Chapter II

Rites and Rituals at Birth and Adolescence
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2.01 Introduction

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

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

The Garos believe that the destiny of every human being has been preordained by Dinggipa Ba-bra Mugipa Jaring or the Divine Mother. It is said that during the birth of every child into the land of the living, the spirits of the element world and the spirits of all living beings muster strong under Dinggipa Ba-bra for an infinitesimally short time at the place of birth to ascertain by means of spreading out their webs whose lot it is to cut off the life of the new born babe. Each of the spirits present has his own mysteriously woven web, known as re-chu or amrechu, that is the Web of Destiny. This process of predetermination of the mode of death or end of a human being at the time of its birth by spirits of all sorts of nondescript beings in the world is known as Re-chu Ana or Spreading Out of the Web of Destiny.² Also, at the time of birth of every human being, a guardian spirit takes charge of the child. This spirit is called Kalkame Kagra. It is he who protects the child throughout its life and when the time of death arrives, gives him over to the element or living being whose lot it is to cut off the life of the child.³
In the book *The Folk-Tales of the Garos* by Dewansing Rongmuthu, he includes a story about the origin or rather, the discovery of *Re-chu Ana* by the Garos narrated by Kacha Sangma Dawa of Simsanggiri (this place is known by the name of Williamnagar in the present day). The story goes that a man called Deng was travelling through a deep forest when he had to stop for the night and so, he took shelter under a gigantic *Awek* tree. About this time, the birth of a child occurred in his village. Towards dawn, he was awakened by the sound of voices overhead. They were the voices of the spirits of all the elements and living beings going to the village to ascertain whose lot it would be to finally end the life of the new born. They called upon the spirit of the *Awek* tree under which Deng was sleeping to ask whether he was coming for the ceremony. He replied that he had a guest and asked the spirit of the *Boldak* tree to take and spread his web for him. The *Boldak* agreed and left with the others. Soon, there was silence in the forest. After a while, the forest became alive with voices again and the *Awek* tree was informed that the child’s death fell on the tiger’s web and it would happen during his adolescence. When the mother’s name, Chelse, was mentioned, Deng, who was listening all the while, recognized it to be his niece’s name.
In the morning, Deng hurriedly returned to the village and was informed that Chelsea had given birth to a baby boy about the time that he had first heard the voices in the forest. He kept his secret from everyone and determined that he would do all he could for his nephew to protect him from his impending doom.

One day, when the boy was in his teens, Deng and his nephew went to the river to bathe. This was the day that was fixed by Dinggipa Ba·bra for the tiger to take the child’s life. As they were returning home from the bath, a tiger suddenly leapt up from its place of concealment and rushed at the child to kill him. Deng, who was ever alert, cut off the head of the tiger with a mighty blow from his mil-am and began to shout words of victory and danced on the ground and stepped proudly on the tiger’s head. Seeing his uncle’s exultation, the child too repeated his uncle’s words and jumped upon the head of the tiger. As he did thus, the child’s leg slipped into the jaws and its sharp teeth deeply prodded it. When the child tried to pull his leg out, it only made the wound deeper. Deng finally managed to get the child’s leg out but by then, he had already lost too much blood and as the shades of night were falling, the child died of haemorrhage. His life was cut off by a tiger as was predestined long ago.
This belief is the same in all the Garo areas, but in Rongri gittim of Rongsu village in the Atong area, there was a slight difference in the story. Rongri is about 13 kms walk from Siju, the nearest motorable place, 8 kms uphill to Rongsu and then 5 kms downhill. The story was narrated by Leben Dagal Sangma (75 years) on October 27, 2009. He is also the only surviving person who knows the old ways in and around this area. He is also still a practicing indigene, for want of a better word. The word “animist”, though used to describe these religions is a misrepresented one.

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

Once upon a time, a man had gone to the weekly market. Those days, the market places were so far that one sometimes had to spend the night on the way back. So this man had to spend the night, and he did so in a Bolsil tree. The story goes as before but this time, the infant born was his own son, and his lot fell to the cobra’s web and the time of his death was when he was still a child. In the same way as the other story, the father was ever vigilant towards his son. One day, the father and son had gone to the stream to take a bath and the day happened to be the preordained day of death of the child. Just as they
reached the stream, the father, in his ever present vigil, saw a cobra poised to strike and with a single stroke of his mil-am cut off the head of the cobra. In order to show that luck was on his side and not on the cobra’s, the father jumped over the head of the cobra, asking his son to do the same. The son, too, jumped over the head of the cobra, but alas, being small, he could not jump very far and accidentally jumped on the head of the cobra, puncturing his foot with its fangs. Try as he might, the father could not save his little boy.

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

Among the Atongs, on the other hand, they have a small ritual. This ritual can be performed by any married man who is able to say the words.
They have been collected from Leben Dagal Sangma (75 years) on October 27, 2009.

The words are given below:

*Aaaija!*

_An-mapaknakenga, jurimenakenga_

_Na-simangara an-mapaknagipao, jurimenagipao_

_Amra anengana jakpa singengana_

_Aaao, na-time ue te-oan ra-sitangbo, bilsitangbo_

_Ia an-mapakna ra-medok, turimena ra-medok_

_Aaa, skal racha kamal tasi_

_Gitok warikak sre tong-gitchak_

_A na-tim chinalsachi, a-paksachi_

_Jalangtokbo, skaldrang, kamaldrang_

_An-mapakkalna, jurimekalna_

_Na-timna kerian, re-eina pa-jarunga_

_Tawona pa-jarunga_

_Atchina man-jairunga_

_Uni gimin na-tim_

_Te-oan jalangtokbo_

_Anga, ye, jako merong gnang_

_Ku-o do-chi ronggnang_

_Anga riksitenga, sanalatenga,_

_Muni ganang chambuni ganang_

_A na-tim jalangtokbo_

_Jakpa senggipa, amra angiparang_
Skal racha, kamal tasi
Sre tong·gitchak wagam warikak
A na-time
Ichijakpa sengkunabe, e·chu ankunabe
Ian anga mirongsang
Satprongatenga, dokprongatenga
Prrruu9
A skal racha kamal tasi
Katchaangjok wechaangjok
Amra angipa, jakpa senggipa
Jakpa ra·galangjok, amra salgalangjok
Indikeming de·odo
An·ma pakalebojok
Jurimearibojok
Katangjok takalba skalba

