Chapter V

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

In the first chapter, an introduction of the Garos has been made. The researcher has included everything that is required into the understanding of the following chapters. In the introduction of the Garos, the geographical distribution of the Garos has been included so as to place the location of the Garos in the world map and to put them in an international perspective. International, because the geographical distribution of the Garos span two
International, because the geographical distribution of the Garos span two nations, India and Bangladesh and if further study were to be done into the migratory routes of their oral history, could cover many more. By looking at the geographical distribution of the Garos alone, it can be ascertained that they are by far the largest ethnic group in the Eastern parts of the Indian subcontinent, and if geographical boundaries had depended on ethnicity, would have formed a formidable geographical entity. Since such is not the case, the researcher has seen that the Garos, though large in number, have been divided by geographical boundaries and face marginalization wherever they are located because in that geographical domain, they are a minority, be it in states like Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Nagaland or even in the state of Meghalaya, which they were instrumental in creating, or in Bangladesh.

The next part of the introduction deals with the history of the Garos. Being a tribe without a written language, most of the history has been passed down orally and as such can neither be categorized as fact nor as fiction. From whatever oral lore that has been collected, we can see that the Garos have lore that can trace their ancestry all the way to Israel, to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah and also genetic links with the Japanese. After they parted ways with the tribe of Japan, it is not certain how long they wandered until they came to
settle in the Tibetan plateau. After their migration from the Tibetan plateau into the Brahmaputra valley, they spread out over the plains and the hills south of the Brahmaputra. Now, it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of these accounts of their history. The part about the Jewish ancestry cannot be ascertained with certainty because they are from accounts collected by Dewansing Rongmitu Sangma from Sonaram Rongrokgre Sangma almost a century ago and till date, these two men have been the only sources for this theory. Both of them were educated men and it is not certain whether Sonaram, who was a Christian, and a well travelled man, could have made these grandiose claims from stories he heard from the bible or in his many travels. Though it may be easier to disregard these accounts as mere “tall tales” made by an educated traveler to awe his audiences, there are some arguments that support this theory. A closer look at the indigenous Garo religion and the ancient Jewish religion, would reveal striking similarities. For example, the belief in the Supreme Being. The Jews believe in a deity, that is the creator and the destroyer of all on earth and accordingly blesses and smites. The same way, the Garos believe in a similar deity, Pattigipa Ra-rongipa Tattara Rabuga who is also described as the same. The Jews never worshipped idols, neither did the Garos. Another striking similarity is the Jews belief in giving the first harvests of their crops to this deity which the Garos
believe, too, and will not touch a harvest until sacrificial offerings have been made of the first fruits. These are just a few similarities and many more can be discovered upon further study. As for their migration from Tibet, though there are no historical records, evidences of Garo villages can be seen all along the said migratory route and upon further study of their history, some new evidences might see the light of day. As for the Garos living in present day Bangladesh, according to one account, they are supposed to have migrated from present day Myanmar, though where they came from to get there in the first place is not known. Were they part of the group that came along the course of the Brahmaputra under the leadership of Dikgil Nongsting or were they another group altogether. Nevertheless, these accounts remain accounts only because there has not been any study made on the origin of the Garos. The Garos themselves are only now waking up to the importance of ethnic identity and are new to the field of anthropological research with most of the researches in anthropology and linguistics done by foreigners while the Garo researchers have resigned themselves to collecting and preserving the cultural heritage.

In the next part of the introduction, we come to the divisions that can be made of the Garos. The first of these divisions is the geographical division and
according to these divisions, there are changes in the dialects and of course, slight cultural variations. These variations can be divided into A·beng, A·we, Atong, Chibok, Chisak, Dual, Gara Ganching, Matabeng, Matchi, Me·gam and Ruga. With the advent of Christianity, the missionaries sought to create a lingua franca among the Garos and adopted the A·we dialect because it was the dialect used by the first division that they came across in their endeavour to spread the good word. Thus, they started using this dialect in the books and in conversation and soon it spread all over the Garo areas. In a way it unified the Garo areas but slowly killed off the other dialects. Though there are still some traces of these other dialects left in some remote pockets, the Ruga dialect has died out with the last living speakers of this dialect. The only surviving words have only been recent collections.

