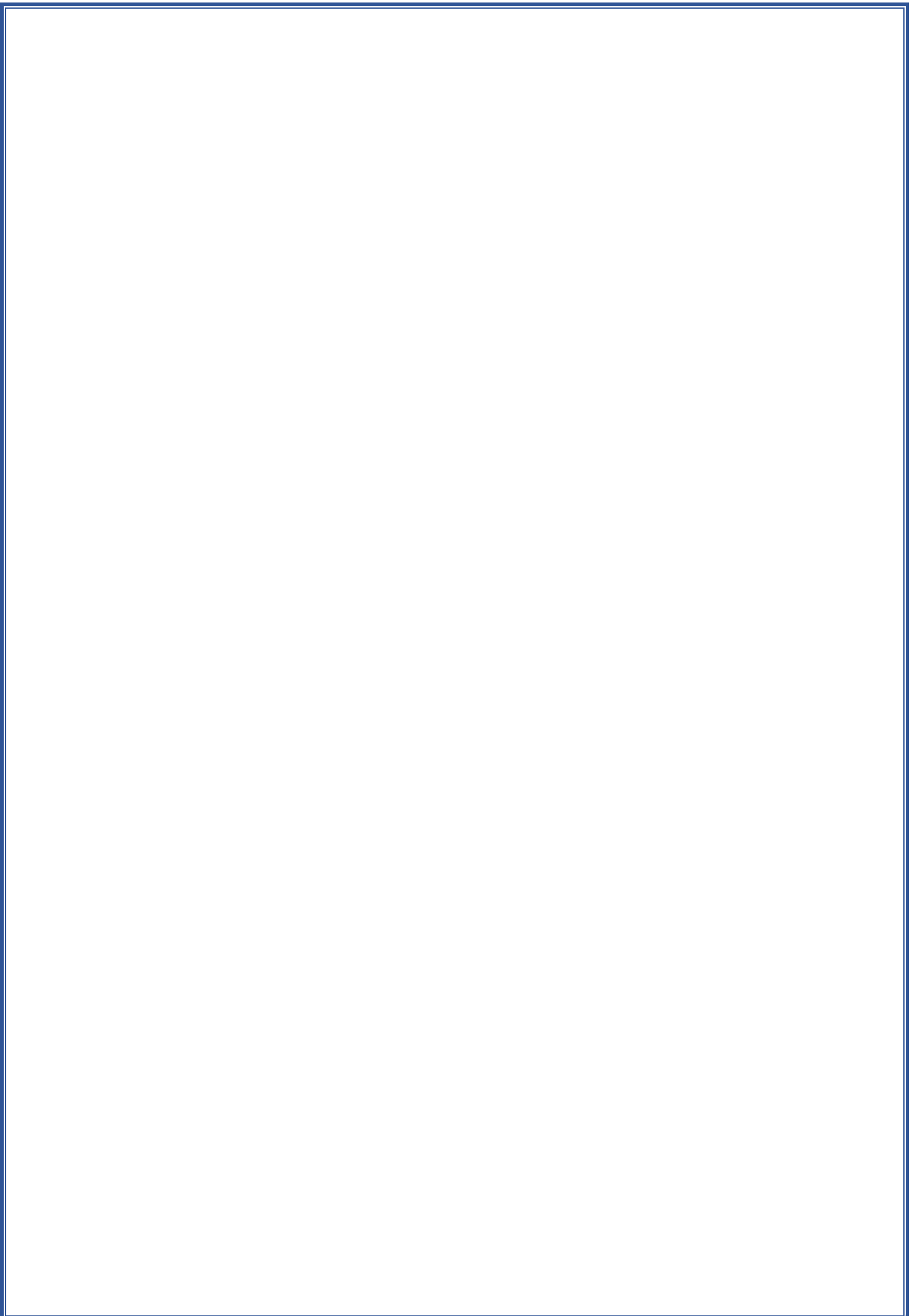*Report on*

DIGITAL LITERACY AND IT'S IMPACT ON CULTURAL HERITAGE PRESERVATION: A STUDY AMONG THE GARO COMMUNITY OF MEGHALAYA

REGION-SPECIFIC RESEARCH PROJECT
2023-2024

Anthropological Survey of India
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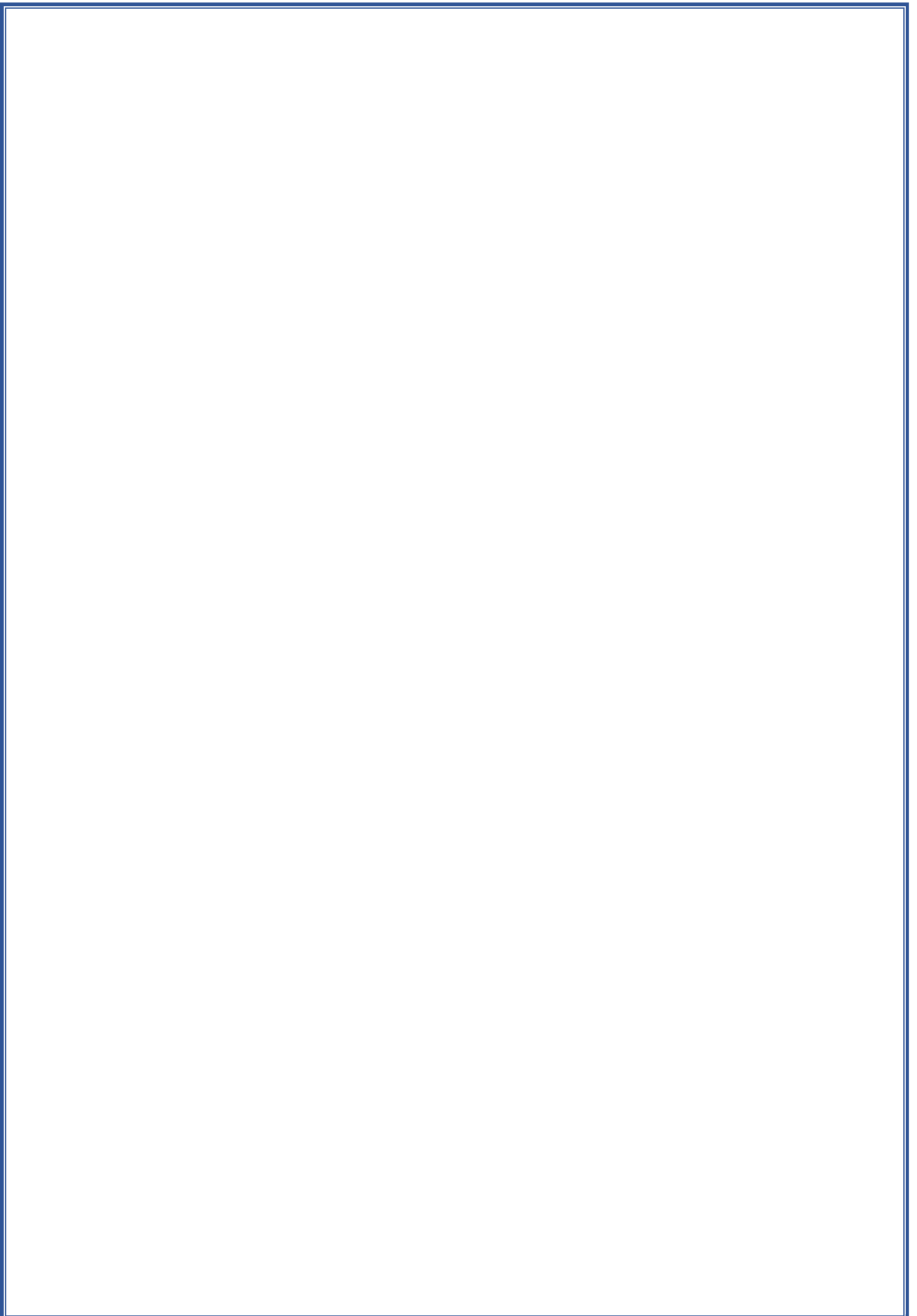### Jijo C.V.,
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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Introduction

Cultural heritage and its transmission

Culture and heritage are intertwined concepts that define and shape a group of people or society. Culture is a broad concept that encompasses the social norms, institutions, and behaviours of human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, customs, arts, laws, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in those groups. It can also be defined as "the way of life for an entire society. Thus, culture can be understood as the collective "way of life" for an entire society, a dynamic and evolving sum of learned behaviours and traditions passed down through generations. Heritage, on the other hand, refers to the aspects of culture which are inherited by the present and which will be preserved for the future. Thus, it is the legacy from the past, what the community live with and what it passes on to future generations. People, their traditions and society is the core of cultural heritage, it is featured through a people's lifestyle, rituals, art, architecture, ways of living together, tradition and belief system.

Cultural heritage comprises mainly of two forms, tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage is apparent and evident physical attributes of a community such as art, architecture, monuments, shrines and archaeological sites which serves are cultural markers and symbols of identity of a community. Intangible heritage is the spiritual and religious belief of a community, the intellectual thought, indigenous knowledge and expressions, social practices, music, dance and cuisine of a community. A community's cultural heritage is a culmination and an admixture of physical objects as well as living expressions which are placed together in a fragile state subject to various dynamic social deterrents and intercultural dialogue.

Cultural heritage is a community's core value which is passed down through generations and this transmission of knowledge, values and traditions promote a people's culture and identity. Cultural heritage of a people unifies a community. A community's solidarity and mutual obligation is stimulated through cultural practices and language which strengthens the immediate community with the total community. It creates a sense of belonging and a social cohesion which is resilient and adaptive to changes bought about with passage of time.

Since time immemorial culture and traditions have been passed down from generation to generation. This transmission of culture has taken various forms over the ages, evolving from the oral storytelling of ancient times to the physical documentation that has preserved human heritage. A chronological account of development of methods of documentation suggest that documentation began with oral traditions in prehistoric times, where information was passed down through storytelling and verbal transmission. Early humans created cave paintings and petroglyphs, leaving visual records on rocks and walls that depicted significant events and daily life. Around 3500-3000 BCE, the advent of written language marked a major shift. The early forms of documentation included inscriptions on stone, papyrus scrolls, and animal skins - each serving as a vital conduit for preserving and conveying the rich and diverse cultural legacies of humanity.

In India, the earliest epigraph found are the Edicts of Ashoka of the 3rd century BCE, in the Brahmi script. Few communities like the Garo had used animal hides for documentation in the past.

By the 4th century CE, the codex format, or bound book, began to replace scrolls. This new format made it easier to reference and organize texts. During the Middle Ages, manuscripts, meticulously handwritten by scribes in monasteries, became the primary means of recording information. The 15th century brought a revolutionary change with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable type printing press. This development enabled the mass production of books and documents. It was followed by the introduction of mechanical typewriters in the 19th century which helped streamline the process of creating written documents. The 20th century saw the emergence of photocopying technology which allowed for quick duplication of documents.

The advent of the internet transformed how documents were shared and communicated. The world wide web and the internet became a vast repository of information. It connected people, businesses, and communities around the world. The rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram further altered and modified communications, enabling users to share ideas, opinions, and experiences in real time. Digital storage solutions and cloud computing emerged, offering scalable and secure document management options.

This evolution reflects how each form of advancement in documentation has served as a vital conduit for preserving and conveying the rich and diverse cultural legacies of humanity and have continually reshaped the ways in which the individual and community record, preserve, and share information. It is important note, however, that the preservation and promotion of a community's culture is influenced by the community's history, ecology, its socio-economic background, socio-cultural factors and technology. Thus, the factors which effect the transmission of culture is attributed to the stakeholders of that particular culture. The stakeholders are the community member and it is up to them to take a stand on what are the cultural markers which reflects a community's identity.

Against this backdrop, an effort has been made to understand the role and impact of digital literacy in the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Garo community of Meghalaya.

Digital literacy in India

Digital literacy is the ability to access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information safely and appropriately through digital technologies for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (UNESCO). According to Masakazi (2009), digitization is the creation of multimedia databases enhanced by digital information and thus offering easy access to cultural and scientific heritage for a large population of the users. Digitization, therefore, involves the conversion of non-digital materials to digital formats.

The digital era and the digital boom which started with the dotcom bubble has transcended from the digital being available in limited spaces such as internet cyber cafes to being abundantly and openly available in the palm of the hand through mobile smart phones. The digital has allowed for access of information from all corners and quarters. It has aided education, entertainment, learning, recreation and documentation. The preservation of information in the internet is a living and continuous process which is made active and inactive by its users. Deepening of various of digital means has also led to the documentation of culture and tradition, and the dissemination of cultural object fosters a continuity of identity to the people which propagates a dynamic of cross-cultural appreciation.

In India poste 2000 witnessed the beginning of digital era. However, digital education was still out of reach for majority of Indians. Taking cognizance of the fact and understanding the potential the digital education hold, in the years 2014 to 2016, two Schemes titled "National Digital Literacy Mission" (NDLM) and "Digital Saksharta Abhiyan" (DISHA) were implemented by the Government with a target to train 52.50 lakh candidates in digital literacy across the country. Under these two schemes, a total of 53.67 lakh beneficiaries were certified. Besides, on 1st July 2015, the Government of India launched the "Digital India". A campaign with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Digital India encompasses digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen, governance and services on demand and digital empowerment of citizens. The campaign aims to achieve universal digital literacy and accessibility to digital resources, and availability of digital resources in Indian languages.

The efforts made by the Government yielded desired results. Digital education in India paves the way for knowledge acquisition and learning through the use of technology and digital tools. It involves the use of digital technologies to record, archive, and preserve cultural objects, documents, and traditions. This ensures the access of cultural heritage to the future generations. Increased digital literacy often leads to greater exposure to global cultures which might influence rapid changes in many aspects like language, food cultures, traditional dress and ornaments, etc. without changing the core cultures of the communities. This exposure may result in both positive and negative impacts on the culture. The availability and increased use of digital devices have enabled many tribal communities to effectively utilize digital tools and utilize a wide range of opportunities provided by digital platforms to preserve their cultural heritage. For the preservation of identity and history of a community's culture, heritage conservation plays a vital role. At the same time digital literacy has some vital roles to preserve the cultural heritage and the team can access vast information about our cultural heritage through various digital platforms.

Garo: Digital Literacy and Preservation of Culture

The North Eastern region of India lies between 21°57` N – 29°30` N and 88° E – 97°30` E. The region comprises of eight states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The region shares a boundary with four countries, Bangladesh (South-west), Bhutan (North-west), China (North) and Myanmar (East).

According to the 2011 Census, the region is home to 3.8 percent of India's population and nearly

8 percent of the total geographical area of the country. The north eastern region is known for its ethnic diversity. It is home to many tribal communities, each of them is distinct with its own culture

and traditions, language, material culture, food, social customs and social organisation. The indigenous knowledge and culture of the people belonging to sub-tribes and smaller groups is encapsulated to the nucleus and the topography of place which can only spread its width to the periphery of a total community. The Garo community of Meghalaya is one among them.

The Garo hills of Meghalaya is predominantly home to the Garo community, a community which is total community of Garo sub-tribes who also consider themselves as *A.chikmande* or the hill people and have their own social system and ways of learning. According to oral narrative, it is believed that the Garos had migrated from Tibet and finally settled on the land in which is called Garo Hills.

The Garos of Meghalaya who are also known as *A.chik* or *A.chikmande* meaning the hill people. The Garos are a combination of eleven sub groups who reside in different geographical regions of the Garo hills, namely, the A.beng or Am.beng, A.we, Atong, Chibok, Chisak, Dual, Gara-Ganching, Matabeng or Matangchi, Matchi, Megam and Ruga. The Garos comprised of the various sub groups have a rich culture and cultural heritage, linguistically different having their own distinct dialect but they follow the same social institutions, marriage systems, inheritance of property and religion. They are a matrilineal community which have a traditional political setup which is headed by the Nokma.

The Garos have a rich culture which consists of beliefs, customs, rituals, institutions, symbols, material culture, food, language, architecture, songs, dance and crafts which is passed down from generation to generation. The Garos traditional religion is called Songsarek and it is believed that the A.chik religion derives its name Songsarek from the first high priest, Taura, amomg the ancient Nurulu Mande is known as Songsarek. The Songsarek are a god fearing people and they have deep respect for their indigenous faith, culture and identity. This is reflected in their pragmatic lifestyle which encompasses a deep connection with humanity and their cultural heritage can be seen in the rites and rituals. Traditional institutes and formal learning centres like the Nokpante or the

boys dormitory was the virtue of the Songsarek faith and it trained young boys into becoming productive men equipped with which aged old knowledge, traditions and skills. The boys would learn about art and craft, songs, dance and musical instruments, agriculture and forest products some of which are adorned till today.

The Garos have rich material culture, their architecture is sustainable, organic and has a defined layout and structure. Traditionally, there was a loin loom in every Garo household and clothing was produced by women. The *Gando,* a loin cloth was the principle garment of men during earlier times and the women would wear what is called an *A.khing*, a loincloth similar to the Gando but a bit longer with intricate designs and motifs. Today, the women mostly wear a lower wrap around cloth called a *Dakmanda*, it has intricate designs wherein the lower section of the Dakmanda features a border embellished with traditional concentric diamond motifs, commonly known as *Mikron* meaning the eye in Garo. The Dakmandas has distinctive characteristics which includes geometric designs, straight line, zigzags and crosses.

The women wear the *Dakmanda* proudly in their daily works of life but during the Wangala festival, a post harvest festival of the Garos which is also known as the 100 drums festival, both the men and the women who perform in the *Wangala* dance wear their traditional dresses and dance to drumbeats. Music plays an indispensable role in the life of a Garo and they possess a rich variety of folk songs. These songs revolve around their religious beliefs, their agricultural activities, social functions and their love life. There are mainly seven different varieties of Garo songs sung on different occasions. They are gonda, ajia, re re, dani, chera, doro and ahama.

The Garos have a rich cultural heritage and this heritage has been transmitted orally. However, they have an oral story stating that the Garos had a written language which was lost in time. Legend state that the Garos had inscribed facts and figures on animal skin. During their migration from Tibet, they suffered from starvation. In a state of hunger, the Garo forefathers consumed the hide by boiling in water. However, what is important is that it marks the first instance wherein the Garos have documented about their heritage. Thereafter, cultural heritage of the Garo have been orally passed down through generations.

In addition to oral traditions, there were other social institutions and learning centres like the *Nokpante* or the bachelor's dormitory which were the centres for transmission of culture, tradition and art amongst the Garo males wherein the elders taught the young about the life and way of life of the Garos. The Garos relate their way of life and lifestyle to the systems which were brought forth by their grandparents or from the times of *Achu* and *Ambi*. For example, the *Nokpante* was a place of learning and sharpening one's skills. The slow decline of these institutions has hampered the transition and transmission of the tangible and intangible elements of culture and cultural heritage

Transmission of culture heritage of the Garo community has helped in the preservation of the identity of the community. It is a continuum of practice, thought and emotion and links a community's present to the past. The shared values and a holistic view which is accepted, appreciated and transmitted through cultural practices, religion and rituals, traditions, language and collective memory. The mutual obligation unifies the community, it creates a sense of

belonging and a social cohesion which can be resilient and adaptive with urbanisation and modernisation. However with the event of Christianity in the Garos Hills, the Garos followed the way of life and the lifestyle of the Christians and the biblical preaching. They slowly departed from their indigenous faith and lifestyle and the Garos have suppressed the ancestral beliefs and practices, and have also assimilated some of them with Christianity. Though the Christian missionaries brought a stance in culture and religious belief, it was only with the advent of the Christians missionaries and the Indian British administration that there were ethnographic accounts about the Garos of Garo Hills.

H. H. Godwin-Austen (1872), A. Playfair (1909), William Carey (1919) were among the first few ethnographers who documented about the Garo Hills and the Garos. Presently the works of such scholars have been digitalized and are made available to the world through open source online repositories.

In the post-Independence era, (insert some lines about education) and digital communication in Meghalaya began with broadcasts on radio and television through government agencies, namely, the All India Radio and Doordarshan Kendra. Later, the internet and digital media platforms assisted publication and broadcasting of information to a mass audience who were equipped with a digital device and an internet connection. These all help in the documentation of the cultural facets of the Garo community.

Education, digital means of documentation have both positive and negative to the transmission of cultural heritage. Technology helps in the documentation, preservation, promotion and dissemination of cultural content. Creation and consumption of cultural content about a community is not regulated and the content is at the discretion of the creator. Thus, cultural content may or may not be in the original from and context. Folk fusion is an upcoming genre where something which is traditional is fused with something which is considered an upcoming trend. Thus, losing the originality and the traditionalism of a culture. Since, technology can reach a wider audience faster, the interpretation of context depends on the response of the viewer.

In addition to the digital documentation of the Cultural heritage of Garos, efforts are being made to revive some of the extinct or endangered cultural facets of the community. In the Garo hills, there are dedicated individuals, societies, organisations and the government which actively works in the revival of culture. The process of revival of culture involves individuals who have knowledge about a particular trait or art form. The learning, education and publicity of the revived culture will allow for its sustainability. The constant support of the community and the government help in revival and transmission of culture.

Transmission of culture heritage helps in the preservation of the identity of the community. It is a continuum of practice, thought and emotion and links a community's present to the past. The shared values and a holistic view which is accepted, appreciated and transmitted through cultural practices, religion and rituals, traditions, language and collective memory. The mutual obligation unifies the community, it creates a sense of belonging and a social cohesion which can be resilient and adaptive with urbanisation and modernisation.

Objective

The project "Digital Literacy and its Impact on Cultural Heritage Preservation" endeavors to understand the Garo core culture and the primary objective of the study is to investigate the impact of digital literacy on cultural heritage conservation and address the challenges associated with the conservation of cultural heritage among the Garos of Meghalaya.

Objective of the study:

1. To know the current status of digital literacy in the Garo community of Meghalaya.
2. To know the initiatives taken for the digital preservation of their own culture at the individual and community level.
3. To understand the reasons for the digital preservation of the culture at the individual and community level.
4. To know about the viewers of those videos and gender-specific preferences of these videos among the viewers.
5. To understand the impacts of the videos on viewers and if they are also disseminating those videos among others.

Community hall among the Garo with Drums (*Dama*)

Chapter 2

Methodology and the Study Villages

The 21st century is considered as the digital era, though it has its beginning at the end of the 20th century. Digital literacy along with use of digital platforms has profoundly altered the ways of preservation of cultural heritage. For the rural and forest dwelling societies who passed down their traditional knowledge and cultural heritage orally and through living institutions, it has proven to be a very effective and sustainable way of preserving cultural heritage. Alongside new opportunities, it has also thrown up new challenges related to preservation of cultural heritage.

There are numerous studies providing valuable insights on the role of digital literacy and digital platforms in the broader context of cultural preservation. However, there is a clear gap in this body of research when it comes to tribal communities. As far as the tribal communities of North East India are concerned, there are various scholarly studies available on them. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of research studies on subject related to digital literacy and its impact on the preservation of cultural heritage. Against this backdrop, the Garo community of Meghalaya has been selected to understand how the digital literacy along with use of digital tools is transforming the ways of preservation of cultural heritage.

Database and Methodology

The Garo is one of three major communities of Meghalaya; the other two are the Khasi and Jaintia. The Garo have a characteristic of matrilineality. The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. In the state of Meghalaya, two districts namely West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills, have been selected based on literacy rate and broadband coverage. The West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills Districts have literacy of 67.58% and
89.79 % respectively. Among the Garo Hills districts, West Garo Hills has the highest broadband coverage (95.58%) and South Garo Hills has the least broadband coverage (72.27%).

A pilot study was conducted in January 2024 for 5 days. The initial 3 days were spent in Tura C&RD (Urban) Block and Selsella C&RD (Rural) Block. The final two days were dedicated to the Baghmara C&RD (Urban) Block and Gasuapara C&RD (Rural) Block. The team established a groundwork for fieldwork. The pilot study was instrumental in testing the tools of the present research project and understanding the logistical and cultural situations of the areas. A minor modification in terms of the questionnaire took place following the pilot study.

The final study was for thirty-one days (including the journey period), from 20th February, 24 to 22nd March, 24. The final study covered the 23 villages of 4 blocks mentioned above. The team contacted and approached the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, and district administration, followed by the block administration officials, and received a positive response. After that, the team contacted the Nokmas (locality head) of respective areas and also received cooperation from Asha workers and Gram Sevaks (village development workers), who facilitated introductions to community members.

Data was collected through face-to-face interactions and mobile phone communications. A total

number of 172 households were selected through random sampling and data was collected through the questionnaire. The household survey yielded data on family details, along with age, gender, subgroups of the community, religious belief, marital details, educational status, occupation, and digital literacy rate among the studied population.

In-depth structured and semi-structured interviews helped to get data on the importance and different uses of digital devices in their daily life, and the duration of the usage of these devices. More importantly, these interviews helped to understand the individual perspective about their own culture, cultural markers, factors impacting their cultural heritage, importance and need of preserving them, and details of sharing of digital content. These interviews also captured the information related to individual and collective efforts being made for cultural preservation.

In order to have detailed information on the content being put on the social media platform related to cultural heritage documentation and preservation, four content creators were selected through purposive sampling and thorough case study data were collected from them. These case studies shed light on the journey of content creators, their reason for making content, and the expected outcome of these videos.

The genealogical method was used to understand the family lineage in the studied community. Focused group discussion was carried out to understand collective views on various topics like material culture, architecture, linguistic division, social institutions, and effect of cultural digitalization. Additionally, observation and photography methods helped to document evidence during the present study.

Various published and unpublished records, reports, articles, and books were consulted to collect relevant data and information on the research topic. As the present study topic 'digital literacy and its impact on preservation of cultural heritage' is a relatively new topic to research, particularly in the context of cultural preservation, there were only a few published research papers on the topic. The study team accessed various sources of secondary data, both published and unpublished, on the Garo community for a better understanding of the community. Census and other statistical hand books were consulted to gain insights into the community's demographics. Additionally, the team reviewed several videos uploaded by the content creators and examined various Facebook and social media pages, dedicated to cultural preservation.

The research methodology employed for this study was comprehensive and multi- faceted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The pilot study laid the groundwork for successful data collection, while the final study utilized a variety of anthropological methods to interpret and analyze the data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to understand the Garo culture, its changing pattern, impact of digital literacy on the preservation of the community culture. The standard chart, graphs and bar diagrams were used to interpret the data. The analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital literacy influences the preservation of cultural heritage within the Garo Hills region of Meghalaya.

About the Study Area

Meghalaya, one of the seven north-eastern states of India, derives its name from two words '*Megh*' meaning clouds, and '*Alaya*' meaning home, thus, *Home of clouds*. The people living here are mainly of three tribes, particularly from three distinct hill ranges,
i.e. Garo Hills, Khasi Hills, and Jaintia Hills. It is home to three tribal communities namely the Khasis, Jaintia and Garo. Each tribe has a distinct pattern of culture, traditions, festivals, and cuisine where lineage and inheritance are passed through women, distinguishing it culturally from other regions (Das & Nagar, 2021).

The emergence of Meghalaya is marked by several historical as well as geopolitical events, as it emerged from North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) first as an autonomous state on 2nd April 1970 and then as a full-fledged state on 21st January 1972. Geographically, on the north and eastern sides, it shares boundary with Assam. On the south and west, it shares its border with Bangladesh. Shillong, the state capital, is located in the East Khasi Hills district. Meghalaya has a total area of around 22429 sq. km, which lies between latitudes 25°02' and 26°07' N and longitudes 89°49'and 92°50'E. The total population of this state is 29,66,889.

Geologically it is an undulating plateau region. The altitude ranges from 150 meters to 1961 meters. The eastern plateau affects the climate of this state to a great extent. Climatologically, Meghalaya falls in a temperate climate zone which is influenced by the south-west monsoon and the northeast winter wind. The climate of the Garo Hills is warm and humid except in the winter. Meghalaya is recorded as the wettest state with an average rainfall of 2600 millimeters and the famous Cherrapunji receives around 12000 millimeters annually. As regards the vegetation type, Meghalaya has a dense evergreen forest cover due to its wet climatic condition, which is also enriched by its floral parts including trees (Segun, Sal, Jamoon, Mango, Banana, oak, pine, etc.), bushes and creepers as well as fauna, consist of wild animals and livestock (cow, goat, pig, hen, buffalo, etc). The major rivers of state are Chagua, Ajagar, Kalu, Dudnai, Didram, Ringgi, Krishnai, Bhogai, Daring, Sanda, Dareng, Bandra and Simsang (the biggest one). Among these Simsang (partially), Kalu, Krishnai, Bhugai, and Nitai have the facility of navigation. The main crops and vegetables of this state are *Gue*, nut, squash, corn, black pepper, ginger, garlic, pumpkin, radish, and other leafy vegetables.

There are three numerically dominating tribal groups, viz., Khasis, Pnars or Jaintias and Garos spread over twelve districts namely East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, South West Khasi Hills, Ri- -Bhoi, East Jaintia Hills, West Jaintia Hills, North Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, and South Garo Hills. The last two districts were selected as study areas.

Meghalaya has a good network of roads throughout the state. It is well connected to other north-eastern states by metal road.

West Garo Hills

West Garo Hills of Meghalaya is located in the western part of the state, with its headquarters at Tura. It is bounded by the East Garo Hills district on the east, the South Garo Hills on the southeast, the Goalpara district of Assam on the north and northwest, and Bangladesh on the south. The district lies between the latitudes 90° 30′ and 89° 40′ E, and the longitudes of 26° and 25° 20′ N, with a total area of around 3,614 sq. km along with a total population of 5,78,390. There are three important mountain ranges, such as Tura Range, Arbella Range, and Ranggira Range in the districts of Garo Hills. Major rivers of this area are Jinjiram, Kalu, Didak, Bhugai, Rongai, Dareng or Nitai, etc. This area shows a tendency for a temperate climate compared to the state.

