

## Observational Performance Review of Wangala, A Ritual-based Festival of Contemporary Garo Society

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### **Keywords:**

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**Abstract:** Due to the diverse geographical location, different ethnic groups live in different parts of Bangladesh. They have different ritual based performances. Garo community is a rich ethnic group. The main festival of the Garo people, One Gala, which is the religious festival of their original family(Sangsarek) tradition, has been traditionally celebrated for thousands of years. The festival has undergone drastic changes after the modern society became reality and converted to religion. An exceptional style of ritual can be observed in the customs and rituals. An attempt has been made to highlight the Wangala festival in the light of the contemporary perspective and reality observation style. Basically, the framework of this article has been analyzed in the form of field survey, visit to the residence of the Garo nation and intensive cultural interaction. This research paper has been created to bring out the rich historical myth of Garo Dakbewal through close time research in narrative theory and data construction. Observational methods and limited data have reduced the scope of the research paper but in the main extract it is a structured Wangala through a continuous arrangement of original and authentic data. The overall picture of contemporary contours has been mapped from the beginning.

### **Introduction**

All over the world, many festivals have been developed to support ritual healing and religious reform. All these reforms of the East and the West are largely similar in style and appearance. Ritualistic rituals have been assimilated by humans as significant adjuncts in the life cycle. In order to find harmony of different tastes in modern life, people have surrendered themselves to nature and the gods and goddesses associated with nature. In contact with the worldly deities, people have developed civilizations as well as festival-centric performances. It has glorified the practice of life-based philosophy through faith, reform and observance. According to Garo myth (Misi Saljong is the symbol of the sun god. He bestows the wealth of mankind on the earth. He makes the earth green with crops. At his command the rain falls. After the harvest of the jum field, the best harvest is offered to the Salang deity. It is forbidden to eat or enjoy anything without worshipping him.<sup>1</sup> The puja or answer dedicated to Missi Saljong deity is called Wangala. The Wangala festival is a thousand-year tradition of Garo society and culture. Wangala is celebrated as a major religious festival of the Garos. Wana means leaf, gala means to pour or fall, i.e. it means standing up or offering, gala means heat. We can also say An Aa, Chin'a and Gala together as Wangala. That is to say, the leaves can be filled with offerings and objects and drink liquor.<sup>2</sup>

### Research Objectives

The main objective of extensive research in a vast environment is to explore and present the ancient traditions of a specific geographical region, encompassing the earliest expressions of environmental art and contemporary indigenous rituals among the emerging generation. Within this region, the indigenous Garo community's culture, intricately linked to their religious beliefs and perpetuated through tangible expressions of auspicious prayers, is contemporarily discussed in the context of social dynamics and the continuous transformation of Garo traditions. By directing attention to the fracture in the resilient stance of the Garos, the research relies on information-based indicators. Through observational research on the level of the terrain and exploration of data, the study aims to bring together environmental art and the life-oriented perspective of presentation in front of the general public. This research serves as a conduit for the convergence of environmental art and the life-oriented perspective of presentation in front of the general public.

### Research Methodology

This research employs an ethnographic approach to observe and analyze the performances of the Wangala festival in contemporary Garo society. Purposive sampling is used to select diverse participants actively involved in the festival. Data collection involves participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and audio-visual documentation. Thematic analysis and grounded theory will be applied for data analysis. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant confidentiality. Triangulation will validate findings, and reflexivity guides the researcher's awareness of potential biases. The research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the festival's cultural significance.