Translation:

Aaaija!
The time of birth has come
In the place where the birth is taking place
You have spread out your webs, your hands
Aaaao, you get away from this place immediately, blow away
The time is nigh
Aaa, demons & priests
You, fire
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Begone, You!! Beyond the waters, beyond the land
All you demons and priests of evil

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

Let it be born
It is scared to come because of you
It is afraid to come out
It is afraid to be born
So you get away from here
Begone, now!!
I have rice in my hand
And an egg in my mouth
I am chasing you all away
I have muni
In line 11, the priests is asking all the spirits waiting to let the baby be born. In line 12, 13 and 14, he is saying that the baby is scared to come out, afraid to be born. In line 15 and 16, he is chasing them all away. In line 17, 18, 19 and 20, he is chasing them away, exorcising with rice in his hand and a whole egg in his mouth. He tells them that he has the muni plant with him.

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

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

Ran away, crawled away
He who spread the web, stretched the hand
Removed the hand, pulled away the web
So now,
Come out
Be born
The demons have run away

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

This is recited when the baby is just about to be born. This is to chase away the spirits that are spreading out their webs of destiny to ascertain on whose lot the child will be fated to end its life. As earlier mentioned, they are supposed to be spreading out their webs to destiny in the very place where the woman is giving birth. That is why they are being chased away and to take their webs with them. The person who performs this will take some rice in his hands and throw it indicating that he is chasing away the spirits. After he has done his duty, he must immediately come out of the room. He should not tarry in that place. If he does, then it is believed that the child will also take as long
in coming out of its mother’s womb. So, he has to come out immediately. Anyone else who goes there for any kind of work cannot peep in through the door nor can they stand around.

### 2.03 Darechik Amua

*Darechik* is a deity that can cause a baby to be born before term or for the mother to have a miscarriage. Even today, though the general Garo population has converted to Christianity, whenever a miscarriage occurs, it is called as *Darechik Cha-a*, or has been eaten by *Darechik*. So, in order to appease the deity so that it may refrain from such malign activities, from the time of conception, the *Darechik Amua* ritual is observed every time the pregnant woman falls sick. For this purpose, according to the wealth status of the family, a *dikka* or two is kept aside with brew for this ritual, as a contingency plan. This sort of *dikka* is differentiated from the other *dikkas* because the mouths are covered with cloth and not with plantain leaves as is the practice. In this way, any visitor who comes to the house will know that that *dikka* has been kept aside in the event that the woman will fall sick and the *Darechik Amua* ritual will have to be observed. Even the mouth of the *rongdik* that is used to keep the rice is also covered in the same manner. When it is time for the baby to be born, the bamboo strips that are used to keep the
cloth covers in place are loosened as they believe that loosening it will help ease the baby out of the mother’s womb. As the time approaches for the woman to deliver her child, the kamal or priest asks the woman if the expected day, month or time has come and if so, he will remain in the house and wait till the time of delivery. As the Garos believe, no man is ever born exactly at noon or midnight, but usually before or after. According to their belief, since midnight is partly for the dead and partly for new birth, the birth of a child does not take place exactly at midnight.

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

_Oh, Darechikna_¹⁰
_Amikkani jamana
_Askini janggina
_Name po-ometbo
_Name misinetbo
_Asindikha girinchhiha
_Nang-ko anga biming mingnua_
Ma·chong de·nua
Nang·ko gialgija
Jakwatgiya
Oh, Darechikna!

Translation:
Oh, for Darechik
For the soul of so and so
For the life of so and so
Blow the life giving air softly
Remove the pain for her to get well
Slowly let all the pain go away
I will honour your name
I will speak of your clan
Not forgetting you
Not ignoring you
Oh, for Darechik

The ‘so and so’s in line 2 and 3 are generally replaced by the name of the person who lies ill, i.e. the pregnant woman. The Garos use the terms amika and aski as substitutes for people’s names as they consider it impolite to use a person’s name. In the case of rituals, however, unless the actual ritual is being performed, they cannot take names as they consider it taboo. In line 4
and 5, the priest entreats the deity to let the sick person go and let her become well again. Since a chicken is a major part of all amua rituals, in this ritual, the priest is informing the deity that in the place of the life of the person, he is offering a chicken, i.e., a life is being replaced with another life, blood with blood.

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

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

*Bani Darechiksa*
*Bani Jakpapusa*
*Kal·aknaba namja*
*Sningnaba ke·ja*
*Noha no no tangsa*
*Nama namchiktangs*
*la darebrim*
Nokpante ja-ruwe
Noa nonotangko
Nama namchiktangha
Nang·ni jikjikako
Nang·ni rembuako
Ian bipa gitchak
Ian du·rang gisu
Ian misinonga
Ian poomatonga
Ka·sindik ha chakna
Gerindik dongnawa

Translation:

Whence Darechik
Whence Jakpapu
It’s not right to tease
It’s not good to mimic
It’s my little sister
It’s my niece
In this precipitous cliff
With feet hanging from the edge of the nokpante
It’s my little sister
It’s my niece
The precipitous cliff in line 7 means that the sick woman is on the edge, i.e., she can either become well and give birth to a healthy baby or she can have a miscarriage or have a pre-term baby.