There are eight community rural development blocks (C & RD) in West Garo Hill District. Of them, two blocks – Tura and Selsella – were selected for study.
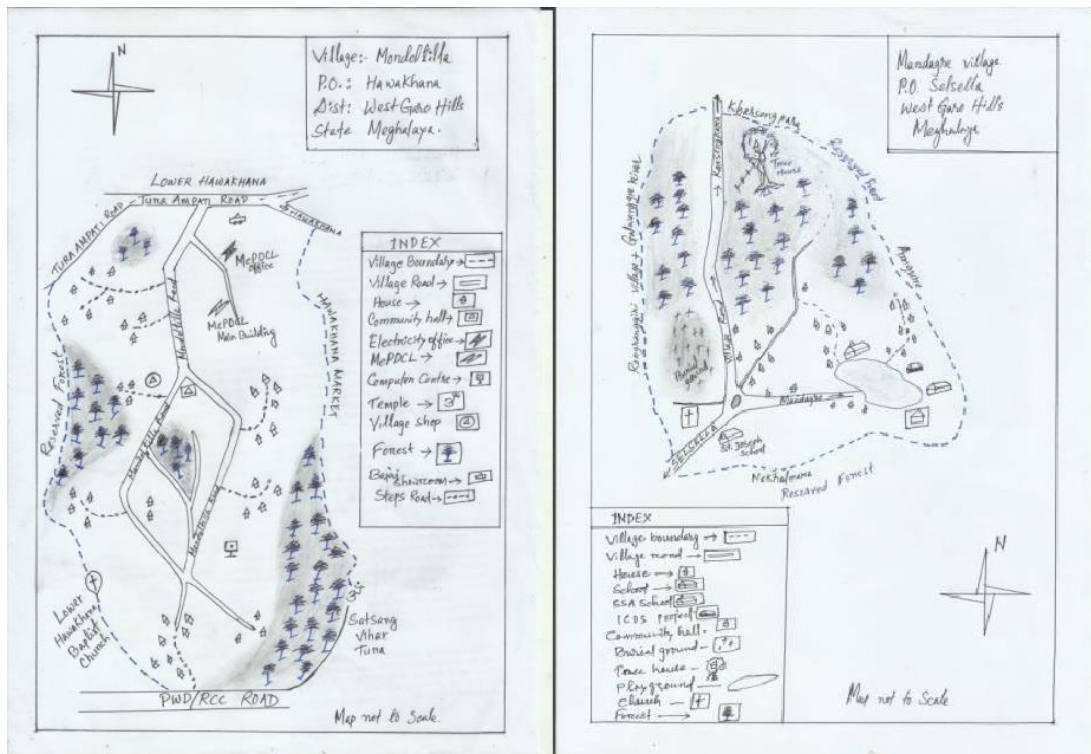
Notional map of Mondoltilla Village and Mandagre village, West Garo Hills District South Garo Hills

South Garo Hills district lies in the southern part of the west half of the state of Meghalaya. Baghmara, the only town in the district, serves as the headquarters. The district is located between 25°10'N and 25°35'N latitudes and 90°15'E and 91°0' E longitude, with a total area of 1887 sq. Km. & the population is around 1,42,574. It is bounded by East Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, and West Garo Hills & Bangladesh in the north, east, west, and south accordingly. The district is filled with hilly and difficult terrain. This area shows a tendency for a temperate climate compared to the state. This area has also forest cover to a large extent. The important timbers available in the district are sal, teak, gamari, khokon, Champa, etc. The other major forest products are bamboo, cane, firewood, broomsticks, thatching grass, etc. Faunal parts include wild animals like leopards, wolves, wild cats, jackals, etc, along with some livestock such as goats, pigs, dogs, hens, etc.. People cultivate paddy, areca nut, betelnut, cashew, rubber, cauliflower, carrot, potato, onion, leafy vegetables, etc. Major rivers of this district are Simsang, Jinjiram, Didram, Ringgi, Bugi, Dareng, etc. Road Communication is in good condition throughout the district as well as connected to other districts and headquarters (256 km) by metal road.
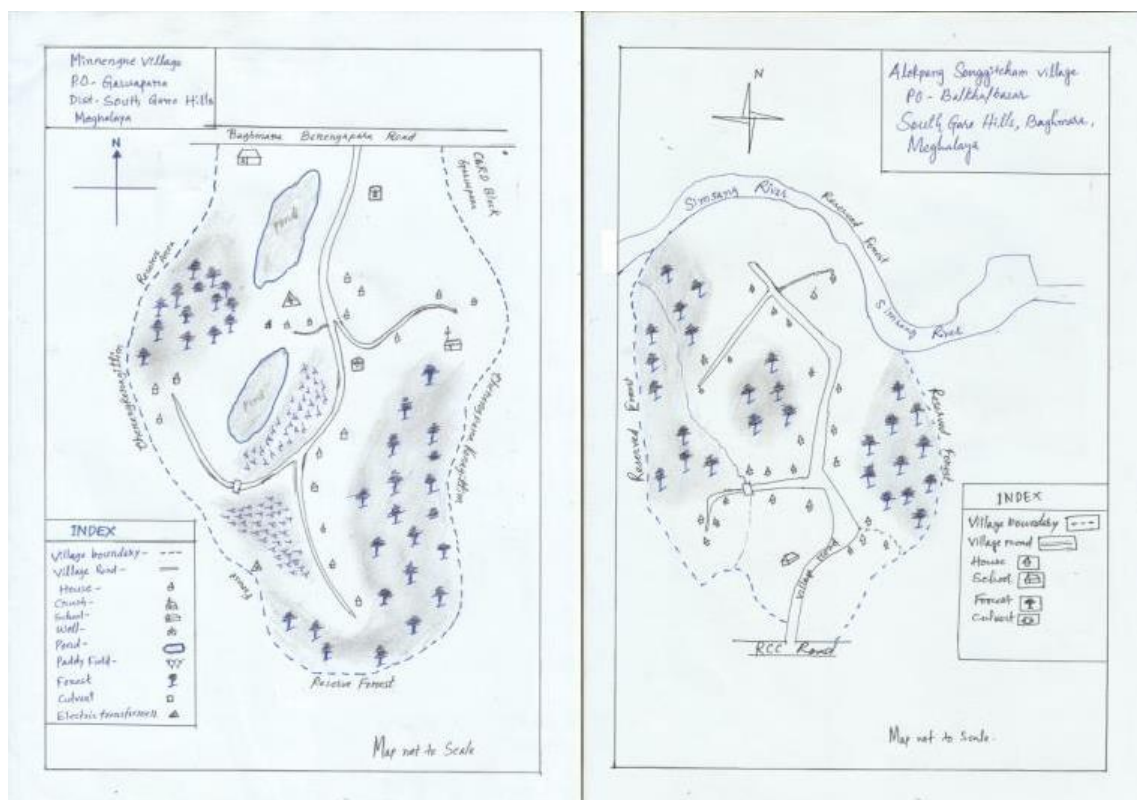
Notional map of Minnengre and Alokpang Songgitcham Village, South Garo Hills District

There are 5 development blocks in the district viz., Chokpot C&RD Block, Ronggara C&RD Block, Siju C&RD Block, Gasuapara C&RD Block and Baghmara C&RD Block. The last two blocks were selected as the study area.

Studied Villages

The present study covers 23 sample villages. There are thirteen villages from West Garo Hills district were selected under study. Out of them seven villages belong to Tura block (or municipality, as it is the only urban area under study). These are Teteng Aja, Teteng Kol, Lower Ading Kongbe, Modynagar, Akonggre, Dobasipara, and Mondoltila. Other six villages viz., Dignapara, Mandagre, Dabakgre, Korakona, Rongkakgre, and Mronggre come under Selsella C&RD block.

There are ten villages from South Garo Hills district which were selected under study. Out of them five villages belong to Baghmara C&RD block. These are Dabit Wakkru Ading, Rangdokram, Emangre,

Alokpang Songgitcham and Siju Rongkeng. Other five villages viz., Minnengre, Seempara, Konagittam, Cherengkeragittam, and Kondok are settled under Gasuapara C&RD block. A list of studied villages with their administrative and geographical location is given below:

Table 01: Villages and their geographical Locations

Sl. No.	District Name	Block Name	Village Name
1	West Garo Hills	Tura	TetengKol
2			Teteng Aja
3			Lower Kongbe Ading
4			Modynagar
5			Akonggre
6			Dobasipara
7			Mondaltila
8		Selsella	Dignapara
9			Mandagre
10			Dabakgre
11			Korakona
12			Rongkakgre
13			Mronggre
14	South Garo Hills	Baghmara	Dabit Wakkru Ading
15			Emangre
16			Alokpang Songgitcham
17			Siju Rongkenggitam
18			Rongdokram
19		Gasuapara	Minnengre
20			Seempara
21			Konagittam
22			Cherengkeragittam
23			Kondok

Tura, West Garo Hills

Teteng Aja/ Tetengkol

The localities of Tetengkol and Tetengaja is derived from the Garo word te.teng which means dwarf/elf. Thus, Te.tengkol is the house/home/cave of the dwarf and Tetengaja, the dwelling place of *Teteng*. The is a cave in Te.teng A.kol, Tura, West Garo Hills which is a tourist spot and the case of the dwarf/elf/fairy is maintained by the Te.Tengkol Development Committee. There are many videos on YouTube documenting the cave. A video entitled "Teteng A'kol at West Garo Hills Tura" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TRexmwnWtkQ) has 1.9 lakh views and provides and in-depth tour of the cave wherein it can be seen that there are statues of dwarfs kept in the cave.

Lower Kongbe Ading

Lower KongbeAding is a locality in Tura, West Garo Hills. The locality derives its name from two words *kongbe* – a waterfall near the locality and *a.ding* meaning hill in Garo. Lower KongbeAding was established in 2003 with registration no. TSR.01:03 of 03. Prior to the registration of the locality, there were inhabitants who settled in the area hailing from numerous parts of Garo Hills and were mostly speakers of the Ambeng dialect. The locality is a settlement which is about 25-35 years old and has about 122 households. It is about 400 meters from the Don Bosco Road, Tura and there is a playground the size of a full-size football pitch besides the entrance of the locality. The locality is intrinsically connected with concrete and muddy footpaths and stairways adorned with lush vegetation and beetle nuts trees.

Modynagar

Modynagar is a locality located in the centre of Tura which is named after Mody K. Marak who in April 1952 became the first Chairman of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, and *nagar* is a Hindi word which means an area or a quarter within a town. It is said that a certain part of the present day, Modynagar was once a graveyard for people who was succumbed by leprosy. Over the years, Garos from different parts of Garo hills settled in Modynagar. There is the Modynagar Baptist Church, Tura in the locality and a majority of the inhabitants of the locality are Christians who have followed the teachings and preaching of the American Baptist Missionaries. In Modynagar, there is a monument which the locals call Rong.te Asonga. The stone structures have inscribed in them "Quarried in Texas" and "Quarried in Wisconsin" . The location can be found on google maps https://maps.app.goo.gl/uhB8JuoMT5d1NFFE9 .

Akonggre

Akonggre is a locality in Tura. Akonggre derives its name from the terrain in which the locality is located in which is a hillock area. *Akong* in Garo means a piece of land which is not flat, plain or straight, it also means the inclined of a hill and *gre* is suffix to locality/area meaning place. The earlier settlers of Akonggre settled in the lower parts of the area which is the Akonggre valley.

Dobasipara

Dobasipara is a locality in Tura, it gets its name from two words, *dobasi* and *para*. Dobasi is believed to be the name of a person who was known as MadaDobasi and *para* is a Bengali word which means a neighborhood or locality, usually characterised by a strong sense of community. According to Mr. Willapson R. Sangma, a resident of Dobasipara, the locality had very few Garo residents in the 1960s and it was inhabited by para military personnel (Border Security Forces) and their families.

Mondaltilla

Mondaltilla/ Mondaltila is a locality in Tura which gets its name from the surveyors quarters of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). According to the residents of Mondaltilla, the surveyors are referred to as *mondals* and their staff quarters which is present till date is known as *mondal-tilla.*

Selsella Block, West Garo Hills

Mandagre

Mandagre derives its name from the from two Garo words, Manda is the name of a Garo clan and gre is suffix to locality/area meaning place. Thus, Mandagre was once a locality which was in majority inhabited by Garos belonging to the Manda clan. The village falls under Dignapara Gram Panchayat and is bounded by the villages of Kangklapre, Galwanggre, Dingnapara, and Rabanokkap on the east, west, north, and south, respectively. There are 121 households in the village and the closest post office and police station is Selsella post office and Selsella police station (Dadenggre subdivision, West Garo Hills district).

Dabakgre

Dabakgre, etymologically *Dabak* is the name of a plant and *Gre* is a place. It was said that the dabak was abundant in Dabakgre but today there is very less to little flora of dabak in the village. If fortunate, the plant might shoot during the monsoons. The village falls under Dignapara Gram Panchayat and is bounded by the villages of Rongkakgre, Sadalpara, Mronggre, and Megonggre on the east, west, north, and south, respectively. There are 93 households in the village and the closest post office and police station is Selsella post office and Selsella police station (Dadenggre subdivision, West Garo Hills district).

Korakona

Korakona is a village under Selsella block. The village derives its name from a story about a ghost with no legs. In the local dialect, Kora/Khora means no legs and Khona/ Kona means this side or over here. The residents of the village have never seen the ghost but according to their forefathers, the ghost would wander about in the village and in the nearby lake. It was said that in the early 1900s who ever would go outside at night saw the ghost.

The village is bounded by the villages of Sekapara, Aronggiri, Rongsak, and Bollongre on the east, west, north, and south sides, respectively. The people of Korakona were Songsarek up until 1990. Ruchang Sangma and his wife were the first settlers of the village and Athest A. Sangma was the first Christian of the village.

Rongkakgre

Rongkakgre or Rong-rek-kak-gre is a village in Selsella block, West Garo Hills. The village is surrounded by Dopburi, Wagspgiri, Balnangiri, and Megonggiri on the east, west, north, and south sides accordingly. This is a remote village in Selsella Post Office, Selsella Police Station, Daderngre subdivision of West Garo Hills district. There are 70 households in the village; out of which 18 households still follow the Garo indigenous faith Songsarek. Four major maharis or clans reside in the village, Chambugong Marak, Cheran Sangma, Baldak Sangma and Mangsang Sangma, and the land is under the Akhang Nokma of the Chambugong land. This is an agriculture-based village, people cultivate paddy, black pepper, cashew, betelnut, chili, ginger, etc. through Jhum cultivation.

Tamarind collection from the forest is a substantive source for the economy. There is no health center, no ICDS, one primary school, and one upper primary school in this village.

Mronggre

Mronggre, means a clan of Garo community. Numerous people with this clan constitute the name of this village. Rongkakgre, Sadalpara, Mronggre, and Megonggre surround this village on the east, west, north, and south sides accordingly. This is located under Dingnapara GP and Kachiamoa post office and Selsella police station of the Daderngre subdivision of West Garo Hills district. This village has a total of 64 households, with a majority of the Garo community. Except for an ICDS and a primary school, there is no educational institution. There is no govt. health facility inside the village. People depend on Dabakgre (a nearby village) for this purpose. Agriculture is the main source of the economy in this village. Main crops consist of various vegetables such as tomato, pumpkin, potato, ginger, etc., along with betelnut, corn, and other leafy vegetables.

Baghmara, South Garo Hills

Alokpang Songgitcham

The village name Alokpang came from two words 'Alok' which means a type of grass and 'pang' means bushes. This village has a well-connected road, electricity, medical facilities, and educational facilities. Agro-based products from Jhum cultivation are the prime source of the economy. The village is 22kms far away from the district headquarter Baghmara. There is a government pre-primary school in this village. The children goes to a private primary school in Bobragittim, which is 5 kms away from AlokpangSonggitcham Village. There is a community health center and a dispensary 10 kms away from the village. There is a primary health center more than 12 kms away from AlokpangSonggitcham. There is no market place inside the village. Three essential commodity shops are there to meet the everyday needs of the villagers.

Rangdokram

Rang means big bowl, *dok* means bit and *ram* means village. Earlier, their ancestors used to bit tongs whenever any information to be given to the villagers. It is a medium size village with 70 households in Baghmara (both PO and PS) of South Garo Hills district. It is nearby the district headqaterBaghmara that is a prime concern of developmental activities in this village. There are SSA L. P. School, SSA U. P. School, Rankha Memorial Higher Secondary Girls School, Captain Williamson Memorial Government College, Captain Williamson Memorial Civil Hospital and other medical facilities near this village. A well-developed drainage system is found in this area. Water supply from both PHE (Public Health Engineering) and community submersibles has enriched the sources of drinking water for people. There are clubs, banks, and burial ground in this village, which facilitate the standard of living of the people in this area.

Gasuapara Block, South Garo Hills

Konagittam

Kona means corner and *gittam* is anonymous to a place or a part of the village. By administration, it is located under Gasuapara Post Office and Gasuapara Police Station. Garo is the only community residing in this area. People have easy access to the Gasuapara market and school through concrete road. There are no ICDS centres or any kind of Government school in this village. Only one private school, i.e., Salwood Secondary School is there inside the village. Gasuapara Higher secondary school is the nearby H.S. school (6 kms away) for people. Gasuapara market is also located within the same distance. There are neither any health center or a dispensary inside the village. For any kind of health issue, people goes to Gasuapara Health Sub-Centre (7 kms away). There is a total of 75 households residing in this village. All the villagers follow Christianity.

Cherengkeragittam

Chereng and Kera were husband and wife in their folktale. One day, Nokma told them, he had land in this village, and directed them to stay there. Then that couple was the first settler in this village and the name came from them. By administration, it is located under Gasuapara Post Office and Gasuapara Police Station of the Gasuapara C&RD block. There are two educational centers in this village, one SSA school and another Upper Primary school. These schools provide education to the children of the village. The Jatrakona Primary Health Centre, which is located 1 km away, serves as the primary healthcare facility for the people of the village. The Primary Health Centre provides a range of medical services, including medical consultations, vaccinations, and basic emergency care. There is no marketplace inside the village. Two essential commodity shops are there to meet the everyday needs of the villagers. Beside this, people use Gasuapara market for weekly basis.

Kondok

It is a place where wild animals like tigers, elephants, etc., were found in the early days. In Garo, it is known as 'Matcha Mongma Konna'. So, it is taken after the word Konna, which means the corner. Matcha denotes the watch tower. It was a corner for watching the wild animals and make a paripherial zone between forest and human habitat. Forefathers, who lived in this village, kept the name of the village as Kondok. By administration, it is located under Gasuapara Post Office and Gasuapara Police Station of the Gasuapara C&RD block. Government Lower and Upper Primary Schools are present in the village. These institutions and the village ICDS centres play a pivotal role in nurturing the physical as well as intellectual growth of the community and preparing the children for future endeavors. There is a sub health center along with a dispensary that meet the healthcare need of the villagers.

Age and Sex Ratio at Block Level

The combined population of the blocks of Tura, Selsella, Baghmara, and Gasuapara is 972 individuals. Within this total, there are 471 males and 501 females, indicating a slightly higher number of females compared to males in this population. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the population statistics for these areas.
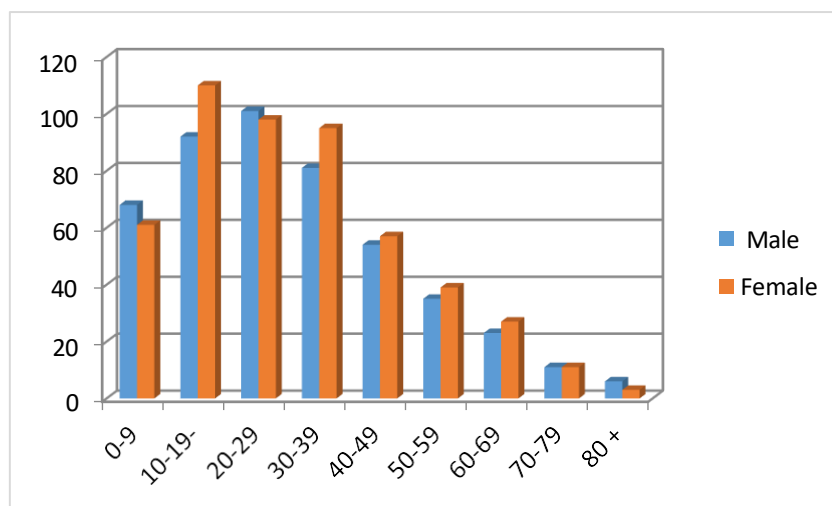
Figure 1: Gender wise total population of the Garo community of Meghalaya

Table no, 2 shows the overall population distribution in the state. It portrays that the age groups 10-19 and 20-29 have the highest concentration, accounting for 20.78% and 20.47% of the total population, respectively. There is a noticeable upward trend in these younger age groups, followed by a decline in the 30-39 age group. This indicates that the majority of the Garo population falls within the younger age bracket of 10-39 years.

Table no 2. Age and Gender-wise Distribution of the Garo Community in Study Blocks of Meghalaya

Age Group		Age and Gender, District and Block Wise Classification											Total Male	Total Female	Grand Total
Districts		West Garo Hills						South Garo Hills							
Blocks		Tura			Selsella			Baghmara			Gasuapara					
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total			
0-9	N	15	10	25	13	15	28	21	17	38	19	19	38	68	61	129
	%	5.14	3.42	8.56	7.22	8.33	15.56	8.05	6.51	14.56	7.95	7.95	15.90	7.00	6.28	13.27
10-19	N	14	22	36	21	23	44	32	35	67	25	30	55	92	110	202
	%	4.79	7.53	12.33	11.67	12.78	24.44	12.26	13.41	25.67	10.46	12.55	23.01	9.47	11.32	**20.78**
20-29	N	26	30	56	20	17	37	32	27	59	23	24	47	101	98	199
	%	8.90	10.27	19.18	11.11	9.44	20.56	12.26	10.34	22.61	9.62	10.04	19.67	10.39	10.08	**20.47**

Age																
30-39	N	36	33	69	10	15	25	13	20	33	22	27	49	81	95	176
	%	12.33	11.30	23.63	5.56	8.33	13.89	4.98	7.66	12.64	9.21	11.30	20.50	8.33	9.77	**18.11**
40-49	N	16	22	38	11	11	22	14	14	28	13	10	23	54	57	111
	%	5.48	7.53	13.01	6.11	6.11	12.22	5.36	5.36	10.73	5.44	4.18	9.62	5.56	5.86	11.42
50-59	N	9	19	28	8	4	12	10	9	19	8	7	15	35	39	74
	%	3.08	6.51	9.59	4.44	2.22	6.67	3.83	3.45	7.28	3.35	2.93	6.28	3.60	4.01	7.61
60-69	N	11	14	25	3	3	6	6	7	13	3	3	6	23	27	50
	%	3.77	4.79	8.56	1.67	1.67	3.33	2.30	2.68	4.98	1.26	1.26	2.51	2.37	2.78	5.14
70-79	N	5	7	12	0	1	1	3	0	3	3	3	6	11	11	22
	%	1.71	2.40	4.11	0	0.56	0.56	1.15	0.00	1.15	1.26	1.26	2.51	1.13	1.13	2.26
80 +	N	2	1	3	3	2	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	6	3	9
	%	0.68	0.34	1.03	1.67	1.11	2.78	0.38	0.00	0.38	0	0	0	0.62	0.31	0.93
Total	N	134	158	292	89	91	180	132	129	261	116	123	239	471	501	972
	%	13.8	16.26	**30.04**	9.16	9.36	**18.52**	13.6	13.3	**26.85**	11.9	12.7	**24.59**	48.46	51.54	100
Sex Ratio		1063.69														
Average Sex Ratio of the State		989 for each 1000 Male.														
National Average Sex Ratio		Urban 926 females per 1000 males Rural 947 females per 1000 males														

*Sex Ratio= (Total Female Population / Total Male Population) X 1000

In the Tura C&RD Block of West Garo Hills, the age groups 20-29 and 30-39 have the highest population percentages, with 19.18% and 23.63%, respectively. Following these age groups, there is a noticeable decline in the population for the 40-49 age group, indicating that the majority of the population is composed of younger individuals. Additionally, Tura C&RD Block has the largest population share, accounting for 30.04% of the total population in the region, which is higher than that of the other three blocks.

Similarly, in the Selsella C&RD Block of West Garo Hills, the age groups 10-19 and 20-29 have the highest population percentages, at 24.44% and 20.56%, respectively. Thereafter, a declining trend is noticed from the 30-39 age group on ward. Despite this trend, it is observed that Selsella C&RD Block accounts for only 18.52% of the total population, which is lower compared to the other three blocks.

In the Baghmara C&RD Block of South Garo Hills, the age groups 10-19 and 20-29 have the highest population percentages, at 25.67% and 22.61%, respectively. The population begins to decline starting from the 30-39 age group. Despite this decline, Baghmara C&RD Block has the second-largest population share, accounting for 26.85% of the total population.

Similarly, in the Gasuapara C&RD Block of South Garo Hills, the population is predominantly concentrated in the age group 10-39, which constitutes 63.18% of the population. There is a declining trend in the population for age groups 40-49 and above, indicating that the majority of the population in this block consists of young adults between the ages 10 and 39.

The table highlights a significant aspect of the sex ratio, revealing that it is skewed in favor of females. It shows that the Garo community has a conspicuously higher sex ratio of 1063.69 females per 1000 males, compared to the state average of 989 and the national average of 940, indicating a greater proportion of females in the population.

Table no 3. Educational status of Garo Community of Meghalaya

Districts		West Garo Hills						South Garo Hills						Grand Total
Blocks		Tura			Selsella			Baghmara			Gasuapara			
Educational status		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Non-literate	N	1	5	6	6	11	17	6	9	15	8	18	26	64
	%	0.36	1.79	2.15	3.73	6.83	10.56	2.74	4.11	6.85	3.42	7.69	11.11	7.17
Literate without an educational level	N	2	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	%	0.72	0.36	1.08	0	0.62	0.62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.45
Below Primary	N	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
	%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.43	0.00	0.43	0.11
Primary Class 1-5	N	13	15	28	13	11	24	22	22	44	26	15	41	137
	%	4.66	5.38	10.04	8.07	6.83	14.91	10.05	10.05	20.09	11.11	6.41	17.52	15.34
Middle Class 6-8	N	7	4	11	6	13	19	19	20	39	21	24	45	114
	%	2.51	1.43	3.94	3.73	8.07	11.80	8.68	9.13	17.81	8.97	10.26	19.23	12.77
Matriculation / Secondary Class 9-10	N	24	30	54	20	21	41	29	31	60	43	37	80	235
	%	8.60	10.75	19.35	12.42	13.04	25.47	13.24	14.16	27.40	18.38	15.81	34.19	26.32
Higher Secondary Class 11-12	N	32	32	64	17	10	27	17	12	29	15	14	29	149
	%	11.47	11.47	22.94	10.56	6.21	16.77	7.76	5.48	13.24	6.41	5.98	12.39	16.69
Non-technical diploma	N	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	%	0.36	0	0.36	0.62	0.00	0.62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.22
Technical diploma	N	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.4	0.0	0.4	0	0	0	0.22

								6	0	6						
Graduation and Above	N	47	64	111	17	14	31	11	20	31	5	7	12			185
	%	16.85	22.94	39.78	10.56	8.70	19.25	5.02	9.13	14.16	2.14	2.99	5.13			20.72
Total	N	127	152	279	80	81	161	105	114	219	119	115	234			893*
	%	14.22	17.02	31.24	8.96	9.07	18.03	11.76	12.77	24.52	13.33	12.88	26.20			100

* Total No. of Eligible Individuals (aged 7 and above) = 893

Table 3 presents data on the educational status of the population at the block level. According to this table, the majority of the eligible population falls into the category of "graduation and above," which constitutes 20.72 percent of the total. This indicates that a significant portion of the population has achieved at least a graduation level of education or higher.

It is evident from Table 3 that 7.17 percent of the studied population was illiterate. 0.45 percent of respondents were those who were literate without education but they could sign and 0.11 percent were below the primary level. 15.34 percent population was educated up to the primary level, followed by 12.77 percent population who had studied till middle school. 26.32 percent of the studied population had completed their matriculation while 16.69 percent had completed their higher secondary school. Out of 893 community members, only 02 individuals (01 male and 01 female) had non-technical diplomas, and also 02 individuals (01 male and 01 female) had technical diplomas.

Table 4 provides an overview of the literacy status of the population at the block level in the studied blocks. The table depicts that most of the Garos living in Meghalaya are literate, with only 7.17 percent of the eligible population being non-literate. The literacy rate among the Garo community stands at 92.83 percent, which is higher than both the state literacy rate of Meghalaya, which is 74.43 percent and the national literacy rate of
76.32 percent. This suggests that the Garo community has a significantly higher level of literacy compared to the overall averages for the state and country.

(https://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/meghalaya.html)

Table no 4. Literacy Rate of the Garo Community of Meghalaya

Districts		West Garo Hills						South Garo Hills						Total		
Blocks		Tura			Selsella			Baghmara			Gasuapara					
Literacy status		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Non-literate	N	1	5	6	6	11	17	6	9	15	8	18	26	21	43	64
	%	0.3	1.7	2.1	3.7	6.8	10.	2.7	4.1	6.8	3.4	7.6	11.	2.3	4.82	**7.1**

		6	9	5	3	3	56	4	1	5	2	9	11	5		**7**
Literate	N	126	147	273	74	70	114	99	105	204	111	97	208	410	419	829
	%	45.16	52.69	**97.85**	56.49	53.44	**87.02**	45.21	47.95	**93.15**	47.44	41.45	**88.89**	45.91	46.92	**92.83**
Total Eligible Population	N	127	152	279	80	81	131	105	114	219	119	115	234	431	462	893*
	%	14.22	17.02	31.24	8.96	9.07	14.67	11.76	12.77	24.52	13.33	12.88	26.20	48.26	51.74	100

*Total No. of Individuals (N) = 893 (including age 7 yrs and above)

A block wise analysis shows that among the four blocks, the literacy rate of Tura C&RD block of West Garo Hills is 97.85 percent which is higher than the other three blocks. The underlying reason for higher literacy of Tura block is attributed to the fact that Tura is more urban and educational facilities are well-developed there compared to the other three blocks. On the other hand, Selsella C&RD Block in West Garo Hills has the lowest literacy rate among the four blocks, at 87.02 percent. This lower literacy rate is likely due to Selsella being more rural and more distant from the urban center and has fewer educational centers compared to the other blocks.

The comparison of literacy rates between Baghmara and Gasuapara blocks in South Garo Hills reveals that Baghmara has a higher literacy rate of 93.15 percent, whereas Gasuapara's literacy rate stands at 88.89 percent. This discrepancy can be attributed to Baghmara's status as the district headquarters, which provides it with more advanced infrastructure and better access to educational resources compared to the more rural Gasuapara.

Sub Groups of Garo

The term "Garo" broadly refers to all groups within the Garo community, which comprises 12 distinct sub-groups. However, in the study villages and among the sampled households, the research team identified that residents belong to only seven of these sub- groups (Table 5).
Table 5 shows that out of the 172 sampled households, a significant majority, 74.42 percent, belong to the Ambeng sub-group. In contrast, the Matchi, Dual, and Chisak sub- groups each have a much smaller representation, with only 1 percent of the sampled households belonging to each of these three sub-groups. This data highlights a pronounced disparity in the representation of different Garo sub-groups within the sampled households. The dominance of the Ambeng sub-group suggests it may be more prevalent or have a larger presence in the study area compared to the other sub-groups. The minimal representation of the Matchi, Dual, and Chisak sub-groups indicates that these sub-groups are either less common in the area or possibly less represented in the sample.

Table no 5. Sub Groups of Garo Community of Meghalaya

Name of the sub-groups	Ambeng	Atong	Awe	Chisak	Dual	Gara-ganching	Matchi	Total
No. of households	128	23	4	1	1	14	1	172
Percentage	74.42	13.37	2.33	0.58	0.58	8.14	0.58	100.00
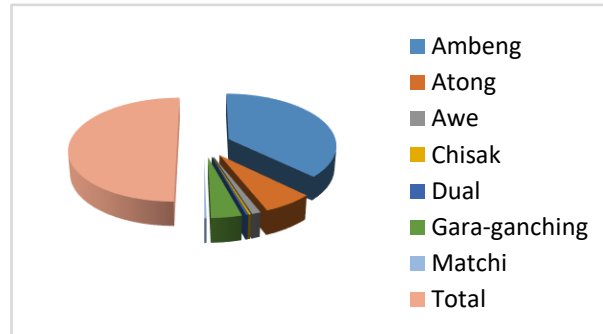
Figure-2 Subgroups of the Garo community of Meghalaya

Besides, it was also found that though each of the Garo sub-groups has its own distinct dialect, most people within the community use the Ambeng dialect for communication among themselves. This trend suggests that the Ambeng dialect is increasingly becoming a common or predominant dialect across the various Garo sub-groups. This shift could reflect a broader trend towards linguistic convergence, where a dominant dialect emerges as a common language despite the presence of multiple distinct dialects within the community.

Religious Beliefs

Table no 6. Religious Beliefs of the Garo Community of Meghalaya

Religious beliefs	Christian			Songsarek	Unitarian Christian Association (UCA)	Total
	Baptist	Catholic	Total			
No. of households	124	44	168	3	1	172
Percentage	72.09	25.58	97.67	1.74	0.58	100
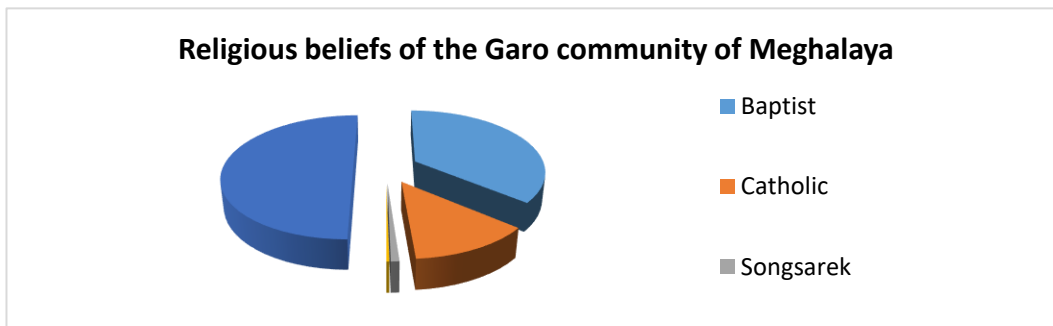
Figure-3 Religious Beliefs of the Garo community of Meghalaya

Traditionally, the Garo community practiced Songsarek beliefs. However, during the colonial period, Christianity was introduced to the region, and today, the majority of the Garo people adhere to Christianity. Consequently, Songsarek beliefs are now primarily found in rural and less developed areas.

The data presented in the Table 6 also support it. It shows that out of 172 sampled households, it has been observed that 168 households follow Christianity. In contrast, only 3 households practice Songsarek religious beliefs, and just 1 household is associated with the Unitarian Christian Association (UCA).

