings (such as flattened rice, betel nuts and leaves, banana, and other materials of daily use), the spirit will not leave the place and may stay on as a ghost in the house. The villagers even say that sometimes the spirit returns home and haunts the people at home till all its belongings are retrieved. Therefore, it is necessary that all the offerings to the spirits be incinerated. It is also believed that all the offerings have to be set ablaze as homage to the dead spirit.

While all the offerings, *delang*, *metongbol*, and *sansea samsuri* are about to be burned, the woman who carries the urn, the woman who plays *jakmora* (brass-bell), the singers of *kabe* (requiem) and the drummers dance in a row around the *delang*, *samsuri*, and *metongbol*. At that time anyone can take part in the dance. It is believed that, the gods and goddesses are with them at the time of this auspicious ceremony. There is also a belief that, they are safe from any incidental accidents associated with fire, even when there is a strong wind blowing. Everyone who has taken part in the ceremony has testified to the amazing fact that such accidents have never taken place in the past, though instances of accidents from fire are quite common in the village, especially during the dry and windy seasons. They even swear that in the future too, such incidents will not happen.

(x) The sale of the *Gando Makkal*:

This is done after the burning ceremony of setting ablaze the offerings to the spirit. This is an important *A-chik* traditional game played to test the strength of the men in the village. This game is played by men, who are strong, wise, and good at heart and helpful in any situation for their people. This is not only a game to test one's strength but also an assessment of their concern for the members of the society.

Gando makal is a piece of loin cloth with which the villagers wrap the dead body of men at the time of death. A small piece is cut out of this loin cloth and tied at the tip of the bamboo *tilta wa-resu*, at the time of cremation. The bamboo pole is commonly known as *tilta wa-resu*, the cloth is called *gando makkal* and the traditional game is called *gando makkal pala*.

The game begins with the dance of men and women. Meanwhile, a strong young man snatches off the *gando makkal* from the *tilta* and by waving the cloth (*gando makkal*) in the air; he provokes the audience and challenges all the men folk by using offensive words. Sometimes the provocation is done by brandishing the *gando makkal* in front of other young men. Naturally, some young men get provoked by this insulting gesture and they accept the challenge to wrestle. The winner will be considered the *challang* of the village or the winner will be considered the wise and strong man of the village for the year. This wrestling is held in front of the house of the deceased, or sometimes on the banks of the Simsang River.

(xi) Breaking of *Dewai-desai* or pushing each other with a strong bamboo stump (*wa-pong siksusaa*):

These are *A-chik* traditional games to test the strength of men. These games are played by the young men on such occasions as the *Chugan* festival to entertain the gathering.

In the *Chugan* festival, all kinds of traditional games are continued the whole day and almost all the games involve young men. The man in charge of such games even beckons certain young men to come forward and participate. People encourage these games as a part of the festival as everyone enjoys them. For the young men it is a time to participate in the game and show off their strength. All these traditional games are very popular on such occasions. This is the last item of the second day of the festival.

As the *samsuri* is burnt down after the ceremony of setting fire to the offerings, the urn can no longer be hidden. It is therefore kept carefully in the *dongrama* or is carried about all day in a *basek* till its burial ceremony on the third day, by a daughter or aunt of the deceased, or by women who are close relatives. At night the close female relatives of the deceased will keep the urn with them and sleep in the *dongrama*. This is an appeal to the spirit to come back to the same family at the time of re-incarnation. These women chant to their god *Katchi* saying,

*“Maa-noan jakwatkuja,
Stitakon engkuja”.*

This means that the family of the deceased has not yet allowed the spirit of the deceased to go to some other family. It is a sort of prayer requesting the god *Katchi Rangsi* not to send the deceased member of the family to any other house. It is also a gesture entreating the god not to reincarnate the spirit as an insect at the time of rebirth.

The Third Day

The sequential activities relating to *Atinia* or *Watchotani* or the final day on the Third day.

<i>Atinia or Watchotani</i>				
<i>(i) Grengdik Auata and Ba-ra Pata</i> or a ceremony of bathing and clothing the urn which starts around 9:00 a.m.	<i>(ii) Grengdik Gopa/ Wapeka</i> or a ceremony of burial of the urn and the ritual of <i>wa-peka</i> (starts around 1:00 p.m)	<i>(iii) a ceremony of Krom Bota</i> (starts around 2:00 p.m)	<i>(iv) a ceremony of Saram Cha-a and Chare Ra-gata</i> (starts around 2:30 p.m)	<i>(v) the ritual of Ste Krita or Nokam Tata</i> (starts around 3:30 p.m)

The Third Day of the festival a Friday is called *Atinia* or *Watchotani sal* or the final day. Around 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning, the villagers prepare everything for the day's rituals. Some make *chokreks*, a bamboo holder (made out of tender bamboo) where the priest smears the sacrificial animal blood as an offering to their gods.

Three *wa·smita*²²⁵ ‘bamboo posts’, are made out of fresh *wa·ge* bamboos; the upper green tender bamboo skin, are carved into strips like hair which are then attached to the two altars; one for the *Wa·pek songa* ceremony and the other for the *Saram Cha·a* ceremony. These are kept ready in the morning. For the *Saram Cha·a* ceremony, two bamboo poles with the bamboo prepared like hair called *wa·smita*, are erected in the place where the *delang* had been burnt the previous day. It is a bad omen to clear the ashes of the *delang* before the last ceremony. Like other *A·chiks*, the *Atongs* love to keep their premises clean, despite the busy and tedious work schedule. In the morning the following preparations are made:

- (i) Two *tilta wa·resus* are erected in the place where the *delang* was burnt.
- (ii) A pig or a bull is kept ready for smearing blood on the top of the *krom* ‘totemic-stone’ in the *krom bota* ceremony.
- (iii) A stone and *wa·smita* bamboo carved into strips and attached to the altar are kept ready for the *krom bota* ceremony.
- (iv) Four hens or chicken are kept ready for divinations in different rituals.
- (v) The burial ground is kept ready for the burial ceremony of the urn; and
- (vi) Two altars with the *chokreks* are prepared for the *saram cha·a* ceremony.

The important ceremony on the third day of the festival is the burial of the urn. In this ceremony, different people are engaged in different activities; as it is compulsory for the family members of the host of the festival to serve food to all the people attending the function. The *mahari* have to take the responsibility for this

²²⁵ This is made of young *wa·ge* bamboo which is used for making bamboo strings.

day's festivity as in the *A·chik* marriage custom. This final part in the festival both for the spirits and the village crowd definitely incurs high expenditure. Therefore, the host of the festival and the villagers prepare for this ceremony well ahead of the time together with the *maharis*. The *mahari* are supposed to help the bereaved family to clear all the dues that may have been accrued during the festival. Balances are not left, unpaid, because they consider the month of October as the end of the year. Therefore, it is believed that starting the New Year with dues is inauspicious.

On the third day of the festival, lunch should be over by 10:00 a.m. before the rituals start. The third day of the festival is the saddest day for the family members and the relatives of the spirit (*memang*) since they have to send the spirit away till the time of incarnation. It is hard to see any one idling around on this day as every body will be engaged in some chores or the other, like cooking special dishes for the spirits (*memangs*) and for the visitors, receiving people and serving food to everyone attending the festival. One finds that *Chugan* is a festival where one has to take heavy responsibilities and has to spend a lot of money. Poor families, who can ill afford such expenses, perform a *Watpaka* ceremony.²²⁶ This ceremony is performed ritually by the priest just after the cremation and is considered the same as *Chugan* but no festivity is involved in this ceremony.

Traditionally, *Chugan* festival is not observed for people who are excommunicated from the *mahari* or the village community, also for one who dies an

²²⁶ This is an alternate ceremony of *Chugan* festival performed by poor families to send off the spirit ritually to Balpakram.

unnatural death, such as being killed by animals, and for suicidal cases, and couples cohabiting in unlawful marriage without the *do-sia* ceremony.

On the third day ceremony, the rituals are:

(i) Bathing and Clothing the urn and the last meeting with the urn:

This ceremony consists of:

- The final bathing of the urn with scented oil, or strong scented hair oil.
- Decking it up with all kinds of new clothes, festoons, etc.
- Bidding farewell to the spirit of the deceased by the people.

As ceremony add up the family members and relatives comprising both the young and old shower the urn with money and tears. They too decorate the urn and sing *kabe* as in a real funeral. The researcher witnessed in the field that monetary contribution ranged from coins to currency notes.

Around 9:00 a.m. the final ritual of anointing is done by the family members and relatives. It is performed in the front yard by mixing egg yolk and scented oil. After this, the villagers dress up the urn in new clothes. At this time, the clothes fitted on the urn on the first and the second day, are taken off. The used clothes are wrapped in a small bag together with money and other items meant for the spirit. These offerings are then put in the urn and the rest which could not go in are packed and buried together with the urn at the time of its burial ceremony.

The *Atongs* believe that if they send the spirit without giving a ritualistic bath or without enough clean clothes, he or she may not be received well by other spirits. So they take special care in the *Chugan* festival or in the *Watpaka* ceremony. The *Atongs* believe that in the Chidimak stream, the spirits take bath and change clothes just before entering Balpakram. That is why, the deceased have to carry new and clean clothes with them when they finally depart for the spirit world.

(ii) Burial of the Urn:

This is the burial ceremony of the urn on the third day of the festival after its bathing and clothing ceremony.

Depending on the economic condition and social standing of the family, the urns are given their rightful burial. Poor families who may not be able to afford an urn made of wood are allowed to use a simple earthen jar. The urn carved out of wood is a status symbol and it is placed between two earthen pots for its burial. Some may even make a small coffin for its burial.

The close female relatives carry the urn and dance the whole day and night with other mourners. This begins around one o'clock in the afternoon and continues throughout the night. Till 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon, they dance either in the front yard or in the *dongrama*, (the middle room of the house). Then the urn is buried in the first compartment of the house in the *balim* area (a front verandah in the *A·chik* house,

shaded and protected by thatching grass) and the threshold (*jangbatra*). The *balim* also serves as a kitchen in most of the *Atong* houses. When all the things, like digging the burial place, preparing rice, chicken, etc, is ready they carry the urn to the *jangbatra* (the threshold) for the burial ceremony. Later, the urn is given a ritual of burial inside the house. The bottom of the burial pit will be filled with about three kilograms of rice and the urn is lowered gently into the pit. At this moment, all the near and dear friends and the family members lament in a heartrending manner as in the funeral.

(iv) *Wa-peka or Wa-pek songa:*

After the ceremonial burial, the burial place is marked ritually by erecting three previously prepared *wa-smita* bamboo stumps for the *krom bota* ceremony.

If the urn is buried outside the house the ritual of fixing the bamboo stumps is called *Wa-peka or Wa-pek Songa*. Burial outside the house takes place if the homes are constructed with cement or wooden floor, instead of bamboo strips as in traditional house. There are some well-to-do families who build homes with raised wooden platforms as floor, in such cases the urn is buried outside the house on the left or the right of the entrance, according to convenience; but it is never buried in the front yard. The burial place is marked by erecting bamboo stumps of *wa-smita* at the site of the burial place for the *krom bota* ceremony. The burial pit is dug about three feet deep and at the same time, another group prepares an altar above the ashes of the *delang* which had been burnt down the previous day for the *saram cha-a* ceremony by fixing *chokreks* and other items for the ritual. The pictures below are that of the *krom*

bota ceremony showing three *wa·smita* bamboo stumps fixed in the *Wa·peka* ritual outside the house. The second picture is taken inside the house and it is photographed after an animal is sacrificed on the *krom* in the same ceremony. In this ritual they had used a pig as the sacrificial animal.

(v) *Krom bota*:

Krom bota means the ritual of erecting a totemic-stone after the burial ceremony of the urn. In the *Krom bota* ceremony, offering of an animal blood sacrifice is performed in the burial place. The stone erected on top of the burial pit is called *krom* and the ritual of animal sacrifice of either a pig or a bull (*matmemang*) is called *krom bota*. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, if the house has a raised wooden floor, the burial place is dug on one side of the house (the *noksambeng*). Another *krom* is a sacrificial post which is used to slaughter animals during the ceremony. This is called *tilla* or *top monggil* or *snaru kin·dik* in the *A·beng* area. The posts of the *krom* and *tilla* are used for the same purpose but only the shape is different (see appendix §...) where all the sacrificial animals are slaughtered during the ceremony.

Erection of a stone is done as a memorial for the deceased and is done symbolically to recall the spirit into the same family at the time of rebirth. This ritual is done both inside and outside the house after the burial ceremony of the urn. In *Atong* houses a portion of the house is specially designed with bamboo-strips for rearing the *masu nokjapang*. *Masu Nokjapang* is usually purchased one or two months

ahead of the *Chugan* festival. This animal is reared with utmost care and cleanliness. It is believed that this particular bull is the embodiment of the deceased and therefore, it is slaughtered on the third day of the festival. The other sacrificial bulls are kept and reared in the open yard till the day they are slaughtered ritually. The *masu nokjapang* is bought and reared inside the house which is called *matchu agrang gata*. The family members of the deceased rear it and serve food both rice and grass as done for a person till the third day of the *Chugan* festival.

There are differences in the term '*krom*' in the *Atong* and *A·beng* area. In the *A·beng* area, *kroms* and *kimas* are memorial posts, but their shapes are entirely different. They are made of wood carved in an oblong shape. In the front yard of *A·beng* houses, mostly placed in the front yard of the *nokma*'s house; the number of *kroms* signify the number of deaths that have occurred in the village. In *A·beng* villages, *kimas* represent the deceased or the ancestral spirits. It is carved out of the thorny, soft-wooded *mandal* tree²²⁷ and the jackfruit tree.²²⁸ It is an effigy of the deceased, dressed and placed in the *balim* or in the front yard. *Kimas* are made in the image of the deceased and they are clothed in the deceased's garments. A *krom* on the other hand, is a simple oblong structure like a post, carved and painted in a traditional manner, always placed in the front yard of the village *nokma*. Therefore, the memorial posts of *krom* and *kima* should not be confused. On this post, they tie the bull and slaughter it for the spirit of the deceased during the *Chugan* festival.

²²⁷ The scientific name is *erythrina suberosa* or *erythrina stricta*

²²⁸ The scientific name is *artocarpus favilora*.

(vii) *Saram Cha-a*:

The *saram cha-a* ceremony starts around 2:30 p.m. just after the *krom bota* ceremony. On the ashes of the *delang*, two altars are erected and *chokreks* fixed on each altar and the left altar is meant for the god *Misi Saljong*. The right altar has two parts, where *chokreks* are fixed separately; one on the right and the other on the left. The right side of this altar is for the surviving members of the family and the left is for the deceased.

As the ceremony begins, the chicken meant for the god *Misi Saljong* is strangled and its blood is smeared on the *chokreks*. This completes the sacrifice for *Misi Saljong*, the god of blessings. After this the priest makes an incision of the lower abdomen of the chicken and takes out the entrails to read the portents for the future. Examining the entrails, the priest exercises his clairvoyance. It is believed that if the *caecum* lies on the top of the left portion of the intestine, the fortune of the surviving male members of the family will be greater than that of *Misi Saljong*. If the left portion or *caecum* lies above the right *caecum*, it is believed that the surviving family members will be afflicted with some more deaths as the fortune of *Misi Saljong* is greater than that of men.

Finally, the chicken meant for the spirit of the dead is taken up and killed in the same manner and blood is smeared over the altar on the left. The entrails are examined for the spirit, to see whether the spirit of the deceased has carried away all the grains of rice or left some for the survivors. All the intestines are hung on the

particular *chokreks* for every one to see. By examining the intestines, they predict whether the survivors will be as prosperous and successful as the deceased had been in mortal life. It may be noted that the fattened calf (*masu nokja-pang*) kept in the stall and the chickens meant for the ceremony are also given extra care and reverence. Hence, plump and healthy chickens with reddish feathers are preferred for the sacrifice. Next, the chicken meant for the surviving members of the family is killed in a similar fashion and its blood is also daubed on the *chokrek*. Divination by examining the chicken intestines is performed which is called *do-bik nia*. If the *caecum* is full and coloured black, it is believed that the family will have a good harvest and become prosperous. If it is reddish in colour, it is interpreted as an indication of disease and ailments that will affect the family. The interpretations are made by the priest who performs the ritual.

In the early hours of the following day, all the spirits of the death are summoned between 2:00 to 3:00 a.m. Then the spirits are finally sent off and the other spirits are requested to take the dead person's spirit along with them to Balpakram, their land. Here, a young bull (*masu nokjapang*) is killed. Behind this act is the belief that the spirit of the slaughtered bull will help to carry all the belongings given to the dead spirit by the relatives and other family members. After performing all the rituals at the two altars and *do-bik nia* for three concerned members is done that is: (i) *Misi Saljong*, (ii) the spirit, and (iii) the surviving members of the family; in the concluding ceremony, the *chra* who performed the *grika* dance carries an old bamboo basket where all the waste materials of the festival are dumped. This ritual is considered

essential to find out whether the eldest maternal uncle (*chra mongting*), can withstand the problems and difficulties in life while looking after the whole *mahari*. In the basket (which has to be carried by the uncle) the wasted banana leaves of the festival, the residue of rice-beer, left over food or decayed food, etc. are dumped. The villagers pour water to irritate the maternal uncle and provoke him as he goes on dancing. If he can bear all these calmly, it is an evidence of his strength and implies that he can shoulder responsibilities. The dirty items symbolize burdens and carrying of the heavy basket symbolizes the shouldering of heavy responsibilities of the family or the *mahari*. If he can handle all these with equanimity in the sight of god and men, he will be blessed by god for his commitments and sacrifices. The *chra* while dancing with the basket full of the refuse and dirt may fall on the people who dancing along with him in the ceremony. But they do not mind as they believe that the blessings showered on the *chra* will be shared to them. The *chra* and three female relatives dance with the baskets in the midst of the gathering. Any provocative action is taken in good humour by the *chra* and also by the people attending the ceremony.

In *Saram Cha-a* ceremony all the participants of the festival dance round the two altars. The dancers are led by the eldest maternal uncle who performs the *grika* dance in all the three festival days. In the *Saram Cha-a* ceremony he dances with the basketful of waste materials of the festival; he is joined and followed by a woman with rice in a small basket (*gachek*). She is also called a *rongianggi satgipa*, 'one who scatters the 'paddy-grain'. Another woman follows playing brass-bells (*jakmora*), others dance in a row and sing the *kabe* (a requiem). A small tin is used as a *ko-ma* or

a measuring basket for rice as she throws rice to the right and left singing the *kabe* or *doroa*. After sometime the woman who carried the urn, takes the turn to carry the brass-bell and sing a *chera*. This ceremony is called *chare rongjanggi ragata*. The seed-grains thrown to the right are meant for the surviving members of the family and the grains thrown to the left are for the spirit of the deceased. It is believed that the spirits of the dead should not carry all the grains of rice or paddy with them. It is feared that if this ceremony is not done, all the rice will be carried away by the spirits.

(viii) *Cha-re-rongjanggi ra-gata*:

This is another ritual in the *Saram Cha-a* ceremony. *Cha-re-rongjanggi* is a compound word, comes from two words '*cha-re*' and '*rongjanggi*'. '*Cha-re*' means 'the paddy grains' and '*rongjanggi*' means 'grains kept for life'. Another is 'the paddy grains specially kept ready for cultivation in the next season. This ceremony signifies retaining the grains of paddy for the survivors.

(ix) *Ste Amua (Krita) or Nokam Tata* :

This is the last ritual on the third day of the festival. The priest performs the *Ste Krita or Amua or Nokam Tata* in the *nokdai* or *nokeng*. This last rite on Friday the third day, is done just after performing the ritual of *chare rongjanggi raa* in the *Saram Cha-a* ceremony. The priest chants prayers to the god *Goera Kalkame* (the god of Strength) to take away all the various profanations and diseases from the family where the *Chugan* was held. A large amount of the rice-beer residue shaped like a cone is

placed on the floor of the *nokdai* or *nokeng* (*srek*). On it, two stalks of grass (used for making brooms) are fixed on the cone and libation is performed accompanied by incantations by the priest. Here, no music is played. As in other rituals, a hen is used for divination or by examining the entrails they find out whether the spirit has reached the destination or not. If the spirit has reached, the people present there exclaim that the spirit has reached Balpakram and has been welcomed by *Waimong*.²²⁹ From this moment, no weeping and singing of *kabe* or *chera sola* take place. The members of the family and *maharis* and everyone participating in the *chugan* are satisfied and they stress on their happiness by exclaiming that the ceremony had been successful and that it has achieved its aim of sending the spirit to the after-life, off from the Land of the Living to the Land of the Spirits.

During this ceremony, the *kamal* (priest) offers the following prayer:

*Nokme gimaa,
Krong abol pita,
Nokap jamang baka.*

The above lines mean let not the house of the bereaved fall into ruins, let it not be overgrown by jungle and let not the wealth and riches of the family dissipate. While incanting thus, the priest requests the god of wealth and riches, *Misi Saljong* not to take away the family property. The main purpose of this ceremony is to see whether the spirit has left for *Balpakram* with the god, the giver of life or is still lingering at home. It is believed that some spirits are emotional and miss the family greatly and refuse to leave home. If this happens it is harmful for the family; therefore the spirit should not linger in the house but he or she should go to *Balpakram*.

²²⁹ This is the king of Balpakram or the care-taker of the spirits of the deceased in Chitmang- Balmang or Balpakram.

The Fourth Day (Saturday) *Echam Gala*:

The sequence of activities relating to *Echam Gala* - on the Fourth Day.

<i>Echam Gala</i>		
(i) <i>Gro Jea</i> or the meeting for clearance or paying off of debts or other obligations etc. in the celebration. It starts around 10:00 a.m.	(ii) <i>Pante Me-tra Sandia</i> or enquiry into affairs between the young boys and girls during the three days celebration. It starts around 12 noon.	(iii) Proposal for <i>Do:sia</i> and arrangement for the <i>Do:sia</i> ceremony. It starts around 1:00 p.m.

The fourth day or following day of the festival is called *Echam Gala*. This is quite an interesting day which ends with the paying off of the obligations arising from the celebrations of the past three days. In this ceremony the social obligations and its formalities that are observed are:

(i) ***Gro Singroka* or *Gro Jea*:**

This means an enquiry into the existing debts and the clearance of it by the *mahari*.

This starts after taking food around 10:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. and is conducted in the same place where the *Chugan* festival had taken place. The *chras* and the sons of the family have the main responsibility to look after the arrangements for this last ceremony. When the festival is over, the debts (if there are any) are cleared and the materials collected from different sources (drums, gongs, jar for rice- beer, etc) are returned and if the articles are found damaged or broken during the festival, these are

replaced by the *mahari*. At that moment, in the meeting, decisions are made to collect money from the *maharis* according to their capacity and contributions are also accepted from any who willingly show their love and concern for the bereaved family. This is very important to them because if the debts are not cleared immediately there is a superstition that the surviving family members may be burdened by debts throughout the year. It is also a practice that one should begin the first day of the year without any monetary obligations and dues. The *A·chiks* consider, the month of October as an end of the year, since *jhum* crops are harvested in the same month in Garo Hills.

