CHAPTER III

Mapping the Garo (A·chik) Traditions in Folk Narratives

Garo Hills situated between 25° 9’ and 26° 1 of North latitude and between 89° 49’ and 91° 2’ of East Longitude. It is surrounded on the north and west by the district of Goalpara, Assam, on the south by the district of Mymensingh of Bangladesh and on the east by Khasi Hills of Meghalaya State. The entire district is densely wooded and bordered by patches of hollow and swamps but due to the Jhum or shifting cultivation, virgin forests and ancient trees have disappeared except in the reserves. Agriculture is the mainstay of A·chik economy.

The A·chik society is a matrilineal society and its descent is traced through the mother and the residence is also matrilocal. The title is also taken from mother’s side which is known as ‘Ma·chong’. The inheritance to the family property goes to the female line through the daughter. The A·chik society divides themselves mainly into two clans (chatchi) – such as Marak and Sangma but nowadays, we find other clans such as Momin, Shira, Arengh added to the A·chik clan (Julius Marak, 2000,4).
A major ethnic community of the North East, the Achiks has no written history but then they have a vibrating legacy of cultural and social life-world. Their life world is intimately associated with myriad narratives, folklores and mythical universe and age old social customs. Their cultural heritage is rich informed by folk narratives. Access to their recess of their folk world is the only way to comprehend the mystic as well as the mythical folk world of the community. Hence, an engagement with the ethnic life world of the Achiks makes understanding of the folklore studies as a tool into an academic imperative.

Major A. Playfair in *The Garos* (1998) says that as per the Garo tradition and legends, originally the Achiks came from Tibet and settled down in Koch Behar, from where they moved on to Jogighopa. To escape from their oppressors they crossed the Brahmaputra on raft of plantain stems. They then believed to have marched towards Guwahati. They next wandered and settled in the neighbourhood of Boko in the present district of Kamrup, Assam. The Achiks are said to have established a kingdom in the Habraghat pargana of which the first reigning king was Habra or Abra. However, there arose some differences amongst the Achiks in the Habraghat pargana, and it was because of this reason that some of them set out on their travels again and entered the Hills, presently known as Garo Hills (1998, 9-10).
Milton Sangma in his History of Garo Literature (1992) points out that A·chik is the language of the majority community of the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India classified the A·chik language as a section of the Bodo group of languages, which, in turn, is a branch of the Tibeto-Burman group of languages of the Tibeto-Chinese speech Family (6-8). In one of the earliest publications, The Garo Jungle Book (1993), William Carey says that there are thirteen different dialects among the A·chiks (251). The Am·bengs; the A·kawes; the Chisaks; the Duals; the Matchis, the Matabengs; the Matchi Duals; the Chiboks; the Rugas; the Garas; the Ganchings; the Atongs. To these may be added another which is called Me·gam that is found along the Garo-Khasi Hills border (Playair, 1998, 59-60).

The A·chiks do not have a rich literary tradition in the written form; neither do they have a script of their own. According to Dewansing Rongmuthu, there exists, however, a belief among some sections of the A·chiks that they possessed a literature of their own in their own script and language on rolls of parchment made from the skins of animals. The literature was evolved while they were still in Mandalay, in Upper Burma. But when they left Tibet and wandered towards the plains of India, they faced acute shortage of food, and so they boiled those scrolls of parchments and ate them up (2008, 2). The A·chiks evolved Oral literature which was
tenaciously handed down from one generation to another orally due to lack of script. The A·chiks possesses a large number of verses and stories, folktales, myths, songs, prayers etc. that formed the oral literature of the tribe.

The traditional or old A·chik literature consists of historical accounts, legends, myths and tales told in poetry as well as in prose, various kinds of songs sung on different occasions as well as in the sacrificial ceremonies. Since the written script was yet to be developed, the traditional materials remained eventually oral, hence, the traditional literature survives to this day in the interior places where the traditional faith of the A·chiks is still held and old customs and practices persist. This poetry can be defined as the Volkseele of the A·chik through which they narrate the approximation of their soul with their mystic reality. Various forms of songs and prayers may be said to have constituted the traditional A·chik poetry like the prayers during sacrificial ceremonies connected with jhum cultivation, song of inaugurating a house, Dani Doka of the Wangala or harvest festival, Ajea which is also an essential feature of the Wangala and funeral wails Grapmangtata or Kabe. The sacrificial songs are solemn prayers to powerful unseen divinities in the A·chik pantheon. They collectively form the grand unwritten mantra-shastra, the sacred hymns or odes of the A·chiks. Only a Kamal or priest can ordinarily chant out or sing the sacrificial songs, although they are handed down from generation to
generation by word of mouth. It would indeed be a sacrilege to call them folk songs. Songs are the vehicles through which man communicated with one another as well as with nature which was seen as the personification of God.

Traditionally, the sacrificial songs are the sacred words of argument, only which the deities can understand. It is believed by the A·chiks that misuse of their holy sacrificial songs, which it is a taboo for laymen to sing or chant out ordinarily, brings down appropriate punishments in forms of fatal illness, maiming or blindness. Almost all notable sacrificial ceremonies of the A·chiks involve ritual dances. But, on any occasion, the sacred sacrificial songs of the A·chiks are never commonly sung or chanted out by the laity (Rongmuthu, 1996, 12). Iris Watre in Music and Musical Instruments of the Garo Tribe of North-East (2007) mentions how the songs were also used for renewing the fertility of soil and crops, for invoking the spirit – gods for exhibiting magical feats and even for curing the diseases (2007, 26). There are also songs which are independent of specific occasions and are sung at any convenient time and place, they are: Katta Salling – The narrative of Salling, Katta Agana or The Epic Story Narration, Folk Songs - Nanggorere; Gonda Doka, Gogaia Gosaia.

Traditional poetry, thus, is a true mirror of the typical A·chik way of life, their social and religious practices. It is a record
of what the A·chik ancestors thought and believed, and a key to the understanding of the A·chik psyche. The various forms of traditional poetry reflect how the sensibility of the A·chik people responded to the world or nature and to their environment. In the A·chik tradition poetry is a medium through which they express their joys and sorrows.

In *Influence of English on Garo Poetry* (1985) Caroline Marak says that prayers during a sacrificial ceremony connected with *jhum* cultivation are performed at every stage of *jhum* cultivation. These ceremonies begin from cutting a few bushes to indicate that a particular area is reserved for clearing by a certain family, to the time of depositing the harvest in the granary. These ceremonies, in successive order, are *O·pata, Den·bilsia, A·siroka, A·galmaka, Mi Amua, Rongchu Gala or Ginde Gala, Ahaia, Wangala* and *Rusrota*. Some of these ceremonies are performed by the priest, some by the ‘Nokma’ of the village headman, and others by the head of the family (1985, 38).

**Krita - Amua**

*Krita* or *Amua* are ceremonies connected with *Jhum* Cultivation. The first of invocational songs we come across during the agricultural cycle is the *A·a o·pata*. He starts with a little
clearance in one corner of a plot of land, which is a sign of claim for jhum cultivation. According to the story of creation it is believed that it was the deity Tatara Rabuga Stura Pantura who created the earth or ground and water. Then it was the deity Jipjini Jipjana who created the lives on the earth above and in the waters below. It was the Asima Dingsima Dramma Chisama Den’pema Den’jima, the spirit or deity, who created the trees and the shrubs. After all of this creation only the spirit Abetpa Ranggapa was assigned by Tatara Rabuga Stura Pantura to look after the land, forests, springs, hills and valleys, etc. Therefore, if any person without any consultation with this spirit clears the plot of land the assigned spirit will be wrathful and he may even cause illness or death (Paulinus Marak, 2005, 49—50). Having chosen the plot, the next step is clearing of the jungle. That patch of land may be the habitation of a malignant deity, known as Abet Rora Raka-Ganda. So, on cutting up the first plants for clearing, he utters the following address to the Abet Rora and Raka Ganda:

Thou Abet Rora, Thou Raka Ganda…
Yet, thou Abet Rengge (Rongmuthu, 1996, 14).