It’s your handiwork
You have her in your spell
This is the red male
This is the crowing rooster
This is the sacrifice
That we offer you
So you will feel welcome
So you will feel comfortable

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

This ritual is usually performed when there is a prolonged labour. It is believed that when a baby is taking time to be born, it is due to the influence of the deity called Darechik. The deity blocks the way of the baby and it needs to be appeased and asked to leave in order that the baby can come out of the mother’s womb. The deity is making the woman undergo so much pain. While
reciting this, the kamal or priest takes a red rooster, kills it, cuts it open and checks its entrails. This checking of the entrails is called do·bik nia and is used for divination. After divination, the kamal or priest will hang the rooster in a kimindam or sacrificial altar which is constructed behind the house. The delivery of the child usually takes place in the dun or sleeping quarters of the nokachik or the traditional house because it is covered. Two midwifes are usually required. Anybody with experience is taken to be midwifes. One has to hold the mother and the other has to take out the baby when it comes out. A belt made of a strip of the bark of the olmak\textsuperscript{12} tree is hung to one of the beams in the sleeping quarters so that the woman undergoing labour can hold on to it while in the throes of childbirth.

2.04 Ma·mri Chinabak

Ma·mri Chinabak is what the Matabengs call Tattara Rabuga, the supreme being in the Garo pantheon, the creator. In the A·beng areas, he\textsuperscript{13} is also called A·tilla Salnok, Dakpipa Rabuga, Dakara Rabuga, Dakira Raboka, etc. This ritual is also performed from the time of conception till the time the baby is born. Like the previous ritual, this ritual is also performed every time the pregnant woman falls sick. This ritual is performed because Tattara Rabuga is the creator and he is also the destroyer and he can and will destroy
anything that he creates, in this case the baby in the woman’s womb. So, in
order to appease this deity so that he may keep it safe, this ritual is performed.
If the woman in question is too unhealthy and frail, her husband hurries to call
the priest and even if the woman is too sick to come out to the courtyard, her
clothes are taken and intonation performed to heal the sickness as narrated by
Nengman Rangsa of Rengmagre village on February 9, 2007 shown below:

Apa Dakgipa
Nama Rabuga
O po·ometnua
Misinetnua
Girinchiha ka·sindikha
Srangelina pang·sangchina
Apa Dakgipa
Nama Rabuga
Ma·mri chinabak
Srangongkal pang·sangongkal
Anga po·ometnjok misinetnjok
Kimbalcha Sirapacha
Dogalcha Gingapacha
Name ba·rikongbo, rodilongbo
Apa Dakgipa
Nama Rabuga
Debra gitchitgija
Name ba·rikonge
Name rodilonge

Translation:
Father, the creator
Rabuga, the good god
Will blow away gently, the pain
Will slowly soothe the agony
Will slowly cool and gradually remove the pain
To get well, To clear this illness

The priest is calling on the deity Dakgipa Rabuga to make the sick woman well again.
Father, the creator
Rabuga, the good god
Ma·mri Chinabak
Let it get well
To be completely rid of pain
I am blowing it away gently
I will take away the agony
With Kimbal Sirapa
With the strong Dagal Gingapa
Look after her well
Take care of her.
The same things are repeated here but in line 15 and 16, the priest refers to the *kimbal* plant and the *dagal* plants which are used in the construction of the sacrificial altar. In line 17 and 18, the Garo version refers to taking care of the sick woman like a mother takes care of her child, nurturing her, but in the translation, due to lack of terms, it has been translated as such.

Take proper care  
Look after her well  
My father the Creator  
The good god *Rabuga*  
Carry the suffering woman in a sling with untiring shoulders  
Take proper care  
Look after her well.

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

As the baby comes out, two women priests are present with the priest to receive the baby. Altogether only three people are supposed to be with the woman. The male priest does not enter the place where birth is supposed to
take place, only the women priests are present there. The duty of the male priest is to conduct the rituals and the women priests to administer to the childbirth and call out to inform the male priest about the situation so that he can perform the necessary rituals with their appropriate incantations. Once the baby comes out, the priest names the baby as she cuts the umbilical cord. It is during this ceremony that the priest counsels the mother and father of the child for his proper upbringing right from birth through adulthood so that he can live in right accord with god and man.

2.05 Cutting the Umbilical Cord

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

Oh, Apa Dakgipa
Nama Rabuga
Mikkang nikani
Bimang talani
Srangajok Pang·sangajok
Angade biming minggnok
Ma·chong de·gnok
Amikka Marak
Amikka Sangma
Kamal Ajipa gita
Dongal Nangjipa gita
Anga biming mingnok
Sko tarirakjana
Ja’pa silchi kajana
Anga nang’ko biming mingonga
Ma’chong de’onga
Mite aide katangbo
Katchi aide rorikbo’
Dikgecha mincha
Sangsengcha Rudikgecha
Anga guarikonga
Gu’a dingonga
A’tal tara tario
Suna ginda gindeo
Kamal Ajipa gita
Donga Nangjipa gita
Anga su’song asonge
Dedeng chakate
Jama sikonga
Biri patonga
Na’a knasonawa
Nachil songnawa
Meja debarikagita
Da·sin bijong songa gita
Na·a knatimnawa
Beberaa kakket minga

Translation:

Oh, Father, the creator
Rabuga, the good god
To see the face
To see the form
It is all clear
I will name it
Declare its clan
So and so Marak
So and so Sangma
Just like the priest, Ajipa
Just like Dongal Dongjipa