The A·beng dialect has survived the onslaught of this linguistic imperialism only because of sheer numbers while the Atong dialect because of the inaccessibility of their areas. In the present scenario, we cannot give the geographical division with precision because of the migration that has taken place on account of trade and commerce and we find that most areas are of mixed citizenry. The divisions that have been included are taken from a century old book by Major Playfair, which has also been the basis of all the
introductions on the Garos in all the books that have ever been published regarding the Garos.

The next division is of the Clans or *ma-chongs*. These divisions still stand strong in modern Garo society because it is this form of kinship that binds society together. This is one of the aspects of the Garo customs that has never gone out of style and looking at modern trends seems like it never will.

The last division that we have is that of religion. This is a fairly recent phenomenon and is rife with the pettiness that infects any organized religion. Christianity has divided Garos into different divisions, such as Baptist, Catholics, Seventh Day Adventist, etc. and these denominations created some misunderstanding between them but in course of time, they buried these Petty differences and went even to the extent of jointly translating the Bible by both the Baptist and the Catholics. This form of division raises its ugly head only when two people from different denominations of the same religion want to get married. It is easier for two people of different religions to get married than for those that are of different denominations within the same religion. Though this is still the case, it is also eventually fading away due to changes in the mindset of the people regarding this issue.
A part of the analysis includes, a small introduction been made on the language of the Garos. Citations from Fuller and Grierson have been taken and the language, with its various dialects, has been established into a group. The next part deals with the occupations of the Garo people in general. Though they are a predominantly agricultural community, with the changing times they are also adapting. There was a rush for technical lines like engineering and medicine during the nineties but with the advent of globalization and the internet, the Garos have been venturing into other fields as well and recent trends have seen women, who were predominantly homemakers or teachers, also venture out into other careers.

The Garos, like any other tribe without a written language, have a rich oral tradition. As for their written language, there is a legend that before they settled into their present locations, they migrated from place to place. In order to preserve their written language, they had written it on the hides of animals and carried them rolled up. During one of their mass migrations, they fell upon hard times. Food was a scarcity and people were dying of starvation. In order to preserve the tribe, they had to take these hides and boil it and use it for food and thus, their written language was lost to the sands of time. There is no way of ascertaining the origin of this legend, whether it existed before the Garos’
contact with the outside more “civilized” world, like the Bengalis and the British, or it came into being after the contact. Some modern scholars are of the opinion that all tribes with only oral language have some sort of legend amongst themselves about the loss of their written language. If the Garos’, or any tribe for that matter, have the legend of the loss of their written language before contact with any of the outsiders, then the fact that they have a concept of language in the written form has to be given some amount of thought. If it came later, then the legend could be attributed to the introduction of the written language of the outsiders.

In Chapter II, the researcher has dealt with the elaborate rites of passage that are performed at the time of the birth of a child. Before the rites, the researcher takes a look at the beliefs that the Garos have on the universal scheme of things. According to the belief that was observed, the Garos believe that the fate of every man is predestined at the time of birth. They believe that at the time of birth, the living spirits of all the living and non-living gather at the place of birth holding their plantain leaves to see on whose lot will fall the fate of the new born. According to this belief, the fate of the newborn is sealed, i.e., his end. The time of death, the age of death and the way he will die is all determined at this time. This belief has a basis on a story about the
discovery of this; the story is given in the second chapter. In order that the newly born may not have a gruesome death or an untimely death in his fate, the Garos have some practices. The first of these practices is the exorcism of the spirits that are supposed to be holding out their plantain leaves hoping that the lot of the child will fall on him. Another practice is that of laying out a plantain leaf on the spot where the baby will fall once it comes out of the mother’s womb. This is done so that the baby will not fall on anyone else’s leaf and live a long life. And yet another practice is that of naming the baby as soon as it comes out from the mother’s womb. If the name was not already decided, then the midwife attending would give it any name that came to her mind. This is also done so that no one else could name the baby and claim it for themselves.

