



# The Importance of the Epic Hero in Katta Agana

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**Abstract:** Katta Agana is the Oral Epic of the A-chik tribe. Also known commonly as the Garos, the A-chiks are endowed with rich tradition and culture. Katta Agana is one such tradition of the A-chiks which is handed down through generations through word of mouth. This epic tradition relates the story of Dikki, the hero and his adventures. The paper sheds light on the importance of Dikki who is the hero of the Katta Agana and his heroic qualities as reflected in Katta Agana.

**Key Words:** Katta Agana, Dikki, Epic Hero, Culture.

## **Introduction:**

Before the birth of written literature, different cultural traditions, cultural materials, etc. all over the world were transmitted orally by word of mouth from one generation to another. This oral transmission is known as Oral Tradition. Oral tradition includes messages, memories and even life's lessons passed on from one generation to another through speech, chants, songs etc. that take the form of folktales, ballads, epic narrations, folk speech, folk songs, etc.

The Epic is one of the oldest forms of poetic expression. It is considered to be different from other literary genres because of its content, style and length. John Anthony Bowden Cuddon in his work *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* writes that an 'epic is a long narrative poem, on a grand scale, about the deeds of warriors and heroes. It is a polygonal, 'heroic' story incorporating myth, legend, folktale and history' (264). Epic is generally a long narrative poem on a great and serious subject and centres on a hero. The narrative usually follows the actions of the hero on which depends the fate of a tribe, nation, or the human race. Narrative of heroes in the form of Epic tradition have been passed on from generations and have survived from early cultures, continually evolving from oral tradition into what is today, a cohesive written form. The reason for the survival of the narrative of such heroes is because it is a source of good entertainment. Additionally, it also serves as a storehouse of knowledge, culture and traditions of the community from which it originates. The Epics reflects, if not the actual living figures, but the people, the community or society as they imagine themselves to be, with their codes of honour, beliefs, etc.

The epic hero is a fascinating archetype spanning man's entire history, from the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh to today's tales of the society and people. Each community or society has their own 'hero' who is highly respected and honoured. C.M Bowra in his work *Heroic Poetry* states that '*heroes are champions of man's ambition to pass beyond the oppressive limits of human frailty to a fuller and more vivid life, to win as far as possible a self-sufficient manhood, which refuses to admit that anything is too difficult for it, and is content even in failure, provided that it has made every effort of which it is capable*'. (4)

One such epic hero of the A-chik or Garo community is *Dikki*. Lores or stories of *Dikki*, a brave A-chik warrior has been narrated amongst the people of the community in the *Katta Agana*, which is the epic tradition of the a-chik or Garo community since time immemorial. The exact period of the origin of the epic tradition of the A-chiks cannot be ascertained and *Dewansingh Rongmuthu* in his work *the Epic Lore of the Garos* says that '*the tradition of Dikki's greatness is preserved in the Garoland in a very recognizable form. How long tradition among the A-chiks has persisted we cannot tell, for all knowledge of the date of the period in which he lived has disappeared*'. However the narration of the feats and deeds of *Dikki*, the great warrior is still prevalent among the A-chik community till today.

An Epic Hero has certain characteristics which differentiates him from an ordinary person. He is a man of superior quality which makes him different from the ordinary. *Dikki* is considered by the A-chiks to be a hero representing the A-chik culture, their beliefs and their way of living. He is narrated in the *Katta Agana* as a warrior of great insight into all the happenings around him. *Dewansing Rongmuthu* in the *Epic Lore of the Garos* says that '*Dikki is the wisest of the wise*'. He is a hero who works for the good of his people. He possesses great knowledge and wisdom. He is 'always portrayed as the A-chik beau, ideal of a warrior-statesman, saint and philosopher' (Rongmuthu76). In *James Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics Volume 6*, A.C. Haddon states, '*the term 'hero' is usually applied to one who stands out from among the ordinary mortals by his superior quality or qualities, conspicuous bravery or sustained power of endurance being the distinguishing features. But there is a large class of persons in oral tradition and literature who stand out from their fellows by reason of their inventiveness, or moral or intellectual qualities, by the introduction of new cults, and, above all, by what they have done to improve the various conditions of human existence. These are usually spoken as 'culture-heroes'. Amongst the renowned dead, there are all gradations in oral tradition-from the men who are recognized as mere mortals to those of such transcendent powers that they may be classed as demi-gods or godlings*'(633).

