CHAPTER V
DEATH AND ASSOCIATED BELIEFS

Origin of Death

The most important occasion for a Gare is death of somebody in the village. Death, not only entails a series of rites but also entails a series of social duties and obligation. Unlike marriage where we find religion plays practically no part in death, religion is intricately linked with social aspect. So, we have attempted below to discuss about death in both these aspects social and religion. Gares admit the reality of death and face it with perfect calmness and with a cool mind whenever it comes. Death is the last moment of life where there is regret, sorrow and crying and wailing. In traditional Gare society, birth and marriage pass on easily with little or no financial involvement where as it is quite opposite with the funeral rites of the dead. Birth and marriage remain mere or less a family concern confined to a small circle while funeral ceremony demands the service of the community as a whole; the function also tells upon heavily on the family economy since it creates many future problems and social obligation to the aggrieved family. Traditional Gare religion has the elements of belief in the doctrine of immortality of the soul. Traditional religion holds the view that men were created by the almighty deity Katara-rabuga in the beginning to live an everlasting life. How then the death entered the human society? Gares have several alternative answers to such a
difficult question. With regard to the first entry of this most fearful enemy called death, slightly different views are heard in different regions but the basic principle of their belief is found to be same, that is, there was no death at the time of creation. Tradition has carried down such idea to the modern age that, man a part of nature knew no death in the beginning of humanity. A Garo saying goes ama mane kore pilde sie mesokiosk ukosa jarikiosk jarikiosk ukosa sningiosk meaning ama mane kore pilde showed the finality of death and it was thenceforth followed.

Another saying goes - Rokji an old woman and Ringkan the old man being tired of monotony and boredom of earthly life invited and challenged death in the manner as the objects of nature such as snake, grass and trees which meet temporary seasonal decay to regain their original freshness and vigour in the next spring. There is another popular tale which says - sometime in the olden days, the king of the spirits of the death left home telling his wife that he would be coming again after seven years and told her "rikborange nisobo, rikjalenge sengeobo". That means erect a small watch house and keep on waiting on its edge for his return. It is said that from such construction of a small watch house, the idea of delang (spirit house) is born. The departed husband actually came back after seven years but on reaching home, he could not find his wife. So he started back to the land of the dead, leaving some oranges to his children. A little later, his wife came and saw him going back and tried to call him again and again but the departing husband did not return home, rather, from a distance, he informed
his wife saying - 'I am not coming back, you may take my nephew for my daughter'. Since then, Garos followed the custom of bringing one's nephew as nokkrom (heir-son-in-law) for his heiress daughter.

In the beginning when death occurred, the creator and the sustainer and the presiding deity called all the objects of nature to discuss as to what should be done with the death and who could dispose of it. White ant was asked about it but it refused saying 'I am not capable of consuming the bones', after that, the opinion of fire was sought and it readily agreed to dispose of the dead. Thus, from that time onwards Garos cremate their dead bodies. Amongst the Garos following the traditional religion, the practice of both cremation and burial are going on side by side. At times, it is rather puzzling why such discrepancies exist among the same community. These days, in most cases, they are found going for burrial, perhaps they just want to avoid such complicated, expensive and time consuming process of cremation. It is also a fact that, within the same social group there appears some strong personalities having courage and boldness to break away from the old original practices in order to avoid unnecessary lingering and to do away with all sorts of social obligations.

In the present study it is proposed to touch some details of funeral rites connected mainly with the cremation. Garos love their fellow beings and they love more when they die. Sickness or bodily ailment is called saa or jomma. The word jomma appears to have been borrowed from the idea of yagya of Hinduism. When a man falls seriously ill and all attempts have failed to cure him and
there is little chance of survival, all relatives living far and
near are kept informed of the condition of the ailing person and
when the person actually dies all near kins are sent for at the
earliest opportunity.