Some of the rituals performed by the Garos at birth are performed from the time of conception till the time the baby is born, though not continuously but whenever the pregnant woman is ill. One such ritual is the Darechik Amia. It is believed to be the deity that causes miscarriages and untimely births. So appeasement rituals are performed for the deity every time the pregnant woman falls ill. There is always a dikka or a pot of rice beer kept for such occasions. In the same way, the Garos have the ritual called Mamri Chinabak.
Ma′mri Chinabak is one of the names of the supreme deity, Tattara Rabuga. It is believed that he forges a human in the Underworld. As the belief goes, since he is the creator, it is believed that he could also be the destroyer. So in the same way as the previous ritual, this ritual is also performed whenever the pregnant woman falls ill as an appeasement to this deity so that it may keep the unborn safe. The pronoun “it” is used for this deity because it is not certain of the gender of this deity. The gender of some of the deities of the Garo pantheon cannot be determined because the language does not have gender specific pronouns like “he” or “she” as a noun replacement. It may be the generally accepted notion that the supreme creator is a “he” but according to the researcher, since this deity is the creator, then it could either have both male and female attributes or be asexual.

In the next part of the second chapter, the cutting of the umbilical cord is mentioned. Here, too, is a ritual with sacrificial offering to Tattara Rabuga as a thanksgiving for the birth of a healthy baby. It is a given fact that the Garos give a thanksgiving offering to a deity at every event in their lives, be it a new born baby, a new harvest, etc. After a new harvest, the first fruits of their crops are always offered first to a deity. It is during this time that the baby will also be named. During this time, the priestess will exorcise the
malevolent spirits that may be present at the time of birth and asks only the benevolent ones to stay.

It has been seen that the Garos attribute every event or occurrence in nature to some deity or the other. Thus, either good or bad, any event has a cause in some deity. The next part of the second chapter is called *Domagipa Doka*. This ritual is performed immediately after the birth of the baby to appease the deity *Me-chibram* so that it will let the placenta come out without any complications. From this ritual, we can see that even things like the placenta ejecting out of the woman’s body is also attributed to a deity who demands appeasement. Though it is a ritual of appeasement, there are no sacrifices made. Only a rooster is made to cry out by beating it.

The next part of this chapter is the main birthing ritual, the *A-tilla Amua*. This ritual is performed at the time of birth and consists of five parts. The first four is performed inside the house and the last one outside. This ritual is as an appeasement to *Tattara Rabga*, the supreme creator, so that the baby may be allowed to be born safely. This ritual is performed by the priest when the woman undergoes labour and is performed in the main compartment of the house. It is performed to make the delivery as smooth and as
complication free as possible. The first part is performed with the necessary incantations, and goes on to the next part. In the next part, the chi rugala ceremony, a plantain leaf is spread out on the floor and water is poured as an offering to the deity. Then the ritual moves on to the next part, the mi tinani. In this ritual, an offering of rice is put in small, evenly numbered, portions on the plantain leaf. After this comes the chu rugala, in which rice beer is poured from a gourd over the rice portions on the plantain leaf as an offering. Then, the ritual moves out of the house into the courtyard in which a sacrificial altar or kimindam has been erected. We can see the systematic and elaborate way in which the offerings are made to the supreme deity in order to facilitate a safe birth.

The next part touches upon the topic of exorcism. Though a minor exorcism is already performed at the time of the cutting of the umbilical cord, there is yet another ritual for exorcism. After the priests and the midwives have washed themselves, the priest exorcises the place of any kind of malevolent entities that may have been drawn there. It is done by sprinkling water. The placenta was wrapped up in cloth and either buried or placed in a bamboo or a tree.
In recent years, we have seen the surge in interest in stem cell research and among them the umbilical cord as one of the best sources for it. Not only that, sources state that it has the potential to cure various diseases and the blood from the umbilical cord can also be used for transfusion, etc. This could be a case of science catching up with ancient wisdom because since time immemorial, Garos have understood the importance of the umbilical cord and have always preserved it for future use in the cure of some diseases.

