

Research Article

THE A·CHIK WORLDVIEW ON ‘MITDE’ (Spirits)

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The word *Mite* (Spirit) or ‘*Mitde*’ consists of two words ‘*Mit*’ or ‘*Mittin*’ which means hidden and ‘*De*’ connoting a child. Therefore ‘*Mite*’ or ‘*Mitde*’ is a hidden spirit (derived from the concept of invisible spirit). This word is also antonym of the word ‘*Mande*’ which also comprises of two words ‘*Man*’ connoting perceptible and ‘*De*’ a ‘Child’ (*Bebera·ani Bimik* 3).

According to the legend of the A·chiks, *Mitde* and *Mande* lived together and cooperated in all social events. But, the *Mitde* were much stronger and powerful than *Mande*. Hence, gods felt that it would be imprudent to allow both to exist together and hence decided to separate *Mitde* from *Mande* and stayed that way ever since (5).

The A·chiks believe in a powerful being, the master of heaven and earth, the giver of all things, the care taker under whose power everything happens. This belief leads to have reverence and obedience towards the invisible spirits so as not to invoke anger and invite occurrences of disaster. This faith in the invisible beings who has the power to bless and destroy or cause disease gives way to form the indigenous religion of the A·chiks. Unlike other culture, the A·chiks seems to worship gods more out of fear than with respect.

The indigenous religion of the A·chiks has been described by Moniram R. Sangma. According to

him, the A·chiks dedicate themselves to their gods and worshipped whole heartedly. The A·chiks believed Tatar Rabuga as the supreme God and revered and feared their god Tatar Rabuga (*A·chikni Ma·biding* 1,2). Whatever religious laws were passed on to them and forbade as taboo or *Nima*, it was considered serious and observed very rigidly. This can be referred as the concept of *Sin*. Though the concept of heaven and hell is not nonexistent, the A·chik believe in rebirth and there is a popular fear that one will be turned into lesser mortals like animals and insects if one displeases god with misdeeds and sins in their present life.

Meckenson Rongmutu, mentioned the belief system of the A·chiks and stated that the A·chiks have never imitated those people around them who are much more advanced and prosperous and worshipped images of their deities and idols made from clay, images made from stone carvings, metals to which livestock are sacrificed by blood offerings and burnt offerings and thereby prostrating to worship such gods.

The A·chiks believes in supernatural power and worshipped the unseen god with their heart and soul. During the time of natural calamity or epidemics, they built an alter for the unseen god where they offered eggs and grain offering and sacrificed domesticated animals like ram, goat, pigs or bullocks, chicken and offered blood offerings to please them and to take away

the diseases and to deliver them from the entire calamity (*A'chikrangni Dal-batgipa Mite Saksan* 53, 54).

The dwelling place of the Spirits

According to their belief, these spirits or *mites* are everywhere - in the sky above, on the earth beneath, in the depths of the waters, in the dark caverns, recesses of mysterious mountains and in the trees and bamboo groves. Rivers and lakes, mountains and hills, trees and shrubs, sticks and stones, are the dwelling places of some spirits (*Rengsanggri* 54 55). Similarly, the stars, the sun and the moon are associated with some spirits or *mites* and all these *mites* are considered immortal (*The Psyche of The Garos* 47).

Llewellyn R. Marak mentioned about the dwelling places as,

'Those *mites* dwells in places like deep crevasse of rocks and hills where people do not frequent, in brooks and streams and nooks and corners of hillocks, treacherous terrains, sacred grooves and in whirlpools and lakes. The spirits also dwells in specially preserved and untouched properties by human like gongs, drums, shields, amulets, tongs, and also in gongs that are used during prayers and worship (*rangmora, ranggachek*) and in the kingpin of certain houses (*rojot maljru*). It is also believed that the spirits are present in the kingpost of the house, centre post (*turuma*) and in the hearth rake (*onggare*) of the place of cooking. Those benevolent spirits are the ones that blesses human and malevolent spirits sometimes brings about illnesses, malaise and maladies (*Bebera-ani Bimik I*).