Then, immediately after the expiry, the clothes of the
dead is changed, body laid on a mat covered by bara nok or
me' mang ba' ra a special kind of cloth meant for the purpose with
head towards Ghimang Hill, a hill which lies on the south eastern
corner of the Garo Hills. The thumb toes are tied together with a
piece of thread to keep the two legs properly and a live chicken is
tied to the toes with the same piece of thread. Home ginned cotton is
used as pillow, the face and the tip of the feet are kept open for
the viewers. Two eggs are boiled and sliced into two, rice is cooked
and wrapped in two packets in banana leaves and are kept near the
dead body. Some quantity of rice filled in a basket, a little quantity
of rongbret (perched rice) and a little quantity of rongehu
(flattened rice) are also set apart for the deceased. Coins are put on
the forehead and also in both the palms. Best available clothes are
used for covering the body of which some are burnt with the dead and
some are taken back and preserved. Few tufts of do'me (cook tails)
are put on the range (gongs) nearby for use by the women guarding
the dead body to dust off the flies etc. In case of elderly
person, these things are given to show the wealth and property earned
by the deceased. Soon after that, a cow is slaughtered by the chra
of the dead provided the deceased is a grown up man and also if the
person is an elderly one. In the event of the bereaved family being
unable to afford for a cow, atleast a fowl has to be killed for the departed soul. Supposing, an elderly and important Garo husband dies, the members belonging to the clan groups of the deceased person and his wife those are closely related will start chanting dirge with their heart-broken weeping, wailing and crying and only after that, other mourners might join in the *grop semanga* (weeping over the dead). All the elderly women then sit around by the side of the dead body guarding it day and night waiting for the arrival of all close relatives and continue to watch the body till it is taken out for cremation. The nature of duty performed by those women watching the dead body is styled as *meng-dongtima*. Male members are not found doing this job, the duty being exclusively of the female members. The first stage of funeral rites ends here.

The second stage of the ceremony comes on the day of cremation or burrial of the dead. Garos do not construct funeral fyre nor dig grave in advance but they do it on the right day and at the right time. At this time, members of the afflicted family should surmise and form an idea as to how many groups of visiting mourners could be possibly expected to attend the funeral ceremony. Thus, according to the traditional Garo social situation, such party or group of kins marching to the house of the deceased to pay their last homage to the departed soul in an organised ceremonial way is called by the Garos *mangrea*. Garos think it essential that as far as manageable, all the near relations should be present to have a last glimpse of the departed and as soon, it is usually observed that atleast one day and one night is the minimum duration for keeping the
dead body so as to enable the visiting relatives and other mourners to have a chance to pay their last look at the face of the deceased. Dalton (Dalton 1960, p. 251) gave a passing reference to Garo funeral ceremony by saying - 'The several clans have different customs; or customs may change. Dr. Latham yet quoting Mr. Eliot's says the death are kept for four days, then burnt'. But, nowhere amongst the Garos we find such a practice of retaining the dead body for such a long time. It seems, perhaps, the author might have confused the information with the practices of some other minor tribes living within the area surveyed other than that of the Garos. If at all death are kept for several days, it might be under certain peculiar circumstances such as unnatural death which involves some other social complications; otherwise, normally, body is not kept for more than minimum required duration as discussed earlier.

Mangrea

Immediately on receipt of the message of the death, all the near relations gather together and quick arrangement of the essentials are done. If of course, the family is capable to afford to organise such a mangrea programme. The custom demands one young bull or a cow and it is accordingly arranged; a cock is killed to have a divining from the sign of the entrails for reading omen of the intended programme and its flesh is cooked and eaten by the persons. Other items like, rice, salt, chilli and a jar of rice beer are kept in readiness. All the members of the party take food before
they move out. Cooked food and curry are carried for offering to the *me'mang* (spirit of the dead). The young bull or cow is then dressed with a red turban and a tuft of cock tails is stuck on the turban. All the participating members then march off carrying all the articles with the cow moving in front. They strike the Gongs and beat the *krem* and blow the *adil* (a trumpet made of buffalo horn) while walking silently in a lugubrious atmosphere all the way. If one could watch such procession of the mourners, he could find that the sight presents a very queer looking, heart rending and shocking picture. As they come nearer the house of the deceased, they strike the Gongs and beat the *krem* and blow the *adil* more intensely, perhaps to give the signal of their coming and similarly the awaiting mourners too keep on waiting for the approaching *mangrea* party with an active sound of *rang*, *krem* and *adil*. The meaning behind such term as *mangrea* according to Garos, is 'carrying some material wealth as a gift for the dead person and to pay him last homage and also to render advice, instruction and guidance for the departed soul if and as might be necessary'.

On arrival at the compound of the deceased, the *mangrea* party goes straight to the front yard and plant a pole of *mandal* (*erithrina suberosa*, *erithrina stricta*) carried with them at the *kiminda* (place for altars in general) and the party goes round the *mandal* pole so fixed by them and at the same time trying to find out suitable spot for raising *delang* (spirit house). After that, the persons specially the female relations carrying rice, rice bear etc. go inside the house and put all the articles brought by them near
the **ohusra** (king post and liquor centre) and make over cash contributions to the responsible member of the bereaved household and having thus met all the important members of the house, they move to the **nujuree** (the place where the body is laid) and sit close to the dead body and speak out their hearts with their loud lamentation and this being done, the first part of the **mangraa** programme ends.

