



Dani Doka as a part of the Performing Art of the A·chiks(Garos)

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Abstract:

The study of the performing art of a particular community unfolds its beauty of music, dance and drama to the audience. The A·chiks 'Garos' one of the major tribes of Meghalaya and also found in Assam, Tripura, West Bengal and in the Mymensing district of Bangladesh are known for their performing arts. Their performing arts are related to *Wangala* festival, which is the major festivals of the Garos. Linguistically, the Garos belongs to the Bodo speech family, one of the sections of Tibeto Burman group of the Tibeto-Chinese family. Their rich cultural tradition and the folk wisdom are passed on through the performing arts such as *Doraa*, *Ajea*, *Dani Doka*, *Ohomai ring-a*, *Gogae ring-a*, *Gosae ring-a* and *Ku-rama sala*. In this article an attempt has been made to study the beauty and content of Dani Doka as part of the performing art of the A·chiks 'Garos'.

Key words: Garos, folk art, music, dance, wangala and dani doka.

Richard M. Dorson outlined four broad sectors of folklore and folklife as Oral Literature, Material Culture, Social folk custom and performing folk arts (Handoo, Jawaharlal *Folklore: An Introction*12,). Handoo writes that performance strictly means the conscious presentation of these arts – dance, drama, folk music, etc – by individuals or groups who carry these art forms from one generation to another (21).

The present paper focuses on the folksong “Dani doka” of the A·chik as a performing art. This song is sung especially during wangala festival ‘thanksgiving ceremony of the A·chiks’ and *A·song Den-a* ‘ritual performed for protection of land’. This song is performed by “individuals or groups with folk instruments, dance costumes”. This song is also “passed on by ear and performed by memory rather than written or printed musical score”. The songs are narrated about the beliefs in the origin of man, plants, natural phenomenon and laws of the community. The first part of *dani* singing is about the myth of Wangala and the origin of the taboo of *Asi-malja* and the strips formed on the snake. The song may be sung by a single person and the choral group singing the refrain.

Caroline R. Marak, in her book, *Studies on Garo and its Cognate Languages* (2018) has mentioned that it is a sacred poem, comparable to a hymn, narrating the origin of the rituals and ceremonies that make up the Wangala post-harvest festival. It is a myth recalling man’s origin, and the great creator mother, the ancestress of all living beings, hosting a great festival of all living objects in the subterranean region at her concepts of the A·chik indigenous religion and ethics.

Irish Watre Thomas in her book, *Music and Musical Instruments of the Garo Tribe of the North- East India*(2007)has mentioned that *Dani* is a traditional A·chik song sung by the elderly men, to the exclusion of women and young men. While singing the *Dani* one takes the lead in singing the verse, then the others join in responsively, saying ‘Hai anga dania’ at the end of each line. The singing begins inside *Nokma’s* house and then crowd moves on to the courtyard, where vigorous dancing and feasting begins, to last for at least three days. The song goes on like this:

Oh anga radaa

Oe anga dania

Bima pe-e nina

Skon’ taru rakkuja

Amako maneko

Ambiko pilteko

Aman brikujana

Chiaricha re-anga

Oh anga radaa

Oh anga dania

Translation:

Oh I'm doing the radaa

Yes I'm singing the dania

The fever should leave

My little mother, aunt, grandmother, my one and only

Your ageless mother

Has just gone to the riverside

Oh I'm doing radaa

I'm singing the dania (Irish Watre Thomas 2007)

Dani Doka is done in the Wangala festival during the incense burning ritual as mentioned earlier and during *A-song Den-a* 'ritual performed for protection of land'. *Dani* can be sung only during the incense burning ritual and not throughout the wangala festival. This is done in front of the nokma's house and the courtyard. During this time, incense is burnt and cooked rice is thrown all over the Nokma's house for god Misi Saljong and goddess Rokkime. An elderly man who knows how to sing dani puts on the *ba-ra marang* 'cloth soaked in blood' sings the dania. Three other men put their hands on each other's shoulder and says 'Ahoia hoia' after the singer chants some lines. After chanting and dancing in circles inside the house, one elderly male takes out the burning incense dancing. The person who sings the dani puts his hand on the shoulder of one of the three men while coming out of the house after the man carrying the incense. All the male and female form a queue on either side carrying gongs, drum and blowing the horn and come out of the house dancing. In the court yard, they dance around the *Tilta* or *Mrong* 'Y shaped stump'. After *Ajema roa*, they once again sing the dania and re-enter the house. Once again, they burn the incense and dance inside the house. Women pick up the rice grain from the small bamboo container and throw it behind their back representing the sowing of paddy in the field.

Dania is also sung during *A-song Den-a*. During this time they do not sing it inside the Nokma's house but perform it in *Nokpante*, 'bachelor's dormitory'. They strain rice beer and all the required work in the courtyard of the *Nokpante*. Dewal M. Sangma performed this *Dania* meant for *A-song den-a*:

Hai anga dania

Hai anga rajara

Samrong mitinona anga.....hai anga dania

Katmitine roaming.....hai anga rajara

Rong-ma ka-bakohahai anga dania

Katmitine roaming hai anga rajara

Hai anga dania, hai anga rajara

Wa-misi bo-dakdakohai anga dania

Katmitine roaminghai anga rajara

Hai anga dania, hai anga rajara

Ambare kongbangbango dongmitine roaming ..hai anga dania

Indakesamo .hai anga dania...hai anga rajara

Marak matgitchakrangba mangkimite robajok

Hai anga dania.....hai anga rajara
Sangma sangoradrangha samejole robajok
Hai anga daniahai anga rajara
Dikka ki-sangnaha ki-mansie donsojok
Hai anga daniahai anga rajara
Janchi okningona hai anga dania ...hai anga rajara
Wal-di kae rosojok hai anga dania... hai anga rajara

Translation:

Oh I'm doing the radaa
 Yes I'm singing the dania
 In a marshy grass ... *hai anga dania*
 I run and hide...*hai anga dania*
 At the heart of a rock...*hai anga dania*
 I run and hide...*hai anga dania*
 In a bamboo bush ...*hai anga dania*
 I run and hide...*hai anga dania*
 I hide myself in the hollow of Gooseberrie tree ...*ha ianga dania*
 Ho, such is this ...*hai anga dania*
 Oh I'm doing the radaa
 Yes I'm singing the dania
 Marak clan has arrived having done 'the deed'
 Sangma clan has come having left 'the body',
 The rice beer is ready for the return of the warriors,
 Janchi has been used to strain the rice beer,
 To mark the time of victory,
 Oh I'm doing the radaa
 Yes I'm singing the dania.

The above lines are sung during the *A-song Den-a*. The lines mean that they search their enemies from every nook and corner of the forest and fight them. Even if they fear their enemies and hide behind boulders or hollowed trunks of a tree, they search their enemies and behead them and bring the head home, shouting the warrior call. Before cremating the dead body, the warriors strain the rice beer and drink to the victory and after which the whole village participate in burning the dead body of the enemy.

In conclusion it may be stated that singing of *dani* is an art which only few people can perform and this performance is presented in front of the people. It has become a part of the performing art among the A-chiks 'Garos'. The art of performance such as dance and singing during Wangala festival have preserved the folk wisdom and tradition of the community. It not only provides a platform for the youth to learn the significance of the performing art during wangala festival but also it helps to preserve the richness of the tradition of the performing art itself. Though at present, it may be performed only as a part of an act for the younger generation to understand how it is performed but it gives a deep significance of the history, culture and folk life of the Garos.

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