Then he goes home and waits for one or two nights for a dream. If he has unlucky dream, he abandons the spot and searches for another. But, if the dream is a good one, he sets to work. The ceremony starts after clearing the jungles for jhum
cultivation. This is known as Den·bilsia or A·a bakchata, which also signifies the driving off of all uncleanness and disease and to invoke the god of human lives to free them from all misfortunes. Hence the performer makes the symbolic act of spitting out water saying ‘Poi’ (utterance which accompanies the spitting out of water) from a new bamboo tube container made especially for the occasion. The chant is of course, accompanied by libation. So, they not only clear their jhum fields at this time, but also their homes and surrounding areas. This is followed by the jhum burning ceremony called ‘A·siroka’, during which the following incantation is used to call the goddess of Minimaa Kiri Rokkime. A·siroka a sacrificial chant to Rokkime the goddess of rice, to come and make her abode in the field: “Make rice to grow bountifully, Cause cotton to blossom and bear fruits abundantly” (qtd in Caroline Marak, 1985, 39). Before she can come and dwell the land must be cleansed of profanation due to evil acts like bloodshed or suicide that may have been committed there. The prayer has two sections, the first part is intended to drive away the desecration and the second is a supplication to the goddess for abundance of crops. The performer expresses reverence for the goddess (40).

Just before the ceremony the father of the house calls out all the inmates of the house and asks them to go to the field. When all the members of the house arrive at the jhum field, he calls upon the mother of the god of fire, Sre-Tonggitchak-Gitok-Warikat
to free the *jhum* land from any profanation, pollution and desecration (Wa·tre, 2007, 15). Each householder performs first the ceremony on his newly made field and is performed at household level in the morning. At noon the ceremony is repeated in each household. For the purpose of performance of the *A·galmak Krita* a householder erects a fresh altar of culms of bamboo and ‘*araru* or *bengraru’ (a type of grass) on a selected site in the field. He chants out sacrificial songs over burnings incense at the altar of *Minimaa Rokkime*, the Mother of Rice. He kills domestic animals as sacrificial offerings and smears their blood at the altar. At the permanent altar by the *turumal* (the main central pillar of the house), the householder chants out sacrificial songs to *Minimaa Rokkime*. To the *A·chiks*, *Minimaa Rokkime*, the mother of rice and Goddess of wealth, is the ideal personification of all that it beauteous, auspicious, desired and desirable in worldly terms. The villagers at first congregate in the house of the village *A·king Nokma* for the ceremonial performance. With the ritual burnings at the home altar and chanting sacrificial songs, the *kram achok* or *kram bichok*, the *rangs* (basin-like lead-brass gongs) and the *adils* (trumpet made of buffalo horn) are sounded (Rongmuthu, 1996, 16-17).

The time when the seeds sprout and grow into young shoots is considered the most vulnerable period for the plants by the *A·chiks*. Thus they have a special ceremony and it is known as ‘*Mejak sim·a*’. The aim of the sacrifice is an offering to the deity of
crops so that she may protect the crops from every possible
destruction by insects, moths, animals, failure of rain, etc. The
A·chiks believes that whatever their works are done without the
blessing and divine assistance, such works is not fruitful. In order to
get fruitful harvest and protection of the crops by the divine
assistance this particular sacrifice is performed (Paulinus Marak,
2005, 54). The following incantation is used to call up the goddess
Minimaa Rokkime to dwell in their land and to bless them with good
harvest:

Oh! Rokkime, the god of food grains of rice, come and bless our crops of
the field and comfort us in our sorrows. The rice barns are beside the
streamlets waiting for you to bless them (qtd in Julius Marak, 2000, 66).

The A·chiks generally follow multi-crop system,
wherein the various seeds are sown. The priest (kamal) takes a lump
of earth from the field after going around the land, naming the
various curses. He puts the lump of earth in a special basket with a
lid (koksep) and shouts that all the curses and disease have been put
in. Then the prayer is chanted:

Do not shrivel and wither away
Within my field and its boundaries.
Let the paddy grow lush and green
Like the green back of the parrot.
Shoo! Be gone you demon (qtd in Wa·tre, 2007, 29).
The A·chiks believe that Akkal or Bang or Rakasi is the Fiend of Famine. It is a malignant spirit, which sucks away the vital principle or rice. It thus brings about famine or acute food scarcity to mankind. The sacrificial ceremony of the Akkal gala is performed partly in the jhum - fields and partly at home. Fresh altars of bamboo culms and bengraru or araru are erected in the jhum - field and in the house of each cultivator in the performing village. Sacrificial songs are chanted out over burning incense at the altars (Rongmuthu, 1996, 23). To begin festivities and ritual dances the villagers congregate the house of the village A·king Nokma at noon. With chanting of sacrificial songs over burning incense at the home altar, rhythmic sounds of traditional musical instruments begin.

Having assured the safe growth of the plants, we come to the time of harvest. The first fruits are never eaten but are first given as thanks offering to Misi Saljong, the sun god, who first taught man the art of cultivation and also provided seed grains to mankind. This ceremony is called Rongchu Gala (offering of the flattened rice). The Rongchugala is also called Gindegala (offering of rice flour). The ceremony is always initiated by the Nokma (Clan chief). The chant recited at this time say:

Bestower of blessings, sower and planter, Katchi Beari (demon) and Susime (the Moon God) Partake of this food and rice-beer Which we will not eat or drink before you. But shall have with you (qtd in Wa·tre, 2007, 30).
With ritual incense-burnings, chanting of sacrificial songs and ritual token offerings of flattened rice, rice-flour and rice-beer at the home-altar, the rhythmic sounds of traditional musical instruments begin and rice-beer prepared our of the first-fruits is drawn and served out to all assembled guest. The householder grasps mi·lam (double-edged A·chik sword) and spi (rectangular A·chik shield) in his hands end, amidst rhythmic sounds of traditional musical instruments, performs ritual dance before admiring audience.

A special ceremony is performed during the reaping of the jhum paddy. This is called Ja·megapa or Megap ra·ona and it also called Ahaia. Best selected sheaves of paddy out of the year’s jhum field are used to be kept hanging by the roof inside the temporary shelter in the jhum fields till the paddy harvest there in is completed. With chanting of sacrificial songs over burning incense in braziers, the paddy-sheaves are ceremoniously brought down from their pensile resting places on the day of completion of paddy-harvest in the jhum cultivations. It is interesting to note that, while the sheaves of paddy are being brought in, the children follow the person carrying the sheaves, uttering the words ‘Ahoea, Ahoea’. The paddy sheaves are put down around the home-altar beside the turumal (the main central post of a dwelling house). More quantities of incense are added to the fire in the brazier and sacrificial songs, invoking Minimaa Rokkime, the Mother of rice, to
dwell in the house and in the family granary, and Na∙ma Na∙sa (the mother of fish), to abide in the waters of the homeland are chanted out over burning incense. This is probably the sequel to the sing song that takes place in the evening, between the young men and maidens of the village. The song that is usually sung is known as Ahoea (Wa∙tre, 2007, 31). In this way the A∙chiks maintains their peaceful relationship with the supernatural beings which surround them. If they do not maintain such relationship they believe that the deities or the spirits may be offended and as a result any kind of suffering may be brought to the transgressor.