The Role of the Gods and Goddesses

According to Llewellyn R. Marak in '*Bebera-ani Bimik*' said that,

Though the *mites* are named differently, not all the spirits are different. Just as a body has different parts, so also are *mites* named according to their spiritual work. Those are referred in plural form as 'Spirits' or '*miterang*' but one should understand that they originated from the same spirit and referred to as '*Ba-bra*'. '*Ba*' in Garo language refers to the one that gives birth and '*Bra*' is referred to the canal of birth. Therefore, the spirit is referred to as the one which gave birth to everything. There is a mother spirit '*Mitemong*' which is '*Ba-bra*' entrusted with the duty of giving birth with twelve elements of birth.

Tatara Rabuga

Harendra W. Marak mentioned that Tatara Rabuga is the greatest and mightiest God, creator of the heaven and the earth and god of all things. He is the Spirit that gave birth to human and thus he is the creator of mankind (*A'chik Aganbewalrang* 1).

Major A. Playfair, used the word '*Creator*' and wrote that the Spirit Tatara-Rabuga along with *Nostu -Nopantu* and *Machi* created the earth. This spirit is looked upon as the one that brings welfare to mankind, which brings about curing of wasting diseases such as 'kalazar' and other persistent fever. *Nostu-Nopantu* (a feminine spirit) is the deity who, at the command of Tatara Rabuga fashioned the earth, this deity is known as Brara-Dogni in Ambeng Dual and *Matchi* (*Atchu Ambini Ku-bisring* 44). A beetle which is referred to as '*Chingching Barching*' brought some clay and gave it to her through which the spirit *Nostu-Nopantu* got impregnated and gave birth to the earth. That is known by the A-chiks as '*Mane Pilte*' which is the name for the earth. Tatara Rabuga also created the sun, moon and the stars and those created celestial bodies are functioning according to their given task.

Tatara Rabuga made an amulet for the earth, clouds for the turban, banyan trees, and geniuses of tall trees, sago trees, reeds and palm tree leaves for hair. For clothing, reeds, bulrush, thatching grass, cinnamon grass, other geniuses of grass and many varieties of vegetations that grows on the earth. *Tatara Rabuga* also created many animals that live on the earth and each of those animals were given duties to perform, for instance, progenitors of fowls, jungle fowl and black gibbon to wake up the people from slumber. Other than that he gave the birds and animals, grasshoppers and insects and all other created beings to perform their given duties according to the season. The frogs were created to foretell the arrival of monsoon and to make others know arrival of rainy season, for the frogs sings only when the rainy season arrives.

In the beginning the water was under the ground. It was '*Tatara Rabuga*' who commanded '*Nore Chire, Kimre Bokre*' (mother of rain) to bring out spring chambers, streams, rivers and other sources of water. That is how the water came out to the surface of the earth. '*Goera*' the lightning was placed in heaven so that it will show the people arrival of rain through thunders and lightning (*A'chik Golporang* III 28,29).

Goera

The A-chiks refer to '*Goera*' as the god of lightning, thunder and of strength. Dewansing Rongmuthu in his book *Apasong Agana* writes that:

Goerako A'chikrang Mikka Riprap, Delipani, Impret Kimgroni Mite.

Darangniba amsokbilsokgijagipa ine da'ona kingking bebe ra'enga,

Olakkienga.(130).

Translation

The A-chiks worship Goera till today as the God of Lightening and thunder with invincible strength .

Dhoronsing K. Sangma also states that Goera is a strong god and shows himself in the form of lightening. He destroys trees, men, and animals which

is often referred to as Goera *goa* or Goera throws. He mentions that when people suffer from a disease for a long time they make incantations to Goera offering pigs and a fowl. The people also offer fowl and ducks near the trees so that Goera may not destroy their houses. The A'chiks believe that Goera uses a flat stone to throw or hit the trees and houses which is known as 'Goera rong-pra' or Goera's stone which believed to have healing powers:

*Goera pelgap dakgipa ro-ongchisa goronga
ine agana. Ukon Goera rong-pra minga.
(A'chik Golporang bak III 17)*

Translation

It is said that Goera hits with a flat stone. It is named Goera rong-pra.