Here, the priest declaring that he will be naming the new born is because of the Re·chu Ana belief. The woman priest will have to name the baby immediately because if some other spirit, like in the story, should name it before her, then the fate of the newborn would be in the hands of the spirit who was able to name it. So, the priestess declares that she would be naming the baby, just like the priests Ajipa and Dongal Dongjipa.
I will name it
For the soft crown\textsuperscript{17}
Before the iron is tied on the feet\textsuperscript{18}
I am naming you
Declaring your clan
Go away you evil spirits
Stay, good spirits
I chase you away with this \textit{dikge}\textsuperscript{19}
With \textit{Sangsen}, with \textit{Rudikge}\textsuperscript{20}
I am throwing it away
I am flinging it away

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

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

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

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

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

Dom·agipa doka

Ian do·magipa me·chibram
Nang·suko nang·deko
Gon gon gon gon
Na·wek jokna na·sal jokna
Gimbil pe·na na·nil jokna
Nang·suna nang·dena
Gon gon gon gon
Do·magipa me·chibram
Ian bipa gitchakna
Durang gisucha
Dilama jang·kareo
Tuchangongnawa
Dongpengongnawa
Gon gon nang·suko nang·deko
Translation:

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

Grandchild, because the placenta comes after the child. The priest is asking the deity \textit{Me·chirbam} to release it. The priest refers to the \textit{na·wek}\textsuperscript{22} and the eel, both slippery creatures, so that the placenta can come out with ease.

This will be chanted for as long as the placenta does not come out. This is done such that the deity \textit{Me·chibram} will release the placenta. The ritual is performed with a red rooster by beating it and making it cry “aiaok aiaok”\textsuperscript{23}.
The rooster just has to cry out. The kamal or priest will hold it with his left hand and with his right beat the wall of the dun, the damdil. This ritual is performed when the placenta remains inside the mother.

2.07 A-tilla Amua or Dakara Amua

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

A-tilla Amua

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

\[\text{An·tang sti·e mendie}\]
\[\text{An·tang rae pan·chonge}\]
Jamako\textsuperscript{26} dongchangongnawa ine
Janggiko rupengongnawa ine
An\:tang doknaronge
An\:tang rubibome
Jamako dongchangongnawa ine
Janggiko doppelengnawa ine
Cholama cholsnion
Dilbri dilsnio
A\:ning\textsuperscript{27} Dakara ine
Chining Rabuga
Jamako pa\:ak galbo ine
Janggiko enggalangbo ine
A\:ning Dakara,
Chining Rabuga
Jamako dokbibome ne
Janggiko rubibomeba
An\:tang na\:ara stie mendie
An\:tang rae pan\:chonge
Jamako doppelengnawa
Janggiko doppelengnawa
Dilama dilsnide,
Cholbira cholsnide
Jamako pa\:ak galbone ine
Janggiko enggalalbone
A\:ning Dakara,
Chining Rabuga
Nang-naba nenggirajaba
Nang-naba jakgitchijaba
Jamana mangsiriade,
Janggina mangbudolade
Do·de gipokchana,
Girang changbokcha
Jamanan mangsirionga
Jangginan mangbudolonga
Amikani\textsuperscript{28} jamako ine
Askini janggiko
Jamako ba·rikboda ine
Janggiko rudilboda
An·tang rae pan·chonggiminan
An·tang sti mendigimin
Jamako dongchangnabene
Janggiko dongpengnabeda
Jamako pa·akgalbo
Janggiko enggalalbo

Translation:

What You have created
What You have formed
Would You block that soul?
Would You stop that life?
What You have beaten to shape
What You have molten and moulded
Would You block that soul?
Would You stop that life?
In the seven doorways
In the seven tributaries

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

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

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

The same things are repeated here, too.

*Dakara* of the Underground  
*Rabuga* from under the water
We remember you
We have not forgotten you
In exchange for the soul
In exchange for the life
With a white peacock
With the white striped
In exchange for the soul
In exchange for the life

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

For the soul of so and so
For the life of so and so
Carry the soul on Your back
Look after the life
It is what You have created
It is what You have formed
Do not block the soul
Do not stop the life
Release the soul
Untie the life
Here, so and so refers to the name of the newborn which would have to have been named as soon as it is born as a safeguard against its fate falling on some spirit’s hands. Carrying and looking after refers to the nurturing care that a mother gives her offspring.

Chi Rugalani – The Water Pouring Ritual:

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

Jamana chi rugalongane
Janggan chi pakgalonga
Di-man me-ako akene
Dong-pene de’e
Sokman panteko dong-ake
Jamana biming minge dong-aka
Janggina ma'chuari dong-pia
Amikani jamanana
Asikini janggina
A·ning Dakara nibone
Chining Rabuga nikbone
Jamana chi rugalongane
Janggina chi pakgalonga
Dolama di·ip dipoa
Sima chiketchiket
Jamani sasisiana ne
Janggini oko jomana
Kni pangpang siana ina
Bimang mangsirengana
Jamanaan chi rugalongade
Jangginaan chi pakgalongade
Do·pa ge·rang jakchikniko
Warigro simdikniko
An·cheng soksisiniko
Chigil ba·ririniko
Jamana chi biahaba
Janggina chi koahaba ne
Jamanaan chi rugalongjok
Jangginaan chi pakgalongjok
A·ning Dakara a nibone
Chining Rabuga a nikbone
Jamako ba·rikongbone
Janggiko rudilongbone
A·ning Dakarade ne
Chining Rabugade

Translation:

Pouring water for the soul
Pouring water for the life
Picked while being named for the soul
Picked while being selected for the life
For the soul of so and so
For the life of so and so
See, Dakara of the Underground
See, Rabuga from under the water
Pouring water for the soul
Pouring water for the life

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

For the fever of the soul
For the life, sick in the womb
For the headache,
For the slender form
Pouring water for the soul
Pouring water for the life
From the Drongo’s tail
From the deep water
From the sand
From the shallow water
Water is brought for the soul
Water is brought for the life

