Chapter VIII.

Religion.

A. Animism.

The Pantheon: The Garos believe in the existence of a supreme Being. They also believe in the existence of a multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits. All these good and evil spirits are commonly called "kite." The term "kite" covers what we call gods and goddesses and some other lesser spirits and imps. According to their belief, these spirits or kites are everywhere - in the sky above, on the earth beneath, in the depths of the waters, in the dark caverns, recesses of mysterious mountains and in the trees and bamboo groves, rivers and lakes, mountains and hills, trees and shrubs, sticks and stones, are the dwelling places of some spirits. Similarly, the stars, the sun and the moon are associated with some spirits or kites and all these kites are considered immortal by them.

To some of these spirits are attributed the creation of the world, to others the control of natural phenomena and the destinies of man from birth to death are governed by a host of spirits whose anger must be appeased by sacrifices and whose good offices must be entreated in like manner.

2. Burling, Robbins, Mengsangri, pp. 54-55;
   also Sinha, T., The psyche of the Jaros, p. 46.
The mythology of the Garos is voluminous and intricate as that of the Hindu. And as they have no written record, nothing but memory to trust to for the preservation of their traditional myths, their mythology varies with change of places and circumstances. Different divisions of the tribe have different names for their gods and goddesses and there are only a few spirits which are common to them all. Again, the same spirits are known by different names in different places, and it is impossible to get their religious concepts and mythology from the Garo animists at the present days as their answer to the questions is "uija" or "don't know".

Besides the above difficulties, the names of spirits or deities are remarkable in their length and in some cases, they bear the tekononymous affixes for father or mother.

The following are the principal Garo deities or spirits:

**Tatara-Rabuga:** He is the creator, at whose command the world was made by two lesser spirits, namely, Hostu-Mopantu and Machi. He is regarded as the greatest of all the spirits. His special mission with regard to the welfare of man, is the curing of diseases like Kalaazar and fevers. The Garos call him by about one hundred and sixty names, of which the following names are mentioned, viz., Tatara-Rabuga, Bisikkrom Bidatare, Haryama, Hanayama, Stura Santura, Aning Randinima, Ambi Mori, Dakdane, Murime, Dakgipa, Kugipa, Aiti, Biati, Korabok Korapin, Haresu Harebok, Lingipa, Labra, La'ragipa, Chitragipa, Mirikgipa, Sandigipa, Ja'rikgipa, Ja'sangipa, Ja'lumgipa.

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An expensive sacrifice is offered to him by killing a bull, a goat and a fowl. Liquor and rice are also to be provided for the worshippers which lasts about two days. 9.

**Saljong:** He is one of the greatest gods and a giver of all things to men and all other living beings on earth. He is represented by the sun. He is responsible for germinations and growth of all crops, trees and bamboos and for ripening of all fruits and grains. He can also bring good and evil to all beings on earth. Nothing could be obtained without his goodwill. Whatever harvests are reaped are due to his favour and mercy. That is why, the greatest festival called the Wangala festival is celebrated in his honour after the harvests. This is also known as the thanks-offering festival, but the actual sacrifice to him is offered in the jhum fields before the village festival begins. A cock is killed, its blood is sprinkled on the sacrificial altars, a little liquor is poured out on the ground in front of it, and the worshipper then returns to the village for the Wangala festivals. Saljong is also known by the names, Tengsungipa-Tengtotgipa, Salgira-Salgra and Kengsa-balsa. Some identify Saljong with Nabuga, but others are

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10. Sangma, J., Jaro Folklore, part 111, p.24-25.
11. layfair, The Jaros, p.61.
inclined to regard him as distinct. According to another story, Hishi Saljong is supreme amongst the gods and lives in heaven, (here heaven means the sky above). Apongma, his wife, left her heavenly parent to elope with him. They became residents of this world, and lived for a time on Toora, where they had two children, a son named Hengra-Barsa, who is the father of fire and of all the heavenly luminaries, and a daughter named Mining-Niji, who married the son of Docjongma, the mother of mankind. Mining-Niji and her daughter Het-Kepong lost their husbands and reside as widows on the summit of Toora, but Hishi Saljong and Apongma have returned to heaven.

Nostu-Mopantu: He, with the help of another spirit named Hachi fashioned the earth, at the command of Tatara-Xabuga. No sacrifices are offered to these two deities as they do not harm any man. According to one story, Nostu sprang from a self-begotten egg and created the world. Previous to that time, she had existed on a water-lily but finding her position uncomfortable she sent Hiramun, the king of the lower regions for earth, with which she formed a seat for herself and progeny, and commenced filling it with the animal and vegetable creation.

Chorabudi: He is a benign spirit and the protector of crops. Before partaking of the first fruits of the season, such as the Indian corn, millet and melons, a small quantity of some of these is always given as an offering to him. Sacrifices are offered to him for pains in the ears and for boils. He is the servant of Tatara-Xabuga and when the latter is sacrificed to, a pig must be offered also to Chorabudi.  

13. Salton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, pp. 54-60.
15. Salton, p. 28.
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**Goera:** He is the god of strength, and the cause of thunder and lightning. He destroys trees, men and animals by lightnings. He is prayed to for health and strength after long illness. He is always sacrificed to at the foot of a tree. A pig, a fowl or a duck must be offered to him. When a tree has been blasted by lightning, it is said that Goera has struck it, and a sacrifice must be offered at the foot of that tree in order that harm may not come to the houses in the vicinity. Goera used to blast the trees, men or animals with a flat stone which is called "nongpra" in Garo. It is believed that the Nongpras have strong medicinal values.

**Kalkame:** He is the elder brother of Goera. He takes care of the lives of all men of this earth. He keeps us safe from the dangers from wild animals, aquatic animals and from all kinds of diseases and dangers. It is because of his benevolent nature, people please him by sacrificial offerings. He is prayed to in the n'songtata or n'songroka ceremony, and is entreated to keep the people of the village safe from all dangers of the forest during the coming year. The n'song or sacrificial stones are erected in his honour and the evils are driven away in his name. A goat or a cock is offered to this spirit and the offering is made on the sacrificial stones which are smeared with the blood of the victim.

**Susime:** She is the giver of both good and bad things to all mankind. She is also the cause and cure of blindness, lameness, and deafness and other diseases. She is expert in instigating people

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17. Playfair, The Garos, p. 81.
19. Ibid., p. 27; Also Playfair, The Garos, p. 82.
to quarrel. That is why, they try to please her by offering sacrifices of a pig, a fowl and some liquor and by uttering pleasing words to her. She is represented by the moon.

Asima-wingsima: She is the mother of Busime. She is not attributed to possess any power and therefore is not sacrificed to, but a superstition exists that it is very unlucky to pronounce her name as it is feared that she may not like to be mentioned of. Her other names are, Morebak-morekdim, Sonakale-Kaburanchi and Hikrongitok-Hisangitok.

Tongrengma: She is also a female deity and cause ailment to the men. When she troubles a man, the sphincter comes out and the patient suffers from pain. A fowl is offered near a river or a stream to appease her.

Hawang: He is an evil spirit who devours the souls of men on their way to the Garo purgatory. That is why, when a person dies, his dresses, ornaments and moneys are thrown along with him so that he can offer them to the Hawang and can proceed on his way. The Hawang also tries to devour living men and with that intention, roams about the world, sometimes in human form and sometimes in that of Maldendong, a mythical animal. He also causes pains in the stomach, vomiting, diarrhoea and is often present at a man's death-bed ready to devour him when he is dead. A mortal carrying a weapon of iron is safe in his journey.

The Garos believe that the Constellation of tars have power and represent the spirits. They possess power to give both good and bad things to man. The seasons and years are also under the control of one or the other of the spirits. Therefore, they used to sacrifice a pig, a cow, a goat, a fowl or a duck to them, so as to keep them in good humour and gain their favour.

The stars are collectively given the name of Horingro-Nojingjo and it is believed that they represent some spirits. The Garos recognised fourteen stars and constellations by name and most of them are connected with the story of the funeral ceremony of the mother of the Moon, Morebak-Morekding alias Asima Dingsima. Just as the mortal beings, Asima Dingsima was cremated when she died and each star is believed to have taken part in one way or the other in the funeral ceremony. Therefore, as an act of thanks and gratitude, for the help rendered during the funeral ceremony, the goddess Susime, daughter of Asima Dingsima, placed them in the heavens.

The fourteen stars recognised by the Garos are given below:

1. Hangripe (Cassiopeia): It literally means the carrying of the body. It represents the carrying of the dead body of Asima Dingsima to the Funeral pyre.

2. Mirontek: This particular star represents the basket of rice from which the mourners were fed. 'i' means 'rice' and 'rontek' means 'basket'.

3. Wal'sado (Sirus): It is a star which set fire to the funeral pyre.


25. ibid., pp. 20-21; also Mayfair, The Garos, p. 244.
4. **Do'sadil (the rιjaides):** It represents the Lo'jasi or cock sacrificed when the body was cremated, to lead the spirit of the dead to the better land.

5. **Chapphore-monje (Castor and Pollux):** These stars were two sisters who came to the funeral ceremony in very beautiful dresses. Susime was so pleased for their coming in such beautiful dresses that she ordained that they should for ever remain as witnesses for her mother's death and roam the heavens together.

6. **Ja'tokani:** Literally, it means the walking stick. They believe that this particular star was the walking stick of Asima Dingsima, the mother of goddess Susime. When Asima Dingsima died, this star wept so bitterly that Susime, in recognition of its affection, promised that it should always remain in the sky near her.

7. **Do'sutat:** It literally means Cock fighting. It is the constellation which represents two cocks which were tied to the feet of Susime's mother when her dead body was laid on the funeral pyre. Instead of ordering two bulls to fight during the funeral ceremony, Susime ordered these two cocks to fight.

8. **Aski Do'me (Comet):** This represents the cocks' feathers which were placed with other offerings at the head of the dead body of Asima Dingsima while she was lying in state. Susime placed them in the sky in memory of that event. The Garos believe that when the comets come out, it will be a bad year for them. The year and seasons will not be favourable for their cultivations and there will be famine and diseases all over.

9. *Henggo ripe*: literally, it means the carrying of the cat. Seeing their elders carrying a pig on a pole to the place of sacrifice, some children caught a cat and carried it in the same manner. Susime was much pleased with them and ordered that a constellation should commemorate their act.

10. *Wak ripe* (belt of Orion): it literally means the carrying of a pig. This constellation represents the pig which was brought to the funeral as food for the mourners.