Marital Status in Study Villages

Table no 7. Marital status of the Garo Community of Meghalaya

Marital status		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Married	N	192	192	384
	%	29.40	29.40	58.81
Widowed	N	5	34	39
	%	0.77	5.21	5.97
Divorced	N	0	0	0
	%	0.00	0.00	0.00
Separated	N	0	14	14
	%	0	2.14	2.14
Unmarried	N	101	115	216
	%	15.47	17.61	33.08
Total	N	298	355	653*
	%	45.64	54.36	100.00

* Total No of Eligible Individuals (N) = 653; *Inclusion Criteria: Males= 21 Year and above; females= 18 years and above.
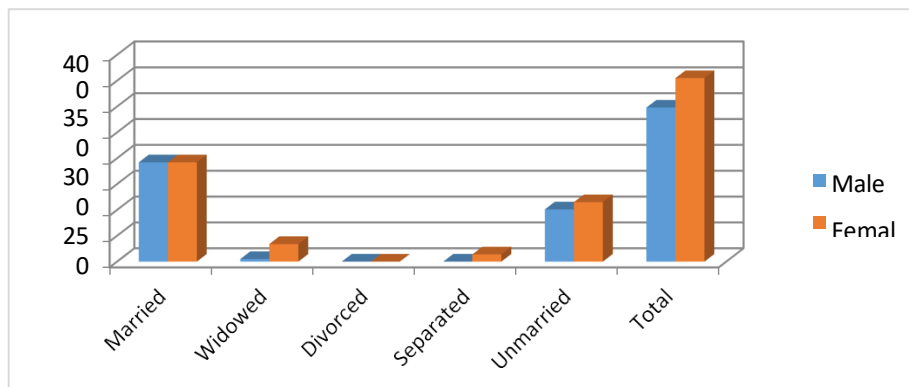
Figure-4 Marital Status of the Garo community of Meghalaya

The Garo are matrilineal and they follow monogamy. Table 7 illustrates that the majority of the studied populations were married with 58.81 percent out of the total eligible individuals with and female being equally represented. However, in the unmarried category, which accounts for 33.08 percent of the total eligible population, it has been observed that more female members remain unmarried, i.e. 17.61 percent in comparison to the males, which is 15.47 percent of the total eligible individuals. 5.97 percent belongs to the widowed category, where 0.77 percent represents males and 5.21 percent represents to female category. Despite this 2.14 percent of the individuals were recorded in the separate category and they were all represented in the female category and no cases of divorce were found.

Occupational Status in Studied villages

Table no 8. Occupational Status of the Garo Community of Meghalaya

Sl.No.	Classifications	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total-N	Percentage
1	Agriculture	37	4.79	89	11.53	126	16.32
2	Daily wage	58	7.51	9	1.17	67	8.68
3	State govt.	47	6.09	48	6.22	95	12.31
4	Central govt.	6	0.78	4	0.52	10	1.30
5	Private sector	4	0.52	0	0.00	4	0.52
6	Unemployed	109	14.12	116	15.03	225	29.15
7	Not Working	15	1.94	10	1.30	25	3.24
8	Retired	18	2.33	9	1.17	27	3.50
9	Student	91	11.79	102	13.21	193	25.00
	Total	385	49.87	387	50.13	772*	100

* Total No. of eligible individuals (N)=772

* Exclusion Criteria: Age groups (14 years and above)

Figure-5 Occupational Status of the Garo community of Meghalaya

Table 8 depicts that out of the total population studied, 772 individuals have been taken into consideration after excluding the age of 14 and above as they do not come under the legal mandate of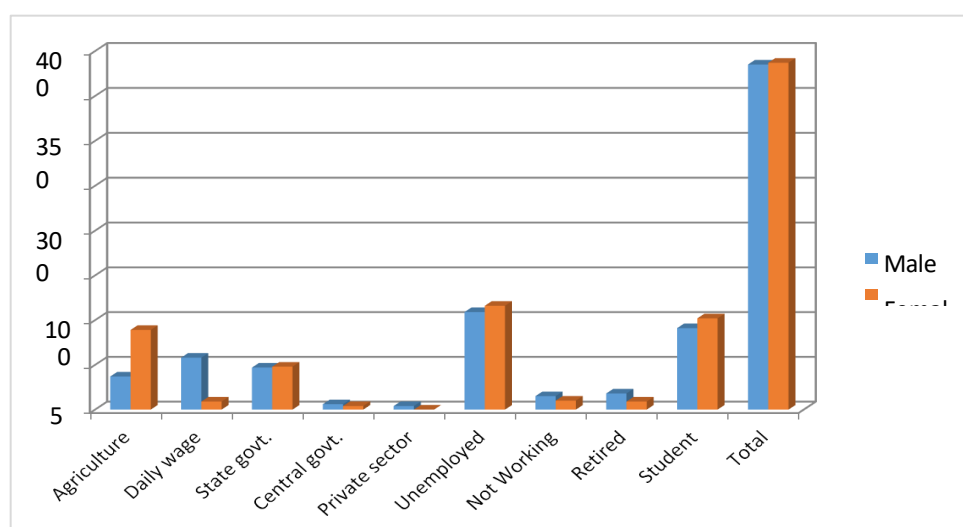 working individuals. Further, it is also reflected from the table that only 14.13 percent of the individuals are employed in various State government, Central government, and Private sector jobs with equal representation of both males and females in employment. However, no female is represented in the private sector. Most of the individuals were in agriculture and daily labour with 16.32 percent and 8.68 percent respectively. 25.00 percent of eligible individuals were still studying. Among the unemployed and not-working individuals, 16.06 percent of males and 16.33 percent of females account for 32.39 percent of the total eligible population. This shows that there is a high level of unemployment among the Garo community of Meghalaya.

Literature review

Digital literacy has emerged as one of the crucial skills in the 21st century, influencing various aspects of society, including the preservation of cultural heritage (Liu, 2004). The ability to store, access, and share information has been altered significantly by technological advancements. This literature review explores the intersection between digital literacy and cultural heritage preservation by examining how digital skills contribute to safeguarding intangible and tangible heritage. It also intends to explore how communities are enabled by digital literacy for more inclusive access while enhancing their own sustained digital age preservation methods.

Martin (2006) provided an early understanding of 'technological literacy,' which he defined as the ability to effectively utilize emerging technologies that are both efficient and appropriate for producing new insights and information. In doing so he laid the groundwork for understanding how technological competency contributes to the broader field of digital literacy. The idea was further developed by Tabusum, Saleem, and Sadik (2014). They described this concept as the capability to locate, organize, understand, evaluate, and analyze information using digital technology. They stressed that the term 'digital literacy' is not confined merely confined computer literacy; it encompasses the adept use of digital platforms to communicate and disseminate information. This distinction is important because while digital literacy allows users to engage with digital content critically, it helps foster the skills necessary for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage within the virtual environment.

The digital revolution has significantly influenced various sectors, including culture, leading to the rise of a new field known as "digital cultural heritage." Although this field is relatively young, it is rapidly expanding due to the increasing integration of digital technologies in cultural preservation efforts. Typically, discussions around cultural heritage and digital technology focus on specific projects that illustrate the practical application of these technologies. However, despite these advances, there is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the broader, long-term impacts of digitization on cultural heritage. Cameron and Kenderdine (2017) argue for more comprehensive studies that critically examine how digitization is reshaping cultural heritage, not just in terms of preservation but also in how it transforms cultural practices and public engagement.

MS Mahendra Kumar (2013), in his seminal work 'Audio-Visual Anthropology,' highlights the pivotal role of audio-visual tools in the field of anthropology. He traces the development

of visual anthropology alongside the advancement of photographic technologies, which has now evolved into a distinct sub-discipline. Visual anthropology is particularly relevant in the documentation and understanding of diverse cultures and human behaviours. Kumar emphasizes that digital ethnography, which utilizes digital cameras to capture ethnographic data, offers a more preservative method of recording cultural practices. Digital anthropology, a term that has emerged from the use of digital photography and the digitization of visual data, further underscores the importance of these technologies in preserving cultural heritage. Contemporary anthropologists increasingly rely on digital video cameras to produce ethnographic films, a practice known as digital ethnography, which provides a dynamic and immersive means of documenting and preserving cultural narratives.

Revianur (2020) discusses the digitization of cultural heritage in Indonesia, particularly during the Hindu-Buddhist period in Semarang Regency, as a new approach to preserving cultural heritage. As technological advancements accelerate modernization, there is a growing concern about the potential loss of cultural heritage. Digitization offers a solution by converting cultural artifacts and practices into digital formats, thereby protecting them from further degradation while making them more accessible to the public. Revianur highlights that digitization not only preserves these cultural assets but also plays a crucial role in raising public awareness about the importance of cultural heritage. Similarly, Bianchi (2006) argues that digitization in museums can address the challenge of limited physical space for heritage items. By digitizing collections, museums can make these items available to a broader audience at a lower cost, enhancing accessibility, particularly for individuals with disabilities.

Robbins Burling's (1961) work, 'A Garo Grammar,' serves as an example of the challenges associated with the preservation of cultural heritage in the digital age. Although Burling's detailed study of the phonetics, morphology, and morphological construction of the Garo language is a valuable resource, it has not been digitized. The lack of digital preservation limits access to this critical work, particularly for researchers and members of the Garo community who could benefit from remote access to such resources. This highlights the need for a concerted effort to digitize and make available important cultural documentation.

Similarly, N.R. Banerjee (1990), in his book 'Museum and Cultural Heritage of India,' underscores the importance of documenting cultural heritage and the role of museums in preserving these objects during their active life. He advocates for the necessity of preservation through museums, noting that documentation is crucial for maintaining the integrity and continuity of cultural heritage. The Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Culture (DBCIC), through its publication on Indigenous Musical Instruments of North East India (2012), exemplifies efforts to preserve cultural heritage through both physical and digital documentation. The book provides a detailed description of traditional Garo musical instruments, such as the Sarenda, Mahjong, and Adil, showcasing the role of museums and publications in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

Jacob Amedie (2015), in his article "The Impact of Social Media on Society," explores the advantages of social media, particularly its role in connecting individuals across the globe and breaking down cultural barriers. Social media platforms, like Facebook, with its 1.4 billion users

worldwide, have become instrumental in sharing and preserving cultural knowledge. By facilitating global communication, social media helps disseminate cultural practices and heritage, making the world feel more interconnected and culturally aware. Narasimha Rao, David, and Kalyani (2022) further emphasize the significant impact of social media on society, particularly among young people. Social media platforms have become integral to daily life, providing a space for the sharing and preservation of cultural content through blogs, videos, and social networking sites. As technology continues to advance, social media will likely play an increasingly important role in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage.

Abhijit Ghosh (2023), in his study "Emergence of Content Creation on YouTube as a Pop Culture Phenomenon in India," examines the profound impact of YouTube on Indian society and its role in popular culture. YouTube, with its vast user base, has become a critical platform for content creation, providing a space for the documentation and preservation of cultural practices. Ghosh analyzes YouTube's influence on Indian society, noting that the platform's accessibility has made it a key source of entertainment, knowledge, and social connection for millions. The widespread availability of affordable smartphones and internet connectivity has enabled a significant portion of the Indian population to engage with and contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage through digital content creation.

Garo people using digital devices

Chapter 3

The Garo: An Ethnographic Note

Meghalaya is a northeastern state of India, inhabited by major communities such as the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia. The present study community is Garos, the second largest tribe in Meghalaya after the Khasis, has its own distinct cultural identity. The Garo are the early settlers in the Garo Hills. The Garo community is primarily concentrated in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and is also found in the adjacent state of Assam in West Bengal and the neighboring country Bangladesh.

Traditionally the Garos and Khasi are well-known as matrilineal and matriarchal societies. The Garo prefer themselves as '*Achik'* which translates to 'hill man'. The study people linguistically belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. They are divided into several sub-divisions like the awes, chisaks, matchi – duals, ambengs, gara- ganchings, atongs, rugas and the megams. Each sub-group has a separate dialect. However, Awe became more popular. They are highly concentrated in the plain area of the foothill of Garo Hills. In the colonial period, the Christian missionaries came to this plain area and they learned and used the Awe language in writing and communication. As a result, the plain area became the center of development in education and health facilities. In the later period, people from neighboring areas moved to this place and also adopted the Awe language through socio-economic interaction. Garo people speak their language among themselves and also speak in Hindi with outsiders in that area. They use Roman script for writing. However, many of them also know the Assamese and Bengali languages due to their geographical location and interaction with them for many purposes.

The Achiks are proud of their language, and among the subdivisions, there are small differences that outsiders can't understand. In their original script, they don't have the letters 'I' and 'Y'.

A kinship system is an arrangement that enables a person to live together and cooperate in an order. They followed the classificatory kinship terminology. In the Achik community kinship plays an important role in all activities of an individual. Family and clan i.e Chatchi, are the major important kin groups and have sub-clans.

Family is the smallest kinship group of Achik society, which consists of husband, wife, and their unmarried dependable children. Joint families are there in the Nokma's families only but few families have extended family members.

The clan of the Garo is a unilateral descent group. It includes a set of kins whose members believe them to be descended from a common ancestor. They have no idea about the names of common ancestors. It is reported that they have five matrilineal clans like Sangma, Marak, Momin, Shira and Areng, in which descent is traced through the female line. Half of the Achik community belongs to the Sangma clan. There is no marital restriction between these clans and one can marry from the same clan also. Each clan has an important role in marriage i.e. selection of bride and groom. They follow tribe endogamy and sub-clan exogamy i.e. called *Machong or Mahari*. *Machong* is an exogamous matrilineal descent kin group and marriage between the same *machong* is strictly prohibited. The names of the sub-clans of the Achik community are Rechil, Koksi, Chambugang, Tegite, Chisim, Rangsa, Machong, Ningmincha, Koknal, Gabil,

Raksam, Chada, Bolwari, Dawa, Te'gite. The name Raksam is associated with a myth. "Rak" means "one hand" and "sam" means "bravery." The grandmother of this lineage lifted a bear with her one hand. So her descendants were named Raksam.

Another name for mahari is A.cha. Here, "A." means "soil" or "land," and "cha" means "eat." When a particular group of the Achik people migrated from the Khasi Hills to the Garo Hills, they ate the soil and promised that they would not leave this place. Apart from the subclans they have sister subclans also, throughout the study two sets of sister subclans were found out. Marriage between these sister's clans is also prohibited even though they are different sub-clans.

Mangsang Manda	Chambugong Chada

The Achik community also follows matrilineal descent, similar to the Khasis, in which descent is traced through the female line. Children of both sexes belong to their mother's descent group. In the past, inheritance of property was through the heiress selected by the parents; typically the youngest daughter or the heiress selected by the parents, but nowadays it varies and sometimes may be divided equally or non-equally among the children.

Regarding the rule of residence, they still follow the matrilocal residence pattern, in which married couples initially live with the bride's family. However, soon after, they must build or move to another house, leaving the parents' house for the youngest daughter and her family of procreation.

In the case of the Nokma family, the youngest daughter, or the daughter selected by the parents, will become Nokma only after the demise of her mother. The role of the nokma is highly respected and holds significant cultural and social importance within the community. Once the current nokma has passed away, a formal process is initiated to recognize the new nokma. The new nokma's name must be registered with the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), which oversees the administrative and traditional functions of the region among Garo community.

Upon registration, the GHADC will bestow a 'dome', a traditional crown-like headgear, which is made of hen feathers, upon the new nokma as a sign of reverence and acknowledgment of their

Matrilineal descent group of Garo Community
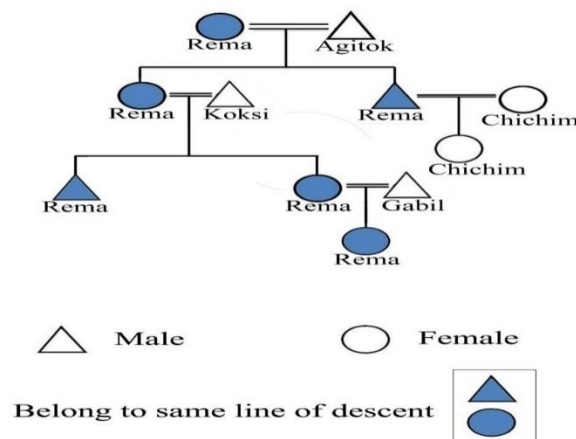
new role. This dome is more than just a ceremonial object; it is a powerful symbol of authority, leadership, and continuity of cultural heritage.

During fieldwork in the Tura municipality area, it was observed that a couple, with two sons but no daughter, adopted a daughter from the wife's eldest sister. They had to register the adoption with the GHADC, as this type of adoption is accepted by their customary law. The adopted daughter has inherited the household property despite the parents having two sons. Among the Garo community, the daughters (even adopted) carry out the family name, so it is important to have a daughter for the maintenance of the property and family lineage.

The Achiks are matrilineal, that is descent is traced through the female line, and matrilocal, that is newly married couples reside with the bride's family. The community is comprised of five clans and several sub-clans that regulate marriage and strengthen clan bonds. Each sub-clan has its association known as the Mahari, whose members are closely related. They conduct meetings twice a month to discuss members' issues and provide support in kind and cash. This Mahari association is exclusive for the separate Mahari members and the President and other leaders are elected democratically. The membership of these associations has a monthly/yearly subscription system and the amount may vary. In case of any emergency, these associations will take care of their members as per their needs.

Monogamous marriage is prevalent among the Achik, but there are no restrictions on remarriage for both widows and widowers. Marriage between members of the same sub- clan is strictly prohibited. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred among the Achik. Marrying someone from the father's Mahari is allowed but strictly prohibited in the case of Mother's Mahari. Marriage from the same mahari is called Madong and is very rare. Among the Achiks marriage is not mandatory and pregnancy before marriage is not appreciated but accepted. In the present study, two cases of pregnancy before marriage have been observed. In both cases, the female member is staying with her family and the unborn child will carry its mother's name in the future.

On certain occasions, such as marriages or deaths, close relatives will provide animals or food items, as gifts, and it is customary to return the same or more during similar events. It is also expected from Mahari members that they will visit one's place in good and bad times to show their support in each possible way.

Marrying outside the community sometimes leads to social exclusion from the community. One incident was observed during the fieldwork, an informant whose mother, a Christian, married a Muslim man and converted to Islam, subsequently adopting Muslim cultural practices. As a result, the neighboring community marginalized this family. The informant later married a Muslim man, but after his death, she returned to Christianity to embrace her own identity which was well-appreciated by her community.

The most predominant form of family is the nuclear family. It consists of a husband, wife and their unmarried children. Joint families are less or none. The matriarchal form of authority is followed by the Achik and the family-level decision is taken by both husband and wife. It is women who carry out all the duties and responsibilities relating to the family. In the past property inheritance was through the youngest female daughter and was the duty of the youngest daughter to take care of the parents but nowadays property may be shared equally.

Before British rule in the Garo Hills districts, settlement of disputes was likely the responsibility of the nokmas and their council of elders. The British administration modified the traditional

system to some extent. While retaining the nokmas as the traditional heads of a'kin, they introduced a new political office, which was laskar. The Garo Hills districts were divided into several administrative divisions, each comprising a cluster of villages under the leadership of a laskar. The laskar's main responsibilities were to supervise, settle local disputes according to Garo customary laws, and collect house taxes from villagers individually through the nokma (Singh et al., 2006). The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, established in 1952, has been functioning with the primary objective of preserving the cultural identities and natural resources of the tribal people in the area. Their legislative powers include the allocation of land for grazing and residential purposes, management of forests, and allocation of land for jhum cultivation and appointment of chiefs or headmen, regulating inheritance of property, overseeing matters of marriage and divorce, and upholding social customs.

The Mahari association is a smaller group within the ma'chong, consisting of close known relatives. Among the Garos, most disputes, domestic quarrels, and other problems within families are settled by the Mahari association of the individuals involved. Additionally, during marriages and deaths, the association organizes meetings to collect money and offer financial and physical assistance. The association is structured with a secretary and president; the secretary must be an outsider of the ma'chong, while the president is selected from the same ma'chong.

NOKMA: Nokma refers to the head of a Garo clan who exercises political power over their people. The term "Nokma" literally means 'Nok' (house) and 'Ma' (mother). While the female inheritress holds the title, her authority is typically exercised through her husband, who is usually a well-to-do person. Therefore, the Nokma is generally the person who marries the female inheritress. Each village has a Nokma as its head, who assists the a'king Nokma.

The role of the A'kingNokma is to protect and preserve the A'king land and pass it on to the next generation. They are responsible for looking after the welfare of the people within their A'king land. Additionally, they regulate the distribution of plots of A'king Land for jhum cultivation. The A'kingNokma is the landowner who provides land to the villagers and settles disputes related to land. In an area or territory, there are about 25 nokmas (depending on the size of the territory) who come under the authority of an akingnokma. The akingnokma is selected by the people from that area. It is the responsibility of the akingnokma to oversee the matters concerning these nokmas and address any issues within the village. If a problem occurs in a village, the nokma will bring it to the attention of the akingnokma. Together, the akingnokma and the respective nokma will work to resolve the issue.

Law of Inheritance: The Garo society follows a matrilineal system, where inheritance is passed through the female line. Property is inherited by the mother and then passed on to the youngest daughter or another daughter chosen by the parents. The heiress remains in her natal home with her husband. Non-heiress daughters may marry someone from their father's machong (sub-clan) or any other machong. After marriage, these daughters must leave their natal home to establish a new household. They receive support from their parents and heiress sister. The land rights are vested in the Nokma'smachong, but the land is managed by the Nokma's husband. However, he cannot alienate the land without the consent of the Nokma'smachong. Additionally, a Nokma's daughter cannot acquire property as long as her mother is alive (Rizvi et al., 2006).

Garo Family: In a Garo family, the mother holds supreme authority over the household. In a Garo

family, one of the daughters is selected by the parents as their Nokma. A Nokma must marry someone from her father's clan; if she refuses, another daughter is chosen in her place. The other daughters of the house are called A'Gati daughters, and their husbands are referred to as Chawaris. If the parents have no daughters and wish to adopt a daughter as Nokma, the adoption is arranged from the mother's clan and GHADC must be informed in such cases.

Marriage: They follow sub-clan exogamy and tribe endogamy. An heiress must marry a man from her father's clan. Marriage within the machong is a serious offense. Remarriage is permissible. If someone dies, it is the duty of the mahari (clan council) to find a replacement from the same mahari. If a widow wants to adopt a daughter, she must also marry the girl's father.

The Garo believe that there is an Almighty God above them who has created all the universe and all the creatures of the world (Rana. B.S, 1989). The key elements of Garo religious observances include the sacrifice of animals and birds, as well as the consumption of rice beer. They offer these sacrifices with the hope of curing diseases, seeking protection from natural hazards, and ensuring a good harvest. Through these rituals, they renew their relationship with the spirits. The village priest, known as the kamal, performs the sacrifices and other rituals (Singh et al., 2006). Garo believes in the existence of spirits, these spirits are collectively called Mites. Some of these spirits are believed to be good and some are evil. Saljong, the god of fertility, is represented by the sun and is worshipped because all crops are in his care; without his favour, no harvests would be reaped. The great festival of the year, Wangala, is celebrated in his honor, but the actual sacrifice to him is offered in the fields before the village festival begins. During this ritual, a cock is sacrificed, its blood is sprinkled on the sacrificial altar, and a little liquor is poured out on the ground in front of it. The worshipper then returns to the village for the Wangala celebrations (Playfair, A., 1909).

In the agricultural field, before any slash-and-burn activity or deforestation, they worship their ancestors and seek permission. This practice is called *Aba Tatta*. After the slash-and- burn, they sacrifice a hen and sprinkle its blood along with local rice beer in the name of their ancestors and spirits. This ritual is called *AgalMaka*.

Garo believes in life after death. They believe that after death the soul will go to Balpakram(in Soth Garo Hills), the abode of ghosts. Only then they will achieve salvation. After marriage, whenever the groom leaves his house, his mother gives him a cloth. When he dies at his wife's house, this cloth is used to cover his body. Afterward, his son or daughter, along with a brass plate and the cloth, will go to the deceased's mother's house and will meet his mahari and give back the cloth. They believe that only then the soul will be able to find its ancestors' home; otherwise, it will continue to roam. This cloth is called *Debra Sugala*, and the ritual is known as *Memngdila*.

If someone wants to convert from an indigenous faith to Christianity, they have to demolish their traditional house to build a new one, because it is believed that the spirits of their ancestors along with other spirits reside there, and that house was used for worshiping. If immediate demolition is not possible, it must be done gradually.

From the studied population, it was found that out of a total of 172 households, 72% embrace the Baptist denomination, 25% belong to the Catholic denomination, and only 0.74% follow Songsarek, the traditional religious faith. For someone wishing to convert from an indigenous faith to Christianity, personal consent is considered to be enough. However, if they want to switch from another sect of Christianity, they must inform the elders and the church and seek permission.

Chapter 4

Material Culture

Material culture is an important aspect of the culture of a community. It includes architecture, houses and house types, household utensils; agricultural and fishing equipment; musical instruments; dress and ornaments and the food habits of a community. Material culture also embraces those segments of human learning, that provide a person with plans, methods, and reasons for producing things that can be seen and touched. These physical aspects make up a community's identity and showcases the rich heritage of a community.

Culture and cultural heritage are dynamic and constantly changing as people and communities evolves and adapts to the requirements of changing time and cultural landscape. They navigate and negotiate their beliefs, values and ideas, making changes to the cultural environment in which they live in. The Garos of Meghalaya are also undergoing the change in cultural dynamics. The shift from traditional to something which is conceived as modern. The shift in the cultural heritage of intangible culture is inevitable with the technological advancements and time. The tangible culture of the past has become scare and is only retained in the memory of a sound mind, books and journals and video documentaries which serves as a testament and a memoir of the lives and cultural heritage of a community and its people.

Photography and videography had assisted in archiving the Garo intangible cultural heritage. The documentation would help future generations to understand a culture of a community. Digital media can preserve the tangible cultural heritage of community as a digital artefact and serve as a reference of learning. The digital artefact can also serve as aid for revival of cultural traits by an individual and at the community level.

Garo Architecture

According to Playfair, "almost every Garo possesses two houses, one in the village and one in his field. During the cultivating season he lives in the latter to remain near his crops, to weed them and protect them from the ravages of wild animals. When the crop have been gathered and stored, he returns to the village, and resides there until the next cultivating season." (Playfair, 1975:37) The houses constructed in the fields are called *borang*. They are tree houses which are constructed high up in the trees. Playfair writes that "the branches of a tree looped off 20 or 30 ft. from the ground, a platform is laid over the stumps and a small house built upon it of bamboo and thatching grass. A bamboo ladder gives access to the borang as the tree-house is called." (Playfair, 1975:38) The Garos also construct granary known as *Mi Jam* where they store rice in large bamboo baskets. Playfair (1975) mentions that "In one corner of the village, or if it is a very large one, in two or three places outside the ring of living-houses, there is always a collection of smaller huts, which, from their size and appearance, are clearly not intended for human habitation. These are the village granaries, of which each family possesses one or more" Apart from dwelling houses, field houses and rest houses, the biggest house in the village was once the *Nokpante* or the bachelor's dormitory which was not only an elongated dwelling uniting for all the bachelors of a village but also an institution of learning wherein the younger boys learn arts, crafts, music and life skills from the elder stags in the dormitory.

During the fieldwork in the districts of West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills, Meghalaya it was found that the traditional Garo architecture is still found, though they have become very scare. They can still be found in a selected few villages where the people still practice Songsarek, the Garo animist religion houses and these villages were called Songsarek villages. In the villages one can still witness traditional architectures and houses like the *Nok-A.chik* or *Nok Mande* (dwelling house), *Mi Jam* (granary), *Jamadal* (field house), *Bandasal* (rest house), *Borang* (tree house) and a model *Nokpante* (bachelor's dormitory).

NokMande/ NokA.chik **(Dwelling house):**

In Garo, *Nok* refers to 'house' and *Mande* means 'person'. Thus, *NokMande* refers to a house where the family resides and it is built with locally available resources from the forest such as bamboo, logs or hardwood, thatched grass, and cane. The house front of the *Nok Mande* is leveled with the ground whereas the middle and the rest fall within an inclined hill. The elongated *Nok Mande* is divided into specific rooms, each with its own function and utility. The Garos believe that spirits and deities or *mette* reside along with the family in the *NokA.chik*. Thus, when a family converts and starts professing Christianity they have to break down their traditional Songsarek houses and dispose all their material possession which are used in rites and rituals of the Songsarek. This act of cleansing and chasing away the spirits and deities that resided in the dimly lit Songsarek houses have caused the once plentiful Garo traditional houses to be infringed to a limited villages and families who still follow the Songsarek religion.

Selsella Block in West Garo Hills does still have a healthy population who still are Songsareks and there a plenty of NokA.chik's in Dignapara village. In South Garo Hills district, Emangre and AlokpangSonggitcham had people who followed Songsarek but the NokAchik have been replaced. The traditional houses of the Garos is a slowly fading and in the brink of modernization expect for a few villages like Sadolpara in Dadenggre Block,
West Garo Hills is a village where in a majority of the population still follow the Songsarek religion. The village has become a tourist place where one can feel the Garo culture and the housing structure in its indigenous form. Youtubers have created and uploaded content about the village and its people, events such as fishing competitions and Sadolpara Wangala Dance, etc. A video on Sadolpara with the title "I spent a day with GARO TRIBE OF MEGHALAYA (solo) | Garo Hills | Sadolpara Village (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzVAviuW4cg)" uploaded in the Youtube channel @MonkeyxMagic has more than 3.8 lakh views. The video is a travelblog and it also showcases fragments of the Sadolpara architecture. Another video "Garo People – Traditional Tribal Architecture – Meghalaya, India"- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTKi7BjAU3o has 1.17 lakh view on YouTube. The video is a comprehensive account of the Garo traditional architecture in the digital form and highlights and documents several villages and the village layout, house types, chicken coops, storage facilities and

granaries and the house building techniques, tools and materials used.

Mi Jam (Granary):

The granary of the Garo is known as *Mi Jam*. Granaries function as a storehouse where season harvests like rice and millets, among others, are stored for further or year-long consumption. It has four wooden base pillars with one door and no windows or ventilation. In between the floor of the granary and the raised wooden pillars a flat stone or a wooden plank is fitted horizontally in all four pillars. The purpose behind placing a flat stone or a wooden plank is to impede the movement of rodents or rats into the granary as they may ruin the harvested grains. During the fieldwork, it was found that Mi Jams were still found the survey villages of Selsella Block, West Garo Hills and, in Bagmara and Gasuapra Block, South Garo Hills. The Mi Jams were mostly found in households which are more affluent and had agricultural land for the cultivation of rice.

Jamadal (field house):

Jamadal is a small house constructed in the Jhum fields. As most of the Jhum fields are far from their village or home, *Jamadal* functions as a storehouse to keep the harvested grains or other edible items and also serves as a resting place to rest and eat food while working at the fields. Apart from this, the Garos also stay overnight in the fields to protect and guard their Jhum fields from destruction by animals. At the boundary of the Jhum fields, an appliance made of bamboo known as *wa·kap* is erected, which has a long rope or a bamboo attached or fixed to the *jamadal*. During the fieldwork, it was informed that the Garos still hand *jamadals* in the agriculture areas for the people who work in the Jhum fields. *Jamadals*play an important role in the agrarian seasons and videos of *jamadals* and a people's life in a *jamadal* with other tangible cultures can be witnessed in a YouTube video entitled "Jamadal" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MZWCQEMf4k) which has 29,000 views.

Bandasal (Rest house):

Bandasal is a rest house with a thatched roof, it is supported by four pillars and the floor is elevated and weaved out of bamboo. A *Bandasal* has no walls and is open in all sides. It serves as a reception house and is a center for people in the village get together for a smoke and chew beetle nut while exchanging stories, ideas, knowledge, decisions, singing which is accompanied by musical instruments such as the *dama* (drums), among other recreational activities.

During the fieldwork, the *bandasal* can be seen in both the urban and rural areas. It has remained an integral part of informal social events and in the entertainment of guests. In urban areas, the concept on the *bandasal* has remained static but the materials by which it is architecture has been replaced due to the non-availability of materials. In Dignapara and Dabakgre, Selsella Block, West Garo Hills there were a few bandasal where any member of the village, males, females and children would sit and stretch off the tiredness of the day or just easing off from the basking sun. The village *bandasal* would also have hung in them drums used in the Wangala dance and other musical instruments, along with animal hide and leather strings which can aide and mend an ailing drum.