(ii) *Gro Jea*:

This festivity may sometimes lead to a lot of romance. Young boys and girls fall in love. These affairs ultimately culminate in their marriage which is supposed to be finalized within a single day. A meeting between the *maharis* takes place, and the involved parties thoroughly enquire in front of everyone and if all of them agree with the time fixed for the *Dosi-Dodoka*²³⁰ they are married off. However, such meetings for the arrangement of *do·sia* rarely happen.

The *chras* of the family further make enquiries whether the concerned man or woman is married or unmarried or is guilty of adultery or infidelity. According to the custom, in case of any of the party is found guilty, a fine is levied on the guilty party.

²³⁰ This is the *A·chiks* customary marriage ceremony.

Festivities Involved:

Folk songs which are sung during the festival are *kabe*, *chera sola* and *gonda doka*. The words used in these different folk songs reflect the beliefs, practices and superstitions of the *A·chiks*. The songs have no fixed verses but they are composed instantaneously, depending on the situation that demands its composition. But the themes are always the same and they revolve around affection for the deceased or appreciation of the good deeds of the deceased or imploration to the spirit to be cautious of *nawang*. According to the *A·chik* folk belief, *nawang* is a dreadful monster who is always after the spirits of the dead who are on the transit path on their way to the Land of the Spirits.²³¹ In order to distract the monster *nawang*, the spirit has to throw items that are highly valued, like bits of costly necklaces, copper and silver bracelets, silver coins or any other charms and ornaments. Therefore, in the *Chugan* festival it is mandatory to drape the urn (*grengdik*) with ornaments, bracelets, etc. in it. They say that while the *nawang* monster runs after those prized items which are intended to be distractive in the first place, the spirit can safely pass through the crossroads without being harmed by him. The very same belief exists among the *A·bengs* too.

The Dance:

The dance takes place during the three day celebration to the sounds of drums, gongs, brass bells, small cymbals, flute or music played with fresh leaves, etc. It is worth mentioning that dancing is also compulsory and essential for celebrations like

²³¹ This has many names as *Me·mang A·song* Balpakram or *Mangru-Mangram* or *Me·mangdam-Balpakram* or *Chitmang-Balmang*.

the *Mangona* of the *A-bengs* and *A-we* and *Mangrua* of the *Rugas*. It is believed that if the relatives of the deceased and the participants from the village refrain from dancing, the spirit feels unhappy. This is a significant festival for it prepares a joyous send off to the spirits. This celebration is collectively observed by men, women, old, and young members of the *mahari* (clans) or anyone who comes to attend the celebration.

Manner of Dancing:

In groups of two or three with hands on each others' shoulder or waists, the dancers move back and forth rhythmically to the beat of the drum. A woman in the middle of two men or a man flanked by two women, or a man and a woman or two women may make up a group. Though in normal circumstances, it is taboo for niece and uncle, sister-in-law and mother-in-law to have body contact, but on the occasion of the *Chugan* or *Chuogin*, according to custom, there is no restriction. At the end of the festival, if this kind of indiscriminate grouping or pairing up creates any misunderstanding between couples, a fine is to be paid to the aggrieved party.

Music:

There are several distinct rhythms of drum beats and horns (*kal*). The particular beat and tune of the drum and horn (*kal*) respectively are indications of different stages of ceremony. For instance, on the occasion of the final release of the spirit (*memang wata*), there is a distinct beat of the drum and horn. The orchestra is made up of the drum (*kem*), flute (*kal*), gong (*rang*) and brass-bells (*jakmora*), flutes (*bangsi*), and two big and small cymbals (*chengchop*). A male mourner plays music on leaves. A woman cradles the urn and dances, sings *kabe* to the rhythm of the brass-bells (*jakmora*) and drums.

Variations in the Observance of *Chugan*:

It is interesting to note that many variations can be observed in the rituals of *Chugan* conducted for the deceased members who are male and female. One can see more rituals when *Chugan* is observed for the male member. The number of bulls which would be slaughtered during the festival will be more when the ritual is performed for a man. Another important aspect is in the way the deceased male's family is ushered in during the time of the festival. They are brought in with elaborate gestures of respect and reverence. Then the priest chants prayers invoking god to let the spirit of the man reincarnate in his maternal family and not in his wife's family. This ritual is not performed in case of departed children or unmarried people. Those couples who cohabit without the consent of the society (without *do·sia*) and Christians will also be exempted from *Chugan*, for the fear of incurring wrath from the gods.

Beliefs and Practices:

There are various beliefs and practices involved in the *Chugan* festival. While buying the *masu nokjapang* for the *Chugan* festival as mentioned earlier any bargain for reducing prices is considered inauspicious. The bull is supposed to be young, healthy, and it is supposed to be of one colour, either black or red. Young mottled bulls of two or three colours are regarded unsuitable. The young bull is brought home from market to the accompaniment of drum (*kem*), musical horn (*adila* or *kal*) and musical gong (*rang*). While bringing the bull from the market, only the male members of the family and close relatives accompany it. The female members of the family prepare meals for the spirit and the people accompanying the group. When they reach home they are served food and the bull is also served food believing that the spirit of the deceased person is embodied in the bull itself and if it eats the served food, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased has entered it. This is called *Jaragata*, or 'the spirit of the deceased has entered the bull'. The *A·chiks* who still follow the indigenous religion, believe that the spirits which are not welcome in Balpakram return to human settlements and haunt the surviving people as *me·mang* 'ghosts' here on earth.

From the day of the ritual of *jaragata* onwards, the villagers treat the *masu nokjapang* (*masu motai*) with due respect and serve it as they would have done to the deceased person. Every morning and evening, meals are served to the young bull by the family members till the day of *Chugan*. It is also believed that if the *A·chiks* do not perform this ritual; their gods will not be happy with them and may not bless them

with the crops in the field. Therefore, the crops will not grow well in the coming year. Therefore, on the third day of the *Chugan* festival, towards the end of it the '*Chare Ragata*' ritual is performed to preserve the seeds for the forthcoming year. Or else, it is believed that the seeds will also be carried away by the spirits because the seeds are burnt along with the *delang, sansea samsuria* where variety of crops are placed at the *maljuri*.

The *Atongs* believe that if a person happens to die an untimely death, it is the work of some spirits or gods and is done out of jealousy and malice. The rituals observed during *Chugan*, involve a plea to the dead or departed spirits that the life and soul of the person remains through eternity in the same family as before. During this ritual, on the one hand, the priest tells the spirit that it is a preparation for a better place in *Chitmang-Balmang* (the homeland of spirits) and on the other hand, it is also a prayer to reincarnate the dead spirits into the same family, which is considered as the best reward in rebirth. There are many beliefs and practices of the *Chugan* festival which will be taken only as a superstition for the unbelievers. However, for the *Achiks* who practice the indigenous religion, the celebration which takes place towards the end of the harvest is in itself, a remembrance of the departed. This is mingled with the sorrows and joys of sending off the deceased to another place of living with all the comforts of earthly life. It is also an expectation and prayer that the deceased will come back to the same family. This is a festival of cherishing memories, as well as, of fastening the ties of relationship even after death.

3.03 FESTIVAL OF MANGONA OR DELANG SO'A OR DELANG RUA

Mangona or *Delang So'a* or *Rua* is an important post-funeral festival, this festival is also related to cultivation practices of the *A-chik* farmers. *Atongs* celebrate this festival as *Chougin* or *Chugan*, *A-we* as *Mangona* and *Am-beng* as *Delang So'a* or *Rua*. This festival is a mandatory custom for the indigenous *A-chiks*. It has to be performed when there is death in the community. The people in this festival gather things which belonged to the deceased and place it on the *delang*. To symbolize their pleasure for the opportunity to satisfy the deceased, the believers pull down the constructed *delang* and burn it down with the items placed on it. It indicates sending off the earthly items in the form of the spirits so that the deceased is able to enjoy the after-life in the same earthly manner. A significant feature is that in this festival, the people indicate sending off their goddess *Mima kiri Rokkime* along with the deceased so that his/her food requirements in the spirit world may be fulfilled. But this is not done without the consent of the goddess as they fear her wrath and misunderstanding. While the items are burnt, the highest priest *Tuara Nangapa* recites incantations to clarify the reasons for performing the task and seek her consent and forgiveness for the seeming insolence. They feel that since they symbolically burn the items including rice stalks, so it also connotes the burning of the figure of the goddess herself. The priest prays to the gods *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Misi Saljong* and rationalizes their position. In this festival after the *delang soa* is done, there is another ritual known as *chare ragata*. This ritual is performed to ask *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Misi Saljong* to return to the particular family where death has visited and continue pouring their blessing.

The family members bid farewell to the departed spirit and offer thanksgiving offerings for good harvest. The festival is observed three times in a year; as for example in September, a week or three days after the *Rongchugala* festival, in October after *Wangala* festival and finally in March during the *A·galmaka* festival. All these three festivals are related to cultivation. In *A·galmaka* festival the farmers call up the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the new *jhum* field before starting cultivation and the other two are thanks-giving offered for good harvest. But they never observe this festival after the *Ahaia* festival. This is because the farmers celebrate the death of the gods of their crops and ritually take down the spirits of their gods to their homes. They place the symbolical form of their gods on the *maljuri* of their house till the day of the *Wangala* festival. It is only on the last day of the *Wangala* festival that they send their gods back to their ocean home after completely satisfying them with ritualistic thanksgiving and festivals.

Nature of the Festival:

In this festival, the rituals are performed to send off the spirit of the deceased to the abode of the spirits, Balpakram. Date for the festival is fixed with the advice of the members of the *chra* and *mahari* of the bereaved family. When the days are set, relatives and friends begin contributing in cash or in kind to the family for the day of the festival. In the case of poor families, the family performs *watpaka* ceremony to send off the spirit at the time of cremation; but no entertainment or feasting is considered as due.

Preparation for the Festival:

A month before the *Mangona* or *Delang So·a* festival, the members of the *mahari* starts preparations for the festival. The first day of the festival is called *wadaka* or the preparation day. On that day, the relatives and friends in the village help the family in various works. The whole village gets busy for the festival and abstains from their daily chores. Women engage in domestic works and men occupy themselves in receiving relatives and friends from far-off places, some help to repair the *delang*.

Performance of the Rituals in the Festival:

The sequences of activities/ rituals relating to *Delang So·a* Festivals

The first day	The second day	The third day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>preparations for the rituals</i> ● <i>selection of preist for the rituals in the festival</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>grendik rimnapa</i> ● <i>jaragata</i> ● <i>matmemang rodila</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>delang rua</i> ● <i>delang soa</i> ● <i>chare ragata</i> ● <i>Rokkime okama</i>

There are various rituals performed in the festival both for the spirit and the gods. The first day is called *wadaka* or the day of preparation; the second day is called *mitingni sal* or the mid of festival; and the third is called *delang so·a* or *rua* or burning off the tiny house or pulling down the *delang*. On the first day, the selection of the priest to perform the rituals is done. This is also a part of the ceremony and it is called *kamal rimnapa* or literally selection of the priest. The *kima sola* or carving of an effigy is also done by one of the son or sons-in-law of the deceased, in the case that the deceased is a person with a family of its own. It is to be noted that this festival is

not observed for all the dead people; in other words, it is mainly meant for the men who hold high positions in society. The deceased is represented in the form of this effigy that is carved.

The Second Day:

On the second day, the priest first of all calls out the spirit from the *delang* which is a tiny house built for the spirit in the courtyard. The ritual is called *grengdik rimnapa*. The deceased spirit is called to take possession of an urn for the performance of the rituals. An urn is placed for the purpose.

The second ritual is the ritual of *Jaragata*. The spirit of the deceased is ritually called back to the same family. They believe that when the god *Waimong*, care taker of the spirits, sends the spirit back from Balpakram, it reincarnates in the same family. This belief in reincarnation in the same family is one of the important traditional custom and beliefs still prevalent. If the spirit is not called to take re-birth in the family it may reincarnate as an animal or an insect. This alternative is clearly not desired by any member of the bereaved family. The priest then calls the spirit back from the *Me-mang A-song* and leads it to enter the house through the main door and stops at the *dunsam* wall. Then he comes out of the house to perform another ritual of *jaragata* into a bull. The bull is believed to be the representative of the deceased, as the spirit has been ritually sent to enter the figure of the bull through the ritual of *jaragata*. Accepting the bull as the form of the deceased, they treat the bull they would to a person, and serve it food lovingly at every meal for three days till the time of *delang so-a* ceremony, or the burning-off of a tiny house.

The bull is taken on a visiting round to the relatives and friends whom the deceased must have known during his lifetime. This ceremony is another part of the ritual of *jaragata*. Then the bull is given the name *matmemang* or the animal with the spirit. Taking the *matmemang* round on a visit is called the ritual of *matmemang rodila* which signifies paying a final visit to the relatives and friends.

The next ritual is *nokdonggaa* or the ritual of house-warming for the spirit and ritually purifies the house to call up the god *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bless them again. *A·chiks* believe that death takes place only when the god curses a person or a family. They even believe that performing such ritual helps the spirit to be in better place or home in its life in the after-world. Therefore, they perform house-warming ceremony before sending off the spirit to the *Me·mang A·song*. At that moment the participants dance round the *delang* in the courtyard to signify the spirit's entering to the new home in the next world.

The Third Day:

On the third day, the priest performs the final ritual to send off the spirit as the will of their gods to Balpakram. The day is called *delang so·a* or *rua* or burning the *delang* or pulling down the *delang*. In this ritual the *delang*, the seed-grains of crops and daily used materials that are offered to the spirit, are burnt together. It symbolizes sending along the seed-grains for the deceased as well as to their gods to carry out the same activities as they did in their real life on earth. The ritual is considered to be a grand send-off of the spirit to the *me·mang a·song*. The priest explains the reason for

burning the seed-grains to the god *Misi Saljong*, and pleads with him to leave the seeds to the surviving members. The priest purifies the place by driving away the incident which they believe is tarnish on the family. *Misi Saljong* is then called to the sacred post where incantations and offerings are made hoping that the harvest may be good the forthcoming year.

Chare or Michri Ra:gata: In *A·chik* post-funeral ceremonies, seed-grains are kept for the spirit of the deceased or *me·mang*. This paddy is burnt along with the *delang* or the house of the spirit of the deceased. Burning rice grains for the spirit is believed to be burning the goddess of rice herself. Therefore the believers fear that *Mima Kiri Rokkime* would misinterpret their action and leave them forever even in the times that they would need her for the welfare of their crops. They fear antagonizing their goddess as it would result in their social and economic loss.

Therefore, a ritual of *chare or michri ragata* is especially held for *Mima Kiri Rokkime* so that she would remain with them. In this ritual, the priest offers prayers to the god *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to spare some seed-grains for the surviving members of the family after burning off the seed-grains along with the *delang*. Here the researcher has observed that during this ritual the names of these two gods of crops are remembered at different times of the ritualistic incantations, but both are entreated to be merciful for the act which virtually seems insolent. But just as the deceased then exists in the form of a spirit, the essential items are also to be sent along with it in the form of spirits.

According to *A·chik* belief, death brings in tarnish of gloom and doom into the family. This is believed to have a contagious effect which is not desired by anyone. Therefore the indigenous *A·chiks* continue to believe in the ritual of house cleansing with the ceremony of libation of rice-beer in the house of the deceased. *A·chiks* are respectful towards paddy or rice, as they consider paddy to be the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*. Therefore, the priest performs a ritual to explain this act to the god *Misi Saljong*, the provider of seed-grains to mankind and a ritual of house purification after the death in the family. It is also done to ask forgiveness from their gods for their unconscious acts of disrespect and to free them from family curses in future. Then the priest performs a ritual to call back the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bless them throughout their life.

Rokkime Okama: In this ritual, they specially call upon the god *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to bestow blessings in future. They believe that if this ritual is not performed, they may not receive gods' blessings in all their activities; be it in cultivation, sickness or any other problems.

Manner of the Festival:

Rich families burn *delang* a month or two after the person's death. They usually offer blood sacrifice of a cock, a pig or a cow before pulling down the *delang*. Rich families invite their relatives and the village people to celebrate the burning of *delang*. The villagers attend the festival as a sign of togetherness. They offer blood sacrifice of a cock and slaughter a pig and a cow and cook a feast for the people who attend the ceremony. After the ceremony they eat and drink the whole day which

continues till the night. If the family is not rich, they usually wait till the harvest season because they have to have some means to spend for the feast during the ceremony, which may include a great number of people. This is because of the participation of relatives and friends living in far off areas and the immediate neighbours as well. They smear blood of the cock, cow, and pig on the *delang* if they make animal sacrifices to the gods during the ceremony.

Delang So-a ceremony is observed only after the festival of *Rongchugala*, *Wangala*, in the beginning of the year or a week or three days after the festival of *A-galmaka*. If the relatives living in far-off places could not reach in time for the cremation of the person, the relatives are given a quick notice about the pulling down of the *delang*. So they get a second chance to pay their respects to the deceased. They bring a cow or a pig as contribution for the day of *Delang So-a* ceremony. As a final serving of the feast, the mother or the aunty of the deceased cooks a mixture of rice and eggs. The food is cooked in the courtyard near the *delang* in an earthen-pot or the utensil especially kept for the *me-mang* since the time of its death. The food is served in the *delang* before it is pulled down to be burned off. The utensils are destroyed indicating that the deceased will not need to be served anymore.

After every ritual drinking rice-beer is a must. After the *delang* is burnt, the family members offer paddy on stalk to maintain their relation with the deceased, signifying that physical separation by death would not separate them in spirit and that they would always be remembered as a part of their surviving families. It is a practice among some *A-chiks* that when a person from a family travels to far off places for

long periods, they are always given *rongjanggi* or a handful of rice. It is given as a symbol of preserving the persons' life in the place to which he or she belongs even if any unprecedented incidents have to take place in the course of their journey.

Delang So-a or *Delang Rua* is never observed during the festival of *Ahaia* since they send off the spirit of their gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to their original homes, that is the oceans, since their *services* have been well received. It is never observed without offering blood sacrifice to the gods. According to their belief the god *Waimong*, the care-taker of the spirits in Balpakram does not receive the spirit well without this festival. The family concerned has to serve rice-beer days and nights continuously during the festival. Incantations are chanted by the priest in the rituals. Drums, gongs and horn are sounded. Jars of rice-beer, as many as they receive as contribution are used.

Beliefs and Practices:

Delang So-a is done in order to assess the state of the spirit, the *me-mang*. The priest predicts after closely examining the intestine of a chicken. It is a practice of divination which is the privilege of the priest. If the entrails of a chicken are full, the *me-mang* is pleased with the works of the family members and other participants in the festival. The chicken intestine used for divination is called *do-o kilding nia* or divination of chicken thread. It is an interesting term because the intestine which increases in length as it is unrolled, almost looks like a piece of string or thread and after this ritual, the intestine is tied to the basket where the family members collect the paddy. This paddy is brought by relatives and friends after the harvest from their

field. It is done when the person dies before the harvest to replace serving the fresh rice of the season. A brown-red rooster is used for the male and a white chicken is used for the female. They welcome guests happily and everyone enjoys feasting which is offered both for the spirit or spirits and the gods. The *Waimong* receives him or her well, only if the family members observe this festival and offers it a place to live in the land of the spirits, *Balpakram (Me-mang A-song)*. They believe that dead spirits never depart from home without the celebration of this festival. Relatives, guests, friends from far and near and well-wishers from the village are received well with plenteous serving of rice-beer. On the other hand, it is also considered as a day of formal reception of the other spirits who had died before. They believe that the spirits of the ancestors who have expired before, visit the bereaved home. After the rituals, people enjoy feasting for a day and a night not only in memory of the deceased but also along with the other familiar spirits who are unseen but definitely present according to their belief.

Another *A-chik* belief is that the spirit of the deceased carries along all the materials that are sent along with him or her including seed-grains to *Balpakram*, so that she or he can carry out the same abundant life in the after-world. The *A-chik* folktales say that the first person who met with death in this life on earth was *Susimema*. Therefore, whatever rituals were performed in her death had to be followed, in exactly the same manner till today.

It has been observed that *Chugan*, *Mangona* and *Delang So·a* may soon become archaic and a thing of the past if measures are not taken to preserve this tradition. The main reasons for the gradual disappearance of the traditional festivals are modernization and conversion to Christianity. The reluctance of the younger generation to follow their forefathers' steps is also another reason. Another major factor contributing to the gradual decline of these post funeral festivals is the fast disappearance of *jhum* cultivation. Today more importance is given to the plantation of orange, betel-nut, betel-leaves, pineapple, cashew, etc. due to their value as a steady source of income. As for the younger generation, the spread of education had become such a time consuming activity that it has become prioritized. Though education is a positive and welcome change, this has also created a rather negative attitude to the culture and contributed to disinterest in following and continuing their ancestors' tradition, which their elders would have liked them to. At this juncture, it is appalling to observe that a time may come soon, when this tradition will be totally abandoned and forgotten. It is sad to consider the fact that in future, posterity may not even identify themselves with traditional festivals like *Chugan*, *Delang So·a* and *Mangona*.

CHAPTER-IV

CHAPTER IV

RITUALS OF EXORCISM

4.01 Introduction:

A·chiks strongly believe in purification and cleansing which are necessary in society, for the healthy habitation of man with god. Therefore, they purify the village and its people ritually in the beginning of the New Year to request their gods to be with them in all walks of life throughout the year. The researcher may mention here the rituals of exorcism called *A·siroka* and the festival of *A·song Den·a* or *Kosi*, practiced by the indigenous *A·chik* believers. All the data presented in this chapter are collected from field work while conducting interviews and observing the informing participants who conducted the rituals. The information also collected from various printed sources shall be systematically enlisted in the footnote.

A·siroka: In the course of field study, the researcher was told by Greatminson Chambugong Marak from Dudanggre, Poni A·gitok Sangma, the *a·king nokma* from Saka Monggre and Monen M. Marak from Kama Boldakgre,²³² that etymologically, the term *A·siroka* is the combination of two words: '*A·si and Roka*'. '*A·si*' is another term for '*marang*' or 'profanation' or 'the spirits which manifest evil', '*roka*' literally means 'clearing away', or in other words 'the clearing away of spirits which manifest evil'. The rituals are performed to exorcise or drive away the spirits from the place inhabited by humans. In some villages, *a·siroka* is known by different names such as *chiga roka* or *marang roka* or *bang roka/rikgala* or *song rakkia*. The rituals are performed at different times to drive away the different spirits on different cases. The

²³² The nokma and village elders interviewed on 04-07-03 at Saka Monggre village.

purposes for performing the rituals vary as it functions in almost every area of the believers lives. It is also meant for the expurgation of impurities or curses or diseases, etc. from an entire village. *A·chik* indigenous beliefs are deeply embedded with ritualistic meanings. Apart from the thanksgiving rituals, *A·siroka* contains an aspect of seeking forgiveness for past wrongs and through the performance of rituals the villagers also plead for blessings from the god(s) in the future. In all festivals regarding cultivation, '*a·siroka*' is the first ritual to be performed. It is only after the purification rituals that the celebration of these festivals is permissible.