11. *Hangganchi* (Square of Pegasus): This constellation represents the four upright posts of the funeral pyre of Asima Dingsima between which the wood for the cremation was gathered. The brightest of the four stars is said to represent the post to which the buffalo for sacrifice was tethered.

12. *Hatma Ja'kol* (the milky way): literally, it means the footprints of the buffalo. The name "Hatma Ja'kol" owes its origin to the following story. The relatives of Asima Dingsima who lived in distant place were bringing a buffalo for sacrifice at the funeral ceremony of Asima Dingsima. The buffalo was however terrified at the blowing of horns and beating of drums in the house and refused to proceed. So the man who was leading the buffalo signalled to the musicians to stop. They, however, mistook his meaning and increased the volume of their music, upon which the buffalo became unmanageable, broke away and galloped off. The band across the sky represents its track and the marks of its hoofs.

13. *Kringgirang* (Morning star or Venus): this particular star warns that cocks that day is approaching and that it is time to wake up sleeping mankind.
14. **Attamprang** *(Evening star or Venus)*: This star gives warning to the people that it is time to shut up the fowls for the night, to sleep and rest.

The explanation of a falling of a star was that once upon a time, there was a star Do'sadil-Mingitir by name, which was married to a girl of this earth. But subsequently it married one of the stars in the sky but to this day, it has not forgotten his first love and occasionally comes down to earth to see her.

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Religious beliefs.

The Garos believe in the existence of a supreme Being, but they do not worship him by sacrifice, believing him to be benevolent, and therefore not in need of propitiation. Their numerous inferior deities are the objects of their dread, and they do sacrifice to them whenever they believe that they have incurred their displeasure. These minor deities are so numerous that even the votaries themselves cannot tell their names. T. Sinha, in his book, 'The Psyche of the Garos' collected as many as 230 names of Garo deities, but still he says that the list is not an exhaustive one.

The numerous deities are composed of both benevolent and malevolent deities. Some of them were regarded as the creator of man, the world and all that is therein, others as controllers of natural phenomena, while others, as the shaper of destinies of men from birth to death. It is because such powers have been attributed to them that they offer sacrifices to propitiate them.

Among the direct objects of their worship, are the Sun and the Moon. To ascertain which of the two they should worship on any particular occasion, the priest takes a cup of water and some wheat. He then calls the name of the Sun and drops a grain into the water. If it sinks, that is a sign that they should worship the Sun. If not, he drops another grain into the cup, in the name of the moon, and so on till one of the grains sinks.

29. Ibid.
All religious ceremonies must be preceded by a sacrifice of a bull, goat, pig, cock or dog. In cases of illness, they offer a sacrifice in proportion to the supposed fatality of the distemper with which they are afflicted as they believe that medicine will not help unless the deity interferes in his favour and that a sacrifice is requisite to produce such interposition.

They believe in the existence in man a spirit which, after death goes to a particular place, i.e., the abode of the spirits. Napak village, Balpakram and Balsiram hills were believed to be the places where the spirits of the dead persons go, and these spirits dwell there for a period of time before being re-incarnated.

They also believe in the transmigration of souls, as a state of reward and punishment. By transmigration of souls, it means that when a man dies, his soul or his essence leaves the dying body and enters the body of some animal or human being as it comes into the world to begin its career, and the process may be repeated generation after generation. The Garos believe that those who are morally wicked are punished by being born as low animals and those who have not been wicked, and who have made many offerings to the gods, are born in high and wealthy families. The lowest form of re-incarnation is that in the shape of insects and plants. The next highest is in the shape of animals and birds and then in human form. The greatest reward for a virtuous life is to be born into the same motherhood as before.

34. Playfair, The Garos, p. 80.
35. Ibid, p. 102.
38. Martin, The Eastern India.
The Garos have no concept of sin as we connote by the word nor have they any concept of merit or of any good work which enables them to live in heaven. In fact, they do not believe anything like heaven or hell. To them, a man is good so long as he does not hurt the feelings and sentiments of others and is regular in his sacrifices to gods.

Life after Death.

The Garos believe in life after death and in its re-incarnation and in that they resemble Hinduism and Buddhism. According to their belief, a spirit lives in the human body, which, after death, goes to an appointed place. Various places have been mentioned as the places of residence of the spirits of dead men. The first one was a village called Napak, located in the north-eastern portions of the Garo Hills district. But in course of time, as the number of dead people increased, they went to two other hills in the Garo Hills, namely, Balsiri and Balpakram. The last place where the spirits go is believed to be to Chitmang, a hill lying in the south-east of Garo Hills district.

As the human beings work on earth, so the spirits must work at Chitmang. As soon as they arrive at Chitmang, they enquire the whereabouts of their relations who have gone there ahead and live with them if they have not returned to earthly life. Life in the spirit land is not all a happy one and they look forward for happy re-incarnation.

The journey to Chitmang is a long one and the spirit is provided with a guide, food for the journey and money for his requirements. All these materials were supplied by the sacrifices of animals, the offering of food and liquor at the shrines. 42

On their way to Chitmang, the spirits used to halt for a while at the Balpakram hill and so it is like a resting place or purgatory for them. They also believe that if somebody tolls the knell of parting souls anywhere in Garo hills, anybody staying at Balpakram at that moment can hear similar sounds resounding there. Several places of the Balpakram hill are believed to have connection with the journey of the spirits of the dead. One such place is called the Ke’mang Mesal cha’ram, a place where the spirits used to take their midday meals. This place is identified with a flat surface rock, a few miles to the north of the main tableland. 44

The other place is the Chidimak-Chianggal or the ink-water pool. It is situated on the northern side of the tableland and the water of this pool is as black as charcoal. It is believed that the water is black because the spirits of the dead used to wash and take their bath in it to cleanse themselves of all earthly impurities caused by cremation of their mortal coils. 45

Another thing connected with this belief is the Boldak tree (Schima wallichii), at which cows were kept tethered by the spirits while they bathe and eat their midday meals. The original tree is stated to have been destroyed by a storm, but in its place,

42. Playfair, The Garos, p. 102.
43. Harak, A., Balpakram, p. 4.
44. Ibid., p. 6.
45. Ibid., p. 5-6.
another tree has come up again with cuts at the stem due to the tethering of the cows.

In olden days, when human sacrifices were possible, attempts were made that a rich man should have a servant during the journey to the spirit land and as such, immolation of slaves and captives were of frequent occurrence. Nowadays, however, a fowl takes the place of a human victim.

On their way to Chitmang, the spirits are no means free from danger, for at one place there live awaiting a demon called hawang. He accosts each spirit and demands what it has done on earth, and what property it has brought with it. The demon is covetous of brass-rings and the spirit who is well supplied with these ornaments, throws them to the ground and escapes while the hawang is busy picking them up. This is one of the reasons why the Garos wear bunches of rings in their ears.

The period of probation at Chitmang and the manner of return to earth, depends either on the cause of the person's death or upon the sins he committed during life-time. For instance, it is believed that the spirit of the person who commits suicide by hanging will be re-incarnated in the form of a beetle which is considered to be the lowest form of re-incarnation. And the spirit of the person whose death is caused by an elephant or a tiger, goes to Chitmang, but is re-incarnated in the form of the animal which caused the death. In neither of the above cases will the spirit again be born in human form. The spirit of a murderer is condemned to reside at Chitmang for seven generations before returning to human form. If a man has committed wrong in his life time, he may

47. Ilayfair, The Garos, p. 103.
as a punishment, be born again in the form of an animal, but this does not preclude the possibility of the spirit returning to human shape after the death of the animal and a second sojourn at Chit-mang. Except the cases referred to above, all others will be re-incarnated in human form, but the most virtuous life will be rewarded with the rebirth into the same motherhood as before.

Stories of Creation.

The Garos have various versions of the story of creation of the world and all that therein. Some versions are given below:

(1) In the beginning, what is now earth was simply a vast watery plain. There was no land, and darkness was everywhere. Tatara-Nabuga, the Creator, then planned to create the earth, and with this end view, sent a lesser spirit, Nostu-Nopantu, in the shape of a woman. As there was no dry place for her to set her foot on, she took her abode in a spider's web which was stretched over the water. Tatara-Nabuga gave her for material a handful of sand, but when she set about her task she found that she could not make the particles stick together. Therefore, a big crab was sent down under the water to fetch some clay, but since it was too deep, the crab was obliged to return empty-handed. Nostu then sent Chipong Nokma-dalpong Gitel, the small crab to fetch some clay, but being afraid of the limitless water, he also returned without fulfilling his mission. Last of all, Nostu sent Chiching-Harching, a beetle, who returned with a lump of clay, with the help of which Nostu-Nopantu fashioned the earth.

46. Rlayfair, The Garos, rp. 103-105.
Nostu created the earth which was called Mane-tilte, and the big and the small rocks, but all was still wet and unfit to walk upon. So Nostu prayed Tatara-Rabuga to help her, who placed the sun, the moon in the sky, and set wind to blow upon the earth. As a result, the surface of the earth was hardened.

Then Tatara gave the earth a petticoat (the earth is spoken of as a woman) and a turban was made of clouds, and caused hair to grow on her in the shape of the Fap tree (Ficus Rumphi), the sio, the Sane (sago palm), the Redjak and Re (kinds of cane), and the am'ang (thatching grass).

Of all the animals, hulock ape was created first, and his mission on earth was to utter loud cries and prevent the earth from sleeping and neglecting her work of productiveness. The brown monkey was next created, and then all other beasts.

The first aquatic animal to be created by Tatara was the frog, and his special mission task was to proclaim the advent of rain to all living things. Then the fish was created.

Though there was water under the surface of the earth, there was no water on its surface. So Tatara made rivers to flow and sent more Chire-limire bokre, or the river, to water the earth and then sent a voice (thunder) before the rain to announce its coming.

Man had not yet been created so far. Therefore, Tatara called around him the lesser spirits and told them his intention of placing man on earth. A goddess called Susime was selected and sent down to prepare it for its new inhabitants.

The first inhabitants of the earth had no rice to eat and so they had to live on roots and fruits of the forests. The first human beings to cultivate the soil were two dwarfs, Bone Jasku and his wife Jane-Gando. They cleared the forest in the same
way as they do the jhumming today.

The above story is the belief of the Am'lobeng sub-division of the Garo tribe. It also represents the belief other divisions though details vary in many instances, and the names of the spirits are not the same in all cases.

(ii) According to another version of the story of Creation, Nostu was not alone in her work of creation. She was accompanied in her work by another spirit named Biste or Machi. Nostu spat on the lilies and grass in the water, and Biste blew. Thus the waters were separated and the dry land appeared, but it was still a waste land, and without life or light and unfit for man to live upon, for, there hung an immense black pot over the whole earth. Bonepa (whom the legend calls Biste or Spirit) then took a pestle and lifted up the big pot with it so that the sun could shine over the earth. Agpa-Ritrampa (legend calls him a sower) then took big rocks and threw them about in the soft ooze, thus solidifying the earth, separating the waters and enclosing valleys.