Finally, we come to the biggest of the festivals of the A∙chiks – the Wangala or harvest festival. This is also known by other names such as Drua Wanbola and Wanna rongchua. This is a “thanksgiving” as well as “Send-off-ceremony” to bid farewell to Minimaa Rokkime (Mother of paddy) and Misi Saljong (god of food crops) who would return to their respective homelands somewhere in the universe, after the harvest is over. The days of Wangala are holy unto Misi Saljong Jobepa Rangrupa and to Minima Rokkime, the benign divinities of the A∙chiks. The days are the days to eat, to drink, to dance, to sing and to make great mirth. The A∙chiks believe that the Wangala is a joy to Misi Saljong and the joy of Misi Saljong is the strength of the A∙chiks. They also believe that Misi Saljong pours out untold blessings to the dutiful and the industrious jhum cultivators. The spirit of the Wangala is, therefore, a perfect
negation of despair and despondency, of hatred and bitterness. The A.chiks refuses to believe that, under the abiding benign influence of Misi Saljong, the most powerful Divinity of Light and Fertility, for whom the Wangala is dedicated, the forces of darkness will ever overwhelm the A·chik race. The Wangala forcefully drives home that evil cannot completely eclipse the good and that the strong, the courageous, the fortitudinous, the upright and the chaste know no defeat. At this time an important ceremony is performed known as “Kumanchi Wal·dukaa”, which literally means negotiation between God and man, where a special request is made to the gods to return in the next season (Wa·tre, 2007, 31).

**Song on Inauguration of a House**

Speaking about the song of Inaugurating the house, Caroline Marak observes that at the completion of a house, the inauguration takes place usually in the evening. The ceremony of offering a chicken and libation inside the house is followed by the singing of the inaugural song. The master of the house or one familiar with the song leads the singing saying the words: “As the father of Mune made the place his home” (1985, 41). The guests, squatting, and sing responsibly, “a·a·a” at the end of each line and rap the bamboo floor with pieces of log to the rhythm of the song. When the ceremony is over, food is served and is followed by group
dancing and the warrior dance. The singer states his determination
to settle down in the village and cultivate the land. “Shield” and
“Shade” are instances of “aganmitapa” (to speak behind the surface)
in which the newly built house is compared to the source of
protection from outside menace and the forces of nature. The
implication is that the master of the house will dwell in the place
and cultivate the land as his forefathers did in Garo Hills. The
chanting is done with solemnity.

I have a shield,
I have a shade,
I will also cultivate the land,
I will also dwell in the village… (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 2004, 72).

In the traditional way he offers sacrifices of birds
smearing their blood and sticking their feathers on the walls. In this
connection allusions to the stories of the A·chik ancestors are made.
According to the legend, Mune and Sane were the daughters of an
A·chik forefather who practiced jhum cultivation. Niba Jonja¹ is said
to be the first man to have acquired the “muni” and “chambuni”, the
sleep-inducing plants, which are also believed to cast a spell. He is
said to have foiled the designs of Salgra, the Sungod, to carry his
wife away by planting the ‘muni’ on the path to his house.

Formerly, as my father with the muni
(a herb which is believed to induce sleep) of Niba
In former days as my grandfather with the chambuni (a herb which
is believed to induce sleep) of Jonja,  
I will pull out and play,  
I will play with small round clods  
For the land and the site of my house…  
(qtd. in Caroline Marak, 2004, 72).

The mood of the song is gay to suit the happy occasion. This prayer is part of the sacrificial ceremony made to *Misi Saljong*, the God who blesses and allots shares (Caroline Marak, 1985, 41 – 42).

**Dani**

“*Dani*” is a traditional *A-chik* song sung to a tune by elderly men, to the exclusion of the women and young men. The singing of the “*Dani*” is a feature of the “*Wangala*” festival of harvest and thanksgiving to the gods. The men wearing various ornaments, arms on each other’s shoulders, in conviviality pour the drink into each other’s mouth from their own ‘*lau*’ (container made from the shell of the gourd). While singing ‘*Dani*’ one takes the lead in singing, saying the words, while others sing responsively, saying “*Ho anga dania*” or “*Hai anga*” as a refrain. The version of the “*Dani*” consists of three main elements: (i) the myth concerning the origin of the ‘*Wangala*’ dance, (ii) the story of *Ase* and *Malja*, and (iii) origin of the thanksgiving ceremony to the gods for the harvest. These tales and the story of the *jhum* cultivation are woven together
to make a colourful web. Each strand of the narrative is taken up or abandoned as desired by the singer (Caroline Marak, 1985, 43).

The song ‘Dani Doka’ begins with the myth recalling the ancient origin of the Wangala dance. It was in the underworld, in the Country beneath the waters, in the land of the Mother and the waters of Bidawe that its inhabitants first demonstrated the art of dancing. The underworld was decked with precious stones. All the living beings of the earth and of the water for the first time performed the ‘Wangala’, dancing to the rhythm of the drum and playing musical instruments (Caroline Marak, 1985, 44).

It was in the underworld,
The land beneath the waters,
In the land of the mother
And the waters of Bidawe,
That Wangala was first demonstrated (qtd. in Wa·tre, 2007, 40).

Noro, the first man did not know how to dance. He simply made human figures out of sand on the river bank, and put a reed on its head in place of feathers. He fashioned drum out of the bamboo tube. Not knowing how to make musical instruments, he made music with his mouth (Caroline Marak, 1985, 44).

The story of ‘Wangala’ is linked to the tale of Ase and Malja. In the beginning of the world, there was no sun or moon, days or months. Seeds of life and grains were yet to come. Thus, the
ancient men used red earth for red grains of rice, and black earth for black rice. They gave nought to eat and nought to drink:

Taking red earth of red rice,
And black earth for black rice,
They fed nought into the mouth,
And served nought to drink (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 45).

When they gave yellow water as wine, the spout of ‘pong’ (shell of small variety of gourd used for ladling and serving rice beer) became wet and slippery. When they fed mud as rice, their hands were filled to overflowing. It was Denjong Ganjong who first divided and served mud as rice to others. Ase, a male relative and Malja, the son of Dian Gancheng, deliberately absented themselves. They would not partake of the food and refused to join the festivities. This was an act of irreverence to Misi Saljong, the god of blessing and distribution due to which both of them were defiled. The profanation resulted in Ase being killed by a tigress and Malja being taken by a mermaid. Due to his act a tiger killed Ase and a mermaid took Malje.

A tigress killed Ase;
A mermaid took Malja (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 46).

It was Giri and his nephew Ringcha who went and informed the widow, the Bine woman and the destitute Kangse Tira of the tragedy. The women, weeping in great sorrow, wondered who
would search for their missing spouses. It was Sirampa and Manggolpa who traced the dead bodies. Birds and insects performed the death ceremonial rites (Caroline Marak, 1985, 46-47).

About the middle of the song, the myth concerning the origin of the ‘Cha∙chat Soa’ or the ‘burning of the Incense’ ceremony is introduced along with the story of the jhum cultivation.