A·song Den·a or Kosi Tata: This festival is celebrated in the month of February for the god *Goera Kalkame* who is believed to be a powerful god, the god of Thunder and Strength. This is another important ritual of exorcism which is observed with solemn reverence out of fear of incurring the wrath of their fearful and powerful god *Goera Kalkame* or *Kosi*. The god *Goera Kalkame* is acknowledged and honoured before they start any activity in the beginning of the New Year to make themselves aware of the presence of their gods and thus be aware of their blessings in all kinds of works they carry out. A particular plot of land or forest is reserved for *Goera Kalkame* near the village. The villagers never cut trees or enter such forests except on or before the festival. During this festival the whole village takes part; even children are allowed to join the festival. They offer animal sacrifices such as a goat, a red feathered chicken and a pig. The rituals in this festival can be performed only by *Tuara Nangapa*, the high priest, since the god is considered to be a powerful and fearful god.

4.02 THE RITUALS OF *A·SIROKA* IN FESTIVALS

The term '*mite*' in *A·chik* is used to describe all the supernatural beings. '*Mite*' is an umbrella term covering what we call 'spirits and imps.' According to the *A·chik* indigenous belief, these spirits or *mite(s)* are omnipresent-in the sky above, or on the earth below, in the depths of the waters, in the dark caverns, in the recesses of mysterious mountains, in trees and bamboo groves. The dwelling places of some spirits are rivers and lakes, mountains and hills, trees and shrubs, sticks and stones. Similarly, the sun, moon and stars are associated with some spirits or *mite(s)* and all these *mite(s)* are considered immortal by the *A·chiks* who follow the traditional belief system.²³³ They believe in the presence of the gods or *mite(s)* in their daily lives, some which were benevolent spirits and the others which were malevolent. *A·siroka* is conducted in every aspect of *A·chik* traditional life to exorcise the malevolent spirits and also not to displease the benevolent ones. It is amazing to see the many varieties of *a·siroka* performed in different ways for different purposes. This chapter is an attempt to put together, the pieces of information collected from the field, the primary as well as the secondary sources. They perform this ritual on many occasions namely - before starting the work in the *jhum* field, while shifting to a new house or while shifting village settlements to a new fertile place, etc. This performance is done with the belief that their gods were the witnesses of their dedication. Primarily they sanctify themselves with these rituals and by doing so; they look up to their gods for blessings on everything they do. The researcher will attempt to show here, the traditional customs of the non-Christian *A·chiks* which is deeply embedded with ritualistic meanings. In the performance of the ritual of *a·siroka* the villagers offer a

²³³ Milton S Sangma. *History and Culture of the Garos* :Oriental Publishers, New Delhi.1979,p.220

thanksgiving ritual, plead for blessing in the future from the god(s) and there is also an aspect of seeking forgiveness for past wrongs.

Before visiting the field to study the ritual of *A·siroka*, the researcher was under the impression that *a·siroka* was a single ritual with the same features all over Garo Hills. When all the information was collected from the narratives of many people the researcher came to know that it was performed at the beginning of each important festival. Thus, it was not until the researcher went to the field that it was realized that *a·siroka* is an altogether indispensable ritual in almost all occasions.

A·chiks perform the ritual of *A·siroka* in connection with cultivation as well as to inhabit in a new place or newly constructed houses and so on. They believe that if the place or house is unclean, the gods will not dwell and bless them. Therefore, this ritual to drive away the spirits of impurities is performed by the high priest, *Tuara Nangapa* with these words:

Poi... marang, marangkode, starangkode
Ia a·songo, ia chigao,
Na·ong nambene, Ki·ong nambene.
Chijajahane, tapopohani,
Chikamachana, Rongdatchana, Girimingsa Rangchiningasa;
Chodin Me·aming, Rangdin Panteming
Chupeetnajok, galwiletnajok, poi...

Poi²³⁴ spirits of impurities,

²³⁴ The word 'poi' is a word for driving away the spirits of impurities. With these words, *A·chiks* send the spirit of impurities through water. In the ceremony, the believers use a pig, a cow, cocks and eggs as animal sacrifices to their gods. To show that they have sent away the spirits of impurities, the priest inserts a stick inside the mouth of a red feathered cock reaching out through the anus; then it is placed upside down with the mouth of the cock pointing to the ground and the tail upwards to the sky. It affirms that the power of man (with the help of their gods) is greater than the spirits of impurities and that the malevolent gods are controlled by the benevolent gods.

Spirits of profanation, this stain;
 In this place, in this land,
 Don't you stay, don't live;
 Go down to the water, to the river, to the depth of the waters;
 Shift to the stony place, with Rain and Hail,
 With the man-god *Chodin*, with Young god *Rangdin*,
 We are sprinkling you with beer, go away poi...

Following are the different kinds of *A·siroka* conducted on various occasions:

(a) *A·siroka* before clearing the jungle for new *jhum* cultivation:

This is performed in November every year. It is usually performed with an interval of one or two years²³⁵, during *Wansaldoa* or *Mi Jam Tata* and *Wankadoa* or *Chare-Mikkol Krita*; that is, if they observe *Wansaldoa* or *Wanbasala* one year, *Wankadoa* or *Chare-Mikkol Krita* is observed the following year. The *Wankadoa* ceremony is observed as an act of thanksgiving to acknowledge the blessings of *Misi Saljong*, the provider of food-grains and also for a good harvest. *Wansaldoa* is performed near the village granary and sacrifices are performed to the gods so that the food-grains stored in the granary will be sufficient for the people throughout the year. Of the above two, the first ritual is *A·siroka*. Here, only the *nokmas* (the custodians of the *a·king* land) or the highest priest *Tuara Nangapa* are entitled to conduct the ritual. Almost all *A·chik* ceremonies and rituals are generally accompanied by feasts. One field informant Sajeng Ch. Momin had willingly answered the queries of the researcher regarding the performance of these rituals.²³⁶

²³⁵ This is according to Greatminson Ch. Marak, from the village Dudanggre where the festival is observed every two years but in Kama Boldakgre it is observed every year

²³⁶ Sajeng Ch. Momin from the village Buripara, Mengkakgre, West Garo Hills was personally interviewed on 27-07-2004.

(b) Purification ceremony at the new *Jhum* Plot (*A·a O·pata*) and Divination through Dreams (*Jumang Sia*):

O·pata means cleansing a small portion of the new selected *jhum* field, on a trial basis. In this festival a new plot is selected and marked. Interpretation of the significance of the dream is done the same night after the villagers select the plot. This is the second *A·siroka* ritual performed in the *jhum* field which is usually conducted between the months of November and December.²³⁷ *A·a* is a 'plot' and *o·pata* means 'clearing a small portion'. *A·chiks* believe that both good and evil spirits reside in the forests. Therefore, before they start any work in the field, they clear a small portion of the place as an auspicious gesture and take the permission of the god *Abbet-Rengge* who is considered as the care-taker of the place by ritually performing egg-breaking (*do·chi goa*) ceremony. The particular night after the ceremony, they sleep in expectancy of a supernatural dream to find out if the gods permit them to use the land for cultivation. This ritual is performed in the newly selected *jhum* field after the *Wangala* festival. At the time of the performance, they carry only one implement from the village such as a *dao* and go up to the new *jhum* field. Prior to the ritual, in fact well in advance, the village *nokma* holds a meeting at the *bandasal* which is a resting place in the middle of the village. Here he allots plots of land for cultivation to all the households in the village.

The ritualistic sequence for *a·a o·pata* and *a·siroka* is as follows: first, the villagers ask the god of that place to leave the area by chanting some ritualistic prayers. The villagers themselves actively participate in this ritual. After incantations

²³⁷ A. C Momin. *Ku·andik*, 1985. pp12-13 and Mihir N.Sangma, *Maniani Bidik*, 1995, pp.4-5.

in a highly ceremonious manner, they clear a small plot of land. It is one way of informing others that somebody has already claimed the place. That is precisely why it is called *a·a o·pata*.

(c) Purification ritual of farming tools or *Attepong Su·gala*:

This ritual is performed in December or January in the village courtyard by the priest who is usually the *a·king nokma*. *Attepong Su·gala* literary means washing the handle of the blade or *dao*. It signifies the ritualistic purification of farming tools. It is another form of *a·siroka* or purification of the implements of agriculture. Aldrich Ch. Momin says that the *attepong sugala* ritual is usually done after cutting or clearing of the jungle or the forest in the new *jhum* field.²³⁸ The purification ceremony is done primarily to wash away the different impurities (*marang*) or evil spirits. The belief behind this ritual would give an interesting insight into the lives of the *A·chiks*, i.e. the rituals of pollution and purification. While clearing the trees the villagers fear that they may inadvertently kill insects or other living beings; therefore, they feel it necessary to purify the agricultural implements used, especially the *daos*. Before the ritual starts, all the villagers place their implements near the *kimrong*, the Y shaped post in the village courtyard where animals are slaughtered; the priest breaks the egg(s) over the implements as a sign of purification. They believe that if they do not observe this ritual, the gods may not co-operate with them during the season of cultivation and may not bless them with a good harvest. Therefore, they always try to keep themselves, as well as all the materials they use in the field, clean. Rice-beer is

²³⁸ The first year use of *jhum* field.

poured over the implements as an act of reverence to their gods and to purify the materials used for cultivation. It is also done to appease the gods to maintain a good relationship with them. It may be noted that the villagers keep their agricultural implements carefully at home after the work, as they fear that the gods will consider it negligence on their part if they do not do so. This, they fear, might even infuriate the gods and may result in their desertion to other places.

(d) Purification ceremony of agricultural tools or *Gitchipong A·siroka* :

This ceremony is called by different names, such as, *Chiga Roka* or *Gitchpong Su·gala* or *Gitchipong Roka*. Mihir N. Sangma, the author of *Maniani Bidik*, a well known A·chik anthropological book has given various names to this ceremony namely; *Rama Krita*, *A·a Bakchata*, *Denbilsia*, *Wa·cheng Bolrroa* and *Rama Cholruramamo A·siroka*.²³⁹ Major A. Playfair, it is interesting to note, has given it another name - *Michitata* and mentions that it is done to appease the spirits and to earn favour from their gods. Willen Mangsang Sangma says that in Dudanggre village under Dadenggre Block, *Gitchipong a·siroka* is called *Anti Ramao a·siroka*. Another variation of the name they have there is *Sabu Roka*.²⁴⁰ It is celebrated on the 2nd or 3rd week of March every year. Other informants give specific dates for observing the ritual saying that it is observed in the 12th and 13th or the 22nd and 23rd of March.²⁴¹ However, Mihir N. Sangma gives the time of celebration as the 1st week

²³⁹ See M.N.Sangma. *Maniani Bidik*. Tura: Garo Hills Book Emporium, 1995, pp.4-5. Also Aldrich Ch Momin who says that *Gitchipong A·siroka* is called *Chiga Roka* in his book *A·chikni Ku·andik*, Tura: 1985, pp.12-14. Also Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*. Spectrum Publications, 1988, p. 93.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Willen Mangsang Sangma, priest of Dudanggre village under Dadenggre Block, West Garo Hills, 04-07-03.

²⁴¹ Greatmingson Chambugong Marak, the priest, Dudanggre and Poni A.gitok Sangma(*a·king nokma*) Saka- Monggre under Dadenggre Block, West Garo, Hills.04-07-03.

of April.²⁴² The names as seen above are meant for the same ritual but they have different names and times of observation in different areas.

Gitchipong a-siroka involves the purification of agricultural implements that are used in the *jhum* field before starting work in a field in the second year of its cultivation which is then called the *a-breng*. They never call up *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the field without ritually purifying the field, the implements, etc. They believe that *Misi Saljong*, the god provider of paddy-grains to mankind, will go back to the ocean where they originally belong, *Rekbok Chiga-Sagal Ama*.²⁴³ Before invoking the gods, they clean the agricultural implements first; then they call up the gods to the *jhum* field. Calling up the gods ritually, is done after burning the selected plot for fresh cultivation. During the ceremony, they use a bull as a sacrificial animal. After sacrificing the bull at the *kimrong*, the blood is smeared on the *chokrek* in the altar. Later, the meat is cooked and shared with all the participants in the village. In most villages it is performed only once in two years, but in an interesting case, some villages surrounding the area of Dudanggre village observe *Gitchipong a-siroka* every year. In the researcher's observation, the ritual of *Gitchipong a-siroka* is dying off due to the villagers using the land for cultivation only for a whole year and then shifting the field to more fertile areas. The villagers however give the reason that, as the fields is no longer fertile as before, it does not produce a good harvest, so they are forced to use the field only for a year, instead of two.

²⁴² See Mihir N. Sangma .*Maniani Bidik*. Tura: Garo Hills Book Emporium, 1995. p4.

²⁴³ According to the *A-chiks'* belief, their gods and goddesses live in the ocean called *Rekbok -Chiga Sagal-Ama*.

(e) **Purification ceremony during *A·galmaka* festival:** This purification ritual is done in the middle of March-April every year. The *A·galmaka* ritual is held just after the burning of *jhum* fields, approximately, around March and April, a week or two ahead of the first shower of rain. This ritual is also called *A·galmaka* or *Galmak Doa* because the ritual is performed while the burnt debris or ashes are still fresh and smouldering in the fresh *jhum* field. The dried debris from the newly selected *jhum* field (*a·dal*) is burnt. Early the following morning, the purification ritual is performed in the new *jhum* field. In the ceremony the ritual of breaking-eggs is done followed by a libation with a little freshly brewed rice-beer specially prepared for the gods. The other form of *A·siroka* done before the *jhumias* start working in the field is the *Gitchipong A·siroka*. It is performed in the *a·breng* which is the field used for a second year as a *jhum* field. It is usually observed a week or two before *A·galmaka*. The *A·siroka* is observed to call up *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* from the sea to the *jhum* field. While chanting, the priest calls out in all directions; north, south, east, and west expecting the gods to come up from their homes to the *jhum* fields. The villagers believe that *Mima Kiri Rokkime* will then be present in their *jhum* field with the crops and will look after the crops till the *Ahaia* festival. The festival of *Ahaia* is observed to take down the harvested paddy to the village. They believe that during the *Ahaia* festival as the villagers take down the paddy in a *mimanggot*, the gods *Misi Saljong* and *Mima Kiri Rokkime* go down to the village with them.

After the purification ritual of the fresh *jhum* field, the *jhumias* can start sowing crops such as maize, paddy and different varieties of tuber. The sacrificial altar is prepared in this *A·siroka* ceremony. Even widows are allowed to perform this

ritual, in their fields by themselves. However the altars and the *jaktap* or the sacrificial holder, made out of bamboo strips like *chokreks* are prepared by the widow's nephew or son-in-law.²⁴⁴ After the ritual, the villagers gather in the *nokma's* house where they consume jars of rice-beer brewed for the occasion. This may sometimes even go on for a week.

(f)Purification during the festival of *Mi Amua* or *Mi Krita* or *Bang Gala*:

This ritual is performed in mid May or June and is done regularly by the *nokma(s)* when the paddy plants became unhealthy. *A-chiks* believe that the crops which are the forms of the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* turn unhealthy due to various diseases disseminated by malignant gods. The crops may not grow healthy if *Mima Kiri Rokkime* gets sick, so to drive away the diseased spirits, they perform the *A-siroka* ceremony. According to this belief, the disease-carrying malignant gods are: *Rakasi* for which the ritual is called *Raksi krita*, *Bang* or *skal* or *nawang* for which the ritual is called *Bang Rika*, *Goera* and the ritual to drive him off is called *Goera krita*, and *Areta Salbamon* which is why the ritual is called *Areta Salbamon Krita*.²⁴⁵ In this ritual the performers ask forgiveness from the above-mentioned gods. Here, they mostly use chicken or cock or pig as the sacrificial item. When the ritual is over, they carry the sacrificial altar such as *sambasia* and *chokrek* to the *Rama Bibra*, the cross-road or *Anti Rama* the village thoroughfare. In doing so, they believe that the evil spirits or diseases will leave the field and go to other places. On the thoroughfare they place the *sambasia* and *chokrek* which they carried from the *jhum* field together. This

²⁴⁴ As collected from Sajeng Ch. Momin, Buripara, Mengkaggre, Babadam on 27-07-04.

²⁴⁵ Aldrich Ch. Momin. *A-chikni Ku-andik*: Tura, 1985,pp.24-25.

particular spot is called *Mi Rama* or the path of paddy. *Mi* means paddy, and it is also the other name for their goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* and *Rama* is a path. At the *Mi Rama* they even attach a slaughtered pig's ear and a cock's head to the *sambasia* or the sacrificial altar.

(g) *A-siroka* at the time of the field-house cleansing ceremony:

A-chiks never stay in a new house or place till its ritual of purification is done. Before staying in the field-house, its purification is performed to drive away the spirits, as the villagers say '*kalakgipa -sninggipa, memang-mittena a-siroka*' which means, the ritual is done to drive away the spirits who haunt people in many ways; eventually the performer asks for the gods' presence in the place. In the same way, whenever *A-chiks* settle down in a new village, a new house or make a new granary, they always conduct the *A-siroka* purification ritual before actually occupying or using it.

(h) *A-siroka* at the festival of *Wachi* or *Salrak Tata*:

This ritual is performed between April and May. The ritual is done to plead to the Rain-god to send rain for their crops during drought or a dry spell. They believe that scarcity of rain is a sign of god's anger. This ritual is observed near a river which never dries; the place is called *chibasal*. The villagers observe this ceremony with a lot of caution. If any one fails to observe it, the person has to pay for all the materials needed for the ceremony. Otherwise, a bull, a pig, a goat and a cock will be bought from the bazaar and the expenses are to be borne by the one who disobeys the restrictions and regulations or commits any mistake. For collection of rice and money,

the *nokma* entrusts some village elders. According to A.C. Momin, while collecting rice from each household, they steal one egg as part of the ritual, which they break on the running water to predict the rain. They believe that if the eggs foam forming a frothy layer over the water, the rain will come soon. The whole village takes part in the ceremony, but on the river-side, only the men-folk have the right to attend the ceremony. After the ritual they sprinkle water on the priest with their hands symbolizing rain showers, then they winnow the priest with a *ruan* or a winnowing fan made out of thin bamboo strips; this symbolises the wind in the rainy season. They stop winnowing only when the priest *Tuara Nangapa* (the highest priest) feels cold. Then all the people present will splash water on each other even the priest would take part in the splashing. This is a symbolic gesture considered to be auspicious on the occasion.

(i) ***A·siroka* at the festival of *Wachi So·a*:** In this festival, the ritual of *A·siroka* is done in mid May-June. This ritual is performed alternately with *Wachi Tata* when the year receives excessive rainfall, which is believed to be an angry outpouring of the Rain god. If there is too much rain the crops will get spoiled. So in case of a heavy down pour, the ritual of *A·siroka* is performed to ask forgiveness from the Rain-god and beg him to stop the rain. Then the villagers go to the same place in the riverside they would visit during the time of drought and in this spot, ritually burn a big rock. The believers then carry stones from there to the village and place it on their fire-place to dry.²⁴⁶ T

²⁴⁶ A fire is lit round a large stone which the Rain-god is believed to inhabit and small stones or pebble

hey believe that by doing this, the continuous rain will stop.²⁴⁷

(j) *A·siroka* at the time of curses befalling the village:

A·chiks strictly follow traditional customs in their daily activities. But the three words '*Asi- Malja, Nima* or *Dakmalja*'²⁴⁸ have a moral force behind them derived from the history of the people, to restrain any *A·chik* from committing any kind of evil offences, or breach of social norms . They believe that various kinds of distress befall those who are tempted to cohabit without following the *A·chik* marriage system, *do·sia*. In such cases, the *A·chiks* say that some kind of profanation (*marang*) has entered the home and the couple suffer a loss of social prestige and respect. Thus cohabitation is not allowed in any village, and the couple would be forced to live in the forest, isolated from the community.

Asi-Malja, dakmalja and *nima*, are three words everyone is absolutely bound to avoid if one does not wish to incur the anger of the spirits. Therefore, *A·siroka* is performed by a priest *Tuara Nangapa* to appease the gods and plead forgiveness by the ritual of breaking-eggs.

Purification and cleansing are necessary for healthy habitation of any society, be it traditional or modern. When the news of an epidemic in the nearby villages is heard, immediate steps are taken to prevent the occurrence in one's own village by performing an *A·siroka* ritual. Sometimes, strangers are even forbidden to enter the

strewn around there are collected and carried home to keep in the fire-place. If these dry up then it is believed that the heavy continuous rain will stop.

²⁴⁷ Milton S. Sangma. *History and Culture of the Garos*. New Delhi, 1981. p.193.

²⁴⁸ *Asi* and *Malja* were two characters of a folk tale who broke the rules of *Salnima* (ritual shunning of daily activities) and received the curse of god resulting in their deaths- thus the saying *Asi* and *Malja* are a reminder of the past.

village as the villagers suspect them to be carriers of some diseases. A sacrificial killing of a monkey or a langur is done to appease the god of pestilence. This is called *Bangriksoa* or *Songariksoa* or 'driving away the spirits in advance'. They carry the monkey on a big basket (called *dola* in the Dudanggre village) and they make an effigy of a man out of thatched grass, believing that the monkey will carry away the deadly diseases.

4.03 FESTIVAL OF A·SONG DEN·A OR KOSI TATA

A·chiks believe in *Kosi* as the dwelling place of the god of the earth and the trees and plants. They specially reserve a forest and leave it unexploited by man. They believe that the god of the *Kosi* dwells with the people, preferring a secluded residence which is demarcated and is called a *Kosi* or *A·song*.²⁴⁹

The whole plot of land demarcated especially for the god, is called *A·song* and the observation of the festival in this sacred plot of land, is called *Den·a*. On such lands, sacrificial stones are placed; the believers call these sacrificial stones *A·song* or *Kosi*. Entrance to such a place is prohibited by the people as it is considered as a sacred place which has to be held in 'high' esteem. The trees and every form of plants are kept untouched. Invocations are made to the god of *Kosi* once in a year or every two years for protection of the villagers from various dangers and sicknesses. The *A·chiks* search for such a place where enemies do not trespass, and tigers and elephants do not destroy man's life and reserve the land for the *A·song Kosi*. In the ancient times, one or two furlongs of land were kept for the *Kosi* god.

²⁴⁹ *Kosi* is a sacred-grove of the god *Goera Kalkame* and other gods; the place is believed to be the dwelling place of the guardian gods of the villagers to save the people from dangers and diseases.

The festival is performed in the month of January. The ritual is performed with sacrificial offerings of animals to drive off dangers that infect the village community from sickness, the attack of wild animals, etc. Permission is granted only on the day of the festival. This is one festival of the *A·chiks* which is solemnly celebrated. It is taken as a mandatory custom. It is observed both by the Christians and the non-Christians living in the villages which are still dependant on the indigenous religion and the beliefs associated with the practices of agriculture. This is an interesting feature of this festival.

According to the sayings of the forefathers when a man was beheaded in the pre-Christian era, the head would be buried in the *kosi*. They constructed a stone structure on top of this head. The people also believed that the head supernaturally turned to stone. On such a stone, the villagers offered animal sacrifices once a year or once in every five years. The village community clears the jungle from the *kosi* once in every one or two years.