(iii) Another version says that when Tatara sent Nostu-Nopantu to make the earth, he also sent two other spirits namely, Brara and his wife Dogni, to make the stars. But Brara was lazy, and instead of doing his assignment, he wasted his time in flirting with his wife’s maid. Brara’s wife soon discovered and decided to punish them. She placed the seeds of all kinds of skin diseases in a pot of water, which Brara and the maid proposed to take with them on a journey through the skies. The lovers were soon in sore distress. In a mood of repentance they returned to

49. Rayfair, the Garos, pp. 83-84.

50. Ibid., p. 85.
Bogni and Brara having promised to behave himself in future, they were forgiven and cured of their diseases. Then Brara set to work and made the stars.

(iii) According to another version which is prevalent among the Ntong division of the tribe, there was water and only water in the beginning. Babra, the god of creation, was present everywhere. Babra saw the vast unending sheet of water and felt like creating the earth. He called Ng'ke or a crab, to help him and asked it to go down under the deep water to fetch some clay from the bottom. But the crab returned after a while without any clay. Babra then asked Wa'chi (a mud fish) to bring some earth. Wa'chi went deep to the bottom of the water. There it collected as much clay as was possible to carry in its tail and came up. Babra was pleased and created the earth with that clay. Then other plants, animals and men were created.

Like the above, there are many other versions of the story of creation varying only in details and in the names of the spirits. These variations have been caused mainly owing to their oral narration of the story from time to time and from generation to generation.


Religious worships.

The Jaro animists are very religious and god-fearing people. They believe that all physical ailments, accidents and unnatural deaths are due to the wrath of one or the other malevolent spirits. Therefore, sacrifices of animals and birds must be offered to the deities to appease them as well as to invoke their blessings. Dalton mentioned that when they are sick they throw themselves entirely on the mercy of the deity, who, they consider, is, for some reason, incensed against them, and they consequently endeavour to appease his wrath by smearing his altar with the blood of a sacrifice.

In all the Jaro non-Christian villages, different kinds of altars and shrines are erected to make offerings to the deities who are believed to have caused sickness or mishap to a person. These sacrificial altars are erected out of bamboos in varying shapes and designs according to the spirit to whom the offering is to be made. One kind of altar consists of an upright, oblong panel composed of a bamboo frame about 4 ft. long and 2 ft. broad, filled in with reeds and the leaves of trees. Another kind of altar is erected to offer sacrifices to a deity named Chorabudi. This consists of bamboos stuck into the ground so as to form an inverted cone about 3 ft. high, filled with earth. A third kind is called the Sekrek. It is merely a short bamboo stuck upright in the ground, the top section being split into narrow strips to form a conical basket. Food offerings and sometimes moneys are placed inside this altar. Another form of this Sekrek is the wa'dambeng sekrek, which consists of two bamboos lashed together in the form of a cross.

The top and the horizontal extremities of this cross are opened out so as to make the shape of a conical basket. Yet another kind of altar is an image of straws lying in the roadways, pierced through a bamboo stake, or a recumbent figure of mud or sand over which have been hung a few strings tied to upright bamboo sticks. The strings are ornamented with coloured rags, while on the image, has been left the beak of a fowl or a duck. The other kind of shrine is a fenced-in enclosure at the foot of a tree, within which an altar has been erected.

Whenever an offering is made at any of the above-mentioned sacrificial altars, the blood of the animal or bird is smeared over it, and some of the hairs or feathers are stuck to the altars. All the above-mentioned altars are erected in order to make sacrificial offerings for minor ailments, everyone of which has its own particular spirit. Serious illness, however, calls for more elaborate sacrifice. It is believed that every man and woman will twice in his or her lifetime fall very ill and be in danger of dying. One such illness will come during childhood and the other at adult age. The first illness is called Bimarima and the second Kambe pe'a. Both must come to everybody. Some may die and some may survive. It is never known what form this illness will take. They may come as cholera, small-pox, dysentery or any other disease. When it was decided that an illness is either the Bimarima or Kambe pe'a, very elaborate and expensive ceremonies are to be performed. Rigs and even cattle have to be offered in sacrifice for the recovery of the patient, and in the case of a rich man, the ceremonies become more expensive and elaborate. 54.

Walton who witnessed a sacrifice for illness wrote, "A funny old fellow, with peacock feathers stuck in his hair, with the usual scarcity of drapery, but with wooden sandals on his feet, seated on a low stool before the altar, addressed it in a long monotonous chant. Another person meantime led a kid round and round the shrine. It was occasionally taken away and washed, on being brought back again, petted and fed with salt by the priest; and after this had been repeated, the animal's head was chopped off with one cut, and the altar smeared with the blood. All the time a sick child for whom the offering was being made, lay beside the priest. Walton wanted to give some medicine to the sick child but they did not consent to it, thinking that such a course would nullify the merit of the sacrifice.

There are also other kinds of altars erected to offer sacrifices to the malevolent spirits who caused damage to crops and who must be propitiated. These spirits are called Bang, Nakasi and Miskal. The common way of invoking the aid of these spirits is by making a cylindrical cage about 4 ft. long and 2 ft. in diameter and by filling it with all kinds of worn-out household utensils, such as cooking pots, gourds and bamboo spoons which are slung on a pole supported by two uprights. This is placed by the side of a path leading to the village, and a fowl is then sacrificed. A pestle for pounding paddy is also considered to be efficacious in keeping the spirits away if stuck upright in the ground by the side of the path.

56. Ibid.
besides the altars and shrines described above, there are a number of long bamboos with leaves on, placed upright in the ground in front of and close to many of the houses. These are hung with cotton or bunches of paddy in ear. These are the offerings to the dead persons and to the spirits. The altars where offerings are made to the dead is known as he'mang Mdong (he'mang means ghost and Mdong means paddy in ears), while altars where offerings are made to the spirits are called Kite Mdong (Kite means spirit, and Mdong means paddy in ears). Another form of this is the wa'dong, the difference being merely in the size of the bamboo.

Different kinds of altars, shrines and other bamboo posts with leaves and ears of paddy and cotton are still a common sight in the non-christian villages.

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The Garos fear the occurrences of the natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, earthquake, eclipses, wind, rain and shooting stars. They believe that each of these natural forces is controlled by a spirit. These natural phenomena are not, in themselves, the objects of their worship or sacrifice, but since each of these events is controlled by a spirit, sacrifices must be offered to these spirits and their favour gained. Thus sacrifices are offered to the rain-god when rain is required and to sun-god when sunshine is needed.

According to their belief, lightning and thunder are caused by the spirit Goera. Lightning is caused by the flashing of the sword by Goera. Goera formerly lived on earth and slew a monster pig as big as a mountain. But afterwards he ascended to the skies and now amuses himself from time to time in martial exercises with the sword. Thunder is the noise he makes when thus taking exercises with his sword.

There are two versions of the story of the causes of earthquake. According to one version, the earth is a flat square body suspended from the sky by four ropes, one at each corner. Four blind men were deputed to watch each rope armed with long bamboos to frighten the squirrels. Occasionally the watchers being tired felt sleepy and neglected their duty. Meanwhile the squirrels begin to gnaw the rope, causing the rope to slacken and shakes the earth.

The other version is that, the earth is supported on four legs like a table, and a mouse running up and down along it, causes the earth to move.

The evil spirit called Mawang is believed to be the one who causes eclipses. The Mawang is said to swallow the sun and
the moon, and hence the eclipses. Thus whenever eclipses take place, drums are beaten and horns blown to frighten the evil spirit nawang away.

Whenever there is the impending danger of a severe storm, the malefolk of a house come out with a sword or a dao in his hand and goes through the action of chopping the air and driving it away by their shrieks and shouts.

**Salgrua sacrifice or wachi krita:** Wachi krita or salgrua sacrifice is performed to invoke the rain-god in cases of long continued drought. A separate spot is set aside for this purpose by a village. All the male members of the village go to this place taking a gourd of water in their hands. The priest then recites a prayer to implore the god to have mercy on them. This is followed by a goat sacrifice whose blood is smeared around the spot of sacrifice. The assembled persons then pour out the water from the gourds over the priest to the accompaniment of beating of drums and blowing of musical instruments.

**Salak so'a ceremony:** Whenever there is continuous and excessive rain, and sunshine is required, the salak so'a ceremony or burning of the sun ceremony is performed. In this ceremony, the people of a village repair to a place set aside for the purpose and fires are lighted around it to bring about warmth and sunshine. Then a goat or a fowl is offered up as a sacrifice to the spirit responsible for this natural calamity. The spot set aside for these ceremonies is considered sacred by them and no man may ever cultivate or cut down anything from and near it except under a heavy fine or punishment. 59.

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59. Sangma, B. K., Karo Folklore, part III, pp. 35-40; also vide Playfair, The Jaros, pp. 67-69.
Ancestor worship: One very important aspect of Garo religion is the great reverence shown for ancestors and for the dead persons. These are clearly indicated in their funeral observances, like the placing of food for the spirits, the erection of shrines for the temporary sepulchre of the bones and the curving of the memorial posts. Save and except these practices, there is no element of ancestor worship in their religious and funeral observances. There is no deification or sacrifices offered to them. On the other hand, they are very much afraid of the appearance of the dead person's ghost, but they happily look forward to their re-incarnation after a period of penance in the spirit world.

60. Playfair, The Garos, p. 87.
The Garos are mainly agriculturists. They live jhum cultivation. Therefore, it is but natural that they attach great importance to the worship of the presiding deities which control the seasons and upon whose good offices the growth of the crops depends. These annual festivals are celebrated so as to preserve harmony with the spirits which rule every stage and season of jhum cultivation. Thus they coordinate the agricultural activities of the people, marking out significant stages in the annual cycle, providing also at the same time, occasions for the most joyous celebrations of the year. They celebrate these festivals most joyously but with due solemnity.

All these festivals consist of two parts, namely religious and social. The religious functions of the festival are first completed. It consists in the worship of the various deities and the spirits having special relations respectively with the individual and the village. Then the social side of the festival begins, which consists of feasts, music and dancing.