Like other cultures, too, the Garos have a haircutting ceremony. The significance of the haircutting ceremony is to remove all pollution and defilement that came along with its birth. The ceremony is accompanied by a chant called Tongrengma, which is a deity that is responsible for the mental retardation of a child. It is recited in order that the mental malaise may not strike the child and that it may grow up normally. There is also a ritual called Kalkame Den:paka which is performed during the haircutting ceremony. This is performed so that the child may grow up with strength and courage. This is also a ritual performed to the supreme creator. It is during this ceremony that the name of the child given at the time of birth will be affirmed or if the parents want to change it, the can do so.
Before the birth, not only the woman had to do certain things but the husband also had to do some other things. Some of these are also touched upon as an understanding of the intricate workings of the Garo psyche. During infancy, there are no rites of passage. Only lullabies called dingdinga and mumua are sung to the child to bring out the expectations in a child.

The next stage in a person’s life was puberty. There were no rites of passage as such, but a significant change in a boy’s life was that he would no longer be sleeping in his parents’ house but would be sleeping in the nokpante with the other adolescent boys of the clan. Here, they would learn everything they had to learn about life. Here, they were taught every skill necessary in order that they may live useful lives. The boys would live on in the nokpante until they got married. This was a system that was in place long before the advent of classroom education in the Garo Hills. It may not have had book education, but it certainly imparted wholesome and practical education. It was crushed in the way of the juggernaut that is Christianity when nokpantes were converted to classrooms and institutions of the Church.

Long before the developed world understood the importance of independence in a man’s life, the Garos had put it in practice in their
nokpantes. Every able bodied boy had to enter the nokpante, stay there and learn and once they come out of this institution, they were ready for life and were already mature and able to make decisions for themselves. In that way, it was far advantageous than conventional education, the only difference being literacy, which, had these institutions not been done away with, would also have found its place in the curriculum. The nokpante also had its various uses, which has been touched upon in the chapter. There have been plans of reviving this system albeit with a difference, not as a sleeping dormitory for boys but as an institution of learning in tandem with the school curriculum but it is yet to see the light of day.

Though boys had this opportunity of learning, the girls were also not left behind. They, too, learnt everything that they had to learn about the various duties of a woman from their mothers and elder female relatives during the course of their household duties and while working in the fields. The rites and rituals of birth that have been touched in this thesis are by no means complete. There are many aspects that need to be investigated further to gain insight into the intricate details that interweave these rituals together.
Chapter III deals with the rituals involving marriage ceremonies. The traditional and the modern aspects of marriage has been touched upon and the many forms of proposals, too. Though the Garos are also moving with the times in all aspects of life, they still retain some forms of traditional practices. One such example can be seen in the marriage ceremonies. The researcher has already touched upon the topic of marriage and all its aspects. In the modern world too, some of this practices are still relevant.

There are two types of sons-in-law in the Garo marriage system, the nokkrom and the chawari. There is a lot of difference between these two types and the researcher has attempted to explain this as clearly as possible. The chawari is a son-in-law without privileges and without any stake in the property of his wife’s parents. A nokkrom, on the other hand, is the husband of the heiress and every responsibility of running the household eventually falls on him after his father-in-law. The researcher has elaborated on all the responsibilities and duties of both these categories of sons-in-law in the Garo marriage system.

The next part deals with the marriage negotiations. This practice was usually only for the nokkrom, i.e., only practiced when the son-in-law to be
would be the heiress’ husband, though nowadays it is practiced for both categories. It used to be such that these marriage negotiations would go on till dawn and the negotiations would be in the form of songs called *dani*. The researcher has given a couple of *danis* as examples to understand the kind of negotiations that took place for a marriage.

The next part is the *Dosia* form of marriage, the traditional form of marriage which is solemnized by killing two chickens and then divining with the intestines of a third. This form of marriage is still relevant in some pockets where the indigenous religion is still practiced. The researcher has elaborated not only on the ceremony but the various practices associated with it. Also included is a case study so as to bring it to a more practical level and not just theoretical.