Nature of the Festival:

The rituals for the god *Kosi* are performed once in a year or once in two years depending on the village rules made by the authority. The believers of Siju area and the Galwanggre village under Dadenggre Block apprised that the festival is observed for three days in *A·beng* area and a week in *Atong* area. This has been recorded in the field study made by the researcher by means of the method of participatory narrative. According to them the festival starts either on a Wednesday or a Monday of first week

of January or February before the festival of *Gitchipong A-siroka* in *a-breng jhum* field. The *nokma* informs the villagers living in far off places, a month ahead of the scheduled time for the festival so they are able to participate in it.

This place where they experience safety from the dangers of adversaries is considered as the best place to live in and is regarded as the place of the god *Kosi* and *Goera Kalkame*. The participants of certain villages also added that they need not fear while walking through their land, because their god was there to protect them. The village authority strictly forbids cutting and felling of trees and bamboos from such places. No one can chop trees even for firewood from this place. The people believe that if anyone deliberately disobeys the rules set by the village authority, no one would be able to vouch for his safety. No one would also be able to take action against anyone for any unfortunate incidences that might occur to the person involved. The believers fear that the god would incur his wrath on them and sell out their lives to other destructive beings like *Irena Japram* (monster). Therefore accidents like falling from slopes and getting killed or even being killed by crocodiles could happen which was beyond anybody's reach and comprehension. They say that the god would sell off their lives by instructing the monster saying:

You may eat if you want,
You can do what you want with them,
For they did not listen to me.

They begin the festival from eight o'clock. Before they start the ritual, they first blow the horn and start preparing the sacrificial altar. When the horn is sounded, everyone stops working. They stop pounding rice and doing other chores. They do not move about to other places as well. Sacrificial altar is prepared in the *nokma's* front

yard. Here, *bengraru* leaves, bamboo branches and a goat are placed near the altar. Blood sacrifice is made for the god *Kosi*. In these days, instead of man, a goat is used as the sacrificial animal. When the goat is being slaughtered, they utter these words –

*Ian atchu-ambi nang-na boli on-skaenga,
Iako cha-eming, iako ringeming,
Ia nang-ni a-songo goreo songdongpagipa a-chapgipa gimikan gipin ong-ja,
Nang-ni dedrang nang-ni su-drangsa,
Iako na-a marangnaba matangnaba,
Katchinaba-mitenaba, gisiknaba, buringnaba, silangnaba, dramnaba,
Wanga-Wangga Dudu-Chompanaba kua rangga ku-chil dangapnaba
na-a palpanabe botpanabe gipin ong-ja,
Ia nang-ni a-songo rogipade, nang-ni derara-su-rara nirikpabo sandipabo!*

Grandfather, grandmother,
We are offering a sacrifice
Eat this, drink this
All these people living in this place are not strangers,
They are your children, your grandchildren,
Do not allow defilement or unclean animals to come near them.
Do not sell them;
To the sickle, to the gods, to the spirits, to the forest, to the slopes,
To the *Wanga-Wangga Dudu-Chompa* (tiger),
who opens his mouth at the sight of man,
Do not loan us, we're not strangers;
We, living in this land are your children; look after us, and protect us.

They offer the sacrifice in this manner. This chant is not only indicative of the people but it indicates other living beings as well. If strange animals not usually seen in their land are spotted; like elephants, tigers, and reptiles or any other living being, they are handed over to the gods. The priest chants an incantation in this way before handing over the unusual animals:

*Ja-dok pe-bo, nang-ni a-kongona napagipako.
Katchi ong-bo, mongma-matchaba ong-bo
Bini drae nang-ko manimitingo re-baode, a-song na-a so-ote galbo.
Indiba nang-ni dedrang su-drangni nang-ni a-kingo roenggipako
Na-a sandi chongmotpabo;
Nang-ni dedrang su-drang iano krite manienga.*

“Eliminate the soul, of the one who enter your land,
 Be it a god, or an elephant or tiger,
 Who forces his way through your land while we worship you; kill him.
 But not your children and grandchildren roaming about in your land,
 Search them all.
 Here we your children worship you.

Before the festival, the entrance and the exit path of the village are blocked by tying a thread across it as a symbol of barricading the path. While tying it the priest calls out these words:

*Ia a·songko-chigako, atchuko-ambiko chiga olakienga, jachik dem·nakenga,
 A·songgipin-goregipinoniko, chipuba jongsaba mongmaba-matchaba,
 Ia a·jako gabatbagipakode mikron ot·bo, ja·dok pe·boni, jajaitaibo-bitbatitaibo,
 Tusidimuataibo aganbitbatitaibo.*

This land, this river, is worshipped by our grandfather, grandmother and the rivers by kneeling;
 From another land, snakes or elephants-tigers
 Will dig out the eye of the one who enters this land.
 Tarnish this soul, mislead them, put them to sleep, make them stammer.

Thus, they tie the thread across. At two or three p.m. on the other day following the festival, this thread is cut to signify opening of the path. Only then, people are allowed to enter the village. In the past ages, they bury the head on which a stone is placed. Blood of a goat is mixed with rice flour and turmeric, this mixture is smeared on the stone. In case the stone should lean during this ritual, it cannot be straightened into a proper position. Everyone shouts “*come grandma rise up, grandpa rise up*”, and they dig a hole to erect the stone. “*Where are you sleeping grandpa, speak, wake up,*” everyone shouts. A goat is slaughtered and sacrificed as a substitute for man. So the land cannot be taken away or looked down upon by anyone with mean intentions. This interestingly is observed by both the Christians and non-Christians in the areas where the festival is celebrated.

Myth of *Kosi* Stone:

The elderly villagers from Rongsu village narrated the myth of Rongsu *Kosi* that in the past, a human would be hunted and beheaded for a funeral ceremony in the village. This head would then be buried in a particular place. They strongly believed that the head would eventually turn to a stone. It is also said that a person fleeing from enemies was always sheltered there and they would not be pursued anymore. They would also be sheltered from tigers and elephants even in the deep forest. They believe that even the animals look after them and do not harm them.

Another saying is that, in a certain place, a man is said to have eloped with a beautiful woman. They hid in that place by constructing a wall, which was five (5) feet tall. A trench was dug near the wall and pointed bamboo poles were placed there, it was then covered with grass. They say that enemies who pursued them fell into the pit and lost their lives. The ancient *A·chiks* believe that they were not harmed for destroying their enemies. Thenceforth, they offer animal sacrifices on the *kosi* where stone is erected in the forest even till today. Even if there is no concrete evidence to prove its authenticity, there are many oral transmissions about its initiation. It is erected for the god of *Kosi* in every *A·chik* village which gives a relevant support to the story.

Therefore, in the *kosi*, the thick forest is kept untouched. For example in Selbalgre village in the West Garo Hills; the *kosi* has a huge and a rare species of tree.

The researcher has borne witness to the fact that even seven well built young men could not grasp the circumference of the tree in November, 1998 during the field study. The jungle clearance of the *Kosi* is done after every five or ten years before the slash and burn cultivation.

Preparation of the Festival:

A week before the festival, the whole area of the *Kosi* is cleared. Money is collected to buy two to three goats, a cow, and chicken for the feast, a red feathered cock to offer the blood sacrifice for the god and a pig; long before the specified time for the festival. The day for the celebration of *A·song Den-a* or *Kosi Krita* is fixed well ahead. The set date is announced to the people in the market place to attend the celebration, so that everyone can protect themselves from the danger of paying indemnity to the village. While announcing they say, “We are going to observe *A·song Den-a*, you living in and around the place may come and take part. We will celebrate it for two days and two nights”- thus, everyone is invited and warned at the same time. The *nokma* selects eleven male members to lead the dance with the traditional *grika* performance.

One day ahead of the festival, an altar is prepared by clearing the surrounding area of the *kosi* stone properly. For the ceremony, the elderly men of the village adorn themselves beautifully and the *nokma* selects eleven men to lead the *grika* dance during the ceremony. The priest and the selected members sharpen the sword brightly to brandish it while performing the *grika* dance during the festival. *A·chiks* hold this festival in grand celebration and it is binding for all the villagers to take part in it.

Performance of the Rituals:

On the first day of the festival, the villagers abstain from daily activities.

The sequences of activities/ rituals relating to the festival of *Kosi Tata*.

The first Day	The Second Day	The Third Day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●observe <i>salnima</i> in the village, the selected members blockage The village path at 7:00a.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●perform rituals, slaughter animal sacrifice for the deceased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ●<i>A·siroka</i>, perform the ritual of purification and after the ceremony the blockage village path is open at 4:00pm.

The second Day:

On second day of the festival, the rituals of animal sacrifice are performed. The priest, *Tuara Nanggapa* clothes himself with a costly traditional dress which is made of precious stones and beautiful beads, he covers himself with *pandra*, the traditional dress for men and ties a head-band called *kadesil* on the head. He also wears precious traditional ornaments to perform the rituals. It is interesting to note the elaborate dress of the highest priest who is the only person with authority to perform the rituals in this festival.

In the past ages, in order to observe the festival, village adult male members were divided into two groups. One group had to hunt for a man to behead. The head was always brought from other villages. The other group has to stay at home to defend the village from their enemies. These days, instead of a man, a dummy made of bamboo and grass is represented as man and is brought to the place of invocation.

When this figure is carried to the place, the people participate in shouts:

We've caught a man, caught a man,
His head is beheaded.

The people are waiting to beat their drums (*kram*),
 Blow the horns and shout together -
 "Come on, come on."

In ages past, when a man was beheaded, they announced the name of the unfortunate person and greatly proclaimed the name of the hunter who achieved the honour. Naming the person, they proclaim- (*So and so*) *It is his head which has been beheaded.* They all come to the place performing the war dance and even those waiting at the place also do the same. When they reach the place, the head of the person which is brought wears a brow band and metal beads. All these are placed on the bundle of grass at the altar. Then, they mention the clan and shout-

"*Ka Chalang, Ka Goera,*
Marak is strong, Sangma is strong."

The priest and the selected people shout, take steps together rhythmically, brandish the sword and dance around the bundle of grass. After they finish the dance, they slaughter a goat and smear the blood on the *kosi* stones and pour beer. They clap their hands and show off the swords and shield and go round the *kosi* shouting-

Ka Goera, Ka Chalang,
Ka Marak reaches the leaves;
 For the *Kosi* land, you have been appointed the head,
 The body is buried beneath the earth,
 For the *Nokpante Kalkambe.*
 With *Goera*, we will move,
 With *Kalkame* we will settle;
Ka Goera, Ka Chalang!

The meat of the slaughtered goat is tied on two logs and a pointed bamboo pole is erected around it to prevent it from being eaten by wild animals. The neck of a red feathered cock is strangulated near the sacrificial altar. A stick is thrust into the

anus and it is placed in a position where the mouth faces the earth and the anus in the opposite direction. A pig and a cow is slaughtered and cooked for the feast at the place. When all the work is over, in the evening, at that place itself, the men test their own strength and games are played by the male youths. When all these forms of entertainment are over, they go to the *nokma's* house and drink beer to end the ritual. Then they collect the big and elongated stones from the river where they believe the god resides.

Blood sacrifice is compulsory part of the ceremony. In the morning set for the festival, all the villagers gather in the village *Kosi*. They keep all the necessary sacrificial items ready before time. In the past the villagers say that, one group is given responsibility to fight and behead the enemy; another group looks after the village to protect its people. These days, they go to the village and prepare an effigy with bamboo strips which is stuffed with grass specifically called *samna·tik* from the river to represent the beheaded person. They carry it to the sacrificial spot in a ritualistic manner. The people shout while carrying it in these words:

*Mande man:jok, man:jok,
Amikkako sko sotna man:jok.*

This is translated as;

We have the man with us; we have the man with us,
Somebody's head has been beheaded.

They shout and beat the sacred drum (*kram*) while uttering these words. They blow horns and shout together "*haibo, haibo*" as they proceed to the *Kosi*. Then the selected individuals lead the group with the *grika* dance and a song to accompany it

which goes, “*ra·ba ra·ba*” or ‘bring, bring’. When they reach the place, they dress the effigy with a head-band made of grass and metal beads on its fore-head and place it on a raised platform (*sreng* or *srek*). They shout together:

Ka Chalang, Ka Goera!
Marak raka, Sangma raka!;

These words mean:

Ka Chalang, Ka Goera!
Marak is strong, Sangma is strong!

Saying these, the priest and the dance leaders of *grika*, dance around the sacrificial place. They dance on the raised platform with each step taken together. They flaunt their bright swords as they dance. After the *grika* dance, they crush the white stones to a powder form and offer it as the ritualistic beer to the gods but since this is obviously not fit for human consumption they do not join in the drinking as is usually done after each ritual. In place of their gods, they collect and pick eight stones and name them after the gods. They are *Plipa*, *Repreppa*, *Chandira*, *Ku·simang*, *Okman*, *Chengman*, *Buru* and *Jangru*. It is followed after the legend which tells of a man called *Noro* who heard these eight (8) gods sharing beer with one another. *A·chiks* believe that even the gods make a din while drinking rice-beer just the way that human beings do. Therefore, this belief is symbolized in the ritual where priest *Tuara Nanggapa* gives ‘*Plipa*’, a red stone to drink as rice-beer. They believe that this god must have passed it to the other gods to drink, and in this manner one god passed it on to another till at last *Plipa* had to drink it first. When the priest scoops out the beer with *e·chok* which is a scoop made out of wild leaves which is usually used by the *A·chiks* as plates and offers it to god saying; ‘for *Plipa*, for *Repreppa*, for *Chandira*, for *Ku·simang*, for

Okman, for *Changman*, for *Buru* and *Jangru*'. When all the rituals are over, a drum and a metal gong is beaten and the horn is blown along the way. When they reach the *nokma*'s house, they dance round the sacrificial altar and one person from the selected group for the *grika* dance slaughters the cow tied up in the *tap monggil*, which is another important sacrificial post. When the cow is slaughtered, they all shout "haibo". Then, they enter the *nokma*'s house, beating the drums. They dance, drink beer and feast the whole day. They select a particular spot and reserve the land for the god *Kosi* or *A-song*. They sing their pronouncement out saying:

Oh, ia biapo amikkani sio den-e songipao songdong achaon,
A-song nama, chiga nama,
Marang starang ong-ja, bobilba ja-ku rikjajok
Ginalba biding sanjajok,
Hai an-ching iakon maninajok ,
Ian an-chingni atchu, ian an-chingni ambi,
An-chingko rakkichina, an-chingko sandichina
Chasongni chasong an-ching iakon olakignok,
Inon jama joka, inon an-ching janggi tanga
Inon an-ching bobil ja-ku rikna gualjok.

O, in this place, where a head has been on the death of a person,
 We'll make this our own land.
 Where the land and water is pleasant,
 Where there is no stain, where enemies do not follow;
 Nor do they charge *them* anymore.
 Come we'll start to worship this,
 This is our grandfather, this is our grandmother,
 Let them guard us, let them look after us.
 For ages to come we'll worship this,
 Here our souls will be free, here we will live,
 Here our enemies will not remember to follow us (we are safe).

Ritual of *A-siroka* in the Festival of *Kosi* or *A-song Den-a*:

As a part of the festival, the ritual of *A-si Roka* or *Marang Roka* is performed in some villages. If a disease or any kind of epidemic enters the village, the villagers

will catch a *langur*,²⁵⁰ beat and drag the animal to the village and take it inside the house and throw it out of the backdoor. Having carried it into the house, they throw it against the *dun* wall which is a partition for the parent's room and throw it out of the house. Eventually, they bring it back and tie it on the branch of a tree till it bleeds to death. Then they put a sharp edged bamboo pole (*wa·chol*) near it, so that no animal will come near it. Preparations are done well ahead of time at least two or three weeks before the festival. The celebration lasts for one week in the village. Information about the festival is given to all the surrounding villages and relatives well in advance.

Items like white thread, a goat, a dog, a bull, a pig, a red feathered chicken, rice-powder, rice-beer, *wa·chol* (sharp pointed bamboo stakes), a sword, a musical gong, a horn, and a sacred drum are kept ready. For preparations the *chras* of the *a·king nokma*'s family have to take the responsibilities. Three *matdoks*²⁵¹ are selected to help at the time of the ceremony. Once the festival starts, no villagers are allowed to go out of the village nor are outsiders allowed into the village, not even in an emergency. If someone unknowingly enters the village during the festive days, he or she has to stay in till the end of the festival. It is the same for strangers as well; otherwise, they have to pay a fine of whatever is due. During the festival, they block the main road of the village with thread at both the boundary ends of the village. In some villages, a bamboo pole is used or a cut branch of a tree is used on the side of the road to signify the closing of the path. If someone crosses the blocked road they

²⁵⁰ Traditional *A·chik* religion teaches that the monkey or langur carries away all the diseases of the people.

²⁵¹ The priest's assistants.

had to pay a heavy fine to the village authority. On festive days, the villagers abstain from daily activities in the *jhum* field.

Manners of Observation:

On the third day of the festival, there is feasting, merry-making and the performance of traditional games like *wapong siksusaa* in the village. The villagers cleared the whole area of the place two to three days before the festival. The whole village takes part in the festival. One day ahead they erect a sacrificial altar with a beautiful bundle of grass. Only the highest priest, *Tuara Nangapa* can perform the rituals in this festival. It is a festival which is not to be taken lightly by the people and thus it is considered mandatory for every villager to participate in it. The *a-king nokma* selects eleven people from the village to lead the *grika* dance during the ceremony. It is considered as an important tradition where sacrificing ones will to live a life for ones people is well received. The selected eleven members sharpen their swords brightly to brandish it in the traditional *grika* dance. Another serious matter concerning the mandatory nature of this festival is that, in case one fails to attend the festival, the person is entitled to pay indemnity in cash to the village authorities. The fine ranges from the sum of Rs.100 to Rs. 1000/- depending on the amount fixed by the village authority after the ceremony. The rituals in this festival are performed only by the highest priest, *Tuara Nangapa* as the god *Kosi* is believed to be a mighty god of gigantic stature.

There are many restrictions which have to be strictly followed during the festival. The villagers abstain from their daily *jhum* activities. Even the Christians

have to observe the day of *salnima* with the indigenous believers. During the festive days, the villagers are not allowed to play in the water, they cannot dry clothes, and are not allowed to shout and make a racket in the village. A day before the festival, the villagers prepare well for the festival. They take complete rest so that they are able to perform their obligatory requirements well. On the fixed date, the whole village assembles at the place where the invocation is to be held. *Tuara Nangapa* wears a beaded loin cloth, *pandra*, a cloth worn to cover the back and ties an ornamented brow band and wears the required attire to lead the invocation. They believe that no common priest is suitable enough to wear the dress of the highest priest even if he covers himself with precious ornaments. On the first day of the festival, the whole village observes a solemn day of abstention from daily activities in the *jhum* field, forest, fishing, washing clothes and so on. They call this day *salnima* or the day of abstention to spend time with their gods who have arrived at the village.

Beliefs and Practices:

A-chiks named the God of Strength and Power, *Goera Kalkame* on whom they have strong faith. They believe that he protects the land and takes care of the water. It is cleaned only when the ritual is performed. In the past, when one village fought with one another, the villagers say that they were protected only by their gods from their enemies and diseases.

They believe that *Goera Kalkame*, lives with them and keeps them safe from diseases and unseen dangers. The people fix a date once in a year or once in two or five years to perform a ritual specifically for this god to take care of their forest. It is

mostly to a river or to a dense forest that they shift their village or house; the erected stones are never shifted. Rather, it is again picked up from the pool where the god is believed to reside. According to their belief, *Goera-Kalkame*, the god of Strength and Power, lives in the forest. So they clear the jungle in the place once or twice every one or two years. They strongly believe in the existence of the *kosi* god in their villages. Therefore, every *A·chik* village keeps a particular portion of the land for the god *Goera Kalkame* who is believed to be the god of Strength and Power. The faithful believers revere the god as they fear that improper manners of worship may anger the god and they may incur his wrath. The believers say that if this festival is not observed with full respect, the god departs to other places as a result of which the villagers encounter unfortunate circumstances in the family. They worship and honour the place as *A·song* or *Kosi* after the god they worship. In places where a *Kosi* has been erected they believe that the people are safe from their adversaries. This is because the people believe that these places are guarded by the gods. They say their fore-fathers have passed down this legacy of worship so that they are not disturbed from living peacefully in the land.

Trees and bamboos are rarely or never cut from this place. *Kosi* is the most powerful demarcated area in the entire land owned by the *nokma* of the village. It almost assumes a supernatural status. Legends have informed us that since the ancient ages, whenever the *A·chiks* had to fight their enemies, they depended on *Goera Kalkame*. They would first seek his permission if a fight was unavoidable. They believe that this god protected them during wartimes. In order to please the god and settle with the enemies, they cut off a man's head and buried it beneath the *kosi* stone.

They believe that when enemies are beheaded or even when a person is beheaded for the requirements of some festivals like *Kosi Krita* and yet are not pursued by enemies, then their belief that the place is protected by the gods, is confirmed. The whole village then, performs a war dance before taking complete rest.

Conclusion:

The *A·siroka* and *A·song Den-a* or *Kosi* festivals are an important part of every traditional *A·chik* life. In fact, the researcher has found out after extensive research that no other ceremonies are begun without the observance of these festivals. They initiate almost all their other rituals and ceremonies. They exercise devoted faith in exorcising these malevolent spirits as they believe; it clears their village from profanations. This is significant to the study taken up by the researcher because it has been found out that the *A·chiks* believe in the co-existence of man with god. Therefore, every aspect of their life is governed by their belief in their various gods which in turn commands unquestioned obedience from the followers.

By analyzing *A·siroka* or exorcism, one can understand the importance of ritualistic purification in traditional *A·chik* society. Keeping the individual and the society clean is one of the necessary conditions of healthy living. For this, keeping the evil powers at bay is most important. This can be done only with the help of the presence of the gods'. In this context the festival of *Kosi* also emerges as another important festival of purification giving utmost importance to the purity of the residence of the gods. Thus the most sacred place for the gods to dwell in is carefully demarcated. Without an undefiled place the gods would not reside with them and this

would result in manifestations of the curses of the gods in various forms of diseases and bad harvest. Thus, *A·siroka and Kosi* are completely interwoven into every phase of *A·chik* life. This daily *A·chik* ritual gains the importance of sanctity almost religious in nature. No purely religious act is thought of, except in connection with and as a complement to, some other act or circumstance of the public and social life of the people.

5.01 REPLACEMENT APPROACH

Today *jhum* cultivation is considered as an unsustainable means of cultivation. This system is associated with the problems of soil erosion, increased run off, loss of vegetation and habitat for wild animals, with low productivity and is labor intensive. There has been an attempt to make technological intervention into the system. The State Soil Conservation Department originated as the *Jhum* Control Wing under the Forest Department in the erstwhile composite State of Assam. Schemes like *Jhum* Control Scheme and Watershed Management Programmes were initiated to address the practice of shifting cultivation with the aim of providing alternative means of livelihood. However, the follow-up programme has not been encouraging as the practice still prevails extensively in the region.

Jha (1997) pointed out that transfer of any technology should consider the psycho-socio-cultural characteristics of the farmers. He emphasized the need to conduct an in-depth study into the social organization, social behaviour and social cognitions profile associated with *jhum* cultivation so as to smoothen the progress of permanent settlement patterns relating to Agriculture, Forestry and Animal husbandry.