The following are the annual socio-religious festivals celebrated by them:-

(i) O'pata ceremony: The annual cycle of the socio-religious ceremonies and festivals begins with the O'pata ceremony (O'pata literally means, to clear a little). Before a man decides to clear and cultivate a plot of land, he consults the omen in the following way. A little of a portion of a plot of land in one corner is cleared after which he consults the deity by chanting rituals. Then he goes home. At night should he dream a bad or unlucky dream, he abandons the land and looks for another plot of land where the omens are more favourable.
This ceremony is performed by every individual but no festivities are held.

(11) Den'bilsia festival: Literally, "Den" means "cut," and "bils" means "year." This festival marks the completion of the clearing of the new jhum field. It is celebrated sometime in January or early February, as soon as the clearing of the jungle is over. The concerned deity is invoked to bless the new field. It is held at the house of the Nokma and lasts only one day.

In the morning of this festival day, the villagers gather together in the Nokma's house to build an elaborate altar and complete it before midday. At about midday, the Nokma sacrifices a goat at the altar invoking the help of the deities for the luxuriant growth of the crops. This is followed by a community feast where most of the villagers join in the afternoon. After the feast, the men beat gongs and one by one, some of them dance with the sword inside the Nokma's house. Sometimes and in some places, eating, drinking, and dancing continue till late at night.

(iii) a'siroka: Most of the Garos cultivate the same jhum land for another year along with the new one. This particular festival is celebrated in connection with the planting of rice and other crops in the old jhum fields. Literally, it means the clearing of the ground and it is celebrated after the clearing of the jungles in the old fields.

It is performed in order to inaugurate the planting of crops invoking the aid of deities for bringing rains and sunshine in proper times.

01. Playfair, The Garos, p.93.
02. Burling, Robbins, Rengsangri, p.66.
The festival begins with the slaughter of a cow purchased jointly by all the villagers and the distribution of its meat. This is followed by a sacrifice offered by the lokma of the village. Following this, is the day of rest and no one is allowed to go to the fields. The main ceremony begins on the next day when each person sacrifices an egg and the richer people sacrifice a fowl or a pig and call upon Saljong (the sun-god) to witness the sacrifice and bless the planting of rice and other crops. Less wealthy people who can not afford to perform their sacrifices, however, attend the sacrifices offered by the rich people and join them in their dinner. The following day is again the day of rest after which all the people of the village attend to their work in the old fields and start planting of rice and other crops.

In the course of the observances of this festival, dance performances are also given by the unmarried young men and women.

(iv) agalmaka: Literally, it means the clearing of the unburned materials after the felled jungles have been burnt down. This is performed just after the burning of the new fields. This ceremony is also performed in order to invoke the aid of the deity to bless the new jhum fields. Every family performs this ceremony individually in their own fields. On the morning after the fire, each family sacrifices an egg and the lokma sacrifices a fowl for the luxurious growth of the jhum crops. This is followed by the scattering and sowing of seeds. After the sowing is completed, everyone returns to the village and

in the afternoon all of them drink and feast in the house of the nokma. After that the elderly people visit all the houses of the village during the day, eating and drinking in every house they visit while the younger folks visit them at night. Every one of them eats, drinks and dances continuously for several days and nights.

(v) **Mi amua:** "Mi" means "rice" and "amua" means "sacrifice". This ceremony is performed so as to ensure the good harvests. It is usually performed by the end of June or by early July, after the rice has grown tall but has not yet started to ripen. The nokma sacrifices a big pig in his own field invoking god's blessing upon the crops and the villagers gather there to help him prepare and share the feast. In the afternoon they return to the nokma's house in the village and play music with gong, flutes and buffalo horns but they do not dance. The ceremony lasts for only one day.

(vi) **Rongchu Gala or Ginde gala:** This is the thanks-giving offering ceremony of the first fruits to the gods. They believe that before any of the crops is harvested, it is necessary to offer the first fruits to the gods and hence this festival. "Rongchu" is a flattened rice, "Ginde" is a powdered rice and "Gala" means to throw away. The offering consists of flattened rice or powdered rice prepared from new paddy or millet and the nokma offers them on the banana leaves at the spot prepared for the purpose. Other articles of offerings are lime fruits and sugarcanes which are cut into pieces.

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64. Burling, Robbins, Mengsangri, Rp. 08-09;
65. Ibid. r.09.
are sprinkled with rice beer. This is followed by eating, drinking and playing of gongs at every house of the village, but they do not dance. Rice and dried fish are considered proper food during this festival.

(vii) *Ahaia*: (Ahaia is a way of shouting). This ceremony is performed in order to thank their gods for the harvests. On this occasion, the youngfolk shout in a peculiar way called Ahaia. This ceremony usually comes in September after the harvest of rice has been completed. Every household cooks fish, dried fish, crab or fowl and offer them to the gods. After the sacrifices and rituals are over, they make rounds of the village, eating, drinking, playing music and dancing at every house of the village. This kind of amusement continues for many days.

They can dance during this festival but they can not do so at the earlier festivals because it is improper to beat the drums while the rice is growing and without drums dancing is not possible.

(viii) *Wangala*: This is the biggest of all the festivals of the Garos performed in connection with the Jhum cultivation. It is usually held in October and so sometimes it synchronises with the Burja puja, but each village sets its own time and so there are two or three weeks during which Wangala is celebrated in one or other villages. The festival of a single village lasts about a week.

After the harvest is well-finished, they celebrate this festival with great pomp and grandeur. This festival is...
observed to honour and offer sacrifices to their greatest god called Saljong (the sun-god), and to seek its blessing for the future. This festival is celebrated by all sections of the Taros except a small section called the Duals and the plain Taros. The plain Taros instead celebrate what is known as Gure wata festival (Gure means horse and wata means to make). In this Gure wata festival, an image of a horse is made out of straws and the horse being led by a priest, the villagers dance along with the horse for about three days and two nights. When it is over, the horse is taken to a stream and the body thrown into the water, the head being reserved for another year.

A day is fixed by the village to give ample time to everyone to make elaborate preparations. So hectic preparations are on the way long before the festival day. The best cows are purchased from the market, ornaments, new clothes and other necessaries are brought for the occasion. Some people repair their houses to accommodate guests and visitors. On the preceding day of the Wangala festival the village is busy with the slaughter of cows and in the distribution of its meat. Liquors have already been prepared in large quantity and are kept ready for the morrow.

The festival begins in the evening in the bachelors’ house where the young men act as hosts to all the villagers. Rice beer, rice and beef curry are served by the bachelors to the whole crowd. This is followed first by a few dances which are only the preliminary of what is to come on the following day.

69. Playfair, The Daros, pp. 94-96.
70. Choudhury, B. A., Some cultural and Linguistic Aspects of the Jars, p. 27.
71. Burling, Robbins, Nengsangri, pp. 63-64.
The actual festival begins on the next day with the "Chu Rugala" ceremony (Chu-Liquor, and Rugala-pour out), but before the actual pouring out of liquor ceremony is performed, worship of the various deities and spirits are made first in the house of the nokma, in the house of the Priest and then in the houses of other villagers.

Rongdik Mite: (Rongdik-big earthen pot, and Mite-spirit). This is a female spirit and the worship is made in the presence of women. The spirit resides in the pot in which rice is kept and the conception of this deity is similar to that of the Hindu goddess 'Lakshmi'. In the evening, the Kamal (Priest) comes and a cotton thread is tied round the neck of the rice-pot with three lumps of cotton hanging round it. After that the priest invokes the spirit with incantations within the room, and sacrifices three hens with a dao in front of the pot. The blood is sprinkled all over the pot and on the cotton lumps, and the feathers are tied to the pot.

This is the goddess of wealth among the Garos and is particularly revered by the ladies. The women also have a special claim to worship her. Here there is a similarity with the practice of the Hindus whose guardian of wealth is the goddess 'Lakshmi' regarded as the special goddess of the ladies.

Nokni Mite or Pakmana Do'tata: Nokni Mite means the spirit of the house (cock-house, and Mite-spirit), and Pakmana Do'tata means the front wall of the house where sacrifice is made (rakma-wall, Do-Cock, and tata-sacrifice). After finishing the worship of the Rongdik Mite, the priest comes before the front wall of the house. Here he first worships the spirit of the house and then sacrifices one red cock. The blood and the feathers are scattered all over the wall.
Krongna vo'tata: Next in importance is the Krongna do'tata or the sacrifice of the sacred post. Near the seat of the spirit of the house is the sacred post. Here the priest after the worship of the house-spirit sacrifices a hen and the post is covered with blood and feathers of the hen.

Kram vo'tata: Next comes the Kram do'tata or the sacrifice to the Kram or drum. The priest is taken to the place where the drum is hanging within the room and here he sacrifices a cock or a hen and smears the blood and sticks the feathers on it.

Akoma, niwe vo'tata: After this, Akoma, niwe do'tata or the sacrifice to the gong and the bell is made. The gong and the bell are kept at the foot of the 'maljuri' or the main post of the house. Here the priest first worships all the iron implements of the house and the gong and the bell. After that he sacrifices a cock or a hen.

Nagra vo'tata: It means the sacrifice to the flat drum. A hen is sacrificed in front of it and the blood and the feathers are put on it.

Amb'ke vo'tata: It means the sacrifice to the crab. The front verandah of the house to which the stairs lead is the place where they keep ginger plants, taro plants and many other wild plants and at the foot of the post of the verandah, all old implements of agriculture are laid out. They also put cooked rice and a soup with one kind of fish near the post. The priest comes to this place after muttering some queer incantations, and sacrifices two crabs and leaves ten or twelve crabs within the house.

When the worship of these spirits is over in the house of the Lokma, the actual 'Chu Ruhala' or 'pouring out' of liquor ceremony begins. With the beating of the drums and gongs and playing of musical instruments, liquor is poured out on all the
places where worship has been made. The Nokma then brings a pot of liquor prepared for the occasion and offers a glass of it to the priest. After the priest has drunk, all persons of the village are allowed to drink and the entire quantity of drink required is supplied by the Nokma. The women and children are not debarred from joining in this festival and they also drink liquor after the male members of the village have drunk.

When the drinking is over, the priest wears a traditional male dress called 'Gando' (a small cotton cloth), the turban, a ring of bell metal at elbows and a ring of bell metal at the wrist. Dressing himself in this fashion he first dances round the fireplace inside the house of the Nokma and after him the Nokma dresses himself in the same fashion and dances after him. After this, all villagers are allowed to dance till a late hour at night.

After the dance, a ceremony known as "wanchi" is performed. It begins with paddy being pounded, and a quantity of water being mixed with it. This white liquid is then distributed to all present in the house of the Nokma. When this is over, the women dress themselves in their best attire and dance for the first time in the house of the Nokma.