The next topic is the marriage by capture, which is a form of marriage in which a son-in-law is kidnapped and then married. This practice is no longer prevalent and have been so for quite sometime, but there are people who have been witness to it. The researcher has included a passage from Robbins Burling’s book *Rengsanggre*, about the time when he was fortunate enough to witness such a kidnapping. In this form of marriage, the process
would start when a girl would tell her maternal uncles and elder brothers about a boy that she had taken a liking to and would like to get married to. Then, these male relatives of hers would kidnap the boy, with the knowledge of his family, and get them married off.

A part of the analysis includes the Cha:senga, a form of proposal made by the girl by engaging in service in the boy’s family. This was practiced so that the girl may endear herself to the boy’s family and get the boy’s hand in marriage. This followed by The next topic in this chapter is Cha:dila. In this form of proposal, the girl cooks and sends some food with a friend to the boy, who, at this time, would be in the nokpante. She herself would hide and watch from somewhere close by. If the boy should accept and eat the food, the girl would come out of hiding and eat with him, ending in marriage. This followed by Tunapa. In this form, the suitor, either a boy or a girl, would sleep with his/her beloved and then they would get married after the necessary negotiations. During some festivals like Wangala, the boys and girls would be allowed some amount of freedom and they would stay up very late and sing songs of courtship to each other, ending in the marriage of one or more couples.
The next topic dealt with is that of *seka* or elopement. It is as the name suggests, the boy and the girl run off with each other. When a husband or a wife dies, it is the customary duty of their clan to provide a replacement for the deceased from among the same clan members. This is called *on-songa*. The researcher has elaborated on the subject and included a case study to demonstrate the complexity of this practice.

Mother-in-law marriage is an often misunderstood topic because of the fact that when the head of the household dies, the surviving wife is also referred to as the *jik*, the Garo term for wife, of her *nokkrom*, the husband of her heir. Though no conjugal relations exist between the mother-in-law and the son-in-law, this topic has been the cause of many misunderstandings just because of the term *jik*.

The topic further deals with the instances in which child marriages arises. The last topic regarding the forms of marriage is the Christian marriage, which is also the contemporary form of marriage. The researcher has elaborated upon the various practices associated with this form of marriage and also the various social impacts of marriages in Garo society.
There is the concept of *do-ki rama*, which refers to the day of idleness spent by the boy on the first day at his in-laws house after the marriage which is analysed at length.

The next topic included *greng gitaka gitcheng godapa*, which is basically the duties of a son-in-law, especially the *nokkrom*, towards his new family and towards society as a member of this family.

If a son-in-law is not the *nokkrom*, then after a certain amount of years that he stays with the in-laws, he has to build a house for himself and stay separately. This house is called the *nokde*. The researcher has elaborated upon the various practices associated with this, thus ending the chapter on marriage.

Chapter IV dealt with the next big event in the Garos life cycle, death and with it the preparation for rebirth. The Garos believe in a larger scheme of things, in life and death and rebirth. To them, death is not the end of everything but the soul of the dead returns and is born again. Almost all the customs and rituals that are carried out by the Garos have an origin in the story of Me-gam Gairipa, the first man to die. The researcher has seen that by far, death has the most elaborate rituals and the Garos are rich in funeral and post
funeral rites, from sending off the deceased to the funeral dirges to leading the soul to its ancestral home so that it can be born again in the same matrilineal lineage, etc. Like all ancient cultures, to the Garos, too, death is only a transition into rebirth. A line from an internet source goes:

“To die is to sleep, the myth seems to be saying, to be entombed among flickering dreams until we wake again.”

The chapter deals with the ceremonies surrounding death. The first part deals with the custom of kima songa, i.e., erecting of carved wooden posts in the memory of the deceased. A human form would be carved in the wood and it would be put up in front of the house. If the house was an ancestral home, then a lot of kimas could be seen. These days such traditions are dying out as society moves on with the rest of the world.