The strengthening of traditional institution rather than the creation of new institutions in rural areas may provide a better scope to address the problem.

Farmers do understand the unsustainability of *jhum* cultivation, says Charseng Ch. Marak (*A·chik* Welfare Society), who is working closely with a number of villages in the West Garo Hills through the International Federation for Agricultural Production (IFAD) Project. This private Project is presently a fast growing project in West Garo Hills and the village self-help-groups are experiencing extensive encouragement in various ways. According to the survey in the IFAD Project in West Garo Hills, the current land use (in hectares) in *jhum* is the highest. He even says that any approach to address this system should operate in harmony with the cultural system of *jhum* cultivation that has been deeply rooted in the lives of the people.

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

The advent of education and contact with the outside world, has helped the *A·chik* farmers to accept new ideas and methods of cultivation. They have started

planting more remunerative crops like rubber, tea, coffee, cashew, areca nut, betel leaf, black pepper, pineapple, orange, banana and various types of medicinal plants as alternative means to earn their livelihood. Beside these, maintaining cattle, fishery, keeping chicken and goat are giving them extra income and help.

5.02 HINDRANCES TO TRADITION IN MODERN LIFE AND EDUCATION

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

However there are some people now showing an interest in learning the old ideas and trying to bring out a good outcome; thus helping to preserve and keep intact whatever traditional cultures or practices we have now. In other words, it helps to show their rich culture to others. To look down on one's own tradition may lead to a great loss to the community. The only hope is that if they value traditions and modern

education, conversion may not have to be blamed or considered a hindrance to traditional faith and culture; rather it will enhance ways to preserve our tradition in a better manner as in other cultures.

CHAPTER-V

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

6.01 Conclusion

The study of the major folk festivals of the *A·chiks* in the preceding chapters highlights the tradition of the *A·chiks* who live not only within the boundaries of the states of Meghalaya but also beyond. These are observed as a series of socio-cultural festivals throughout the year. The study, however, focuses only on the eleven major folk festivals out of eighteen such festivals. The study of these festivals has been divided into chapters under the topics Agricultural Festivals, Funeral Rites and Rituals of Exorcism. In all these, an attempt has been made to examine the nuances of the *A·chik* way of celebrations of festivals and their beliefs. In these context the practices and beliefs as found among different sub-tribes of the *A·chiks*, have also been taken into account. An attempt has also been made to answer to queries such as– what kind of culture do these folk festivals portray? What is the nature of their beliefs and practices? What are the changes that have crept in, in course of the passage of time and the changes brought in by modernity. What changes took place in their time tested beliefs and observances and what caused such changes? In a study of this kind, it is also pertinent to enquire into the present status of such old and traditional festivals, beliefs, and so on.

The study has been conducted through personal witnessing of various folk festivals in different parts of Garo Hills among different sub-divisions of the *A·chiks*. Personal interviews with the practitioners as well as with some knowledgeable

persons also threw light on the fact that different sections of the people living in different regions of Garo Hills celebrate these festivals with slight variations. Basically, all these beliefs and observances are meant to seek the goodwill of the concerned spirits to bless their crops and ward off the diseases and such other imminent dangers which cause problems.

The *A·chiks* are a distinct tribe with their own distinct language and culture which evolved from time immemorial to the present state. It has lasted through ages with changes in varying degrees due to their contacts with the people from the neighbouring hills and plains. The contacts and interactions influenced their culture and beliefs. Significant changes took place in their socio-cultural life due to British rule and the arrival of the foreign Christian missionaries and conversion. Introduction of western education which ushered in and modernity also played significant roles in bringing about noticeable changes in their belief system and ways of celebrating folk festivals. Wet cultivation and private ownership of lands also contributed greatly to the erosion in the intensity and fervour of their beliefs and practices. In effect, there is a continual decrease in the number of people who remain faithful to their indigenous faith and their observances to such an extent that today amidst the invasion of these changes the indigenous believers are still able to be faithful to their belief. There is only about 10 to 12 percent of the *A·chiks* who choose to follow their traditional ways of living and worship.

Their folk traditions are fading away day by day; but there are some Non-Governmental Organizations and Students Unions among the *A·chiks* who are trying

to preserve the folk cultures. Such as Asimma Dingsima Rangsaljong Association (ADRA based at Tura), the Hundred Drums *Wangala* Festival Committee and the Garo Students' Unions which realize the values of folk life and appreciate their traditions.²⁵² The ADRA which is a non-governmental organization based at Tura, has been set up to make efforts to conserve and preserve the different natural resources which include not only flora but fauna as well. Since the late nineties they have been organizing environmental awareness programmes which include adventure-hikes to examine the extent of damage caused to natural resources and camps to encourage the youth to take up measures to preserve and conserve the flora and fauna and in effect bring about a regeneration of the exhausted resources. In their efforts to turn the endeavors into a social movement they have also encouraged the people to preserve cultural practices which will contribute to the enhancement of their environment. This has been given importance because it is a known fact that *A·chik* cultural practices and beliefs have always been linked to nature and agricultural practices in some form or the other. To preserve such primeval practices, these concerned NGOs and the State Government Departments are encouraging the interested youths for documentations of various rituals and ceremonies from all over the *A·chik* community. The Hundred Drums *Wangala* Festival Committee is organizing the *Wangala* festival at Asananggre, which is about 20 kms. from Tura, every year in November, since 1976, This festival has assumed a national status by now, and it is through the initiation of this collective effort that a certain level of success has been achieved in preserving it for posterity. In the *A·we* region, the *Garo* Students' Union

²⁵² Recent documentations of different rituals and ceremonies from different areas have been started by interested *A·chik* youths and adults. They are festivals like *Chugan*, *Wari Bila*, *A·song* *Den·a* and many other traditional games which are associated with these festivals.

Garó Hills and the *A·chiks* living in Kamrup and Goalpara Districts are collectively organizing the festivals of the *Wangala* and the *Gure Wata* since the late nineties, at Nishangram every year in December. Every other year these festivals are bringing more serious participation from interested people and the colours of the festival are being brought alive. It has almost become a fiesta for the media people. In the month of November, 2005, the *Atong* NGOs of South-Eastern Garó Hills with joint efforts of the *A·chik* Students' Union started organizing the *Chugan* Festival of the *Atongs* for the first time at Nongalbibra, East Garó Hills. These are evidences that the people are trying to restore some connection to their roots in their traditional believes and practices. As with the hundred drums festival which invites participants and organizes competition among 10 villages each with ten drums and male and female dancers, and musicians, *Chugan* festival too invites as many participants as possible.

The Government departments on account of overpopulation and economic concerns are trying to discourage this traditional method of *jhum* cultivation by introducing various other methods, such as terrace cultivation and cash crop cultivation. However, many of the *jhumias* are still sticking to this traditional method of *jhum* cultivation despite various difficulties. It has been a way of life for them since ages past and that is why a new way of life is still taking its own time to impose itself on these faithful believers. Every agricultural practice has been associated in one way or the other with their strong religious roots. In the context of *jhum* cultivation, traditionally, a plot is used for two years. Nowadays many of the same *jhum* fields are not cultivated for more than a year since they do not yield good harvest. There is no objection to any family who desires to carry on cultivation for more than two years as

long as they are satisfied with their yield. These are the signs in the *A.chik* society which are sure indications of transition. These customs and traditions have to be preserved for the sake of posterity which has been the concern of the researcher. This having been the objective of the thesis, the researcher would like to add that this endeavor has to be projected in the documentations done. These festivals need to be researched and made known, so as to be able to educate the rest of the world on their significance and relevance to modern times. Socio-cultural activities may help in this endeavor to a great extent. Perhaps then, these cultural activities which are fading away to anonymity may be salvaged. The researcher has found that this is not the final juncture of the possibility of creating new and more detailed survey and analysis in this area of social studies. Therefore, there are certain suggestions which will go a long way in helping form fields for further studies on this particular aspect of *A.chik* sociological life.

6.02 Findings/Suggestions

- The research field is still virgin in this area; therefore there is still much scope for research and detailed studies.

- There are many festivals which are observed by the *A·chiks*, and the entire field cannot be covered by one researcher alone; many minute but significant details might be over looked. Therefore, it can be suggested that this type of research work with one or two such variables can still be carried out.

- Each festival is associated with a lot of beliefs, rituals, manners and practices. A particular scholar can take one festival and go into an in-depth and detailed study of the same, keeping a record in greater detail of a particular festival, instead of taking an umbrella area as the area is very vast with much scope.

- As many of these practices are dying out, there is an urgent need to undertake a study of the rituals to be preserved for future generations, while they are still in practice. Otherwise in the future nothing will remain of even what little is still seen in the villages today. Usually what is seen in the observances of festivals in a particular year is seldom seen again the following year, so rapid is the pace of change taking place. Each year is a new experience for a devoted scholar.

- Even the traditional houses are changing as the materials; such as thatch, bamboo and other kinds of essential wood and trees are becoming less and less available due to the depleting forest and environmental changes. As maintenance is becoming more

difficult and expensive, a preference is seen for easier available and longer lasting tin roofed houses rather than the original thatched houses. Therefore, it can be suggested to interested researchers to carry out research works on the use and benefits of traditional houses.

- In the festivals, knowledge of each part of the house is necessary, as one must know exactly which part of the house offerings must be made to the god to make it acceptable. Therefore, although it is already quite late, if different fields are taken up for study by different scholars even now, while they are still available, it would help in the preservation of dying traditions.

- Many of the younger people are busy with their education attending schools and colleges the whole day; thus they have no time to learn the traditional way of life from their parents, the way things are done at home; the chants and incantations are also no longer remembered by many and the few who are there are also slowly ageing and dying. It is therefore urgently necessary to record the details of the chants for posterity through the research work while much of it is still available.

- These festivals observed are connected to shifting cultivation by those who are following indigenous faith. But in present days, the most of upland cultivators are shifting to permanent cultivation and plantations in place of *jhuming*. Therefore, it needs urgent attention through research work.

GLOSSARY

A·CHIK TERMS USED IN THE THESIS

A·ba O·pata: It is the first ritual of the *jhum* cultivation. It is performed at the time when a new field is selected and cleared. By clearing up a small portion of the land allotted by the village headman, they perform a ritual to the god *Abed-Rengge*, the care-taker of the forest before starting to cut trees and bamboos for the fresh *jhum*.

Abet-Rengge: According to *A·chik* traditional belief this is the god who is the care-taker of the forest. Before cutting or destroying any tree in order to use the land specially for cultivation, the *A·chiks* first have to take permission from this god. They also have to ask the god to move away from the place selected for cultivation. This is strictly believed and observed.

A·brenng: The *jhum* field in its second year of cultivation is called *a·brenng*.

A·dal: The *jhum* field in its first year of cultivation is called *a·dal*.

A·galmaka: This is a ceremony observed in the morning following the burning of the new field. It is a ritual of calling up the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* to the newly selected field. Different varieties of special items are offered to the god *Misi Saljong* by preparing an altar at the best place in the field. The altar is usually prepared in the centre of the new field. After the ritual they usually build a field-hut at this place; the hut is called *a·ba jamadal*. Here, all the members of the village of each household except the old and helpless take part and go up to the new field early in the morning to observe the ceremony.

A·siroka: This is the ritual of purification which is considered as the first and foremost ritual of many *A·chik* ceremonies and festivals.

A·a Bakchata: This is one of the rituals performed before starting the working season in the new field.

A·chiks: This is the name by which the tribe called *Garos* call themselves. The *A·chiks* are an indigenous tribe inhabiting Garo Hills, western and northern parts of Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya; they occupy some parts of Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Bangladesh.

Adil: This is a musical instrument made from buffalo horn; it is used in most of the *A·chik* rituals and ceremonies. In the *Atong* dialect it is called *kal*.

Agrang: This is a stall (cowshed) for fattening a calf which is to be slaughtered as an offering in some ceremonies.

Ahaia: This is another important ceremony observed just before *Wangala* festival. This is done after the farmers carry down the harvested paddy from the *jhum* field to the village. This is done, the farmers say, to take the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* back home and keep her in the village till the time of the *Wangala* harvest festival when they ritually send her off to her original place believed to be in the sea.

Aia: It is an exclamatory expression when one feels pain or anxiety. On the second day of the *Chugan* festival, a ritual of piercing the rim of the urn is done. This is to symbolize the piercing the ears of the deceased. It is believed that the spirit may shout *aia* to express pain. To hear such a sound however, is considered a bad omen. *Atongs* believe that death may occur in the same family soon; the person who heard the sound may also be affected.

A·king: All the land that belongs to a village is termed *a·king*; the custodian of the land is called *a·king nokma*.

A·king nokma: He is the head or the custodian of a large tract of land belonging to a particular clan. He administers the area, settles disputes and is in charge of protecting the land.

Aminda: *A·chiks* believe that it is one of the malevolent spirits that causes disease or death to the crops. They perform a ritual to this spirit during *Mi Amua* or *Mi Krita*, a ceremony that is mainly done both for the malevolent and benevolent spirits or gods.

A·tila: A courtyard or a square in a village. The believers of the indigenous *A·chik* faith construct a *delang*, a tiny house to shelter the spirit of the deceased; a *tilta wa-resu* is a bamboo pole erected to signify that death has taken place in a family. A *kimindam* is an altar in the heart of the village. Inside the altar is a *Kosi* stone for the god *Goera*. A village rest house called a *bandasal* or *kasari* is constructed to receive guests and for various other purposes. All of these are erected at the *a·tila*.

Atinia: This is an *Atong* word which means *watchotani* in the *A·chik* standard language. It is the 'final release' of the spirit of the deceased. In the *Chugan* festival, this ceremony is performed on the final day of the festival. The ritual is performed to release the spirit of the deceased to *Balpakram*, 'the land of the spirits'.

Attepong Sugala: This is one of the rituals of purification of different tools or implements that have been used in the *A·chik* traditional way of cultivation. This is still strictly followed by *A·chik* believers till today.

Ba·sek: A cloth which is used to carry the urn by a close woman relative of the deceased. It is customarily given to the woman who carries the urn during the *Chugan* festival. It is believed that such an action will lead to the reincarnation of the spirit in his or her family.

Balim: This is an open space under the roof in front of a traditional *A·chik* house. It is also called *apsari*, *apsali* or *noksari* in some *A·chik* villages. It is a space that serves as a verandah in most of the traditional *A·chik* houses.

Balpakram: The land that is believed to be ‘the abode of the spirits’ where the spirits settle in their life after death till reincarnation. It is a compound of two words *bal* and *pakram* which mean ‘wind’ and ‘the place where fresh breeze is always blowing’ respectively. This plateau is full of *A·chik* mythological places and is very special and sacred for the *A·chik* believers of indigenous religion.

Bandasal: This is a rest house in an *A·chik* village. It serves as a place for receiving visitors and is an ideal meeting place.

Challang: A person who emerges as the champion is a traditional *A·chik* game called *gando makkal pala*, in which a man’s strength is tested. This game is played right after the burning of the *delang* on the second day of *Chugan* festival. The winner is declared a *challang* or ‘a man of strength and power’ for the year in that particular village.

Cha·rama: This is a section of a room in a traditional *A·chik* house. It serves as a sitting room for visitors where they place the jar of rice-beer that is attached to the *chusimra* post of the house. In this part of the room, people drink and dance during festivals.

Chare-Mikkol Krita: *Chare* means the grains of the staple food reserved for sowing. In this case it refers to the selected grains of millet and paddy which are retained for the next season of cultivation. The staple food of the *A·chiks* is rice or *mi*; the reserved grains are called *chare rongjanggi*. For this reason after the harvest festival a ceremony is performed for the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime*, the mother of food-

grains and paddy. The villagers prepare an altar for her close to their own granaries in the village.

Chiga Rodila: It is a ceremony performed on the second day of the *Chugan* festival. This ritual is performed to show the spirit of the deceased the river or stream that had been used daily when the person was alive. The spirit of the deceased is taken on a visiting round through the entire village, to places which had been frequently visited by the deceased.

Chokrek: A conical bamboo basket that is attached to an altar during the performance of the rituals where all the ceremonial sacrificial offerings are made. In some *A·chik* sub-divisions it is called '*chekrek*' or '*cherek*'.

Chra: The term *chra* is applied to all the male relatives especially the maternal uncles and brothers of a person. In *A·chik* society the senior-most maternal uncle plays a vital role in any social functions, meetings and settling any disputes in the family. According to *A·chik* traditional custom, his views and decisions are final. In the case of *Chugan* festival, the *chras* take major responsibilities in all the rituals till the closing ceremony. The oldest maternal uncle or *chra* is the leader of the dance and he can act as a priest in the rituals if he is entitled to take the role of the priest. If a close maternal uncle is not available, some other maternal relative, who is close to the family and can be regarded as an uncle, can perform the ritual.

Chu: This means rice-beer which is an essential item in all *A·chik* ceremonies and rituals. Without this the *A·chik* festivals are considered incomplete. During festivals, there is no restriction to drinking.

Chugan or Chuogin: This festival of the *Atongs* has features of both post-funeral and agricultural festival. As in *Wangala*, thanksgiving offerings are made to the god *Misi*

Saljong and the goddess *Mima Kiri Rokkime* for a good harvest. Prayers are also made to the god *Salgra-Susime*, *Nawang*, the dreadful spirit and a monster, and *Waimong* the king of the spirits of the dead in Balpakram. The purpose of the prayer is to ensure the safety of the spirits of the dead from all dangers while traveling to Balpakram.

***Dakgipa Rabuga* or *Tatara Rabuga*:** He is the supreme god and the creator of every living and non-living things according to the *A·chik* traditional belief.

***Delang*:** It is a square bamboo structure constructed with four bamboo poles, one at each corner. The posts are piled up with straw. Inside it is a tiny hut called *me·mang nok* meaning the house of the spirit. According to the *A·chik* beliefs, the spirit is sheltered in the hut till the time of the *Chugan* festival.

***Dewai-desai*:** These two sticks are placed together in the hut inside the *delang* to symbolize the oneness of husband and wife after death. According to *A·chik* customary law, marriage is permanent and the bond continues even after death. According to the belief, husband and wife will be united when both die and will be together again as spirits at Balpakram.

***Dewai-desai pe·susaa*:** This is a traditional game played after the burning ceremony of the *delang*. It involves a contest in breaking two tiny strong wooden pieces carved like ribs which are kept near the door of the hut built to house the spirit inside the *delang*.

***Do·sia*:** This is the *A·chik* traditional marriage ceremony. It consists of two words, *do·o* and *sia* which mean 'fowl' and 'to die' respectively. In the traditional *A·chik* marriage ceremony, the priest ritually strikes the groom on his back with a chicken and the bride with another while uttering verses which are traditionally used for conducting marriage. The chickens are killed and the priest makes a ritual of

divination. He observes the chickens' intestines to study their future happiness and whether it is the will of the gods for the couple to be together.

Dongrama: This is a compartment in a traditional *A·chik* house, it is normally used for receiving visitors and conducting important meetings, gatherings and for ceremonies and rituals, such as *do·sia* the traditional *A·chik* marriage ceremony.

Gachek: This is a tiny basket made out of fine bamboo strips. It is also called *we·ra*, *kodo* or *sarongdik* which are used to measure rice. It is ritualistically vital and is customary for an *A·chik* to keep the *rongjanggi* or rice-grains in this tiny basket in festivals like the *Chugan* or *Mangona*, *Me·mang Dila* or *Jaragata*. Keeping rice in this way means keeping life itself. A *gachek* is used to store rice-grains while scattering them ritually to the man and to the gods during the *Chare Ra-gata* ritual in the *Chugan* festival. It is done to request the gods to spare some seed-grains for the surviving members of the family.

Gando makkal: This is a piece cut from the cloth by which the *Atongs* wrap the dead body at the time of cremation. It is tied at the tip of the bamboo pole called *tilta wa·resu*. This piece of cloth is brought down on the second day of the *Chugan* festival. It is then used as an item played in a traditional game to test one's strength. The game is called *gando makkal pala*. This game is played solely by men.

Gitchipong A·siroka: This is a purification ceremony where a ritual is performed to purify the implements of cutting the forest and tools of cultivation.

Goera Kalkame: This is the traditional *A·chik* god of thunder, power and strength. According to the belief, the god lives at the forest which is kept untouched. The sacred forest is considered as the home of the god *Kosi*. The boys' dormitory called

nokpante is kept ritually clean through performance of various rituals, in the belief that it is also the abode of the god *Goera Kalkame*.

Grendik: This is a wooden urn where a few of the charred bones and ashes of the dead body is stored after cremation. It is customary for the *Atongs* to care the spirit of the deceased in the urn till the day of *Chugan* festival.

Grika: A traditional solo dance led by a maternal uncle of the host family during *A-chik* ceremonies. The maternal uncle is considered the leader of the festival; he takes the lead in performing this ceremonial war dance brandishing sword and shield. In the *Wangala* festival the *nokma* performs it.

Gro sing-roka or jea: It means taking account of the expenses incurred in the *Chugan* festival to clear debts and to settle love affairs (if any) or any other such cases that happened during the days of the festival. This is usually conducted by the oldest *chra* or *chras* with the concerned clans or *maharis* on the the day following *Chugan* festival.

Jakmora: This is a hand bell made of bell metal. A *jakmora* consists of two or more bells. It is used as accompaniment especially by women mourners in singing *kabe*, a requiem.

Jamadal Nokdangгаа: Here *jamadal* is a field-hut meant for resting while working under scorching sun and as a shelter from rain. *Nokdongгаа* is the ritual of 'house warming or purification' in the ceremony for the newly constructed field-hut.

Jangbatra: This is the threshold of a traditional *A-chik* house where the urn is buried ritually by the *Atongs*.

Jaragata: This is a ritual of the *Atongs* performed when a young bull is purchased for the *Chugan* festival. On reaching home, cooked rice is served to the bull by the family members as they would do to a person. If it eats the food, they believe that the spirit of the deceased has entered the bull. This ritual is called *jaragata*. After this ritual, the bull is considered to be the deceased and the bull is served a meal everyday till *Chugan* begins.

Jumang Sia: This is a ritual of divination and interpretation before starting the work in the new *jhum* field. It is also one way of predicting one's future through the interpretation of dreams.

Kabe or Chera Sola: It is a requiem, a song of lamentation sung especially by women during funeral and post-funeral ceremonies.

Kal: A wind instrument made of buffalo horn. This musical horn is called *kal* in *Atong* and *adil* in the *A·chik* standard language.

Kal wata: This is the ritual of summoning the spirits of the dead from Balpakram by blowing the musical horn.

Kem: It refers to the drum used by the *Atongs* which is slightly different from the drums used by the *A.bengs*. It is called *dama* in the *A·chik* standard language.

Kem krita or tata: *Kem* in *Atong* means drum and *krita* or *tata* means 'performing a ritual'. It is the ritual performed by a priest for the purification of drums before the *Chugan* festival. The *Atongs* believe that if it is not performed by breaking eggs, the gods may not allow them to use drums and as a result, the drummers or the villagers may fall ill.

Kerengdik: This is the *Atong* word for an urn.

Kima or ***kima teka***: This is a memorial post erected for the deceased as practised in the *A.beng* area. It is placed either at the entrance of the house, at the *balim* or courtyard of the village *nokma*'s house.