After this, the priest takes all persons of the village to his house to worship the three spirits, namely,mongdik Do'tata, Pakmana Do'tata and Krong Do'tata. These three spirits are worshipped and three hens are sacrificed to them in the same manner as described above, after which dancing follows. The "wanchi" ceremony is then performed and after the women dance there. After finishing the worship in his house, the priest with all the men of the village goes to each house of the village and at each house the priest performs mongdik Do'tata and sacrifices a hen. The wanchi
ceremony and the dancing follow in the same manner as already described. Sometimes the worship of nongdik lo'tata is not finished in one night in all the houses of the village. In such a case, on the next night it is continued in the remaining houses. This worship can not be performed at day time.

At dawn all the villagers again assemble in the house of the nokma and a feast is arranged by him with pig, hen and rice beer and the villagers are fed sumptuously by the nokma. After the feast, the "Sasat Soa" ceremony (burning of incense) is performed. First, the priest takes a piece of sasat or incense and goes near the Maljuri post where all the jhum products and the agricultural implements are collected and burns the incense with queer incantations. The idea of worshipping the sasat is that according to Garo cosmology, God first made the sasat tree and after it all other trees were made. Therefore, they annually worship this tree and in each worship sasat forms an important ingredient. After the worship of sasat, it is burnt in all other places where ceremonial rites have been performed earlier.

After the worship of sasat, the people assemble in the court-yard to dance, but before this dance, they are not allowed to dance outside. Here the people dance for sometime and then they go to the house of the priest who offers to all persons plenty of drink. Then again, all the men of the village assemble in the courtyard of the nokma and spend days and nights with songs and dances with unceasing supply of drink by the nokma, and march from house to house until the entire village is covered.

Wangala is one of the many festivals at which group dancing takes place. Both married and unmarried male and female take part in the dances. Group dancing is almost exclusively a night pastime and continue until dawn. Group of girls always dance more or less opposed to group of boys, though they pair off now and then temporarily. During this festival, the boys and girls associate far more freely than on ordinary days, sitting together during the breaks between dances and passing round rice beer, betel nuts and tobacco. It is an occasion for the telling of stories, especially the competitive stories in which two people alternately chant, each trying to outdo the other in the cleverness and obscurity of his phraseology, to the amusement of all bystanders.

This festival is also used as an occasion for selecting brides and bridegrooms. When all the rice beer is exhausted, the celebration comes to an end. By that time most people are ready to go back to the work of tending the fields that have been neglected for a week or so. A few enthusiasts, however, troop off to another village to get in a few more days of dancing and drinking, but most of the people return to their daily activities until the next festival comes round.

(ix) Rusrota Ceremony: This is the last ceremony associated with the jhum cultivation. The plain Garos call this ceremony as Jakara. This ceremony is celebrated for the safe-custody of the crops in the granaries. As usual, after the sacrifices are over, drinking and eating take place which last only for a day, with the observance of this ceremony, the jhum year of the Garos comes to an end.

The Garos thoroughly enjoy these festivals. They look forward to them eagerly and remember them with pleasure. However, these festivals are observed only by the Garo animists. The Christians do not observe them. The Garo Christians, on the other hand, observe all the Christian festivals.

It may be mentioned that even among the Garo animists the enthusiasm and zeal with which they celebrated in the past is waning year after year. Many of them today observe only some of festivals mentioned above, and even that with less enthusiasm and interest. The changes can be ascribed to the influence of Christianity, various economic schemes introduced by the government, thereby destroying their traditional mode of life and their deteriorating economic conditions.

(x) A'songtata ceremony: besides the sacrifices for individual cases of illness and other socio-religious festivals, there are certain ceremonies which are observed annually by a whole community or village. This is known as A'songtata ceremony. This is observed in order to safeguard its members from dangers of the forests, and from sickness and mishap during the coming year. The ceremony takes place at a place set aside for the purpose. Close to the outskirts of every big village a number of stones is noticed which are stuck into the ground without any order or method. These are known as A'song, and on them is offered the sacrifice which the A'songtata demands. The sacrifice of a goat takes place, and a month later, that of a langur or a bamboo rat is considered necessary. The animal chosen has a rope fastened round its neck and is led by two men to every house in the village.
It is taken inside each house in turn. In the meantime, the assembled villagers, beating the walls from outside frighten and drive out any evil spirits which may have taken up their residence within. The round of the village having been made in this manner, the monkey or rat is led to the outskirts of the village, killed by a blow of a dao, which embowels it and then crucified on bamboos set up in the ground. Round the crucified animal, long and sharp stakes are placed, which form chevaux de frise round about it. These commemorate the days when such defences surrounded the villages on all sides to keep off human enemies, and they are now a symbol to ward off sickness and dangers to life from the wild animals of the forest, and mishap during the coming year.

75. Playfair, The Garos, pp. 92-93.
Birth Ceremony: There are mainly two ways of observing the ceremony connected with the birth of a child, that is, the one observed by the A'kawe and the other by the am'beng division of the tribe. The other Caros follow one or the other pattern with little variations in details.

According to the ceremony common among the A'kawes, as soon as a child is born, an animal or a fowl is killed by the priest while reciting a long incantation to avert the influence of evil spirits. Rice is also scattered on the floor of the house around child and a chant kept up, of which the following is the translation: "Go away, Go away, evil spirit; in the way of the Na'na, of the Na'sa, of the Banggni, and of the Giljare; do not stand watching, do not prevent it, do not wait for it, do not smack your lips, do not let your mouth water". The names mentioned above are those of fish, and they are intended as symbols for the child which is about to enter the world. If the labour is of long duration, a goat is brought into the house and its body placed in contact with that of the woman. At the same time, the priest takes a little water in his mouth, blows it in a fine spray over the woman and utters the word "Boisrang" meaning "good luck".

According to the custom of the am'bengs, a goat is brought into the house, some hairs are plucked from its body and burnt close to the woman. The goat is then lifted up and promised in sacrifice to the spirit who is afflicting the woman if he stops troubling her.

At the time of birth, the omens are often consulted to ascertain whether the infant will be prosperous and happy. A fowl is killed and its intestines are pulled out. They are divided into
two parts, and the priest holds them up before him. That part which is to the right belongs to the child and that to the left to the spirit. If the right hand portion be of digested food, and a little larger than the other, the omen is good and the child will grow up into a prosperous man or woman.

Naming a Child: Most of the Garos do not observe any ceremony in connection with naming of the children. The Ambengs, however, have a custom, though it may not be followed by all. Among them, names are given on the day of birth but usually it is done after three weeks or a month. The name given is given to the child while the priest offers sacrifices to Tongpengma, the guardian spirit of all children. This is inevitably followed by feasts and drinking.

The names of ancestors are given in many cases, but the names of living relatives or one who died recently, is never given, for they think that it is unlucky to mention the name of those relatives who died lately.

The Christians never observed these ceremonies. Even among the animists, these ceremonies are rarely observed these days.

Religious Ceremonies attending marriage: There is hardly any element of religion in the 3aro marriages. No sacrifices are made to any spirit during the ceremony and no rituals recited. The only approach to anything of a religious nature is the consulting of omens by the priest to ascertain whether the couple will be happy or not.

The official and the recognised form of varo marriage is called Do'sia. Literally, it means the killing of the bird (wo means Bird, and sia means kill or die). In the presence of the bride and the groom and the audience, the priest takes a cock and a hen, holds them up so that their heads are close together, and strikes them with a piece of wood. Then they are dropped on the ground 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 the beaks apart, it is bad and it is considered that the marriage will be an unhappy one.

The Am'bengs follow a slightly different method in consulting the omen. According to their practice, the priest takes the hen either by the legs or wings and strikes the woman on the back with the bird. The back of the groom is also struck by a cock. Then the priest holds the two birds together and with one effort pulls off both heads and throws them on the ground. If it is to be a good omen, the beak of the cock should as it lies on the ground, point towards the woman and that of the hen towards the man.

This is followed by a ceremony called Do'biknia. This is another way of consulting omen. (wo means Bird, and bik means intestine, and nia means to examine). This is the ceremony when the
priest examines the intestines of the bird to know the omen of the marrying couple. In this ceremony, the priest makes an incision in the stomach of one of the birds and draws out the large intestines and holds them out before him. If they hang together, the omen is good but if they are apart, divorce or death is portended. If the intestines are full of digested food, the couple will be rich, if empty, they will be poor.

Another form of this ceremony is the one performed by the Hokmas to know if his future son-in-law will be a lucky one or not. A goat or a cow is killed and the gall-bladder is taken out. If the bladder be full of liquid, it is believed that the youngman will become rich and prosperous.

These ceremonies are usually followed by feasting, dancing and drinking. The Christians conduct their marriage ceremonies in accordance with the Christian manuals.

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The Caros usually burn their dead and the cremation takes place at night. But there are some exceptions to this rule. For example, a leper is not burnt but buried. In olden days, the lepers were isolated in a hut and in the last stages of the diseases, he and the hut were burnt down. Again, if a man suffers from an incurable disease, he would be left at the far away forest with some rice and a few utensils. When the food is finished he was left to die of starvation.

A person who is killed by a tiger is cremated but cremation takes place in the day time. Moreover, the dead body will not be taken into the village but is cremated at the place where he was found. Besides, no funeral rites will be recited for him and all his belongings will be destroyed as they consider that it is taboo to make use of them after such an unnatural death.

When a person dies, the relations are all informed of it. If the relatives of the deceased live nearby, then the cremation takes place immediately, but if the relatives live at distant places then the dead body is kept undisposed for two or three days though the body begins to decompose. Before cremation, the dead body is placed among a row of gongs and other valuables if he is rich but the corpse of a poor man is laid upon the bamboo floor. The body is then washed with undiluted liquor if he is rich, but if he is poor with water.

The corpse having thus laid out, is kept undisposed for about two days and a night and then cremation takes place. During this period, the women of the family along with the priest keep watch over the dead body. These keep up an almost unceasing dirge which consists of a recital of the good deeds and qualities of the deceased, and of a prayer that his spirit may be taken safely to its appointed place. Usually the wailing of the women contains also an invocation to Megam-Airipa, the first man who died. They also warn the spirit of the dead person to beware of Nawang (the evil spirit) and of the dangers on the road to Chit-mang and to return to his mother's house when released from the spirit land.

Among the A'kawes, there is a custom for the relations of the deceased to march in procession from the house of the dead person to the house of his mother before cremation. The A'mbens on the other hand, have the custom for the relations to place the corpse on the funeral pyre and then march in procession round it, the nearest relation holding a bunch of cock's feathers in his hand. They then move off to the house of the deceased mother of the deceased and place the feathers on the kima or the memorial post, or lay them in the house until the kima is curved. In the course of the procession, horns are blown, drums and gongs are beaten as is usual on all solemn occasions. Liquors play an important item on such occasions. The underlying meaning of this practice is that the spirit of the deceased is shown that it should come back to its mother's house. This ceremony is known as Ja'ragata or the bringing home of the spirit.