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

Pouring the water for the soul
Pouring the water for the life
See, *Dakara* of the Underground
See, *Rabuga* from under the water
Carry the soul on your back
Look after the life
*Dakara* of the Underground
*Rabuga* from under the water
Mi tinani – The Rice Portions Ritual:

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

*An·tangni noksam ga·mekatang*
*An·tangni wakmesalpakatang*
*Ian mima gorimbo ne*
*Na·ma na·bokba*
*Jamana miraronongade ne*
*Janggina sam sualonga*
*Mi ra·rona kira ren·e ne*
*Sam suala nitoe*
*Amikani jamana ine*
*Asikini janggina*
*Nang·naba nenggirajane*
*Nang·naba jakgitchujane*
*A·ning Dakarana*
Chining Rabuga

Jamanan mi ra·ronongjokne
Jangginan sam sualongjok
Mi ra·rona kira ren·e
Sam suala nitoe
Jamako ba·rikongbone
Janggiko rudilongbone

Translation:

From your own toil
From your own sweat
This is the aromatic rice
The white rice
Rice for the soul
Curry for the life
Rice in neat portions
The curry, too, on top
For the soul of so and so
For the life of so and so
We remember you
We have not forgotten you
For Dakara of the Underground
Rabuga from under the water
Rice for the soul
Curry for the life
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Carry the soul on your back
Look after the life

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

Chu rugalani – The Rice Beer Pouring Ritual:

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

Jamana kapingchapanane
Janggina rongga sikane
Ian mima gorimbitchi ine
Na·ma na·tongne
Jamako ba·rikalbone
Janggiko rudilalbo
Jamanaan rugalongade ine
Jangginaan kanchikongade
Ian kapingchapana ine
Ian rongga sikane
Jamana biming mingahaba ine
Janggina ma-churaba
Nang-na nenggirajawaba ne
Nang-na jakgiitchijawa
A-ning Dakara nikbone
Chining Rabuga nibone

Translation:
Covered for the soul
Grains, put in for the life
This is the brew of rice
The white rice
Carry the soul on your back
Look after the life
Pouring out for the soul
Pouring for the life
This is the covered
This is the grains put in
It has been named for the soul
It has been kept for the life
We remember you
We will not forget you
See, *Dakara* of the Underground
See, *Rabuga* from under the water

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

*A·tila Amua*—The Courtyard Ritual:

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

*Sargoko angsariko ne*
*Wa·geko wa·naruko*
*Sako angsariko songtingringongade ne*
*Wa·geko wa·nakchakongade ne*
*Jamanaha songtingringe niongade ine*
*Jangginaha ge·bakjake niongade*
*Amikani oko jomanaha*
*Asikini sasisianaha*
*Jamako ma·ringringe niode ne*
*Janggiko jajok niongade*
*A·ning Dakara ine*
*Chining Rabuga*
*Jamako ba·rikongkubo ne*
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Janggiko rudilongkubo
Nang-na nenggirajaba ne
Nang-naba jakgitchijaba
Do·ma girang changboko ne
Matma ja·tong gipokko
Jako ra·baa gitan
Sing·o kebaa gita
Jaljang mitapsni cha
Chimik grangsnicha
Sko takorimako
Ja·ping damborimako
Sko takorimako sonacha dokdoade ne
Ja·ping damborimako rupacha modoade ne
Jamana biming mingemingna ne
Janggina ma·churaemng
A·ning Dakara nibone
Chining Rabuga nibone
Jamanaan mangsiriongade ine
Janggi naan mangbudolongade
Ha jajil mitapo
Pakma kurio
Gitolo bitchi chi·ongade ne
Gisilo bamongade
Sko takorimade ne
Ja·ping damborima
Translation:

The Sargo tree
The wa:ge and the wa:naru³⁴
That are being put up for the ritual
Standing the wa:ge with its branches
 Putting it up for the soul
Keeping it bushy for the life
Because so and so’s belly is aching
So and so is lying ill
If you moan and look at the soul
Looking at life being born

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

Dakara of the Underground
Rabuga from under the water
Look after the soul
Keep pouring the life
You are not forgotten
You are remembered
The white feathered bird
The white legged buffalo
As if brought by the hand
Or carried on the back

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.08 A·siroka or Exorcism

After the delivery, an exorcism is performed by the kamal or priest.

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

*Mikkang nikani*
*Bimang talani*
*Su marang!*
*Su marang!*
*Marangkode*
*Starangkode*
*Io Nangong Nambi*
*Kiongnangbi*
*Kamal dakani*
*Chital dakani*
*Nangong nimbi*
*Kiong nimbi*
*Marangkode*
Andimekode
Chikamamingsa
Rongadatmingsa
Chubaketnawa
Chudinetnawa
Sagil amacha
Rekbok bimacha
Chubaketongjok
Chugaletongjok
Su marang!

Translation:

On beholding the face
On knowing the body
Be off with you, defilement!
Away with you, pollution!
This particular profanation
This particular pollution
Do not stick here
Do not get stuck here
Of presiding over as a priest
Of handling the sacred cup of holy water
Do not stick here
Do not get stuck here
This particular pollution
This particular type of fever
With the downward flow of the stream
With the huge boulders
I will dig with a spade and throw
I will dig and throw in a heap
Towards the mother ocean
Towards the mother of waves and foam
Now I am digging with a spade and throwing
Now I am digging and removing
Away with you, pollution!

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

After the child is born, the placenta is wrapped up in a cloth, put in a bamboo and hung up in a tree. This can be done anywhere. The umbilical cord is tied. According to the customs, the parents of the child are indebted to the person who cuts the umbilical cord and the person who ties it. Because the child is born does not mean that everything is over and the work is complete, the debt has to be repaid. So, when the baby’s hair is cut for the first time, two
helpings of rice and meat curry with some rice beer each are taken to those people. Even the kamal or priest who performed the ritual is also given this fare. The parents are indebted to a total of three people. The two women in the labour room and the kamal or priest who performed the rituals.