Kilmrong or ***kimrong***: A hard wooden pole that has three encircling notches at its top end. Its name varies according to the regions. Some areas call it *tilta*, *top*, *tap monggil*, *morong* or *snaru kindik*. It is the stump of a mature tree, erected in the middle of the village near the village altar called *kimindam*. Animal for sacrifices are tied to the post and slaughtered during the ceremony.

Ko·ma: This is a measuring basket used to measure rice. It is also called *we·ra* in some *A·chik* villages.

Koksi: It is a fishing basket woven out of fine bamboo strips.

Kram: A large wooden drum which is associated with the deity *risi*. It is a sacred drum played during ceremonies at *Wangala* and during funerals.

Krom: After the burial of the *grengdik* (the urn), a totemic stone is erected above it as a memory of the deceased person. This stone is called *krom*.

Mahari: It refers to a clan or an organization of close relatives.

Mande: It means 'a man' but in *A·siroka* festival it refers to the monkey which is used as a sacrificial animal in the ritual of *Gitchipong A·siroka*.

Mangona: It is a post-funeral ceremony among *A·beng* and *A·we* sub-divisions to honour and finally send off the spirit of the dead.

Marang: A concept of tarnish and blemish that is identified with blood, violence and death. *Marang* is pollution which should be got rid of.

Marang-Roka: This is one of the purification rituals performed for deliverance from any profanation in life by sacrificing animal blood or by breaking eggs. It is believed that the gods desire animal or blood sacrifice.

Me-mang: The spirit of a deceased person.

Me-mang a-song: The land of the spirits, i.e. Balpakram is in South Garo Hills.

Mima Kiri Rokime: The *A-chiks* believe her to be a goddess of paddy. She is also referred to as 'Kiri Rokkime', 'Ama Rokkime' or 'Rokki' in the different places.

Mil-am: The sharp double-edged sword of the *A-chiks*.

Misi Saljong: The god of blessings who also supplies food-grains to man. He is also called *Patigipa Ra-rongipa* which means the god who blesses and the god of prosperity.

Nagra: This drum is also called *dama dalsang* or *kodoreng*. This drum is specially played to call villagers for meetings, to receive important visitors in the village or as a warning about some lurking dangers in the village.

Nawang: It is a dreadful and gluttonous monster who resides on the transit route to Balpakram. There is a saying that no spirit can cross the place except by throwing some valuable items, bits of ornaments or coins to distract him on the way to Balpakram.

Niam: Guidelines for relationships among people, regarding attitudes to the deities, as well as to animals and plants. The term also includes observations and rules.

Nokkra: It is the first part of the *A-chik* traditional house and in many of the *Atong* villages, it is used as a kitchen. It is also used as a stall (cowshed) during *Chugan*. The urn is buried at its door step, near the threshold before stepping into the raised bamboo floor.

Nokma: Nokma is the chief or the head of the village; in his *a·king* land he is responsible for administration, settling of disputes and protection of the land. He allots land for *jhuming*.

Pilne: This is an *A·chik* traditional bamboo comb which is decorated with beads of different colours. It is worn as part of the head dress by female dancers during festive days.

Tatara-Rabuga: According to *A·chik* belief he is the supreme god and the creator of the universe.

Raksi-Dombe: This is one of the malevolent spirits causing diseases in the crops.

Rama Cholruramo A·siroka: This is another name for *A·siroka* or the purification ritual performed in the path to the *jhum* field.

Rang: A gong of brass or bell metal. This is an important traditional musical instrument used in *A·chik* traditional music played for ceremonies and dances.

Rongjanggi: It is a handful of rice kept aside for scattering ritually. During the *Chugan* festival a woman scatters it ritually to her left and right in the *saram cha-a* ceremony.

Sansea Samsuria: It is the thanksgiving offering to the god *Misi Saljong* at the *maljuri*, the king post of a traditional *A·chik* house. Paddy and the other seed-grains are beautifully fastened together in a long bamboo pole and under it the urn is kept safely till the day of the *Chugan* festival.

Skal: Usually a synonym for the deity *daini*, who takes possession of a particular insect. Simultaneously, the deity associates with the spirit of a person. The *A·chiks* associate *skal* with a dreadful monster, which is supposed to be a physical form of the deity.

Srek: A platform constructed outside every *A·chik* house. Here, members of a family spend time together in the *srek* after a day's work in the field. In *Atong* it is called *nokeng* or *nokdai*. Rituals like purification of drums, piercing of the urn and *nokam amua* are performed here during *Chugan* festival.

Susime or Salgra: He is the God of impediments.

Tilta: This is another name for *top monggil*, *morong*, *mrong* and it also means the bamboo pole erected to symbolize death in a family. A bamboo pole is erected inside the *kimindam* or village altar without cutting its leaves.

Tilta wa·resu: It refers to a piece cut from the cloth used for wrapping the dead body at the time of cremation. The piece of cloth is tied at the tip of a bamboo pole called *tilta*.

Wa·ge: A kind of bamboo that is flexible and durable, which is commonly used in rituals. The *A·chiks* believe that *wa·ge* is a special gift of the god *Misi Saljong* to *Rangsi* and *Palanggi*, the wives of *Alak* and *Jadak* respectively. This bamboo is so tall that it seems to reach the sky but when viewed from the top it seems to touch the ground. There is a saying that the fruits of this *wa·ge* were so attractive that people on earth made various attempts to get them but failed. Finally, when the high priest *Tuara Nangapa* performed rituals to pluck some fruits, they were blessed with precious items like beautiful necklaces with precious stones such as *abanggi*, *dokatchi*, *rikgitok-rikmatchu* and seed-grains of various crops that are found today in Garo Hills.

Wa·peka or Wa·pek songa: It is the erection of three stout bamboos after shaving off the upper green skin of bamboo with a sharp knife or *dao*. This pole is erected on the side of the burial place of an urn.

Wa·pong siksusaa: It is a traditional game of the *A·chiks* where a tug of war is held with a strong bamboo pole.

Wa·smita: This is a piece of *wa·ge* bamboo the outer skin of which is carved into beautiful hair-like strips. It is made for the ceremony of *krom bota* and *saram cha·a* at the site of the burial ground and is fixed to the *chokreks* at the altar.

Waimong: According to *A·chik* indigenous religion, *Waimong* is the care-taker of the Land of the Spirits, Balpakram.

Wangala: It is a festival at the end of the annual agricultural cycle that involves offering of the first fruits to the deities. It is held during the season of change from the wet to the dry season by the end of September or early October.

Watpaka: This is another ceremony of sending the spirit ritually to ‘the land of the spirits’ right after the cremation without the customary rituals of *Chugan*. This is facility extended to the economically disadvantaged and who cannot afford to bear the expenses of a post funeral-ceremony.

APPENDICES

Appendix-I

- (a) “*Angni anti re·ani a·kang doani nokona sokbapiljoka, anga nang·na chri on·atgne, gron watatgne. Mima gilrimito, jabilsu kakketo, jakari namsango, angkosa chachangnabe, angkosa ringchangnabe, biming mingatpabo, mande ra·atpabo.*” (D. Rongmuthu. *Apasong Agana*: pp.63-64)
- (b) “*Beben, ian sing·toa sing·nama, miko nanga, ka·stanga.*” (D. Rongmuthu. *Apasong Agana*: p.110)
- (c) “*Jabilsu kakketo, jakari namsango, slonggani tappuo, te·gatchuni palino, anga sokbataigne, anga nabataigne. Uno na·song cha·a Misi cha·bo, ringa Saljong ringbo, angna dao gita so·dimeatenba, ringrimeatenba.*” (D. Rongmuthu. *Apasong Agana*: pp.110-111)
- (d) “*...mima gilrimito, jakari namsango, jabilsu soko, Mini Agilpa Saljong Galapana (Misi Saljong) turumalo, changsimalo, churugale chasat so·e, mande ra·gne, biming de·gne, anga nang·ko ringchangjawa*” (D. Rongmuthu. *Apasong Agana*: p.64)
- (e) “*Nang·na angni gimalna, nang·na angni besana gron dakchengako, rongjanggi ong·chenganiko dinonga, chinonga. Angko ka·anangnabe, angko bika sonabe, mikchi ong·nabe. Na·a angni gimal, na·a angni besa, Chri on·gipa, Gron watgipa, Ge·songgipa, Ge·botgipa, Barigipa, Dilnenggipa Rongjanggiatgipa, ronggronatgipa, anga nang·ko cha·changja, anga nang·ko ringchangja. Patikubo, ra·ronkubo, nirokkubo, sandikubo.*” (D. Rongmuthu. *Apasong Agana*: p.64)

Appendix-II

Lindrid D.Shira states his opinion on the use of the word 'A·chik' as:

“‘A·chik’ ni orto minggni gnang... ‘a·ding’ ba a·brirango songdongna namnikbatani gimin an·tangtangko ‘a·brio songdonggipa’ ba ‘A·chik’ ine mingahakon! Minggipin, skango uamang da·o songdongenggipa a·dokona napahaon, ianoni pangnaba gipinchi re·jitangjawaha ine uamang a·ako chike mikchetaha ine agana. Uni giminsa uamangko ‘A·chik’ ine mingaha. ...uamang skango an·tangtangko ‘Mande’ inesa mingna namnikbataha. Uamang an·tangtangko ‘A·chik’ ine mingaha, aro gipin jatrang uamangko chonnikani gita ‘Garo’ ine mingskaha.”

(Lindrid D.Shira. *A·chik A·songona Nama Kattani Sokbaani*, 1991 p.79)

DIAGRAMS

Diagram-1 : A'chik Traditional House(Gambaregre village)

Fig An Am'beg traditional house of Juchang R. Marak nokma at Gambaregre village

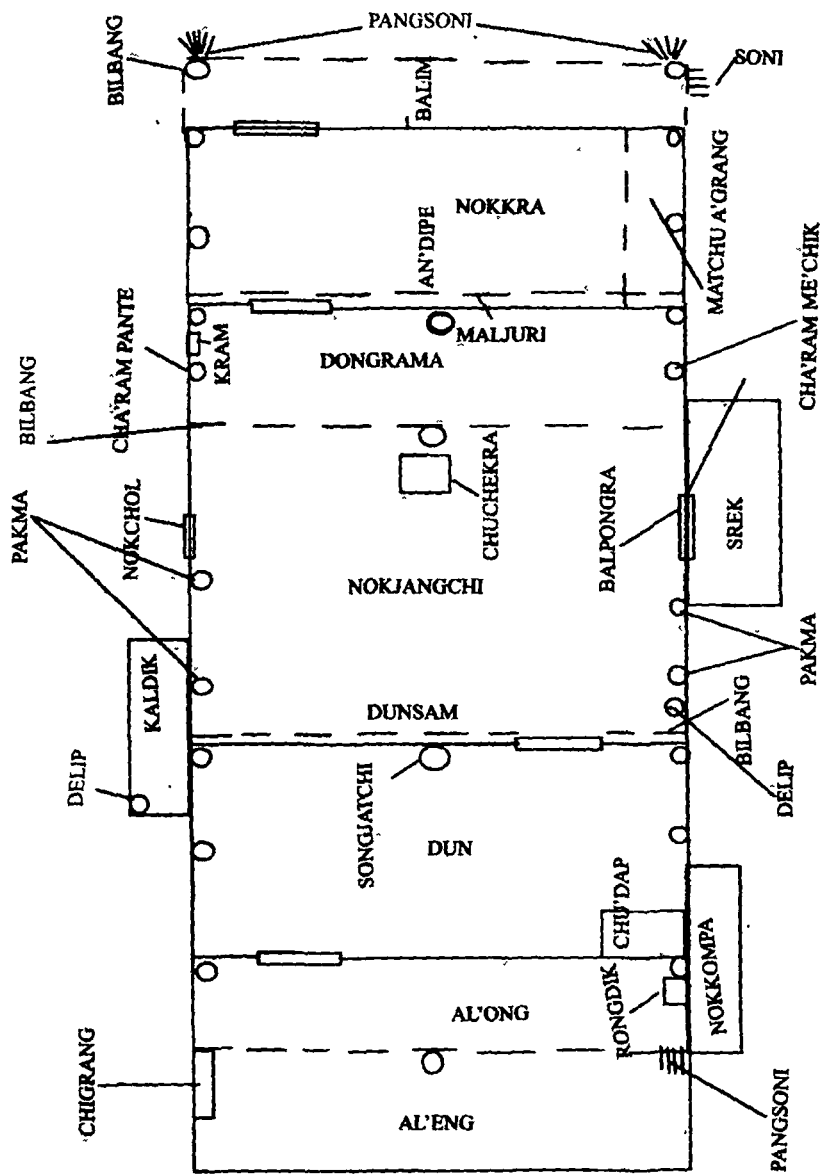


Diagram-2 : A'chik Traditional House (Sasatgre village)

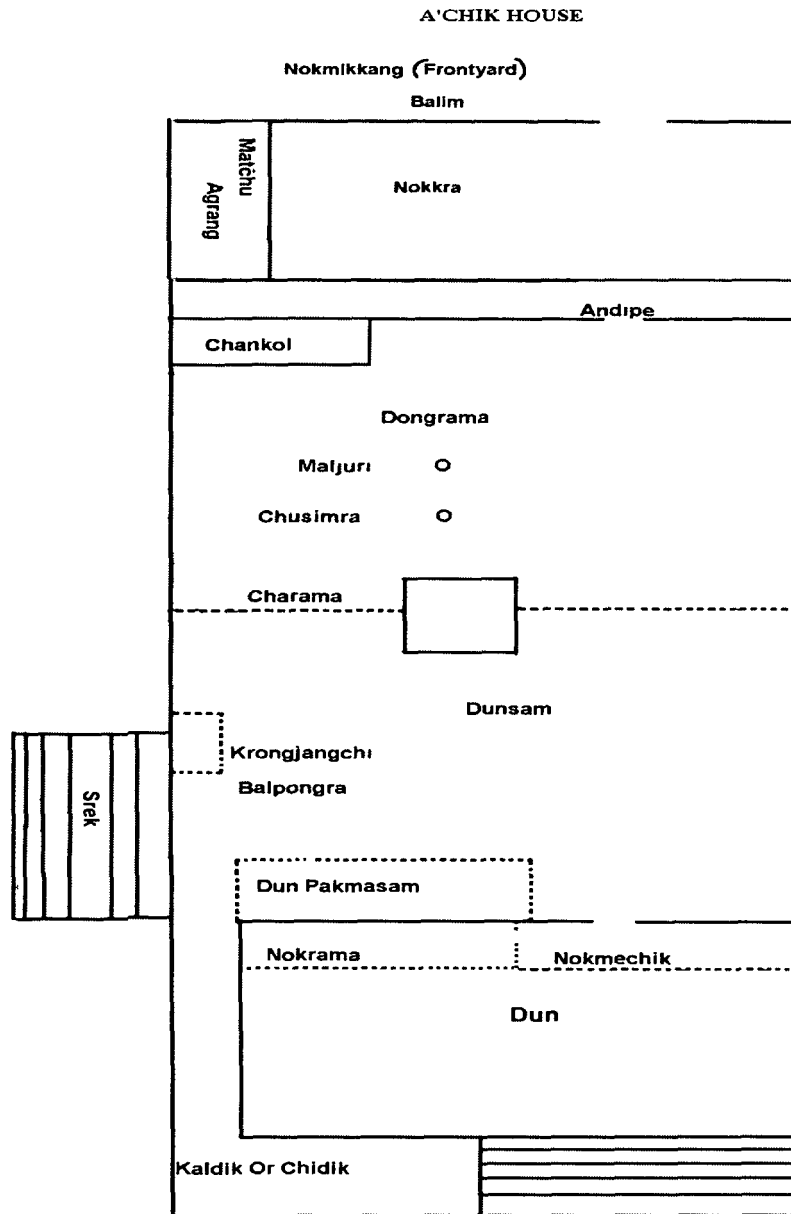


Diagram-3: Traditional *Am'beng* House (Dadudangre village).

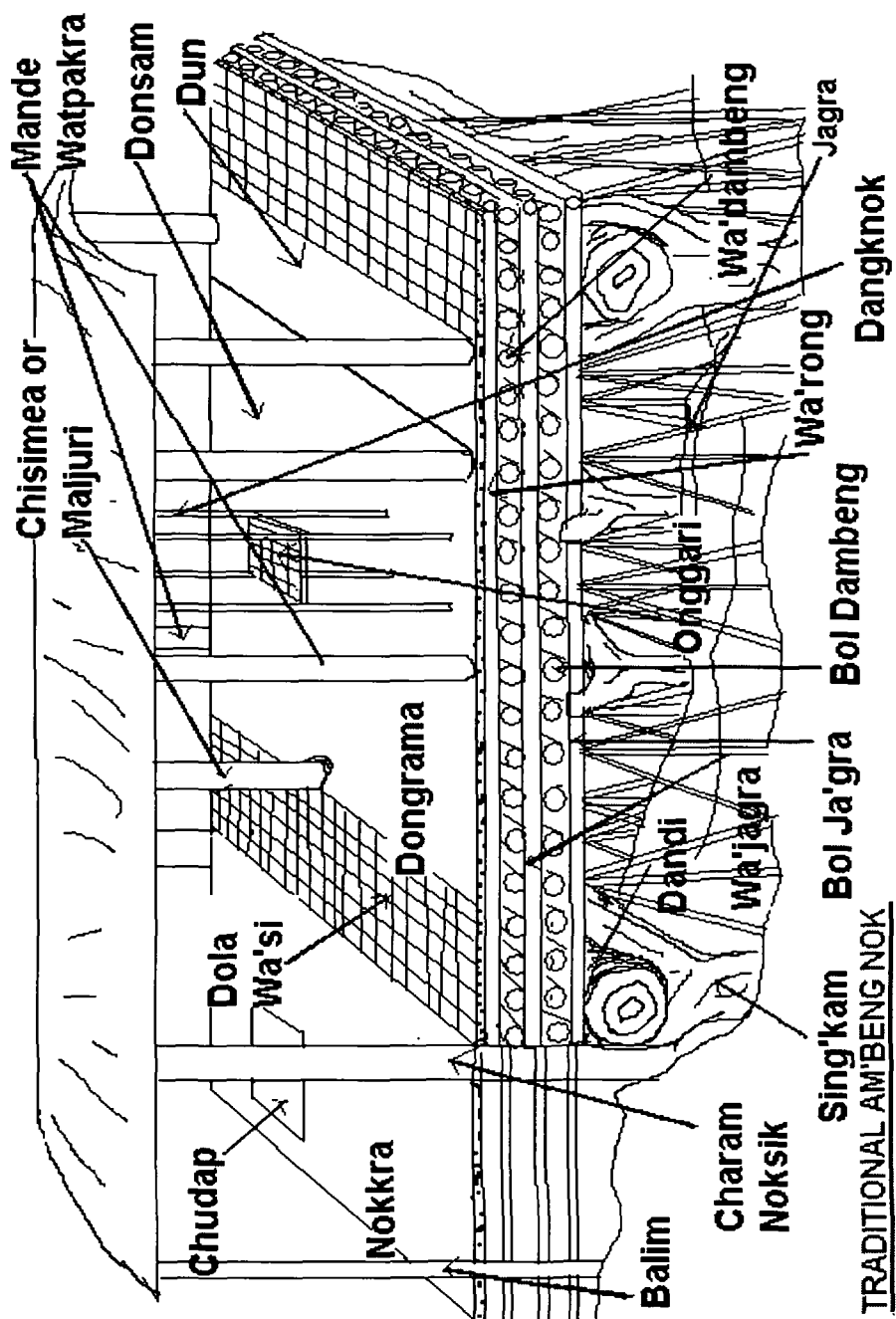
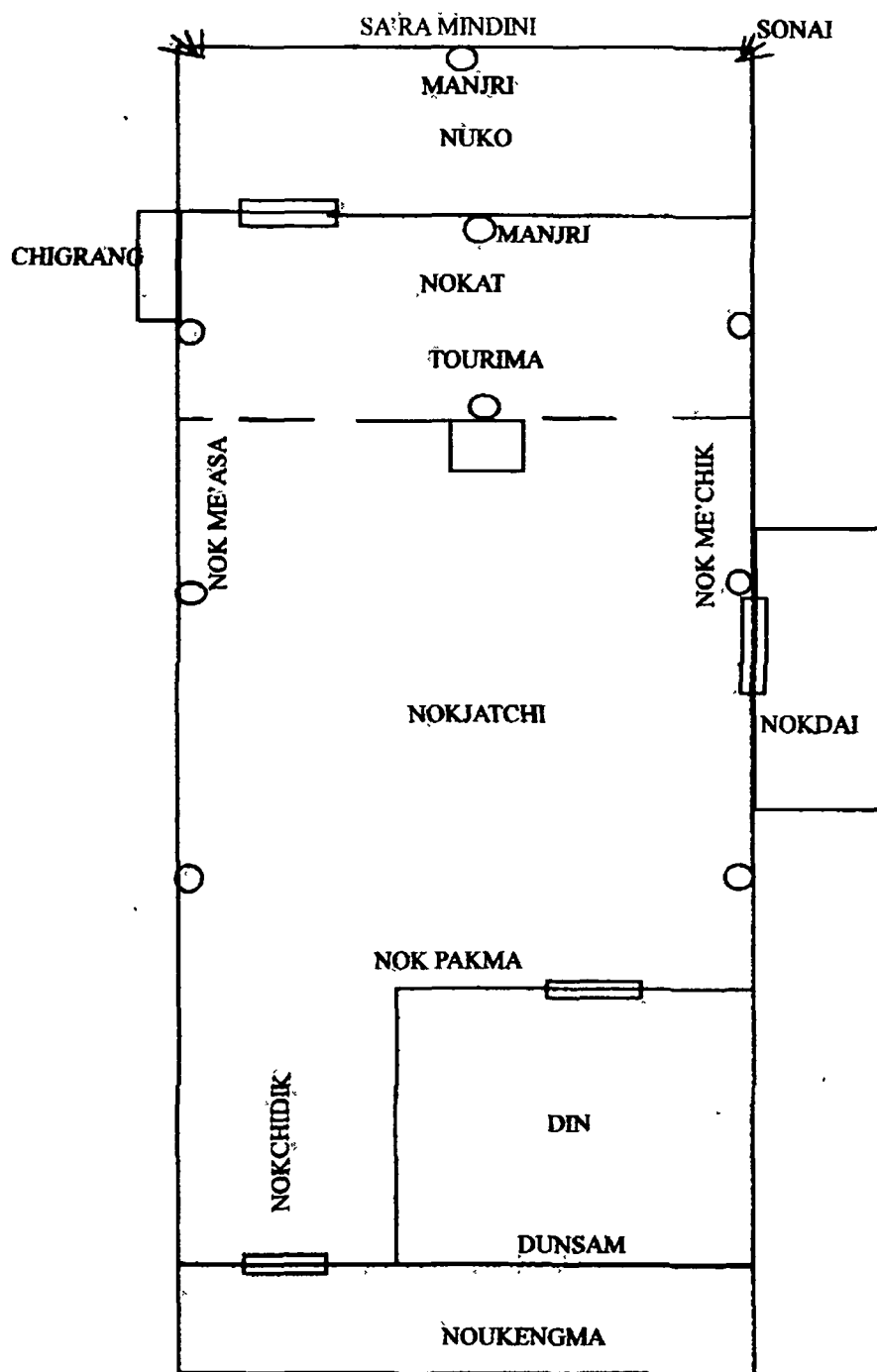