The god of blessings Misi Saljong made his sojourn in the house of the destitute widow Ae and Ae Dikante. They, being very poor, and having nothing to offer as gift to their guest Saljong Racha Misi Gitel, burnt incense for him at the ‘truma’ or the central post erected beside the hearth in a typical A∙chik house. The god was very pleased with them and blessed them with grains. From this offering originated the practice of the burning of the Incense ceremony which is performed at the beginning of the ‘Wangala’. The god then departed for Mother Nokki and grandmother Dimki, to the country of Achi and the waters of Dimchre. Further Misi Saljong conferred favour upon Gisil and his maternal uncle Pandil. He took Gisil as his son-in-law and their Pandil as husband to his daughter. The singer, recalling the ancient past, says that stone implements were used for tilling the land, and that the ancient men fought with stone weapons.

A year has passed since the clearing of the jungle for cultivation, the seeds sown in the field have borne fruits, and the
harvest is over. The time has come for thanksgiving to Misi Saljong, and the occasion calls for celebration. Gratitude to the goddess of rain is also expressed. The grains and cotton seeds have been sown in anticipation of rain and the hopes of the people have been fulfilled.

Another feature of the harvest season described by the singer is the destruction of the crops by wild animals. After giving a beautiful pictorial description of wild goats which live in steep slopes and cliffs, and fight with their horns locked together, tails bent down, he says that they come to the field and eat away the crops. Wild boars also destroy a part of the produce.

The origin of the jhum cultivation is also recalled:
The “jhum” where trees were cut by Bone,
The field cleared by Jane,
Was cultivated,
Seeds were sown (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 49).

These lines refer to the story of Bone Nirepa Jane Nitepa, the man who is said to have pioneered in ‘jhum’ cultivation, whose first field was Misi Kokdok Abri (the Hill of Six Basketfuls of Millet) in the north-east of Garo Hills (Caroline Marak, 1985, 49).

The “Dani” is appropriately brought to a close with the concluding lines recalling the origin of the ‘Wangala’ dance once more. This song thus is steeped in the traditional myths and tales which are more or less familiar to the participants.
**Ajea**

*Ajea,* can be said to be a kind of song. According to Caroline Marak, *Ajea* is a song chanted by an individual or by two participants in response to one another. The singing of *Ajea* is an essential feature of the *Wangala* and customs sanctions the informal get-together of the youth, their romance through the song and the possible selection of marriage partners (Caroline Marak, 1985, 50). If the song is centered around on any other theme other than love, then it can be sung on any ordinary occasion and it is known as *Ajeme-apa.* But if the song is sung during *Wangala,* it is called *Wangalao Ajea.* *Wangalao Ajea* can be sung between the two young lovers. In the *A-beng* area it is known as *Ajebalsala.*

*Ajebalsala* is a kind of wooing and proposal to enter into love and marriage. The young man and woman exchange their views and thoughts through the songs, they express their feelings for one another. *Ajebalsala* being an oral rendition, they can improvise the song but they follow the traditional pattern, they don’t always invent. It is ancient days, the young people cannot choose their life partners on their own; they are always bound by rules and laws. However, during *Wangala* they have freedom to choose at their will.

The tone of *Ajea* is light hearted and gay, because this song is a source of amusement during the festivities, an opportunity for the youth to get acquainted with each other, and a way of
releasing their emotions. Through Ajea the young woman of a particular village, asks the young boy in a typical manner from whence, how and why he came. They enquire about each others’ clan, for then only will they know whether marriage is possible between them. According to A·chik customary laws, man and woman of the same clan are not eligible to marry. Accordingly, if marriage is possible between them, romance will develop, which is life-blood and source of inspiration of this form of ‘Ajea’. The song goes thus:

Are you a parrot wandering aimlessly? From which kind of tree are you? 
Are you a hero without destination? From which village are you? 
Are you a mynah flying in from the plains? 
Have you come for the Wangala of the Nokma? (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 51).

Thus the girl by means of beautiful imagery asks whence he come, whether he has come with the purpose of participating in the Wangala festival dressed and prepared for the festival. In this way they sing and respond to each other and their romance develop through songs. The song becomes deeper and deeper that at last they make commitment to each other.

By one path let us run away my dear 
And together die in one pyre, my dear (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 55).

Proposals made by both the girl and the boy are part of the song. They express their love, admiration and desire for one
another and their songs culminate in their intention to elope and marry. The following lines express how the boy is attracted and falls in love even for the glance of the young girl. Her conversation with him and others leads him to love.

I have fallen for (her) very glance
And her utterance has endeared her (to me)
(Dhoronsingh, 1974, 52).

With the approval of the Nokma and relatives, the romantic desires of a couple finds fulfillment and ends in marriage. Through the song, A·chiks can find their life partners. The song is a source of amusement during the festivals.

**Dirge or Grapmangtata**

Dirge or Grapmangtatta or Kabe or Grapmikchi is steeped in traditional A·chik beliefs regarding life after death, spirits, re-incarnation and the cause of death. Grapmangtata literally means lament – it is funeral dirge. It is a song of lamentation at the death of a loved one. The out pouring of a broken heart is encapsulated in ‘Kabe’.
Myth of Kabe:

Mihir N Sangma in his book *Pagitchamni Ku·bisring* (1996, 47) speaks about the origin of *Kabe*. He says that a man *Demi Resi* (the ancient man) called *Eman Me·a Banggi Me·chik* lived in the deep pool called *Dengreng Wari* in the *Rompa* stream which joins the *Simsang* River. The story says that one day *Eman Me·a* heard *kabe* for the first time which was coming from the distant forest. The name of the male bird is called *Gora Me·a Dilma Pante* (Mihir Sangma, 1996, 46). Mistaking the voice that was crying with painful heart to be a human voice, he kept silent in fear. But it was a bird named *Gangsime Gangchime* (*renggok bima* /the female hornbill) (Mihir Sangma, 1996, 45) which fully moved him and made him forget his way back home and also where he was heading to. After hearing the voice of the bird, he further looked around and found the bird just a short distance from the stream. The bird had died with his wings spread open toppled over by a stone. The female bird had gone through such painful days of hunger and thirst that she could no longer bear it. At the same time, *Bangji Me·chik*, the wife of *Dema Resi Eman Me·a*, thought that her husband has lost his way in the deep forest. Out of fear and despair, she informed the villagers. As soon as they heard the news though it was dangerous to search for him in the deep forest at night, they went out with their traditional torches (*bilcham*) to look for him. Though late, he reached home safely. He related the real story to his wife as he lay
down to sleep after dinner. After the story of the bird was narrated in detail to his wife, he requested her thus saying:

   In this way she cried (that her husband had instructed her to do so) so you too, at the side of my death bed do the same for me. This is what I’m telling you, what I want to say to you (Mihir Sangma, 1996, 49).

   He completed the narration and died in his sleep. The story says, after his death, she did the same for her husband just the same way the bird cried for her husband. After this, it says that the kabe began to be used as a dirge among the A·chiks during the funeral ceremony (Mihir Sangma, 1996, 49).