Because of his awareness, knowledge and wisdom, it is believed by the A·chiks that Dikki is gifted with extra ordinary powers by the Gods and Goddesses. It is believed that he is always in communion with deities or 'Mite' which enables him to help his fellow men. Because of his extra ordinary powers Dikki is believed to be a demi-god by the A·chiks and ordinary laws of nature are sometimes suspended for him. The following lines in the Epic Lore of the Garos describes describes Dikki's prowess:

*Ada Mithdei Dikkina,  
Rurimena Thobanna,  
A·ninga·sak jojrang,  
Rangga raksilga jasengseng;  
Khatchio ripeng dake,  
Mithdeiko besa mong·e,  
Silga ranggrak pa'angding,  
A·ningchi ningpongding  
Soka Ada Rurime,  
Oe, Mithdei Duramong. (Rongmuthu 106)*

Translation:

To The God-like Dikki,  
Yea, to the Hero Spiritual,  
Wide clear the spaces terrestrial,  
Regions subterranean, and all of celestial,  
In friendship he with the spirits,  
And in close alliance with the gods;  
Soars he up so joyously heavenward,  
Beneath the earth and waters steers he forward;  
So reaches he everywhere, this Spiritual Elder Brother,  
Yea, the God-like Paramount One.(Rongmuthu 106)

A hero is brave man who is always willing to do things which are difficult, dangerous and painful. A hero has faith in himself to do something daring when ordinary men dare not. In other words, a hero has great courage and firm determination to cope with any situation which makes him desired and respected by the people around him. A hero recognizes courage as the first necessity of life. His indomitable courage pushes him to conquer any difficult situation and take it to his advantage and prove his worth. He is a great warrior. C. M. Bowra in his work *Heroic Poetry* states that 'a hero differs from other men by his peculiar force and energy. Just as the Greeks define him as one who has a special dunamis or power, so in all countries he has an abundant, overflowing, assertive force, which expresses itself in action, and enables

him to do what is beyond ordinary mortals' (97). Dikki's strength takes the action of the narrative forward in KattaAgana. His assertive force results from his strength, courage and bravery and is described in the following lines of DikiniGroDinga when Wal-di (Dikki's foe) tries to abduct Giting (Dikki's lover)

*Dikki Wal-di sikgrikjok*  
*A-dram gijel pilange,*  
*Kinte dimu changpile,*  
*Wa-chong ginde changpile,*  
*Balroroni balao*  
*Songdu an-chengsatana batjok,*  
*Salgi wal-ang napiljok,*  
*A-bangguri mopiljok,*  
*Gao-oo-gao-*  
*Wal-ku aram changpiljok,*  
*Silga charanggipiljok. (Marak7)*

Translation:

Dikki and Wal-di wrestled,  
 And the cliffs crumbled down,  
 The ground became dust-filled,  
 And the bamboos pulverised,  
 It was greater than the sandstorm in the River Songdu  
 during the windy season,  
 The sky became red,  
 And the earth trembled,  
 Gao-oo-gao-  
 Clouds of smoke rose,  
 And the sky was overshadowed.

His strength can be also be recognised when he cuts down five hundred trees and brings them to the courtyard of Katchi's mothers house as narrated in Dikki I by LlwellynMarak:

*Dikki ja-sirerea,*  
*Bola ritchabongako,*  
*Kasrope ra-bae,*  
*Sara pattalo doneaha. (Dikki-I:30)*

Translation:

The mighty Dikki,  
Tied together and carried,  
Five hundred trees,  
And brought it to the courtyard.