Diagram-4 The *Atong* Traditional House (Kalu village)

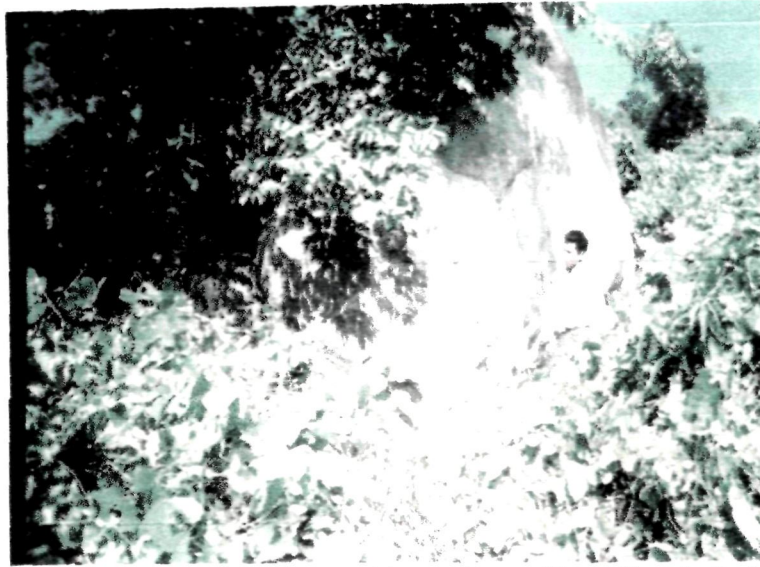


PHOTOGRAPHS

1. The ritual of *samsepa* in *Jumang Sia* festival to select new plot for *jhum*



2. *Kosi* in the reserved forest



3. The *kosi* stone where the worshipers observe *Wachi Tata* festival



4. *Kosi* near the village where sacrifices are offered during *Kosi* festival



5. The burning ceremony in the newly selected place for *jhum* cultivation



6. The new *jhum* field after the burning ceremony



7. The villagers enjoying on day of the *A'galmaka* festival



8. Villagers enjoying drinks after the rituals



9. Preparing *jaktap* for the ritual



10. A sacrificial altar for the *A'galmaka* festival



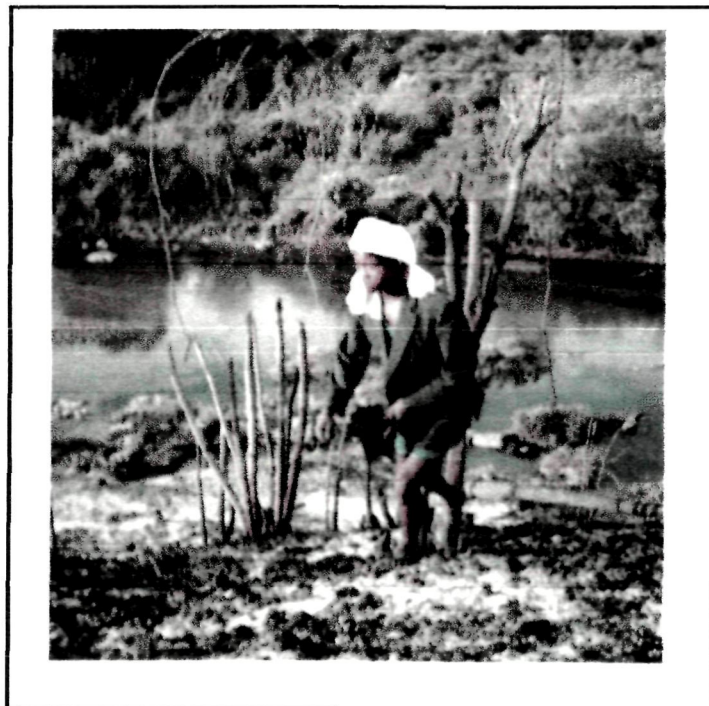
11. The *nokma*'s sacrificial altar in the new *jhum* field



12. The priest is performing the ritual of divination



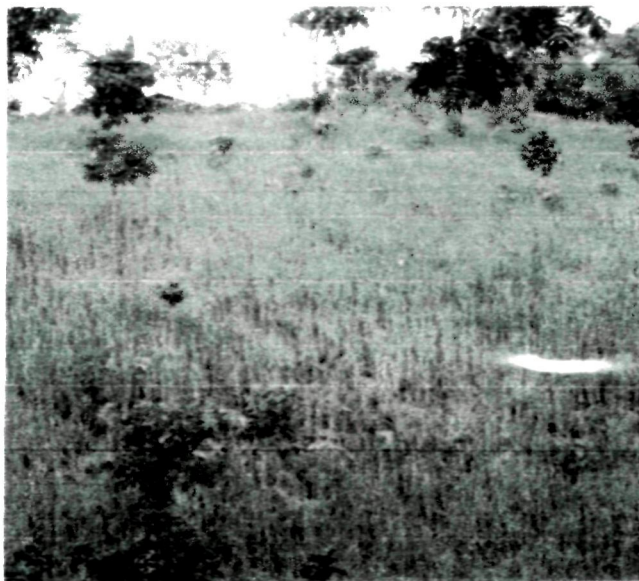
13. The *A-chik* Agricultural tools and baskets



14. A man sowing seed-grains in the new *jhum* field



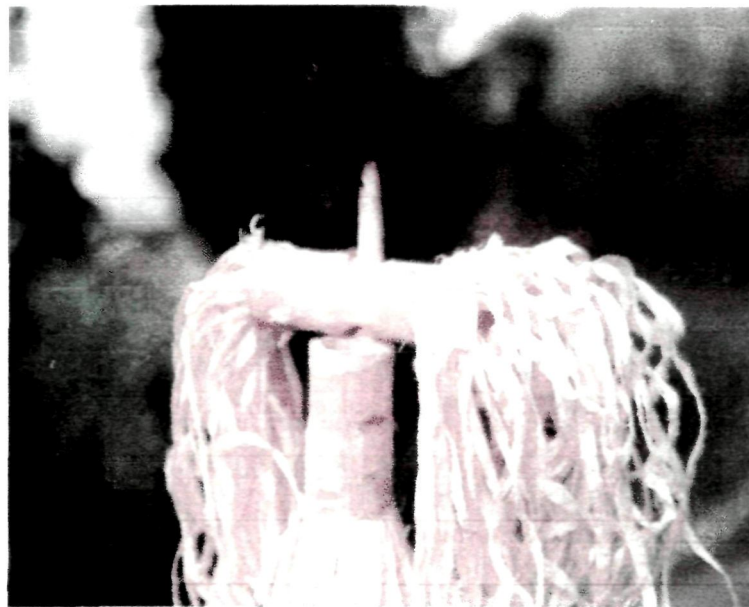
15. The ritual of animal sacrifice (goat) at the festival of *Wachi Tata*



16. The *a breng jhum* field in the paddy-growing stage



17. The *Gitchipong A'siroka* in the cross-road of the market



18. Sacrificial altar at the cross road on which the head of a pig is pierced



19. Paddy ready for harvest in the *jhum* field



20. Shifting cultivators harvesting paddy



21. *Bandasal* or resting place in the centre of the village



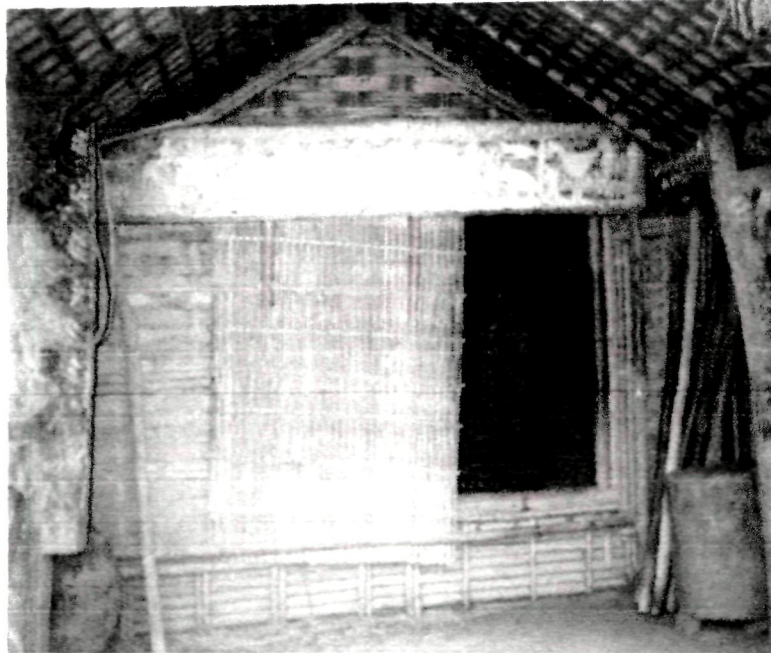
22. The backyard of the *nokmas*' house at Gambaregre



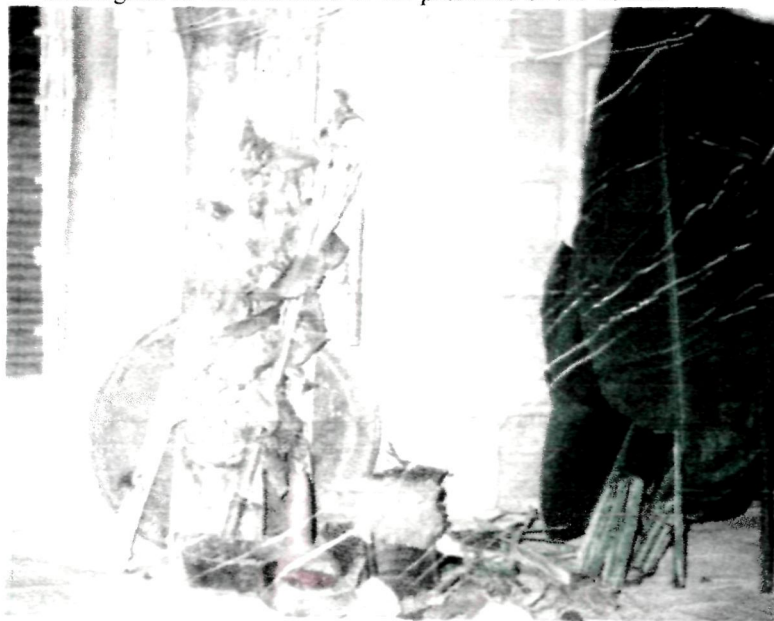
23. Taking contributions for a festival to the *nokmas* house



24. Offering cooked rice and millets during the festival



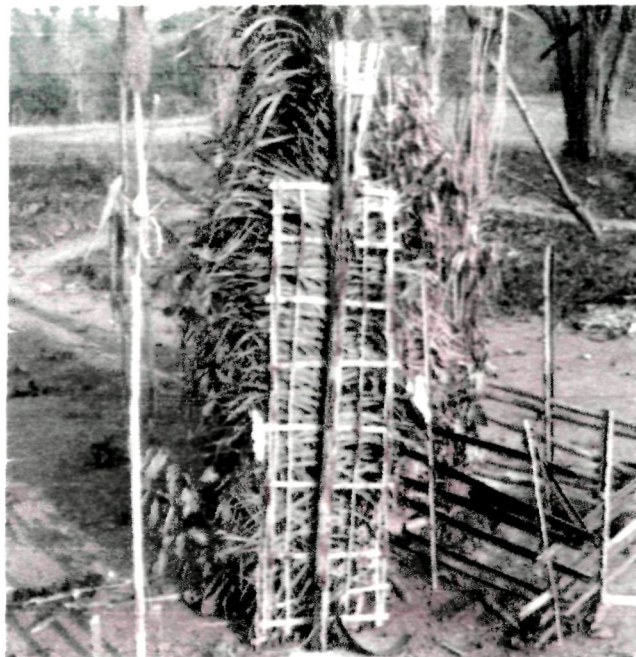
25. Crossbeam of a traditional house with the symbols of the sun and moon gods to remind them of the presence of the deities



26. Offerings at the *Maljuri* after the harvest



27. Sacrificial post at the courtyard of the village



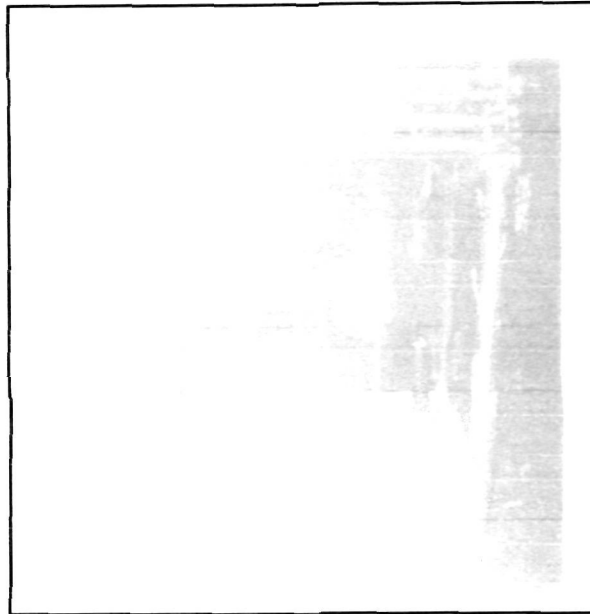
28. *Kimindam* or altar at the courtyard of the village



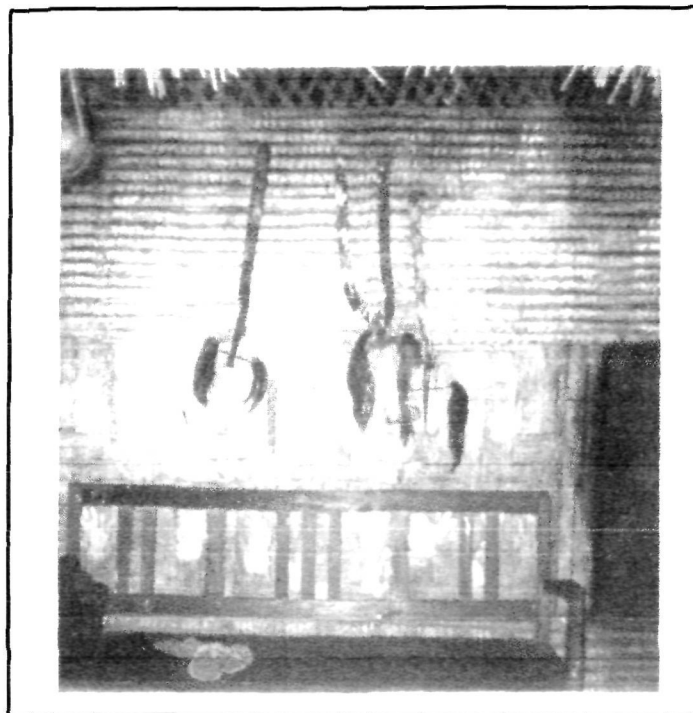
29. Drinking with the god *Misi Saljong* during the *Wangala*



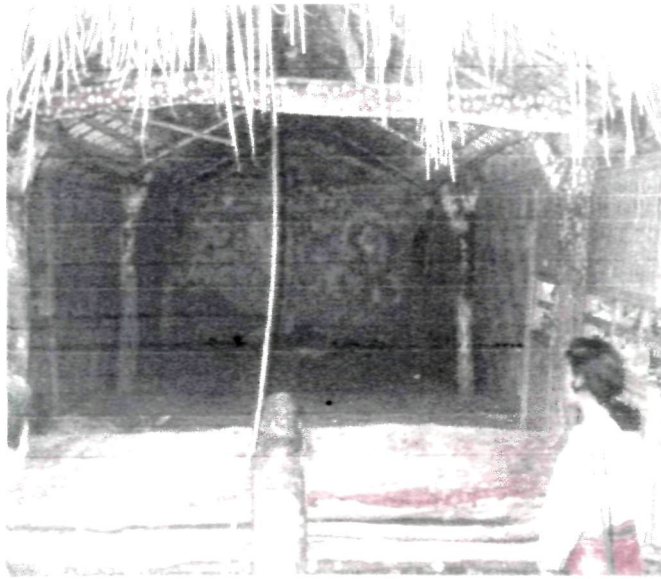
30. *Bilbang* or crossbeam and the *maljuri* or sacred post



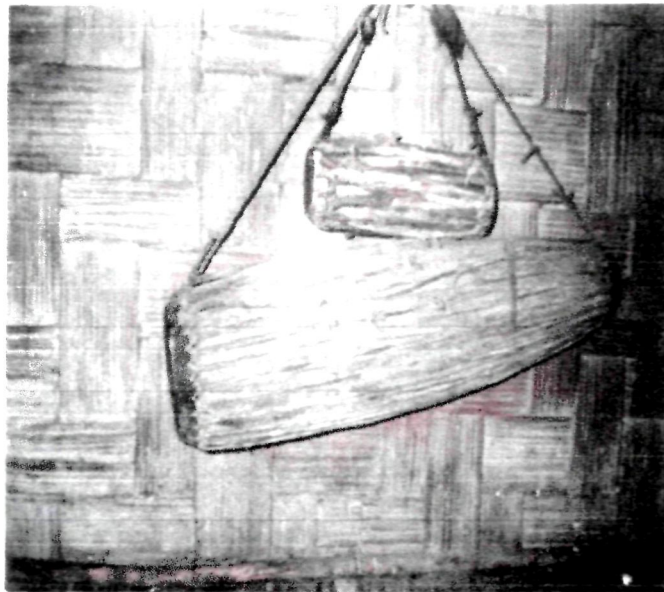
31. Furnace inside the kitchen of a traditional *A. chik* house



32. *Dunsam* where swords and shields are placed



33. Boys' dormitory or *Nokpante* in the village



34. Sacred drums - *kram* and *dama na.tik*



35. *Nokma* is bringing the incense for burning at the *kimindam*



36. Taking *Misi Saljong* to the courtyard



37. Keeping food-grains for the deceased after the harvest



38. Serving meal for the deceased



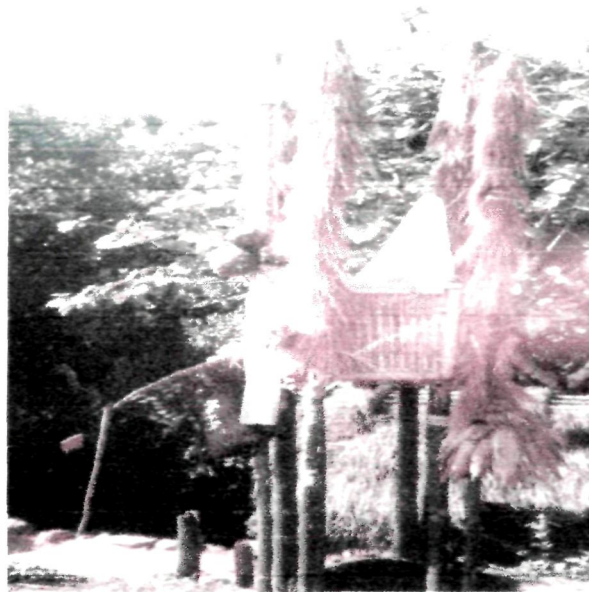
39. Cooking food for the deceased at the *delang soa* festival



40. Symbolic dance at the festival of *delang soa*.



41. Complete structure of the *delang* along with offered items



42. Paddy on stalk symbolically attached to the *delang* for the spirit of the deceased



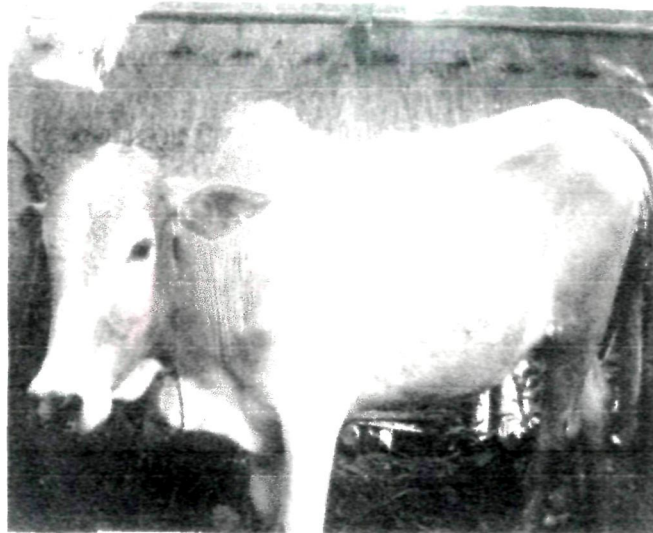
43. Oil-bath of the *matmemang* wherein the spirit is believed to have entered



44. Slaughtering of the *matmemang*



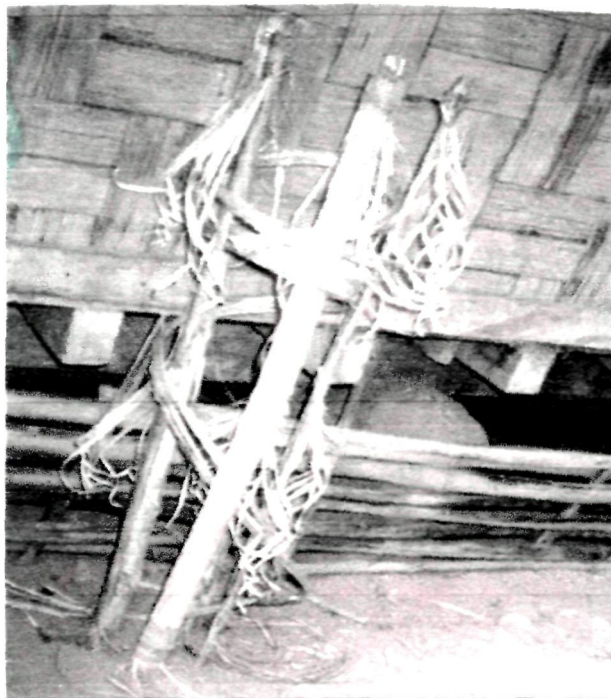
45. An *Atong* priest preparing for the ritual of *grendik pua*



46. A *nokjapang matmemang*



47. Family member taking care of *Nokjapang matmemang*



48. Ritual of *wa.pək songa* on the side of the house



49. Essential items placed at the *sanséa*



50. Serving food for the spirits during the festival of *chugan*



51. Used items placed near the *grengdik* after the rituals



52. Egg-breaking ritual for purification of drums



3. A typical Atong drum



54. Ritual bath of the *grendik* before its cremation



55. Dressing the *grengdik* for burial



56. Taking the *grengdik* to pay a final visit to the relatives



57. The *nokjapang matmemang* being given respect with a red turban



58. Serving food to the *nokjapang matmemang*



59. The ritual of taking the *grendik* for a visit to the stream



60. The *grendik* being given bath in the Simsang river



61. Final serving of food to the *Matmemang*



62. Slaughter of the *matmemang* before burning the *delang*



63. Another slaughter of the *matmemang*



64. *Delang* in the *Atong* style



65. *Dewai-Desai*



66. Dismantled *delang* being burned down.



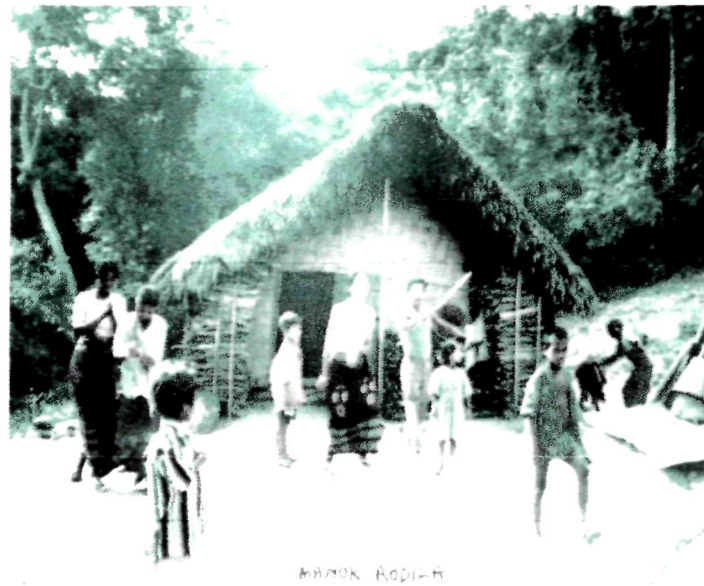
67. Traditional house of the *Atongs* where the *delang* is being burned down



68. Traditional game of wrestling during the ceremony of *delang so'a*



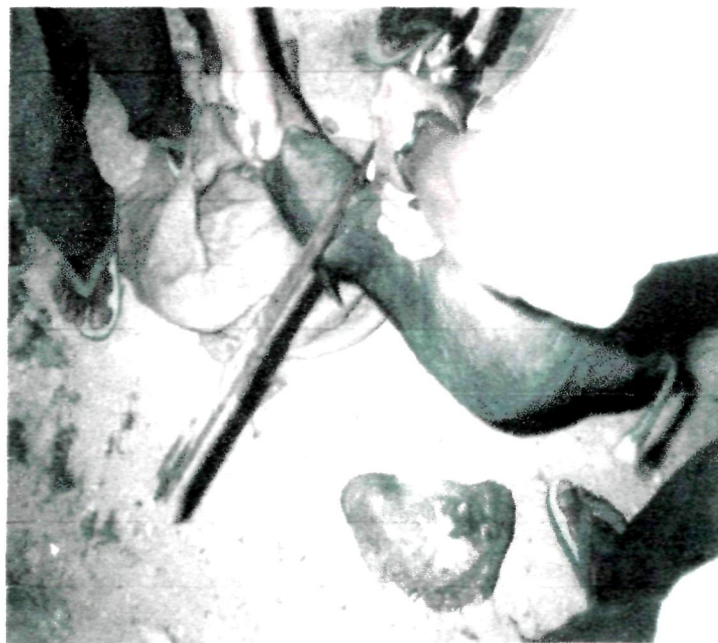
69. *Grendik* is cuddled and taken for a final dance where the *jakmora* is used to provide music.