   Dirge is sung by the female members of the bereaved family, close relatives or professional mourners who take turn to sing. The funeral dirge is recital of merits of the departed, as well as a prayer for him/her to reach his/her goal without mishap. The stories of the deeds of valour and fame, or the pinnacle of glory reached by their sons and spouses are uttered (Wa·tre, 2007, 58-59). Chikmang or Balmang, an isolated hill in the South Garo Hills, is believed to be the home of the spirits of the dead. The song begins with the instructions to the deceased according to the traditional beliefs of the A·chiks. The child is asked to make his way to the land of Chitmang and the waters of Balmang. He is told to rest and have his lunch at “Chidimak” – where the spirits bathe: “My father, for a little while sit, My bird, for a little while stand” (Caroline Marak,
The spirit of the child is asked to stop for a while in the resting place of the ghost Bogia, where Chanapa, a demon, sighed with relief after a steep climb. That is the place he must have his lunch after tethering the bull to the “boldak” (Schima Walichii) tree. The spirit is cautioned that on its solitary journey it may encounter Nawang, a demon which devours the souls of men on their way to Chikmang. To escape from Nawang, the spirit must throw down his arm-rings and feathers, while the demon is collected the spirit gets a chance to run to safely. After this advice the child is compared to an umbrella shielding them from the elements, and to “Bolong” (Cyathocalyx martabanicus) and sal trees. The child is further compared to a young bull that is developing a hump and horns the parents watch tenderly (Caroline Marak, 1985, 61). The mother bids the spirit to remember its home, so that at the time of reincarnation it may be born into the same family. The spirit must proceed cheerfully with eyes raised and a pleasant smile upon its lips.

The themes in Kabe are mostly of love, affection and an appreciation for the good life led by the deceased. In the post funeral ceremony Kabe the themes differ in the sense that they acquire a counseling nature, cautioning the spirit of the dangers that are to be expected by the malevolent nawang. They also wish the spirit a good life at Balpakram. Traditionally through kabe, the A·chiks pray for a good after-life of the deceased in the land of the
Waimong, the caretaker of the land of the spirits. Traditionally it is believed that the relatives or the family members can lead the spirit of the deceased to a better life in the life after death through a soulful rendering of *kabe*. In other words, a meaningful recall of all the good deeds of the departed soul would perhaps help in winning some appreciation for the deceased in the land of the spirits.

There are various *kabe* that are recited at different times;

*Kabe for an uncle who is on his death bed*

The song says that the death of the maternal uncle was a great loss for the *A·chiks* since he bore great responsibility in all family matters. Therefore here the family members cry in great agony for the lost soul (Mihir Sangma, 1996, 89).

*Kabe by the wife for her deceased husband*

The *Kabe* says that the wife is going to face problems after the husband’s death. She is afraid to face the difficulties and dangers in future and face life alone. The wife wails that there will be no one to repair the broken roof, no one to take shelter in when troubles vex the family, no one to work with, and no one to watch over the paddy field.
**Kabe by the mother/maternal aunt for an uncle:**

The song speaks about the great loss. The mourners speak to the spirit (**mite** - **mître**) to receive the deceased and not keep silence to their request.

**Kabe sung at the mother’s death:**

In the song at the mother’s death the relatives and friends wail saying that there will be no one to care of the children. The children will be like the chicks, motherless and crying for food and will be scattered about. There is no one like the mother to care for them lovingly and her death will be an irreparable loss.

**Kabe** contributes and reflects the rich cultural values of **A·chik** traditional society. It an interesting feature of the **A·chik** society where mourners relive the memories of the deceased by recounting all the deeds and actions of the past in such effective selection of words that no is able to ignore the gravity of the moment overflowing with tragedy.

**Doroa**

**Doroa** is kind of song sung mostly during **Wangala** festival, which is sung about **Minimaa Kiri Rokkime**, the goddess of rice and about the origin of incense which is usually sung for **Misi**
Saljong, the god of blessing. Doroa is related to the myths of creation, and gives imaginative explanation of natural phenomenon. It relates to the history of the tribe, describes the land they came from, their leaders and manner of migration, origin of chatchi and ma·chong. Doroa embraces the customs and the ways of life as they had been for generations. This narrative is called Ma·ambi (Mignonette, 2003, 69). Other important aspects of life covered by Doroa are beliefs and mythology on which are based rituals and ceremonies. Myth and faith are inextricably woven together. Myths exist in the consciousness of the whole tribe. It is concerned with the creator and the different gods. It starts with the state of earth in the primordial period, and then proceeds to the creation of animate and inanimate objects, and the purpose of creation. It recalls how the creator invited all the living things to himself in the underworld to appraise each of its function, to reveal himself to them and teach them to celebrate the gift of life by dancing to the rhythm of musical instruments. To this all the gods and goddesses were also invited: Misi Saljong (god of blessings and distribution), Susime (god of wealth), Minimaa Kiri Rokkime (goddess of fertility), and each was apportioned a duty. It pointed out that only man was absent at this great festival. Ase and Malja, sent to represent mankind, failed to turn up at the function, hence Asi was killed by a tiger and Malja was taken by mermaid. Since then Asi and Malja have become symbols of disobedience to authority and to cosmic order.
According to tradition, it is said that Noro Mande, the first man did not know how to sing *Doroa*. But once the gods and goddesses quarrelled over the death of *Dore*, (a white-headed babbler) and over the broken leg of a *bengbul* (frog) because they were the only two who knew how to sing *Doroa*. As there was none else left to sing *Doroa*, descendents of the gods and goddesses tried to sing it by moving their lips but they could not utter the words. So it was left to *Tatara Rabuga*, the Creator, to revive and refashion *Dore* and *Bengbul*. From the living beings of the earth and of the water, the ‘prawn’ went to the land of the gods and goddesses to take part in *Doroa* where he learnt the song for seven years and seven seasons in the underworld of gods and goddesses. After coming back from there, he demonstrated and taught others how to sing *Doroa*. Since then, it is squirrel that lives on trees and a field cricket that makes hole on the ground imitated *Doroa* and demonstrated by making music with their hands on their mouths. Thus the first man *Noro Mande* also started imitating it and began to sing *Doroa* (Harendra Marak, 2010, 88-89).

*Doroa* is basically a prayer offered to *Minima Kiri Rokkime*, the goddesses of rice, who lives in the underworld in the country beneath the waters of the great sea *Songduma- Rekbokchiga*. She is implored to come and made her abode in the jhum land by putting on her ‘*gana*’ (woman’s dress) and wearing *seng-ki* (waistband) on her hips. She is begged to bring a handful of rice
which would be enough for one season (Harendra Marak, 2010, 82). A pig, a cock and an egg are offered to seek her blessings for a good harvest. The prayer also includes bringing along with her ‘na·ma’ (the mother fish).

*Doroa* also tells about the cycle of cultivation, the rites and ceremonies conducted during a year; *agalmaka, jumangsia, ja·megapa, rongchu-gala*, etc. Beliefs and myths associated with cultivation are also described, such as the origin of mother of paddy, of various vegetables grown in the *jhum*, etc.

In poetry, such as *Doroa* and *Dani*, which narrates myths and the names of ancestors of numerous objects, like squirrels, monkeys and domestic fowls, we come across the *A·chik* concept of the earth and the world-view. Their answer to the basic questions of life, their belief in sacredness of life, belief in immortality of the soul and what happens in the afterlife may be obtained from certain myths.