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

*Iako kal-akode kiliode
Saljong mikron othoai
Misi ja-dong pe-boai
Ganduriko kal-akode.*

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

This is said so that nothing, not rodents nor reptiles nor insects nor any other animals, can touch it. And when this placenta is buried in a hole, it
cannot be thrown carelessly into the hole. It has to be placed slowly into the ground. It is believed that if the placenta is thrown carelessly into the hole, then the newborn baby will get startled and fall sick. It will get startled and be sick in the heart. This is what the indigenes believe.

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

According to the customs in some *Am-beng* areas, when the umbilical cord comes off, it is buried at the threshold. This is generally to ward off the evil eye or as the Garos believe, from the person who can transform himself/herself into a *skat*\(^{35}\). If such a person should come into the house then when he/she crosses the threshold he/she would have stepped over the buried
umbilical cord thereby nullifying his/her power against the new born. In the Atong, when the umbilical cord falls off from the baby, it is dried and kept. They believe that it has medicinal value. When the baby has a stomach ache, the dip it in water and feed it to the baby. This dried umbilical cord is used for a host of maladies. Though this may be the belief, not everyone keeps the umbilical cords.

2.09 Kni Rata or Hair Cutting Ceremony

When the time comes to cut the child’s hair for the first time, called the Kni Rata ceremony, the child can also be named at the time. There are no rituals as such but some traditions to be followed. It is like a thanksgiving of sorts for the three people that helped in the birthing of the child, namely, the midwife, the woman who cuts the umbilical cord and the kamal or priest who performs the Dakara Amua. A bottle of rice beer, two helpings of rice wrapped in banana leaves and two portions of meat curry (chicken, pork or beef) each will be taken to their houses. As for the naming of the child, it is named during the birth itself. This is because of the belief that during the birth of a child, the a-ani bi-sa dimdak, chini anggri dimdak, which literally translates to “all the children of the earth and the nephews of the water”, which means all of nature would spread out their own webs for it. Everything
in nature would be bringing their own webs of destiny and spreading it out. That is to say that the destiny of the child would be decided. If it were to fall on the web of a tree, it would be fated to death by a fall from a tree. If it were to fall on the web of a snake, it would be fated to die of snake bite. So, in order to save the child from such calamities, a plantain leaf is spread out in the place where the mother is undergoing labour and when the baby comes out, it is supposed to fall on that leaf and the baby is immediately named with any name that comes to the mind. This is done so that none other would be able to name it and claim it for themselves. If the name that has been given is not liked then the baby can be given a better one at the hair cutting ceremony.

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

*Tongrengma amua:*

*Bani sakuresawa*
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Bani sakambesawa
Bani tongrengmasawa
Ba sakurekode
Ba sakambekode
Anga guariknawa
Anga gua dingnawa
Misa misi dakako
Rimi rimak pil·ako
Icha munichana
Icha dudikgecha
Icha glaschichane
Icha ringdubichane
Ia sakureko
Ia sakambeko
A·kamana riknawa
Salchokona gunawa
Dea degrapjanane
Achak bao sing·jane
Anga guariknawa
Anga guadingnawa
Ian bipa gitchakcha
Ian du·rang gisucha
Ian misinatonga
Ian poomatonga
Ka·sindik gerindik
Dongnawa chanawa
Translation:

Whence is this mad disease
Whence is this malady of the top
Whence Tongrengma
This disease
This malady
I will throw it away
I will chase it away
This uselessness
This intoxication

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

With this Muni
With this smelly dikge\textsuperscript{37}
With this glas\textsuperscript{38}
With this ringdubi\textsuperscript{39}
This disease
This malady
Will chase it to the bottom
Throw it down
Child don’t cry
The dog won’t bark
He chases this malady away with the *muni* plant and the *dikges glas* and *ringdubi*. Throw it down – in the Garo version, the word *salchokon* is used which refers to the high end of the *nokachik*, the back end. According to Sembertush A. Sangma, an expert in matters pertaining to Garo culture, the chant collected is incomplete because the chant refers only to the back part of the house whereas it is conducted on both ends of the house. Child don’t cry – meaning such that the child won’t cry and go mad.

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

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

Saying this, the child’s hair is cut in the belief the spirits and deities may be playing with the new born child. After the ceremony, as mentioned
earlier, the rice, the curry and the rice beer are taken to the *kamal* or priest’s house. Even if the *kamal* or priest does not come to the house on that day, the food and drink is taken to his house. Even if the *kamal* or priest came to the house on that day and partakes of the feast, as a mark of respect, the food and drink are taken to his house so that even the members of his household may be included in the feast.

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

2.10 *Kalkame Den-paka*

There is another ceremony called the *Kalkame Den-paka*. This ritual is performed one month after the child is born and is a ritual performed for shaving off the baby’s hair. This is one ritual that is observed as a tradition in the lifetime of the Garos at the stage of infancy. According to the traditional Garo belief, if this *Kalkame Den-paka* ritual is not observed; the child is
deprived of food and drink and leads to drying up of breast milk. In this ritual, three chickens are used, out of which two may be of any colour and may either be a rooster or a hen, but the third one, which is regarded as the ‘bird of good luck’, called *dorasong*, should be a red rooster. If the family observing this rite is an affluent one, the whole village is invited for the feasting, drinking and merry making.