### Literature Review

There are various folklores about the origin of this festival of the Garos. Similarly, I am presenting two folklores, Garos cultivated rice in ancient times. Because the thing called rice did not exist among them. So, they stay away from cultivation, they did not know what rice is. Wild potato and fruit collection was their only means of survival. A man of this world, 'Ani A. Filfa Chini Galafa', with 'Miss A. Filfa Saljong Galaf' as a sign of identity and friendship. Filfa Saljong Galafa gave his friend the rice seed and taught him how to sow, care and grow it, saying, "Angni a.nti reani a.kong do.ani nokona sokbapilijoko, ang.a Nangna chri onatgne, gron watatgne. Mima gilrimito jabilsu kasseto, jakari namsango, angkosa changchangnabe, angkosa ringchangnabe, biming mingatpabo, mande ra.atpabo." That is, at the end of my journey, I will return to my abode and send you rice seeds. When your rice ripens to a golden color, your good day will come, do not forget Me, do not eat, do not drink, but remember Me, I will respect Ani Afifa Chini Galafa as per his friend's instructions in joy of heart as he promised 'Mrs Afifa Saljong Galafa' expressed his gratitude turumalo, changsimalo, churugale cha.sat so.e mande rae biming de.e' i.e. incense at the base of the pillar in the middle of the main house. -By offering incense and liquor to him and paying respect and gratitude to him and remembering him by making offerings on Mongre Abri' or Mongre Hill. This is the first 'Wangala' in the history of the Garos. This is how 'Wangala' has been celebrated in the Mandi or Garo society.<sup>3</sup>

This is the Another notable, most popular and widely accepted story among the Garos is that the ancestors of the Garos used to live off forest fruits, cheng, anfang or bagichak etc. They did not know what 'rice' looked like. One day Anku Khani got very tired while collecting fruits and roots in the Alifa forest. Ash Bashi Afifa was resting under a large 'danga tree' spread out a soft web of trees, exhausted. At that time sweet Missing Saljong who is known

as Suryadev or 'Salagna' appeared to Afifa and said, who are you? Don't be afraid of what you are doing here. I am "Missy Saljong-sama". I am the one who gives you the fruits of the forest." Ash said in fear, "I am Afifa. I am collecting the fruits and roots of the forest." Middi Missi Salz asked again, "Have you eaten rice?" Anju replied, "I don't understand anything. Sweet Missy Salz saw the pitiful condition of the grapes. He doesn't even have a container or basket to keep the fruits of the forest. Acchu is carrying fruits and roots on a bamboo stick. Middi Missy Salza is here again I am Alif. Cullen, "If eating rice satisfies my hunger, gives me strength, then of course I will eat rice." Middi Missi Saljong said, "The rice will be used for all purposes from you and your descendants till death, even after such death. This rice is made by removing the rice from the grain and boiling it. This rice grain can be stored for the whole time." Sweet Missy Saljong and Anju asked Afifa, "Are you willing to do the hard work required to grow this tree?" She replied, "I am willing to work hard if you learn to grow it." Ani to Amilfa. He gave Ash a Madi Kayan (Kula) and a thunderbolt and instructed, "You shall cut down the mountain trees, dry them, burn them clean, and sow the seeds of paddy and other fruits and vegetables at the foot of the hill. It is full of various kinds of rice seeds, fruits, and vegetables." Shatakei Thak Jonggi says. Sweet Missy Mama added, "Here first 'Wangala' in the history of the Garos. This is how 'Wangala' is celebrated in Mandi or Garo society.

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There are variants of the ritual based festival, the Garos celebrate Wangala in four ways. This festival is celebrated according to time and ability. The details of Wangala are given below:

### **Wankhel-Thappa**

Wankhel-Thappa is an abbreviation of Wangala. Wankhel-thappa ceremony is usually performed in the month of Kartik. The Garos believe that if any produce is consumed

without offering it to the creator, it will become sour. On the other hand, if there is not enough preparation or ability to perform the Wangala ceremony, then doing the Wangala to observe the rules is Wankhel-thappa.<sup>5(A)</sup>

### **Wan-Jiri-A**

The Wangala ceremony of the Garos is also held on a smaller scale to appease the crop deity Missi Saljong in various ways and to convey thank. The One-Jiri-A ceremony begins at Song Nakma's house. The characteristics of Wan-jiri-a are that this event is celebrated only for one day. Everyone in the village participates in this event. Three days and three nights one-jiri-a has to be done.<sup>5(B)</sup>

### **Wankha do-a**

Wankha do-a is usually celebrated with more pomp than Wan-jiri-a celebrations. House-to-house liquor is prepared for the occasion. On the day of the event, Song Nakma started with a gala ceremony. The pig is killed and the meat is cooked and served to everyone. Drinking 'Chu' from house to house. All houses in the village are marked with handprints made of rice powder.<sup>5(C)</sup>