*Doroa* does not merely bear religious value but is also serves as the unwritten records about rituals and ceremonies, beliefs are embedded in Traditional Oral Literature.
**Do∙sia**

The principal form of marriage among the A.chiks is Do∙sia. The meaning of this term is ‘killing a fowl’. Do∙sia simply refers to the A.chik traditional marriage. The ‘kamal’ or priest performs the ceremony invoking the gods to bless the couple. The bride takes the initiative to fetch the bridegroom. A cock and a hen, furnished by the girl’s must be sacrificed and eaten. Among the A∙kawes, the priest holds the cock and the hen by the wings and holds them up to the contracting parties asking some questions, to which they reply ‘nama’ (good). The priest then holds the fowls close together, and strikes them with a piece of wood. He then drops them to the ground. The fowls struggle a little before dying and their relative positions after death determines whether the omen is good or bad. If the heads of the birds lie with the beaks pointing towards each other, the omen is good, but if they lie with their beaks apart, it is bad (Playfair, 1998, 101).

Among the A∙bengs, the manner of performing this ceremony is somewhat different. The Kamal takes the hen, and holding it by its legs or the wings, strikes the woman on the back with the hen, and at the same time repeats an incantation: “Certain ones have this day consulted the omen of the fowls. If they are to be bound to each other like the melon clings to its support, or the setiri, or the badagong (kinds of climbing cane), or the‘re’ (another
kind of cane), then the hen will look to the man and the cock to the woman”. The man is treated in the same manner. The priest then holds the fowls together, and with one effort pulls off both heads and throws them on the ground. For the omen to be good, the beak of the cock should, as it lies on the ground, point towards the woman, and that of the hen towards the men.

The *do-sia* is followed by the *do-biknia*. An incision is made in the stomach of one of the bird, and the kamal draws out the larger intestines and holds them out before him. If they hang together, the omen is good but if they are apart, desertion or death is predicted. If the intestines are full of digested food, the couple will be rich and if empty, they will be poor (Playfair, 1998, 101-102).

The Narrative of Salling or Katta Salling

Regarding the narrative of Salling or Katta Salling, Caroline Marak observes that the theme of nature and the seasons, objects and forces of nature and the *jhum* field forms the subject of this poem. In a way the song covers the whole panorama of *Ac'hik* rural life in the hills, noting the changes in nature caused by the cycle of seasons. The poem is divided into sections, each dealing with one season. A section of the poem presents not the static objects, but nature in continuous flux in the process of growth or
decay under the influence of the elements. A phase in the life-cycle of nature is thus described in each section.

The first season of the year is the Windy Season, a period of hot and dry spell, which is accompanied by strong winds. The land is dry and the wind raises so much dust that the atmosphere is thick, obscuring vision. The second line conveys the sound of the splitting bamboo inter-knots, due to extreme dryness and heat. The brown cicada after the silence in winter once again fills the air with the sound “Siao-siao”. The poet then speaks of the effect of the hot sun on human beings.

Atmospheric dust obscures vision,
Inter-knots of bamboo split “tiptap-tiptap.
Cicade emits the sound “siao-siao”
Sweating heat produces burning sensation
(qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 64).

In the second season the poet describes how a great change comes with the onset of monsoon. The earth is covered by green vegetation. Various kinds of creepers, millet and bamboo shoots grow in jhum field. Green cicada and field cricket appear in this season. The young crabs leave the mother and the female fish swim upstream to eat the flowers of trees that fall into the water. Wagtails and bobolink sings. The fruits of ‘bolchim’ (Duabanga sonnetatioides) form into small balls while ‘dimbil’ (Careya arborea) bears tufts of hair like flowers (Caroline Marak, 1985, 65).
The season of millet follows. To protect the ripening millet from predators, a member of each family keeps watch in the jhum at night. The fruits of ‘chama’ (Astocarpus chaplasha) and ‘gasampe’ (a kind of tree with edible fruits) ripen. ‘Chenggari’ (a kind of cicada) makes a chirping noise in the evening. In the streams cockles crawl on rocks and big fishes glide gracefully in deep pools. Leeches infest the jungles and overgrown paths. Doves make nests to lay eggs and feed their young with millet grains and toucans with black and white feathers are seen flying (Caroline Marak, 1985, 65-66).

Rice matures and is harvested late in the fourth season. As rainstorms becomes less the plantain leaves open wide and glitter in the sun. The pods of sesame grow large and spring onion blooms. Sitting on the stem of the cotton bush the ‘gukchru’ (a kind of green locust) makes noise resembling the sound of a spinning machine. ‘Gaanti’ (a kind of cicada) fills the air with a ringing sound while the silk spider spreads its web along the pathway. ‘Gandrak’ (a kind of green frog) makes the sound “gak gak” on the waterfalls where it lives while the red squirrel cries “chak chak” close by the boundary of the ‘jhum’ (Caroline Marak, 1985, 66).

In the fifth season the ‘megong’ (Barebinia variegate) trees are covered with flowers and various kinds of tall grass also
bloom in the cold season. ‘Kitma’ bears white berries and the bean of ‘abilik’ (a genus of bean) becomes half-ripe. The woodpecker strikes the ‘olmak’ (sterculia villosa) while the porcupine gnaws pumpkin in the jhum. The fragrant ‘chaging’ (a late variety of rice) is ready to be prepared into flattened rice. Streams become smaller; ‘na·chi’ (a kind of fresh –water fish) takes shelter in water source and bigger fishes in pools. ‘Do·aran’ (a kind of bird) and ‘do·sisi’ (a kind of bird) migrate into the plains. Rodents leave their holes and hollows of trees (Caroline Marak, 1985, 66-67).

**Katta Agana or the Epic Story Narration**

*Katta Agana* or the epic story narration consists of a vast, seemingly inexhaustible and number of poems on the legend of the *A·chik* heroes Dikki and Bandi. It appears to be one of the oldest form of oral literature of the *A·chiks*, immensely popular, is common to all the *A·chik* communities within the Garo Hills and outside, and known by different names in different regions.

In a way “*Katta Agana or The Epic Story Narration*” is also a mirror of the unwritten history and culture of the *A·chiks*. It describes a land where mighty heroes and enchanting ladies lived, where the people were wise and where mighty deeds of valour occurred. The mighty deeds of heroes and heroines, manners,
customs, ways of living and thinking, war and peace in the *A·chik* community make for the subject matter of the poem. Various stories are told of a host of characters, chief of who are *Dikki*, *Bandi* and *Balwa* (Caroline Marak, 1985, 68). They are the most famous brothers in the world. In the songs of *Katta Agana*, *Dikki* is always portrayed as an *A·chik* beau, ideal of a warrior-statesman, saint and philosopher. He is the mightiest spirit who ever appeared on the stage of world’s human history. He is a man of superlative vision, of exalted mind and of intense spiritual nature. He lives in close touch with the rulers of elements and the nature-spirit who govern natural phenomenon, all of whom are conscious intelligences. For this reason, he is also known as *Rurime Todik*, that is, the Heroic Spiritual Being. *Rurime Todik* is identified by most Katta Agangipa (narrator) with the Sun-Myth. He is often sung of with praises by then to have received instructions from the Sun-God himself. True wisdom is a part of his being. He has a perfectly sound conception and thorough understanding of human race. *Dikki* is the wisest of the wise. *Bandi* is the strongest, the bravest and the most alert warrior in the world. *Balwa* is the fleetest and the finest looking man in the world.

