



# Role of *A-king Nokma* as documented in Garo Literature

**Sengsime A Sangma**

Assistant Professor  
Department of Garo  
PASF-Abong Noga College, New Tura

**Abstract:** This paper bring to light the various roles of *A-king Nokma* in different cases in Garo Society as documented in Garo literature. The Nokma is the earliest political figure in Garo society. A nokma is the chief of a certain territory called *a-king* occupied by a certain clan. All the people living under the jurisdiction of his territory depend on him. Before the British annexation and rule of Garo Hills, the Nokmas were the only authorities to take responsibilities of the whole villagers regarding their safety and livelihood. The Nokma was the sole authority to settle disputes among the villagers and maintain peace and harmony. This paper aims at highlighting the roles of *A-king Nokma* and his way of resolving numerous problems faced by the Garo people.

**Keywords:** *A-king nokma, Gamni nokma, Gana nokma, Kamal nokma, Nagra, Kram, Dai.*

**Introduction:** The Nokma or the Territorial Chief is an important person in the socio-political life of the Garos. Nokmaship is the earliest political system in the Garo society. The entire people under his jurisdiction depend on the Nokma, because he is the chief of the territory where they live. According to Milton S. Sangma there are four kinds of Nokmas among the Garos as mentioned in his book, *History and Culture of the Garos* (1982, 61):

A-king Nokma  
Gamni Nokma  
Gana Nokma  
Kamal Nokma

**A-king Nokma** is the head of all the nokmas. A-king Nokma means the head of the whole territory occupied by a certain clan. It is the duty of the A-king Nokma to look after the welfare of the inhabitants of the clan's territory or their A-king land. He distributes the land for cultivation and settlement. It is the duty of the A-king Nokma to lead in observing all the religious ceremonies. C Changsa in the book, *Power to People in Meghalaya* (1998) states that "the A-king nokma is the most powerful nokma among all the nokmas since he control the village land"(29). He holds the status of keeping the sacred drum called *Kram* in the house. Robbins Burling, in his survey to Rengsanggre village, also observed that a special drum or *Kram*, which is used during Wangala ceremony can be kept permanently only in the Nokma's house. Rengsanggre (1997).

**Gamni Nokma** is the wealthiest among all the nokmas. He has no political power nor any authority, but gain respect for his wealth in the society.

**Gana Nokma**, on the other hand, is the richest nokma who wear a *Jaksil* or brass bangles around his elbow as a mark of richest man as mentioned by Julius L.R.Marak in his book *Garo Customary Law and Practices* (60). He states that *Jaksil Gana* ceremony is performed to display his wealth to the people and to all his relatives, showing capacity thus gaining much respect in the society.

**Kamal Nokma** is a village priest, who performs all the rituals and sacrifices during different religious ceremonies. Though he devoid of the powers hold by the A-king Nokma, yet he takes the charge in conducting all the rites and ritual, and therefore, as a mark of respect he also holds a title of nokma and is recognized as one of the important persons in the Garo society.

A-king Nokma, wielding the most powerful authority over the villagers, looks after the needs of village people. Not only does he participate by performing the rituals in important festivals and ceremonies, but also the final authority to preside in the council to solve any dispute as can be seen in Garo literature.

Lindrid D. Shira, in his drama *Skul Master* (2017) tries to show the two different characters and qualities of the school teachers of Marakkapara village. It is a small village where the villagers are illiterate. Rang seng, the school master, serving as a primary schoolteacher helps the villagers as much as he can. He teaches in the primary level for a meagre salary and opens a night school for old people, and encouraged them to go to school and learn how to read and write. Before Rang seng came to Marakkapara village, the previous teacher was a womanizer, alcoholic and gambler. He gathers all the young boys, drink together and gambled with them, but never goes to school. These were the reasons as to why the villagers do not allow their wards to go to school. They try hard to cast him out from the village after failing which they decide to burn down the School building, but the Nokma prevented it (51). It is clearly seen how the Nokma becomes an important figure in the contribution in the fields of education.

*Biko katatna man-jaen songgimik melae rikgale galsrangna chanchipilahchim. Indiba ja-manode bini rodilronggipa randi me-chikkon.....Bia katangjok, nambejok. Bini a-selan songni manderang ski man-gipa manderangkode nidiktokaijokchim aro lekka pora ingipakon songo ra-napna on-jajokchim. Skul nokkon so-chipe galtokna am-ahachimba, Nokmani krengani giminsa donpilaiaha* (51).