### **Wan Marang-a**

When there are frequent wrongdoings in the village, the people of the village feel that their wrongdoing can lead to greater harm. According to Garo custom, a wangala is then performed with great fanfare, called wan marang-a. Cows and pigs are killed in this Wangala for the god Saljong. Because he is the master of all grains. Wan Marang-a celebration is very expensive. Not everyone can do this event. This festival is celebrated occasionally.<sup>5(D)</sup>

Wangala festival is celebrated in three phases. Namely:

**1. Ru-gala:**

'Rugala' begins as the first episode of the Wangala festival. On the morning of Wangala day, all the young men go to their respective mothers' houses and finish their work. Then gathered at Narufasthi and went to Nakma's house with Khamal playing musical instruments. Later, with Khamal's permission, the youth leader asked Nakma in front of the gathered crowd, "We have come to your house today with Khamal to start the "Wangala Festival". We seek your permission in this regard." Nakma answers with a resounding 'yes' and brings out all the things for organizing the wangala. Pamal chants the mantra and forgets the 'chu-bichi' with the help of a 'fong' from a wine pot and goes to the biminder (worship altar). 'Khimida' and ' The place is sanctified by sprinkling chu-bichi around the checkrek.<sup>6</sup>

**2. Jal Anna:**

The Garo community offers Jal anna to Missi Saljong on the second day of Wangala. In the Jal Anna ceremony Sasat So-a or incense burning ceremony is performed for the deity. During the Sasat So-a or incense burning, the Kamal or priest recites mantras seeking the blessings of the deity in front of everyone. Khamal prophesied to the deity how the life span of the human race would go in the coming year. At this time, the khamal or priest gives chumari by kissing the incense pot. It should be noted here that if the fire catches fire when incense or Sasa is lit, then it is assumed that this year will not be good. A great danger lies ahead. Incense fire prophesies it. Again if the fire does not burn while burning the incense and the thoa is released then it is assumed that the next year will be very good.

Good work will be done among all in the village. All the assembled then cheered with gratitude. In this way the khamal or priest counts the year in the jal anna ceremony of Wangala.<sup>7</sup>

**3. Bisiriwatta:**

The Bisiriwatta ceremony is an important part of Wangala. The Garos bid farewell to the Misi Saljong deity by observing the day on the third day of the Wangala Parban. All the assembled people thanked him for all his work. This episode can be called a farewell episode. A day of praise and thanksgiving to the Gods who give life and give crops in the coming year. Besides, the deity is invited for the coming year with deep interest. Because in the presence of God only wangala will be worthwhile.<sup>8</sup>

**Limitation of the study**

Like every research work, there are certain limitations in the discussed research as well. Notably, in the larger Mymensingh region, about 95% of the Garo community has converted to Christianity. This conversion has led them to adopt Christian customs, values, and rituals, diverging from their traditional practices rooted in ancestral beliefs. Despite a lack of sufficient reference books and previous notable research on the subject, efforts have been made to communicate with the Garo community in remote mountainous areas. Economic instability may be a reason why the organization of the Wanagala festival is not adequately highlighted. There is a clear distinction between urban and rural perspectives on Wanagala, occasionally causing divergence in the research trajectory. Additionally, certain Christian practices, like the traditional Christian family structure, have entered Wanagala, replacing indigenous Garo customs. In some places, Wanagala has transformed into a Christian ritual named "Christ Raja's part," with detailed information available on this shift. Despite overlooking multifaceted challenges, the researcher, with consistent collaboration from key figures such as main males, researchers, artists, weavers, or priests, has strived to provide a comprehensive interpretation and analysis in this entire research.

**Conclusion**

Although Wangala is one of the most special meritorious festivals of the Garo community, the religious, social and philosophical significance of the festival in human society is widely integrated. The unsurpassed grandeur of the performance or performance is noticeable, thereby giving rise to the parallel significance of the performance festival Wangala in human society in terms of style and morphological organization. People have tried to find their connection with the mundane gods by offering offerings to the deity or worshiped Lord. All these rituals have been performed by people in the daily activities of their own creation, especially at a certain time during the year. Wangala has been humbly celebrated from ancient period, which has informed today's global agrarian civilization of the companionship of a mundane deity.

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