The next part deals with memang gisi, gro gisi, or the debts that the deceased could not repay. This is a custom in which if the father-in-law could not pay off his debts, it would be transferred to his nokkrom. According to custom, the nokkrom was always the father-in-law’s nephew, his sister’s son, or a close cousin’s son, but having the same clan as him. That is why for
generations, the nokkrom was always the same clan as the father-in-law, this was done as an insurance against the property falling into the hands of another clan. Thus, if a nokkrom was from another clan, the nephews of the father-in-law had a right to claim it as their birth right. It so happened that if the nokkrom was of another clan, during the marriage negotiations, the girl’s father would have to clarify that there would be no claimants from among the father’s nephews. Again, if the nokkrom was already from another clan, then the sister of the father-in-law would adopt him in a custom called deragata. Thus, the nokkrom would have the adopted clan of his father-in-law.

The next part deals with tokari pita or the slashing of the tokari, a holder for mil-ams made of bamboo. The person performing this task not only has to slash the tokari but he also slashes the walls and the doorways of the house. This was usually done when the head of the household dies, and the slashing of the walls and doorways of the house signified that since the head of the household had died, the household would fall into ruin. This is because even though the society was matrilineal, the main bread earners were usually men. In the story of Me-gam Gairipa, he had told his wife to take a new husband from among his matrilineal lineage. This in order that they would be provided for, they would not feel the need of a man in the house. Accordingly,
in the case study given in Chapter IV, someone had to be given as a replacement for the deceased. In this case, the wife of the deceased was aged so his son-in-law was given as a replacement, which falls under the category of the mother-in-law marriage touched upon in Chapter III. This has been the tradition by which the clan members of the deceased give a replacement and in this way, the relationships between the clans are kept for generations.

Next in the chapter is the tradition of *me-mang dila*, a custom of leading the soul of the deceased back to his ancestral home. Since the Garos believe in rebirth, they are of the opinion that it is best to be born again in his own matrilineal clan. Thus, it is believed that a soul, if left to itself, would never find the way back to his matrilineal lineage and would be in danger of being born as an animal or an insect and worse yet, in another clan. Why worse, because if he were born in another clan, he could end up in marriage with someone from his original clan. This was taboo (i.e., marriage/sexual relations between people having the same *ma·chong* or clan) and was tantamount to incest. These traditions, though outdated, are some of the traditions that still colour the life of the Garos, keeping them linked with their ancestors. *Me-mang dila*, on the outside looks like a simple traditional belief, but the main reason for this is actually for keeping the relationship of the two clans.
The intricacies of relationship between the Garo clans are also a very interesting topic for research.

The next topic is the ritual of jaragata, which is the ritual of leading the soul of the deceased back to its home so that it will not lose its way when the time comes to be reborn again. This tradition is fading away with practices only in certain pockets. There are two forms of jaragata, which literally means “to adopt the soul”. The first form is the one in which the soul of the dead is led back to his/her ancestral home. This ritual is different according to the gender, the marital status and the relationship of the deceased with the woman performing the ritual. The other form of jaragata is performed when a person wastes away without any apparent signs of sickness. The ritual included in this work is of the ritual performed for a child though it can also be performed for a grown up, too, as was the case with one of the sources Mr. Sembertush A. Sangma. Though he is a Christian, he has an avid interest in the culture of the Garos. According to him, in the summer of 2001 he was afflicted with a mysterious ailment without any symptoms of any disease, but he was just wasting away. So in September of that year, the chisalbat amua ritual was performed for him in Gambarigre village in West Garo Hills district by a priest Onsing Mrong Marak and he was cured. So, we see that it is not only the
non-Christian Garos that believed in the power of these rituals. Sembertush’s case may be rare in the towns, but in the villages, it was still prevalent at that time though now these practices have slowly been fading.

The next part of this chapter deals with the crossing over of the souls from the land of the living. Comparisons have been made with Greek mythology into the similarities of paying the ferryman and crossing Nawang. Though the tales of crossing over to the land of the dead exist, there exists no account of how and when these souls will be born again. This is another point that has to be looked into.