C. M. Bowra further states in his work *Heroic Poetry* that ‘the root of heroic nature is the hero’s unquestioning, unfaltering desire to prove his worth to the utmost limits of his capacity’ (103).

A hero is noble and virtuous. He performs his feats and deeds because he knows that it should be done for the good of his fellow men. The fame and rewards that he receives are not the reason for completing his quests. Rongmuthu praises Dikki and says that he is ‘an exceedingly fine figure of a man. He radiates fine thoughts and cheerful courage and preaches humanity and kindness and faith in his fellow-men. He views things from a broad human standpoint, as a man of super-heart and super-head. One cannot help but appreciate in him the wonderful extent of his knowledge, his power of adaptability to new light, his sympathy of soul and kindness of heart.’

One of the aspects of heroes is that they are favoured by Gods. They are semi-divine beings or demi-gods and excel other ordinary men in their human stature. However, like other human beings, they are subject to mortality and cannot live forever. Dikki is admired by the A·chiks. He is praised for his qualities. He is larger than life, who embodies the highest ideals of his culture. He is described in Katta Agana as a reflection of the Gods. It is believed that he is an embodiment of the Gods and a·chiks consider him a demi-god. The following lines of the *KattaAgana* describe Dikki’s god-like qualities:

*Mikkang Salgra,*  
*Bimang Moepa;*  
*Ku-rang Goera*(Rongmuthu 101)

Translation:

His face is that of Salgra, the Sun-God;  
His body is that of Moepa; the resplendent Sun;  
And his voice is that of Goera, the God of Thunder and Lightning.  
(Rongmuthu 101)

A hero is skilled both with and without weapons and Dikki and his brothers were skilled in warfare and also in domestic works. In the opening lines of Dikki-II, Dikki and his brother Bandi build a Nokpante or bachelor's dormitory and also carve out a drum, flute, bugle, etc. which are important parts of Achik material culture.

*Dikki, Bandi adasa  
Nokpantena, do-kakuna  
Do-sateke, sol-erepe,  
Mikkango mande dake,  
Sambengo bimang sol-e,  
Jang-ki den-a ritichasa done,  
Gambareko damana pue,  
Matbigilko baratna rate,  
Matma grongko singgana ra-e,  
Wa-tesako bangsina den-e,  
Dama bangsi sike,  
Dikki adasa ma-drangde,  
An-sengtokenga bisongde! (1)*

Translation:

Dikki and Bandi, the two brothers,  
For the nokpante and the do-kaku,  
Carved and shaped da-sateka,  
A human form in the front,  
On the side hewed a figure,  
And leaned a ladder with a hundred rungs,  
From the Gambare hollowed out a drum,  
From a hide made a thong,  
From the horn made a bugle,  
Slashed a wa-tesa for a flute,  
Playing the drum and the flute  
Dikki and his brothers  
Are enjoying away!

**Conclusion:**

A hero lives on even after his death. In other words he achieves immortality and he is remembered by those who live on after him. A hero is a man who represents a whole culture and Dikki is one such hero. Dikki is the cultural hero of the a-chik community. Dikki is a heroic figure who is still revered by the a-chik people. His adventures and the mighty deed are still narrated till today. The a-chik people are able to identify themselves with him because they believe that he is their great forefather, an example of bravery, strength, courage and virtue for the younger generation. His lores are a motivation to boost their moral values and also educate them to be better people.

**Notes:**

Bangsi- flute

Dama- A-chik traditional drum

Gambare- Specie of tree

Goera- According to belief, Goera id the God of thunder and lightening

Mithdei/Mite- Deity/God

Nokpante- Bachelor's Dormitory

Salgra- According to belief, Salgra is the Sun-God

Songdu- A-chik name for the river Brahmaputra

Wa:tesa- Specie of Bamboo

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