When all relations and friends have arrived and assembled at the house of the deceased, preparations for cremation commence. A funeral pyre called Ganchi is erected in front of,
and close to the house of the deceased. The pyre consists of four upright wooden or bamboo posts in a rectangular shape within which logs of wood are piled.

In ancient days, if the deceased is a rich man, the pyre is adorned with cloth and flowers and the head of an animal or even of a human victim. These are burnt along with the dead man. If at a cremation, the body does not burn properly, it is believed that the hawang has got hold of the spirit of the deceased and some brass earrings are thrown on the fire as offerings to induce him to release it.

The favourite wood for burning a body is that of the mandal tree (Erythrina suberosa). It is believed that if the corpse is burned with bad wood, the spirit in its re-incarnation will have bad health. The burning of the body with simul or tree cotton is believed to bring bad luck to the spirit; boldak tree (Schima walichii) causes itching and irritation to the spirit; the agatchi tree (Uilennis pentagyna) causes sorrows and tears for it is full of water or sap. A hard wood is preferred as it is thought that the flame of which is a greater help to the spirit than the soft one. But in reality, all woods are used without distinction.

Near the cremation place, a bull is kept tethered to a post called Gilmirong, and when the last part of the body is about to be consumed by the fire, the animal is killed so that its spirit may accompany that of the dead person and be of service to it in the next world.

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81. Playfair, the Garos, pp. 107-109.
Sometimes, the relatives of the deceased bring several animals which are made to fight before being sacrificed. In some parts, a dog is burnt along with the corpse as it is supposed to guide the spirit to the spirit world. In olden days, a living slave is tied to the leg of the corpse from the hour of its death till cremation after which the slave is released from further servitude.

**Post-Cremation Ceremony:** After the cremation is completed, the bones that remain amidst the ashes are collected. The ashes are also collected in a basket and left in the jungle. The bones are disposed of in a variety of ways. Among the A'kawes, the bones are collected in a pot which they wrap up in a cloth and place on a Sekrek, a cone-shaped support made of bamboo. This is then tied to the Maljuri post (central post) of the deceased's house. Daily oblations are offered to the bones until the post-cremation ceremony is performed.

The Am'bengs and the Chisaks also collect the bones in the same way, which, however, is buried in the earth outside the deceased's house. Over the pot, a small shrine is erected called [elang. The elang or shrine is an enclosure made of bamboo, sometimes with earth and covered by a canopy of white cloth. Oblations are offered before the elang daily for a month. Oblations consist of rice, curry, liquor and are offered for the pleasure and emancipation of the soul.

About two months after the cremation ceremony, the second ceremony takes place. Among the A'kawes, the pot is brought out of the house and taken to a place where preparations have

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been made for feasting and dancing. The bones are distributed among some of the female relatives of the deceased, who carry them and dance during the entire celebrations. Finally, the bones are taken to the jungle and buried there.

Among the Am'bens, the feasting and dancing take place in the same way as described above, after which the Belang is set on fire but the bones are not taken out. The Atongs, like Am'bens, bury the bones of the dead and erect a Belang over them, but for the second ceremony, they dig up the bones and dance with them like the A'kawes. The Hugas and the Chiboks also burn their dead and bury the bones like the Am'bens but instead of erecting Belang, they cover them over with a winnowing-tray made of bamboo. By the side of this a long bamboo is struck into the ground to which a strip of white cloth is attached, which flaps in the air. Offerings of food are made to this like other Garos. When the time comes for post-funeral ceremony, the women put on peculiar silver ear ornaments called Fenta and a solemn dance is performed in memory of the dead. When this ceremony is over, the bamboo-tray is burnt but the bones are not disturbed.

The Chiboks slightly differ from the Hugas in details in the post-funeral ceremony. For example, after the cremation has been completed, the bones and the ashes are collected and thrown away. A Gelek or small round stool is made of bamboo and placed at the foot of the Haljuri post in the deceased's house. The object of this is to provide a seat for the spirit in case it returns. For the second ceremony, four bamboos are set up so as to mark out a square. A fowl is killed and its blood is smeared on the bamboos. Ornaments and other valuables are hung up between the posts where stool is placed in the middle of the square after which the whole collections are set on fire. Both after the
cremation and after the post-funeral ceremony, the Chiboks plant a branch of the Mandal tree (Erythrina Suberosa) by the side of the principal path to the village. To this branch are fastened the horns of the bulls sacrificed. The branch easily takes root and the result of several deaths in a Chibok village would be the planting of an avenue of mandal tree in its outskirts.

This post-funeral ceremony mentioned above is called Delang So'a (Delang means shrine, and So'a means to burn) by the Am'bens and Kangona or Kangroa by the other Garos.

Besides the above, there is one more form of funeral ceremony called Nolma dea. It is sometimes observed by the A'kawes and the Chisaks and is said to be of Habha origin. The main feature of this form is dancing with the bones of the deceased and drinking. The frontal bone is said to be specially preserved for this ceremony as is the custom of the hill Kacharis.

The Christians, however, do not burn their dead. They bury them and the funeral ceremony is performed according to the Christian practices.

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64. Rayfair, The Garos, pp. 110-112.
The Garo animists have a priest called Kamal, but the priesthood is not hereditary, nor does it confine to a particular division of the tribe or a clan. Anyone can become a Kamal who knows enough of the traditions, able to name the particular god who should be appeased on different occasions, and the nature of the sacrifice to be offered. He should also be able to chant the necessary string of obscure words and incantations at the time of sacrifices and worship.

It is the duty of the priest to perform certain rites at the ceremonies of naming a child, weddings, funerals and at the investiture of Chiefs. But his principal importance is derived from his ministration in times of sickness.

In spite of the multifarious works he has to attend to, the Kamals are paid very little remuneration. He does not enjoy any special privileges either. In fact, he is not different in any way from that of his neighbours. Like his co-villagers, he works in his jhumland, plant crops and perform all other domestic works for the sustenance of his family. Over and above his family duties only does he render his services as a priest for his co-villagers. As such, the post of a Kamal is not an enviable one. Yet every village has its Kamal, without whom the normal village life is not possible.

The Christian villages, however, have their own organized Churches and Christian priests.

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The Kimas are the memorial posts or the statues erected in front of a dead person's house. They are erected by all the sections of the Garos except the nugas, Chiboks and the Christians. A Kima consists of wood carving in the semblance of the dead man or woman and they are erected as soon as possible after the cremation. They are usually from two to four feet tall. In villages where there is no artist of sufficient skill to carve a human face, two posts with notches are made and erected. When the face is carved, it is customary to adorn the figure with some of the deceased's wearing apparel and ornaments. Brass vessel is often broken and set up upon a stick beside the Kima.

These Kimas are a pathetic sight, especially when the epidemic diseases like Kalaazar sweeps off a great number of people. Kimas are erected in memory of their friends and relatives besides their own family members. A number of Kimas tell the number of persons dead. Usually, in front of each house there is a row of these Kimas to indicate how many members of the family had fallen victim to the disease, but in some villages, Kimas are placed under the eaves of the house.

Nowadays, polished Kimas are erected with dresses like a living man or woman with a small cloth called Gando ma'kal, a half shirt, a towel and a stick in one of the hands and with shoes on the feet. All the necessaries of life including eatables were also placed near it. Thus a Kima keeps the memory of the dead before the family.

The custom of erecting the memorial posts is prevalent among the Garo animists even today. Such memorial posts are still common in their villages. The Christians, however, do not practise this custom.
Conclusions: The above is the Garo religion, their worship and their various festivals and ceremonies. It may be noted that all these vary from place to place. All the local variations have not been mentioned here, but since the variations occur only in details, the above can be said to represent the most popular religious beliefs and their observances. It may be also mentioned here that the Christians do not take part in any of these religious worships and observances. Even among the animists, the enthusiasm and zeal with which they worshipped before is fast disappearing. The factors contributing to this is the spread of Christianity, education, rapid economic changes and the use of modern medicines.

It is essential therefore, that the religion, its philosophy, its various forms of worship and sacrifices are recorded before they completely disappear from the scene.
B. Christianity.

David Scott's attempt to Christianize the Garos.

It was David Scott who first conceived the idea of Christianizing the Garos. He wanted to win them over through the spiritual force of Christianity and through the medium of schools. Therefore, as early as 1822, he was found corresponding with the Serampore Mission on the subject of appointment of a missionary to the Garos, but being unable to secure a missionary from Serampore, he wrote to his Agents in England asking them to send out suitable men. The Agents in England, however, asked Scott to consult the Bishop of Calcutta on this matter. Scott accordingly wrote to Bayley, Secretary to Government, asking permission to apply to the Bishop, saying, "I am satisfied that nothing permanently good can be obtained by other means, and that, if we do not interfere on behalf of the poor Garos, they will soon become Hindus or half-Hindus. I would greatly prefer two or more Moravian Missionaries who, along with religion would teach the useful arts. If the Government would ensure them subsistence only, I would be willing to take on myself the expense." Secretary Bayley sent a most encouraging letter in reply closing with the words, "I do not think the favourable opportunity for making this very interesting experiment should be lost." He also forwarded Scott's letter to the Bishop— with commendation of his own. Bishop Heber replied in a long and enthusiastic communication, containing a number of recommendations. But unfortunately, the Bishop died before anything further could be done for the Garos.

The next stage in the development of this subject was the submission of the whole matter for the consideration and orders of
the Right-Honourable the Governor-General-in-Council in 1826. The suggestions of the late Bishop and of David Scott were accepted and Mr. Valentine William Hurley was appointed School master of the Garo school to be established at Singimari, where forty Garo boys would be educated with the full support of the government. Hurley joined the school but soon resigned in utter dismay. Mr. Fermie was next appointed but died suddenly due to unhealthy climate. Thus the attempts of David Scott ended in smoke.

American Baptist Mission.

In 1847, the British Government started a School at Goalpara for the Garo boys, hoping thereby to gain some influence and control over the Garo tribe. Their purpose has been partially successful. Ten boys were brought into this school, two of whom - Omed and Kamkhe - were first converted to Christianity.