70. Traditional *Atong* house



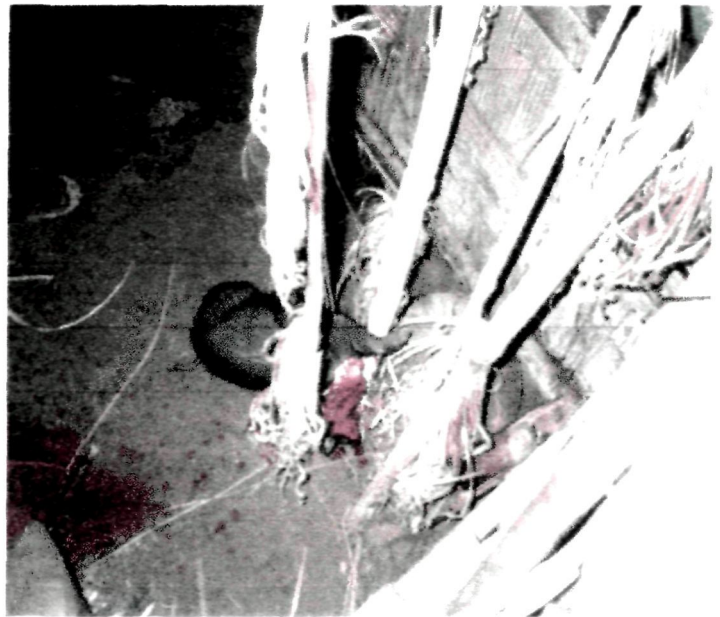
71. Burial of *grendik* at the *nokkra*



72. Pig being sacrificed at the *krom* after the burial of the *grendik*



73. Blood sacrifice on the *krom*



74. *Wa pek songa* ceremony after the burial of *grendik*



75. Preparation of bamboo stump for *chare ragata* ceremony



76. Altar of *saram cha'a* ceremony



77. Altar of *saram cha'a*



78. Sacrifice of chicken -blood during the ritual of *saram cha'a*



79. Divination of chicken intestine



80. Ritual of calling the god *Misi Saljong*



81. Performance of the invocation ritual



82. Ritual of incense burning



83. Merry making after the ceremony of *saram cha'a*



84. Ritual of *ste amua*



85. Land development for permanent cultivation at Waram Songma



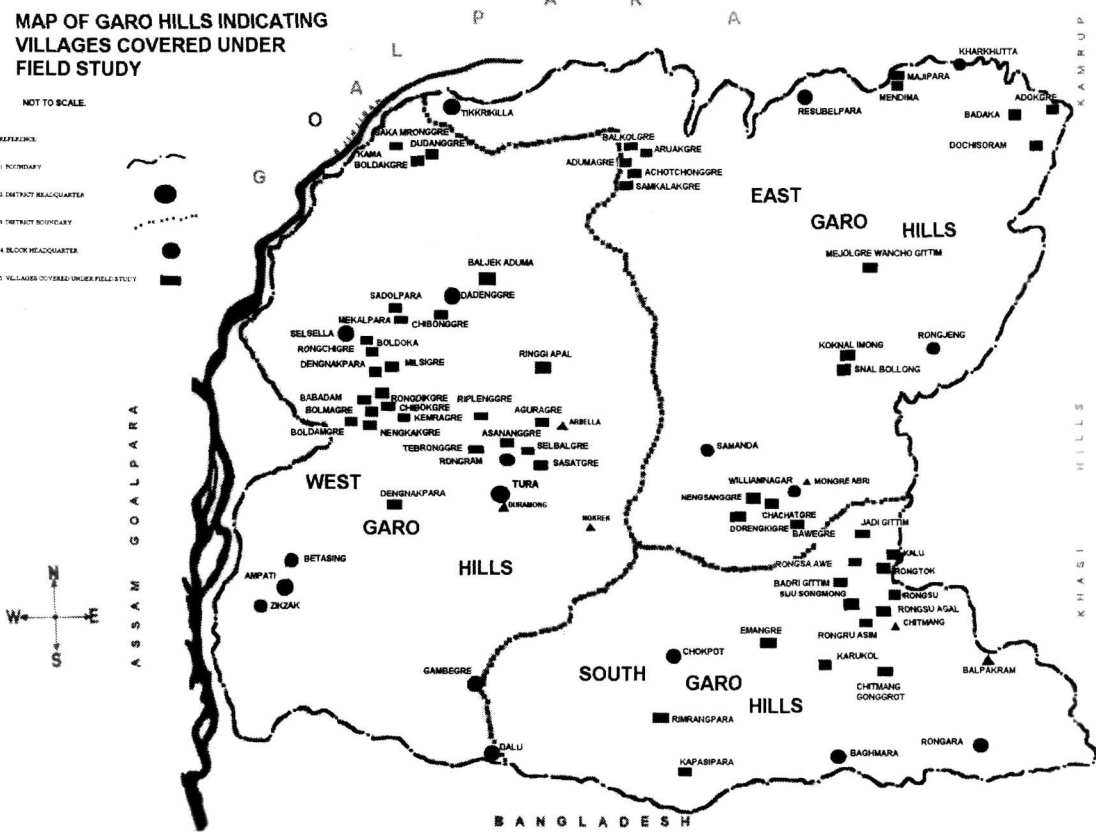
86. Distributing arecanut seedlings to the farmers



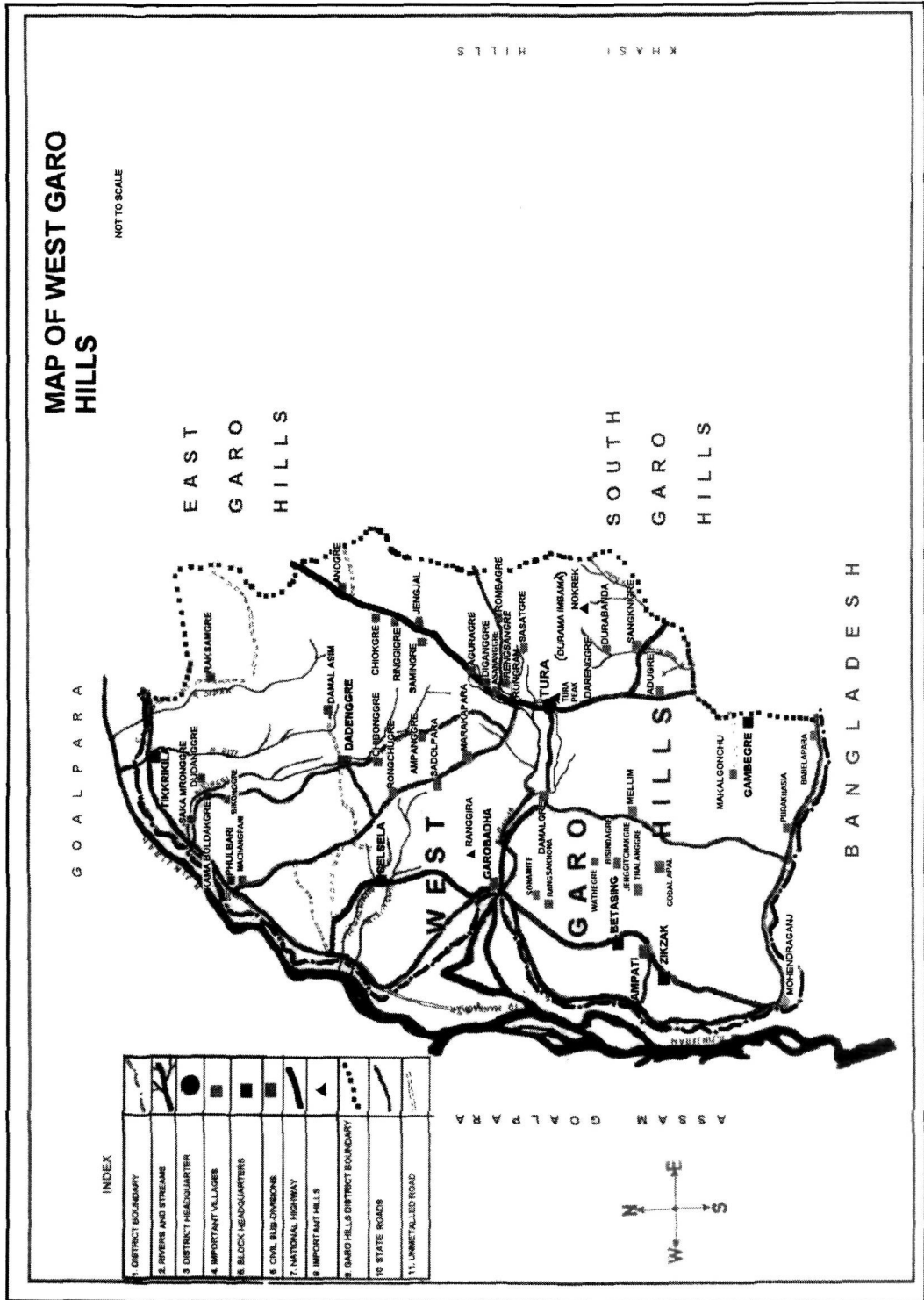
87. Intercropping with pineapple at Kama Boldakgre village

Maps

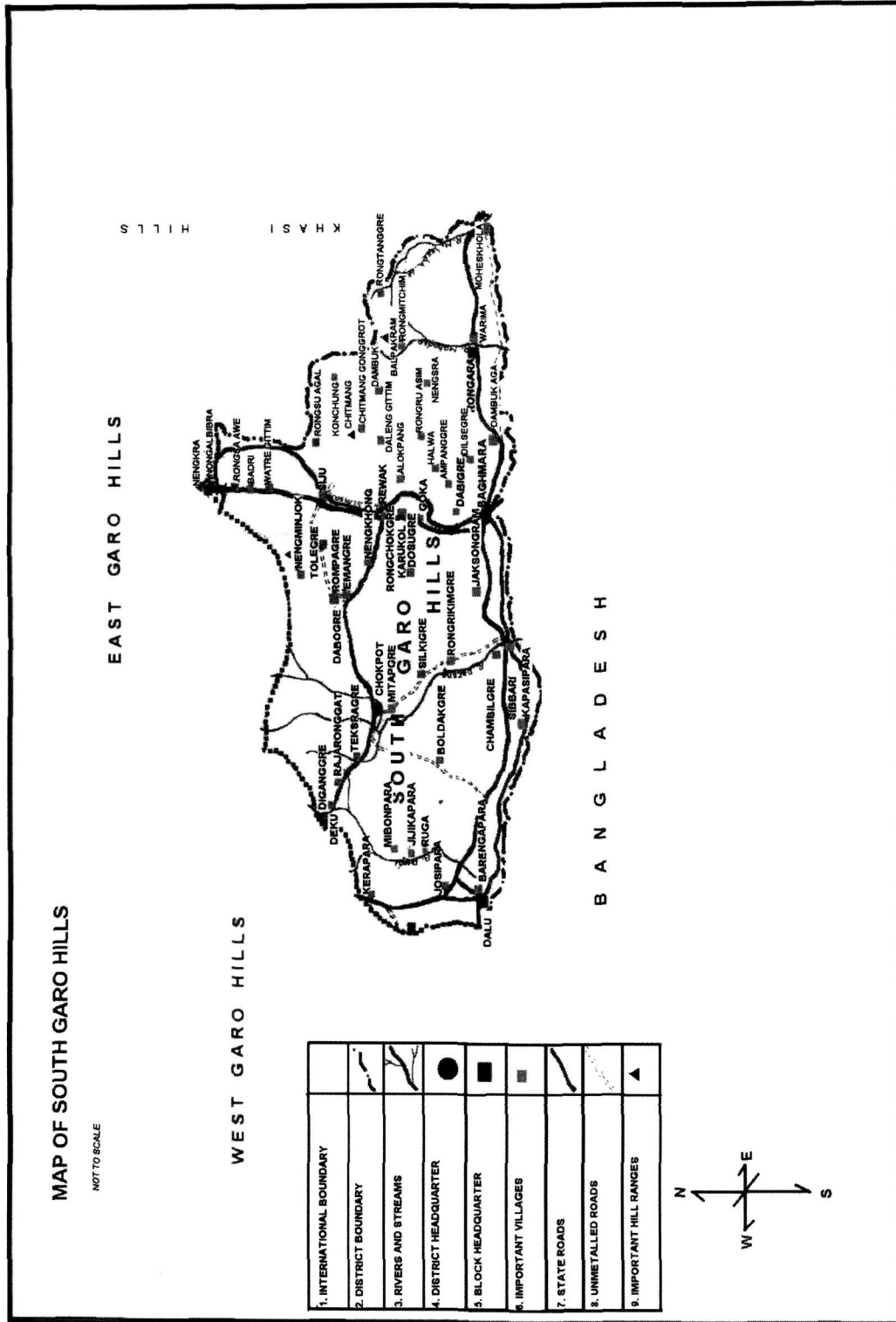
Map No.1



Map No.2



Map No. 4



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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1. In five years of research, interviews were conducted of people in different places including priests, who were knowledgeable of the festivals mentioned in the research analysis. They are-

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 - (b) Marak, Mr.Plinder at Siju,dated 18-10-2000.
 - (c) Marak, Mr.Mrinel Ch Sonai / Sone Agal, Siju dated 18-10-2000.
 - (d) Marak, Mr.Wingnal R at Sonai / Sone Agal, Siju dated 18-10-2000.
 - (e) Marak, Mr.Albin R., at Siju dated 19-10-2000.
 - (f) Marak, Mr. Janseng R. (a priest/) at Sonai/Sone Agal, Siju dated 20-10-2000.
 - (g) Momin, Ginol Gare (the priest *Tuara Nangapa* or the high priest) 27-9-2002.
 - (h) Momin, Mut Gare at Siju Dobakkol, 28-9-2002.
 - (i) Sangma, Kempai Ampang at Siju Bazaar, 28-9-2002.
2. The following people who are *Atongs* and field observers on the spot were also consulted for *Chugan*
- (i) Momin, Mr. Sengban G. in 1998 at Rewak/Raiwak village.
 - (ii) Sangma, Ms. Rose Meridina N. in 2001at Baghmara.
 - (iii) Marak, Ms. Femina Ch. 2002-village Baghmara.
 - (iv) Marak, Mr. Dilliram G. -2002- village Kalu.
 - (v) Sangma, Mr.Lingdoh A. -2002- village Rongsu.
 - (vi) Marak, Mr. Bitching N. -2003-village Rongsu Agal.
 - (vii) Shira, Mr.Jobillyne D. -2000 -Tura (attended *Chugan* festival in 2000).
 - (viii) Marak, Mr. Likin Ch -2002-Tura (attended *Chugan* festival in 2001).
 - (ix) Marak, Mr. Basan R. -2001-Tura (attended *Chugan* festival in 2001).

(x) Sangma, Mr. Timul N. -2002–Tura (attended *Chugan* festival in 2002).

The researcher had a consultation in 2004 with the following people in the field who were experienced in the *A·we* and *Am·beng* area in West Garo Hills:

Marak, Ms. Annoline R. Mendipathar, East Garo Hills.

Marak, Mr. Ebinal K., Daram, Resu, East Garo Hills.

Marak, Mr. Lithinson B., Soragre, West Garo Hills.

Marak, Ms. Sengchi R., Kharkutta, East Garo Hills.

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Sangma, Mr. Agat A., at Selbalgre, East Garo Hills, Meghalaya, 2003.

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Sangma, Ms. Nekmie Ch., at Gambaregre, West Garo Hills. 2003.

Sangma, Mr. Rok Ch., at Gambaregre, West Garo Hills. 2004.

Sangma, Mr. Ratjen Ch. (village *nokma* - headman) at Chibokgre, West Garo Hills. 2004

Sangma, Mr. Usin A., (village *nokma*- headman), at Chidaogre village, Ranggira, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya. 2004.

The following were interviewed for *A·siroka* (rituals of Exorcism) and *Kosi* festival as well as the *Am·beng* Funeral Rites.

Areng, Lebensingh, (priest, about 57 years), Rongsu village, South Garo Hills, interviewed from 05-09-04 to 07-09-04 and on 19-10-04.

Marak, Mrs. Botjak R. (68 years), Wa·ram Songma, West Garo Hills, on 18-08-05.

Marak, Greatminson Chambugong (56 years, priest) Dudanggre village, West Garo Hills, on 04-07-03.

Marak, Kilsan M. (about 57 years) Sadolpara village, West Garo Hills, on 07-09-04.

Marak, Monen Mrong, (56 years) Kama-Boldakgre village. West Garo Hills, on 04-07-2003.

Marak, Monen Rangsa, (59 years, village elder) Waran Songmagre village West Garo Hills, on 6-09-04.

Marak, Rombak Bolwari, (53 years) Chibonggre village, West Garo Hills, on 05-09-04.

Sangma, Alnon A., (55years) Village Darechikgre, West Garo Hills, on 18-08-05.

Sangma, Poni Angitok. (54 years, *nokma*) Village Saka-Mrongre. West Garo Hills, on 04-07-03.

Sangma, Willen Mangsang, (57 years, priest) Village Dudanggre, West Garo Hills, on 04-07-03.

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Marak, Chekchek Gonjeng Mrong, Chibonggre village, on 31-07-2005.

Marak, Takka Morjen Bolwari, at Danang Rongbakgre village, on 07-08 2005

Marak, Jengwan Ch. (*nokma*) Mengkaggre village, Ranggira, West Garo Hills, on 10-10-2002.

Marak, Gosin M. at Mengkaggre village, Ranggira, West Garo Hills, on 10-10-2002.

Marak, Monen R. (priest -76), Waran Songma village, West Garo Hills, 19-08-05.

Marak, Taseng Ch. (*nokma*) Chidaogre village, West Garo Hills, 10-10-2002.

Marak, Motchang Ch. (*nokma*) Sadolpara village, and his wife Mrs Denu M. Sangma, West Garo Hills, 10-10-2002.

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Momin, Sonjeng Ch.vat Rongdikgre village, West Garo Hills, on 09 and 10-10-2002.

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Momin, Marson Ch., and his wife, Mrs. Kita Ch. Marak, Village Chidaogre, West Garo Hills, 10-10-2002.

Momin Sajeng Ch., (Age- about 52 years) Village-Buripara (Mengkakgre) on 30-08-04

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Sangma, Gatsang S. (about 60 years,) *nokma* of A·gilanggre, West Garo Hills, 10-09-04.

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Songma, Rongram Block; interviewed on 10-9-05.

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Sangma Poni A·gitok, Saka-Mrongre village, West Garo Hills; interviewed on 04-07-03.

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2	National Seminar	NEHU, Tura Campus, Chandmari	18 th , 19 th , May, 2001	Dept of Garo	Jointly by the Dept of Garo & Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), New Delhi	Paper Presenter
3	National Seminar	NEHU, Tura Campus, Chandmari	11 th , 12 th , Nov 2002	Dept of Garo	Jointly by the Dept of Garo & Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti, Gauhati	Paper Presenter
4	National Seminar	NEHU, Tura Campus, Chandmari	23 rd , 24 th May, 2003	Dept of Garo	Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manas Sangrahalaya, Bhopal	Paper Presenter
5	Regional Seminar	NEHU, Tura Campus, Chandmari	28 th , 29 th , March, 2005	Dept of Garo	Dept of Arts & Culture, Govt of Meghalaya	Paper Presenter
6	National Workshop	Shillong	1 st to 15 th May, 2000	National Folklore Support Centre Chennai in collaboration with NEHU, Shillong	Ford Foundation	Attended
7	Translators' workshop	NEHU, Tura Campus	30 th to 31 st August, 2002	Directorate of Arts & Culture Meghalaya, Shillong		Participated
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9. Publications:

- Contributor (pp.187-195) - "*Rivers and Culture Focus on Garo Hills*" ,Edt. Caroline R. Marak & Sujit Som, Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, 2004.
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Declaration

I hereby declare that the above information given by me is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

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



Fameline K. Marak

AN ABSTRACT
SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Supervisor
Dr. Caroline R. Marak

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

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

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

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

Justification of the study

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

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

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

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

Chapter -1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter II-Agricultural Festivals which includes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter III-Funeral Rites (of Festivals) include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter IV-Rituals of Exorcism:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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