Borang (Tree house)

Borang is a watch house which constructed at the top of the tree. It has a *jang·ke*or a ladder made of bamboo and is used to watch over animals as well as enemies. A *borang* is built in the middle of an agricultural land or at the end of village. Borangs are still used by the Garos to watch over agricultural land and fend away from wild animals. During the fieldwork, borangs were observed in Mandagre, Selsella Block, West Garo Hills and in Kondok village, Gasuapara Block, South Garo Hills. In Mandagre, the *borang* was used as a rest house and a watch tower by the members of the community who were involved in mining sand from nearby river.InKondok village, the *borang* was used to fend away from wild animals because the area is an elephant corridor and during the month of March-April, the elephants cross between parts of Bangladesh and South Garo Hills. In Kondok village, there were fresh elephant dropping and a herd of elephants were sighted in Gasuapara during the fieldwork.

Nokpante (Bachelor's dormitory)

Nokpante or bachelor's dormitory is derived from two Garo words *Nok* meaning a house, and *pante* meaning, a bachelor or young boys. The *nokpante* was an institution of learning for the boys and traditionally each village had one *nokpante*. Today, the *nokpante* still exists but it is no longer an institution of learning, it is a rest and recreational house. The most prominent and talked about remaining *nokpante* is the *nokpante* which is situated in Emanaskagre.

The *nokpante* adorns the traditional structure and materials used in Garo architecture with craftsmanship and designs, and the most important object is a centre pillar called *dokaku* which is a cylindrical object about 3 feet in height. The *dokaku* is crafted by a master craftsman who craves the Garo history and culture into the object. This pillar is painted with cultural markers such as traditional ornaments (senkhi and rang), traditional foods, traditional dresses, and symbols. A short video of the dokaku with a title "EmangreNokpantegitchamnidokaku" has been uploaded on YouTube and can be watched on the hyperlink https://www.youtube.com/shorts/hPho4Ol8xTQ.

Today, it is believed that there are only two master craftsmen who know the technique and have

the skill to craft the *dokaku*, they are residents of Emangre, South Garo Hills namely, Daljin Rongmuthu Sangma and Mr. Arengh who is fondly called Pa-jong. Mr. Sangma and Mr, Arnegh said that a *dokaku* would cost Rs. 60,000/- if it has to be made from scratch. Mr. Sangma reflected that in the most recent past he had crafted a *dokaku* for a *nokpante* which was supposed by erected in Nagaland.

In Emangre, the *nokpante* and its tradition of being an institution of learning was alive till about 2014 or 2015. In the site of the *nokpante* lies cavities and stumps of the past but the centre piece is kept as an artefact and a reminder of the lost past by the Nokma of Emangre in a neglected shed besides their residence. The once prominent and important object has been left aside and almost forgotten. This is due to the non-transition of traditional knowledge and the people of the present cannot harness the knowledge of the past, especially with the passing away of gatekeepers.

During the fieldwork, *nokpantes* were found in Dabakgre, Selsella Block, West Garo Hills and EmanA.sakgre, Baghmara Block, South Garo Hills. These *nokpantes* are said to be smaller in size than the original *nokpante* and they serve as rest house for the male members of the village. Females are not allowed to enter the *nokpante* and the people EmanA.sakgre warned outsider that if a female entered the *nokpante*, a female would have to pay a fine of Rs. 5,000/-. The *nokpante* at EmanA.sakgre is well known and there are many videos on YouTube of the *nokpante*. A video uploaded on the channel West ID Vlogs in March 2021 with the title "Nokpante' EmanA•sakgre South Garo Hills Meghalaya" and hyperlink https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THDsEXqJySs having more than 15,000 views and a video on the channel Milton Manda Sangma which is entitled "EmangresongniNokpante" and hyperlink https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vLiAIbdY4_Yprovides a comprehensive account of the *nokpante* and its heritage from the not so distant past.

The Garos have simple and organic household items mainly made of bamboo, clay and gourds. They mainly consist of vessels for storage, cooking pots and other kitchen utensils, and stools. The Garos while welcoming guests would offer *amphok*, a wooden stool which is about one foot wide and four-five inches tall. They also welcome guest by offering beetle nut. During the fieldwork, it was observed that the traditional *amphok* was replaced by mora and plastic chairs and stools. Though most household still posses *amphok* and *moras*. Mora is portable piece of furniture which is used for sitting among the Garo and it is made of bamboo and cane. It is slightly cylindrical with concave sides in the middle and the seatis either weaved about of bamboo strips or covered with animal hide. Traditionally, it is covered with animal skin not nowadays cane or plastic strips are weaved together to make the seat.

The Garos traditionally welcomed guests and elderly members of the family by pouring a gulp of rice wine from a gourd directly into the mouth of the guest. The Garos use gourds for personal and religious purposes. They are available in many shapes and sizes, and have their own functions. A large-size flat gourd is generally used as a water container. Smaller gourds are used to fetch and drink water or alcohol beverages.

During the fieldwork, it was observed that the Garos who follow Songsarek still ferment rice beer and brew alcohol. Rice beer is fermented in a large earthen pot called *chudikka* and a smaller gourd with an elongated neck and a bulbous body known as chu pong is used to mix the fermented drink.

The chu pong has two openings, the one on the bulbous body is known as *kolma* which is used to scoop out the prepared rice beer and it is poured to the other opening called *chirping.* There are also other miscellaneous pots used in day-to-day activities, the do·*doki*: it is a long neck earthenware pot used as a jug and *Minilme·dik* is a pot having a perforated base, it is used for cooking or steaming sticky rice (*minil*).

Apart from earthenware, the Garo hills is rich in bamboo and cane, and products made out of bamboo and cane are extensively used by the Garos. One such products is the *kokcheng*, a basket which is made of bamboo. It is one of the common baskets used by the Garos. A *kokcheng* is a multipurpose basket which is use by the Garos in their daily works of life, it is used for carrying items and commodities. In rural and sub-urban areas, the *kokcheng* is aided with a head strap/ tumpline is extensively used for carrying farming equipment, firewood, sand, rice, and vegetables and used while going to the market. During the fieldwork, in Siju market, Siju, South Garo Hills the shop fronts were lined with *kokcheng* filled to the brim with groceries tended by the Garo women folk who were crouching in the shade and waiting to return back to their respective villages along with the entire troupe of women who had come to the market on a market day.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

Rang:

*Rang*is a musical instrument which is made of brass. It is gong which is round and shaped like a bowl used during the Wangala festival. *Rang* was also used during public announcements in a village. During the fieldwork, it was said that in earlier times atMandagre, Selsella Block, West Garo Hills the nokma of the village would ring the *rang* as a public announcement to spread the any news regarding the meeting of members who belonged to the manda clan or manda-mahari. Today, announcements about clan meetings and other such circulations are done through messengers applications such as WhatsApp on mobile phones.

Chigring:

It is a traditional bamboo instrument made out of bamboo. It has strips which are slit out on the bamboo and these strips slit are known as *ding·chita.* The hole in the center of the bamboo which helps to make a vibrating sound is known as *do·go*. Chigring is played with the help of sticks. The art of making musical instruments such as the *chigring* was taught in the Nokpante but the slow decline and abandonment of this traditional institution of learning has lead to only a handful of people who make traditional musical instruments in Garo hills. Mr. Blastin T. Sangma, a resident of Gasuapara Block, South Garo Hills district is one such craftsman who is recognized for his work in Garo hills.

Adil:

Adil is a trumpet-like instrument made from a buffalo horn and attached to a bamboo. It was blown during the Wangala festival as an accompaniment to other instruments.

Dama:

Dama is a long drum and the body of the long drum is made of *Gambare (gmelinaarborea)* wood. The drum has two drum heads, each head placed at the end of the shell of the instrument. The ends of these drum heads are concealed with the hides or the skin of a cow. Usually, the frame or shell of the *dama* is bigger in diameter on the left side and
comparatively narrower on the right side. The hair from the hides or skin is scrapped off and the process of removing the hair from the hides is known as *kimilsiksika.* Since the presence of hair on the hides reduces the emission of sound, the hair is removed entirely. The Garo *dama,* are typically hung from the neck and are played with both hands and sometimes placed on the ground and can be played in a sitting position. The long drums among the Garo include *Dadigipa, Rikrakgipa,* and *Ongrimgipa,* each of which produces different pitches. During the harvest festival, Wangala, these long *damas*, suspended by a strap (made of cloth, tree bark, or animal hide) are carried by men folk on their necks while dancing. However, they have to ensure that the bigger side of the *dama* known as *bipad* that is kept on the left side and the narrower part known as *bichok* is kept on the right side. This drum is kept in the Bachelor's dormitory *Nokpante*. Since these are very few *nokpantes* still standing, the Garos keep the *damas* in different places. In Mandakgre, there were fifteen damas kept inside the community hall. The damas are for recreation and most important during the Wangala dance. In Dabakgre the *damas* were kept in the *bandasal.*

Kram:

Another type of drum among the Garo is the *kram* and a smaller drum attached to it known as *Nadik.* It is regarded as the sacred drum of the Garos, where the deity of illness and death resides.

Nagra:

Just like the *kram* and *nadik,* the *Nagra* which is a larger drum is kept house only in the nokma's house. However, unlike the other drums which are two-sided, *nagra* is only one-sided. This drum is an earthenware pot covered with cow hides which is also believed to host deities like the *kram.*

Fishing equipment

Koksi:

Koksi is a fishing basket used for holding fish or other aquatic animals like crabs, shrimps, frogs, etc. after they have been caught from the rivers, streams, or ponds. This basket is pot-shaped with firmly woven bamboo strips. It is woven in such a manner that the aquatic animal can no way escape. It has a narrow mouth with a neck and a broad base. It is usually attached around the waist by a rope or a cloth. *Koksi* can be of different sizes depending on the user. During the fieldwork, it was found that the *koksi* was kept as a decorative item, in the actual size or in a miniature size in urban areas of studied in West Garo Hills but the *koksi* is present and still used by most households in the Selsella block and other localities and village of South Garo Hills.

Chekki:

It is a fishing gear woven out of thin bamboo strips. It has a triangular shape with the front section open and a long stiff bamboo stalk that serves as a handle. The women folk as well as children use this fishing trap in shallow or rocky rivers to catch fish. It is a long, pointed stick with a sharp tip. Instead of that, it is used to dig holes in a plot of land to prepare for Jhum cultivation.

Agricultural equipment (tools):

Atte:

One of the widely used agricultural implements among the Garo is the *ate* or a *dao*. Usually, it is a flat iron head attached to a bamboo shaft or a hardwood used mainly for cutting or felling trees and also for clearing shrubs and bushes. Every *Jhum* cultivator has different types of *atte*. Some of the most widely used *ate* are: i. **Attemande**: This is used to cut down big trees and woods. ii. **Attemongreng**: It is a curbed *Dao* used for cutting heavy branches. iii. **Atchili**: It is a sickle with curved blades used for reaping etc.

Selu:

Another weapon worthy of attention is the *selu* or a spear. It is a pole weapon comprising a pole made of bamboo or wood about five feet long with a pointed iron head. The iron head measures about one foot or fourteen inches long and two or three inches broad. The head is a fire-hardened spear made of iron which is fastened to the pole. The head of the spear bears the shape of a leaf or a triangle. It is mainly used for thrusting.

Dress and ornaments:

The *A.chik*/Garos wear clothes and ornaments made and designed by themselves with some regional varieties. Garo women wear an *eking* and men wear *gandumakal* which is a short piece of cloth worn around the waist. A video of a *gandumakal* along with many other material culture and ornaments of the Garos can be seen on the YouTube channel RK tv vlog (www.youtube.com/@rktvvlogs2630) in a video entitled "Gandumakkal" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODUeXnI6OtE.

Table No. 9. Ornaments of the Garo community of Meghalaya

Sl. No.	Ornaments (local name)	Part of the body associated	Worn by
1.	NadongbiorSisi	Ear	Male
2.	Naderong	Helix	Female
3.	Natapsi	Ear	Male/female
4.	Nokci and nairki	Nose	Male/female
5.	Nabal		
6.	Ripok /RikgitokKonal/ Kakam/ Rikmatchi/ Danggasora (Necklaces)	Neck	Female
7.	Jaksan / Sangong (Bangles)	Wrist	Female

8.	Sengki	Waist	Female
9.	Kotip	Head	Male/female
10.	Do.me	Head	Male/female

The Garo women do not normally wear the *eking* as a daily wear anymore but they wear a wraparound skirt which is known as *dakmanda*. The *dakmanda* is a decorative rectangular cloth which is adorn with motifs, commonly known as mikron meaning the eye in Garo. The majority of women also wear another wraparound garment known as *daksari* indoor as well as outdoor. The Garos both males and females adorn themselves with a variety of adornments. Nowadays, the *A.chik* males wear their traditional dress only during festivals but the men wear the traditional wear on a day to day basis.

Nadongbi or *Sisi* is a thin brass ring to wear on the earlobe. Men wear around 30 to 40 *sisi* in each ear on special occasions and usually wear 12 to 20 on ordinary days. *Naderong* is a brass ring for the helix (upper part) of the ear by both men and women. *Natapsi* is about 4 inches long and people wear it on the lower helix part of the ear. This semicircular ornament is made of silver or brass. *Nokci* and *nairki* is nose-wearing and *nabal* is a brass ring worn on the helix (middle part). *Ripok, Rikgitok, Konal, Kakam, Rikmatchi, Danggasora,* etc. are some types of necklaces used by people irrespective of gender on festive occasions. Most of these necklaces are made of brass or silver and beads. They are as valuable as heirlooms. *Jaksan / Sangong* (Bangles) are made of different materials, especially bronze and silver. *Sengki* is a form of waistband exclusively for women. They wear a *kotip* (a turban) which is made of *dome* (the plume feathers of the cock) around their head.

Traditional Ornaments (Rigitok Natapsi, Ripok, Jaksan, Naderong, Sanggam etc.)

Dakmanda (Traditional Dress for Women)

Chapter 5

# Core Cultural Heritage of the Garos

Core cultural heritage is the most important part of culture. These cultural heritage markers remain evident despite influences from various external factors, serving as the most significant aspects of a culture. Core cultural heritage encompasses the fundamental or essential elements that define a particular culture. This heritage has been prevalent from time immemorial and passed down through generations. It includes the lineage of many communities in India, along with their customs, beliefs, practices, languages, arts, and tangible artifacts that are integral to the identity of a community or society. India, being the most diverse country in the world, contributes immense cultural diversity. People speak different languages, follow various religions, and enjoy diverse cuisines. Food and clothing also vary by region. Each community has its cultural heritage, specifically cultural markers that have been preserved for generations. In Meghalaya, three major tribes inhabit the region, and all three follow a matrilineal form of lineage. This matrilineal system is a common cultural marker for the communities in this area.

The A'chik community has a distinct cultural heritage characterized by its social organization, descent principles, and traditional rules governing marriage and inheritance. It has been observed that there have been no changes in the core aspects of the community's culture, such as social organization, descent principles, and the observance of prescriptive and proscriptive rules of marriage and inheritance. However, some rapid changes can be observed in other aspects, such as language, food culture, traditional dress, and ornaments.

Among the A'chik community, the matrilineal form of social organization is still practiced, with descent traced through the female line. The society follows a matrilocal residence pattern, and the clan system continues to play a crucial role in regulating marriage.

Living cultural markers

The A.chik community possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage, deeply embedded in their daily lives. Living cultural markers are the cultural markers that are still in prevalent or actively practiced by the community. These markers include traditions, rituals, festivals, crafts, and ways of life that have been passed down through generations. Living cultural markers refer to the tangible and intangible elements that reflect the unique cultural identity, practices, and heritage of a community. The language spoken by the Garo people; the Garo belongs to the Bodo speech family of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. They are divided into several sub-divisions like the awes, chisaks, matchi – duals, ambengs, gara- ganchings, atongs, rugas and the megams. Each sub-group has a separate language and speaks other languages. Even though the A.chik are influenced by other languages such as Hindi, Assamese and Bengali language the A.chik speak their own language among themselves. The written form of Garo was developed by American Baptist missionaries during the final decades of the 19th century (Burling, 2003).
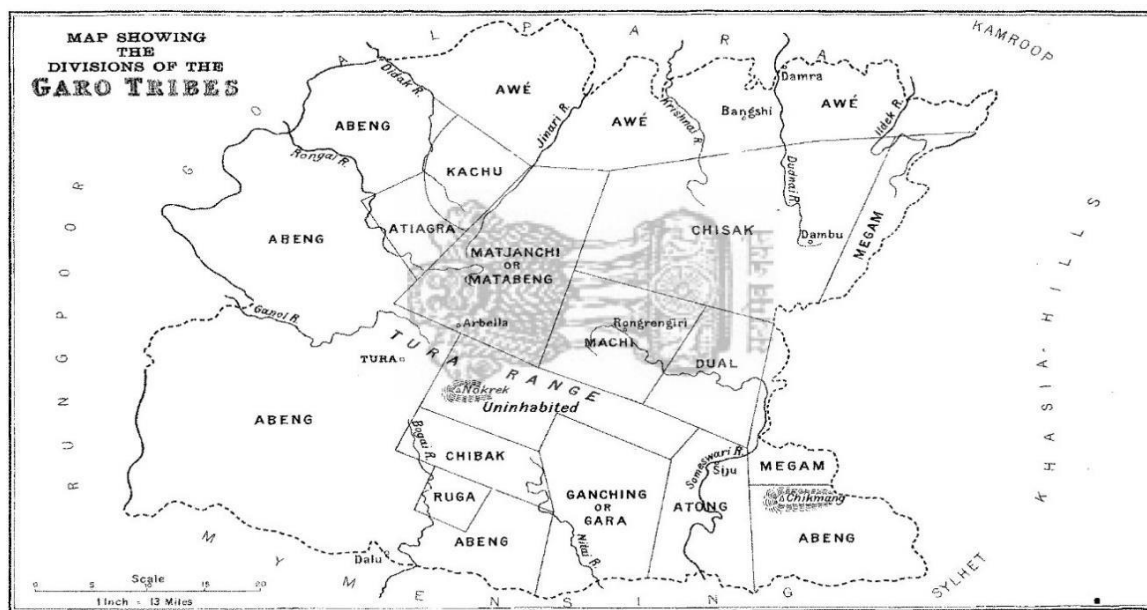
Source: Playfair, A. (1909). The Garos. David Nutt, London.

The above map shows the division of the Garo tribe on the basis of language and different subgroups based on geographical location. From the map itself, it is evident that the speaking area is more than other areas. From the study, it has been observed that out of 172 households 125 households belong to ambengs sub-division and 23 belongs to atongs and 14 belong to gara-ganching and 5 awes and matchi – duals 2 and chisak 1. The Garo language serves as a marker of identity and enables the members a sense of belonging and cultural pride, especially in the face of modernization and external influences. The following table shows the linguistic subdivisions of the Garo community based on the study.

Table no. 10 Linguistic sub-division of the Garo community

			Linguistic sub-division of the Garo community							
District Name	Block Name	Village Name	Ambeng	Atong	Garaganchi	Awe	Matchi	Dual	Chichak	Total
West Garo Hills	Tura	TetengKol	4 (2.33)	0	0	0	0	0	0	4 (2.33)
		Teteng Aja	6 (3.49)	0	0	0	0	0	0	6 (3.49)
		Lower KongbeAding	5 (2.91)	0	0	1 (0.58)	0	0	0	6 (3.49)
		Modynagar	3 (1.74)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 (1.74)
		Akonggre	**12 (6.98)**	0	0	1 (0.58)	1 (0.58	0	0	14 (8.14)

District	Block	Village								
							)			
		Dobasipara	**12 (6.98)**	0	0	1 (0.58)	0	0	0	13 (7.56)
		Mondaltila	9 (5.23)	2 (1.16)	0	0	0	0	0	11 (6.40)
	Selsella	Dignapara	3 (1.74)	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 (1.74)
		Mandagre	6 (3.49)	0	0	0	0	0	0	6 (3.49)
		Dabakgre	6 (3.49)	0	0	0	0	0	1 (0.58)	7 (4.07)
		Korakona	5 (2.91)	0	0	0	0	1 (0.58)	0	6 (3.49)
		Rongkakgre	2 (1.16)	0	0	0	0	0	0	2 (1.16)
		Mronggre	5 (2.91)	0	0	0	0	0	0	5 (2.91)
South Garo Hills	Baghmara	Baghmara	3 (1.74)	0	1 (0.58)	0	0	0	0	4 (2.33)
		Emangre	0	0	6 (3.49)	0	0	0	0	6 (3.49)
		AlokpangSonggitcham	0	11 (6.40)	0	1 (0.58)	0	0	0	12 (6.98)
		SijuRongkenggitam	0	9 (5.23)	0	0	0	0	0	9 (5.23)
		Rongdokram	0	1 (0.58)	7 (4.07)	0	0	0	0	8 (4.65)
	Gasuapara	Minnengre	7 (4.07)	0	0	0	0	0	0	7 (4.07)
		Seempara	10 (5.81)	0	0	0	0	0	0	10 (5.81)
		Konagittam	**11 (6.40)**	0	0	0	0	0	0	11 (6.40)
		Cherengkeragittam	**11 (6.40)**	0	0	0	0	0	0	11 (6.40)
		Kondok	8 (4.65)	0	0	0	0	0	0	8 (4.65)
Total			128 (74.42)	23 (13.37)	14 (8.14)	4 (2.91)	1 (0.58)	1 (0.58)	1 (0.58)	172 (100)

Garo traditional attire is a vibrant expression of the Garo people's rich cultural heritage.The traditional attire of the Garo community is a significant cultural marker, showcasing their rich heritage and unique identity. In the interior villages, old women still tie a short cloth called eking

around the waist while men wear a traditional loincloth. But in more accessible areas, Garo women wear a long, unstitched piece of cloth called Dakmanda around their waist. The Dakmanda is hand-woven and features a six to ten- inch border adorned with motifs or floral designs, showcasing the intricate craftsmanship and cultural aesthetics of the Garo community (Singh et al., 1994). Garo dress is very primitive, and the principal garment of the man is the *gando* and the *riking.* Gando is a strip of blue cotton cloth interwoven with lines of red. It is six inches wide and about six or seven inches long. Riking is an eighteen-inch long cloth and broad enough to meet around the waist in the form of a petty coat (Playfair, 1909).

Despite their religious differences, both Christian and SongsarekA.chik people share several common elements in their traditional attire, such as the Dakmanda and showcasing their shared roots. Everyone wears the Dakmanda but the motif is different. People from urban areas wear very vibrant Dakmanda compared to people from the village. The only songsarekA.chik female were Jaksan (bangles) and Natapsi (worn on the upper part of the ear) and Rikgittok (necklace) in their daily life.

Dakmanda is a costume of the Garos. This dress is weaved by the Garos and worn by the Garo women. It resembles the 'mundu' or 'lunki' used in the southern part of India. It is a long unstitched cloth tied around the waist extending up to the knee. Dakmanda is hand woven and has a six to ten-inch border with a motif or floral design. The Dokmanda is a traditional dress that wraps around the waist and is worn by Garo women. It is a slightly modernized form of the Eking, a small cloth traditionally worn around the waist. The Dakmanda, featuring geometrical motifs on its border, is primarily worn on various occasions such as festivals and official meetings. While some women wear it regularly, younger women often prefer Western outfits over the Dakmanda.

Young girls of the Achik community often wear their traditional attire while going to church or attending some festivals or special occasions. The whole outfit includes the Kotip (headband), Rikgittok (necklace), Natapsi (worn on the upper part of the ear), Naderong (earrings), Sengki (white waistband), Jaksan (bangles) and Rikwareng (another type of necklace). However, only a few of their attire are still regularly used by the community.

The social organization of the Garo community is a profound cultural marker that highlights their unique matrilineal system. The Achik follows a matrilineal system, where lineage and inheritance are traced through the mother's line. Property is typically passed down to the youngest daughter or a daughter selected by the parents. The village headman, Nokma, usually a woman, plays a crucial role in community decision-making and leadership. Each sub-clan of the Achik, consisting of several kinship groups called "mahari," plays a crucial role in maintaining bonds among members and ensuring social order. They also follow tribe endogamy and matrilocal system of residence. There are many Mahari association groups in Facebook such as Koksi Mahari Association, an online public group for the Koksi sub-clan people of the Garo community. There are 1733 members till date and they post various videos regarding gospels and news.

The cuisine of the Garo community is a vibrant cultural marker that reflects their connection to their traditional way of life and nature. Garo cuisine is characterized by its use of locally available ingredients. Rice is their staple food, accompanied by a variety of vegetables, meats, and fish. Culinary traditions are not just about food; they represent identity and heritage.

There is an Instagram account named 'master chef Nambie Marak' owned by Nambie Jessica

Marak, who identifies as The Tribal Chef. She was the 1st runner-up of MasterChef India Season 8 and has 50,100 followers on her Instagram account, where she creates various videos about A.chik cuisines. Nambie Jessica Marak also has a YouTube channel called 'Eat Your Kappa' where she has uploaded 178 videos primarily focused on cuisines. Her channel has 50,600 subscribers and 3,620,008 views. Among the A.chik, the Kappa style of curries is famous. Kappa is a cooking method where the main ingredients are chili, ginger, and soda (Kalchi). When prepared with pork, it is called Wak Kappa, and when prepared with chicken, it is called Do'o Kappa. Nakam chutney, a dry fish chutney, is the main side dish of the A.chik. Nakam Bitchi is a dry fish curry. The side dishes available among the Achiks are very simple and made with only a few locally available ingredients. The indispensable side dish, dry fish, holds significant importance. The Achiks, as they are blessed with rivers began drying and storing fish in bamboo poles to use during times of food shortage.

Traditional architecture is a distinctive cultural marker of the Garo community, reflecting their close relationship with nature. Garo houses, known as *Nokachik*, are typically built on raised platforms to protect against creepers and pests and adapt to the hilly terrain. These structures are made using locally available materials such as bamboo and wood, and they are thatched with palm leaves or grass. The traditional Garo house has a rectangular shape. While some people still construct these traditional Garo houses, they have replaced the roof material with asbestos sheets instead of grass or leaves, which are less durable. When entering the house, there is a hall in the middle. In the middle of the hall, there is a slightly raised fireplace where they keep fish and meat for smoking. Next to the hall, there is a kitchen with a fireplace for cooking. After that, there is a bedroom, and adjacent to the bedroom, there is a balcony where they drink and dance during some festive occasions. Its floor is paved with bamboo poles. On the right side of the house, they keep firewood for household purposes.

The *MiJam*, the granary of the Garo people, serves as a traditional storage facility for grains like rice and millet. This granary is an integral part of Garo culture, reflecting their agricultural practices and architecture. The Mi Jam is constructed with four wooden base pillars that elevate it above the ground. This design helps protect the stored grains from
pests and moisture. The granary features a single sliding door, providing access. Mi Jam has no windows or ventilation, which helps to maintain and safeguard the grains from external elements.

A watch house of A.chik built upon the top of a big tree is known as *Borangs*. *Borangs* are built in the jhum fields to guard agricultural fields from birds and animals (Rana B S, 1989). Nowadays, *Borangs* have also undergone many changes. Currently, they are building the roofs of the *Borangs* with asbestos sheets instead of grass and leaves. The team has seen a Borang in Mandakgre village. It is not near the agricultural field but is built for people who are working in sand mining to take a rest and also watch over the mining area to avoid any probable criminal activity during nighttime. It must be mentioned here that the main utility of Borang has remained unchanged i.e. a watch house.

Nokpante is a traditional bachelor's dormitory system practice among the Achik community, in which unmarried male youth or bachelors lived together and learned many things such as folk songs, dances, and musical instruments, craftmanship, making fishing tools, and learning to 'become a man'. In the Garo language, "nok" means house, and "pante" means bachelor or youth. Thus, "nokpante" refers to a bachelor's dormitory, which serves as a learning institution as well as

a social gathering for boys. In the Garo village, the nokpanthe is designated solely for the boys of the village. It serves not only as the dwelling for adult unmarried males but also as a shelter for any guests or strangers who may come to the village (Sinha Tarunchandra, 1966). The team witnessed a very old traditional nokpante in the village of Emangre in the South Garo Hills.

The rest house of the Garo is called a *Bandasal*. There will be at least one rest house for a cluster of households. It is a small shed elevated from the ground where people come and sit together and socialize. Just below the roof of the rest house, musical instruments like the *dama* and *adil* are kept, which they use to play music. Wealthier families construct their own *Bandasal* within their compound, often with a concrete floor and walls, and a roof made of bamboo and grass. When guests visit, they sit there to discuss, and exchange knowledge and will have tea.

Craftsmanship is a significant cultural marker of the Garo community, showcasing their skill, creativity, and how they adapt to their livelihood using natural elements available in their natural ecology. Basketry is an important craft, Garo artisans create a variety of baskets from bamboo and cane. Important types of baskets include *kokcheng* (a large basket for carrying vegetables and firewood) whenever the women go to the forest to collect firewood, they hang the basket on their backs and place the strap on their foreheads for weight support, *akok* (A small basket made from bamboo poles is used for carrying piglets, especially when purchasing them from weekly markets. The piglets are given to buyers in this basket), koksi (for storing dry fish), kerang (for carrying paddy), and gachek (For carrying seeds, the basket is tightly woven otherwise, the seeds will come out). Additionally, ruans (winnowing pans), rimmol (pestles), cha'am (mortars), and wa'sding (bamboo ropes) are still commonly used by the Achik. The A.chiks use a dry bottle gourd called *pong*. This gourd has two holes: one on the neck and another on the top. The A.chiks prepares rice beer called *chu*, and the traditional pot used for making or the fermentation of rice beer is called a *dikka*. To filter the *chu*, they use a bamboo filter known as a *janti*. BlaslinTegite Sangma from Gasuapara, South Garo Hills, has been crafting Garo artifacts for the past 12 years. He specializes in creating miniatures of Borang (the Garo watch house), musical instruments, and various other baskets and artifacts. As a member of the community, he believes that his work will help to preserve and sustain their cultural heritage.

Music and dance are vibrant cultural markers of the Garo community, deeply connected to their traditions and livelihood. The Wangala dance, performed during the Wangala festival, is one of the most significant celebrations, where men and women dance to celebrate the harvest season. The Garo people have a rich musical heritage characterized by the use of traditional instruments such as the *Dama*, a traditional musical instrument of the A.chik community, playing an integral part in A.chik music and dance. It is a type of drum, typically made from wood and animal skin. The drum is cylindrical and varies in size. It is often used during festivals, ceremonies, and other cultural events. Another musical instrument is the Adil, a trumpet-like instrument made from a buffalo horn with its narrow side attached to bamboo. It is traditionally blown during the Wangala festival, serving as an accompaniment to other instruments. *Chigring* is a traditional bamboo musical instrument with strips slit out of the bamboo itself. This instrument is played with the help of sticks. *Dimchrang* is a musical instrument made from bamboo and wood, and *dotdrong* is a guitar-like musical instrument). In Garo churches, they sing carols accompanied by their traditional musical instruments, creating a unique blend of their cultural heritage and religious practices. This fusion of traditional music with Christian carols helps to preserve and celebrate the Garo musical

heritage.

Despite of religious identity, whenever the Garo people enter the *Bandasal* and sit together in an informal gathering, they often engage in playing the Dama, a traditional musical instrument. This practice brings a sense of joy among the A.chiks and it will create a lively and festive atmosphere. They cheer and celebrate showing that their traditions remain a vital part of their community life.

The Garo people use various plants and herbs found in their local environment for medicinal purposes, including different types of leaves, tree bark, and flowers. They have a traditional hospital known as a Samachik. It is an age-old tradition to use medicinal plants to treat various ailments among the A.chiks. There is a Samachik Hospital in Rongbskgre, Atmile West Garo Hills, named SamachikSikmanAchik Ethnic Hospital. This hospital started functioning in 2011 and is run by Dr. Vidyanisth Marak, who is dedicated to propagating the rich heritage of medicine in Garo Hills. People primarily come to this hospital for arthritis treatment and jaundice. The herbs are collected from the jungle.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Rajib M. Sangma, a traditional Garo medicine man, began sharing Sam Achik medicine and medical practices through a YouTube channel. He aimed to reach and assist people who needed medical care but were unable to go to the hospital. This initiative helped to disseminate traditional knowledge more broadly and provided vital support to those unable to access modern healthcare facilities.