After their school in Goalpara, Omed and Kamkhe went to Gauhati and enlisted as sepoys. While in Gauhati they came under the influence of Kandura, a native Rastor, and were subsequently baptised on February 8, 1863, at the Sukherwar ghat in Gauhati. Eager to give the truth to their own people they obtained dismissal from Government service and returned to their own relatives. In 1867, they persuaded Dr. Bronson of Nowgong to visit them and their mission. Dr. Bronson came and baptised 37 converts and organised these, with the three already baptised, into a church, ordaining

Omed as their pastor. On his way back, Mr. Bronson bought a compound and a house for Rs. 800, at Goalpara. On reaching Gauhati and consulting Messrs. Stoddard and Comfort, it was decided to occupy Goalpara. The society approved and in October, 1867, Mr. and Mrs. Stoddards moved from Gauhati to Goalpara. Thus, the year 1867 was closed with a Church of forty members, an ordained native pastor, three other native assistants and two schools.

During the early part of 1868, Stoddard visited many Garo villages and baptised a good number. In March that year he visited Tura and anticipated a station there. After returning from Tura, he and Mrs. Stoddard attempted living at Damra so that they might have more direct supervision of the school there, which had now become the Training or Normal School for the mission, but they were driven back to Goalpara with bac fever. In 1870, the Lieutenant-Governor and the Chief Commissioner urged the removal of the Goalpara station to Tura. In 1871, Messrs. Stoddard, Comfort and Bronson visited Tura, chose a site for a compound, left a Christian teacher with two other boys from the normal school who were employed as vaccinators and who began to preach while on tours. At first, the people sought to turn them back, but when it was found that they were vaccinators, they were welcomed.

In 1872-73, the entire hills were annexed by the British and soon the whole territory was opened for mission work.

In 1876, the mission built a temporary House at Tura and in March, 1877, Mr. and Mrs. Phillips moved there. In the following May, six were baptised and soon after a Church of seven members was organised. With the occupation of Tura, the mission was so located as to begin extending its work into all parts of the hills.

The Government made over all the educational work with the whole grant-in-aid to the mission and in November, 1878, Rev. Mason who was still working from the Goalpara mission station gave that up and moved to Tura, for better prosecution of the work.

In January, 1879, Miss Russell came to Tura and soon opened a Girls' school there. In 1883, Mr. Burdette arrived at Tura and improved the Teachers' Training school, turning out better teachers than there had been. After his transfer to Gauhati in 1885, Thangkan Sangma, who had already spent two years in America, became the Headmaster of the Training School for two years. In 1886, Misses Bond and Mason arrived at Tura and worked in the Girls' school.

Thus, this brings us up to the Jubilee Conference in 1880 (American Baptist having come to Assam in 1836) with ten Churches; 862 members; 44 schools; 700 pupils and the Station school at Tura of which Phillips says, "237 have been in the school since it began, of whom all but 14 left unconverted, and six of these were Hindus. Of 237, 103 have been engaged in teaching or in religious work by the mission."

In 1889, Mason speaks of the expansion of the churches in the Garo hills. In reviewing their work he says that the Churches have made real progress. One new Church has been organised at Chotcholja. The people also have ordained a Pastor whom they supported by giving one-tenth of their rice harvest for church work. 37 have been added to this church by baptism since its organisation, and now numbers 102. They paid Rs.102 to their Pastor annually and contributed to the mission besides.

The Church at Derek which began in 1860 continued to grow and though they were inexperienced they have supported their

Castor and conducted their own church affairs. 106 have been added by baptism and they now number 262.

The church at Mesu which was organised in 1876, and where before 1080 numbered 122, has lost by death a good number, 30 by exclusions and some by removals.

The Tura church was composed of the largely scattered christians on the south of the hills and pupils in the station schools. There had been 216 baptisms, and there were altogether 179 members.

Nishangram, one of the oldest and the wealthiest and one of the strongest, has made true development. She has increased her contributions, and increased in membership, having baptised 177.

The members support their pastor and one evangelist with his helper and give from 4 to 6 rupees a month to their school teacher and contributes very largely to the High School.

Najasimla, the first church in the Garo hills, has added 57 by baptism but she can not be said to have developed much as a church. Kongkal church was reduced to 12 members, but the few remaining members worked faithfully and in the following year, they received 100 by baptism. Rongjuli church has dismissed 23 members who formed the Amjonga church. Adokgiri church held its own.

The Okapara church since its beginning in 1890, has added 56 by baptism, and numbered 83. The Baghmara church organised in 1892 has added 40 by baptism.

Thus, the 19th century was closed by a membership of 3631; 16 mother Churches and 80 branch churches; 105 mission run Lower Primary schools, with 1035 boys and 556 girls reading.

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7. Ibid., 1893.
10 mother Churches with their branches formed into three associations for the purpose of supporting evangelists and upbuilding each other. These three associations formed into one General Association which continued its evangelistic work, both at home and for the Daflas and in 1899, sent a young man with his wife, to assist Swanson in the Golaghat missionary field.

At the end of 1911, there were 17 organised churches with a total enrollment of 5314. In some parts of the hills, there seemed to have been earnest efforts to convert people. Backsliders have been reclaimed and members have been added in several heathen villages, new work has been opened up and converts have been gathered.

In 1926, 1039 converts were added to the church by baptism, making a total of 11,001 members and the number of the churches rose to 21 with 236 branch churches. One notable feature of the year 1926 was the 53rd annual Convention of the Garo Christians held at Okapara village. The other notable event was the evangelism among the Kala-zar hospital patients. In Tura, the government had a large Kala-zar hospital where 1500 Garos were treated every year. Most of the people who came to this hospital were non-Christian Garos. With the permission of the government they opened evangelistic services every Sunday afternoon and they went out from the hospital not only better physically but also better religiously.

In 1936, the number of the mother churches came up to 22, with a total membership of 10,000. Though the number of the churches and the members are steadily rising, the biggest drawback of

9. Ibid., 1913.
10. Ibid., 1927.
the mission is the lack of sufficient funds. This stood in the way of further carrying on the work of evangelism among the heathens.

In 1941, another milestone has been passed in the mark, in the mission work, as the church membership passed the 20,000 number representing a Christian community of more than 30,000. There were more than 2000 baptism during the year and the mother churches rose to 24 with 360 branch churches. The number of the unbaptised children of Christian parents was 6578 and 3246 non-Christians attending church services regularly. During the second world war, the number of Christians decreased and the churches fell short of active workers. This was mainly because many young Garo young men joined the war services in Porter corps, pioneer corps, armed police, the Assam regiment, medical corps, Transport and supply, Technician groups, signal corps, navy and air forces, etc.

In 1947, there were 27 mother churches with 375 branch churches and a membership of 20,988. In 1950, Golden Jubilee was celebrated at Rajasimla, the first among the Garo Churches. It was a time of remembrance and inspiration for the several thousands in attendance. In 1954, there were 29 mother churches with 460 branch churches. These mother and branch churches formed into four Associations or Krimas, and these four Associations or Krimas made up of one Garo Baptist Convention. There were 1448 baptisms during the year, bringing the total membership to over 24,000.

12. Ibid., 1941.
13. Ibid., 1943.
15. Ibid., 1950.
In 1964, the Garo Baptist Convention was composed of seven associations or Krimas. There were 14.0 mother churches and 713 branch churches. With the 3139 baptisms during the year, the total membership reached 40474.

The Garo Baptist Convention assumed a new dimension when in 1968, it admitted into its fold, the Garo Churches of the Kamrup district in Assam as one of its associations or Krimas. The Kamrup Garo Churches which so far formed a part of the Assamese Church with its headquarters at Guwahati, became a part of the Garo Baptist Convention.

The Garo Baptist Convention continued to gain more members, and more churches were founded and the Church statistics in 1973, shows the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association or Krina.</th>
<th>Mother Church</th>
<th>Branch Church</th>
<th>Male members</th>
<th>Female members</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>No. I</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>0,904</td>
<td>0,904</td>
<td>13900.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. II</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2,103</td>
<td>2,104</td>
<td>4207.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. III</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3,086</td>
<td>3,086</td>
<td>6172.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. IV</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>5,861</td>
<td>5,220</td>
<td>11147.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. V</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>2,211</td>
<td>4623.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. VI</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>4,044</td>
<td>4,043</td>
<td>8087.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. VII</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>1,921</td>
<td>3881.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. VIII</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>2,062</td>
<td>3946.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dainal Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>797</td>
<td>1594.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khasi Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>1101.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 70 1003 29050 29150 56600.

19. Ibid.
Other activities of the Mission.

Besides the propagation of the gospel, the mission societies directed their activities to other fields as well. Education and Literature: Education and Literature were taken up by the mission societies from their very inceptions. Without education and literature, gospel could not be communicated to the people, and as such, the aim and the policy of the missions were to make education and literature as chief handmaids to religion. Therefore, the missionaries opened schools in the villages and in Tura where the Teachers' Training School was run by them. In the village schools, both the boys and the girls read together, but in Tura, a separate school was opened for the girls which still continues till today.

In addition to the secular education, they also started the Bible school for training the people for pastors. They also started the Sunday schools for imparting knowledge of Bible and Christian theology.

The missionaries gave all the possible time to the translation of the Bible and the making of needed school books. A Garo monthly periodical which was started in 1879 still continues today.

Medical work: Medical work was also taken up by the mission in right earnest. Dr. and Mrs. G. G. Croziers were the first medical missionaries who came to Garo Hills in 1899. Dr. Crozier soon set up a small building made of bamboo for a Dispensary. Soon crowds were coming, patients were brought 3 or 4 days journey to Tura, and the greater need of the village was realised.

Dr. and Mrs. Crozier spent many months each year touring on foot and so began Mobile Medical work in the Garo Hills. Dr. Crozier soon saw the need of a hospital, and a small 15 bed hospital with dispensary was built in 1906. This building was replaced by a bigger building in 1956. Dr. Crozier was succeeded by Dr. Ahlquist in 1917. Several ladies from America came as nurses to this hospital. One of them was Miss A.V. Blakely who started Orphanage in Tura in 1921. In 1927, Dr. and Mrs. E.S. Downs came to work as missionary doctors in the Garo Hills and worked till 1907. The mission also other dispensaries in other places.

Industry: The American Baptist missionaries have also started a Cotton Ginning Industry at Tura, during the early stage of their work at Tura. This was taken up with a view to help the pupils to earn and study and to help the people in general. For some years, the cotton ginning paid for itself. Gins were sold to government in Simla, Calcutta and the Naga Hills. It was also sold to private parties in Cawnpore, Chittagong and Bengal. In 1990, Mr. Dring was sent from America to take charge of this industry. He worked for a few years after which he was transferred to other mission field. With his departure, the mission being unable to get another missionary worker, the industry has been closed down.