In the ritual of *Kalkame Den·paka*, a bamboo pole is erected right through the roof in the middle of a thatched house and a youth who is a close relative climbs up to a roof and slits the neck of the *dorasong* leaving the head of the rooster hanging by a piece of skin and its blood is made to drip down a bamboo pole. Then, the priest pushes up the bamboo pole and the youth cuts the chicken off the bamboo pole and throws it toward the backyard of the house. “*Nambi na·chi* has gone away” chants the priest as the bamboo pole is cut and thrown away. It is only after this that a priestess, who receives the baby during its birth, shaves the baby’s hair off its head. According to the Garos’ belief, a prayer is offered to the Creator *Rabuga* to take away all the dirt accumulated during the nine months in the mother’s womb so as to make the child grow up strong and start his life on earth with hope and courage. Then the child is put on a bamboo plane and the name of the child, given by
the priest during delivery, is reaffirmed. If the name is to be changed, it can be
done only by that priest, who had named the child while receiving it at birth.
But most often, the name given by the priest is never changed as the Garos
believe that the priest has given the name to a child only through the direction
of the Creator Rabuga. Only if the child is unhealthy or falls sick frequently,
the name can be changed, as and when the priest finds it necessary.

The intonation us as follows:

\textit{Angital sibo}
\textit{Jagital nikbo}
\textit{Kni ja·sramdike}
\textit{Wagam warongs\textit{i} chae}
\textit{Barikonga ro\textit{dilonga nang·ko}}
\textit{Angan Tattaragita}
\textit{Angan Rabugagita}
\textit{Anga debarikrikonga}
\textit{Jongjong ge·rikonga}
\textit{Name ba·rikongke}
\textit{Name ro\textit{dilongke}}
\textit{Kalkamegita}
\textit{Goeragita}
\textit{Apa Dakgipa gita}
\textit{Nama Rabugagita}
\textit{Anga ra·chakonga}
Anga sintingonga
Name ba·rikonge
Name rodilonge
An·gital sibo
Jagital nikbo
Anga jama raktonga
Janggi tangatonga
Apa Dakgipa
Nama Rabuga
Sing·jok anga sanjok
Nameha bilsonkongke ja·dalongke
Trusikkana skang skang
Bisokongke
Ja·dagongke

Translation:

Get a new body
Witness the next cycle of the moon,
Let the hair grow thick and long
Let the teeth grow well
You are being carried in the arms
You are being looked after,
Just like Tattara
Just like Rabuga
I am carrying my child
I am rocking my child

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

Carefully looking after the child
Carefully nurturing the child
Just like Kalkame
Just like Goera
Just like the father, the Creator
Just like the good god Rabuga
I am accepting
I cannot ignore the command of god,
I am carrying the child
I am carefully nurturing the child.

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

Acquire a new body
Witness the next cycle of the moon,
I am strengthening your soul
I am ensuring your longevity
My father, the Creator
The good god Rabuga.
I have asked my god
I have enquired of him
May you grow to be a youth
May you become an adult
Faster than other children of your age
Faster than your brothers
May you arrive at
May you live to be an adult.

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

Thus, the rituals for the birth of a child are over, but before closing, there are certain practices that have to be mentioned. When the woman is in labour, a mixture of araru, smu, and another herb is mixed into a paste and cooked inside a bamboo, called brenga. It is then applied to the belly, the breasts and the waist or lower back of the woman in labour. This is done by the priestesses. The place of labour is behind the dun, called the balkim, which is at the high end of the house and is open on one end and in olden days it was
very high that nothing could be seen from below. The priestesses are called *mande gital sokbagipako nisogiparang* or “the ones who are waiting for the new arrival”. When the baby is born, one of the priestesses will shout *badijok* or “it has passed”. Sometimes, there is prolonged labour and the priest is tired, somebody else can take his place. The term priest is used loosely here because the Garos do not really have a designated priest as such in the village. Anyone who can officiate can do so. In the same way, any woman who can do the work that the priestesses do can do the work, for example, the mother or elder sister of the woman in labour can be the priestess.

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

2.11 Lullabies

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

**Dingdinga:**

*Dingding do·ma dingding*

*Dingding dingding*

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

Translation:

Dingding$^{43}$ do·ma$^{44}$ dingding
Dingding dingding
You can wear the koka$^{45}$, do·ma!
Dingding dingding
You can place your earlobe by the pillar$^{46}$, matma$^{47}$,
Dingding dingding
Dingding do·ma
Draw two parallel lines on your back
Tie the koka beautifully,
Dingding dingding

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

Sit yourself by the flat pillar, matma;

Dingding dingding
Draw two parallel lines on your back,
Dingding dingding do·ma
Tie the koka beautifully,
Dingding dingding matma
Dingding do·ma
Dingding matma,
The tail$^{48}$ is like the ear of rice
Dingding dingding do·ma;

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

Dangtiti$^{49}$ dangti matma
Your mother has sharpened your horns, matma,$^{50}$
Dangtiti dangti
Combed your unkempt hair, do·ma,
Dangtiti dangti
Sharpened with a knife, matma,
Dangtiti dangti
Combed your hair, matma,
Dangtiti dangti
Dangtiti dangtiti doma
Dangtiti dangtiti matma.

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

*Mumua:*

Owai... owai... ooh!
Ma-na jojong grapa oh!
Cho-cho cha-na grapa oh!
Ama ba-na re-ango
Ama nateng tapata oh!
Bolrikkongo dandano
Atching din chikata oh!

Translation:

Owai... owai... ooh!
Why are you crying, my little boy oh!
Crying to be breastfed oh!
When your mother has come to carry you
When she touches you with her cheek oh!
When you leaned against the tree
An ant bit you oh!

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

2.12 Adolescence and the system of the *Nokpante*

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

Huberth C. Marak, in his seminar paper on *Nokpante*\(^{53}\) gives the following description:

“They say that a man is first a bachelor, and then he gets married and start a family and build a house for himself. Therefore Nokpante is built in a much elaborate manner than house. If a settlement is big, a number of Nokpantes were
constructed according chatchi or *ma’chong*. In Emangre, there were five Nokpantes for five clans: Arengh, Nengminja, Re’ma, Gabil and Manda. Two or more chatchis never slept together in the same Nokpante.