Major Playfair also states if a person suffers from persistent illness *Goera* is invoked and sacrifices are made to the spirit to heal the sick person. As Goera is the god of thunder and lightning, whenever a tree or any structure is struck by thunderbolt, it is said that Goera has struck it. The A'chiks believe that at the foot of a tree, sacrificial offerings of a pig, a fowl or a duck should be made to honour him so that no harm would come to the houses in the vicinity of the area (*The Garos* 89).

In *The Folk-Tales of the Garos*, Dewansing Rongmuthu wrote a full story on Goera stating that in the early days, men and mites lived together and cooperated in all social activities. During that time, a batch of A'chik fore-fathers migrated from *A'song Nonoe Chiga Nengkuchot*, mountains of *Apiljangsa*, *A'song Tibotgiri* and settled in *Bindenggu Rongchingkol Takkru Malikkao*, the place which is in the vicinity of the *Balpakram Hill* (152). During their settlement in that place, they befriended and formed a deep relationship between gods and goddesses of the upper regions and human beings of the lower regions. The result of all these was that people were more demi-gods than men-proper and their stature grew to a gigantic proportion. Due to intermingling and acquired virtues and vices, some of the gods and goddesses died like ordinary mortals, while human beings attained eternal glory and immortality. They led a very happy, peaceful and live full of freedom and were ruled over by only the strongest men of them all. Among them, was a man named *Misi A-rakpa Saljong Gingmatpa*. He had a daughter named *Kabu Renche Norimbi Dikkimbi*. She grew up to be a beautiful and energetic woman and she belonged to *Rongbang* matrilineal clan. When she attained her womanhood, she was married to *Dumerong Ducherong A'ning Gring Wana Chining Gring wacha*. While she was carrying in her womb her first child *Goera*, her husband suddenly died of an emaciating illness with which he was attacked while clearing jungle for jhum cultivation at a place known as *Misini Jakrimra Saljongni Redokra* (153).

Goera is said to be born as an ordinary man with supernatural strength. Goera's conception itself was unnatural one. His mother carried him in her womb for seven years. It was said that his tooth had already developed before he was born. He exhibited extra ordinary strength during infancy itself. In *The Folktales of the Garos*, it was written that the mother went for a bath to the stream leaving him sleeping in the house but as soon as the mother's back was turned Goera was said to have gone to the bachelor's dormitory and beat the drums frenziedly (154-155). Even the Supreme Divine Mother, *Bisikkrom Bidatare* was believed to have foretold *Wana Wangga Dudu Chompa Aropa Bindopa* the patriarchal head of the tiger family, that the child will grow up to be the strongest of human being in the world. This *Wanna Wangga* became his enemy as he was jealous of his strength. But, Goera even as child did not fear *Wana Wangga* who tried to catch and eat him. In the end, Goera killed *Wanna Wangga* when he was about to kill *Marakma Makalma*, the man who is said to have eloped with *Wanna Wangga's* bethrotal.

Goera's extra ordinary strength could be seen when he played with other children. One day, some children did not want him to play with them as they knew he will win. It seemed that he was so angry that he threw the *gila* seeds into the jungle. It was then that those children told him that if he was intent on showing his strength he should kill *Wakmangganchi Aragondi*, the monster boar which was creating a nuisance for everyone. It was in his quest to fight the monster boar, he came across his uncle, a civet cat carrying his *mil-am* 'sword'. Goera wanted to hold it and the civet cat gave it to him. When Goera held up the sword examining it with wonder, the civet cat became scared and started to distance himself from Goera. Later, when Goera gave back the sword, he did not want it back and that is how, it is said that Goera got a sword which he displays in the sky in the form of lightning. Goera is said to have slain the monster boar with this sword. After this feat, he travelled in search of adventures. He rescued his one of his elder sister from *Sheh-elja Wachingja*, the patriarchal head of the dogs. He defeated *Buga Raja*, the patriarchal head of merman who kidnapped another elder sister but could not rescue her as she was confined to an impenetrable rock. He was also said to have slain the gargantuan ogress named *Budangma* for eating the villagers.