Then, we move on to the funeral dirges. During the funeral, several dirges are sung according to the situation. The example given is sung at the funeral of a married man when his mother’s household and close relatives arrive.

The amount of research that has been conducted has been exhaustive and is by no means complete because in a living people culture is for ever changing and adapting with the times. Though a thorough study has been attempted, there may still be some aspects that have been overlooked because
of the fact that some of these aspects may well have been forgotten in the deep recesses of the mind due to the lack of practice.

From various field trips and studies, it has been found that the oral traditions differ from area to area depending on their geographical distance. Though they share the same foundations, they have slight differences. Take a look at the folklore for example, the Garos have a tradition of their migration from Tibet. All the lore will be similar to a certain point from which it will differ, this is the point at which the two groups part ways and as the years pass, the lore of migration keeps piling up according to the individual village. Thus, it may be possible to find different accounts of the same story in different geographical locations. This was possible when there was less communication between villages but with increased connectivity, everything has become a mishmash of ingredients.

The object of this study was to documenting the various rites of passage in the oral tradition of the Garos. The Garos are rich in rites and rituals pertaining to all aspects of their everyday life and are very reverential to their deities, giving them sacrificial offerings as appeasement at every turn of their lives be it in times of celebration, in times of strife, etc. They have rites of
passage at various stages of their lives but the most important ones are birth and death with death having more importance than birth. The Garos are firm believers in the cycle of death and rebirth and have elaborate rituals. During the birth of a child, they have mostly sacrificial offerings towards the various deities for a safe birth, exorcisms and other rituals to ensure a bright future for the newborn. During death, the deities have no place in the rituals. The most important person in death is the deceased. The womenfolk of his clan have elaborate rituals to coax him back to return and be born again in his own clan. They have rituals that lead the deceased back to his/her own relatives and it is always preferred that the deceased be reborn in his own matrilineal lineage. Though the rituals are slowly fading away with the rapid spread of Christianity, the researcher has taken utmost care to collect the data from first person accounts of witnesses or former practitioners of the indigenous religion.

The major problems faced by the researcher were the deplorable conditions of the roads and the dearth of people to take authentic accounts from. Most of the elder generations are gradually dying out and from those that still live, with old age most of them have lost their hearing. When the word “authentic” is used, it means a bonafide practitioner of the indigenous
religion, or someone who has witnessed it first hand and not someone who heard of it from somebody else because, as is the case with anything passed on from word of mouth, there tends to be a lot of embellishments whether knowingly or unknowingly.

This research has been an entirely new foray into virgin territory and as such has not been without any difficulty. The first difficulty faced by the researcher is the lack of published literature dealing with this subject. Though there has been many books written on the culture of the Garos none has been on any kind of exhaustive research, only compilations of narrations collected from various sources.

Another problem faced is the dearth of people who practice the old religion or of former practitioners. Though many were found, some of them were not too well versed and were not able to explain most of the rituals. There were some that still practiced but they were unwilling to share the chants of the rituals citing reasons that they were sacred and could not just be recited, especially those dealing with funerals, without bringing some form of curse on the family. As culture and traditions of indigenous communities disappear due to the onslaught of foreign influence and so called modernity,
matrilineal Meghalaya has withstood the test of time although the cracks are there to acknowledge that “change”, for the worst, is in the air.

Meghalaya – the abode of clouds – is also the abode of a rich cultural heritage where its indigenous people have inherited from their ancestors. The cultural heritage is still unrivalled and vibrant in spite of the blitzkrieg from foreign sway, modern schooling and a systemic modification in the way of life.

The major tribes – Khasis, Jaintias and Garos - of the matrilineal state have a distinctive culture which they have been identified with. But the indigenous people, safeguarded by the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, have a challenging task ahead of them – to preserve and promote their culture which is unquestionably synonymous with the preservation of their “tribal identity”. The culture is their identity. Once the culture is renounced, the identity is also at stake.