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

They will learn everything that they will need in the Nokpante. The knowledge will be passed on from the seniors and the elders. They will be taught everything from warfare, how to handle a *mil-am, spi* and *danil*, how to handle a spear, how to make wickerwork from cane and bamboo, how to make the general all-purpose *wa-ding* or bamboo strips, how to weave the split and flattened bamboo for making the walls of houses, how to hunt, how to build a house, etc. It is in this institution that the boys with aptitude go on to become *kamals* and story tellers. It is here that a boy finds out what he is truly meant for and go on to excel in it be it hunting or fighting or making wickerwork or building a house, etc. Looking at the modern educational system, we can see that this institution was far more advanced in the overall
development of the individual, a concept which was there in the Garos’ social system, which is only now being re-discovered by modern researchers and being implemented experimentally. No female is allowed to step inside the *Nokpante* except during some festivals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9. As a medical institute. The Garos had three traditional forms of healing. *Krita* or *Amua*, i.e., healing with sacrificial offerings to deities. *Samra*
sampila, healing with medicinal herbs and jaria, healing with concentration on certain devices. These three forms of healing were taught at the Nokpante.

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

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

The end of the nokpantes came about with the advent of Christianity when the missionaries, with little understanding of the role this institution played in the social education of the Garos, converted them to school-cum-church institutions. They substituted one institute of learning with another vastly incomplete institute of learning.
There were no such facilities for the young adolescent girls in Garo society. Though this may be the case, the girls were also not deprived of gaining knowledge that would teach them to be good homemakers. They helped out in and around the household and in the course of their chores, they were taught the various skills necessary for a homemaker. They also worked in the jhum fields with the other women, where they also learned about other social mores.

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

1 One of the names of the Supreme Deity in the Garo pantheon


3 Ibid.

4 25.4954600°N 90.6168200°E

5 Tetrameles mudiflora

6 Schima wallichii

7 A two edged sword used by the Garos

8 An expression. Without any meaning

9 Sound effect of blowing

10 Name of a hardwood tree with edible fruits, said to have soothing powers for a woman in labour

11 Offering of a red rooster

12 A species of tree. Its bark is used as belts to hang the wicker baskets from the head.

13 The Garo language does not have gender specific pronouns, so it is not
certain whether any of the deities are male or female. In this case, the
pronoun “he” is used for ease of use.

14 Another name for Tattara Rabuga

15 Kimbal is a medium sized tree whose leaves are used in sacrificial
ceremonies to deities.

16 Dagal is a grass-like plant, also used in sacrificial ceremonies

17 As in crown of the head. The soft crown of a new born

18 i.e, before the newborn is steady on its feet

19 A medicinal root

20 Names of dikges

21 Do·magipa me·chibram – a phrase used for a baby

22 A slippery fish

23 The narrator’s own words

24 Dakara Rabuga/Tattara Rabuga – Two of the many names of the creator in
the Garo pantheon

25 Sti mendia, rae pan·chonga – To create

26 Janggi-Jama – life and soul

27 A·ning Chining – The Underworld
Amika-Aski – Names that are usually substituted in place of real names.

Seven is a number associated with the divine

Kaksi – a container for water used in rituals.

Sko Takorima Ja·ping Damborima – The first hen that was taken from the Underworld by the Eagle, Ureng Me·a Kokeng Pante. It was seen by Sani Aje, the man, and was reared by him and used for various rituals as sacrifice.

Jajil Mitapo Pakma Kurio – The Underworld, also known as A·ning Chining

Gitol Gisil – The ceremonial gongs used by the Garos. The belief is that in the Underworld, before the hen was brought out from there by the eagle, it used to lay its eggs in these gongs and was kept in an enclosure made of these gongs.

Species of bamboo

Skal – a human astral vampire in the form of a human head. (Sangma, Dewansing Rongmitu. Jadoreng, p. 152). They are generally psychic vampires and feeds of the psychic energies of a person whereby the person wastes away due to incurable vomiting and/or diarrhoea.
36 Name of a deity

37 A medicinal plant

38 A type of dikge

39 Another type of dikge

40 Kalkame – god of strength and protector of life and the village from the outside aggression and pestilence

41 Goera – god of thunder and lightning, of strength and protection

42 This probably refers to the act of divination, in which the priest tries to find out the longevity of the baby’s life, the rate of child mortality being high.

43 Meaningless word, used for its soothing sound

44 Do·ma is actually a migratory duck that flies high up in the sky. It is used as a term of endearment for boys.

45 Koka – kokasil, a headgear made of silver. The line means to wear nice and proper clothes and sit in a clean place.

46 Nadi – earlobe, bipak – a flat pillar, inside a traditional house. The line means sitting in those places.
Matma – buffalo, a term of endearment used for boys

The buffalo’s tail, signifies the strength of a boy

Meaningless word, used to signify the sound of a bell

The mother nurtures the boy as he is growing up, as if the horns of a
buffalo are sharpened

Meaningless expressions

Nok – house, Pante - bachelor

Unpublished as of date

Clan

A village in South Garo Hills

These are exogamous sects or ma-chong each belonging to one chatchi or
the other. According to the findings by Major Playfair, there are 138
sects among the Garos. According to L.M. Holbrook in Kurongdik
A-chikku into English Dictionary (first published 1998), there are 301
sects.

Goera- the spirit of strength and the one who causes lightening.

Kalkame- He is the elder brother of Goera and is the caretaker of all men
on earth.
58 Momin, A C. *A-chik Ku-andik*. P 3

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

60 Marak, Huberth C. NEHU Seminar paper entitled *A-chik nok – the art of house construction*.

61 Rectangular Garo shield, usually cane wicker or carved from wood

62 Round Garo shield made from wood and covered in buffalo or rhino hide.