Here again there is another interesting aspect which speaks of unusual behaviour of the visiting **ohra** relation of the **nok** usually comes with a sword in his hand and while entering the house through the main entrance he vigorously cuts the front wall through at the entry. Other **mangraa** groups and **ohra** relations will also act in the same manner. There may be a number of such organised **mangraa** depending on the importance of the dead person and the extent and economic condition of the related kins. One Garo male coming from an interior Ambeng Village told me that during his grand father's death there arrived about fifteen **mangraa** parties and he further cited another instance saying that still earlier, when the traditional religion was in full bloom, in his village, the older generation witnessed as many as forty such **mangraa** troops at the death of one village headman, that means, as many as forty **kraas** reached the place, such a large number of **kraas** fairly sufficient for use as ordinary **deemas** (big drums) in an average Wangala festival. Here the wonder is that in traditional Garo religion, **kraas** are regarded as the most sacred and as such **kraas** are not used in each and every function. Moreover, **kraas** are possessed only by
a few households of standing. In certain village there may be one or two krame whereas there may be many big drums generally used in all functions like Wangala and other minor festivals. So, the arrival of forty krame at a time is really a thing of wonder in the traditional Garo society.

Delang

Delang is a tiny house having an average size of 115 centimetre in length and 75 centimetre in breadth with a proportionate height, a house erected for the abode of the spirit of the dead person and located at kismindem (place for alters in general).

All the expected relatives having arrived the matter relating to the keeping of delang after the dead person, and its maintenance is taken up and decided upon. The problem generally faced by the family here is that, if the delang is to be retained it entails the household duties and responsibilities towards its maintenance and subsequent expenditure for its disposal, while, if it is otherwise, all the formalities are completed once for all with the cremation of the dead. In taking up the decision, it is generally observed that the opinion of the majority prevails.

The problem of erecting a delang will become clear from the following case history:
Lalsing Ajim Marak was a very prominent local leader and well to do man. He commanded much respect and honour in and around his village Ramakengga. He died at the age of 83. In his family two different religions were practiced vis-à-vis, traditional Garo religion retained by him and his wife alone and Christianity adopted by all of his sons, daughters and son-in-laws. Lalsing's wife Gabil Debra Sangma was a good housewife, well versed in the affairs of her traditional religion vis-à-vis traditional society and she was also highly skilled in preparing shu (rice beer) but never took a drop of it herself all through her life.

On the death of Lalsing, his distant relative Sunaohon Dio Sangma and his family attended Lalsing's funeral with a formal sangrea party. Sunaohon Dio Sangma is a follower of traditional religion and he insisted construction of delang in favour of his dearest departed friend. This created a pandemonium amongst the members of the bereaved family belonging to Christian Section. This way, two opposing contenders came up, all Christian members opposing and non-Christian relatives favouring keeping of delang. All Christian members contended that, the old mother being the lone follower of traditional religion there would be none to manage and take care of the delang. After a great deal of argument and serious discussion, the idea of retaining delang was dropped to the displeasure of Sunaohon and his supporters; the body was hurried and the funeral rites completed on the same day.
As has been discussed earlier, amongst the Garos living under the atmosphere of traditional faith, funeral ceremony being a social affair, it touches every aspect of community life such as their mutual help, sympathy, time and material assistance etc. The local populace generally forego their individual interest and devote their time for the needs of the bereaved family. If one visits any funeral function, it will be found that the mourners all around indulge in orgies of loud lamentation, wailing and weeping over the dead and such state of atmosphere applies not only to the traditional society but also the Christians as well.

Funeral Chant

Garo women wish to give an affectionate send off to their dead with beautiful verses expressing their deep love and affection to the deceased. They also want to speak out their feeling of gratefulness to the works and services done by the departed to the community as a whole.

Adil Chisik Sangma an old woman was lying bed ridden for several years; her end was expected any time. The family already earmarked a cow for her funeral while she was still breathing. Everybody preferred death for her to facing misery of old age. Death actually come to her one day, every one commented - 'better for her', Nobody wept, nor wailed nor expressed regret over her death. After a little while, an old lady named Rama Mrong Marak appeared and enquired from the attending ladies and asked - *graptijokma*?
(wept over) and all the women present replied 'so far none yet';
then Bensa chanted beautiful verses for about ten minutes at a
stretch and the words she uttered were enough to touch the hearts
of all present and all the women burst into tears.