Bluwin Ch. Sangma, in his book *Dugalgrene Me-chik*(2011) portrays about the olden days when measles, air borne diseases spread all over the village of Dugalgre. Sengban, the protagonist tries to help the village people by giving ‘TIKKA’ vaccination to prevent them from getting the disease. He goes around the entire village not only to give vaccination but also preached the gospel and tries to convert them into Christianity. Through his teaching many begin to believe in God and ready to become Christians. But one of the elders (senior citizen of village) Renggin kamal was not happy. He feels that if people become Christians, they will not preserve the culture and tradition to the next generation and the consequent disappearance of Garo culture. One night, some of the villagers hold a meeting and decided to behead Sengban for proclaiming the good news, but Kalnang Nokma defends and saves him (31). Had it not been for Kalnang Nokma, the villagers would have chopped off Sengban’s head for spreading the gospel. Here the Nokma is seen as an important arbitrator in such a situation.

Keneth M Momin, in his book *A-chik Composition* (2007) writes how the village people obey the Nokma. When the Nokma once beats the drum *Nagra*, then all the villagers gathers to his house (51). It is seen that the Nokma has power over them to make them present in his courtyard. Awensing Rongmuthu in his book *Wangalani Bimik* (2014) talks about a special drum *Nagra* is kept in the corner of Nokachik. If anyone dares to touch it, he is to be fined with one vessel of dikka (44), because *Nagra* is a drum which is used exclusively to summon the people for the meeting.

It is also believed that if a Nokma dies, his body is cremated with a *bolnokma* or banyan tree which otherwise known as *Giting bol*. It is also called “the tree of wealth”. It is believed that a Garo progenitor received a ‘rice grain’ from this very particular tree. D.S.Rongmuthu in his book *Apasong Agana*(2010), mentions about the Garo myth where it says that *Misi Saljong* the provider, blessed rice grains to man. Since then, *Giting bol* is considered to be very important and useful tree. Hence it used to cremate the bodies of Nokmas. Chenggan Sangma in his book *Pagitchamni Ku-ringa*(2000) mentions about the same tree being used for the cremation of Nokma.

*Nokmarang siode pangnan Nokmako bolnokmachisa uni be-en bikapko so-e mangkimatronga*(101).

Basan R. Marak in his novel *Donnugin Dosi*(2012) shows how the Nokma resolves the case of adultery between Simje and Rapseng. When Simje admits her fault, the Nokma thinks of as to what punishment should be to given to them, and ultimately comes to the conclusion of forgiving them (80).

Awensing Rongmuthu in his book *Jikrongdik* (2013) shows the way of Nokmas resolving Boldamas’ alligations against her husband Boldampa and Sanrema for having extra-marital affair. When the Nokma finds out the alligation to be true, they has to give the *Dai* of Rs 30/- to the Nokma and also to the *mahari* of both Boldamma and Sanrepa. The author mentions that according to Garo customary law, *Dai* or fine of Rs 30/- for adultery has to be given to the maharis (31).

*A-chikni niam reti gita jakjipana jakpasa, rim-brakana jaksamgittam, til-ekana kolchangsachi, sekkamana kolchanggitam gamani niam donga*(31).

Rajat K. Das and Debashis Babu in *North East India in Perspective* (2005) also mention that should a married man have an extra-marital affair with the unmarried girl or woman, the *Dai* of Rupees 30/- has to be paid to the Nokma (234).

Icylian R. Marak, in her play *Kandikgipa Dakmesokani* (2014) shows how the Nokma is considered as a peace maker. In her story, she shows how the Nokma assumes his role of bringing peace to the villagers (35, 36). When Jason hears that Jongna and Ajak blaming the Nokma for allotting them a barren land for cultivation, the Nokma assembles them into a meeting and settles the matter between the two.

**Conclusion:** It can thus be seen that the Nokma is of paramount important in the socio-political set-up of the Garos. The Nokmas wielded sovereign power in the days past. With the establishment of modern political system, the authority of the Nokma has declined to some extent. However, in some aspects of the socio-political system of the Garo society the Nokma is still the authority to reckon with.

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Footnotes:

- *TIKKA*: A vaccination.
- *Dai*: A fine given by the wrong doings or criminal.
- *Kram*: Sacred drum that can only be kept in the house of Nokma.
- *Nagra*: A special drum that is used by the nokma to assemble the people to his house.
- *Bodamma* : (the mother of Boldam).
- *Sanrepa*: (the father of Sanre).
- *Bolnokma* or *Giting Bol*: A banyan tree which is believed to be a sacred among all the trees.
- *Maharis*: Relatives.