It is, however, sad to witness how this significant cultural tradition is slowly being forgotten about as a result of modernisation and lack of effort to disseminate the knowledge about the Garo culture to the younger population.
It is time the traditional dances, chants, etc be incorporated in schools and colleges as a part of school curriculum. How many of them from the younger generation and who claim to belong to the Garo community know how to perform Wangala dance? I must admit that there are many aspects of their "culture" that one is ignorant about and probably would never know it as they are slowly but steadily disappearing.

With the conversion of many indigenous Garos to Christianity by the missionaries, various rituals have been given up since it is considered 'evil'. A classic example is the preparation of 'rice beer'. The Wangala festival is considered meaningless without the ritual of rice beer preparation, offering and presentation to Misi-Saljong, the god and the giver.

And with the apparent frailty of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, which is the custodian of Garo traditions under the 6th Schedule to the Constitution, the Wangala festival is imperilled. The Garo community has hailed the coming of the District Council, which has been there for the last 35 years. But very little has been done by the Council to protect, preserve and promote the indigenous culture and tradition.
Despite the relevance of the Wangala festival in Garo society, the arena of performance is fast disappearing in most parts of Garo Hills because of the influence of modernisation, education, and cross-cultural integration. For the Garos, the Wangala dance festival combines the complex spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional element that characterises our society, and, when it is lost, the Garos will lose their unique heritage and an irreplaceable way of being. It is a part of their cultural blueprint and all effort must be made to preserve it.

Having seen the importance of reviving, preserving, promoting and protecting their traditional cultural identity, a group of Garo intellectuals have put their heads together and decided to organise the "Wangala Festival" on modern lines by grouping together 30 dancers with ten drums to form a contingent, and 300 dancers to comprise the "Hundred Drums Wangala Festival". There is, of course, a challenge to preserve their culture by practicing and making them part of their lives. But they must make an effort to sustain their tradition and culture. The younger generation today needs to know their rich culture so that they are preserved for the upcoming generations.

As Theodore Bikel puts it,
"You don't really need modernity in order to exist totally and fully. You need a mixture of modernity and tradition"\textsuperscript{3}

During the course of the research work, the scholar has found that there are many aspects of Garo culture that has hardly been touched. Even this thesis is but a tip of the iceberg and could well be improved upon. Not only are there rites of passage but there are many more rites and rituals in the Garo tradition that are lacking research. Research can also be done on the folklore and folktales of the Garos, the myths and legends. Even the migration from Tibet and the history beyond that is still shrouded in mystery. While working on this thesis, the scholar has found many diversions into the various interesting aspects of the Garo culture that has been overlooked by the many researchers over the years.

5.02 Suggestions

During the course of the research work, the scholar has found that there are many aspects of Garo culture that has hardly been touched. Even this thesis is but a tip of the iceberg and could well be improved upon. Not only are there rites of passage but there are many more rites and rituals in the Garo
tradition that are lacking research. Research can also be done on the folklore and folktales of the Garos, the myths and legends. Even the migration from Tibet and the history beyond that is still shrouded in mystery. While working on this thesis, the scholar has found many diversions into the various interesting aspects of the Garo culture that has been overlooked by the many researchers over the years.

The Indian Constitution, has, within the statutes of its Sixth Schedule created the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). Though it is meant for the self-administration of the Garos, one of its many functions should have been the preservation of the Garo culture. The only form of preservation of culture that is being done is only on the succession and appointment of the nokmas. In an interview with Executive members of the District Council the researcher was made to understand the fact that till date there were no separate provisions for the preservation of Culture with the GHADC. However the Council would soon be taking the initiative to start some sort of programme and would raise during the next session of the GHADC. Only time will tell whether this words will materialize into something or will remain the words of a politicians.
In view of the lack of interest taken by the Constitutional bodies such as the State Government and the District Councils, NGOs and social organizations should devise ways and means to preserve and protect our rich cultural heritage before it is completely blown away by the weight of globalization. Without the active participation of the NGOs, the days are not far off when our old culture and tradition disappear from the face of the earth.
Endnotes


2 http://www.endicott-studio.com/rdrm/rrTombWomb.html Access date: 09/07/2011