*Bandi* is the strongest, the cleverest, the most versatile, the bravest and the most renowned warrior the world has ever seen. *Bandi* is an extremely fine-looking warrior. He is the most ideal and the most magnificent physique in the whole world.
He is the finest specimen of human race. He has the most tremendous dynamic drive

Yonder, the Strong Warrior moulded of Pure Steel
The dreaded Man-Eater, Bandi the wild swan.
The Fierce-Looking Rapacious Hawk of the Sky…
(qtd. in Rongmuthu, 2008, 81)

In the field of battle, Bandi is seen to perfection. He is the finest, manliest, bravest and noblest of all warriors. In the midst of the bustle of battle, he is absolutely calm and cool. He is ubiquitous and his quick eyes see everything. Nothing fatigues him and nothing disturbs his equanimity. His intrepid heart is unmoved by the dangers into which his impetuosity leads him. No misfortune disconcerts him. His courage is indomitable, he displays unflinching determination and serene equanimity in the midst of noise and din of battle.

When victory is secured after the battle Bandi shouts hilariously in a high pitched thunderous voice:

Toban (real warrior-hero) am I, a living image of Goera, the god of thunder and lightning
The faces of rock-cliffs, as if they were mirrors,
Bear living witness to my heroic deeds (Rongmuthu, 2008, 87).

Balwa, is a man of broad views and generous sympathies, intensely sensitive to oppression and wrong, filled with a passionate love of his countrymen and a desire to help them to
nobler and higher national and social life. He gives his own countrymen the inspiration of a winsome personality possessing a spirit which can be used to leaven and uplift the world. In times of difficulties his is the spirit of fortitude, resilience, patience and tenacity. He is also a man of intense spiritual fervor. One cannot fail to understand that Balwa’s intense reverence for the Supreme Deity, known as Mite, in whom he lives, moves and has his very being. He confesses himself overawed by the vastness of the Unknowable, appalled by the great vision of Everlasting Law, and silent in the contemplation of the infinite and the Eternal. His metaphysical acumen, versatile talents, pure patriotism and consistent piety have endeared him to all his countrymen. He possesses extraordinary human qualities of instantaneous reflex action, sound instinctive judgment of right lines of action, acute sense of personal grip on progressive plems and courage. To his finest quality of brain he adds a sense of justice and honour. He is lovable, always calm, patient, generous, kind, and humane.

In his home circle, he is an ideal husband and a devoted father. As a man of complete self mastery, he is never swayed by emotion of passion, but remains always believing in the loftiest possibilities (Rongmuthu, 2008, 88-93).

Dikki the central character of the song and the greatest legendary of the A·chiks, born and brought up in his
mother’s country, a place of great beauty and wealth, which is described as the most ideal, the most famous and the most glorious country in the world, which has never been conquered by any foreign foe since the beginning of time:

The Heavenly Central Land  
The Child of Salgra, the God of Light,  
The Country of Silver pillars,  
Where bullions of gold are piled…  
(qtd. in Rongmuthu, 2008, 19).

Peerless in physique, wisdom and strength, Dikki has completely subdued his basic instinct to noble spiritual ideals of high intellectual and spiritual order. Through his occult powers, Dikki can entrust his soul to his adopted Mother, A·ning Bokrinima Chining Randinima, the goddess of energy and vitality in the underworld for safe keeping whenever he goes to battle. If his body is killed his spirit flies to it and revives it. In times of sorrow his communion with the forms and powers provide him with joy. His contact with the invisible forces enables him to cause thunderstorms at will. His kind and sympathetic nature, and sagacity accounts for his popularity as a ruler. Though he is the leader of his people, his life is unostentatious and dedicated, like that of a sage, to the search for truth and to intellectual and spiritual advancement. Quiet and unobtrusive, service is his ideal. He believes in the sanctity of all things, animate and inanimate.
Dikki, thus emerges as the finest specimen among men. In the past he was held with pride and reverence as the ideal by the Garos. In his praise it is sung thus:

His face is that of Salgira, the sun god;
His body is that of Moepa, the resplendent sun;
And his voice is that of Goera, the God of Thunder and Lightning (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 70).

Under the wise rule of Dikki, his country attains prosperity and moral perfection. Dikki himself sets an example by personally clearing and cultivating the land, growing cereals and fruit trees. In this country labour is never a matter of servitude but of honour. Dikki is praised for his godlike strength, courage and other supernatural qualities. He is portrayed as a shining pillar of silver or a bar of gold, a demi-god and a man of great spiritual learning. Also as one who has been moulded along with Dakdame, the goddess of vitality and strength as well as Rurime, the goddess who moulds human forms (Wa∙tre, 2007, 58).

Tales are woven around Dikki’s marriage to Giting, a girl said to be the hero’s counterpart in qualities of head and heart. Some of the female characters in the song are Dikki’s younger cousin sisters who are virtuous, beautiful and share his occult powers. Bandi and Balwa are the sons of Dikki’s maternal aunts. Bandi like Dikki is a perfect athlete, but quick tempered and
scrupulous. Balwa (wind), true to his name, is the most nimble-footed of the trio.

The images in this narrative give a Utopian description of the land of Dikki as a place which is so prosperous, that gold and silver coins are freely strewn in the village courtyard and where crops are so plentiful that they (the paddy and the banana flower), bend with the weight of their abundance. The symbolic image of the tree on which many different fruits of gold, silver, bananas, paddy, etc bloom in rich abundance.

Dikki has become a master of matter and of the nerves of men for high divine purpose beyond the comprehension of mere humanity, possessing powers which other human beings do not possess; but at the same time he lives as a perfect man of the world among his own people. He commands the universe and through his comprehensive fundamental knowledge of the wonderful field of matter, of the perspectives of the true nature of man, and of the varied degrees of human consciousness.

*Dikki*, the shining pillar of lustrous silver,
*Todik*, the glowing bar of gold… (Rongmuthu, 2008, 120)

The ‘Epic Story Narration’ may be described as an epic, because the narrative covers a vast subject – numerous places connected with the past history of the A·chiks, apparently unending adventures of the heroes, the legend of Dikki, his romance and the
stories of his cousin sisters. It possesses solemnity of tone characteristic of an epic.

**Folk Songs**

Folk Songs are an intrinsic and inseparable part of the A·chik culture. Marked with diversity and versatility in composition and melody, songs remain ingrained in the day to day life of the A·chiks. The strength of the genre of the folk songs lies in their variety and flexibility, with each genre having a distinct identity of its own. The A·chiks weave tales of songs and songs of folk tales. People’s beliefs, ritual ceremonies, agricultural activities, social functions, and love-life – all find expression in folk songs. Traditional jhumming practices have given birth to many folk songs. Merry making follows the ceremonial functions, which in turn leads to the composition or addition of new verses to the existing songs. Folk songs can be sung by ordinary people, whereas traditional sacrificial songs can be chanted or sung by a kamal or priest (Rongmuthu, 1996, 63).

Folk songs are handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Spontaneity is evident in composition as it offers singers some leeway in adaptation and substitution of words in the songs. Its theme varies in range, with the creation of the earth
at one end and love and romance at the other. The A·chiks lived and still lives in close proximity with nature and it is but natural that nature be a part of their legends, myths and folk songs. Original is the word for all the themes of the folk songs – origin of the earth, origin of the Wangala dance, courting through songs, love and romance, pure merriment, death of a loved one, emotions, expression of grief and so on. The A·chiks expresses their joys and sorrows, feelings and emotions, reflections of their way of life, zest for life, humour in life, their fears, their beliefs in gods and goddess, in things supernatural.

Folk Songs Nanggorere, Gonda Doka, Gogaia and Gosaia may be taken as specimens of folk songs. Different types of imageries are used for different songs and some of the images are based on traditional customs, practices as well as beliefs and superstitious. The first two are essentially love songs. Though all of them can be sung by one at any time and place, the young people specially like to sing them during leisure hours. The verses are sung alternately by young men and women singly or in chorus. All the folksongs are remarkable for their lyricism.