The festivals and celebrations of the Garo community serve as significant cultural markers, showcasing their vibrant expressions of traditional beliefs and practices. Wangala, a harvest festival, pays homage to the sun god MisiSaljong. The festival involves traditional dances, music, and rituals. Irrespective of age and gender, all community members participate, adorned in colorful dresses and headgear. Celebrated in October– November each year, the festival begins with the 'Rugala' ceremony, where the chief priest performs rituals to invoke blessings from the deity and ensure a fruitful harvest season. These dances, accompanied by traditional musical instruments like drums and flutes, narrate stories of the community's cultural history and agricultural practices. The Wangala festival is also a time for community bonding and socialization. It provides an opportunity for people to come together and strengthen social ties. Wangala festival is more than just a celebration of the harvest; it is a manifestation of the Garo community's cultural richness and their commitment to preserving their heritage. Many videos on YouTube channels showcase the Wangala Festival.

DYING CULTURAL MARKERS

Increased digital literacy often leads to greater exposure to global cultures which might influence rapid changes in many aspects like language, food cultures, traditional dress and ornaments etc. This can be observed among the Garos as well.

Likewise, dying cultural markers are those that are fading away day by day or becoming obsolete. Several of these markers are facing the threat of decline due to modernization, globalization, and other socio-economic factors.

As discussed in the living cultural markers of the Achik community, they have eight dialects: Ambengs, Awes, Gara-ganchings, Atongs, Chisaks, Rugas, Matchi-duals, and Megams. From the study, it was found that due to the extensive use of Hindi and English, people, especially the

younger generation, are forgetting their mother tongue. In the colonial period, Christian missionaries came to this plain area, which was highly concentrated with Ambeng dialects. They learned and used the Ambeng language in writing and communication. As a result, the plain area became a center of development in education and health facilities. Later, people from neighboring areas moved to this place and also adopted the Ambeng language through socio-economic interaction. In this way, the Ambeng dialect became more popular, negatively affecting other dialects.

Traditional attire is one of the dying cultural markers of the Garo community. The traditional dress of the Garo people includes the *dakmanda*, which many women still wear; however, the younger generation prefers modern clothing. The gando, a short traditional waistcloth for men, is no longer used by the male folk. The younger

generations are increasingly influenced by global fashion trends. Young girls of the Achik community often wear their traditional attire when going to church and during festivals like Wangala. Apart from these occasions, they do not wear traditional attire. The traditional Garo attire includes the kotip, a headband often made from cloth, beads, and feathers. This headband is an essential part of Garo attire and is typically worn during cultural events, festivals, and dances, symbolizing cultural identity and pride. Other traditional attires include the rikgittok (necklace), natapsi (worn on the upper part of the ear), naderong (earrings), sengki (white waistband), jaksan (bangles), and *rikwareng* (another type of necklace). Unfortunately, these traditional attire markers are on the wane. The craft of weaving, once practiced by Garo women, is no longer widely practiced. Many now buy their textiles from nearby shops, and the availability of cheap labor from other states, mainly Assam, has negatively impacted the weaving tradition. Nowadays, other Assamese communities like the Hajong are involved in the mass production of the Garo dakmanda.

Traditional architecture serves as a distinctive cultural marker of the Garo community. However, community members argue that especially nokachik house needs not be preserved or continued due to concerns about safety from natural disasters and theft. Moreover, since these structures are made from bamboo and other natural resources, there is a necessity to change the materials every few years. The granary (Mi Jam) of the A'chik is also on the wane. Once upon a time, each family had their own granary in the corner of the village. Nowadays, they store their grains in their own houses. The watch house of the A'chik, called Borang, which is traditionally constructed near the agricultural field, is also not commonly found nowadays. During fieldwork, one Borang was seen in Mandakgre village, which has been discussed earlier. The *Nokpante*, the bachelor's dormitory of the A'chik, is not visible anywhere except in Resubalpara village, where one has been built for tourists.

The staple food of the A.chik is rice but they also eat fish, meat, millet, maize and various other vegetables. The Garo community still cooks their traditional cuisines, but not as frequently as before. *Kalchi*, a natural soda made with burnt bamboo shoots or unripe bananas, is now often substituted with readymade soda. The Garos use a kind of potash in their curries, which they obtain by burning dry pieces of plantain stems or young bamboos, locally known as *Kalchi* or *Katchi*. After burning, the ashes are collected, dipped in water, and strained using a conical-shaped bamboo strainer. However, this traditional method has largely been replaced by soda, which is now frequently added to their preparations (Das Puspita et al, 2021). *Brenga* is a unique food

preparation style where ingredients are stuffed inside hollow bamboo and then the bamboo is burned to cook the food. However, these traditional culinary practices are gradually being replaced by modern and more convenient alternatives.

The Garo traditionally utilized locally available bamboo and cane to create a variety of baskets, which were essential for almost all livelihood activities. In the past, everyone knew how to make these bamboo baskets, but nowadays, they are increasingly bought from markets instead.

The Milam, a double-edged sword that once held cultural significance, is no longer used by the community. Similarly, the use of *Wa'sding*, a bamboo rope, is also on the wane. A few people from the community are working to preserve and showcase the handicrafts that were once widely used by the community. A *Borang* is a watch house built in a tree near the paddy field to guard against wild animal attacks; however, it is no longer found among the A.chik people today. One Borang in Mandakgre village has also undergone various changes.

The Wangala festival, once a grand harvest celebration involving the entire community, is now less enthusiastically observed, particularly among converted Christian Garos who are less interested in its traditional practices. Traditionally, the festival was a time for the community to come together and celebrate the end of the agricultural season with singing, dancing, and rituals dedicated to the deity MisiSaljong. The Wangala festival, which was once a grand harvest celebration involving the entire Garo community, has become a state festival that has now become an international tourist attraction. The Wangala, presently celebrated more like a carnival, rather than a harvesting festival, sponsored by the state, promotes the Garo identity, but it has lost its old identity. Now, during the Wangala festival, everyone gathers to witness the staged performance by Garo people, have some local cuisine, and socialize. Undoubtedly, this festival has sought international fame as well, but the originality and authenticity have been lost, though, in Songsarek villages, this festival is still celebrated in its traditional way. However, with the increasing conversion to Christianity among the Garo people, there has been a noticeable shift in attitudes towards these traditional practices Among the Garo population, those who have converted to Christianity often show less interest in the traditional practices associated with Wangala. As a result, the festival, once a symbol of cultural unity and identity is no longer celebrated with the same fervor and communal spirit. *Hasiroks*, a seed-sowing festival conducted in March, is no longer practiced by the Garos.

Nokpante was a traditional bachelor's dormitory system and a well-known social institution among the A.chik community, but it is no longer in practice, in which unmarried male youth or bachelors lived together and learned many things such as folk songs, dances, and musical instruments. The literal meaning of *Nokpante* is "the house of bachelors," where the unmarried males of the village would stay together and learn various arts and crafts, music, and dance. The decline of institutions like the *Nokpante* has negatively affected the transmission of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The team witnessed a very old traditional *Nokpante* in the village of Emangre in the South Garo Hills, which is no longer in use.

Traditional medicine is also a dying cultural marker of the Garo community. For generations, the Garo people relied on extensive knowledge of local plants and herbs to treat various diseases. Nowadays, most people are resorting to modern medicine. The healthcare infrastructure in the Garo Hills consists of a mix of government and private institutions, working together to provide medical services to the people. People like Dr Vidyanisth Marak and Rajib M. SangmaOjapropagating and disseminating traditional knowledge and rich heritage of traditional medicine in Garo Hills. Norjordiki, a traditional medicine for stomach

problems, is no longer used by the community.

The Garos practiced a form of animism and they were worshiping various deities and spirits associated with nature. Their indigenous faith, Songsarek, is also fading after the conversion to Christianity. When the Garos converted to Christianity, their traditional religion began to fade away. Christianity also had negative effects on their culture and customs. However, the contributions of the American Baptist missionaries to the Garo community were significant, particularly in the fields of education, health, and literature (Amellina G, 2019). From the study, it has been observed that out of 172 households, only 3 households are following indigenous faiths, Songsarek. These 3 households are located in rural areas of the Garo Hills. The spread of Christianity has significantly impacted the traditional faiths in this region, leading to a decline in the practice of indigenous beliefs which made broader social and cultural changes within the Garo community. Rituals and ceremonies, once conducted by priests known as Kamal, are no longer performed.

The K'ma is a memorial post erected in front of a house in memory of a deceased person. Except for the Rugas and Chiboks, it is customary throughout the hills to put up memorial posts in front of a deceased person's house as soon as possible after the cremation ceremony. The figure is typically adorned with some of the deceased's clothing or ornaments (Playfair,1909). These k'mas are not visible anywhere in the Garo Hills except in traditional villages. Even in these villages, they do not place the deceased's dress and ornaments; they simply put up a memorial post in front of the deceased person's house. Traditional agricultural practices like shifting cultivation (A.ba cha·a) are being replaced by settled cultivation, and modern farming techniques are also being adopted.

The use of traditional musical instruments like the dama, adil, chigring, and dimchrang is declining as modern musical instruments become more popular.F these instruments played a central role in the cultural and social activities of the Garo community, providing the rhythmic backbone to their music and dance. The dama, a type of drum, and the adil, a trumpet-like instrument, along with the chigring a bamboo musical instrument, dimchrang (a musical instrument made from bamboo and wood, were not only used for entertainment but also for rituals and ceremonies. However, with the advent of globalization and the influx of contemporary music, these traditional instruments are now primarily used only during traditional festivals and ceremonies. Similarly, folk songs are being replaced by contemporary songs, with only a few people remaining who know the traditional folk songs. These songs, once an integral part of everyday life, are now mainly sung during festivals. The vibrant heritage of Garo folk music, which includes a variety of songs such as *Serejing, Ajia, Dim Dim Chong Dadi Chong, Ang' Atchiram, Badi Dake Na'ade*, a well-known Garo folk song, are fading gradually. *Serejing* is sung when missing someone or feeling happy, while *Ajia* is a mourning song traditionally sung when someone dies. *Dim Dim Chong Dadi Chong*, a folk song named after the sound and beat of a drum, is played during the Wangala festival. *Ang' Atchiram* and *Badi Dake Na'ade* are especially significant as they are used in traditional storytelling, passing down folklore from one generation to the next. Muama, a Garo lullaby, holds a special place in the hearts of the community as it reflects the relationship between mothers and their children. The decline in the use of traditional musical instruments and folk songs poses a significant threat to the cultural heritage of the Garo community. Efforts are being made by cultural organizations and community to revive and preserve these traditions.

CULTURAL MARKERS WHICH ARE BEING REVIVED

Despite many cultural markers of the Garo community fading, some are being revived by various associations and through groups on Facebook and Instagram, as well as YouTube channels. The availability and increased use of digital devices have enabled many tribal communities to effectively utilise digital tools and utilised a wide range of opportunities provided by digital platforms to preserve their cultural heritage.

Revivalism of traditional art and culture appears to be a recent trend among the Garos. The Hundred Drums Wangala festival, organized by the government of Meghalaya every year at Asananggiri in the Rongram Development Block, presents a rich and varied part of the cultural heritage of the Garo (Singh et al., 1994). This festival, held annually by *the Garo tribes* in the month of November, is one of the most significant cultural events for the Garo community, showcasing their unique customs, traditions, and way of life. The Wangala festival, also known as the harvest festival, the Wangala Festival marks the end of the agricultural season, involves dance performances and rhythmic drumming that symbolize thanksgiving to the deity *MisiSaljong*, the giver of bountiful harvests. Efforts to preserve and promote traditional Garo music and dance, such as the Wangala dance, have seen renewed interest, especially during cultural events. The state government, in collaboration with the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), will initiate, recognizing the importance of maintaining cultural identity in a rapidly modernizing world. The state government is receiving funds for fairs and festivals under the Domestic Promotion and Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH) Scheme, initiated by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in 2004, to create general awareness among the domestic population about the potential tourist destinations within the country. This initiative seeks to develop the domestic tourism market in India. Under the scheme, Meghalaya is included in the North-East region-specific campaigns, which helps organize the Wangala festival. This financial support has been crucial in ensuring the festival's success and sustainability. The DPPH Scheme provides resources not only for the festival's logistical needs but also for promoting the event at national and international levels, attracting tourists and cultural enthusiasts. The influx of visitors during the festival serves as a platform for the Garo community to display their traditional attire, crafts, and cuisine, promote and showcase their cultural heritage. Wangala festival plays a vital role in the cultural revival and preservation efforts among the Garos.

During the fieldwork in the Tura municipality of West Garo Hills district, under government initiatives, particularly led by the tourism department, several structures have been erected displaying cultural markers of the Garos on this they have pasted a QR code scanner which directs to Meghalaya tourism. This initiative, undertaken approximately five years ago, aims to enhance tourism and provide visitors with insights into the local culture and its people. Each board provides insightful descriptions of significant cultural aspects such as the intricate art of traditional weaving, the Songsarek traditional Garo religion, the unique matrilineal societal of Garo communities, and the distinctive architecture of traditional Garo dwellings. These markers are the living traditions that continue to shape the identity and daily lives of the Garo people. The primary story signage is placed at Araimile, Tura. The signages are placed at a tri-junction in a triangular shape, the signages have brief information about the notable members of the Garo community, a political leader – Purno Agitok Sangma; Garo literature – H. D. W. Momin and Garo freedom fighter – Pa Togan Sangma.

"Shri Purno Agitok Sangma – A Visionary Leader

Shri Purno Agitok Sangma (1947 – 2016) was born in Chapahati, West Garo Hills, and is remembered for bring a visionary leader. Before joining politics and holding several ministerial portfolios, Sangma made his mark as a lecturer, lawyer and journalist. He served as the fourth Chief Minister of Meghalaya (1988 – 1990) and eventually as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha (1996 – 1998). In 2012, he became a candidate for prime ministership and in 2017 was awarded with Padma Vibhushan – becoming its first recipient from Meghalaya."

"Shri H.D.W. Momin – The Pride of Garo Literature

Shri Howard Denison W. Momim (1913 -1944) known as the Father of Modern Garo Literature, was the first Garo to hold a postgraduate degree. He became the first college lecturer among his tribe, along with being a versatile personality – a poet, artist, philosopher and patriot. He pioneered the first Garo magazine 'A.chik Ku.rang' or the Voice of the Garos. During World War II, he resigned from lectureship at Guwahati Cotton College to serve the war-torn people of Burma. His legacy is kept alive through Garo literature and Garo language studies."

"Pa Togan Sangma – A hero

Pa Togan Sangma was a Garo tribe leader from Garo Hills, who led the resistance against the British occupation in the late 19th century. Togan Sangma realised the threat to his people, their land and cultural identity by the colonial state; and carried out a stealth attack on some sleeping British soldiers. Other British soldiers retaliated, and even though the Garos were ill-equipped with weapons, they fought bravely but were eventually martyred."

The sign ages which have inscriptions and images on both sides also reads "Tura, Pride of Garos"; "Shield – Warrior Weapon as well as Dance Prop" and "Traditional Garo Dwellings – A traditional Garo bamboo house is a long structure built on wooden posts. Different forms of dwellings or 'Nokachik', are built to suit specific uses or family

structure, and constructed with locally grown bamboo, cane, dried palm leaves and timber of rubber tree. For instance, 'Nokmong' is the A'chik household 'Nokpante' is for unmarried males. Small huts in rice fields or orchards are 'Jamsreng' and 'Jamatal' is a miniature house in Jhum fields. Harvested grains are stored in 'Jamnok'. These structures are built by local youth, ensuring that traditional knowledge of building construction is passed on through generations."

A story signage which was placed outside the Chandmari playground in Tura has an inscription of a red panda (*Ailurus fulgens)* and states the Nokrek Park – A UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. The other side of the signage read "The Story of Tura – According to local legends, this peak was home to the Gods and was originally called Dura, after Goddess DuramaImbama. The native Goddess is considered to be one of the most beautiful, rich and powerful of the three divinities; KoasiMinduri, AratchaRongbareandDuramaImbama. However, the British mistook Dura as Tura, and the place has been called the same ever since."

The cultural marker signages placed at Hawakhana, Tura gave brief descriptions about Bamboo craft and Weaving. "Bamboo craft is significant to the culture and economy of Meghalaya. A versatile material grown and used in abundance, bamboo finds its place in every part of Garo life. From artistic baskets known as *meghumkhok* used for storing valuables, to sieves and pokerwork, bamboo craft is being developed using innovative techniques. Meghalaya is rich in a diversity of bamboo species, 24 of which are used for handicrafts, matting and basketry, 14 are edible and 21

are used for construction purposes."

"Weaving – The craft of weaving practiced by Garo women is an important source of livelihood in the region. The variety of weaving lies not only in the patterns but also in the processes of fabric spun from local materials. Indigenous endi silk, known for its durability and texture is a major raw material. Garo women weave and wear a long- unstitched piece of cloth around their waist, called Dakmanda, made with handloom cotton. Dakmanda has a border with traditional concentric diamond motifs, known as *muikron* or eye in Garo; an auspicious symbol similar to the evil eye."

The signages placed at Ringrey, Tura reads "An Oral Tradition – The Garos, one of the major tribes of Meghalaya are a community whose knowledge systems and traditions are passed down orally. Historical studies state that Garos once had their own script. It is said that in the course of migrations and due to shortages of food, the manuscripts written on animal hide, were boiled and eaten to survive. Ever since, all literature has existed as poetry; sung or recited by community member who recount stories, battles and legendary heroes."

"A matrilineal Society – The Garos are one of the few remaining matrilineal communities in the world. The prominent characteristics of matriliny is inheritance and ownership of property by the youngest daughter or the 'Nokna', along with naming of children by the mother's surname and matrilocal residence. It is believed that the decision to adopt matriliny took place centuries ago in a conference with community leader called Bonepa, where a question regarding the ownership of one's house was raised. A Garo representative replied, let us give the house to the daughter. This was agreed by all unquestionably, and has been followed ever since."

"Songsarek – Garo Religion. The Garo approach to religion is complex and required a deeper understanding of the Garo way of life. The Garos may be considered to be closer to animism in religion; which means a belief in spiritual essence possessed by all beings, elements and objects. The belief in the creation of Earth, all living beings and elements is of essense to Garo religion or Songsarek. In this context all ceremonies and ritual sacrifices are performed for the propitiation of spirits, with divine spirits invoked during births, marriages, deaths, illness, or for abundance in crop and welfare of the community."

"Garo music – Garo culture is alive with many traditional musical instruments and forms of expression, especially practiced during Garo festivals which are linked to the agricultural cycle. Musical instruments have religious connotations as per their use at an appropriate place and time; and are largely based on wind, strings, skins or membranes, and self-sounding materials. Most celebrations begin with playing
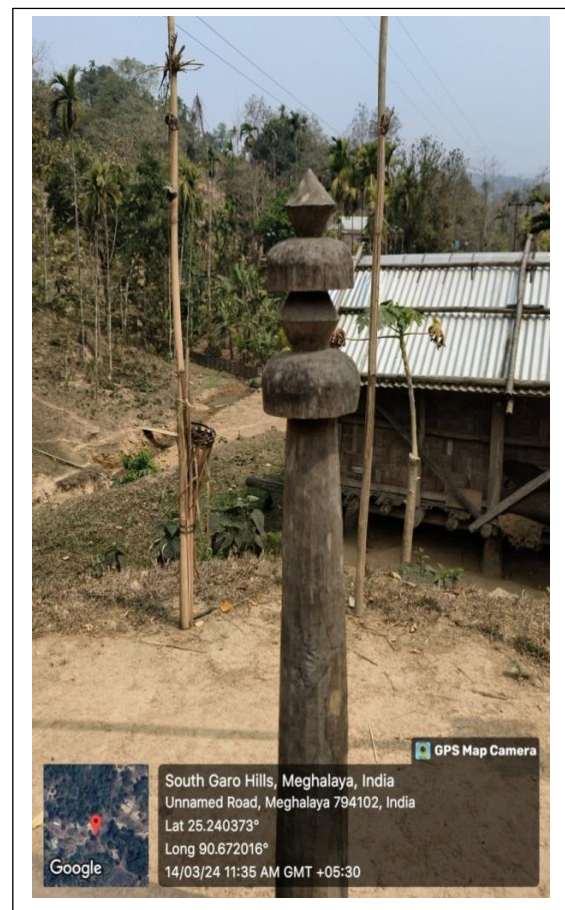
of instruments such as dama, adil, rang and flutes, followed by dance performances."

Garo cultural markers, such as traditional music, dance, cuisine, and craftsmanship, are essential elements of the community's heritage and identity. Preserving these cultural markers is crucial to maintaining the richness and diversity of Garo culture. Efforts are being made by various associations, social media groups, and government initiatives to revive and promote these traditions. People from their own community, like Will Ch Sangma, aim to preserve and disseminate Garo cultural heritage digitally through his YouTube channel, Mr Will Sangma (www.youtube.com/@mrwillsangma). He showcases the Wangala festival, the NokAchik and Nokpante, cuisine, dress, and ornaments. This content is also published on Instagram and Facebook. Father Jimberth K. Marak, with huge Subscribers about 2.92 Lakh, also uploads cultural heritage content of the A.chik
people through his YouTube channel, Jimberth K Marak (www.youtube.com/@Jimberthmarak). He has uploaded gospels, Christian songs with traditional A.chik attire, dance, and the Wangala festival. Rajib M. Sangma, with his YouTube channel named A.chikOja Part2 (www.youtube.com/@OjaPart2), has been creating and uploading content on indigenous Garo medicine since 2019. The channel currently has 59,400 subscribers. Rajib disseminates knowledge regarding the herbal and traditional medicines of the A.chik, which have been used since time immemorial. He learned this knowledge from his grandparents. His efforts are helping to preserve indigenous Garo medicine as an archive on YouTube.

Tourism is developing in India as well as Meghalaya. In the Tura municipality of West Garo Hills district several structures have been erected displaying cultural markers of the Garos where they have pasted a QR code scanner which directs to Meghalaya tourism. Many tourist destinations are there in Garo Hills like Tura peak, Balpakram National Park, *Siju cave and Sanctuary* and *Wari Chora* especially *Wari chora* people opined that because of the visuals of *Wari chora* on social medial platform like youtube, instagram and facebook made a sudden influx to this tourist destination. Even people started to come from forign country aas well. When people started to come, gradually home stay and hotels have been developed and where they started to serve and showcase traditional Garo cuisines. Dishes like Wak Kappa (pork curry), Nagam Chutney (dry fish chutney), Nakam Bitchi (dry fish curry), and Do'o Kappa (chicken curry) are now available in hotels. During cultural festivals like Wangala and Tysam these dishes are also showcased and sold.

In the past, before the advent of woven cloth, like many other communities, A.chik also used tree bark cloth and they know the technique, which is now an important traditional handicraft and cultural marker. The Garos are fortunate enough to possess several varieties of tree from which fiber can be obtained. Even though they can purchase blankets and warm clothes from plain dealer, for the conservation only they are still adhere the heritage of making bedding from the bark clothe. The *pakram (Grewialilia folia)* tree yields the best cloth apart from *pakram* tree they would use and prepare clothes and bedding from *prap (FicusRumphi), the chram (Artocarpuschaplasha, the dimbri (Ficusglomerata),* and the *anisep (Kydiacalycina)* (Playfair, 1909). Cultural programs like the Tysem Festival also aim to provide a platform for conducting Garo traditional dance and song, as well as showcasing and selling traditional cuisine and Garo artifacts and bamboo and cane products, and traditional jewelry. People like Jibon S. Marak from *Rongkenggittim village*, Siju still making and showcasing the bark cloths such as bark cloth jacket locally known as *ampak* and tree bark mattress *pursok* along with other musical instruments he

started to do this work still his childhood. A.chik wearing tree bark cloths as their attire is documented and uploaded on social media networking site Facebook by Plinder Dote Marak, a digital content creator from Siju, South Garo Hills. Tysam festival the winter festival of Baghmara is an annual festival organized by The South Garo Hills District Administration on the Shore of Simsang River. In Atong language

the word Tysamliterally mean by the river side. On this two day event they will showcase traditional cuisines, traditional sports, music, dance and artifacts other tourism related activities. A woman self-help group in the Siju-Rongsu area of South Garo Hills has begun to revive ancient art form of weaving clothing material from tree barks. In 2024 for the first time during the Tyisam festival in Baghmara women self-help group and Jibon S. Marak got an opportunity to showcase the bark cloth which has been published on Hub News, an online *digital media platform*.

The Garo traditional medicine system, practiced by the *oja* the medicine man of Garo community in Meghalaya, has been receiving renewed attention and revival efforts. The Garo people use various plants and herbs found in their local environment for medicinal purposes, including different types of leaves, tree bark, and flowers. Their traditional hospital is known as *Samachik*. There is a Samachik hospital in Rongbskgre, Atmile West Garo Hills, named Samachik Sikman Achik Ethnic Hospital. This hospital started functioning in 2011 and is run by Dr. VidyanisthMarak, who is dedicated to propagating the rich heritage of medicine in Garo Hills. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Rajib M. Sangma, a traditional Garo medicine man, began sharing Sam Achik medicine and medical practices through a YouTube channel A,chik Oja Part2 (https://www.youtube.com/@OjaPart2). He aimed to reach and assist people who needed medical care but unable to go to the hospital. This initiative helped to disseminate traditional knowledge more broadly and provided vital support to those unable to access modern healthcare facilities.

Blaslin Tegite Sangma, a 45-year-old artisan from Gasuapara in the South Garo Hills, has dedicated the past 12 years to crafting Garo artefacts. Having acquired his skills from a close friend, Sangma specializes in creating intricate miniatures of Borang, the traditional Garo watch house, as well as various musical instruments and other cultural artefacts. His passion for this craft emerged from a deep belief in the importance of preserving the Garo heritage for future generations. Some individuals purchase these artifacts for their personal use, particularly the musical instruments, which hold a special place in Garo culture and rituals. Others buy them for their aesthetic interest, using them to adorn their homes and offices, thus keeping these artifacts of Garo heritage alive in contemporary settings. These unique artefacts can be found at 'Meghalayan Age - The Store' in Delhi, a well-known outlet that showcases the rich cultural diversity of Meghalaya. Additionally, 'Dakchi Craft,' a prominent artifact shop in Shillong, showcases and sells his creations. These stores not only provide a platform for local artisans like Blaslin Tegite Sangma to reach a broader audience but also play a vital role in promoting and preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Garo community. Through his work, Blaslin Tegite Sangma believes Garo craftsmanship will continue and helping people understand and appreciate their cultural roots.

Store house of firewood

Bark cloth *(Amphak)*

Chapter 6

Factors Impacting Garo Cultural Heritage

Effect of Christianity:

The Garo traditional religion is called Sangsarek. The Garo people had traditionally practiced animistic beliefs, centered around natural elements, which are connected with their lifestyle and rituals. Presently very few Garo people follow the belief system. The history of Christianization in the Garo Hills began in the late 18th century with American Baptist Missionaries followed by Catholic Missionaries and British Protestants. The arrival of missionaries may be marked as a significant turning point for the Garo community if not the most significant turning point after they started inhabiting in Garo Hills of Meghalaya (then Assam).

In 1867, the administrative headquarters was established in Tura for the entire Garo Hills, by the British government. Soon after that, missionaries sought to spread Christianity among the Garo community which was accompanied by efforts to provide education, health care, and other social services. For a long time, education was left to the missionaries by the government itself and then the responsibility was shifted to the government.

The missionaries faced lots of challenges in the initial days like other tribal-dominated areas of India. The challenges include language barrier and cultural differences at the most, though over time the challenges were met by the missionaries through their slow but steady efforts. Gradually, schools, religious establishments for prayers, and hospitals were built in remote corners across the Garo hills, and religious texts were also translated into the Garo language for easy preaching of the religion. The missionaries played a vital role in the spread of Christianity by educating Garo people, baptization, and training them to be pastors and preachers to spread Christianity among the community which played a crucial role in reshaping the existing Garo culture,

The process of conversion brought significant changes in the community like other tribal communities of India. In the beginning slowly and later on vastly, many Garo people accepted Christianity, and converted themselves to Christianity (Presbyterianism, or Catholicism, or Baptism or others), in some instances along, with or without family, with or without other community members. This led to major transformations in not only religious practices but also social and cultural norms, lifestyle, and overall community identity. In religious practice, the animistic rituals dedicated to spirits, natural elements, and ancestors transformed into Christian hymns, prayers, etc. Traditional Garo festivals and rituals associated with their animistic beliefs gradually faded away to Christian religious practices and celebrations. Most of the Garo community members identify Christmas as their biggest festival. Along with religious knowledge, conventional education was also a part of the missionary vision which altered the course of life of the Garo community. The establishment of schools and educational institutions for providing Western education was a milestone for the missionaries. This contributes to the literacy rate among the Garo community as well as their social mobility and exposure to the political sphere of the state. This phenomenon impacted beyond religion or the education system of the community.

With Christianity, the family structure, as well as social structure, belief system, social norms, gender roles, moral values, and ethical framework, have also gone through abrupt changes.

Christianity impacted the economic pattern of the Garo community as well. Previously the community was dependent on a traditional agricultural system which never yielded be profitable affair. Missionaries introduced modern agricultural systems along with new technologies. The establishment of churches and missions also provided avenues for economic support through community development projects and vocational training.

However, the religious conversion was never without challenges and tensions. This conversion process witnessed conflicts between families and communities, due to differences between traditional beliefs and new religions. The concern about the fading of indigenous cultural practices as well as community identity has always been a topic of conflict from the time of the first conversion till the present day. During the fieldwork, the team interviewed families who have practiced Christianity for multiple generations as well as those who are first-generation Christians. Some families exhibit a dual faith practice within their household. The researchers noted varying perspectives among these families. Simon Sangma (name has been changed) and his wife, the Nokma couple of Selsella block, expressed sadness that all their children and grandchildren have embraced Christianity, while they continue to adhere proudly to their traditional belief system, identifying themselves as 'Sangsarek'. Simon Sangma anticipates that upon his passing, their cultural heritage will fade, as they are the last adherents of Sangsarek in their village. According to their customs, Simon Sangma's descendants are supposed to erect a Kamma (wooden humanoid structure) in his memory after his death. Concerned that his offspring have converted, he has already constructed two K.mmas for himself and his wife, fearing disrespect to their ancestors if this ritual is neglected. In Tura, a Christian family conveyed their unfamiliarity with their traditional culture, having followed Christianity for two generations. They explained that their ancestors lacked education, leading them to practice animism.

Alcohol consumption is forbidden in the majority of Christian sects. Among the Garo people, traditionally, Chubak, a type of rice beer, was brewed in households. With the influence of Christianity, many have refrained from consuming Chubak, leading to a decline in knowledge about its preparation. Only a few families, particularly those adhering to Sangsarek, continue to practice brewing and consuming Chubak.

Before Christianity, Garo people practiced traditional healing methods that were deeply connected with their animistic beliefs and natural elements. These practices were a combination of various rituals, and herbal medicines, hailing the spirits of ancestors. The arrival of Christianity has changed the course of traditional healing practices. After the advent of Christianity, the missionaries often discouraged traditional healing practices and introduced Western medicine to the community. The traditional healing practices were somehow considered backward after that. Those who were converted to Christianity inclined more towards Western medicine. This shift played a major role in the prominence of traditional healers in the Garo community. Traditionally, due to the animistic belief system, Garo culture had a spiritual connection with nature. This connection has built their lifestyle, agricultural practices, rituals, food habits, day-to-day lifestyle, etc. With the spread of Christianity, the dynamics of man-nature relationships have changed gradually.

In the Garo community Nokpante, the traditional male dorm, used to be a common hangout space for unmarried boys over the age of adolescence. This dormitory used to be a learning center for a Garo boy to learn about fishing, weapons, various tools, musical instruments, hunting, and so on. Presently very few villages still have Nokpante, and one functioning Nokpante has been observed

by the research team in South Garo Hills. The design, architecture, and pattern of the Nokpante depict the rich cultural heritage of the Garo community which requires preservation. Undoubtedly, modern houses can provide comfort and safety, but this also signifies a departure from traditional architectural style and knowledge. Moreover, very few houses are built traditionally as it is time-consuming, more expensive, and high maintenance but with the declining number of traditional house types, architectural diversity is rapidly declining as well.