Goera showed extreme bouts of temper. When his sister jokingly lied that his expansive field yielded a poor harvest, he burnt the whole barn. The people were very angry at this. But, he did not take it to heart as he did not intentionally hurt his people. Later, he felt uncomfortable staying on the earth that he gathered all his relatives and announced he was leaving the earth to live with the celestial gods. It is said that Goera raised himself on a wisp of white cloud and instructed his people to perform sacrifices to the gods during birth,

death, accidents, illness and on encountering with wild beasts so that there will be peaceful relationship between man and god. He told them that he will return to earth in the form of lightening:

*Mikka tim ino do-de eok ino, Nore Chireni
ja-re ja-sokbaon, maikai mitapo,
aramni drango anga a-gilsak chigilboona
re-bagne. Unon anga bolona,
wa-ona, angni namnika gita maeba
majabaona chri salgne, bra watgne
. Angni mil-am riprapani teng-ako na-song
knagne. (Apasong Agana 128)*

Translation

By the time Nore Chire, the goddess of rain visits the earth and when rain clouds gather and peacocks cry, completely enshrouded in clouds and I will come to visit this world of yours. Then I will play pranks on trees or on whatsoever I shall be pleased to strike, by sending my arrows at them from my trusty bows. (*The Folktales of the Garos* 181)

By summing up all the characters of Goera, he was extraordinary in strength, intelligent and nature. When he was ascending to heaven, he said that he will be one with the Supreme Being, who dances eternally. Goera instructed his listeners on matters of health, strength, on husbandry, on the proper performance of sacrificial ceremonies in honour of the gods and goddesses, on observances to be carried out by men and women in cases of birth, marriage, death, accidents, illness and in encountering various kinds of wild beasts, and finally on the maintenance of a just, equitable and peaceful relationship between the gods and men and women.

According to him, men and gods require not much talk but action and one should be faithful to his heart and minds and act accordingly. Goera said, that man will worship him more when he manifests himself. After saying all these, he ascended into the ethereal heavens, taking with him his beloved *milam*, bow and arrows.

The A-chiks worship Goera as the Immortal and Invincible god of Thunder and Lightning, the most extraordinary power in all universes. He is also worshipped as the god of Health and Strength. The signs of Goera are flashes of his mighty *milam*, lighting during cloudy and stormy weather with loud rumbles of thunder. The destructive agent in a lighting flash is an arrow from Goera, it is the thunder-bolt stone known as *Goera Rongpra*, which can be found in A-chik lands till today.

Durama Imbama

Durama Imbama is believed by A-chiks as the 'Gamsengni Mite' or Goddess of Wealth. There were

three sisters namely 'Koasi Minduri', 'Aratcha Rongbare', 'Durama Imbama'. All the three sisters lived together in a place called 'Anang Dilkang Te-matchi Ponggro'. *Durama Imbama* had a dog 'Achakja Matijaja bandaja tongrak' which proved to be a menace as it virtually rendered it impossible to domesticate livestock because it killed piglets and chicken. So, *Koasi Minduri*, *Aratcha Rongbare*, connived with their neighbouring cultivator 'Abet Rengge' and chased away *Durama Imbama*.

Durama Imbama settled at *Rongdong Bra* near the bank of river *Simsang* and was very prosperous. She, being wealthy, also enjoyed influence and power that came along with her wealth. Even though his son 'Okbong Jada Wake Wanel' wasted her wealth unscrupulously and never contributed in any way and *Koasi Minduri Aratcha Rongbare* took for themselves from what *Durama Imbama* had, her prosperity never diminished. Since then, the A-chiks regarded *Durama Imbama* as the Goddess of wealth or 'Gamsengni Mite'. That is why the A-chiks, while invoking the spirits with offering of wild boars and deers invokes thus, "Dura cha-gipako Imbamangipako Koasi Minduri Aratcha Rongbare dokpakpabo chekpabo, dinpabo, patipabo, ra-rongpabo, silgijanama-grina" The loose translation of which is, 'Koasi Minduri Aratcha Rongbare take away from *Durama Imbama*, the one who is prosperous and wealthy and bless those who are less fortunate and orphaned(*Apasong Agana* 138,139).