Agriculture: The American Baptist mission have also started model agricultural farms at various centres. The model farms paid for themselves and they are being continued till today by the local churches.

Printing Press: The American Baptist mission also bought a press and published a number of school text books. The Tura Donbosco still has a press and is doing useful works.

Besides, the mission gave financial helps to poor students.


A few Garos living in the south-eastern parts of Garo Hills, bordering Bangladesh, evinced some interests in the Roman Catholic Church, in the early thirties of this century. They came in contact with the Fathers and native evangelists of the Ranikong Roman Catholic mission of Hymensingh, bordering the Garo Hills. Weekly market at the border village of Baghmar in Garo Hills became the centre of proselytising the Garos of these areas. But the Ranikong mission could not start a mission there as it fell under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Assam, Shillong. The Bishop of Assam was therefore requested to open a centre at Baghmar and in other parts of Garo Hills. On receipt of this request, the Gauhati Roman Catholic Mission began to operate in the Garo areas of Kamrup and Goalpara districts bordering the Garo Hills as early as 1931-1932. Father Leo Piaseski, Father Marmal and Father Vincent Scuderei of the Gauhati Roman Catholic mission began to visit the Garo villages lying in the north-eastern parts of Garo Hills as early as 1932, and succeeded in establishing the first Roman Catholic Church at Chotcholja village in the same year. In this pioneering work, the Fathers were greatly helped by Sam Peter G. Monin, the first convert and the first catechist and evangelist, among the Garos. The second Garo catechist and a preacher was Samdong G. Monin of Kharkutta village. He was originally a Baptist but later became a Roman Catholic and a main pillar of the Roman Catholic church.

In spite of strong native support, the growing church demanded constant care and attention from the mission. In order to


Father Buccere was one of the early missionaries in Garo Hills.

meet these needs, a Roman Catholic Mission Centre was opened at Dhubri in 1932. Father Pianazzi and Father Rocca were the founders of this Mission Centre. From this Centre, they began to visit their churches in the northern parts of Garo Hills and to organise a Church at Baghmara, on the south-eastern part of Garo Hills. But Dhubri was also very far from the Garo Hills and no effective work could be done from such a far-flung place. Therefore, permission was asked from the D.C. of Garo Hills to open a Centre in Garo Hills. Their request to have a rest House at Tura was granted in 1933. This was a stepping-stone to the establishment of a Mission Centre which was soon founded. The present Roman Catholic Mission compound on the hill overlooking the Tura town was purchased for only Rs. 90 in 1933, with the help of some Garo leaders like Jobang D. Marak.

After Tura, Damra was opened next as a Centre in 1940. Damra was followed by Baghmara and Dalu centres in 1953 and 1959 respectively. Arben and Phukon Sangma were the first catechists and preachers of the Dalu mission Centre. Kongjeng was opened next in 1971 followed by Chokpot in the following year. Selsella, Tikirkilla and Resu centres were opened in 1973. In 1974, total membership in the Roman Catholic Church rose to forty five thousands.

Besides their church activities, the Roman Catholic Mission also promoted the growth of industrial and other technical skill among the Garos by the establishment of Donbosco both at Tura and at Damra. They also promoted education by establishing many Lower Primary, Middle English and High English schools in different parts of the Garo Hills district.

Thus, from a small beginning in 1933, the Roman Catholic church grew so rapidly that in 1973, Garo Hills was upgraded into a diocese of a Bishop.

25. As narrated by Father Buccere at Shillong on 24.5.1974.
The Seventh Day Adventist Church Mission.

The next Foreign Mission who came to Garo Hills was the Seventh Day Adventist. It first entered into the Garo Hills in 1954. It was K.K. Ghayan, a gentleman from Bengal who was a pioneer of this mission in the Garo Hills. He established the first mission centre at Majasimla, a village where the first Baptist Church was founded and from where the first Roman Catholic Garo convert hailed. The first Garo convert was Wallace Momin and the second was Grohonsing Marak. His contact with Ghayan led Grohonsing to join this mission as its preacher. Mr. Grohonsing Marak, who was already known as a good preacher and an organiser, soon raised the position and popularity of this mission in the Garo Hills amidst great opposition, by the followers of other Church denominations. Within a year or two, by dint of his eloquence and hard work, he was able to enroll into this mission a membership of about 400 Garos. Mission headquarters was built at Majasimla during 1955-56, which became the centre of diffusion of this new mission.

However, today, this mission did not play any longer the same important role as it was during the days of Grohonsing Marak. Membership did not rise up any more, and the members did not show up any more the same zeal and enthusiasm with which it began its work.

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As in other parts of India, the Garo society also felt the impact of Christianity and western civilizations at the beginning of the 19th century. The occupation of the Garo Hills by the British, the subsequent proselytizing works of the American Baptist missionaries followed by the Roman Catholics and the Seventh Day Adventists and the introduction of English education had direct influence upon the social customs and traditional beliefs of the Garos. Christianity had the most direct effect of them all. But while the impact of western culture and religion in Bengal and in other parts of India had resulted in organized reform movements, its cumulative effects on the Garos were somewhat different.

In the Garo Hills, the spread of Christianity and the introduction of western education did not lead to the re-valuing and reorganizing their traditional religion. At the same time, the core of their social customs and practices also remained unchanged, although some aspects of the Garo culture connected with their old religion were replaced by the new religion. The replacement was not demanded by Christianity itself, but the early missionaries and the Garo converts felt that certain aspects of their culture connected with animism should be given up. As a result, almost all the traditional arts of the Garos - their music, dancing, wood-curving, house-building, etc., have been replaced.

The traditional Garo socio-religious festivals have a ceremonial aspect. The climax is usually a sacrifice to the concerning deities. Christianity can hardly co-exist with sacrifices to the spirits, and as a result, the whole festival - music, dancing, feasting and merry-making is abandoned. The Christians, of course, substitute these by new activities. They have Church services on
Sundays, and prayer meetings and youth meetings on week days. They observe Sundays as days of rest, just as the Garo animists sometimes take days of rest in connection with their village festivals.

The non-Christians have several socio-religious festivals which they celebrate by dancing, feasting and drinking. The Christians have their own feast days, and on Christmas especially all Christians of a village usually take part in a community feast. The social gaiety in such feasts is not very much different from the non-Christian festivals, except that no rice-beer stimulates the Christian gaiety.

The American Baptist mission church had been rigid in its disapproval of alcohol, and so, if a Christian drinks as some of them do, he does it surreptitiously. Christians have substitute for rice-beer. Tea has become a symbol of Christian hospitality.

Christian hymns which are invariably of western tune form an obvious substitute for the traditional Garo music. Both of them are sung in praise of their God and both are vociferously enjoyed.

Bachelors' Barracks which are an inescapable institution in a traditional Garo village have been disappearing in the Christian villages, as that Institution is considered to be closely connected with their old religion. Now the problem have arisen so as to house the young boys at night. But this need was met by allowing them to sleep in their teacher's house. In many Christian villages, the school teacher's house becomes an informal substitute. His house, like the Bachelors' Barrack, becomes a centre for the activities of young boys and plays a parallel educational role in the village life.
Even the houses of Christians are generally constructed in different designs from those of the non-Christians. Christian houses are usually less long and narrow, and often have roofed porches of one kind or another, and much more varied than the traditional ones, whereas the traditional Garo houses are invariably long, narrow and of the same pattern.

Christians always cut their hair short while the non-Christians tie their hair in a knot at the back of the head. Christians never wear the traditional earrings and necklaces as these are connected with their old religion. As a man moves closer to Christianity, he usually sells his traditional heirlooms which his family possesses since these also have some connotation of the old religious system.

Christians no longer sacrifice since they are directed towards the curing of diseases. To cure their diseases, the Christians have resorted to other methods. All Garos make some use of jungle medicines, but Christians use them more consistently than the non-Christians. Moreover, Christians are more receptive to modern drugs than the non-Christians. We may not be happy at the loss of traditional dancing and music, especially, when it was replaced by the western hymns, but it is unrealistic to expect people who can recognise the value of modern drugs to retain unaltered their faith in sacrifices or in the spirits towards whom the sacrifices are directed.

Christians are more receptive to innovations than the non-Christians. This is true in the case of new agricultural techniques. Today, more Christians have taken to wet cultivation than the non-Christians, who though have followed their Christian brethren are still more attached to their traditional slash and burn method.
Christianity have also impinged upon the traditional rules of marriage and divorce. Christianity does not permit polygamy, whereas the non-christians can have more than one wife. Among the non-christians, the son-in-law who has been chosen to succeed to the estate have to marry their widowed mother-in-law, in order to complete the inheritance, whereas the christians no longer followed such traditional custom.

Negotiations for a marriage became different between the christians and the non-christians. Marriage by capture is no longer followed by the christians.

Christians solemnize their marriage at a ceremony involving a pastor, rings and traditional Christian vows, whereas the non-christians solemnize their marriage by the sacrifice of a fowl by the village priest.

Christian marriage is indissoluble as it is based on the word, "what God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Therefore, Christian divorce is encumbered with more serious problems than relatively simple divorce of non-christians. Christian marriages are governed by the Indian Christian Marriage Act, under which divorce can be obtained after undergoing court proceedings, but this will result in expulsion from the church.

Although Christianity and education brought about some changes in some aspects of the Garo social customs and practices, the basic culture remains unchanged.

Neither Christianity nor education nor new agricultural techniques has any impact upon kinship relations. Thus kinship remains one of the most durable aspects of Garo culture.

Laws of succession to the property by a daughter and the custom of bringing father's sister's son to marry the heiress still hold good. Marriage is still exogamous generally. Negotiations for marriage comes from the girl's side and the marriage is still
for marriage comes from the girl's side and the marriage is conducted in girl's village. Children still take the clan title of their mother, not of their father. Marriage is still matrilocal.

Family disputes are still settled by a joint meeting of the members of the whole mahari or clan, presided over by the seniormost maternal uncle. Thus, avuncular influence is still felt in the settlement of family matters and in the control of the children.

The same customary laws still govern them in the settlement of lands, property and other disputes, which are now decided in the Village court, failing which, appeal can be made to the higher courts.

Institution of nokma still continues. Of course, some adjustments had to be made with regard to the institution of nokma. Usually, nokmas are regarded as the ritual leaders and so if the nokma becomes a christian, someone else is entrusted with the task of performing the necessary rituals. Shifting of responsibility does not of course mean the change of nokmaship. The government invariably recognises the old nokma as his religion is irrelevant to his office.

Thus, we find that while the Garos have adjusted themselves to the challenges of the modern age, they have preserved the basis and the valuable aspects of their culture.