Despite all the effects of Christianity, the Garo community still follows the customary law, related to their social norms, inheritance of property, family and social structure, political system of the village, and distribution of land. Few of the amendments have been observed over time but, the core of the law has remained the same. All the members who identify themselves as Garo, irrespective of their religious identity, have to abide by the Garo Customary law, which has a written format as well, published by Garo Hills Autonomous District Council.

In recent times, there has been a trend for the movement of preserving Indigenous cultural practices to reconnect with the roots of the community. This is prevalent among the 'educated and converted' community members. Due to this effort, many community members are working towards revitalizing the Garo language and its subgroups. Some are engaged in collecting old artifacts that are significant for the community itself to make a collection to display for the new generations. In recent years, a new trend of content creators has flourished where people tend to record cultural practices digitally through videos and upload them on the internet in the form of Instagram reels, YouTube videos, and Facebook videos. A genuine effort to rejuvenate the oral history and record it on a digital platform has been observed which might lead to a proper documentation of the indigenous rich heritage of Garo culture. In conclusion, it can be said that the history of Christianization (an ongoing process) in the Garo Hills is a complex narrative of not only religious transformation but also cultural encounters and socio-economic changes. Its impact on Garo culture may have pros and cons but it has undoubtedly reshaped the Garo society, its religious landscape, educational advancements, social structure, and cultural identity.

Effect of the development programmes:

Before independence, the mountainous regions of India did not experience much of development initiatives such as transportation systems, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities. However, post-independence, the government implemented numerous long- and short-term development programmes, specifically targeting tribal areas. These initiatives have significantly influenced the traditional lifestyles of Garo community members.

Traditionally Garo houses were built with locally available materials such as bamboo, wood, and leaves, as they were associated with nature. With time, various housing schemes were introduced by the Government of India, where modern types of houses were built using brick, cement, sand, stone chips, and other materials. This modern type of house might be more durable than the traditional type, but the traditional type is associated with the climate of the area. Traditional type house has a story of itself that depicts the Garo culture. It perfectly showcases the family structure, basic customs, and social structure of the Garo community. For example, every traditional house is comprised of a traditional hearth, which is a family gathering place as well as a place to welcome guests. People used to gather around the hearth to have quality family time, to share traditional knowledge, and to know about community myths and folklore. A traditional type of house itself is

a memoir, which has been home to generation after generation, which holds some design or pattern that may be from the old days, a true living history of traditional architectural knowledge.

Among other development programmes, healthcare facilities were also introduced in Garo Hills. Presently almost every village has a PHC (Primary Health Centre) or CHC (Community Health Centre). Government hospitals have been constructed in every block. With the advent of modern medicine and treatment, the mortality rate has also declined with time. Different vaccination programmes have been introduced by the government for the prevention of fatal diseases. While these development programmes have tangible benefits, they also challenge the preservation of traditional healing systems and knowledge of ethno-medicine.

The introduction of modern systems and practices may undermine traditional knowledge and practices, leading to a potential loss of cultural identity among younger generations. During the fieldwork, the team visited the Sam Achik hospital which is run by Dr Vidyanisth N. Marak. The legacy of traditional medicine is declining and soon it will be forgotten if not preserved immediately. Traditionally Garo community is a community hugely dependent on agriculture. Shifting hill cultivation (jhum), process shifting hill cultivation involves rotating fields among several plots to allow for natural regeneration of the soil. This practice is deeply rooted in the Garo calendar and cultural belief system as well. As per one informant, traditionally he would leave the land for his kids to cultivate again once he has cultivated the land. This will give the soil time to regenerate naturally.

The government has introduced many developmental programmes, which include the modernization of agricultural practices among the Garo community, to promote sustainable agricultural techniques, and increase crop production. The modern agricultural system often involves chemical fertilizer which harms nature in long-term use. Modern irrigation process is heavily used which affects the water level of the area. The government has limited the shifting hill cultivation. Modernized agriculture can produce more crops, but challenges traditional agricultural knowledge and rituals associated with this process and cultural norms. An elder in the community expressed her preference for jhum cultivation over modern agriculture, citing that vegetables nowadays do not taste the same as they used to due to the heavy use of chemical fertilizers. Additionally, the use of modern and mechanized agricultural tools has reduced the usage of traditional hand tools and implements used by the Garo people for generations. This shift has impacted cultural practices associated with rituals associated with agriculture.

While development programs bring about positive changes such as improved housing, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and the modernization of agriculture among Garo communities, they also pose challenges to the preservation of Garo traditional culture.

Effect of pop-culture

In recent decades, the influence of global pop culture, particularly from Korean (K-pop) and Western sources, has increasingly permeated into Garo society, bringing about both positive and challenging effects on their cultural identity. Pop culture often refers to popular culture transmitted via the mass media and aimed particularly at younger people. Pop culture has a significant role in reshaping societal norms and values. In case of Garo community exposure to Korean culture (popularly termed K-pop) and Western culture has been popularized by the

internet in recent times. In recent decades, the vibrant tapestry of Garo society has been significantly shaped by Western culture. This influx has brought about a nuanced transformation, where traditional facets of Garo culture, such as songs and dances, once deeply rooted in everyday life and community connections are now undergoing gradual change.

Historically, Garo songs and dances were integral to their cultural identity, serving not just as performances but as a means to bond people with each other and with their land and nature. These expressions were imbued with meanings that resonated through generations, woven into the fabric of daily rituals and social gatherings. However, with the influx of global pop culture, these traditional art forms have increasingly taken on a different form. They are now often seen more as stage performances rather than as communal practices that bind individuals and communities together.

This shift poses both positive and challenging effects on the cultural identity of the Garo people. While it introduces new modes of artistic expression and cultural exchange, it also risks diluting the intrinsic connections that these traditional arts once fostered within Garo society. The transition from tangible, community-centric cultural practices to more staged performances reflects a broader global trend of cultural adaptation and reinterpretation in the face of evolving societal dynamics.

As Garo society navigates these changes, there is a delicate balance to be struck between embracing new influences and preserving the rich heritage that has long defined their cultural identity. The challenge lies in honouring the past while embracing the future, ensuring that traditional songs and dances continue to serve as meaningful conduits of cultural memory and community cohesion in the modern world. Korean culture is currently trending globally among youth for its catchy tunes, cute appeal, global fandom, and vibrancy, and the Garo youth are no exception. Western music has also made its way into the Garo community for some time now, influencing local music preferences and styles. During fieldwork in Tura, the team visited the home of Kishen Marak (name changed). Mr. Marak, aged 64, is a devoted fan of The Beatles and enjoys playing guitar while singing. His 14-year-old daughter, however, finds The Beatles too old-fashioned and prefers BTS. Neither of them is particularly interested in Garo music, as they both feel that "Garo music is not up to the mark."

This is not the same for everyone. Many people are fond of Garo music as well, and they are adopting the other music. The popularity of K-pop and Western music among Garo youth has inspired the formation of cover bands, dance groups, and musical performances that combine global pop influences with traditional Garo musical elements. This blend represents a lively cultural exchange, allowing traditional Garo music to incorporate modern instruments and stylistic elements inspired by global pop genres. History has been witnessing, that pop culture always extends its influence beyond music. It reflects directly on fashion and lifestyle. The fashion aesthetics of K-pop idols, innovative hairstyles, makeup trends, and skin care products have influenced fashion choices among Garo youths. This adoption of global fashion has reshaped traditional Garo attire. The young generation is more into Western outfits following the new trend, insta- worthy outfits, rather than choosing traditional attire. For them, traditional attire is equivalent to occasional attire. The advent of social media platforms and digital communication channels has facilitated the rapid dissemination of pop culture trends and content among Garo youth. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube serve as spaces for sharing and consuming

pop culture content, from music videos and dance challenges to fashion, skincare, and lifestyle vlogs. While the infusion of pop culture can be seen as a form of cultural exchange and creative expression, it also poses challenges to the preservation of traditional Garo cultural identity. The prominence of global pop culture may overshadow local cultural practices, leading to a dilution of traditional values, languages, and customs among younger generations.

In conclusion, it can be said that the influence of K-pop culture cannot be ignored but it should not overshadow the root essence of Garo culture. Like every other culture, Garo culture is also going through changes and that is the only way to sustain in today's world. It must be preserved for its people, and by its people.

Chapter 7

Chronological Account of Mass Media in the Garo Hills

Print Media

In the Garo Hills, it was the American Baptist Missionaries which published the first monthly Garo monthly journal – "A.chikni Repeng" or Friends of the Garos from Tura in 1879, a journal contained news and views of the Garo converts, and writing on better living. The journal was originally published in the Bengali script but later published in the Roman script from January 1906. 'A.chikni Repeng' which catered to spreading the word of the missionaries, better living, health and hygiene to the Garos in the far flung areas was followed by journals such as the 'Phringphrang' or Morning Star (1912) which was discontinued in 1914 and the 'Seng Baa' or Dawn (1933) which published religious text and contexts (2020, Borah).

In 1940, a journal by the name 'A.chik Kurang' or Voice of the Garos was first published by Howard D. W. Momin and Evelyn R. Marak from 1940-1942. The journal published essays, stories, poetry and Garo language and its syntax and spelling. The journal was republished in 1949 and 1953 by Mackenson Rongmuthu. With the formation of the Garo Literature Society, popularly known as A.chik Literature Society in 1963, the society started publishing the 'Achik Kurang' by promoting the preservation of A.chik culture and traditions, A.chik heritage, A.chik language and dialects and folklore. In 2013, A.chik Literary Society published 'Dakokni Sul' or The Music of Dakok, a compilation of A.chik oral literature sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, Government of Meghalaya (2020, Borah).

Meghalaya was formed on 21st January 1972. It comprised two districts from the state of Assam i.e. the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills. Print media played a pivotal role in the Hill State movement (1952-1972) by creating awareness about the movement. During this phase, the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills saw a growth in literature which dealt in diverse fields, especially about the role of life and the identity of the people of the hills. The literature resonated a very strong sense of preservation of identity and culture and this could be fulfilled when the people of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills had a state of their own (2023, Lyngdoh).

The period of the Hill State movement saw a growth of newspapers and journals in the Garo Hills. In 1953, AchikSongbad or News in Garo, the first Garo newspaper was established by Narayan N. Marak. In 1955, "Pring Prang" or morning, a political weekly newspaper was started by Mody K. Marak. Through print media, the voice and the language of the Garos had started to be documented and read by the people of the region. The public and private media told the story of the people and their land. Publication such as, a journal - "Kubarangba" or language and voice, established in 1958; a government financed journal – "A.sangmi Songbad" or news of the country, published during 1960- 1962; a government sponsored monthly magazine – "Do a mek", published in 1964; a monthly magazine "Chadam be" or "the youth", established in 1965 by the Garo Youth Club; the Mothers' Union, Tura started "Nokdangni Ripeng" or the friend of the family in 1966; another government financed periodical was started in Baghmara namely "Songni Ripeng" or friend of the village; a journal – "Pringprang" or morning star was started by the youth of the Roman Catholic

Church in 1969; and the Garos of Goalpara district of Assam started a magazine – "Ku.bisik" or source of language in 1972; a political periodical by the name 'Chadambeni Ku.rang' or "Voice of the Youth" was started in 1974; a weekly news named Tura Weekly was started and published by Tribinson B. Sangma in 1976; Ku.mindi or "Assorted news", a news weekly was started in 1978; a bi-monthly periodical by the name 'Singga' or "Trumpet" was started by the Catholic Church, Tura in 1978; a daily newspaper, 'Salantinin Janera' or "Daily Mirror" was started in 1992, it is popular Garo newspaper which is still in circulation; a monthly literary magazine, Chimik or "Stream" was started in 2002 which published articles on arts, culture, tourism, agriculture, politics, etc. (2020, Borah) (2023, Lyngdoh). In 2019, a magazine in the Am.beng dialect of the Garos by the name of "Am.beng Magazine" came into being through the efforts of members from a group in Facebook - an online social media platform called 'Am.bengKu.tok'. The motto of the magazine is 'Ma·bitchrini Ku·rang Biambini Katta' which means "the voice from the seed of a mother and the words of the creator" with a motive to protect and preserve the Am.beng language and culture. In 2021, Readington Marwein published a Garo weekly, Kosi Songbad (2019, 2021, The Shillong Times).

Audio - Radio

Radio broadcast came into Northeast India after India's independence. The region was dark in the field of broadcasting till 1947. The first radio station in Northeast India was the Shillong-Guwahati All India Radio (AIR) station. The AIR station was called Shillong- Guwahati radio station because Shillong was the administrative capital of the then undivided Assam. On 1st July 1948, the then Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari in the presence of the then Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi inaugurated the Shillong studio. The Guwahati station at Uzan bazar's Commissioner Bungalow was equipped with a 1 kilowatt transmitter and broadcasted programmes mostly in Assamese but also had English, Khasi and Jaintia segments. It broadcasted programmes in two sessions daily, the morning transmission for 90 minutes (7:00 AM to 8:30 AM) and an evening transmission of 4 hours and 15 minutes (5.00 PM to 9.15 PM) (1949, The Indian Listener). In 1953, the headquarters of the AIR Shillong-Guwahati was shifted to Guwahati and the station was in 1956 renamed as Akashvani Guwahati.

In 1977, a member of Parliament from Tura constituency, Shri Purno A. Sangma raised a question to the Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the Lok Sabha debates regarding a Radio Station at Tura in Meghalaya, "whether there was any proposal to set up a Radio Station at Tura in Meghalaya". The then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Shri L. K. Advani answered, "Yes", "A provision for setting up a radio station at Tura was included in the regional shelf of schemes for the draft Fifth Plan. However, due to the paucity of financial resources, this provision could not be retained in the finalised version of the Fifth Plan. The area has been surveyed from the point of view of ascertaining the feasibility of setting up a radio station at the centre. Frequencies have also been coordinated internationally for the operation of medium-wave transmitters at Tura. An attempt will be made to include it in the 6th Plan proposals." (1977, Lok Sabha Debates). After a long wait, a radio station in Tura, Meghalaya was set up with a 1 kilowatt medium wave transmitter on 23rd November 1984 (1986, Luthra).

In 1990, All India Radio established the North Eastern Service or NES programme at Shillong. The radio station at 100.1 MHz broadcasted from 6:00 AM to 10:30 PM daily. It showcased various

programmes from the North-East Region which now home to the seven sister states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram Nagaland and Tripura and one brother state, Sikkim.

The All India Radio Station at Tura was followed by two other All India Radio stations at Baghmara, South Garo Hills District and Williamnagar, East Garo Hills District. These radio stations currently are in transmission at 100.1 MHz (Megahertz) and 1602 kHz, respectively (2023, Prasar Bharati). The All India Radio Tura or Akashvani Tura currently broadcasts through a 20 kW MW and a 5 kW FM transmitter at a frequency 1233 kHz and

101.7 MHz, respectively. In 2023, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated a Community Radio Station (CRS) at Williamnagar along with 90 other FM transmitters of 100 Watts. The CRS at Williamnagar, East Garo Hills District will be operating on 100.9 MHz FM (frequency modulation) band (2023, The Shillong Times).

Apart from radio stations that are set up in the state of Meghalaya and Assam, there are other radio stations which broadcast Garoprogammes. The Garos also reside in Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Betar, the national radio broadcaster of Bangladesh which was initially established as the Dacca now Dhaka station of the All India Radio on 16th December 1939. The radio station was equipped with a 5 KW Medium Wave transmitter (1939, The Indian Listener). Post-independence, the Bangladesh Betar introduced a special programme on the tribal life of the country highlighting the socio- cultural life of the Garos and the development initiatives in the tribal areas. On 11th April 1976, the Dhaka radio station started broadcasting a programme entitled "Sal Gittal'' which means "New Sun'' in the Garo language for the Garo folk on the country on each Sunday at 5:00 PM BST (1100 GMT) (1976, Translations on South and East Asia No. 621). According to Hoque (2006), Sal Gittal is broadcasted by the Bangladesh Betar, Dhaka every Friday for 35 minutes from 05:10 to 05:45 PM BST. The radio broadcast from Dhaka reached far flung tribal areas of Bangladesh and was also receipted in the border areas blocks of India and Bangladesh. A man aged about 50 years residing in Seempara, Gasuapara Block, South Garo Hills District recollects that he first heard the radio through radio broadcast from Dhaka. He said that, "Most of the programmes were in Bangla, we reside in the border area, so we can understand some Bangla. The Garo programme was first broadcasted only for five minutes and later on increased to ten minutes and thirty minutes. It was the first time the Garos of Gasuapara heard the Garo or A.chik language being aired on the radio. It was a proud moment for us, especially to hear progammes and songs in Garo."

Video - Television

In Meghalaya, Doordarshan had established a relay station in 1983. The broadcasting centres of Doordarshan Kendra (DDK) were commissioned as Doordarshan Kendra, Shillong on 30.04.1993 and Doordarshan Kendra, Tura on 31.05.1993 (2007, Datta). Doordarshan Kendra, Tura was established experimentally on 26th January 1993. DDK Tura was officially launched on 21st May 1993 and it began broadcasting programmes in Garo, Hindi and English. DDK Tura broadcasted programmes for 2 hours and 15 minutes from Monday to Friday and for 5 hours on Saturday and Sunday on Garo folk culture and songs along with the culture of the other communities of the region such as the Hajong, Rabha, Koch and Bodo (2021, Singh).

Prior to 1993, there were audio-visual films and documentaries on the Garo community and culture. But with the establishment of DDK Tura, Garo cultural programmes were produced and broadcasted to a mass audience of the Garo hills for the community's recreation, entertainment and learning. DDK broadcasted and safeguarded the culture of the Garos in the digital forms and still serves as an archival source of cultural content in both the original and staged settings. Over three decades (1993-2023), the broadcast in television programmes have shifted from terrestrial television to cable television and satellite television and the people residing in the Garo Hills have transitioned, adapted and accepted various forms of mass media in their daily work of life.

Digital - Internet

A communication protocol called Transfer Protocol/ Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) was established on January 1, 1983. The new communication method allowed for computers to talk to each other and this new system of communication was called the Internet (2009, Leiner). In India, internet services was introduced in November 1986 but made available to the public on August 15, 1995 by the then government owned public sector enterprise Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) (1996, Rao). In 2004, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), a central public sector undertaking, launched internet broadband services in India. The internet provides a space for quick access to data and information with the click of a button. The other aspect of the internet was that it was a medium for social networking through various social media websites such as MySpace (2003), Orkut (2004) and Facebook (2004), and video streaming platform YouTube (2005). The early 2000s saw steady growth in the internet users of the country but after 2010 with internet providers, Bharti Airtel (2012) offering 4G services and Reliance Jio (2016), India crossed 500 million internet users in 2019 (2020, The Economic Times). The internet is mainly accessed through mobile devices viz. laptops and mobile phones. According to the Department of Telecommunications, Ministry of Communications the total number of internet subscribers in Meghalaya is 1.86 million and the internet subscribers per 100 population in the urban area is 101.14 and in the rural area, it is 43.82 (2022, GoI). Due to the rise in the number of internet subscribers, the Government of Meghalaya has amended the Meghalaya Telecom Infrastructure Policy, 2018 and adopted the Meghalaya Telecom Infrastructure (Amendment) Policy, 2024 in order to facilitate equitable access of quality telecom services in the state of Meghalaya (2024, GoM).

With the advent of the internet, the reach of the masses has increased considerably. Where there is internet, there is media. Thus, even print media, radio and television channels have their respective channels and pages in various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. There are also eBooks and eNews, electronic versions of print media which can be accessed on the palm of the hand by mobile devices such as smartphones. During the fieldwork in Garo Hills, it was found that most of the people have access to the internet and they use the internet regularly for various purposes. There are areas and villages which have no metal roads but those areas have internet and the public are able to access it and use digital media for communication, education, entertainment and recreation.

Digital Media

The internet has paved the way for independent media broadcasters and new channels to thrive in their own ecosystem with limited resources and technical support. Amongst them are digital media channels which broadcast news in Garo in the various digital media platforms and the popular channels to the public in Garo Hills are A.chik Kobor (www.youtube.com/@AchikKobor) having 3.89 lakh followers and Northeast Media Hub (www.youtube.com/@NortheastMediaHub2020) having 3.07 lakh followers. Both A.chik Kobor and Northeast Media Hub work in publishing content in Garo and accounts from the Garo Hills. Northeast Media Hub broadcasts their video through YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, and print and visuals on published on their website (https://hubnetwork.in/) through Hubnews.

Use of digital devices

Digital devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and smartwatches, operate using binary data (0s and 1s), enabling them to perform complex computations and tasks. These digital devices, such as smartphones and PCs, have revolutionized our daily lives by enabling instant communication, access to vast information, and entertainment right at our fingertips, which support a myriad of applications ranging from online banking to virtual learning that enhance productivity and connectivity in both personal and professional spheres, thus increasing the dependency on digital devices.

India has witnessed a significant surge in internet usage in recent years, surpassing China and South Korea, which shows that more and more people have access to digital devices. (**McKinsey Global Institute, n.d.**). A report shows they are spending an average of 4 to 5 hours per day on smartphones and other digital devices, mostly for social media, online browsing, and video streaming **(The Hindu, 2024)**. The rapid growth in digital device usage has transformed the way people communicate, access information, and conduct various aspects of their lives. It has also opened up new opportunities for businesses, educators, and policymakers to reach and engage with the population. One can assume that the increasing affordability of smartphones and data plans, often colloquially referred to as the 'Jio Effect,' which revolutionized India's digital world and made internet access more accessible to the masses after 2018, is responsible for the growth of mobile usage in India. **(Sharma, 2022)** Thus, it is evident that smartphone users increased from 1.5 million in 2009 to 629 million in 2023, and mobile internet users increased from 10 million in 2009 to 658 million in 2023 (Shangliao, 2023).

This rapid growth has fostered connectivity and social networking among the masses, allowing them to easily communicate through various means such as social media, video conferencing, and so on. This has also created new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs, allowing them to buy and sell their goods easily using various e- commerce platforms and reach a global audience. Not to mention, daily activities like booking a flight ticket on the go, and even conducting transactions through UPI have become more convenient and efficient. It also creates fresh opportunities for governing and engaging citizens.

However, the advent of digital connectivity has also introduced negative aspects of the internet, such as concerns regarding data privacy and security breaches, cyberbullying, and the impact on both mental and physical health. Therefore, it has become crucial to raise awareness among individuals about responsible consumption of digital content by improving their digital literacy and bridging the digital divide. Addressing these challenges and ensuring equitable distribution and sustainability of the benefits of digital device usage is crucial as India continues to embrace digital technology.

Meghalaya, a northeastern state in India, has also seen significant growth in the use of digital devices in recent years, and despite being one of the smaller states in terms of population, it has made notable progress in digital adoption in India. Garo Hills, which covers the western ranges of Meghalaya, has seen a gradual increase in the use of digital devices in recent years, but the adoption rate is slower compared to other parts of the state. To bridge the digital divide, we must address the challenges and improve digital infrastructure, literacy, and access to devices.

Table No. 11: Digital Literacy Rate: Use andTypes of Digital Devices in the Garo Community of Meghalaya

Districts	Blocks		Smartphones		Keypad Phone		No digital devices		*Laptop- Desktop		Total	
West Garo Hills	Tura	Male	98	33.56	2	0.68	34	11.64	26	8.90	134	13.79
		Female	126	43.15	1	0.34	31	10.62	24	8.22	158	16.26
		Total	**224**	76.71	**3**	1.03	**65**	22.26	**50**	17.12	292	30.04
	Selsella	Male	56	31.11	0	0	33	18.33	0	0	89	9.16
		Female	47	26.11	0	0	44	24.44	2	1.11	91	9.36
		Total	**103**	57.22	**0**	**0**	**77**	42.78	**2**	1.11	180	18.52
South Garo Hills	Baghmara	Male	75	31.38	0	0	41	17.15	0	0	116	11.93
		Female	67	28.03	1	0.42	55	23.01	2	0.84	123	12.65
		Total	**142**	59.41	**1**	0.42	**96**	40.17	**2**	0.84	239	24.59

	Gasuapara	Male	64	24.52	3	1.15	65	24.90	0	0	132	13.58
		Female	64	24.52	5	1.92	60	22.99	0	0	129	13.27
		Total	**128**	49.04	**8**	3.07	**125**	47.89	**0**	**0**	261	26.85
Total			597	61.42	12	1.23	363	37.35	54	5.56	972	100.00

* Smartphone users also include laptop and desktop users.

Table 11 shows that Tura has the highest number of digital literates, with 76.71 percent of the studied population possessing digital devices (inclusive of smartphones, laptops, and desktops). The Baghmara block of South Garo Hills follows Tura in terms of smartphone possession with 59.41 percent active users, followed by Selsella and Gasaupara with 2 percent and 49.04 percent active users, respectively.

Tura, West Garo Hills is the oldest administrative headquarters of the Garo Hills. Through the years, Tura has become an urban center with the help of the colonial administrators and the Christian missionaries who had set up educational institutions, healthcare, and government establishments. Mrs. Sengmetira N. Sangma, aged about 70 years, a resident of Hawakhana, Tura, who is native to Rugapara and belongs to the Ruga sub-tribe of the G aros was a student at Tura Government College. Mrs. Sangma like many others had shifted to Tura for education and finally settled in the Tura.

Tura is well-equipped with technological infrastructure and has good cellular reception. The inhabitants of Tura who work in the public or private sector along with students of the various educational institutions use digital devices daily for work-related activities, as a learning device, or as a source of recreation. Thus, the data collected during the fieldwork reflects that there are more digital devices in Tura than in the other blocks viz. Selsella, Baghmara and Gasuapara.

Purpose of use of digital devices-

Digital devices are an indispensable part of our daily lives as they have enabled us to do several tasks simultaneously, such as accessing healthcare facilities, booking travel itineraries, gaming, video streaming, accessing educational materials, etc. Using similar parameters, an attempt was made to assess the purpose of digital device usage among the Garo community in their day-to-day lives, which is elucidated in the table below.

Table no 11A. Purpose of use of digital devices of the Garo community-

Particulars information relating to	for	Always	Most Often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	No response

Health care, Education, Travel, Buying and Selling	**133 (77.33 %)**	7 (4.07%)	12 (6.98%)	7 (4.07%	3 (1.74%)	4 (2.33%)	6 (3.49%)
Skill enhancement	13 (7.56%)	13 (7.56%)	25 (14.53%)	48 (**27.91**%)	23 (**13.37**%)	18 (10.47%)	32 (18.6%)
Updating knowledge	18 (10.47%)	34 (**19.77**%)	29 (**16.86**%)	37 (21.51%)	13 (7.56%)	12 (6.98%)	29 (16.86%)
Entertainment	25 (14.53%)	31 (18.02%)	23 (13.37%)	39 (22.67%)	12 (6.98%)	13 (7.56%)	29 (16.86%)
Online games	18 (10.47%)	5 (2.91%	4 (2.33%)	20 (11.63%)	16 (9.3%)	74 (43.02%)	35 (20.35%)
Social Network	32 (18.6%)	31 (18.02%)	24 (13.95%)	28 (16.28%)	12 (6.98%)	15 (8.72%)	30 (17.44%)
Others	1 (0.58%)	0	0	0	0	**48 (27.91%)**	**123 (71.51%)**

From table no. 11A, it is seen that 77.33 percent of the total studied households (N=172) always use digital devices for accessing health care services, educational materials, travel itineraries, and the buying and selling of products. Apart from this, their purpose also inclines towards social networking, entertainment, and online games, with 18.6 percent,

14.53 percent, and 10.47 percent of the population exclusively relying on their devices for such digital consumption, respectively. A growing trend in online gaming, particularly among adolescents and youth, was also observed among the studied population. Mr. Chongkim R. Marak, aged about 24 years from Emangre, South Garo Hills is an avid online gamer who has also uploaded online game videos, cultural progammes, and scenic videos on his YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@chongkimyt432) humble 2,976 views only since joining the video platform in 10th October 2022.

Table no 12. Training in the use of digital devices

Particulars	Trained			Non-trained	Total
	Govt. Org.	Private Org.	Total		
No. of Households	4	10	14	158	172
Percentage	2.33	5.81	8.14	91.86	100.00

From Table 12, it was found that individuals from only fourteen households had proper training in the use of digital devices, of which only four households received training from government institutions while the rest received training from private institutions. It was found that they received this training out of their own accord, and no government organization or NGO

approached them to take part in such training. However, one government employee from Tura C&RD received training through the government to further enhance his capabilities in official work. The rest of the remaining individuals from the 158 households have either received no formal training (learned from friends or families) or are digitally illiterate.

Table no 13. How often do they use digital devices

Time in hour	No of Households	Percentage
Below-1	3	2.14
1-2	54	38.57
3-4	48	34.28
5-6	24	17.14
7-8	9	6.4
9-10	2	1.4
Total	140**	100

**Calculated after not accounting for the households who had no digital devices (N=32) from the total No of households (N=172)

From Table No. 13, it is seen that most of the households fall under the 1-2 hour class interval, i.e., 38.57 percent, followed by 3-4 hour class intervals with 34.28 percent, which shows that the majority of the households have their usage time ranging from 1 to 4 hours. It is evident that more than 70% of users use digital devices for 4 hours. Most of the users are either employed in the organized or unorganized sectors or are students. They use digital devices for learning or recreation. Mr. Traman D. Marak, aged about 50 years, an inhabit of Seempara, Gasuapara states that entertainment, news, and recreation were once available to a limited few. The cathode-ray tube (CRT) television sets were once a luxury wherein a 20 or 24-inch screen would gather viewers from the village or
nearby villages as well. Mr. Marak remarked, "Today, the television set is available in the palm of our hands."

Mr. Marak who is originally from Duragre village, Chokpot, South Garo Hills is an A.chikaronga or the Garo who stays in the hills. He has witnessed many of the culture and traditions of the people of the Chokpot area which is slowly fading away in the towns and urban areas. What is left are stories of the past and the content on new media and video platforms for the younger generations to absorb in the latter years. Thus, digital media has transformed the mass circulation of information. About 25% of the studied population who use digital devices for more than 5 hours a day are youths who are engaged in online gaming and who are very active in social media by viewing reels, shorts, and other visual content.

Table no 14. Operation of digital devices

Personal Device	Common Family Devices	No Digital Device	Total Households

137	3	32	172
79.65	1.74	18.60	100

Table 14 shows that 81.40 percent of households had a personal digital device with every individual in the family, while only 3 families had a common device for all members of the family. The rest, i.e., 18.60 percent of the household, had no digital device.

Table no 14A.Sharing of the digital content: (Digital Documentation of events)

Particulars: To share the contents for	No of Households	Percentage
Uniting community members	24	13.95
Preservation of cultural heritage	14	8.14
Educating the younger generations on social heritage	23	13.37
Inform others about the specialty of Garos	12	6.98
Other	33	19.19
NA	66	38.37
Total	172	100.00

Table 14A shows the purpose of sharing digital content among the Garo Community members. It is seen that 13.95 percent share digital content to unite community members, 8.14 percent to preserve cultural heritage, 13.37 percent to educate the younger generations on social heritage, and 6.98 percent to inform others about the specialties of the Garos. Collectively (42.44 percent), a majority of the population is sharing digital content for the greater welfare of the Garo society by using it as a means for ethnic mobilization, preservation, and raising awareness of their culture among the young and the old of their society.

Table no 14.B. Sharing of the digital contents: With whom they mostly share the contents

Particulars	No of Households	Percentage
Family	46	26.74
Relative	41	23.84
Friends	73	42.44
Colleagues	22	12.79
Other community	10	5.81
Social media friend	10	5.81
Total	172	100
More than one option*	30	17.44

Table 14. B, with whom they mostly share the content, illustrated that 26.74 and 23.84 percent of them shared their content with family members and relatives. 42.44 and 12.79 percent of them,

shared with friends and colleagues. Despite this, only 5.81 percent of them shared with other community members and social media friends. It is noted that

17.44 percent of them shared more than one option.