Susime

Susime is represented by the moon. He is considered as the giver of riches and attributed to causes of blindness and lameness and also the one that cures it (*The Garos* 90). The spirit is the one that can bless or curse human, the one which can entice human to fall into temptation and commit grief to others. That is why the A-chiks refer to the spirit as 'Malamgipa do-kime, Ruragipa Susime' equating it to vermin or hen house. *Susime* has the power of curing lameness, blindness, deaf and dumbness and other diseases. A pig, a fowl, a duck or rice beer (*chu*) is offered and her name is invoked with different prayers and thanksgiving (*A-chik Golporang, Bak III* 19).

Misi Saljong

Misi Saljong is represented by the sun and is considered as the god of fertility. He is the spirit attributed with the protection of crops and is worshipped as no harvest without his favor would be reaped. The offering to *Misi Saljong* is made in the field by sacrificing a cock. The blood of the cock is sprinkled on the sacrificial altar and a little liquor is poured on the ground in front of it and worshipped. After the ritual the annual village festival of the year 'Wangala' in honour of *Misi Saljong* is celebrated with fun and gaiety. *Misi Saljong* is also referred to as 'Teng:sugipa-Tengtogipa, Salgira, Salgra and Rengra-Balsa (*A-chik Golporang, Bak III* 24 25).

Kalkame

Kalkame, the brother of *Goera*, is the spirit which holds in his hands the lives of men. He is the one entreated with offerings for keeping the human beings safe from all the dangers of the forest, wild animals like boars, tigers, elephants, bears, reptiles like poisonous snakes, poisonous insects like centipedes and also the one who protects from diseases like boils, scabies all other troubles. Therefore, a sacrificial stone is erected in his honor near the village and a sacrifice of a goat or fowl for *Kalkame* is made once in a year to drive away the evil spirits. The smearing of blood of the sacrificial animal on the stone is known as '*A:song Tat-a*' or '*A:song Roka*' and it is imperative to the *A'chiks* not to forget to perform this ritual once in every year (*A'chik Golporang, Bak III 26 27*).

Chorabudi

Chorabudi is a benign spirit and considered as servant of *Tatara Rabuga*. He is the protector of the crops and therefore offerings of the first fruit of the season like millet, corn, melons and other agricultural product is made to the spirit before using it for one's own consumption. He is also sacrificed for the ailments of the ears and for boils. When *Tatara Rabuga* is sacrificed to, offer of a pig must also to *Chorabudi* so as to entreat the spirit (*The Garos 89*).

Asima-Dingsima

Asima-Dingsima is the mother of *Susime*. She is referred to as '*Norekbak Norekdim*', '*Sona Kale-Kabu Renche*' and '*Mikrong Gitok- Ki:sang Gitok*'. A superstition prevails that it is very unlucky to pronounce her name, the idea being most apparently that *Susime* will not like it. She does not appear to be attributed with any role and therefore, she is not offered any sacrifice (*The Garos 90*).

Nawang:

Nawang is a monster or a demon believed by the *A'chiks* to devour the souls of men who are on their way to the *Garo* purgatory. The character of *Nawang* is very peculiar and is often present near the cradle and at the sick person's bed ready to devour him when he dies. Usually a machete or tools made of metal are kept above the head while sleeping as deterrence to the *Nawang*. The *A'chiks*, even while travelling, carries with them weapons like spears but it is said that the *Nawang* sometimes snatches away the spears and harm the people (*A'chik Golporang, Bak III 27 28*).