grap nemanga as it is found, contains full of words
having variety of instruction, advice and guidance to the departed
soul. Garos believe in the life after death. With the decay of physi-
cal body, human soul does not die but the soul leaves the material
body for its home at the place called me'ang a'song (the land of
spirits of the dead) where it continues to live till it returns to
the world again. Therefore, after death, man's soul takes a journey
into the land of the spirits taking all the things given to him on
his death. Garos believe that the me'mang a'song is situated
somewhere in and around Balpakram a beautiful plateau lying on the
extreme south-east of Garo land. We have not heard anywhere from
amongst the Garos that soul travels towards other direction other
than towards the east. Therefore, the essence of grap nemanga is
that the soul of the dead man needs to be told the way how to go,
which way he is to follow and whom he should meet at the end of his
journey. Thus, the outgoing soul is informed of his future life in
the other world. It is also believed that the soul on reaching the
land of the dead could meet all the members belonging to his clan
who died before and could rejoin them in their daily activities. So
as far as memory can recollect, the grap nemanga should mention
all the names of the ancestors who died and gone long before. If the deceased is a man of outstanding personality with comfortable economic background and of high social status, the surviving members of the 

shatho (clan) desire that the departing soul leaves his manly qualities and honour behind to be inherited by the new generation. The fact is evident from the extract of 

grap memanga offered on the death of a prominent member of ohra which reads somewhat like this:

\[ \text{nangni kadesilko donangbo,} \\
\text{nangni kalkambeko galangbo;} \\
\text{ampang bawemon donangbo,} \\
\text{krong wagemon galangbo;} \\
\text{kurang ragguriko donangbo,} \\
\text{jektong goerakon galangbo.} \]

Thy precious name, wisdom and crown, leave thou behind ,
Drop us rank and honour coveted of thine ;
Keep them on the thatch roof layer,
Throw them thou on the crotch of pillar ;
Leave us thy thunderous voice behind ,
And, thy manly arm and might benign .

From the given passage, it is obvious that the Garo women do not like to part with the high personality, dignity and honour of their beloved departed but they sincerely desire that all such virtues be inherited by the posterity of the same lineage and not to slip outside.
It is however very strange to note at this juncture that the male members of the society do not generally perform *grap-memanga* as a result the job remains confined purely within the circle of womenfolk. The reason for such coolness on the part of the males might be due to the fact that they remain all along engaged in more responsible functions outside and as such, they have very little time for reflection or it might be because the duty is traditionally bestowed exclusively on the womenfolks. Funeral chants of the Garos do not contain well set permanent verses, rather, modes of expression, sentences and words differs from person to person. One can give a talk according to her own idea and style and it is because of this reason that it is very difficult to reduce them into writing. However, the basic idea of the chant remains the same; that is leading the departed and outgoing *jemggi* (soul) in its journey unto the *me'mang a'song*, to help it to find out other members of the kin who are dead and gone long before and to appeal the *jemggi* to come back to the same blood relationship after a temporary sojourn at the *me'mang a'song*. So, if one sincerely examine the real significance of the *grap memanga* one could find that, the quintessence of the phrase seemed to take the form of sorrowful farewell address delivered on the eve of a long distance temporary trip taken up by a certain personage and wishing him a safe and pleasant journey and a happy home return.
Grap Me'manga

In traditional Garo religion several kinds of chants of both sacred and profane nature are found in use. Those chants are found under the titles of course, with regional variation such as, grap-me'mange, doroa, kabi ringa, ajea, gonda doke and katta ringa etc. and those chants are collectively known as kabi mongal. With regard to the sources of such verbose, spontaneous and non-stop flow of rhythm one might reasonably think that, there must be a preceptor or master - instructor who taught such obscure, metaphoric, difficult and unintelligible sentences to the older generation. Author’s personal curiosity is that, when and from whom Garos learnt those hymns or in other words, who first gave them the idea to sing such hymns, and to such inquiry, Garos have the reply to give to the inquisitive minds that the tatara kamal and women kabi singer first learnt all sorts of chanting while they were in sub conscious state being under serious illness in the early stage of humanity and those kabi singers were taught by such an impersonal being called noronggi ama. This way, many incessant flow of verses specially the hymns like grap me'mange, kabi ringa and doroa came into the knowledge of man and human mouth began to sing. There is no wonder in maintaining such view as because, even in the most advanced world religions like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam there are many sacred words which are believed to be the direct revelation of God to the prophets and seers. The Veda which the Aryans produced as their main religious text are believed to be the word of god revealed to pious and learned men known as the Rishis.
The second phase of funeral ceremony thus, witness an hectic time; different groups being engaged in different functions and responsibilities, such as ladies watching the dead body, menfolk managing whole affairs and receiving the arriving mourners from within and outside the locality, and even in this hour of despondency, grief and sorrow, the receiving family does not miss to keep the accounts of the charitable helps coming from other families, be it from near relations or otherwise. Some one is put in charge to carefully look into every detail as to how many bulls, pigs, goats, fowls and other kinds of contributions have come from others. There are also some to take care of those arriving mourners and visiting sympathisers. All valuable and other charitable donations particularly the livestock like cows, bulls, pigs and goats are strictly and carefully noted since such gifts are to be reciprocated sometime in future whenever the donor falls in similar distress. All such important and expensive material contributions by giving cows, pigs and goats is called *matbara* and all donations under *matbara* are strictly accounted for and carefully reckoned with and that all the members of the help getting household are kept well aware of their future neighbourly obligation. But, one significant point is observed here, that is, every contribution under *matbara* does not go unrewarded, because, the receiving household gives out at least one *rang* (gong) and a portion of meat so brought and slaughtered in honour of the dead. The *rang* so given out to the donor of the meat-animal is called *urum-ko'kaa*. For example, Y's family brought a cow to Z's family; Z accepts the contribution; Y's cow is slaughtered. As a token of respect and appreciation, Z then gives
away to Y one gong and a portion of Y's cow. The gong so given by Z to Y becomes urim ko'kam.