Table no 14.C. Sharing of the digital contents: How often share the contents

Sl.No.	Particulars	No of Households	Percentage
1	Most Often	4	2.33
2	Often	4	2.33
3	Rarely	3	1.74
4	Sometimes	75	43.60
5	Not share	15	8.72
6	N/A	71	41.28
	Total	172	100.00

Table 14. C, the sharing of digital content: how often share, it illustrated that 43.60 percent of studied households shared their content sometimes. 2.33 percent of them, shared most often and often. Despite this, 1.74 percent rarely shared and 8.72 percent were not shared. 41.28 percent of them did not respond and they were not eligible. The collected data indicates that the Garos of Meghalaya predominantly utilize their smartphones for social media, online surfing, video streaming, and banking, dedicating approximately 1 to 4 hours each day to these activities. A significant proportion of the younger demographic in the surveyed area predominantly utilizes mobile devices for engaging in online gaming and leisure pursuits, such as video streaming. This suggests that their reliance on mobile phones has reached a level of addiction. Nevertheless, the middle-aged demographic employs digital devices for a wide range of reasons, including healthcare, education, travel, and commerce. The Garo community faces several obstacles in obtaining digital content through smartphones. The studied population is digitally literate on their own accord through self-learning and has not received any formal education through digital literacy progammes. There is a heap of cultural content on the Garos and Garo culture online it lacks proper segregation and streamlining through hashtags. Thus, there is a gap in what pops up on one screen, especially among the elderly of the community who predominantly rely on artificial intelligence's algorithm to generate suitable content for their viewership. Apart from cultural content, the use of the digital allows for the people of the community to be directly linked to government schemes. During the fieldwork, it was observed that houses allotted under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) were being geotagged along with the beneficiary by the Block officials of the Government of Meghalaya. This process of geotagging helps in freezing the time and space of a particular village. Dignapara village in Selsella Block, West Garo Hills is a village that is majorly inhabited by people who still follow the Songsarek religion. Many in the village are beneficiaries of PMAY which is considered a social upliftment but at occurrence where PMAY is slowly substituting the *noka.chik*, a traditional house of the Garos. The members of Dignapara village are beneficiaries of government housing progammes but the approach road for about 3 kilometers to the village is a muddy uneven tract across forested areas and plantations. The area does not have proper road communication but it does have digital communication through

selected mobile service carriers. The members of the village who own digital devices use them to stay updated about the political scenario of Garo Hills and the state of Meghalaya. They are watching Garo and Hindi movies through YouTube or other video platforms. The digital is most of the studied village is used as a form of communication, entertainment, and leisure. It is only in certain urban settings and towns used for digital transactions and e-commerce.

To address these difficulties, the Meghalaya government has implemented specific measures, including the 'Digital Meghalaya' programme, to enhance digital infrastructure and connectivity. The objective is to promote digital literacy and ensure online safety. The government is enacting measures to improve digital infrastructure and connectivity, guaranteeing connectivity even in far and secluded regions. In addition, they are actively creating citizen outreach initiatives and conducting training sessions to enhance digital literacy among the general public. These efforts also aim to promote e-governance and online services. Promoting digital literacy among the Garos of Meghalaya through various initiatives will empower them by improving the education sector and increasing access to healthcare amenities. It will promote entrepreneurship, enabling individuals to engage in the online buying and selling of goods and services, as well as facilitating employment development in the digital sector. In addition, they will have the opportunity to exhibit their culture to the global community, thereby promoting tourism and generating income. However, its most significant impact is in its ability to establish connectivity with the outside world and integrate individuals into a globalized society, particularly in regions without access to communication networks. Thus, Meghalaya is making progress in embracing digital technology by addressing challenges and ensuring equitable access to digital opportunities.

Chapter 8

Use of Digital Means for Cultural Preservation and Promotion

What is digital? Digital is an electronic technology that is a product of binary code. The data is represented as numbers, letters, images, and sounds, and stored in storage spaces such as hard disk drives, online servers, and the cloud. In recent times, computers, laptops and mobile phones, with the assistance of the internet have aided the consumption and creation of digital content. Accessibility and availability of resources and content have helped in the creation of digital content for the documentation of a place, its people and their culture. The use of digital technology for preservation of culture began with the making of documentary films. These documentaries were mainly ethnographic films about the community and their culture. PrasarBharati, a state-owned public broadcaster setup by an Act of Parliament had documented the Garo community in their Tribes of India series in the form of a 25 minutes documentary in their YouTube channel – PrasarBharati Achieves (@DDARCHIVES) having 1.38 million subscribers and 6700 videos. Today, the access to computers, laptop, mobile devices and the internet has allowed the general public to be part of the digital world and take part in virtual learning and virtual consumption of content through various video hosting platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo; social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram; and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook Messenger. On the onset, the general public are mostly consumers of the various genres of digital content which is available online but a certain few are virtual learners. These learners consume digital content and learn how to utilise the open source softwares which would allow them to create digital content by following the current trends in social media.

Creation of Digital Content

Mobile phones and the internet have enhanced and simplified the production and publication of content on the world wide web, in most cases without any plan or procedures. From the fieldwork, it was found that most digital content which was published online about the places in Garo hills and people are based on emotion. Digital culture about the community is mostly published by individuals with their own understanding about the history and the current scenario of the cultural attributes and heritage of the people. The content is in majority produced and published online through individual accounts based on real life situations and most of the content is not staged or scripted. At first, the creation of content never begun with the concept of preservation of culture but it was an individuals' interest or passion. And such accounts of a place, the people and their way of life is an archival source which is trapped in time, it showcases the cultural landscape, artefacts, artwork, traditional knowledge, language, oral history and the intangible cultural heritage of the people.

The creation of cultural content and uploading/ publication on the internet in open source platforms allows for accessibility about the diverse cultures and traditions of a people through a mobile screen equipped with internet from any corner of the world. Once the content is published on the web, it leaves a digital footprint and it is preserved for the long run. Though content is uploaded on the internet for public viewing and comments, the content is not categorised, sorted and placed at the same place, webpage or site. There are countless content on the same niche genre

which belongs to various other groups and traditions. Thus, the creation of content needs to be assisted by hashtags and keywords so that it becomes easier for the public to sort through according to their interest.

The topic cultural preservation and promotion amongst the Garos resonated a particular response among the people in Tura, West Garo Hills. "Visit Sadolpara", a village which is about 40 kms from Tura. It a Songsarek village in which the majority of the inhabitants are Songsarek and still live in their traditional huts or the nokachiks and dress in the traditional Songsarek attire of the Garos. Many of the informants have never physical visited the village but they have visited it virtually through video platforms and social media handles.

From the dotcom bubble of the 1990s to 'insta-worthy' or 'Instagram worthy' and the hashtag 'insta-famous' of 2024, having 24 million posts on Instagram, the internet as a tool of spreading digital content has marched through mountains and treaded unchartered seas. Travel and tourism is in the bucket list of many individuals and visiting scenic places and uploading content from and about the place is the latest trends amongst travelers and globe trotters. The scenic beauty of the Garo hills has remained static since time immemorial but the recent hashtags and travel trends have highlighted places like WariChora and Siju Cave in South Garo Hills. These places have been made insta-famous by individual content creators who post content about such scenic locations online as a memory of their travels and also to give a glimpse of their travels to their friends and families in a creative manner which is accompanied by songs with relevant lyrics, subtitles and voice overs. Such digital content promotes the cultural diversity of the place; the ecology and the environment, the indigenous people and their way of life. It empowers the community and facilitates documentation, preservation and sharing of their own culture.

Furthermore, digital content also stimulates economic development through cultural tourism. In Emangre village, South Garo Hills a retired school teacher, Mr. Arengh narrated that Emangre was brought into the limelight because he shared his knowledge about the topography and the culture of the area with a person who was amateurly technically equipped in video making skills and in social media. Mr. Arengh claimed that Mr. X uploaded the video of WariChora in YouTube and Facebook and since then it became known to the people who are active in social media platforms, and subsequently, the content thronged people from others districts, the state and the rest of the country to witness the scenic Garo hills and the culture of the people.

When the consumers of content on social media and video platforms watch some content with particular keywords and hashtags. They are further suggested with other content which are similar to the first content and this is done through algorithms which are encrypted on the platforms with the help of artificial intelligence. It can be said that content is content, it does not need to be professionally created, it can be created by individuals, groups, organisations or public bodies. Back in the day, information was transmitted through word of mouth and it was being spread from place to place. The key role for remembrance of any content is exposure and repetition. Such was the case of the 'Sam-Achik' Hospital in Tura, West Garo Hills. The informants in Tura informed that they have heard and seen visuals of a 'Sam-Achik' or Garo medicine hospital in Tura on the television and YouTube through news channels and an infotainment broadcasted in the digital hoarding at Tura; but they do not know about its exact location. The 'SamachikSikman' or the Garo Traditional Hospital situated at Rongbakgre, Atmile, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya was established on 10th January 2011. It is managed and run by Vidyanisth N.

Marak, Oja and Superintendent of the hospital who is also a member of the Meghalaya Sam Achik Association (founded in 2003).

Individual Efforts

Content created and publish it in the digital form online for a widespread audience are majorly by individual content creators who have a mixed genre of content and a few have niche content. There is wide array of content available in the digital form, ranging from artifacts, art and architecture, food, language, lifestyle, media, musical instruments, material culture and medicine, to name a few.

Artifacts, Art and Architecture

Mr. Sembertush A. Sangma is a prominent name when it comes to efforts taken by individuals in creating and sharing culture and tourism content on the Garo community and Garo hills, respectively. He has more than 66,000 followers on his YouTube channel @sembertushasangma1540, and has uploaded various videos on Achik art and artifacts, architecture, musical instruments, rituals, cultural tourism and tourist places. Mr. Sangma learned about Achik art and architecture from a young age when he resided in a traditional house of the Garos, the nokachik, in a Songsarek village. As an artist and an artisan, he promotes and preserves the Garo culture through his artwork. One of the main reasons for his association with Achik architecture is because he believes that art of building houses the Achik way with the resources of the hills as used by the forefathers is slowly fading with time. Thus, he wants to protect this art form for future generations before it disappears and can only be found in books or in the videos.

Food

Food is one distinctively element of the Garo culture and an authentic cooking style, kappa, which uses and alkali called kalchi – ash of plantain stumps; and *Nakam Bitchi* or dryfish stew is an emotion amongst the people. Ms. Nambie Jessica Marak promotes Achik food through here the various social media handles with a page name "Eat Your Kappa" (www.youtube.com/@EatYourKappa). Ms. Marak publishes content on Achik food along with other savory dishes from the rest of Northeast India.

Language

The Garo language has many dialects which is spoken amongst the various sub groups of the Garos. With the advent of the British and Christianity in the late 19th century through the plains of Golpara district in present day Assam which is an Am.beng speaking area. The Am.beng dialect was used for communication among the people and that became to be popular Garo or standard Garo, the lingua franca between the various sub-tribes of the Garos. Though, it was reported that the standard Garo language is not only the Am.beng dialect but is also admixed with A.we. Mr. Marcus Rangsa Marak through his YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/@rangsaofficialchannel821) has documented many other Achik dialects spoken by original speakers in his channel such as Atong, Megam, Matabeng, A.we and also Garo Grammar.

Fashion and Lifestyle

In the ever-growing fashion industry, the incorporation of indigenous designs and motifs into the lifestyle and fashion industry. Seven Cherri is a fashion accessory brand started by SemadaMarak in Tura, West Garo Hills. Seven Cherri is an initiative which involve women to create folk fusion

handmade accessories by using Garo material culture and motifs in their ornamental collection.

Media

Mr. Melkey Chisim who is a digital content creator creates and publishes content on the Garo community and posts them on his Facebook page. Mr. Chisim also works to safeguard print media through a website name 'Jarongpang' which host Garo and English content on fiction and non-fiction. It also showcases the Garo literary magazine Chimik.

Medicine

"We (the Garos) are here today because our ancestors used the medicinal plants and tubers which were available to them in the lush green forests" says Vidyanisth N. Marak, Oja and Superintendent of the Sam Achik Hospital in West Garo Hills. Likely, there are many other tribal healer and practitioners all over Garo hills. Among them is Rajib M. Sangma who is popularly known as Rajib Oja and publishes content on traditional medicine and medical practices through a YouTube channel A,chik Oja Part2 (https://www.youtube.com/@OjaPart2). Rajib Oja hails from the Emangre, a place had/has a reputation for having effective and well-versed traditional healers. He started sharing content on YouTube during the Covid-19 pandemic with a sole purpose of reaching and helping out to those people who required medical care but were only limited to the natural resources which are available in and around their areas. Currently, Rajib Oja has 194 videos and 58600 subscribers to his YouTube channel.

Collective Effort

The earliest collective effort to digitalise and preserve the culture of the Garos as the mass level was done by the All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan. The AIR station would record audio in the form on songs and programmes by trained and self-taught artists in their studio at Tura and in Shillong and would broadcast it to the radio listeners. Doordarshan Kendra Shillong and Tura has a wealthy digital archive on the Garos.

Doordarshan Kendra Tura

The Doordarshan studio at Shillong and Tura facilitated video recordings of the Garo community and culture through documentaries and programmes. These would be aired on live television through the Doordarshan Network for a wide audience. With the advent of the internet and the popularisation of video platforms like YouTube, Doordarshan Kendra Tura (@doordarshankendratura4178) started posting and uploading archive content and new content on their channel. The YouTube channel has 546 videos and more than 2 lakh subscribers. They host a wide array of content from Garo folk songs, dance, epics, traditional musical instruments, food, and biodiversity. The channel also hosts Garo Telefilms such as 'Dombe', 'Chigitchakgreni Nokma', 'Tengton', to name a few. These telefilms showcase the rich culture of the Garos, the architecture, material culture, the way of life and the daily activities of the people because the film sets have very few props and setting of the film are in the original setup, villages and towns. The films depict the lifestyle and the environment of the people from yesteryears.

INTACH Meghalaya Chapter

The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has a centre in Tura, West Garo Hills for the documentation of the cultural heritage of Meghalaya. The organisation is working to

preserve the cultural heritage of the Garos and in 2023 they organised a symposium on Garo cultural heritage. The symposium is uploaded on their YouTube Channel (@INTACHMeghalayaChapter) for wider circular so the viewers can have an academician insight into Garo oral culture, the Garo bachelor's dormitory or Nokpante, matrilineal system, Nokmaship and the Wangala festival.

Facebook

The social network platform Facebook owned by Meta Platfroms, Inc. was launched as The Facebook in 2004. In two decades, Meta has acquired more than 90 other companies, amongst them is a photo and video sharing social networking mobile application, Instagram; an instant messenger mobile application, WhatsApp and Oculus VR, a virtual reality and augmented reality hardware and software company. Facebook is the world's most popular social media platform and its popularity has grown immensely in India over the two decades. India has 378.1 million Facebook users in the country and its network is so strong that in Garo Hills, there is a Facebook group by the name 'Am.bengKutok', an

online public group of Am.beng speakers from the Garo community. There are 12500 members who are a part of the group and they post various content on Am.beng language, Achik culture, medicinal herbs and plants, food, material culture and art. In 2019, the efforts of the online community 'Am.bengKutok' grew into the publication of a print magazine called Am.beng Magazine and the motto of the magazine is 'Ma·bitchriniKu·rangBiambiniKatta' which means "The voice from the seed of a mother and the words of the creator" with an objective to preserve oral language of the Am.beng folk in the written form so that it is preserved for future generations (The Shillong Times, 2019). There are many such Facebook groups that publishes content on Achik culture amongst the members of the group, another is the "A.chik WhatsApp Group".

WhatsApp

Like Facebook, Whatsapp is most popular messaging application world round. It connects people and cultures from different parts of the globe. WhatsApp is a community of user who have sprouted various communities under the shade of the mother tree and one such community by the name "Ku.Mandi Rikrim Kotok" has users from India and Bangladesh. The group members share photos, videos, website links, articles and write ups on Achik culture and identity across the borders. Another such WhatsApp group for promotion and safeguarding the Achik language and heritage is the "Ku.tangna Chanchirimna" (Hub News, 2023).

Cultural Heritage Revival and Preservation

A community's cultural heritage is a community's asset, it is the core system by which a community has progress through time and space. The Achik heritage enhances the solidarity and social integration of its community members, and language is one such facet that is a significant identity of a sub-group or a sub-tribe.

Language - Ruga

Language is a marker of cultural identity and the protection and preservation of language is very important. Language is passed down through word of mouth. It is practiced and also lives with a community in a present continuous relationship which is again passed down from generation to

generation. But living present continuous relationship was such that the Rugalangauge of the Ruga sub-tribe of the Garos had been left behind by the past generation of speakers. Today, there are very few Ruga members who can still recall the Ruga vocabulary and syntax. In 2013, the Ministry of Education, Government of India had initiated a scheme known as "Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India" and as per a UNESCO report, the Ruga language/dialect spoken in the state of Meghalaya is a critically endangered language (PIB, 2014). Various scholars Grierson (1903) and Burling (2003) have made efforts to document the languages of the Garos and in 2016 Caroline R. Marak published a book entitled "The Ruga language". The book on Ruga language is a comprehensive documentation of Ruga phonology, verbals, nominal, syntax, vocabulary and short sentences. Accordingly, the Ruga–Mereka – Cultural Association of South Garo Hills is one such group which is working to preserve and revive

the language and culture of Ruga. The association also has a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/people/RugaMereka-Cultural-   Association/100075856063272/) with 4700 followers.

Material Culture –

Simphak

Material culture identifies people and their culture. It is the foremost cultural marker of the cultural identity of the community. Cloth and clothes made from the bark of a tree or bark cloth locally known as *simphak*. The Garos would prepare clothes and bedding from trees such as the *pakram (Grewialilia folia), prap (Ficusrumphi), chram (Artocarpuschaplasha), dimbri (Ficusglomerata)* and *anisep (Kydiacalycina).* The bark of the tree is boiled, beaten and cured. The product of which is a bark cloth which is brick red and/or reddish brown (Playfair, 1909; Walker, 1927). Walker (1927) writes that the use of *simphak* is common amongst the Matchi and Chisak sub-tribes of the Garos but today, it is found that the Atong sub-tribe has revived this long-forgotten art of manufacturing bark cloth amongst the Garos. The Atongs of Rongsu Rongrigittim in Siju, South Garo Hills district through the indigenous knowledge acquired by Jibon S. Marak from his forefathers took the initiative to prepare the bark cloth from the bark of *pakram* tree. Henceforth, a society by the name Garo Indigenous Cultural and Heritage Society was established which aims the preservation of Atong and Achik culture.

Playfair (1909) writes that the Garos prepare *simpak* for bedding and blankets even though the blankets and warm clothes could be purchase from the market from vendors. The bark cloth, then and now, it does not have a commercial value. The making of bark cloth by the Garos is an example of their conservatism and preservation of the rich ecological and culture heritage of the Garo hills and their people. The revival of the manufacture of *simphak/simpak* is documented and published on social media networking site Facebook by Plinder Dote Marak, a digital content creator from Siju, South Garo Hills.

In 2024, the district administration of South Garo Hills, Government of Meghalaya organised a two-day festival called "Tyisam Festival" on the banks of the Simsang river, Baghmara. Tysiamin the local Atong language translates to "by the river side". Tysiam festival aims to promote, preserve and showcase the rich culture and traditions of the Garos especially the culture of the Garo sub-tribes inhabiting in South Garo hills. The festival showcased lesser known folk culture of Atong and Rugasubtribes, such as the Chugan and Ruga dances, respectively. The festival also

provided a platform for Jibon S. Marak and the self-help group from Rongsu village, Siju to showcase the bark cloth and the content is published digitally on Hub News, which is an independent digital media network under Northeast Media Hub launched in 2020, and also on YouTube by an independent Youtuber in his channel JyotizBarchung (@jyotizbarchung) with a title "Tyisam Festival 2024 - Garo Traditional Bark Clothes" and mentioned the bark cloth to be known as *simphak*.

Digital Content Creators - Case Studies

Smart phones have revolutionized capturing, storing and sharing of text in a context which is personal to the documenter. Capsulation, production and publishing of original text with a context to form content of cultural importance and significance has been the brainchild of many individual digital content creators who have an eye for cultural preservation and promotion. The advent of the internet has allowed for individuals to become content producers and publishers equipped with only a smart phone. UNESCO defines world heritage as "Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration." Cultural heritage is innate to an individual and to the community as a whole. It is a web which links the differences in sub tribes to a unison, creating a uniform identity. The Garos are a community which is a culmination of various sub-tribes with a community identity of being Garo or A.chik. The sub-tribes have same, similar and distinct cultures and these facets are being preserved in the digital form by content creators, consciously or subconsciously.

Cultural content is published in the digital form because of the accessibility of the content to a broad-based public. The digital medium has provided a continuum in cross cultural communication and also aids survival of cultures by bridging the information gap which may exist among the public. Digital content also are reminders of one's legacy and past, what is published digital retains its original shape through the years and the content does age. Digital content is almost non-ageing and shape footprints in the sand of time.

Content Creators

The video streaming and sharing platform, YouTube is the popular platform for publishing content by most content creators. India has the largest YouTube audience in the world with over 462 million active users (GrabOn, 2024). According to YouTube, its impact in India has contributed more than Rs. 16,000/- crores to India's GDP in 2022 (YouTube, 2024). The content creators who create content about the Garo Hills and Garo culture have content spread out over a range of themes and events. The content creators do not have a niche genre but they contribute to the cultural conservation and it is an endowment for future generations.

Content Creator 1 – Jimberth Marak

Channel: Jimberth K. Marak (www.youtube.com/@Jimberthmarak)

Subscribers: 2.92 Lakh; Views: 7,22,16,791; Videos: 137; First video: 6 January 2018 Video category: Songs, Dance, Movies, Travels, People, Events, Sports and Games, and Personal Experiences.

Content Creator (CC) 1 was always involved in the production of audio and visual content and circulated them through recordings in cassettes and compact discs. In 2002, self- funded CC1 recorded and

circulated 1500 cassettes of an album of Christian songs entitled '*Christo AngJokatKapa*' or "Jesus is my savior" along with TeibokLaloo, and according to CC1, the album was a hot cake!

CC1 is a Priest and teacher. In 2015 he was enriched about digital media and the uploading of videos on YouTube by one of his students who was studying in class 10. The student who is also a good dancer introduced the technically equipped and self-taught CC1 to the new media of fast circulating content through open source medium YouTube. CC1 who was involved in preaching, teaching and guidance, worked to help the people of the Garo community, uplift them through principles of Godly views and work views, and academia so that the people of the Garos hills may grow to reach their potential in their daily works of life. CC1 believe that the most beautiful thing about the Garos is their simplicity and their smile. A Garos smile is a genuine smile, it radiates innocence and sheds light to the lush and prosperous Garo hills. CC1 at first focused on content about the beauty of Garo Hills, preservation of popular and ecologically attractive places because he feels that the Garo Hills is the best place in the world.

Through the years of producing audio and visual content, he has involved the local Garo folk in his content. With a flair for singing, his digital content is a diaspora of songs, dances, people, places, awareness and current situations. The songs and dances are a mixture of catechism and Garo folk identity, the amalgamation of core Garo material culture and language with Christian tunes have administered a sense of belonging among the people through his content about CC1's thought "We are Garos and we are Christians". The digital content which is published in YouTube, Instagram and Facebook and circulated through WhatsApp is the work created by passion. A passion to spread the word to the people and digital media helps propagate the message of joy and happiness to the people. Content from a far can spark a flame when in distress and difficulty, let the little media bring light and peace to the hearts of the viewers. CC1 spreads messages through his videos, he expects his viewers to watch and to the get the message. CC1's content is subscribed and viewed by many, a majority of whom belong to the Garo community, and also from viewers of an international audience from Nepal, Philippines and Bangladesh. With the growth in viewership CC1 is incorporating subtitles in English to his new and upcoming content to enhance the viewership of his content to an ever- growing audience. According to CC1, critical evaluation of content helps in creation of better content and positive comments encourages him to create more content. CC1 comments that there is a shift in the outlook of the current generation with regards to the social heritage of the people. The content involving songs in the local language is supported by the youth and the elders. CC1 has diverse content which appeals to various age groups. He narrates that his content has also become a modern lullaby, a lady commented "Whenever my child cries, I put on your YouTube channel."

Content Creator 2 – Will Sangma

Channel: Mr Will Sangma (www.youtube.com/@mrwillsangma)
Subscribers: 1.11 Lakh; Views: 1,16,14,487; Videos: 222; First video: 6 December 2013 Video category: Garo Movies, Places, Cultural Tourism, Awareness Programmes Content Creator (CC) 2 started shooting videos as an amateur through his mobile phone. The first video he uploaded on YouTube was in December 2013. Through the years he has upgraded his skill in content creation. Today, he is a professional photographer and videographer who creates content on various themes including Garo culture with special emphasis to the tradition of the Garos, Wangala dance, the

NokAchik and *Nokpante*, and awareness programmes sponsored by the Government of Meghalaya.

The passion for creating videos has turned him into a professional who is well known in Tura, Garo hills. His digital content showcases aspects of Garo culture related to culinary culture, dress patterns and dressing style, ornaments, dance, songs and Garo movies with an audience who belong to Garo hills. CC2's varied content which is published on YouTube, Instagram and Facebook seeks to contribute to the vast repository of unsorted content on Garo culture which is available digitally. Garo culture heritage is disseminated digital. The digital media is an archive for the socio-cultural heritage of the Garos but it needs to be properly cataloged so that the viewers can have an easy access to content creating their own ecosystem in the niche genre which they would like to view.

Content Creator 3 – Sembertush A. Sangma

Channel: Sembertush A. Sangma (www.youtube.com/@sembertushasangma1540) Subscribers: 66,800; Views: 1,63,24,378; Videos: 56; First video: 30 March 2018 Video category: Garo Art, Architecture, Festival, Culture, Ritual, Cultural Tourism

Content Creator (CC) 3 is a prominent artist and content creator who is associated to Mandi Art or Garo art. His work incorporates the A.chik indigenous knowledge which he has learned from a young age when he resided in a traditional house of the Garos, the *Nokachik*, in a Songsarek village.

A combination of passion for art and preservation of indigenous knowledge had initiated CC3 to publish his work and content online for circulation to a wide audience. As an artist and a content creator who uses Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, he promotes and preserves the Garo culture through his artwork. One of the main reasons for his association with Achik architecture is because he believes that art of building houses the Achik way with the resources of the hills as used by the forefathers is slowly fading with time. Thus, he wants to protect this art form for future generations before it disappears and can only be found in books or in the videos. One of his most watched videos of YouTube has 13 million views, it is a short video clip accompanied with only a soundtrack. The video showcases the lush green Garo hills and their agricultural fields which have *borang*or a treehouse/watch tower, a form of indigenous architecture which the Garos use as a protection from wild animals.

CC3's content is spread over a vast array of genres. The digital content which showcases musical instruments, rites and rituals, art and craft, indigenous architecture, material culture, Wangala festival, Songsarek villages and houses, tourist places, wildlife sanctuary and national parks, and the *nokpante* contributes to the preservation of the cultural heritage of the community. The passion to create content has accounted for content to be made professionally catering to an audience from the region, the country and even overseas, who support his work and provide positive comments on his digital content.

Content Creator 4 – Rajib M. Sangma

Channel: A.chikOja Part2 (www.youtube.com/@OjaPart2)

Subscribers: 59,400; Views: 35,95,050; Videos: 201; First video: 29 July 2023 Video Category: Indigenous medicine

Content Creator (CC) 4 started creating and uploading content on indigenous Garo medicine or Sam A.chik since 2019 in a YouTube channel by the name Bringimintv (www.youtube.com/@RajipSangma) where he has 1.34 lakh subscribers and 101 videos with

92,65,008 views. CC4 belongs to the Garaganching sub-tribe of the Garos. He is originally from Emangre in South Garo hills, an area which is known for having healers and medicine men or *oja* in the local language. CC4 learned the art of medicine making and healing from his grandparents which let him to start practicing the ways of a medicine man from senior *ojas* in the area, and as a young *oja* he started helping people to be cured from common ailments and ailments caused by the supernatural. CC4 is a *samachik* or garo medicine practitioners, healing and curing people is profession. His interest to help people cure common ailments with readily available herbs from their kitchen garden and nearby jungle led him to create and publish videos on traditional medical healing practices online. The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown created a situation wherein people who resided in far flung area to not have access to medicine and medicinal facilities. CC4 took up the task of creating videos in knowledge dispersion of local herbal and traditional medicines which the Garos used since time immemorial. Bringimintv is a YouTube channel with mix content, therefore he created another YouTube channel, AchikOja Part 2 which wholly dedicated to Garo traditional medicine. A video platform like YouTube as open access and is available to anyone who has access to a digital device and the internet. CC4 believed in the purpose of providing medical help through the use indigenous plants through digital medium. It is free but in turn allows the content creator to generate from the viewership. Thus, a practicing medicine man had become a self-taught and self-exploring digital content creator who spread his knowledge to Garos far and wide by using media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook.

Creation of content allows the slowing fading practices of traditional Garo medicine to be preserved in the digital form. People can get a comprehensive knowledge of traditional medicine and herbs. They can learn from it and create medicines on their own or DYI (do it yourself) without the need to meet Ojas. But not all healing practices are published online because some practices are very risky and needs utmost care and professionalism. CC4 audience is mostly from the Garo community which resides in Meghalaya and Assam, in India and from Bangladesh. The audience is recognized by the Garo community in South Garo Hills. He receives emotional and sociological support from his patients and viewers. According to CC4, people are more likely to visit an allopathic doctor when they suffer for an illness but there are few who do visit him. The few through word of mouth help spread the message that the medication and healing practices provided by an *Oja* is effective and the medication can cure. CC4 believes that his content on traditional medicine preserves the Garo cultural heritage because this the knowledge of the forefathers, they have passed this knowledge to a few and they few that remain must help pass on so that the practice can help the people of the area. CC4 said that the people of the area do not believe in hospital but do believe in tribal medicine for small illnesses. He narrates that there was a patient who suffered from cancer and was in the last stage of the illness and could not be cured. The patient visited him thrice and his medicine provide relief.

CC4 content is viewed and is helpful to many viewers from India and Bangladesh, catering to the Achiks. His content receives positive feedback and comments from the people who use his medicine for good. But he does also receive a wave of negative comments, they shun the practice of the *ojas* by stating that the practice is fake and not scientific, amongst them are Christian converts, their conversion has led them to new faith wherein they do not believe in these practices anymore. The *Ojas* are medicine men who also practice shamanism; it was narrated that the *ojas* can cure people who are possessed by *mite* (spirit) with rites, rituals and traditional medicine. The

Garos lives amidst a host of spirits called *mites,* they can be good or bad spirits. These mites can harm humans and required to be appeased by prayer and offerings. Though there is hindrance about the practice of traditional medicine and traditional medicine men, it has stopped CC4 and many other medicine men who are also content creators like him to publish their content and practices online. CC4 was also featured by PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market Driven Enterprises) Meghalaya, a program for the promotion and incubation of enterprises in Meghalaya.

There is an ocean of digital content creators from the Garo community and others as well who publish content on a wide array of genres. This mixed content which is uploaded online possesses rich cultural data on the cultural heritage of the Garo community. Internet slang calls the old, boomers the current generation as Generation Z or GenZ, it is a time where anyone from anywhere can upload and execute an idea no matter their background or experience and quickly reach a far-fetched audience if the content resonates a distinctive feeling or a vibe; a vibration or a vibe is an emotional experience and reaction to an energy felt from a person, place or thing. A content creator who is working with the Garos of Tripura states that the internet helps to uplift the people because people consume what they see and hear. The Garos of Tripura were drifting and assimilation of a foreign culture and language but the work of the missionaries and Garo preachers have helped the people to recognise their origins. The content creator stated "Unless there is someone who can speak, how can we hear". Thus, digital content creation is uplifts and perseveres a community's culture and it becomes immortal for and in the digital generation.

Chapter 9

Digital and Popular Culture - Cultural Aberrations

Cultural aberration pertains to the divergence or distinctive characteristics found within a cultural group in contrast to wider societal standards. This study concentrates on the Garo community, an indigenous group predominantly situated in northeastern India and certain regions of Bangladesh. The Garo people possess unique cultural customs that distinguish them, encompassing festivals, culinary traditions, religious rituals, traditional dress, and adornments. The objective of this research is to investigate these facets to comprehend their role in shaping the cultural identity and social framework of the Garo community.

Wangala festival:

The Wangala Festival, also known as the '100 Drums Festival,' is an annual harvest festival celebrated primarily by the Garo tribe in Meghalaya, India. It marks the end of the agricultural season, typically held in November after the sowing of seeds and completion of harvesting.

The festival begins with the 'Rugala' ceremony, where the chief priest performs rituals to invoke blessings from the deity and ensure a fruitful harvest season. Offerings of rice beer, fruits, and symbolic items are made to appease the spirits. Traditional dances such as the 'Wangala Dance,' performed by men and women adorned in colorful attire, are central to the festival. These dances, accompanied by traditional musical instruments like drums and flutes, narrate stories of their cultural history and agricultural practices.