Abetpa Ranggapa

Abetpa Ranggapa is the care taker of the native land and the woods. He was given this charge by the mightiest god in *A'chik* pantheon '*Tatara Rabuga*'. So, the ritual of '*A'a O-pata ba Jumang Sia*' or clearing of a little patch of jungle and consulting the spirit for revelation through the medium of dreams about the prospect is done in his honour. The *A'chiks*

also invokes and consults the spirit before settling or adopting a new place as their village and if the dream is not favorable, then the place is abandoned and kept as sacred grooves. These kinds of place are referred to as '*A:song Raka*' or '*Ranggadam*' (*Maniani Bidik 2*).

Rokkime

Rokkime is the mother of crops and she is believed to dwell in the ocean along with a shoal of fish. A ritual of thanks giving is offered to '*Rokkimema*' and '*Misi Saljong*', after which, the harvest festival of the year '*Wangala*' is celebrated with fun in honour of '*Misi Saljong*' and '*Rokkime*' (*Maniani Bidik 4, 12*).

Gure Mite

Gure Mite is a benevolent spirit that the *A'chiks* believe as the one that gives wealth and riches. The *A'chiks* even today believe that the ones who worship *Gure Mite* are bestowed with wealth and prosperity. But if the spirit is displeased because of a single commission or omission and other mistakes in observing the ritual, their riches just fades away. The ritual of *Gure Rodilla* is observed on 16th and 17th day during the month April. This spirit is so strong that the chants and songs sung during *Gure Rodilla* cannot be sung anytime or anywhere other than the day of observation. The ritual of *Gure Rodilla* is observed by beating gongs and drums. Since this *mite* is from seven layers of the earth and of the sea beneath, the *mites* from the surface of the earth opposes and fights the spirit. Therefore, in order to defend the spirit from other opposing spirits, one does a war dance with a shield and sword. The shield used in the dance is made of rhino skin which cannot be cut or pierce through because of its thickness. The one who leads the horse during the dance is the high priest *Tuara Nangapa*. If the priest is not able to sing and narrate all the chants of the ritual, the horse does not move. Only when all the words of the chants are narrated or sung, the spirit unleashes its power to the priest. During the ritual, women burn incense and dance for the spirit. The procession of the rituals sometimes passes through other neighbouring villages as well. While passes through '*Kachari*' village if procession encounters another group singing and chanting for their god or village deity other than the *Gure Mite* the priest chants "*A'jong mite batamindakmalja, Rori mite banachilakmanja,*" invoking the power of the spirit and resulting in bursting of drums and gongs of other tribe. The priest leads the song and the followers sing the chorus. In order to proceed further, the priest breaks an egg by tossing it on the ground. If the egg is not good on breaking, it is considered as a bad omen and they do not proceed further. If they do not obey, it is believed to have a far reaching consequence. Only if the priest is spiritually very strong the procession can continue otherwise, their drums will burst and their gongs crash (*Dakokni Sul 208*).

Gana Mite

Among the spirits, *Gana Mite* is the most strongest and hard to please requiring lots of sacrifices. It is said that to please the spirit '*Gana Mite*', a man needs to sacrifice hens, goats and lots of pigs apart from buying '*kram*', '*lots of rang*', '*dani*' and '*mil·am*'. *Gana Mite* spirit is known to cause sickness only to a few lucky ones as because it is considered fortunate and blessed if one is caused sickness by this spirit. The one, who undergoes illnesses by this spirit, despite spending a lot for appeasement, does not become poor by any means because of all these expenses met.

Religion is a belief system in the existence of a supernatural ruling power, the creator and controller of the universe, the *A·chiks* always believed that there is someone who is powerful and controlled everything. Like other cultures, the *A·chiks* also believe in spirits representing different powers. Although the *A·chiks* believe in different spirits, they believe in one supreme god '*Tatara Rabuga*'. The lesser gods or spirits are believed to be malevolent. They offer sacrifices to the malevolent gods for fear of destruction of crops and diseases they can cause. They feel they have to please their gods or else they land in deep trouble. Therefore,

this belief system and culture of the *A·chiks* play an important role in their folklife.

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