Operation of Urim Ko'kam

It is therefore observed that whatever articles are given out by the help receiving family as a token of appreciation and acknowledgement to the help giving family are not permanently given, because, from the nature of preservation and retention of such valued properties, it is seen that whatever article is given in the form of urim ko'kam, it is nothing but a token of deep love and appreciation mutual help and understanding that is to exist between the giving and receiving households. The ko'kam also serves as an constant reminder about the social bond and mutual indebtedness between the two families. For instance - Y's house has received a piece of gong as ko'kam from Z's house in honour of his donating a cow to the latter. The gong given as ko'kam then remains under temporary possession of Y's house. So urim ko'kam as a matter of custom remains a returnable moveable property. Some Ambeng Garos living in south central region told us that, in their area, under certain circumstances, a plot or strip of land is also given out as urim ko'kam but in such a case, attempt is made to get the land released by paying requisite amount of money at the earliest opportunity. Again, it is also generally considered, whether the matbara donated on the occasion is a repayment of old old dues or is a fresh arrival or it is given for the second time in addition to the earlier matbara which is still pending with the
receiving house for return; such consideration being very essential to enable the receiving house to render preferential treatment to such donors.

The third stage of funeral ceremony comes when all the expected arrivals are complete. Necessary *ganchi* (funeral pyre) is constructed with sufficient fuel and thick woods or grave is dug as the case may be. Before taking out the dead body for cremation four elderly persons are selected and one of them is nominated as *shagipa* (one who eats or eater), the name given to the leader of the group and to act as such in the actual time of cremation.

All the necessary arrangements and preparations being completed, the body is given a last bath by the nearest female relations. For instance, a middle aged man 'Z' dies. Then Z's own surviving sister or in absence of sisters his nieces or in absence of the above two kins, Z's surviving wife would wash and oil the body. Selja Chisik Sangma died at the very old age; all his sisters predeceased him. His body was laid over a bed of gongs as it is done in case of a well to do person. Two nieces of Selja, Binre and Ganre did the job with undiluted rice beer since the deceased was a rich man with strong traditionalism, whereas, his two nieces were both Christian converts. The two sisters received one gong and a piece of cloth each from the mourning family in the form of *debra ohkitra* or *ma'gual*. The gongs and the pieces of clothes which may be given to the nearest female relations of the deceased as a mark of recognition to their works of washing and oiling the dead body is styled as *debra ohkitra* or *ma'gual*. 
Bathing or washing of the body is ordinarily done with water and annointed with oil. Such act of simple sponging and dressing up the body remains a very important consideration as because, the very service of giving last bath to the dead by the deceased's nearest female relative symbolises the first entry of the deceased to its mother sib through birth. In the minds of the Garos, the hands which bathed the baby first should also wash it last. Such practice, no doubt, appears to be similar to the Jews' custom of annointing the dead body with spices or some sweet smelling herbs by the ladies but Garo way of doing it differs in that the attending women should be from amongst the close relatives of the deceased and they are rewarded with what is called debra ohikitra or ma'gual. Two things are needed for applying toilet to the dead body, viz., a bowl and a piece of cloth. In most cases, Garos use either a rang (gong) or a brass plate as bowl for keeping water and an average size of cloth is kept slinging on the shoulder of the attending women. Works being done, the gong or the brass-plate and the cloth used as such, are given out to the attending women as debra-ohikitra or ma'gual. The bowl signifies the bowl which the mother used in bathing the man while he was in her arm and the cloth stands for a debra (baby cloth) for carrying a baby. Whatever things are given as debra ohikitra or ma'gual are permanently given out and as such, it is not subject to return and the recipient gains the absolute ownership over them. Whereas ko'kem is subject to return and here lies the distinction between the two. Even the Christian Garos are found following the same practices in some rural areas although their new faith could have easily ignored it. Garos living in the urban areas do not bother much about such practices, yet, on many occasions, in
some families, clothes and other things are given out as presents to the nearest and dearest ones at the death of a man. Such gifts are handed out of course, in remembrance of the departed soul but in true spirit, it can be no other than a part or a kind of debra shikitra or mgual in an unnamed form.

