

## Miscellaneous Garo Terms

### Akhim

*Akhim* is a customary rule amongst the Garos concerning re-marriage within the clan. Dealing with *khim* (a variant of *akhim*) Baldwin explains it as "a responsibility or obligation automatically devolving upon the respective *manoks* (male relations of a man on the mother's side) of any contracted marriage". Apparently, there is no time limit. Failure to fulfil *khim* means a fine of Rs. 60/- and the returning of all property of the mother-in-law or near relatives.

Under Garo customary law, marriage establishes an ever-lasting tie between the *maharis* of the bride and the bridegroom. So, when one spouse dies, it becomes the duty of that *mahari* to provide the surviving spouse with a substitute partner and the surviving spouse is obliged to accept the substitute partner so provided to him or her. This practice is known as *akhim*. The relatives of the deceased have a right to prevent the surviving spouse from re-marrying out of the clan. The surviving spouse may, however, be released from the *akhim* bond in certain cases, for instance, when the relatives of the deceased are unable to find a substitute within a reasonable time; when the relatives of the deceased are dissatisfied with the conduct of the surviving spouse; or when the death of the spouse is due to some unnatural cause. If the widow or widower re-marries into another clan against the will of the clan of the deceased, it amounts to breach of *akhim* and entails a fine of Rs. 60/-. A widower released from the *akhim* and re-marrying outside the *mahari* is deprived of his wife's properties.

### Akhing land

*Akhing*, as known to Garos, is the agricultural land *i.e.*, *jhum* land, owned by a village community. According to the Garo Hills District (Awil

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1. C.D. Baldwin, *Garo Law* (1933).

Fees) Act 1960, *akhing* means any land held by a clan or *machong* under the custody of the head of the clan or *machong* called *nokma* recognised as such by the District Council, and any land held collectively by a particular community of a village or group of villages under the custody of the recognised head of the said community called *nokma*. Normally each clan or *mahari* has an *akhing*, but sometimes more than one clan may also jointly own *akhings*. Prior to the creation of the District Councils, the administration of these lands was in the hands of the Deputy Commissioner, who kept all records pertaining to the *akhings*. Now, however, the administration has been transferred to the District Councils.

*Akhing* land is also subject to the ordinary laws of inheritance through the system of *nokna* and *nokrom*, who are recognised as *nokmas* by the Government. When they succeed, their names are entered in the record of the District Council.

### **Chatchi**

*Chatchi* denotes female relatives of a man's mother.

### **Chras**

*Chras* are the male descendants of the mother's clan amongst the Garos. They perform a number of functions including a few connected with distribution of property.

### **Dai**

*Dai* is compensation or penalty ordered to be paid by a party at fault, usually in matrimonial matters.

### **Gro**

*Gro* means a fine. Refusal to give *gro* means that no hospitality will be accepted at the hands of those who refuse.<sup>3</sup>

### **Machong**

*Machong* means a clan.

### **Manok**

*Manok* are the male relations of a man's mother.<sup>4</sup>

### **Nokchik**

*Nokchik* means the female descendants of the mother's clan and their husbands.<sup>5</sup>

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2. Section 2(1), Garo Hills District (Awil Fees) Act, 1960 (1 of 1960).

3. *Supra* note 1.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

**Nokma**(a) *Meaning*

The word *nokma* generally means a wealthy man or headman of the village or group of villages amongst the Garos. In the strict sense, it means one who has a land or *akhing* registered with the Government. The term has been defined by the Garo Hills Autonomous District (Social Customs and Usages) Validating Act<sup>6</sup> as "the head of a clan or machong who holds any land as a custodian on behalf of clan or machong".

This land, in fact, belongs to the wife. The husband becomes *nokma* by virtue of his marriage with her.

(b) *Duties*

The *nokma* distributes the *akhing* land for *jhumming* (cultivation) amongst the families living in the village under him. Some times outsiders are also allowed to cultivate on this land, but they have to pay a token rent or tax of about Re. 1/- known as *awil*.

Besides his duty of distribution of land, the *nokma* is also responsible for the peace and good administration, submission of reports on epidemics, on births and deaths or any unusual occurrences in his *akhing*. He regulates *jhum* cultivation of the village. His home and family constitute the pith of the clan and a number of social and religious festivals are initiated at his house. Besides, under customary law, he is endowed with a number of privileges. He performs the *ganna* ceremony. (This is performed by very rich *nokmas* as it entails heavy expenditure). He wears elbow rings which are emblems of his high position. There is a dance performance led by a priest known as *kamal*, followed by *nokma* and his wife and then by privileged guests, one behind the other. There is feasting also.

(c) *Privileges*

A *nokma* alone is entitled to possess a *kram*. A *kram* is a drum made of cow-hide and it is believed to be endowed with supernatural powers. Special sacrifices are performed before making it and it can be used only on solemn occasions. Under custom, a *nokma* may possess it permanently. No one else can permanently possess a *kram* except with the consent of the *nokma* of *akhing* in which he lives. If any one does, it would be a usurpation and the *nokma* could demand its withdrawal and *dai* (compensation) too.<sup>7</sup>

Besides, the *nokma* has the privilege of sanctioning the performance of *asongtata* sacrifice. Certain plot of land is kept apart at the outskirts of every big village of the tribe whereon sacrificial stones are erected

6. Section 4(8), Garo Hills Autonomous District (Social Customs and Usages) Validating Act, 1958 (The Garo Hills Act No. 1 of 1959).

7. Jangsan Sangma, *Principles of Garo Law* 28-29 (1973).

known as *asong*. This place is held very sacred and none is allowed to cut or remove a tree or stone or anything from that place. A sacrifice is made to *asong* to drive off dangers to the village community from sickness, animals or other calamities. This sacrifice is known as *asongtata*. The sacrifice is performed by the priest, but the sanction of the *nokma* has to be obtained for this.

(d) *Village nokma*

As distinct from the *akhing nokmas*, there is another set of *nokmas* called village *nokmas*. They are appointed by the *laskars* or *mouzadars* and are required to perform certain social administrative and judicial functions. Unlike the *akhing nokmas*, they possess no land, but are generally well-to-do men in their own village.

**Nokna**

*Nokna* is the heiress daughter of the family. Generally she is the youngest daughter, but in certain cases a daughter other than the youngest may be appointed as the *nokna* by the parents in consultation with other members of the clan.

**Nokrom**

*Nokrom* is the son-in-law who marries the heiress daughter (*nokna*). He is generally the nearest nephew of the father of the girl. If any other boy is to be made a *nokrom* in the absence of the nearest nephew or under certain other circumstances, the consent of the relatives has to be taken and after that the boy concerned will be accepted and recognised as the *nokrom*. Under Garo customary law the *nokrom* is under a duty to support the family of his wife, especially the mother-in-law and the father-in-law. According to custom, after the death of the father-in-law, the *nokrom* has to marry the widowed mother-in-law. This custom is, however, now dying out, though the duty to support and maintain her still continues. In case he refuses to do that, he may be disinherited.