Nanggorere is a song for all happy occasions, and the verses are sung alternately by young men and women singly or in chorus. However, there is no logical progression of thought from one verse to another because most verses are self-contained and are
not continuations or replies to the previous ones. It is basically a 
love song that can be sung by anyone at any time, on any occasion 
except funeral and at any place. Though this song is a romantic in 
nature, it also reflects the culture and tradition of the A-chiks. 
Moreover, the song is full of metaphorical languages in which a 
lover is often compared with the flora and fauna.

_Gonda Doka_ according to Dr. Julius L. R. Marak was 
started in the year 1922-23. It is a song of nature and on human 
theme is appeals; the association also lies in the suggested choice of 
action. The verses may be sung alternately by young men and 
women. In every stanza of _Gonda doka_, the first line sung is about 
the nature and then the second line is on human deeds, the 
association also lies in the suggested choice and action:

> Choose and transplant the best seedling of rice, 
> Though my face and form are not comely, take me (as wife) out of love 
> (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 75).

The two groups of young men and women join in 
singing the refrain which runs thus:

> Sing _Gonda_, Chant _Gonda_, I have twenty–six rupees on hand 
> ‘_Dodoancheng, doancheng_’ (a kind of bird) sweet heart, 
> First draw me towards you (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 75).

The words ‘twenty-six rupees’ and ‘_doancheng_’ are 
sung only for the sake of rhyme. The young man singing here
obviously bids a particular young woman not to be jealous of another, who has won the heart of the young man she loved. The parallel points out that the maintenance of amicable relationship is as essential to life as the elements.

In Atong area the biggest festival is Chugan or post funeral ceremony. In earlier days the young man and young woman were not allowed to talk or communicate openly, the Gonda doka on several occasions serves to bring prospective lovers together. So through the gonda song they express their feelings towards each other when they meet for the first time. It is during Chugan or post funeral ceremony the young men and women have freedom to choose their life partners. Through this song young man and woman express their liking for one another and their willingness to start a friendship and sometimes it results in their elopement and marriage.

I have already named you
I have already made up my mind
(Caroline Marak, 1994, 46-47).

Gogaia Gosaia may be sung solo or in chorus. It has a refrain which runs thus:

Gogai wai, gosai wai
Direng wai.

While this passage cannot be rendered into English, a verse will serve to illustrate the nature of the song:
I, the brave, go along the plains, indeed,
I go from village to village in order to challenge other men for a fight, indeed (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 76).

The reference is to the customary sport of the braves or warriors who go from one village to another offering a loin cloth to other braves, which is a gesture of challenging them for a fight. Anyone who accepts the offer accepts the challenge. Various aspects of A·chik customary life form the theme of ‘Gogaia, Gosaia’ (qtd. in Caroline Marak, 1985, 76).

_Serejing_ is popular with the A·chik young man and woman. There is more than one type of tune to this folk song. There are about six different tunes. Initially, the main theme was the flora and fauna, the streams, rivers and hills (Wa·tre, 2007, 48). According to Dr. J.L.R. Marak, the main theme of _Serejing ring·a_ was a funeral wail or lamentation. On the death of her father and mother an A·chik lady named _Serejing_ sadly lamented in the following way:

Alas! I am alone without a mother or a father,
Now I have to wander wretched and sad,
I will look after the house and its surroundings
and keep their memories alive
Alas! Where else will I see my mother’s face?
(qtd in Dr. Julius Marak, 1999, 23).

There are no fixed rules for the creation of lyrics and the singer has the freedom to add his own creations, appropriately according to situations and circumstances. At times there is no
linkage between the lines. Initially, the main theme was the flora and fauna, the streams, rivers and hills (Wa·tre, 2007, 48).

_Ahaoea or Ahaia_ is the song of the _Jamegapa_ season, when the paddy has just been cut and is being brought into the granary. However, it can be sung throughout the harvest season, for it ushers in the time of feasting and merrymaking (Wa·tre, 2007, 38). Several ‘_matta_’ (pointed digging sticks) are accumulated near the farm house at the field. The members of the household in the field take these sticks and make ceremonial representation of some phase of cultivation after which the grains are neatly plucked and bounded in sheaves. The person who carries the _medong_ (sheaves of paddy) in a bamboo basket comes shouting ‘Ah, ha! ha! Mother of earth; Ah!ha! ha! Mother of food-grains’. This kind of singing is called _Ahaoea_ (Julius Marak, 2000, 68-69). Every evening boys and girls dance together to the accompaniment of drums, bamboo flutes and _adil_ (trumpet made of buffalo horn). They enter each and every house with slow and swaying movement and singing the famous indigenous song “_Ahaoea_”. This is the song to exchange views and ideas and expressing one’s love and gratitude as continued offering the rice beer to the young drummers by the young dancing girts inside the circle (Mihir Sangma, 1994, 48).
Araowaka, is a song for any occasion and has a lively, catchy tune. It is sung in the Chisak area of the Garohills. The refrain appears to be an imitation of some bird sound.

The beautiful yellow blossom – araowaka
Is the mustard flower – araowaka
Though you live in another village – araowaka
Please do not forget me – araowaka (Wa·tre, 2007, 45).

Another indigenous romantic A·chik song called Rere Ring·a is sung by the three divisions of the A·chiks – the Rugas, the Duals and the Chiboks. It is sung on joyous occasion by the young people, through they tease each other.

Oh I mistook you for a chief
Because of your umbrella
Back home I’m sure
You’re as poor as me (Wa·tre, 2007, 46).

Chera sola is sung only in the Gara-ganching area. The subject of this particular music is usually the heroes and heroines of old like Jingjang, Nongdu a·ding pante, Gangga and Rutha, exchanging views and ideas as sometimes putting questions and answers or old tales (Mihir Sangma, 1994, 52). It is a traditional song and sung responsively by young man and woman and it can be sung anywhere.

O dear! Jingjang’s country
The land of Nangal. (Wa·tre, 2007, 50).
Dime ring·a is a speciality of the Atong area. It is sung after the mangona (post funeral) ceremony amidst dance, gaiety and music. It is known as Chugan by the atongs. This particular song, however, is not confined to mangona only but can be sung at any time. Like the Nanggorere each verse of Dime ring·a consists of four lines with alternate rhymes. The response may be given by any member of the opposite group. The following song is sung by a young man.

Whose sheaf of thatching is this?
I shall pull off the thatching grass (Wa·tre, 2007, 53).

There are many other folk songs, the above mentioned are just a few of the many found in Garo Hills. Different types of imageries are used for different folk songs and some of the images are based on traditional customs, practices, as well as beliefs and superstitions. Creative similes and metaphors have been utilized to express each and every imagination of their minds in the most beautiful way. In The Traditional Dances of the Garos, Dewansing Rongmuthu says: “The genuine Garo folk songs, as handed down by tradition, are soul-stirring songs, full of romance, full of beauty and pathos, full of sentiments of love, life and death. They sing expressions on the eternal triangle in human affairs, on the sanctity and divinity of human life at its best and on the glimpses of divine substance in man. Some folk songs project out essentials for
continued survival of human race. They are, in fact, the spontaneous expressions of the soul of the Garo race”.

End Notes

1 A myth is told about Niba, Jonja, a Garo patriarch, that he fought with Salgra, the sun-god with the herb muni chambuni.

Works cited