Toilet being over, the attending ladies release the body to be taken out. The body is lifted up by the most experienced elderly person of the society. Not necessarily a kin of the deceased. The first lifting of the body from the bed is termed mangbila. Young and inexperienced persons are not allowed to handle the dead body; then a group of elderly persons carry off the body to the place of cremation or to the place where the body is to be buried as the case might be. But in contrast, in the Christian society younger persons are encouraged to do the job of mangbila and to carry the coffin to the grave.

With the burrial of the dead body, all the subsequent rituals are cut short, but, in case the body being cremated, some more rituals and ceremonies are yet to follow. At the time of cremation, the chagipa takes out a piece of knee bone and keep it aside. The cremation is attended by all the important persons and lady mourners. Next morning an elderly woman of close relationship accompanied by a group of other women carries that piece of bone kept by the chagipa on her back with a special kind of cloth called bara marang and bury it under the delang. The woman carrying the bone exactly in the same manner as if she is carrying a baby walks up slowly towards
the site where delang has been or going to be erected chanting all along elegy mainly calling the departed soul to return to the same family or to the same ma’ehong, meaning thereby, that, the spirit of the deceased might re-incarnate in the same family or in the same ma’ehong in the next life. The process of carrying the bone by the woman to the delang site is termed jaragata which means to bring up the jangai (soul) of the deceased to the house from where it departed.

This is the last stage of funeral function when delang is erected, kima carved and site midong or memang midong is prepared in honour of the departed soul.

Inside the delang, a cook is kept if the deceased was a male and a hen in case of a female, but, some say, any chicken might be put, sex being immaterial. A quantity of rice and the fowl which were put by the side of the dead body are cooked and placed at the delang. Such offerings are made so that the spirit of the dead might enjoy them. Construction of delang again demands one cow and as such, one is killed and its skull is tied up in the post of green mandal tree (erithrina suberosa, stricta) and posted near the delang. Next thing to be done at this moment is to carve out a kima (memorial post or monolith) or an image made after the dead person. Since it is prepared hurriedly, green post of soft tree like bolemu (bombax male baricum) or sokehon (estonia scholaris) and such other similar woods are normally selected. kima is dressed in such a way that as/ as practicable, it might look like the person it
represents and placed just at the front verandah below the roof. Khasis of Meghalaya also maintain such memorial post or monoliths. But, Khasi memorial post is made of stone and is called *kynmaw* which means 'to mark with a stone' which is the Khasi word for 'to remember' and Khasi *kynmaw* is lasting whereas Garo *kima* being made of wood does not last long. Side by side, *mite midong* or *memang midong* is prepared. It is a bamboo pole placed upright in front of a house hung in a particular way with the bunch of paddy in ear meant for offering to the dead or the spirit. Such *me'mang midong* is prepared first by the bereaved household and other relatives may also bring similar *me'mang midong* similar *midong* at the time of disposal of the *delang* if they feel it inconvenient to do so at the time of funeral ceremony. *me'mang midong* once prepared is not destroyed nor burnt but it remains as long as it lasts till it meets its natural decay as in the case of *kima*.