The Wangala Festival exemplifies cultural aberration within the Garo community through its distinctiveness from mainstream cultural norms. The emphasis on animistic beliefs and reverence for nature, embodied in rituals and offerings, contrasts with more urbanized and industrialized societies' practices. The festival's focus on agrarian livelihoods and communal harmony reflects the Garo people's deep-rooted connection with their land and environment, emphasizing sustainability and traditional knowledge transmission. Among the followers of Songsarek, Wangala festival still stands as a harvesting festival, where they celebrate through dance and music performance, as per the traditional way.

Presently, this festival plays a vital role in Garo's cultural identity and is a tourist attraction. Efforts have been made by the government to promote the festival where it has become more like a carnival than a ritualistic performance. Originally this was performed only by followers of Sangsarek, as gratitude for a good harvest. In the 100 Drums festival, people from different religious faiths take part to perform to represent the Garo Indigenous culture, which is vibrant and colourful to the world, and not only attracts tourists, and social media influencers but also researchers from various fields. In recent years, the festival has become more organized and capitalized. As a result of the digital boom, many photos and videos are available on social media platforms, which attracts more tourists with every passing year. In the end, it may be concluded that, in both ways, the Wangala festival remains a symbol of cultural pride for the Garo people, preserving their identity and heritage for future generations.

Dakmanda and Ekong:

Previously, Garo women used to wear Ekong, a bottom wear which is a combination of two short

pieces of cloth tied with each other with strings. Presently, Dakmanda is considered as traditional bottom wear for Garo women. Dakmanda is a long piece of cloth to be wrapped around the waist for bottom wear. Presently Eknong is not worn by Garo women apart from some dance performances such as the Wangala festival. As per the community members, Ekong is not suitable to be worn in modern days as most of them do not feel comfortable. They prefer Dakmanda more and it is mainly worn on various occasions, like festivals, and official meetings, and some wear it regularly though young women prefer Western outfits over Dakmanda.

Garo attire holds deep cultural significance within the community, reflecting their social customs, rituals, and identity. The attire is worn during various occasions such as festivals, weddings, and rituals, symbolizing traditional values and customs. The intricate designs and patterns woven into the garments often depict motifs inspired by nature, animals, and geometric shapes, representing their close connection with the natural environment and spiritual beliefs.

Garo attire exemplifies cultural aberration through its distinctiveness from mainstream fashion trends and globalized clothing styles. The emphasis on handmade textiles, natural fibers, and traditional weaving techniques contrasts with mass-produced garments prevalent in urban settings. Efforts to safeguard and promote Garo attire are essential for preserving cultural continuity and identity. Local initiatives and cultural organizations work to document traditional weaving techniques, promote garment production using eco-friendly practices, and support artisans involved in textile craftsmanship. These efforts not only foster economic opportunities but also strengthen community pride and cultural resilience among the Garo people. Presently, the weaving art of Dakmanda is a dying art for the community members. Mass production of Dakmanda has proved to be cost friendly but it affected the individual craftsmanship and ideas. Moreover, at present the production of Dakmanda is mainly operated in Assam. These machine productions do not offer much room for creative ideas. The materials in machines are also artificial fabric. Very few numbers of handlooms are still in operation with natural fabric but due to scarcity of the natural resources, those items are expensive.

Garo attire serves as a visible manifestation of cultural aberration within the community, highlighting their unique identity, craftsmanship, and social customs. As efforts continue to preserve and promote traditional clothing, Garo attire remains a symbol of cultural pride and resilience, reinforcing their cultural heritage for future generations amidst a rapidly changing world.

Nokpante and traditional architecture:

Nokpante is a traditional institution among the Garo people. It serves as a community gathering place for young males and plays a pivotal role in maintaining social order, transforming traditional knowledge, and upholding traditions. Nokpante is typically a large, elevated hut constructed within the village.

Nokpante embodies the cultural values and social structure of the Garo community. It symbolizes unity, collective responsibility, and mutual respect among villagers. The architecture and construction of Nokpante reflect traditional craftsmanship and communal effort, reinforcing cultural identity.

In contemporary times, Nokpante continues to play a vital role in Garo society as a symbol of cultural resilience and community governance. Efforts to preserve and promote Nokpante in the Emangre village of SGH include initiatives to maintain its physical infrastructure, documentation of oral histories and customary laws, and educating younger generations about its significance. These efforts aim to safeguard cultural continuity and empower communities to uphold their traditions amidst external influences and societal changes.

Dama:

The Dama is a type of drum made from wood and animal skin. It has a deep, resonant sound and is played using sticks or hands. Dama has always played a significant role in Garo culture as the music and dance are associated with Dama and other musical instruments, Garo traditional musical instruments hold profound cultural significance within the community. They are integral to rituals, ceremonies, and social gatherings, where music and dance play a crucial role in expressing emotions, celebrating achievements, and fostering community cohesion. The craftsmanship and symbolism embedded in these instruments reflect the Garo people's cultural values, spiritual beliefs, and historical narratives.

The art of playing dama has always been passed down from generation to generation but presently the young generation is more inclined to western music which showed a decline in practice and knowledge of dama. Moreover, the production of Dama is not in practice and the community members have preserved the already existing dama as a remembrance of their rich culture.

Efforts to preserve and promote Garo traditional musical instruments are essential for maintaining cultural continuity and fostering intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Initiatives include documenting musical traditions, revitalizing traditional performances, and providing training in instrument-making and playing techniques.
These efforts not only preserve cultural heritage but also promote cultural pride, creativity, and community resilience among the Garo people.

Kokshi:

It is a container made from bamboo and cane used for fishing purposes. In recent times, declination of fishing has led to less use of Kokshi. Some artisans are making miniature of kokshi and other baskets to keep the art alive. Those models can be preserved for future generations to learn about their roots and other cultural significance. Few community members have kept those miniatures as a home decorative and it is being used as a gift purpose as well. The purpose of these miniature versions of artifacts may be different but these do not carry any less cultural significance than their original; versions.

In conclusion, it can be said that cultural preservation is facing lots of challenges. The main challenge is the loss of traditional knowledge, as the younger generation migrates to urban areas or engages in modern professions, traditional knowledge transmission from elders to youth diminishes. Another problem is environmental threat which includes rapid deforestation, climate change, and natural disasters that endanger cultural sites, oral traditions, and ecological practices vital to Garo identity. Apart from those External influences from global media, consumerism, and

digital platforms challenge Garo's cultural distinctiveness and traditional values.

Digital preservation plays a crucial role in safeguarding Garo's cultural heritage amidst contemporary challenges and cultural aberration. By embracing digital technologies, the Garo community not only preserves its rich cultural legacy but also adapts and reinterprets traditional practices for modern contexts. These efforts contribute to cultural resilience, identity affirmation, and global recognition of Garo cultural diversity and innovation.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

The *State of India's Digital Economy Report, 2024*, published by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), reveals that India's digitalization level surpasses that of several developed nations, including the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan, based on overall digitalization metrics. However, at the individual user level, India ranks 12th among the G20 countries. Internet penetration in India reached over 52% in 2024, a significant increase from approximately 14% in 2014. The present study focuses on the current state of digital literacy within the Garo community, highlighting how rapid digitalization has impacted cultural preservation and how the community is adapting to these challenges.

The study took place among Garo people of West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills of the state of Meghalaya. Data has been collected from a total number of 972 individuals of which 471 are male and 501 are female. Number of households in the present study was 172. The Garo community comprises of 12 subgroups, though in the present studied population, 7 sub-groups were found. Data was collected from 23 villages of those two districts.

Among the studied community 92.83% of the population is literate, of which 48.26% are male and 51.74% are female. In case of digital literacy, 76.71% of the studied population can be considered as digitally literate. It must be mentioned that, among the four blocks, Tura has the highest number of digital literate.

It was seen that most users use digital devices for accessing health care services, educational material, travel itineraries, and buying and selling products. On the other side, members of 61.63% of the household share the digital content, among which only 8.14% do that for the purpose of cultural preservation and, 13.37% do that for educating the younger generations on social heritage.

The Garo community of Meghalaya represents the richness of cultural identity, matrilineal traditions, and unique kinship structures that have evolved over generations. Their distinct linguistic and social characteristics, including the classification of clans and sub-clans, showcase a deeply rooted sense of belonging. The matrilineal pattern of inheritance, matrilocal residence pattern and the significant role of the women within their society, emphasize their crucial influence in familial and communal affairs.

Their material culture showcases their dynamicity and it is a reflection of their ecology like most of the cultures. Starting from their architecture to their food habit and dress ornaments, the material culture is a living example of the history of preservation of their culture. Among the cultural traits, few cultural markers are considered as living cultural markers such as language, house pattern, dance, music, food habits etc. and some are dying cultural markers such as few dialects, traditional architectural patterns, traditional medicine, traditional ornaments etc.

Culture is not static, rather it is always changing and the degree of change depends upon the transport system, communication and infrastructure facilities and modern impact including education, urbanization, Christianity, technological advancement and so on, but a culture and language can survive only through the community members practicing the culture in their day to day lives with the emotion, value system, and norms. But in case of particularly northeast tribal communities rapid change can be seen after the conversion of Christianity during the British period. In some cases, Garo community members follow their core culture in the family level. The community members tend to follow both types of traditions i.e. their ancestral traditions and Christian traditions. For example, converted Garo community members pray in the church but they prefer, especially the elderly women, to go to church in their traditional attire, rather than a Western outfit. Similarly, in the church, carol songs are sung both in Garo language and English language which indicates inclusiveness.

Despite the transformative effects of colonialism and modernity, the Garo have preserved essential aspects of their traditional customs, including marriage practices, inheritance laws, and religious ceremonies. These practices are deeply intertwined with their agricultural lifestyle, which strengthens their connection to the land and ancestral heritage. As the Garo navigate contemporary challenges, such as social integration and cultural preservation, they continue to uphold their unique identity while adapting to a changing world. Their effort is evident in their commitment to cultural practices and community support, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding these traditions for future generations.

The history of Christianization in the Garo Hills demonstrates the community's capacity for change and adaptation. While Christianity has led to significant shifts in religious practices, social structures, and cultural identity, it has also contributed to advancements in education and healthcare. The shift from traditional animistic beliefs to Christianity has led to the decline of some indigenous practices, causing tension within families and communities. However, movements aimed at preserving and revitalizing Garo cultural heritage have emerged, signaling an increased awareness of the need to maintain their distinct identity in the face of ongoing change. This process of Christianization illustrates both the challenges and opportunities for the Garo people, highlighting their adaptability in a rapidly evolving social landscape.

Development initiatives in the Garo Hills like other remote and hilly areas, since India's independence have significantly altered the community's traditional ways of life. Modern housing, healthcare, and agricultural practices have improved living conditions, but they also pose challenges to the preservation of Garo culture and identity. For instance, the shift from traditional building materials to modern construction methods, and the transition from *Jhum* (shifting) cultivation to modern agriculture reflects a departure from cultural heritage. Additionally, the influx of global pop culture, particularly from K- pop and Western influences, offers cultural exchange but also risks diluting the unique traditions that have historically united the Garo community. Balancing modernization with cultural preservation is crucial for the community's survival and prosperity.

With the advancement of technology, the process of data preservation has changed a lot with time. In the beginning of the advance of media, radio programme and then TV programme were used to

broadcast different events including sports, fictional and non- fictional programmes. This was more like a collective effort to bring one's story to the world. With time the broadcasting system has changed a lot. Presently, with the advancement of technology smartphones took over and majority of the studied population possess smart phone. Many content creators are making videos about their culture, art and broadcasting it in different social media platform like facebook, YouTube and Instagram. The major advantage of using this smart phone is an individual can watch content of his/her choice without interrupting others. The content creators, with their individual effort, are showcasing and educating people about their culture and worldview. The topics include mainly artifacts, art and architecture, food, language, fashion and lifestyle, media, Medicine and so on. At present also, collective effort can be seen via Facebook group, WhatsApp group, and arrangement of festivals and uploading the videos in different social media platforms. Organization like INTACH is also functioning in Garo Hills to preserve the cultural heritage of the Garos and in 2023 they organized a symposium on Garo cultural heritage.

Interviews with content creators revealed that many see digital media as a tool for preserving and promoting Garo culture for future generations. Some content creators use the medium to document fading traditional practices, such as Garo medicine, while also earning an income. Despite the challenges posed by digitalization, there is a growing recognition among the Garo people of the importance of preserving their cultural traits before they are lost. While not everyone is fully aware of the preservation process, there is a clear and urgent need for such efforts.

Ultimately, embracing new influences while safeguarding traditional practices is essential for the Garo community to thrive in today's fast-changing world. The ongoing dialogue between past and present will be vital in ensuring that the essence of Garo culture remains vibrant and meaningful for future generations.

The study suggests that future efforts should focus on improving digital literacy to preserve culture. Although there are attempts to use digital media to document traditions, there is still a lack of understanding about how to fully use these tools for broader cultural preservation. Future steps should include: improving digital skills, making technology more available in rural areas, and creating platforms where the community can share its cultural heritage. Also, teaching people about the importance of preserving their culture should be a priority to make sure future generations are not only good with technology but also aware of their cultural values.

In conclusion, the study shows that digital tools can help preserve Garo culture, but there are still gaps in how they are being used. It may be suggested that a mix of digital efforts, community involvement, and a balance between modernization and tradition is key to keeping the Garo community's culture alive. As India continues its rapid digitalization journey, the Garo community of Meghalaya stands at a crossroads, balancing the opportunities and challenges posed by modern technology. While digital tools offer new opportunities for cultural preservation, they also present risks of eradicating traditional practices and identities. However, the future of Garo culture will depend on a conscious and collective effort to embrace the benefits of digitalization while actively preserving the core traditions that have defined their identity for generations. By finding a balance between tradition and modernity, the Garo community can show how indigenous cultures can thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

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GLOSSARY

A.ba.cha.a- traditional agricultural practices like shifting cultivation *A.cha*- "A." means "soil" or "land," and "cha" means "eat." *A.ttemande*- This is used to cut down big trees and woods *A'kingNokma*- Protect and preserve the A'king land and pass it on to the next generation.

Aba.tatta- In the agricultural field, before any slash-and-burn activity or deforestation, they worship their ancestors and seek permission. This practice is called *Aba Tatta*.

Achik- Hill man

Adil- A trumpet-like instrument made of a buffalo horn attached to a bamboo

Agalmaka- After the slash-and-burn, they sacrifice a hen and sprinkle its blood along with local rice beer in the name of their ancestors and spirits. This ritual is called *Agalmaka*.

Alokpangsonggitcham- Alok (a type of grass) and pang (bushes)

Amphak- A particular grass

Anisep- Kydiacalycina

Atchili- It is a sickle with curved blades used for reaping

Atte- One of the widely used agricultural implements Attemongreng- It is a curbed dao used for cutting heavy branches *Bandasal*- Rest house
Bangsi- The musical instrument among the Garo is made using different types of bamboo with varied holes to produce sounds

Borang- Tree house

Brenga- It is a unique food preparation style where ingredients are stuffed inside hollow bamboo and then the bamboo is burned to cook the food.

Catchi- the major important kin groups and have sub clans.

Cha'am- mortars

Chekki- it is a fishing gear woven out of thin bamboo strips

Cherengkeragittam- Chereng and Kera were husband and wife in their folktale

Chigring- it is a traditional bamboo musical instrument with strips slit out of the bamboo itself

Chirping-it is used for pouring

Chram- artocarpuschaplasha

Chu pong- it is used as a dipper to dip and scoop out the prepared rice beer from the *chu.dikka*.

Chu- The A.chiks prepares rice beer

Chu.dikka- it is a pot which is used to brew and store traditional rice beer

Chupak- a type of rice beer

Dakmanda- traditional dress, generally wrapped around the waist *Daksare/ gannaa*- plain

wrapper around an unstitched skirt *Dama-* a long musical instrument drum
Debra sugala- ancestor's cloth

Dikka/Dhikka- rice beer, prepared by fermentation of rice and then distilling the product *Dikka-* the traditional pot used for making or the fermentation of rice beer

Dimbri- ficusglomerata
Dimch rang- a musical instrument made from bamboo and wood

Dimchrang- musical instrument

Ding.chita- the strips slit from the bamboo

Do.doki- it is a long neck earthenware pot used as a jug

Do.go- the hole in the center of the bamboo, helps to make a vibrating sound

Do.gring- this straw-filled bamboo basket is used for the hens to lay eggs

Do'o kappa- chicken curry

Dobakgre- Dabak (plant) and *Gre* (place), popularized by its name for huge Dabak plants

Dolanok- the traditional type of house

Dol- it is a medium size basket made out of bamboo which is usually used for storing paddy

Dome- head band, made of the plume feathers of the cock

Dotdrong- a guitar-like musical instrument during emergency or to inform about the visitors or danger in the village

Eking- short piece of cloth, women wear around the waist

Gachek- for carrying seeds, the basket is tightly woven otherwise, the seeds will come out

Gando- the principal garment of the man

Gandumakal- short piece of cloth men wear around the waist

Gong/Rang- one of the distinct musical instruments of the Garo

Gourd- it is used as a storage container or sometimes as a bottle or a dipper to drink any sort of liquid.

Gue- betel leaf and unripe betel nut

Hasi.roks- a seed-sowing festival conducted in March, is no longer practiced by the Garos

Jakep- special food during ceremonial occasions

Jaksan/Sangong- bangles, made of different materials, especially bronze and silver
Jamadal- a small house constructed in the Jhum fields

Jang.ke- a long cane stalk

Janti- bamboo filter

K'ma- a memorial post erected in front of the house in memory of a deceased person

Kalchi- a natural soda made with bamboo shoots or unripe bananas

Kamal- village priest

Kappa- most important foods of the Garo community, where the main ingredients are chili, ginger, and soda

katchi- burning dry pieces of plantain stems or young bamboos

Kerang- for carrying paddy

Kimilsiksika- the hair from the hides or skin is scrapped off and the process of removing the hair from the hides is known as *kimilsiksika.*

Kok.magma- food curry, a kind of *potash* in curries

Kokcheng- bamboo baskets of different sizes used to carry load on back of the person

Koksi- it is a fishing basket used for holding fish or other aquatic animals like crabs, shrimps, frogs, etc.

Kolma- it is used for the filling and scooping the rice beer *Konagittam- Kona* means corner and *gittam* is part of the village *Konakora- 'Kona'* means 'no lake' and '*Kora'* means 'ghost'
Kotip- a turban

Kram- A·chik sacred drum

Machong- an exogamous matrilineal descent kin group *Mahari-* a group of closely related kin within the ma'chong *Mahjong-* musical instrument
Memngdila- death rituals

Mi.gitaicha.a- the consumption of the first rice of Jhum cultivation.

Micchichalijong- the local name of the lord of crops

Mijam- a store house

Milam- a double-edged sword that once held cultural significance

Minil/Mi mittim- sticky rice

Minilme.dik- this pot is a perforated pot on the base used for cooking or steaming sticky rice

Mite- the term used for gods/goddess /spirits

Mora- a portable piece of furniture used for sitting among the Garo

Mronggre- a clan of Garo community

Muama- Garo lullaby

Naderong- is a brass ring for the helix (upper part) of the ear by both men and women

Nadongsi/sisi- thin brass ring to wear on the earlobe

Nagam chutney- dry fish chutney

Nagra- a big A·chik traditional one sided drum used for calling people

Nakam.bitchi- is a dry fish curry

Nakambitchi- dry fish with sodium

Nakci/ Nabal/ Nairki- it is a brass ring worn on the helix (middle part)

Natapsi- people wear it on the lower helix part of the ear

Nokachik- the main traditional house of the A·chik.

Nokkra- it is built on the ground level. It acts as a storage place where they keep items like baskets, mortar and pestle, fishing equipment, etc.

Nokma- A village head man.

Nokmande- refers to a house where the family resides

*Nokpante-*bachelor's dormitory

Pakram- grewialilia folia

Pong- A.chiks use a dry bottle gourd

Prap- ficusrumphi

Raksam- "Rak" means "one hand" and "sam" means "bravery." *Rangdokram- Rang* means big bowl, *dok* means bit and *ram* means village. *Rimmol-* pestles
Ripok/Rikgitok/Konal/Kakam/Rikmatchi/Danggasora- various types of necklaces used by people irrespective of gender on festive occasions

Rongchugala- it is a ritualistic offering of flattened rice known as *Rongchu* from the first harvested paddy of a jhum field to a deity by sacrificing a hen.

Ruans- winnowing pans *Sakkinpitha-* traditional rice cakes *Samachik-* traditional hospital *Sangko-* a cooking vessel with handles

Sarenda- musical instrument

Selu- weapon

Sengki- it is a form of waistband exclusively for women

Serejing/ Ajia/ Dim Dim Chong Dadi Chong/ Ang' Atchiram/ Badi Dake Na'ade- Garo Folk song

Simphak- cloth and clothes made from the bark of a tree or bark cloth
Jainsem- blouse

Songsarek- a Garo who follows traditional magico-religious practices

Teteng.aja- the dwelling place Dwarfs or elves

Tyisam festival- to promote, preserve and showcase the rich culture and traditions of the Garos

Wa'sding- bamboo ropes

Wa·kap- at the boundary of the jhum fields, an appliance made of bamboo

Wak.kappa- pork curry

Wangala- it is the most important and richest festival of the Garos which is celebrated for several days.

Digital Literacy and its Impact on Cultural Heritage Preservation among the Garo

Interview Schedule for Digitally literate Garo members

Schedule No.				

Village/Area: *District:*   *Contact no:*

A. Respondent details:

A.1.Name: A.2. Age:

A.3. Sex: A.4.Religion: (Christian/Songsarek)

A.5. Sub-group of tribe: A.6. Clan:

A.7. Mother Tongue: A.8. Other language known:

A.9. Educational level: A.10. Currently working: Yes/No

A.10. If working, occupation: A.11. If not working, earlier occupation:

B. Digital literacy and access to and use of digital equipment

1.   **A)** Do you use digital devices? **Yes/No**

   B) If **yes**, how?

   Personal device/Common family device/School or library/At public places/ Internet café /Any other

   C)Laptop/Desktop/Android Mobile/Computer/any other specify _____

2.   **A)** Do you browse internet? **Yes/No**

   B) If Yes. Mention Frequency –

Daily (Hours)		Days in a Week		Weekly		Any Other	

3.   Internet Connectivity in your area – Excellent/ Good/ Poor/ No internet facility

4.   Since when are you using digital devices?

   A)Laptop/ Desktop (in years) -

   B)Mobile/Tablet (in years) -

5.   How would you rate your digital literacy? Poor/ Average/ Good/ Excellent

6.   **A)**Have you ever attended any training sessions for digital literacy? **Yes/No**

   B)If yes, can you give the following details?

Sl	Training programme	Duration	Organising Agency	What was learned?
1				
2				
3				
4				

7. If you have not attended any formal training sessions for digital literacy, from whom did you learn?
   From Self-learning materials/ family members/Friends/tutors/Others (specify) _____

8. What motivated to be digitally literate?

9. Can you please specify your use of digital devices for the following purposes?

Purpose	AW	MO	OF	ST	RA	NV
For information to make right choices relating to health care, education, travel, buying and selling etc.						
Skill enhancement (self-learning of skills)						
For updated knowledge and current events						
For Entertainment, Sports						
Online games						
Social networking/communications						
Others (specify)						

*Always (AW)/Most Often (MO)/Often (OF)/ Sometimes (ST) / Rarely (RA)/Never (NV)

10. Use of digital equipment for dissemination of social heritage-

   A) Can you list some of the cultural markers of Garo community according to your opinion?(Encourage free listing)

(**Ex.** Specific dish/Specific dress/Specific ornament/Specific dance/Specific art or craft or economic activity/Specific festival/Specific institution like Dormitory, Age group associations/Any value system/Any ritual/Norms relating to residence or inheritance or marriage/language)

1		9	
2		10	
3		11	
4		12	
5		13	
6		14	
7		15	
8		16	

11. Arrange hierarchically the above listed cultural markers according to their significance for Garo cultural identity?

1		9	
2		10	
3		11	
4		12	
5		13	
6		14	
7		15	
8		16	

12. Which of the above listed features of Garo cultural identity do you think are fading and require attention in order to be rekindled?

1		6	
2		7	
3		8	
4		9	
5		10	

13. A) How often do you attend family social events like life cycle rituals, family festivals etc.? (Frequently /Sometimes/Rarely)

B) Can you recall details of such events you attended in the last six months?

Event description	Month and year	Duration	Location of the event

14. A) How frequently do you participate in community/village level festivals/social or cultural events organized in your village or other villages?(Frequently /Sometimes/Rarely)

B) Can you recall the details of such events in which you recently participated?

Event description	Month and year	Duration	Location of the event	Any specific reason for participation?

Digital Documentation of events

15. **A)** Did you click photos and videos of those social events you attended? **Yes/No**

B) If **yes**, what type of photos and videos you clicked most?

(Ritual or performance/ photos of family members/ random pictures of participant groups/ Self/Others)

C) Where do you save digital photos and videos: In device/google drive/ cloud/ networking site

D) If device: Own mobile/computer/external memory/others

E) If networking site: Facebook/Instagram/Twitter/any other networking site

F) If you preserve in social networking site, why do you preserve/upload in networking site?

(For net-working/ for disseminating community heritage/ for entertainment/Others)

16. A) Do you share cultural content for the purpose of preservation/ Uniting of community members/ Preservation of cultural heritage/ Educating the younger generation on social heritage/ Inform others about cultural specialty of Garos/ Others

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B) With whom do you mostly share the photos and videos of the social events that you made?

Family members only/Relatives only/Friends and community members only/Colleagues/Members of other communities/ Social media friends

C) How often do you share?

Sometimes/ Often/ Most often/ Rarely

D) What is the approximate number of persons/ organization with whom you share?

17. **A)** Are photographs/videos of social/cultural events or objects or others which are of social and cultural significance to your community are shared with you by others? **Yes/No**

B) If **yes**, who share such photos/videos/commentaries with you mostly?

Relatives/Friends/Youtubers/Bloggers/ Vloggers? Community leaders/office bearers of certain associations/Others

Creation of digital content for preservation of social heritage

18. **A)** Do you create digital content for preservation and/or dissemination of social heritage of Garos? **Yes/No.**

B) If **yes**, what kind of digital content you create? Photos/videos/Others

19. **A)** How do you disseminate the digital content you create?

Youtube/Reels/Blogs/ Vlogs/ Others

B) What aspect of Garo culture, the digital content that you create is mostly related to?

Food and culinary culture/Dance, songs, folklore/Garo morals and ethics/Garo community living/Dress, ornaments and body decoration/Festivals and rituals/Health, hygiene and healing/Traditional knowledge/Others (specify)

C) Type of content you mostly create. _____

D) Since when you have been creating the digital content?

E) What motivated you to create the content?

F) Does your content have satisfactory impact on the preservation of social heritage? Narrate.

G) What are the challenges you face in order to create digital content relating to Garo social heritage?

Membership in specific social media groups that are created to preservation of social /cultural heritage

20. Are you aware of any specific groups created for preservation of social heritage through digital means? **Yes/No**

If **yes**, can you list such groups and provide some information on them?

Group name	Year formed	Objectives	Total members	Who referred to you?	Active member of the group.	When did you join

Digital Literacy and its Impact on Cultural Heritage Preservation among the Garo

<u>Interview guide for Digital content creators</u>

Village/Area: District: Contact no:

A. Respondent details:

A.1. Name: A.2. Age: A.3. Sex:

A.4. Religion: (Christian/Songsarek/other)   A.5. Sub-group of tribe:

A.6. Clan: A.7. Mother Tongue:

A.8. Other language known: A.9. Educational attainment:

A.10. Currently working: **Yes/No**   A.10. If working, occupation:

A.11. If not working, earlier occupation:

B. Initiation and Experience in content creation:

B.1. When were you first initiated into this activity?

B.2. Who influenced you for initiating yourself into this activity?

B.3. Any specific reason that induced to this activity? **Yes/No**
    If **yes**, Can you please narrate?

B.4. Which aspect of Garo culture is covered in your digital content?

Culinary culture/Health culture/Rituals and religion/Dress, ornaments, body decoration /Dance, drama, folklore/Economic activity and indigenous knowledge/Sports, games/ traditional art, craft/Others (specify)

B.5. What is your media platform? to preserve culture/make it popular among others/Own benefit (YouTube/Instagram/Facebook/others)

B.6. Is it your profession or passion?

B.7. Is your audience from your community or other community?

B.8. What kind of recognition do you expect from your own community?

B.9. Do you think your videos can contribute to preservation of Garo social heritage?

B.10. Brief description of the videos which has made a greater impact and how?

B.11. Do you think your videos facilitated dissemination of Garo culture to a global audience?

B.12. Did you get any response or feedback from any foreigner?**(Yes/No)**

If **yes**, please describe-

B.13. Did you face any challenges from your community while making videos?

Digital Literacy and its Impact on Cultural Heritage Preservation among the Garo

<u>**Interview Schedule – Head of Household**</u>

Schedule No.

Village/Area: *District:*   *Contact no:*

A.1. Respondent details:

A.1. Name: A.2. Age: A.3. Sex:

A.4. Religion: (Christian/Songsarek/other):

A.5. Community: A.6. Other Names of the Community:

A.7. Clan: A.8. Subgroup:

A.9. Village/ Locality Name: A.10. District:

A.11. Language - Mother Tongue: A.12. Other language known:

A.13. Migration – Whether Migrant (Y/N)   A.14. If Yes, Original Habitation (OH):

A.15. Distance from OH: A.16. Reason for Migration:

B1. Household members

Sl. No	Name	Relationship with Head	Age	Gender	Marital status	Education status	Primary Occupation	Secondary Occupation	Monthly Income	Digital Devices Used
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

C. Digital literacy of household members:

C.1. How do your family members generally use the digital equipment accessible to them?

Purpose	No. of members
Online classes/seminar/meetings	
Browse for specific information for educational purposes	
Watch general educationalprogrammes (like programmes on nature, geography, environment, people etc.)	
Online shopping and information	
Watch news, Entertainment, sports, play online games	
Use for communications and for building social networking	
Use for skill enhancement (self-learning of skills)	
Create content on chosen pastime activity	
Others (specify)	

C.2. How do you rank the following (on a scale of 3) in respect of your family members?
(With which of the following you think your family members are mostly engaged in respect of using of their digital skills?)

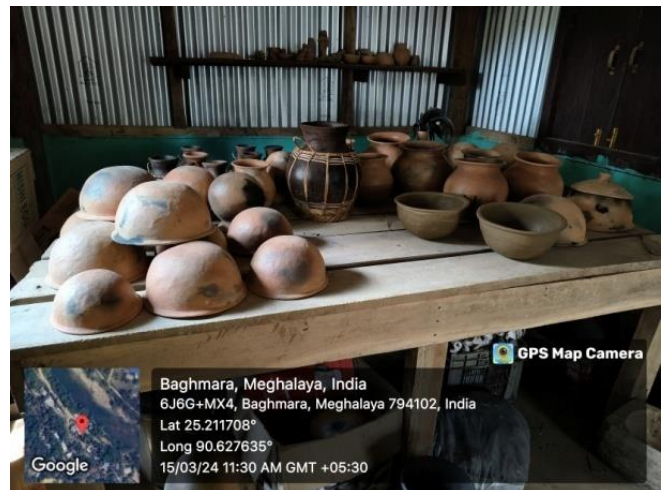| Basic Digital literacy components	Rank
Consuming (browsing internet for information; online shopping etc.)	
Creation of digital content and uploading on digital platforms	
Communication – e-mail	

Do'a Kappa (Chicken curry)

Traditional Utensils

Dimchrang (Musical Instrument)

Pottery

A Garo man busy with making a
musical instrument

A Garo woman carrying firewood in the
Kokcheng

Nakam (Dry Fish)

Preparing of *Chu-Dikka* (Rice beer)

Balcony of the house

Sanitation/Toilet facility

Traditional House and construction of P-MAY
house

Vidyanisth N. Marak, Oja and
Superintendent of the *Samachik Sikman*
(Traditional Hospital)

Akok (a small basket made from bamboo used for
carrying piglets)

Water facility

Digital device in use

Traditional House with crop (*Mi Jam*)

Mobile tower of Rongkakgre village

Interview with Will Sangma

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Regional Project, North East Regional Centre, Shillong, An.S.I.