**Post Funeral Ceremony**

Funeral works being over, the *mahari* sit together and take up the matter connected with the *a'kim* issue in respect of the deceased person if and when necessary. Supposing a married woman 'X' dies leaving behind her husband 'Y'. Then, the mahari of X has to give another suitable lady to 'Y' in place of the deceased wife. Such reciprocal provision of substitute of the partner on the death of either is called *onsonga*. In the Garo society, traditional or
modern, they do not linger in settling the a'khim issue. There being no observation of self mortification or penance of any sort of social restriction on the part of the surviving member at the death of either spouse, onsonga, if at all necessary is immediately solved. Among the Ambeng Garos, such issue is generally settled up on the very day of disposal of the dead body while the surviving partner is still weeping and sailing. We often wondered at this and asked several Ambeng Garos as to why such remarriage is done so quickly and, invariably, we often received identical views from almost all of them saying: "Lineage concerned have to provide one to fill up the missing partner today or tomorrow, hence, there is no meaning in delaying the matter. Delay sometimes brings more trouble and more complication. So, they further say sig sigijagita, bono bongijagita, which means to maintain the status quo, onsonga issue must be finally decided then and there". Thus, the bereaved partner is not kept under the grip of sorrow and mental affliction for long, but rather advised to reconcile and adjust to the changed circumstances. So, according to the Garo point of view, the best way of giving comforts to the bewildering mind is to immediately decide upon a'khim which alone according to the opinions of some Garos could bring back the agonising soul to its normal family life if at all one is entitled to. Moreover, according to them, all the important members of the lineage near and distant are available at the hour. If the issue cannot be finally settled up the moment, it could at least hear views and suggestions from the lineage people present and thus, arrive at a near solution to the problem. All the subsequent dialogue with regard to the same issue are usually based on such preliminary
and summary talks made on that day and the line of approach is carried on accordingly. Having thus formed a solid ground for the continuity and protection of the bereaved nek all the attending relatives disperse to their respective homes.

Disposal of Delang

The delang keeping household maintains it by putting feed and drinks at the delang daily till the time of its disposal sometime in the future preparably in the time of next Wangala festival.

The delang is dismantled and ceremonially burnt towards the close of the Wangala festival at dawn before day break. A cow is slaughtered and its bleed is sprayed over the burning flame. While burning the delang, young boys and girls dance around and the mourners weep and wail with chanting of funeral verses.

Life after Death

The fear of death is universal in man. The life of a person in this material world is, to a certain degree regulated by the idea about the life beyond this present existence. Garas believe that human soul, after severing itself from the mortal frame takes a journey unto the land of the dead where they carry on their daily
activities similar to that of the world of ours. So, according to Garo belief, there is life beyond the grave. Man fears death because he cannot fully comprehend about the nature of his life beyond the present life. It is an universal law that birth gives a beginning of life, and death puts an end to it; but the question arises as to whether baljanggi (soul energy) of man is mortal or immortal. Traditional Garo religion maintains that human soul falls within the sphere of the existence of that, which is unchangeable. The belief in the immortality of the soul seems to have been based on various near death experiences gained by different persons in different times. Before death visits a man, old age and sickness enter into his body. At times, under serious illness man becomes unconscious or sub-conscious and meets with temporary death. Most persons, after resuscitation from the temporary death often tells something of their experiences. One old man who was also a krita kamal says - "under serious illness, I met a temporary death. In my unconscious state, I was travelling to my village and meet persons who died long back during my childhood. I was walking with one young co-traveller who was a Christian. Midway, my young friend went one way telling me to follow the other way. On reaching my destination, I asked the people I met first, about the location of my father's house. One man showed me the path leading to my father's place with a further information to me that my father had been ailing since sometime back. Accordingly, on reaching his house, I found my father basking in the sun at the back porch. I then introduced myself to him but he at first could not recognise me. On further conversation however, he could identify as his own son whom he left behind many
years back and rebuked me for coming to him; he then forced me to return home quickly lest my hut would be burnt down by the villagers. I suddenly woke up and regained consciousness and told the sorrowing people not to be worried about me since I had returned and would not be dying at the moment". On further discussion, the man told us that his dream-land where his father lives, is a typical Garo village; people there, are busy in their activities exactly in the same manner as in this material world experiencing same joys and sorrows. In fact he found no difference between the two worlds, his father's and his own. Likewise, Christian Garos too often narrate their near-death experiences according to their expected and hoped for future, be it adverse or favourable depending on character and conduct in one's life on earth. So, survival after physical annihilation, for the Garos, means an existence in a disembodied state. Traditional Garo religion does not indicate that death is a dreamless sleep but sleep with full of dreams. The moment the jangdi leaves its earthly abode, it takes up a journey unto the other world or the spirit-land; but unlike the concept of other world by other tribes like Khasi and Nagas Garo (Vatsyayan 1974-75 : 185; Chattopadhyay 1978 : 85, 143) other world lies within the bounds of human comprehension. As the popular saying goes, the soul of a man goes towards Chitmang and Balpakram, beautiful hills full of uncommon flowers and plants lying on the south east corner of the Garo Hills. Human soul, after death takes its abode there with other members of the society who died before. In the world of spirits too, there are health and sickness, wealth and poverty, works and activities as are found in the present world. Human soul does not remain there permanently but returns to
this world again through re-incarnation. Some Garos say that the land of the dead is the land of contrast as because there are indications in folktales, ghost stories supported by near death experiences gained by many individuals to the effect that all the opposites are going on in that land. To cite a few examples, some Garos say, me'mang the spirits of the dead, consider an iguana as a pig, grasshopper as deer and a certain soft common shrub as bamboo and so on. If it is actually so, the land of the spirits can really be known as a land of all-opposites having qualitative and quantitative differences. The life after death is thus, full of social and economic activities, rather a copy of the human world. The life in the me'mang a'song (land of the dead or spirit land) is also temporary as much as it is in this human world. Under such situation, life beyond death cannot be equated either to hell or heaven nor it can be taken as purgatory either.

**Belief in Rebirth**

Garo hold the view that man's soul returns to earth through re-incarnation. Human soul re-incarnates through birth in human form and also in the form of lower animals according to the merit of one's actions in previous life on earth. In his atohi ramesachi (subsequent existence through rebirth), one may be born in human society or among other lower species depending on his past deeds. So, in Garo view of life, reward or punishment, if there could be any awaits everyone here on earth through rebirth in lower
and higher lives. Khasi view of life after death when compared to Garo notion of rebirth appears to be half way; because, according to the Khasi religion, if a person lives a faithful and righteous life, after his death the soul goes back to God and lives thenceforth in his presence. Hence Khasis call their dead - one who is eating betelnut in God's house. God does not punish after death and there is no idea of hell. The souls of those who have broken sang (taboo) however roam about in the earth in various forms. In Khasi religion, good people enjoy eternal life in the garden of God except the spirits of the wicked men who take the forms of animals, birds or insects etc. (Gordon 1914: 105-106) whereas, belief in transmigration of soul is universal in Garo religion. In Khasi religion, there is no scope for the soul of the righteous persons to return to the earth through rebirth as they enjoy eternal life in the house of God. Garo view of transmigration of soul seems to have been influenced by Hinduism from the neighbouring areas. In Hinduism, the transmigration of human consciousness into divine consciousness cannot be done during a single life-span because, it is not possible in one life time to make man's soul called atman one with reality, called Brahman (Schneider 1972: 39-40). Hindu scripture also teach that the soul of man does not pass into hell, heaven or purgatory, but it is reborn into another existence which will and in the due time necessitate yet another birth (Wadiyar 1965: 1-5 and Ahmad Shah 1971: 135). From this aspect in Garo religion, if one makes a close look, one would be tempted to think that, for the active and diligent person me'mang a'song as conceived by the Garo religion appears to be more attractive since there is continuity of worldly pursuit
with similar pattern of life till the man is born again in flesh and blood. We tried very often to press the matter, during our investigation a bit deeper and asked some of the informants as to whether they could be certain about the re-incarnation of the soul in the same community or in the same clan where it lived its former life, but, none could give us definite reply except saying - "It is popular belief, but we are not sure about it".

Hinduism is based on three fundamental traits; firstly, the law of Karma and rebirth; secondly, the theory of purushartha or values of life and finally, the theory of Avatara of the re-incarnation of God as man to uproot the evil in society and to restore Dharma or righteousness to its right place (Sharma 1971: 39-53; Mohatta 1970: 31 and Ahmad Shah 1971: 128-136). In the Garo religion, the elements of faith in karma and rebirth are implicitly present and the theory of purusharthas of Hinduism is vaguely manifested in the form of good social behaviour good conduct and character, but the last traits of Hindu faith that is avatara is not explicit in Garo religion, instead Garos believe that man is born again as man and is destined to reap the fruit of his past actions. Garos have no idea that God re-incarnates in the fleshly body. Hinduism says that, death is the passing from one body to another and finally makes man's soul called atman one with reality (Brahman) (Gandhi - Series No. 21, 1971: 20-21). Garo religion too maintains successive births but the self or soul is expected to be in the company of men on earth once again. Some Garos are of the view that, the soul of a man so purified through subsequent
rebirths, proceeds to spiritual realm and live there for ever. In this respect, no one could give us definite information if the purified soul in its final entry into the realm of the spirits enjoy eternal spiritual existence or the soul is subject to rebirth sometime in the future. The idea as the soul becoming one with ultimately reality is not expressed in the Garo religion. Therefore, according to the traditional religion of the Garos, the idea of separate heaven and hell does not find proper place, since all awards to the virtues and punishment to the wicked are done on this earth depending on one's past deeds. So, according to Garo situation, this visible world of ours is both heaven and hell if there could be any as such. Obviously, the idea of sin and salvation from sin is absorbed in the notion of rebirth.
TRADITIONAL CEREMONIAL DANCE
TRADITION IN A MODERN WAY

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